

Introduction

The present work aims at providing a grammatical description of Early Judaeo-Persian. „Early Judaeo-Persian“ (EJP) is not a uniform or standardized language, but may be described as a bundle of dialects and regional variants of Persian that was spoken and written by the Jews of Iran, and the Jewish-Iranian diaspora in Central Asia and the Levant, approximately from the 8th to the beginning of the 13th century C.E. Judaeo-Persian (JP) continued to be used from the 13th until the 20th century, but it underwent changes that brought it closer to Standard New Persian (SNP). EJP, like JP, was written in the Hebrew script, which facilitates the distinction between (Early) Judaeo- and other forms of Persian.

Most of the texts that form the basis of this study were found in the Cairo Geniza. They were discovered towards the end of the 19th century C.E. at the Ben Ezra Synagogue in Old Cairo (Fusṭāṭ). There they had been stored for some 1000 years by pious Jews, in order to ensure that the words for „God“ that were written in the texts should not be desecrated and as a precaution against defiling the sacred Hebrew script. Due to favourable climatic conditions, many manuscripts survived nearly undamaged.

The EJP texts belong to various genres and are not linguistically uniform, showing both dialectal differences, and traits of the evolution of Persian over time. Early Judaeo-Persian can be distinguished from „Early New Persian“ (ENP), i.e. the form of Persian written in Arabic script that originated in northeast Iran during the 9th/10th centuries C.E., and developed into Standard New Persian from the 13th century onwards.

History of research

The history of the study of Early Judaeo-Persian is over 150 years old, but easy to relate. A number of Judaeo-Persian translations of parts of the Old Testament, dating from the 13th or 14th centuries C.E., were published during the late 19th century (e.g. the History of Daniel, ed. Zotenberg 1869; Isaiah, ed. de Lagarde 1884). At the turn of the 20th century, new JP documents came to light that were of a considerably older date, e.g. two short non-religious texts from the 8th and 11th centuries C.E. (ed. Margoliouth 1899, 1903), and another Bible translation (Ezekiel), possibly from the 11th century, a small part of which was edited by Saleman 1900.

It took over half a century until philological work on Early Judaeo-Persian was resumed, first in the edition of a short EJP inscription from Afghanistan by Henning 1957 (in 1958, p. 79-81, Henning published further important remarks on EJP); then in the re-editions of the two non-religious texts mentioned above (Asmussen 1965, Utas 1969), and in the first edition of a newly-found 20-page, important religious text by MacKenzie 1968 (for which a helpful index has been published posthumously as MacKenzie 2011). At the same time, Paper started a series of preliminary editions of various Judaeo-Persian Bible translations from about the 14th century (e.g. Genesis, Pentateuch, ed. Paper 1965, 1972), and wrote two articles on grammatical details of (Early) Judaeo-Persian (1967, 1968). Other JP texts from ca. the 14th/15th centuries C.E. were published, about the same time, by Mainz (e.g. Esther, Mainz 1970). Lazard 1968 summarized and classified the most important grammatical features of Early Judaeo-Persian.

In the following years, Shaked edited a one-page legal text from the 10th century (1972), two short Bible commentaries from about the 11th/12th centuries (1982), and wrote two articles on the grammar of EJP (1986, 1989). Following the discovery and publication of an important dialectal Muslim tafsir from southeast Iran, the *Qorʿān-e Qods* (ed. Ravāqī 1984), Lazard explained in a number of articles (e.g. 1987, 1990) how this text, together with EJP, helps to clarify the picture that we have of the evolution of New Persian. Khan 2000 edited an interesting EJP Bible commentary

(of 26 pages), based upon Shaked's preliminary reading and translation, a small part of which had been included in an earlier publication of Shaked's (1982).

