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THE BOOK OF TESTIMONIES AND LEGAL DOCUMENTS
BY SE'ADYAH BEN JOSEPH GAON

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Edited and translated

by

MENAHM BEN-SASSON AND ROBERT BRODY



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FOREWORD

The *Book of Testimonies and Legal Documents* is one of a number of pioneering monographs on legal topics written in Judeo-Arabic by Se'adyah ben Joseph. The most elaborate and likely the last of these monographs, it was composed in Baghdad in 926, two years before the author was appointed Gaon (head of the academy) of Sura. Like most of the monographs composed by Se'adyah and several later Geonim, this work was virtually lost when the intellectual center of the Jewish world shifted to the European lands, in which knowledge of Arabic was very rare. For a millennium it was known only from occasional mentions or citations, or paraphrases in later rabbinic literature. Since the discovery of the Cairo Genizah at the end of the nineteenth century, a number of scholars have published fragments of the work. The current edition supersedes all of these publications and includes many previously unpublished fragments. We estimate that we have succeeded in reconstructing eighty-five to ninety percent of the entire work. Our edition includes an introduction, a critical apparatus and an annotated Hebrew translation.

The work itself comprises a preface, eight chapters and a brief appendix. The first four chapters concern the laws regulating testimony in general, while the last four deal with the writing of legal documents, which may be considered a form of written testimony. The final chapter is subdivided into fifty-four sections, each devoted to the text of a particular type of legal document and the rules associated with it. The appendix lists the names and purposes of ten types of documents that the author chose not to include in his work, because their use was restricted to high officials in their administration of public affairs. In keeping with ancient tradition, the texts of the documents are in Aramaic, although the author assumes that the spoken language of those who write them is Arabic. As is usual in works of this sort, biblical and rabbinic sources in the original Hebrew or Aramaic are embedded within Se'adyah's Judeo-Arabic composition.

We hope this edition will help restore Se'adyah's groundbreaking work to its rightful place in the study of rabbinic literature.

Menahem Ben-Sasson and Robert Brody

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