

The Open Book – Textual Fluidity and the History of Transmission: A Case Study of A Medieval Karaites Commentary

Ilana SASSON

(Sacred Heart University, Fairfield, CT)

For the preparation of a critical edition of Yefet b. Eli's Arabic translation and commentary on the Book of Proverbs I used fifteen manuscripts. These manuscripts are dated to as early as the eleventh and as late as the nineteenth-century. The text found in these manuscripts is not identical; some of the variants are minor and insignificant, while others are major and of great importance. In the pre-printing era, when books were transmitted by way of handwritten copies it is expected to find some degree of variance among the different copies. The fluidity of the text as a feature of the pre-printed book has been described by other scholars and is often referred to as the open book. In this paper I examine such variants in Yefet's manuscripts. I determine their level of significance, and make an attempt to determine which of them likely stemmed from scribes and copyists, and which were potentially penned by the author himself. In addition, I discuss the significance and ramifications of this phenomenon for the study of Yefet's work.