

**A NEW AND CRITICAL VERSION OF  
RHYMES ON MORAL INSTRUCTION  
ATTRIBUTED TO RABBI HAI BEN  
SHERIRA GAON BASED ON THREE  
MMS. IN THE BRITISH MUSEUM**

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A new and critical version of Rhymes on moral instruction attributed to Rabbi Hai ben Sherira gaon based on three MMS. in the British museum by Hai Ben Sherira & Hermann Gollancz

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**HAI BEN SHERIRA & HERMANN GOLLANCZ**

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A NEW AND CRITICAL VERSION  
OF RHYMES ON  
MORAL INSTRUCTION

ATTRIBUTED TO

RABBI HAI BEN SHERIRA GAON

(Died 1038)

Based on three MSS. in the British Museum

WITH TRANSLATION AND NOTES BY

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DEDICATED  
TO MY CHILDREN AND GRANDCHILDREN  
IN HOPE

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## INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

IN the Introduction to my edition of the *Shekel Hakodesh* (1919, p. xii), I remarked : ' I have further included parallels to be found in the delightful and terse poem *שירי מוסר השכל* by Hai Gaon, anterior to both Gabirol and Kimchi, striking both on account of the similarity of ideas and language.'

These parallels may be found in the Notes to the said edition, pp. 64, 68, 69, 71, 72, 75, and 77.

It is necessary to qualify the expression which makes Hai Gaon absolutely the author of the work ; for doubt has been cast by several scholars upon the authorship of the collection of maxims which go under his name. Nor is even the title of this little work as it appears in the printed editions beyond cavil ; since, as may be gleaned from a perusal of the manuscripts



themselves, it is not met with in this form in the originals which I have had before me.

It occurred to me that, considering the intrinsic value of this unpretentious work, and the fact that the various editions which have appeared hitherto are both defective and faulty, a critical version might be welcome to those who delight in products from the great storehouse of Hebrew literature. The translation which I have prepared will serve to enlighten the general reader as to this presentation of moral sayings of mediaeval times.

Similar to other works of its kind, like the Last Will of Rabbi Jehuda Ibn Tibbon addressed to his son Samuel, and that of Moses Maimonides addressed to his son Abraham, this didactic poem seems to have been prepared by the author as a *vade mecum* for his own child; and it will be readily conceded that no more fitting gift could be bestowed upon one's offspring than a collection of rules and maxims drawn from ripe experience, whereby to regulate the conduct of their lives.

It is not my purpose in these brief introductory remarks to discuss the authorship of the collection of sayings here presented, or to give a biographical sketch of the activities of Rabbi Hai Gaon, who has been credited with its production, beyond stating that this Gaon, who died in 1038, was the son of the celebrated Sherira Gaon, and was the last and most distinguished of the 'Geonim'—that is, heads of the academies of learning in Babylon which exercised their influence for nearly 450 years. For these and other particulars I would refer the reader to the various notices concerning this outstanding personality, among them, the article in the *Jewish Encyclopedia* (sub Hai ben Sherira, and the Bibliography) and the interesting sketch in Hebrew, which serves as an introduction to Weiss's edition of the maxims, published in his *Likute Kadmonim* (Warsaw, 1893). This latter sketch is certainly of greater value than the version of the poem itself, prepared from a most unreliable source, which puts the editor to great pains to explain in foot-notes some forced meaning of a naturally misunderstood

phrase or expression owing to a wrong reading. This is the more surprising for a Hebrew scholar like Weiss, as Steinschneider's older edition, published in 1860 (Berlin), is a much safer guide, and might well have served to elucidate expressions which seemed incomprehensible to Weiss.

My concern in the present volume has been mainly with the preparation of a fairly intelligible text ; and yet I will not claim perfection for my version. It is an attempt to produce amid a mass of variants something better and fuller than has so far appeared, with an English rendering.

Though based mainly on the British Museum MS. Add. 27045, I have incorporated emendations by the light of MS. Add. 27193, and both emendations and additions from the Harleian MS. 5686. In the Notes I refer to the first as A, to the second as III, and to the Harleian as H. In the *Brit. Museum Cat.*, the first is described by Margoliouth as written in Franco-German Rabbinic of the fifteenth century, the second in Italian Rabbinic of the same century, while the