The longest and most important single EJP text (of 226 manuscript pages), the tafsir of Ezekiel, a small part of which had already been edited by Saleman 1900, was edited and translated in full by Gindin (2007), again based upon Shaked's preliminary reading and translation. Another tafsir, with over 50 pages also quite long, of parts of the book of Genesis, was introduced (and edited in extracts) by Shaked (2003). Shaked published yet another 4-page tafsir fragment, the only one that originates from Iran proper (2008); two short, but grammatically important EJP private letters (2011); and gave an up-to-date overview of salient grammatical features of EJP (2009). Besides, several articles on grammatical features of EJP were published by Gindin and Paul over the last years, e.g. Paul (2003) on prepositions and case relations in EJP and ENP, and Gindin (e.g. 2003, 2008) on the manuscriptological and grammatical informations that can be gained from the study of the tafsir of Ezekiel. With the increase in knowledge about EJP, data from the language were increasingly used also in works that deal with broader or related linguistic issues, e.g. Orsatti's (2007) study on the phonology of Early New Persian, or a comprehensive encyclopaedia article on ENP by Paul (forthcoming 2013).

Although a great deal of work has already been done on EJP, all publications so far have described its grammar only in relation to that of Early (or Standard) New Persian, and have only highlighted its most conspicuous features. What is still lacking – and what the present work tries to provide – is a more or less comprehensive and coherent description of EJP grammar *in its own right*. A grammar of EJP that is based mainly on the tafsir of Ezekiel, and will in some ways be complementary to the present work, is forthcoming by Gindin.

The linguistic and historical background

The history of New Persian in *Arabic* script is assumed to have started during the 9th century C.E., under the reign of the Sāmānīds.¹ The earliest texts (from the 10th/11th centuries) were composed mostly in northeast Iranian regions (Transoxania, Balkh, Herat, etc.) and show dialectal characteristics from those regions, some of which continue to be found in the modern Persian dialects spoken in those regions today. Only in the 12th/13th centuries C.E. would literary Persian gradually become standardized, doing away with most regional peculiarities, to attain a form that may be called „Classical Persian“, or better, „Standard (New) Persian“.²

The linguistic importance of Early Judaeo-Persian. For various reasons, EJP is of great importance for the understanding of the history of Persian. The oldest EJP documents, the short inscription of Tang-i Azo and the Dandān Uiliq letter (eds. Henning 1957, Utas 1969), are both dated to the mid-8th century C.E., and thus precede the oldest datable ENP texts by over 100 years. Another letter, attributed to the early 9th century and probably also from Dandān-Uiliq, has recently come to light (eds. Zhang/Guan 2008). Yet another very short text was written in the late 9th century on a copper plate in Kollam, South India (last ed. Cereti 2009). The next-oldest datable EJP text, a one-page legal document, is from 951 C.E. (ed. Shaked 1972).

Besides being of older age, the manuscript situation of the EJP texts is also more favourable for linguists than the ENP one. Many EJP texts, especially the non-religious ones, are autographs, i.e. original documents written by the author(s) themselves, giving direct witness of the state and usage of the language, unlike the ENP documents that are often copies of a much later date.

Still more importantly, EJP developed independently of ENP for several centuries, preserving a lot of dialectal features that are not found in ENP. Since extralinguistic evidence allows us to

¹ Lazard 1961, p. 24f.

² On the problems that are connected to the usage of the term „Classical“, see Paul 2002.

locate several EJP texts in southwestern Iran, they act as a welcome counterbalance to the ENP texts which are predominantly of northeastern provenance, and help to complete the dialectal picture. Lastly, the Hebrew script with its various systems of diacritics (cf. Grammar, §§6-9) in some ways complements the picture of the pronunciation that we have from the Arabic script used for the writing of ENP.

The full linguistic importance of EJP emerges only from the historical perspective. The cultural centers of ENP lay in northeast Iran, most of those of EJP in the southwest, closer to the areas where the centers of Zoroastrian culture and writing had been situated in Sasanian and early Islamic times. This is why in grammar and lexicon, EJP is closer to Middle Persian (MP) than is ENP, and may be called an important dialectal link *between* MP and ENP.¹

