

The Last Geonim of Sura

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THE LAST GEONIM OF SURA

THE importance of Sherira's Letter for the chronology of the Gaonic period becomes all the more evident when we miss its sure guidance. When Sherira wrote his well-known epistle to Ḳairowān in 987 C. E., the Sura school was defunct.¹ But not very long afterwards this ancient seat of learning reverted to its former function. Samuel b. Ḥofni became its Gaon, and still in the lifetime of Sherira an agreement was entered upon between the two Babylonian academies and their heads about the division of the donations from benefactors.² Samuel b. Ḥofni was a renowned scholar and shed new lustre on the school entrusted to his care. Beyond this the further vicissitudes of Sura have been entirely obscure. Hitherto Samuel b. Ḥofni was regarded as its last Gaon. Ibn Daud (Neubauer, *l.c.*, 67, l. 9 ff.) even gave us the year of the Gaon's death, viz. four years before the demise of his great son-in-law Hai Gaon (1038 C. E.), hence in 1034 C. E. And this date has passed without challenge into every book of Jewish history.

² This is evident from Samuel's letter, printed by Margoliouth, *JQR.*, XIV, 308 (cp. p. 621 and also my remarks in *JQR.*, N. S., VIII, 362 f.), (read מררב (מררר) וואָפּ ל' 2, Hebrew text שרידא נאון טרם אסיפתו בשנים ועם נאון בנו (i. e. Hai) כי התחתת[?] בנו ויקח בתנו ויכתבו בינינו תנאים בשמנ[?]) ומהם כי כל הנדבות וכו'. See also Poznanski, *Haggoren*, VI, 44.

On the very surface it would seem rather strange that Hai, who himself reached a very advanced age³ (having become Ab of the school already in 985 C.E.), should have outlived his father-in-law by only four years. But of course such reasoning would by itself carry no conviction. However, by means of new Genizah data we are able to establish the facts that Samuel b. Ḥofni was succeeded in the Gaonate by Dosa, Sa'adya's son; that the latter died towards the end of 1017 C.E.; that the next Gaon of Sura was Israel Hakkohen, the son of Samuel b. Ḥofni; that his successor in turn was 'Azaryah Hakkohen, probably a son of Israel; and finally that the *last* president (as far as yet known) of the Sura academy was a certain Isaac Gaon.

To begin with, a Damascus MS. of Sherira's Letter (Neubauer, *l.c.*, I, 189, bottom) has an addition at the end of the epistle which gives first the dates of demise of both Sherira and Hai and then continues as follows, *ונפטר ארננו שמואל הכהן בן ארננו חפני בחדש אב שנת שכ"ד ונפטר בנו ארננו שמואל הכהן נאון ליל חמישי חדש כסלו שנת שמה*. Accordingly Samuel b. Ḥofni died in Ab 1013 C.E., while *his son* (Israel) died on the eve of 5th of Kislev (1)345 Sel. (= Monday, October 29th, 1033 C.E.). There is no doubt that between *בנו* and *ארננו* the word *של* has fallen out, hence read 'בנו של ארננו וכו'.'⁴ The correctness of these dates is established by internal

³ Ibn Daud (*l.c.*, 66, l. 4 from bottom) gives his age at his death as 69 years. But the *var. lect.* *צ"ט*, 99, is more correct.

⁴ Ginzberg (*Geonica*, I, 13, note, end) was on the right track in tentatively suggesting that in Neubauer, *l.c.*, I, 189 (not 198 as printed there), Israel should be read instead of the second 'Samuel'. But there is really no need to change anything, but to supply *של* which is missing. (Poznański, *RÉJ.*, I.XIII, 318, in adhering to the date 1034 as that of Samuel's death-year rejects Ginzberg's suggestion). Who knows whether Ibn Daud was not confronted with the same text and thus transferred the date of demise of the son (Israel) to the father (Samuel)?

evidence which the Genizah fragments discussed here furnish.

