

Genesis 5:24 in Karaite Exegesis: *Sefer maamar Mordekhai*

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ABSTRACT: This article deals with a little-known commentary on the Pentateuch (more precisely, a supercommentary on Aaron ben Joseph's *Sefer ha-mivhar*) titled *Sefer maamar Mordekhai* (*Book of Mordecai's Speech*). Its author is the Polish-Lithuanian Karaite Mordecai ben Nisan of Kukizov (died around the year 1709), one of the founders of the Karaite community in Kukizów near Lwów, the ancestral seat of the Polish king John III Sobieski. This commentary was based on an earlier commentary on *Sefer ha-shemen ha-tov* by Aaron ben Judah, also a Polish-Lithuanian Karaite. Mordecai ben Nisan quotes the text of *Sefer ha-shemen ha-tov* and adds his own commentary to it. Its importance as an authoritative textbook of Karaite exegesis is evidenced by the fact that it was formally approved for use by leading Karaite scholars of the Polish-Lithuanian communities (between the years 1706 and 1709). Undoubtedly, this commentary should be recognised as the greatest creative achievement of the theological and exegetical thought of the Polish-Lithuanian Karaites, produced during the period of the peak intellectual flourishing of this community (which took place in the 17th-18th centuries). In this article, I present an English edition of the text of this commentary on Genesis 5:24. The edition is based on manuscript C104, *Maamar Mordekhai* (manuscript in the collection of the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts, St. Petersburg, 1753). The manuscript contains a commentary on the books of Genesis and Exodus, i.e. up to the parasha *Elle pekude* (Exodus 38:21–40:38). Another part, containing commentaries on the books of Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, was recorded in manuscript C102. The copyist of both volumes was Mordecai ben Samuel of Halicz. He completed the transcription of the text of the commentary (a total of about 1,000 pages) in the month of *Ziv*, i.e. *Iyyar*, of the year 1754, see C102, folio 242 verso (the first volume, manuscript C104, was completed in 1753, see C104, folio 3 recto). In the article, I also mention several minor exegetical works of the Polish-Lithuanian Karaites related to *Sefer maamar Mordekhai*.

KEYWORDS: Exegesis of Genesis 5:24, Karaite exegesis, Enoch, Enochic literature, Polish-Lithuanian Karaites

Sefer maamar Mordekhai (*Book of Mordecai's Speech*) by Mordecai ben Nisan of Kukizov (died around the year 1709) is a supercommentary to *Sefer ha-mivhar*. Mordecai ben Nisan, who belonged to a group of Karaites from Troki settled by John III Sobieski in Kukizov (Pol. Kukizów, also known as Krasny Ostrów) near Lviv (Pol. Lwów) in the late 17th century. He became famous primarily for his treatise *Dod Mordekhai* (*Beloved of Mordecai*), written in 1698 at the request of the Leiden Protestant professor Jacob Trigland (1652–1705) and devoted to the origins and history of the Karaites and the differences between them and the Rabbanites. The treatise first appeared in print in 1714, with a Latin

translation by Johann Christoph Wolf.¹ He also authored a treatise on a similar topic, titled *Sefer levush malkhut* (*The Book of the Royal Attire*), written for the Protestant King of Sweden, Charles XII, who visited Łuck in 1702 during the Third Northern War. Protestants took a keen interest in Karaite Judaism during this period because of the parallels between the Karaite-Rabbanite schism and the Protestant-Catholic schism. In addition, he authored several other works, including *Sefer kelalim yafim* (*The Book of Beautiful Principles*; a manual of Hebrew grammar). Mordecai ben Nisan went missing during a trip to Crimea with his son Nisan (the place and date of their death are unknown, it is believed that they died in 1709).² It is noteworthy that Mordecai ben Nisan is referred to in Karaite literature as the “Karaite Ramban,” apparently in connection with the commentary *Sefer maamar Mordekhai*.

The commentary on the Torah, *Sefer maamar Mordekhai*, was written in Kukizov in 1706 (it was completed on the 14th of *Ziv*, i.e. *Iyyar* 14, see manuscript C102 folio 242 verso). It was finally approved for use by the Karaite scholars of the Crown of the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in 1709.³ Earlier, Mordecai ben Nisan had revised the Hebrew text of *Sefer ha-mivhar* (the manuscripts were known to have contained errors that were later repeated in other manuscripts). The main motivation for writing the new commentary was the need to expand the explanations in order to make them comprehensive and fully understandable (without the help of a mentor), but also to bring the explanations up to date with the current state of knowledge. The commentary prepared by Mordecai ben Nisan has undoubtedly fulfilled these expectations. *Maamar Mordekhai* is unquestionably a complete and insightful exegetical work (in manuscripts C104 [Genesis–Exodus] and C102 [Leviticus–Deuteronomy]), the commentary was recorded on a total of 504 numbered folios, or more than 1,000 pages). In addition to Mordecai ben Nisan’s own commentary, it includes a lost commentary on *Sefer ha-mivhar* by Aaron ben