The EJP texts

The main EJP texts that were used for the present study fall into the categories of „non-religious“ and „religious“. The non-religious texts portray the Jewish-Persian community from southwestern Iran, some of whom had moved to Egypt in early Fatimid times, to become well-off merchants on the mediterranean scene. For the historical background, see the seminal work of Goitein 1967-93, based mainly on thousands of Judaeo-Arabic letters from the Cairo Geniza; an up-to-date overview of the history of the well-known and influential Jewish family by the name Tustari, often mentioned in the letters, has been given by Rustow 2010. The religious texts can be attributed mostly (if not all) to the Karaites, a Jewish sect that thrived from ca. 900-1200 C.E. in Iraq, western Iran, Cairo, and the Crimea (for the religious background, Polliack 2003). The texts may be categorized and described in the following manner, following a (yet unpublished) classification of Shaked's:

Abbrev.	pages (edition)	shelfmark	condition, language(s)
<u>1. Non-religious, or „private“:</u>			
- <i>legal documents:</i>			
Kd	1 p. (Shaked 1972)	Mosseri l:1.2	good
Lr	1 p. (Asmussen 1965)	Bodl Ms Heb b.12.24	good
- <i>commercial/private letters:</i>			
Du1	1 p. (Utas 1969)	BL Or 8212	fragmentary
Du2	1 p. (Zhan/Guang 2008)	NLC Nr. X-19	good
L2	1 p. (Shaked 2010)	T-S 8 J 19.28	short, mixed EJP/Ar.
L3	2 p.	T-S 18 J 3.16	good
L4	2 p.	T-S Arab. 42.176	mixed EJP/Ar., verso Ar.
L5	2 p.	T-S AS 145.42	partly fragmentary, verso Ar.
L6	1 p. (Shaked 2010)	T-S K 24.16	good, short
L7	1 p.	T-S Box 128.103	good
L11	1 p.	JTS ENA 1822A.31	short, partly fragmentary
L12	2 p.	JTS ENA NS 22.11	fragmentary, partly Ar.
L15	2 p.	Bodl Ms Heb b.12.24	good
L17/21	2 p.	T-S Ar 30.301/ T-S K24.1	fragmentary
L18	1 p.	T-S 10 J 32.7	good
L19	1 p.	T-S AS 148.90	very short
L20	2 p.	T-S AS 152.158	good, short
L23	1 p.	Mosseri IX:34	short, fragmentary

¹ See Lazard 1987, or the summary in Lazard 1995, p. 5-15.

- *inscriptions*:

Ta	1 p.	(Henning 1957)	(funerary inscriptions) very short (10 lines)
Koll	1 p.	(Cereti 2009)	(copper plate legal inscr.) very short (8 lines)
Afg	~ 20 p.	(Rapp 1965)	(funerary inscriptions) short

2. Religious:- *tafsirs (Tiberian)*:

Ez1	170 p.	(Saleman 1900, Gindin 2007)	Firkowicz II 1682	good
Ez2	56 p.	(Gindin 2007)	Firkowicz II 1682	good
Gen	50 pp.	(Shaked 2003, partly)	Firkowicz I 4605	good
Jer	2 pp.		Firkowicz I 4611	good
T8	2 pp.		Mosseri II:62	good, partly fragmentary
T11	4 pp.		Firkowicz I 4607	good
T12	6 pp.		Firkowicz I 4609	good
T13	3 pp.		Firkowicz I 4610	good
Gr	26 pp.	(Khan 2000)	T-S K 24.29, CUL Or. 1080.15.12, T-S K 24.17, T-S Ar. 31.238, CUL Or. 1080.15.13, T-S NS 108.153a	good, partly fragmentary
Zef	4 pp.	(Shaked 2008)	(Jerusalem, private collection)	

- *tafsirs (Babylonian)*:

Db	4 pp.	(Shaked 1982)	T-S K 24.2	good
Is	4 pp.		T-S K 24.5	good, partly fragmentary

- *halakha*:

Ar	20 pp.	(MacKenzie 1968)	BL Or. 8659	good
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The abbreviations for the shelfmarks are the following:

BL	British Library, London
Bodl	Bodleian Library, Oxford
CUL	Cambridge University Library
Firkowicz	Firkowicz Collection, St. Petersburg Public Library
JTS ENA	Elkan Nathan Adler Collection, Jewish Theology Seminary, New York
Mosseri	Mosseri private collection (Paris, exact location unknown)
T-S	Taylor-Schechter Collection, Cambridge University Library
NLC	National Library of China („X“ seems to be a provisional shelfmark)

The abbreviations for the texts (Kd, etc.) will be explained below. The publication details (in brackets) usually concern only the most recent edition. The information about the condition of each manuscript above (good, fragmentary, etc.) does not say everything about its *legibility*. Some of the non-religious documents described as in „good“ condition are written in cursive handwriting, and are quite difficult to read (*Grammar*, §5). In contrast, all religious texts are written in square and clear handwriting.