Dosa, Sa'adya's son, is designated a few times as Gaon. But as his time of activity as president of an academy could not hitherto be accommodated to the prevalent chronology of the period, his title was explained away as having been merely complimentary.⁵ All doubts are now dissipated by T.-S. 10 J 27¹⁰ (brownish paper, square writing, damaged and faded), being a letter from Hai Gaon to a Rosh Hasseder in Fustāt, no doubt identical with Elḥanan b. Shemarya (see about him, *JQR.*, N. S., VIII, 344). The address in Arabic (verso) is hardly legible. But in the middle there are clearly visible in Hebrew script the words **האיי נאון**, in the same hand as recto. Moreover the whole epistle is in the same handwriting as another letter from this Gaon which we give farther on (p. 440). Thus Hai's authorship of this letter is subject to hardly any doubt.

(recto)

⁶

(1) קד נסר כתאבי פי זמנא הדיא אלי סירי ראם הסדר אטאל אללה
בקאה גואב כתאבה וערפתה פיה כבר ביע (2) ואן אבן רושל
אלפאס[י] נט רח⁷ מא כתאבני פי דלך אלאמר בשי וינחל^{??} (3)
פ[י] הדיא
מן כאתבני לם יצג אלי קול[ה] לאן אל.אם ענדי פי וערפתה
אן כתאבי אד (4) [ראם אל]נאלות נטרוה[י] מן שמיא וצאפתה
וערפתה ופאה מר רב דוסא נאון מחסיה זכ לב וערפתה (5) אל
לה מן אלשהאדה פי התרת העגונה אחסן אללה תופיקה עד^{??} אן כתבת

⁵ See especially Poznański, *Haggoren*, VI, 47, and *Babylonische Geonim*, 106.

⁶ A few illegible letters, probably forming the usual heading **בשמה רחמנא**.

⁷ נטריה רחמנא.

דלך אלכתאב (6) . . . מכאתבתה בסבב רגל באלפצטאט והו אבן
 אלשיך אבן אלחסן
 الفصل מר יוסף בן בשר אידה אללה אן אכאה מר עלי בן מר (7) בשר
 אדאם אללה קר וכלה במלב חקוק לה הזאך^{???} ואל אוראכה⁸ בכמי וכתאבי
 והי צחיה והיא (8) אלרגל אלמוכל וה[ו] אלשיך אבן אלחסן אדאם אללה
 ע[זה] בדר[?] כביר בבגדאד ו. . . לי שוכהא⁹ ואנא אסאל סירי (9) ראש
 הסדר אן יתגרד מעה פי אסתדעא כא . . . ה . . . (11) . . . ויכתבני
 במא יתנצל בה מן דלך אן שא אללה יד בשבט שבט ישע רב

Hai refers to a previous letter from him to the Rosh Hasseder in reply to the latter's epistle. He recapitulates here its various contents. A certain Ibn Rushl of Fez did not write to the Gaon on a certain matter. The Exilarch mentioned, is very likely identical with Hezekiah who then occupied this dignity in Bagdād. Further, the case of a certain ענונה is referred to. But the chief item of interest, contained in Hai's former letter and alluded to in the present one, is the report of the demise of Dosa, '*the Gaon of Sura*'. The present epistle was dispatched on behalf of a certain Ibn-al-Fadhl Joseph b. Bishr in Fustāt whose brother, the elder Ibn-al-Ḥasan 'Ali b. Bishr, gave him power of attorney to collect a certain debt. The latter seems to have been a very influential man in Bagdād (l. 8), where the Gaon presided over the school that went by the name of Pumbedita (see *JQR.*, N. S., VII, 467 ff.; VIII, 348-9, and especially *infra*, p. 434 ff.). It was to please him that Hai requested the Rosh Hasseder in Fustāt (viz. Elḥanan b. Shemarya) to lend his aid in settling the matter.

⁸ אל אוראכה is evidently derived from the Aramaic אורכתא! For the latter see Talmudic Dictionaries.

⁹ This gives no satisfactory meaning here. Read perhaps שוכרא, thanks.

Hai himself drew up the document of attorney which Ibn-al-Ḥasan sent to his brother (l. 7).