1 *Notitia Karaeorum ex Mardochei, Karaei recentioris, tractatu haurienda, quem ex ms. cum versione latina notis et praefatione de Karaeorum rebus scriptisque edidit Johannes Christophorus Wolfius, Hebr. et oriental. lingg. prof. publ. Accedit in calce Jacobi Triglandii Dissertatio de Karaeis cum Indicibus variis recusa.* (Hamburg et Leipzig: Impensis Christiani Liebezeit 1714). The title *Dod Mordekhai* refers to Est 2:15. The term דד “beloved,” as the author explains in the “Introduction,” refers to Jacob Trigland, whom he considers “beloved” and “friend,” but also to each of the two Karaite scholars, his relatives, who assisted him in writing the treatise. These were David ben Shalom of Lutsk and Joseph ben Samuel of Halich (he refers to them as דודים, Heb. דוד “beloved,” “uncle”). See pp. 4–5.

2 Cf. A.B. Gottlober, *Bikkoreth letoldoth hakkarim oder Kritische Untersuchungen über die Geschichte der Karäer* (Vilno: Funn et Rozenkrancz 1865) 200–201; J. Mann, *Texts and Studies in Jewish History and Literature. II. Karaitica* (Philadelphia, PA: Hebrew Press of the Jewish Publication Society of America 1935) 588, 738–739. See also the account given by Joseph Solomon ben Moses Lutski in manuscript D80 of the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts, folio 15 verso.

3 See manuscript C104, folios 3 recto and 6 recto; cf. Mann, *Texts and Studies*, 739, 1256–1257. Among the Karaite scholars who expressed their personal approval of the *Maamar Mordekhai* commentary between 1706 and 1709 were Abraham ben Aaron of Nowe Miasto, Moses ben Samuel of Szaty (Wilkomierz region), Mordecai ben Isaac Łukszyński of Świętojeziory (Troki region), Joseph ben Isaac of Świętojeziory, Solomon ben Aaron of Poswól, Joseph ben Isaac of Szaty (Wilkomierz region), Joseph ben Samuel of Łuck (originally of Derażne). See manuscript C104, folios 6 recto–10 verso.

Judah of Troki (Mordecai ben Nisan's uncle). Little is known about this author.⁴ He was the teacher of Solomon ben Aaron of Poswol.⁵ He died at the end of the 17th century (see manuscript C104, folio 11 verso). The commentary is titled *Sefer ha-shemen ha-tov* (*Book of Good Oil*; a title given to it by Mordecai ben Nisan). The manuscript of this commentary, which Mordecai ben Nisan received from his disciple Solomon ben Aaron of Poswol, was in poor condition and covered only the text from Genesis to Numbers.⁶ Mordecai ben Nisan completed the commentary for the missing portion and added his explanations and critical comments to the entire text. When he quotes Aaron ben Judah's explanations in his commentary, he prefixes them with the abbreviation (אמר הרב בעל השמן) "אהב"ה "Said Rav, the author of *ha-Shemen*" and ends with the phrase "עד כאן" "To this point" (cf. manuscript C104, folio 14 verso; optionally "עד כאן לשונו" "To this point, his words"). Notably, Mordecai ben Nisan's own commentary also includes explanations of *Sefer ha-shemen* (see, e.g. folio 52 recto, 40–42), which means that *Sefer maamar Mordekhai* is in part also a supercommentary on *Sefer ha-shemen*. Similarly, as in other commentaries on *Sefer ha-mivhar*, the abbreviation ר"ל (רצונו לומר, rendered in the English translation as "it means") usually appears immediately before the explanations themselves (including quotations of explanations by other authors). However, the quoted text of the *Sefer ha-mivhar* itself is preceded by the abbreviation מ"ש (מה שאמר, "what he said"). The same abbreviation also appears before quotations of the biblical text (in which case it is translated as מ"ה שכתוב "as it is written").