During the work on the present grammar, Paul prepared improved editions of most non-religious texts, based on the (private) editions that Shaked had put at his disposal. A joint publication of the texts is in preparation. There are yet other EJP texts that have not been included in the list, because they are short, or fragmentary, or more recent than the texts above, and therefore have not, or only marginally, been used as sources for this study.¹

¹ E.g., H1 (halakhic text No. 1, CUL T-S K 24.30, unpublished) consists of 36 pages, but there is a large hole in the middle of each page that leaves only two or three full lines to be read on the upper and lower margin of each page.

Despite their small extent (in page numbers) and cursive, sometimes illegible handwriting, the private letters are of disproportionately great linguistic importance, because they are written in a simple and „natural“ style. The two EJP legal texts contain both natural and more formally written passages. Most religious texts, by contrast, are either slavish translations (and therefore useless for the study of syntax), or – the commentary passages – written in a literary style *sui generis* (with the partial exception of Ar, which also contains passages written in a „natural“ style).

The contents of the texts. The two EJP legal texts deal with an inheritance (Kd) and a legal settlement (Lr); the short text on the Kollam plates (Koll) is also of legal nature. The commercial/private letters give a lively impression of the life of the Iranian-Jewish community of the time; commercial matters often freely intermingle with private ones. For example, in letter L3, lines 1-15 deal with private, ll. 15-30 with commercial, and ll. 30-51 again with private matters. In the final private section, one commercial remark is interspersed: L3.39 „flatter brother Abū °Umar, for it is possible that he may return these 500 s.(?) to you after all these years“, and after the private goodbye, the letter ends with a commercial request: L3.50 „Books and ... anything that may come from Basrah and Baghdad, buy (it), for there is a good profit in it“.

A letter can sometimes be of a moving personal tone. L6, written by a man in heavy financial difficulties, says from l. 7 onwards: „I can no more go anywhere, for his (i.e., his creditor's) letter of safety has fallen on my neck. In this region, I am in grave danger ... that I may still be able to go to another place to seek a living“.

The tafsirs, i.e. translations and/or exegeses of (parts of) the Hebrew Bible, differ greatly in the way they translate and explain the Holy Scripture. In the longest tafsir in this corpus, on the book of Ezekiel, the verses Ez1.21-39.29 are translated one by one, and after each verse interpretations of various kinds and length are given, mostly concerning the understanding and usage of certain Hebrew words.

The explanations are often lengthy, convoluted and hair-splitting, e.g. Ez31.21 {8.9}: „And (as for) the words [°]*et-hattō°ebōt hārā°ōt* (= „wicked abominations“). People say, 'we know that all abomination is (also) wicked, then what (is) the meaning (of) saying *hattō°ebōt hārā°ōt*?' The (following) answer is given to them: 'the word *tō°ebā* „abomination“ refers also to other things, (so) that we cannot say to that thing that it is 'wicked', (for example) as He said: {Deut14.3} 'Thou shalt not eat any abominable thing (*tō°ebā*)!' Then, (as for) the words {*hattō°ebōt hārā°ōt*} (sic!), the word *hārā°ōt* is the explanation of this *tō°ebā* (sic!).“

The tafsir on the book of Genesis starts with a eulogy of God that seems to have an Islamic flavour, e.g.: Gen1.28 „(He is) a maker of thing(s) from nothing, a knower of the last from the first, a finder of light from the darkness, ...“. Then, unlike Ez, the text deals not with linguistic but rather with doctrinal matters. The style of Gen, and its way of dealing with passages from the Hebrew Bible, however, is similar to that of Ez (esp., Ez1), and both tafsirs (like others that derive from the Firkowicz collection) may be assumed to be part of one tradition/school of Judaeo-Persian, probably Karaite, commentators.