Our epistle was written on the 14th of Shevaṭ (1)329 Sel. (=February 2nd, 1018 C.E.). Shortly before ('in this time', l. 1) the Gaon reported in a previous letter the death of Dosa. He must have therefore departed this life towards the end of 1017 C.E. Hai styles him 'Gaon of Sura', a title Dosa is mentioned by also in another fragment soon to be discussed. There can be no doubt that he actually presided over the Sura school. But what about Samuel b. Ḥofni? To assume that there were then two rival Geonim of Sura would be quite unwarranted in the absence of positive proofs. But the difficulty does not arise at all, if we accept the above date of Samuel's demise, viz. Ab 1013 C.E. Thus his *successor* in the Gaonate for over four years was Sa'adya's son, Dosa.

The latter must have been very young in 942 C.E. when his great father died. When the defunct school of Sura was re-opened after 987 Dosa, though a son of a former Gaon, had to make way for Samuel b. Ḥofni who was Ab of Pumbedita (see farther on, p. 420)! It is hardly likely that this took place without friction.¹⁰ But Samuel's superior scholarship demanded and obtained recognition. He seems to have also been older than Dosa (see note 10). However, Dosa, blessed in years, at last reached the goal of his life on the demise of Samuel in 1013 C.E.¹¹ As will be seen from

¹⁰ See the beginning of the letter referred to above (note 2),
 . . . בדרכים ההם ופן יתעו ופן יטו ופן נטה כי אנחנו גדול הישיבה וזקנינו
 אין גדול ממנו בחכמה ובשנים זיקני הישיבה עמנו ויושבים לפנינו.
 Samuel seems to defend here his position as Gaon by reason of his age and scholarship.

¹¹ Dosa's responsa (enumerated by Poznański, *Haggoren*, VI, 47 ff, 119)

the Fihrist printed farther on (p. 423 ff.), Sa'adya had two sons, Sheerit Alluf and Dosa. The former is mentioned first and seems to have been the elder son. Moreover, when that Fihrist was composed, 'less than eleven years since the death' of Sa'adya, viz. in 953 C.E., Sheerit was already Alluf, while his brother Dosa, in the absence of any such title next to his name, seems to have not yet been advanced in his studies. It is altogether obscure when this Sheerit was gathered to his fathers, whether before Samuel b. Ḥofni became Gaon or afterwards. But it may be safely reasoned that had Sheerit lived in 1013, he would have had a claim to the Gaonate prior to his brother Dosa.

When the latter died towards the end of 1017 C.E., Israel Hakkohen, the son of Samuel b. Ḥofni and Hai's brother-in-law, became president of the school. We have found him in Elul, 1004 C.E., collaborating in his father's correspondence. Indeed, he acted for some time (probably already, before 987 C.E.) as 'secretary of the school' (see *JQR.*, N. S. VIII, 364, and *infra*, p. 439).¹² Only a few

no doubt date from the years 1013-17 C.E., when he stood at the head of the Sura school.

¹² Cp. also *JQR.*, N. S., VIII, 7, top. I could not find the Memorial-List, referred to there, in MS. Adler 2594. For חפני read there חפני. He is designated 'head' of the school. But in reality he was only Ab (see *infra*, p. 420). Likewise in the fragment given farther on (p. 415) Samuel (b. Ḥofni) is called 'the son of a Gaon', more correctly 'the *grandson*' of a Gaon (i.e. Kohen-Šedek). T.-S. 8 G 3, consisting of 11 paper leaves, contains on fol. 1, recto, the following colophon : קאבלת בהרא אלכתאב אלנסכה (1) אלעראקיה (2) וכאן מכתוב עליה (3) בכט מצנפה מא הורא נסכה (4) כתאב אלצמאן ואלכפאלה תאליף דיאן אלכאב (5) שמואל בן דיאן אלכאב חפני אלצמאן (6) בן כהן צדק. The colophon is signed by Netaneel Hallevi. Now Ḥofni is rightly called here Dayān al-Bāb (דינא דבבא) = Ab Bet Din, see *JQR.*, N. S., X, 339). On the other hand his son Samuel is also given the same title. It may be that he composed this work on the laws of pawns

Halakic decisions of this Gaon have so far been preserved. T.-S. H 11¹ (2 vellum leaves, square writing, right-hand top corners missing, faded, size $8\frac{1}{2} \times 6\frac{1}{2}$ inches) forms the beginning of a work on the 'duty of prayer' which Israel composed at the request of Abraham b. Natan, better known as Ibrahīm b. 'Aṭa, Nagid of Ẕairowān. A poem in his honour we edit farther on (pp. 430 ff.; see also *ẔQR.*, N.S., IX, 163). Hai greatly eulogized this prominent leader of Ẕairowān Jewry, and his brother-in-law Israel, Gaon of Sura, likewise found him worthy of honour. We give here a few lines from this fragment.