The text of *Sefer maamar Mordekhai* was not published in print, although in the years 1820–1822, the project of printing it was initiated, in one volume with the text of *Sefer ha-mivhar* and *Sefer keter Torah*. The initiator and executor of the project was the well-known Karaite scholar David ben Mordecai Mardkovich (Pol. Mardkowicz; later known as "Kukizov" or "of Kukizov"), then living in Kukizov, located about 20 kilometres away from

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- 4 He is probably to be identified as Rav Aaron son of Judah, who is mentioned in the "Resolutions of the congress of the Lithuanian Karaites" of 1665 (NLR Evr II a 146, folios 48–50; NLR Evr II a 221, folios 101–102). See Mann, *Texts and Studies*, 825 (doc. 9, 46); P. Muchowski – M. Tomal, *Resolutions and Community Documents of the Polish-Lithuanian Karaites from 1553 to 1830: A Critical Edition* (Paris: Editions Suger Press 2017) 75 (v. 47). As for his literary output, it is only known that he wrote a *zemer* for the occasion of circumcision, which begins with the words אל חי ומגדל ערו (attested in a manuscript from a private collection) and *zemer* on Shabbat, which begins with the words אשרר שיר לאל נורא ואיום, see J. Bezekovich – I.-B. Firkovich, *Tehillot Israel. Tosafot li-tfillot ha-karaim* (Berdycew 1909) 76; S. Poznański, "Zweiter Nachtrag zur 'Karäischer Literatur der letzten dreissig Jahre,'" *Zeitschrift für hebräische Bibliographie* 14/5 (1910) 153; Mann, *Texts and Studies*, 1287, footnote 742, 1433.
- 5 I.e. Solomon Yedidyah ben Aaron (born c. 1665 and died 1745), best known for his treatise on Karaite Judaism titled *Sefer appiryon asa lo*. See manuscript C104, folio 11 verso. For his biography and works, see for example Mann, *Texts and Studies*, 740–741; S. Kubicki, *Edycja krytyczna traktatu Szelomo ben Aharona z Pozwola „Lechem Seorim”* (Diss. Adam Mickiewicz University; Poznań 2020) 59–66.
- 6 That is, exactly from parasha *Beresbit* [Genesis 1:1–6:8] to parasha *Hukkat* [*Zot hukkat*, Numbers 19:1–22:1] and partly from parashot *Balak* [*Vayyare Balak*, Numbers 22:2–25:9] and *Pinhas* [Numbers 25:10–30:1]. See manuscript C104, folio 11 verso.

Lviv (he moved to Gözleve in Crimea shortly after that, also in 1822).⁷ The work was to be printed by Rabbanite printers from Lviv. Accordingly, David ben Mordecai solicited funds from Karaite communities in Crimea and Odesa, especially from Simḥah ben Solomon Babovitch (d. 1855), a wealthy Karaite merchant from Eupatoria (Gözleve), who in the following years became a leader of Karaite religious and social life in Crimea, and with whom the Polish Karaites from Volhynia (Joseph Solomon ben Moses Lutski and Abraham Firkovich, who resided in Crimea) were already collaborating.⁸ These efforts are attested to in three surviving letters from Abraham Firkovich's second collection, which he sent to Crimea (see Evr II a 1816, Evr II a 1822, Evr II a 1823). We learn from them that a printed copy should cost no less than 2.5 silver rubles and two or three kopecks if printed on good paper in an edition of at least 500 copies (Evr II a 1822, folio 1 verso, 37–40).⁹ The funds, however, apparently could not be raised, and the project was ultimately not completed. Its material trace, however, is the surviving proof print of the first card, which shows the intended graphic form of the edition (the letters Evr II a 1822 and 1823 were written on the back of the printed card). The idea of printing was revived in the 1830s when a Karaite printing press was established in Gözleve (1833), however ultimately the *Maamar Mordekhai* commentary was not included in the 1834–1835 printed edition of *Sefer ha-mivḥar*, for which Abraham Firkovich was responsible. Despite the disappointment of some members of the Karaite community, it was finally decided that it would be replaced with the commentary *Tirat kesef* by Joseph Solomon Lutski.¹⁰