The tafsir Gr (ed. Khan 2000) is written in a style very different from Ez and Gen. It does not present the Bible text continuously, but discusses grammatical matters from select verses, in the form of questions and answers. It apparently belongs to another tradition/school of commentators than do Ez and Gen. Yet another two tafsirs, Db and Is, also present select verses or even single words from the Bible, often only with a straightforward EJP translation. They differ from the other tafsirs also orthographically, writing the sound [k] with *qōph* (see §10) and using the Babylonian (instead of Tiberian) system of vocalisation.

The religious category of *halakha* (legal matters) is represented among the texts published so far only by Ar, that appears to be a (small) part of a *Sefer Mišwot* („Book of Precepts“), i.e. a systematic treatment of the commandments of Jewish law, a genre that was common in Karaite literature. The author tries to explain why the world needs a prophet, and why the (right) prophet must have been Moses, defending him against other faiths like Zoroastrianism, Christianity and Islam. The later, smaller (extant) part of Ar seems to comprise the beginning of the main part of the Book of Precepts, where certain details of the commandment of circumcision are discussed, with frequent reference to appropriate passages from the Bible. Although Ar contains a high number of *ad hoc* abstract nouns in *-ih* (etc., *r³ynydg²ryh* [rāyenīdgārīh] „organization“, *b²z st²nyh* [bāj-stānīh] „saying grace“), parts of it are written in a quite natural style, and therefore of great linguistic importance.

Goals, methods

Since the importance of EJP for the study of Persian lies in historical and dialectal dimensions, the present work does not merely aim to describe its synchronic *état de langue*, but partly also to include the historical perspective – not systematically, and only where it seems appropriate, and is possible without too much digression. The most important points of comparison for EJP are contemporary ENP (as described by Lazard 1963, abbreviated here as „Lazard“), and MP.

The point of departure for any historical grammar, of course, must be an exact and comprehensive synchronic description of each of its stages. Since no linguistic standard of EJP existed, and the texts, in contrast, display various measures of dialectal, diachronic and stylistic variety, a description of EJP has to start with the investigation of the language of each single text, with respect to each grammatical feature and detail. The parts of the description may then be joined together for each grammatical feature, and (wherever appropriate) a grammatical rule common to all (or most) EJP texts may be proposed.

Because of the heterogeneities and difficulties that characterize the EJP texts, a description of them will not always lead to an exact grammatical rule, but must sometimes confine itself to presenting the facts, i.e. various examples from the texts, together with one (or more) hypotheses that may help to explain them. In this case, resort must sometimes be had to MP or ENP, so as to complement the incomplete picture that is provided by EJP. Before doing so, however, it must be the main goal of this study to present the EJP data in a most comprehensive and unbiased way.

In view of their shortness and great linguistic importance, the EJP private texts will be documented completely in the grammatical description, i.e., for each grammatical phenomenon all relevant examples from them will be quoted. For the larger religious texts, esp. Ez and Gen, only representative examples will be quoted.

The employment of *statistical* methods is also essential for the grammatical description. For a true understanding of any language it is not enough to know that a certain grammatical phenomenon (e.g. morpheme) exists, or what functions it has; it is equally important to know exactly under which circumstances and how often it occurs, especially in relation to phenomena of similar form or function. Since language change is continuous, the development of a given grammatical category or phenomenon may sometimes be seen only from statistical tendencies in the usage of certain grammatical elements (see also below).

The present work aims at giving a complete description of EJP phonology and morphology. In view of the almost complete lack of studies in EJP (and ENP) syntax, the syntactic section ought to be regarded as a pioneering study, where only a select list of important phenomena is dealt with; certain syntactic phenomena that are not found in the syntactic section may be found in the appropriate morphological section (e.g. comparative constructions, §96ff.; reflexive constructions, §115ff.; the use of the present tenses, §§142-45).