(fol. I, recto, l. I) [בשמך רחמ' 13 (2) [כתאב פי וגוב אלץ] ליה
תצניף ישראל הכהן [נאון] בן אדינינו שמואל (3) [הכהן נאון] בן נאון
ללש[יך אל] גליל עלם אלדין ותאג אלאמה מררב (4) [אב]רה[ם נגיד]
הגולה בן מר רב נתן ראש הקהלות וזכר צדיק לברכה (5) צנפה באסמה
לאנה אמר בולך פאמתתל מרסומה מתוביא (6) . . . ענר אללה פיה
וקאל מבתריא תבארך אללה אסרא 14 וכו'

This work was divided into thirty chapters, as we read

and pledges (also mentioned in the Fihrist of his works, *JQR.*, XIV, 311, l. 3 of text, **כתאב אלעמאן**) while he was still Ab of the school. But of which? Ḥofni was Ab of the Pumbedita (Bagdād) academy. As presumably the defunct Sura school started on its new career only when our Samuel became its Gaon, one would be inclined to maintain that prior to this he too acted as Ab at the Pumbedita school! If this be correct, we might obtain the date when he left it to take up his new position as president of Sura. We know that two years before Sherira wrote his Letter Hai became Ab of Pumbedita, hence in 985 (see *infra*, p. 439). Accordingly we may reason that the vacancy, filled up by Hai, was due to Samuel's departure for Sura. However, in the absence of further data, too much reliance cannot be placed on this title of Dayān al-Bāb in our colophon because the heading of the work (fol. 1, verso) reads **בשמך רחמנא (2) כתאב א . . אב אלעמאן** (1) **נע** (נאון =) **נע** **ואלכפאלה תאליף אדונינו שמואל גא' (= נאון) נע**. There follow in the MS. the introduction as well as an index of the thirty-one chapters of the work.

13 = רחמנא.

14 = אסר'איל.

on fol. 1^b, bottom, **הוא פצולא לתכון אצולא** וקד פצלנא כחאבנא **הוא פצולא לתכון אצולא** וקד פצלנא כחאבנא ונעלנא תלתין פצלא וזכרנא פי כל פצל מנה מה יחתמלה מן אלקול וצממנא אליה מה ישבה וינאנסה. There seems to be a gap between fols. 1 and 2.

Sa'adya also composed a work on 'the duty of prayer', as already mentioned in the book-list published by Bacher (*REJ.*, XXXIX, 200, no. 30), **ונוו פיה ונוב אלעלוא לרבנו סעדיה** (see Bacher, *ibid.*, 206, no. 7, and also the Fihrist, *infra*, p. 425, l. 24). In another book-list (*JQR.*, XIII, 55, no. 91) there is mentioned a **כחאב ונוב אלעלוא**,¹⁵ which may have been either Sa'adya's work or Israel's.

Israel Hakkohen died at the end of October 1033 C. E. (above, p. 410), and his successor was 'Azaryah Hakkohen. To prove this we must go somewhat farther afield. We read in the *Megillat Ebyatar* (*JQR.*, XIV, 460, l. 6) of Joshiah the son of **ר' רבינו עזריהו הכהן ראש ישיבה של גולה ז"ל** who helped his cousin David b. Daniel to proclaim himself Nasi at Fustāt (about 1080 C. E.). Now this 'Azaryah Hakkohen was hitherto taken to have been the head of the school in Fustāt, having also bequeathed his office to his son Joshiah.¹⁶ That the latter ever held the dignity of Gaon is mentioned nowhere.¹⁷ As has been shown elsewhere,^{17a} the Gaonate in

¹⁵ Cp. also Poznański, *ibid.*, p. 300. Perhaps Israel's work is also meant in no. 14 of the same book-list, **ז"ל [supply שמואל נאון]** [supply **כת' אלעלוא לאבן רב' שמואל נאון ז"ל**]. In this case, no. 91 would certainly be Sa'adya's work.