- 7 Biographies of David ben Mordecai report that he was the great-grandson in the male line of Mordecai ben Nisan, author of *Maamar Mordekhai*. This information comes from David Maggid, author of the “Preface” (ראשית דבר) in the *Sefer ṣemah David* published by Nisan ben David Kukizov (son of David ben Mordecai of Kukizov) in 1897. On page XIII he wrote about the father of David ben Mordecai: “The son of the son of Rav Ribbi Mordecai, also named Mordecai ben Nisan (II), who was also a scholar of the Kukizov congregation [...]” (Heb.). This information seems doubtful, however, since the son of Mordecai ben Nisan, the author of *Maamar Mordekhai*, who bore the name Nisan, died on his way to Crimea as a bachelor, see NLR manuscript EVR I, 759, folio 4 verso, 2–4. For a discussion of this topic, see also Mann, *Texts and Studies*, 1350–1351. Thus, the information repeated in contemporary publications that David was a descendant of Mordecai ben Nisan, author of *Maamar Mordekhai*, is uncertain. See, for example, B.D. Walfish, “Karaite Press and Printing,” *Karaite Judaism: A Guide to Its History and Literary Sources* (ed. M. Polliack) (Leiden – Boston: Brill 2003) 928; M. Kizilov, *The Karaites of Galicia: An Ethnoreligious Minority among the Ashkenazim, the Turks, and the Slavs 1772–1945* (Leiden: Brill 2009) 123, note 180; V. Klimova – A. Yariv, “Outstanding Karaite scholars from Kukizov,” *Jewish History Quarterly* 273/4 (2020) 889; J. Algamil, “Preface” (ראשית דבר), David ben Mordecai Kukizov, *Sefer Ṣemah David* (ed. Joseph ben Ovadya Algamil) (Ashdod: Tiferet Yosef le-ḥeqer ha-yahadut ha-qarait 2004) I, 25. Nevertheless, it is theoretically possible that he was a descendant of Mordecai ben Nisan I after the daughter of his other son Abraham ben Mordecai (buried in Kukizov, d. 1747).
- 8 For Simḥah ben Solomon Babovitch, see Ph.E. Miller, *Karaite Separatism in Nineteenth-Century Russia. Joseph Solomon Lutski's Epistle of Israel's Deliverance* (Cincinnati, OH: Hebrew Union College Press 1993) 18–67. On the situation in Eupatoria during this period, see D. Shapira, *Avraham Firkovich in Istanbul (1830–1832). Paving the Way for Turkic Nationalism* (Ankara: KaraM 2003) 12–13.
- 9 Cf. also Kizilov, *The Karaites of Galicia*, 182.
- 10 Cf. A. Firkovich, *Avne zikkaron li-vne Israel be-eres Krim* (Vilna 1872) 4. Abraham Firkovich reports that it was he who printed *Sefer ha-mivḥar* with the commentary *Tirat kesef* by Joseph Solomon Lutski in 1834–1835. According to his statement, the Karaite printing press in Gözleve signed a contract to print *Sefer ha-mivḥar* with the commentary *Maamar Mordekhai*. However, under the influence of Joseph Solomon Lutski, a change

The text of the commentary on Genesis 5:24 in *Sefer maamar Mordekhai* focuses on issues related to the meaning of the word “took,” the nature of the soul, the body of the pious, and the chronology of the letter of Elijah (2 Chronicles 21:12).

1. Edition of the Commentary on Genesis 5:24

(Based on the C104 manuscript, Institute of Oriental Manuscripts, folios 52 recto–53 recto).

Hebrew text:
folio 52 recto

37 (ומ"ש כי יקחני סלה) 11 אהב"ה 12 ר"ל כי ענין לקיחתו אותו 13 38 הוא השארות נפשו והדבקה בשכל הפועל המשלים אותה והמוציאה מן הכח אל הפועל וזהו אמרו כי 39 יקחני סלה עכ"ל .. אמנם אני כבר פירשתי בפרק נעשה אדם וכן בעזרתו ית' נפרש בשלימות בסדר 40 ויחי בפסוק אל תחד כבודי . כי דעת הרב ז"ל במהות נפש האדם שהיא שכל בפועל קודם בואה לגוף . 41 על כן נראה לי שרצון הרב ז"ל שהעור האלהי יהיה עמו בכל ענייניו הגופיים והרוחניים להצליחו 42 בקיום המצות לנחול שני העולמים . וענין כי לקח אותו אלהים שקבל נפשו לפני השכינה ולא היתה 43 נשמתו נזופה ממעונה כי לא היתה מטומאה בעבירות .. (ומ"ש ואל תתמה שמלת לקיחה כוללת

folio 52 verso

1 הגויה והנשמה) ר"ל בלקיחתו של אליהו .. (ומ"ש היא הנשמה היא השרש בחיים ובמות) אהב"ה ר"ל כי 2 בהיותה בגוף האדם הגוף חי מסבתה . ובסורה מהגוף הגוף מת והיא נשארת חיה . עכ"ל .. 3 (ומ"ש כי גוית החסידים כדמות הנשמה) אהב"ה ר"ל שאחרי שהגוף הולך אחרי הוראת ותאות הנשמה 4 ואינו הולך אחר תאות יצרו הרע בכך גם הוא מתדמה לנפש ונמשך אחריה כמו שהיה באליהו א 5 אבל אם נטמאה היא מסתבכת בגוף ואינה יכולה להפרד ממנו לגמרי ולשוב למעונה . ובכך 6 תהיה נפשו נמשכת אחר גופו לארץ ולא לשמים . וכשהיתה הנפש טהורה כנוכח בראשונה 7 עד שימשך הגוף אחריה ע"כ אמר לקיחה על הגוף ועל הנפש .. (ומ"ש וכתוב ויאסף אל עמיו) 8 ר"ל שכתוב לשון רבים . כי הגוף ילך בין הגופות הקדושות ונפש תלך בין הנשמות הקדושות .. 9 (ומ"ש והמתבונן באליהו סוסי אש ורכבי אש יבין דבר) אהב"ה ר"ל כי רמז כי לקחו האלהים והתאחד 10 עם המלאכים ונהיה רוחני והגוף כלה באש היסודי שתחת גלגל הירח ושב אל יסודותיו .. (ומ"ש 11 ואדרתו עדות לגויתו) אהב"ה ר"ל שנפלה אדרתו כדי שיקבלנה אלישע להכות המים . עד כאן 12 לשובו .. ואענה גם אני חלקי שנראה לי אמרו ואדרתו עדות לגויתו . רצה בזה שאחר שאדרתו 13 שבה אל הארץ למקום שהיתה שם . כן גם יסודות גויתו נפרדו והלכו כל אחד למקומו .. (ומ"ש 14 ואל יטעך מאמר ויבוא אליו מכתב מאליהו) בפירוש זה המאמר אוסיף גם משלי אצל דברי החכם 15 בעל השמן הקצרים ואומר . כי ידוע שמאמר ויבוא אליו מכתב מאליהו היה אחר שעלה אליהו 16 למרום . והעד על זה כי בימי יהושפט כבר לא היה אליהו נמצא . כי יהושפט בלכתו עם יהורם 17 בן אחאב למלחמה על מואב לא שאלו מאליהו אלא מאלישע

was made and his *Tirat Kesef* commentary was printed instead of *Maamar Mordekhai*. Cf. also S. Poznański, “Karäische Drucke und Druckereien,” *Zeitschrift für Hebräische Bibliographie* 21/4–6 (1918) 78–79.

11 A writing mark with the function of a quotation mark.

12 Abbreviation in meaning: “Said the Rav, the author of [Good] Oil”.

13 The first letter of a word on the next line, written to align the text, a line filler. Similarly on folio 52 verso, l. 4.