¹⁶ See Bacher, *JQR.*, XV, 86, note 6, and after him Poznański, *Babylonische Geonim*, 99.

¹⁷ Schechter (*JQR.*, XIV, 459, note 12) refers to T.-S. 20. 104 in which **שנת אלף ושפא (?) מר ורב יאשיה נאון** is mentioned, and which is dated (?) at Fustāt. For **ושפא (?)** no doubt read **ושכא**, 1010 C. E.! Here the Palestinian Gaon Joshiah is meant who flourished at this time (see *JQR.*, N. S., IX, 411, and especially Mann, *The Jews in Egypt and in Palestine under the Fātimid Caliphs*, 1920, vol. I, 71 ff.).

^{17a} In the last-mentioned work, pp. 190 f.

Egypt only began with David b. Daniel, in opposition to the Palestinian Academy. But his attempt failed when he was deposed in 1094 C.E. The first actual Gaon in the country of the Nile was Maṣliāḥ Hakkohen (1127–38 C.E.), when the Palestinian academy was no longer in existence.

But to return to our 'Azaryah Hakkohen. T.-S. 12. 109 contains a document the end of which is given here. The date cannot be ascertained.

..... וכנֶק [מִדּוּ וְ] נתן החבר בֶּס גְּדוּלָּה¹⁸ בִּיר יִשׁוּעָה [יּוֹסֵף] החזן
 בר יפת
 המלמד י צמח בִּיר אֶלְעָזָר וְכֶנֶק מִדּוּ וְרַב יֵאֲשִׁיחוּ הֶכֶה בֶּן כְּבוֹד גְּדוּלָּה
 קִדּוּ מִרְנוּ וּרְבֵנוּ עֲזַרְיָהוּ הֶכֶה
 ראש הישיבה שלעיר מחסייה דחתמין ידיהון בסימני[ה]ון שמואל
 ברבי שלה
 נתן בן ישועה יוסף בן יפת המלמד צמח בר אלעזר [י]אשיהו הכהן בִּיר
 עזריהו
 גאון ומדאיתברר קרמנא דחתמות ידי שהדי אילין והני אינן בסימוניהון
 אשרנוהי וקיימנוהי
 ברחוי דניאל הנשיא ראש ישיבת גאון יעקב בִּיר ע[זריה] . . .
 יהודה החבר בסנהדרין גִּדּוּלָּה בִּיר חוֹצְפִית חֲנֻצָּבָה

Accordingly this document was signed by five witnesses and was afterwards verified by the well-known Daniel b. 'Azaryah, Nasi and Gaon at Jerusalem, and also by the Ḥaber Yehuda b. Ḥuṣpit. Of the witnesses mentioned, the Reader Joseph b. Yefet (the teacher) is known from a letter which the community of Jerusalem sent to Ephraim b. Shemarya of Fustāt (*ẒQR.*, XIX, 108, ll. 13–14). Joseph is referred to therein as the representative of the congregation having gone to Egypt to collect donations on their behalf. Ṣemaḥ b. El'azar signs a bill of divorce together with the

בסנהדרין גדולה = ¹⁸

Nasi-Gaon Daniel b. 'Azaryah, dated Tishri 1369 Sel. (= 1057 C.E.) at Jerusalem.¹⁹

Of chief interest for our purpose here is the signatory Joseph Hakkohen b. 'Azaryah Hakkohen, *Gaon of Sura*. He is no doubt identical with the person mentioned in the *Megillat Ebyatar*. The document was very likely drawn up in Palestine (either Jerusalem or Ramlah). Joshiah probably emigrated from Babylon to the Holy Land together with his uncle Daniel b. 'Azaryah.²⁰ As has been shown elsewhere,^{20a} Daniel was already in Jerusalem in the summer of 1051 C.E., when the well-known Gaon Solomon b. Yehuda died, and could thus succeed to the dignity without delay. Joshiah probably stayed there for some time. But subsequently, very likely after the demise of his uncle Daniel in 1062 C.E., he settled in Fustāt, where as son of a former Gaon of Sura and nephew of the Nasi-Gaon of Palestine he must have been much respected. Later on he introduced his cousin Daniel to the notabilities of Fustāt-Cairo and assisted him to obtain recognition as Nasi.