כדכתוב במלכים (ב ג) ועליית 18 אליהו למרום כתובה בסדר הקודם . וביאת המכתב היתה בימי יהורם בן יהושפט כי אליו בא 19 המכתב ההוא . וכן מה שאמר הרב (ויהורם בן אחאב ויהושפט שאלו לאלישע וגו' עד שאמר 20 והקשה שבכלם כי לא נפרד ממנו עד עלותו) כל זה המאמר אינו למלט את המעיין מלטעות 21 אלא אדרבא עוזרים להוליד הספק . ודעתו במה שאמר (ושם כתוב אשר יצק מים על ידי אלישע) 22 ר"ל בלכת יהושפט עם יהורם בן אחאב לשאול מאלישע כתוב פה אלישע אשר יצק מים על ידי 23 אליהו שאמר יצק בלשון עבר ר"ל שכבר יצק בזמן שעבר בעת שהיה עם אליהו רבו ועכשיו אינו 24 יוצק כי כבר רבו נלקח ממנו . ואלו היה עדין בזמן ההוא עם רבו היה הכתוב אומר אשר יוצק 25 מים או אשר יצוק מים . וזהו שאמר הרב ז"ל ולא אמר עתיד . ורצון הרב באמרו (והקשה שבכלם 26 כי לא נפרד ממנו עד עלותו) ר"ל שבכל הימים ששמש אלישע לרבו לא נפרד ממנו שיהיה זה 27 נמצא במקום אחד וזה במקום זולתו . והעד על זה מה שכתוב במלכים ב' ב' ויאמר אליהו אל 28 אלישע שב נא פה כי ה' שלחני עד בית אל ויאמר אלישע חי ה' וחי נפשך אם אעזובך . וכן אמר 29 פעם שני ושלישי ולא אבה להפרד . מזה נגלה כי מיום שדבק אלישע לשרת לאליהו לא נפרד מאצל 30 רבו . מכל זה נולד ספק בכתובים שנוכרח לומר אם שהכתובים באו ע"ד מוקדם ומאוחר . ר"ל 31 שאחר שבא המכתב ליהורם בן יהושפט מאליהו עלה למרום אע"פ שנכתבה עלייתו בזמן מלכות 32 יהושפט . או שנאמר שאליהו לא עלה למרום רק היה פורח בעולם ממקום למקום ולא היה 33 מתפרסם לבני אדם רק שלח מכתב ליהורם בן יהושפט שלא להראות עמו פנים בפנים . והנה 34 הראשון בטל . מפני שאם היה עדיין אליהו נמצא בזמן ששאלו יהושפט ויהורם בן אחאב לאלישע 35 אחר שהרב והתלמיד לעולם לא נפרדו כדלעיל . למה לא שאלו מן אליהו ושאלו מאלישע .. 36 והשני כמו כן אי אפשר להעלות על לב כי יש לזה טענה גדולה . והוא שבזמן שלא רצה אליהו 37 להראות להמון בהסתרתו בנחל כרית לא הוצרך לסוסי אש ולרכבי אש אבל עכשיו סוסי אש 38 ורכבי אש הפרידוהו מתלמידו ועלה למרום ותלמידו היה מביט בעלותו עד שיכול לראותו .. 39 אם כן אי אפשר לומר שהיתה העלייה כדי להפרידו לבד מתלמידו ומעיני ההמון אלא להפרידו 40 לגמרי מעולם היסודות .. ואחר שנתבלטו מקומות הספיקות צריך ליישב המקראות באופן 41 שלא תפול סתירה בהם . והרז"ל אמר ואל יטעך מאמר ויבוא אליו מכתב מאליהו ר"ל שאני 42 אומר שסוסי אש ורכבי אש באו להפריד לאליהו מעולם היסודות . אם כן אפשר ליפול בלבך 43 ספק ותאמר אחר שלא היה אליהו נמצא בעולם היסודות מנלאן בא לשלוח מכתב ליהורם בן

folio 53 recto

1 יהושפט . ע"כ אומר הרב ז"ל אל יטעך זה הספק . ולא חשש הרז"ל להתיר זה הספק מפני בחירת הקצור 2 כמנהגו בכל ספרו לסמוך על המבין . ע"כ החכם בעל השמן נ"ע חשש למלאת החסרון ואמר כי 3 דעת הרז"ל ששגירת המכתב מאליהו ליהורם היה באופן זה כי ברוח הקדש נראה אליהו לאחד מן 4 הנביאים וצוה לו שיכתוב בשמו המכתב ליהורם ויוכילהו אליו ויאמר לו שזה המכתב שלח אליו 5 אליהו מן השמים וכל זה כדי לאיים את יהורם המרשיע ולהכניע לבו שישוב מהמעשה הרע 6 שעשה . ואמר בעל השמן כי בסדר עולם אמרו כי כבר היה לאליהו שבע שנים אחר שנגנז ואז 7 בא המכתב להיורם . עכ"ל .. ואענה גם אני חלקי ואומר שאולי דעת הרז"ל באמרו ואל יטעך 8 מאמר ויבוא אליו מכתב מאליהו כי הוא מקרא חסר . והיה צריך לומר ויבוא אליו מכתב מאלישע 9 תלמידו של אליהו . ויש כזה רבים מקראות חסרות כמו ולחם אמר לו . שהרצון אמר לתת לו . 10 וכן חמור לחם . חמור נושא לחם ודומיהם .. ומ"ש הוא כמו יהי מאורות . ר"ל שאמר לשון יחיד 11 לרבים .. ומ"ש ומיעוט שניו אולי תרענו מן קלקול דורו שלא יקלקלוהו . זה הענין דומה למה שכתוב 12 יקר בעיני ה' המותה לחסידיו . כמו שנדבר בזה הענין אי"ה בס' שמיני בפ"פ וימותו לפני ה' . ששם 13 הזכיר הרז"ל פסוק יקר בעיני ה'

.. ומ"ש ואריכת הימים יש לפרש בדרך נס. אהב"ה דעת הרז"ל כי זה¹⁴ 14 נס גדול באנשים ההם שחיו ימים רבים כמו שנמצא במין האדם לפעמים שיהיה גדול בכמותו 15 מאשר בני אדם. ולפעמים הויה זה הענין מסבה מה כגון מצד היותו באקלים הנקרא משה 16 היום שהלילה והיום שוים בו לעולם. או מצד מזונותיו כשירגיל את עצמו למזונות המיוחדים 17 להעמיד הלחות השרשי. או במה שיתנהג באכילה ושתייה ומשגל כפי הסדר הכרחי וספוק ה 18 המחיה לבד ולא לתאווה בהמית או בהשמרו מן הקור והחום וזולתם. או על דרך המופת כפי מה 19 שהתנה במעשה בראשית עכ"ל.