From the time of activity of Joshiah Hakkohen, both in Palestine and in Egypt, it can be inferred that his father 'Azaryah Hakkohen flourished in Sura in the second quarter of the eleventh century. This would very well fit in with the chronology of the Sura Geonim at the point we have so far reached. Israel Hakkohen died in October 1033 C.E., and the next Gaon to succeed him was none other than our 'Azaryah Hakkohen. The fact of both having been of priestly descent at once suggests that 'Azaryah was

¹⁹ See the document in Blau, *Jüdische Ehescheidung*, II, 102-3.

²⁰ Joshiah is stated in the *Megillat Ebyatar* (l. c.) to have been 'the son of his (i. e. David b. Daniel's) aunt'. Accordingly Daniel b. 'Azaryah and 'Azaryah Hakkohen must have been brothers-in-law.

^{20a} Mann, *l. c.*, pp. 178 ff.

Israel's son. As will be shown forthwith, 'Azaryah occupied the Gaonate for a few years only, and departed this life before Hai (1038). So far nothing whatever is known of 'Azaryah's literary activity.

There is one more Genizah fragment to be discussed in this connexion. As peculiar chance willed it, only one half of it has been preserved, the other having been torn off across its whole length. Had it been complete, we should have had a full chronological list of the last Sura Geonim, which to re-establish we have succeeded only after a laborious combination of scattered data. Yet even in its present state, the fragment yields several points of interest. T.-S. 6 K 2² (paper, square writing) contains on verso liturgical poems. On recto we have the following list :

- וְגַד בְּכֹחַ מְרֵנָה יִשְׂרָאֵל .
 נַחַת נַפְשִׁיָּה דְמוּב דִּילֵן בֶּן גֵּאוֹן דִּילֵן [י] .
 וְתוּפִי ²¹ מְרֵנָה הָאֵי גֵאוֹן בְּאֵלּוּל שְׁנַת .
 וְנַחַת נַפְשִׁיָּה דְאֶדְוִינֵנו חֲפְנֵי אֲב דִּילֵן [ל] .
 5 נַחַת נַפְשִׁיָּה דְמִ צִמַּח בֶּן מֶר יִצְחָק [ח] .
 וְמֶר רֶב שְׂרִירָא גֵאוֹן בֶּח בְּתִשְׁרִי [י] .
 22 וְמְרֵנָה שְׁמוּאֵל בֶּב בְּשַׁבָּה כֹּה בֵּא [ב] .
 וְמֶר אֶסְפָּה בֶּן מֶר בְּצִלְאֵל בְּמַעְלֵי שׁ [בְּתֵא] .
 וְמֶר דּוּסָא גֵאוֹן מַחְסִיָּה נֹחוּ עַד [ז] .
 10 תוּפִי מֶר דִּי יִשְׂרָאֵל גֵּאוֹן בֶּן מֶר שְׁמוּאֵל בְּיוֹם .
 וְנַחַת נַפְשִׁיָּה דְמֶר [י] עֲזוּרִיָּה בֶּן [מֶר] נֵא ²³ .
 אִיתִילִיד הַלִּיל דִּילֵן בְּמַעְלֵי שׁ [בְּתֵא] .

²¹ וְתוּפִי 'died', V, Pass. of וְתוּפִי .

²² This reading is in accordance with the date in the passage cited above, p. 410.

²³ The last two letters are very faded. Hence the reading is uncertain.

ונחת נפשיה דמרנא האיי גאון ביום	
ומו יצחק גאון מחסיה [ביר] ח ²¹ מר[חשון]	
כאן מולדי פי יום אלגמעה ראש ח ² [דש]	15
ואפק דלך מן כליקה אלעאלם שנ[ת]	
וואפק דלך לסני אלהרבן שנת	
והי אלסנה אלתאסעה מן מחזור	
והי אלסנה אלתאסעה מן מחזור	
והי שלימין	20

This list was found in the handwriting of a certain Israel who probably was its author. The latter clearly was a member of the Pumbedita (Bagdād) school. Hence he designates the dignitaries of this academy as דילן 'ours'. We have obviously before us a chronologically arranged list of the dates of demise of the scholars enumerated therein. The first scholar mentioned is Ṭob (l. 2), most likely identical with Ṭob ישיבה שלגולה (i.e. Pumbedita-Bagdād), the son of the Gaon Ṣemaḥ b. Palṭoi and grandfather of the writer of the interesting epistle, dated Nisan (1)264 Sel. (= 953 C.E., printed in *ŸQR.*, XVIII, 402, l. 1). Probably in our list read דטוב אב דילן, i.e. Ṭob, Ab of 'our' (school), the son of the Gaon of 'our' (school), viz. Ṣemaḥ b. Palṭoi (872–90 C. E.). Hai Gaon, mentioned next (l. 3), is no doubt identical with Hai b. David, the next Gaon of Pumbedita (the first to reside in Bagdād, 890–8 C.E., see *infra*, p. 435). Then we have Ḥofni (Samuel's father), Ab of 'our' (school,²⁵ l. 4). Ṣemaḥ b. Isaac (l. 5) is unknown to me. Sherira Gaon (l. 6) died

²⁴ One could also read ח [ביום]. But there is no dot on the ח, unlike l. 6. Therefore the reading ח [ביר] appeared to me more justified.

²⁵ Already Ginzberg (*Geonica*, I, 7, note) surmised, though hesitatingly, that Ḥofni was Ab of Pumbedita.

on the 8th of Tishri. The passage referred to above (p. 410) indeed gives the date of his demise as *Tishri* (1)317 Sel. But the year 1005 C.E. is uncertain. It is more likely that Sherira departed this life a few years earlier at the close of the tenth century. Samuel b. Ḥofni (l. 7) died on Monday, Ab 25th, 1013 C.E., if we combine our list with MS. Damascus cited above (p. 410). According to the Tables in Mahler's *Handbuch der jüdischen Chronologie*, Ab 1st, 1013, fell on a Saturday, hence the 25th was on a Tuesday and not on a Monday. This discrepancy of one day reveals a miscalculation in the above Tables. Asaf b. Bešalel (l. 8) died on Friday. He is no doubt identical with the Rosh Hasseder of the Pumbedita-Bagdād school mentioned in a letter dated 1021 (see *infra*, p. 436). Next comes Dosa, *Gaon of Sura* (l. 9). Israel (Hakkohen) Gaon b. Samuel (b. Ḥofni) is mentioned next (l. 10). Whereas our list says he died 'in the day' . . . , MS. Damascus (above p. 410) states explicitly that his demise took place on the eve of the 5th of Kislev. But this discrepancy is really small. 'Azaryah (l. 11) is no doubt identical with 'Azaryah Hakkohen, Gaon of Sura. The 'death-roll' is interrupted by the mention of the birth of a certain Hillel, a member of 'our' (school, l. 12). Next we hear of the demise of the famous Hai Gaon. According to Ibn Daud (*l.c.*, 66, l. 4 from bottom) this happened on the seventh day of Passover (בערב יום טוב) (אחרון של פסח). Finally comes the date of death of Isaac, *Gaon of Sura* (l. 14). He seems to have been the *last* Gaon of this academy. How long he survived Hai is unknown. Thus the close of the Babylonian Gaonate and the causes that necessitated it are shrouded in obscurity. The Pumbedita-Bagdād school is stated by Ibn Daud to have existed for two years after Hai's death in 1038 under

the presidency of the Exilarch Hezekiah. But against this a contemporary note tells us that, after Hai, no 'head of the school was appointed in *Babylon*' (בבבל, i.e. Bagdād! see *infra*, p. 434).²⁶ But no reason is given for closing this ancient seat of learning. Assuming that Isaac presided over the Sura school till he was gathered to his fathers, we obtain the surprising result that Sura existed, though only for a few years, longer than Pumbedita-Bagdād! Why again the Sura academy became defunct on his death, and this time finally, is again altogether unknown. We can only hope for further Genizah discoveries to shed new and unexpected light on the deep darkness that covers this chapter of Jewish history.

²⁶ See especially on these conflicting reports, Poznański, *Babylonische Geonim*, 1 ff.