Translation:
folio 52 recto

37 As it is written: *For He will take me. Sela.* [Ps 49:16]¹⁵ Rav [Aaron ben Judah], the author of *ha-Shemen*, said: "It means that the case of his being taken 38 is that his soul remains and clings to the intellect *in actu*, which completes it and leads it from potentiality to action. And it was said of this: *For 39 He will take me. Sela.*" To this point, his words. In fact, I have already explained it in the chapter "Let us make man"¹⁶. And similarly, with His help, blessed be He, it was explained fully in parasha 40 "And he lived," in the verse *Let not my glorious (soul) be united* [Genesis 49:6]¹⁷. For the opinion of Rav [Aaron ben Joseph, author of *Sefer ha-mivhar*], of blessed memory, concerns the essence of man's soul, which is an intellect *in actu* before it enters the body. 41 Therefore, it seems to me that the intention of the Rav, of blessed memory, was that God's support would be with him in all bodily and spiritual matters, to ensure his success 42 in fulfilling the commandments, and that he would have an inheritance in both worlds. And the matter of *for God took him* (refers to this), that He took his soul before the *Shekhinah*, and that his soul was not 43 reproved (and banished) from its abode,¹⁸ because it was not defiled by transgression. And what he said: "Don't be surprised that the word 'taking' includes

folio 52 verso

1 both body and soul [para. 512]," it means in the case of taking Elijah. And what he said: "For the soul is the core in life and in death [para. 512]" – Rav, the author of *ha-Shemen*, said, "It means that 2 when it is in a person's body, the body is alive through its cause, and when it departs from the body, the body dies and it remains alive." To this point, his words. 3 And regarding what he said: "As for the body of the pious, which is in the likeness of the soul [para. 513]," Rav, the author of *ha-Shemen*, said: "It means that when the body subsequently acts according to the instruction and desire of the soul, 4 and does not act according to the desire of the evil inclination, it also resembles the soul and follows it, as was the case with Elijah. 5 But if it defiles itself, it becomes entangled with the body and cannot completely separate itself from it and return to its abode. 6 Therefore, its soul will follow

14 In the left margin, the words שמן הטוב are written.

15 The brackets [] include words added in translation.

16 See manuscript C104, folio 39 recto.

17 See manuscript C104, folios 114 recto – 117 recto.

18 See *Adderet Eliyahu, Asara ikkarim*, ch. *Ha-ikkar ha-shemini*; seder *Tuma ve-tohora*, ch. *Ve-nashuv*.

its body to the earth, not to heaven. Since the soul, as mentioned, was pure in the beginning,⁷ while the body still follows it – that’s why he said “taking” in reference to the body and in reference to the soul. And what he said: “As it is written: *And he was taken to his ancestors*¹⁹ [para. 513],”⁸ it means that it is written in the plural because the body goes to the holy bodies, and the soul to the holy souls.”⁹ And regarding what he said: “And whoever looks at Elijah, the horses of fire, and the chariot of fire, will understand [para. 514],” Rav, the author of *ha-Shemen*, said, “It means: *for God took him* is an allusion to the fact that God took him and he united¹⁰ with the angels and became a spiritual being. And the body was destroyed by the element of fire, which is under the sphere of the moon, and it returned to its elements.” And regarding what he said: ¹¹ “And his cloak is a testimony to his body [para. 515],” Rav, the author of *ha-Shemen*, said: “This means that his cloak fell so that Elisha could take it and strike the water with it.”²⁰ To this point, ¹² what he said. And I will also give my opinion as it seems to me. When he said: “And his cloak is the testimony to his body,” his intention was that when his cloak ¹³ returned to the earth, to the place where he was, the elements of his body separated, and each went to its proper place. And what he said: ¹⁴ “And do not be deceived by the statement: *A letter came to him from Elijah* [para. 516],” in commenting on this statement, I will also add my brief considerations to the words of Rav, ¹⁵ the author of *ha-Shemen*, who states: “It is known that the statement *A letter came to him from Elijah* [2 Chronicles 21:12] was after the ascension of Elijah ¹⁶ on high, and this is proved by the fact that in the days of Jehoshaphat there was no more Elijah. For Jehoshaphat and Jehoram ¹⁷ the son of Ahab, who went to war against Moab, did not ask Elijah, but Elisha, as is recorded in the Book of Kings (2 Kings 3, [11]). And the ascension of ¹⁸ Elijah is recorded in the previous chapter²¹. The letter came in the days of Jehoram son of Jehoshaphat, for the letter ¹⁹ came to him. And likewise, what the Rav said regarding “Jehoram the son of Ahab and Jehoshaphat asked Elisha” etc., up to the words ²⁰ “And the hardest thing is that he was not separated from him until he ascended [para. 517–518]” – this whole statement is not to protect the one who sees it from being mistaken, ²¹ but on the contrary, it is meant to help raise doubts. And as for his opinion about what he said: “And it is written, *who poured water on the hands of Elisha*²² [para. 517],” ²² it means, when Jehoshaphat went with Jehoram the son of Ahab to inquire of Elisha, it is written here: Elisha, *who poured water on the hands* ²³ *of Elijah* [2 Kings 3:11], which was said in reference to the past – he poured, and this means that he already poured in the past tense, at the time when he was with Elijah, his teacher (Rav), and now he does not pour ²⁴ because his teacher has already been taken from him. And if he was still with his teacher at that time, the Scripture would say: “He pours ²⁵ water,” or “he will pour water.” And that is what the Rav [Aaron ben Joseph] of blessed memory said. And he didn’t say that it refers to a future time. And as for Rav’s intention, when he said: “And the hardest thing

19 Literally, “and was gathered to his peoples.”

20 Cf. David Kimhi’s (Radak) commentary on 2 Kings 2:11.

21 I.e., in chapter 2 of 2 Kings.

22 It was mistakenly written “Elisha” instead of “Elijah.”

is 26 that he was not separated from him until he ascended [para. 518]” – this means that all the days that Elisha served his teacher, he was not separated from him, so that one was 27 in one place and the other was not. And this is proven by what is recorded in the Book of Kings (2 Kings, 2, [2]): “Elijah said to 28 Elisha: ‘Stay here, for the Lord has sent me as far as Bet El. And Elisha answered, ‘As the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you.’” And so, he said a second and a third time. He would not part. From this it appears that from the day Elisha entered the ministry with Elijah, he did not part with 30 his teacher. All this raises a doubt about what is written. So that we are forced to pronounce whether what is written refers to an earlier or a later event? That is, 31 whether it was only after the letter came to Jehoram son of Jehoshaphat from Elijah that he ascended on high. Even though his ascension was recorded during the reign of 32 Jehoshaphat. Or shall we say that Elijah did not ascend on high, but went from place to place, not letting himself be 33 recognised by the people. And he sent only a letter to Jehoram son of Jehoshaphat, not to show himself to him face to face. 34 However, the first (possibility) is untenable, for if Elijah was still (on earth) at the time when Jehoshaphat and Jehoram son of Ahab asked Elisha 35 – while the teacher and the disciple never separated, as discussed above – why did they not ask Elijah, but asked Elisha? 36 Similarly, the second possibility cannot be accepted because there is a serious objection to it. The point is that at the time when Elijah did not want to show himself 37 to the mob, when he was hiding by the brook Kerit, there was no need for horses of fire or chariots of fire. Now, however, horses of fire 38 and chariots of fire separated him from his disciple. He ascended on high, and his disciple watched him ascending as long as he could see him. 39 If so, it cannot be said that the ascent was only to separate him from his disciple and the eyes of the mob. Rather, it was to separate him completely 40 from the world of the elements. And if the doubts about these places are removed, then the biblical passages must be clarified 41 so that there is no contradiction in them. The Rav of blessed memory said: “And do not be deceived by the statement: *A letter came to him from Elijah* [para. 516]” – this means, 42 I contend, that horses of fire and chariots of fire came to Elijah to separate him from the world of the elements. If this is so, a doubt may arise in your heart, 43 and you will say: “Since Elijah was no longer in the world of the elements, where did the letter to Jehoram son of Jehoshaphat come from?”

folio 53 recto

1 Therefore, the Rav of blessed memory says: “And do not be deceived by this doubt.”²³ Rav, of blessed memory, was not afraid to resolve this doubt – (but did not address it) due to a penchant for abbreviation, 2 according to his custom, throughout the book, relying on the intelligence of the reader. Therefore, Rav, the author of *ha-Shemen*, may he rest in the Garden of Eden, was anxious to fill in the gap, and said that 3 the opinion of Rav, of blessed memory, regarding the sending of the letter from Elijah to Yehoram was thus (stated), because through the Holy Spirit Elijah appears to be one of the 4 prophets. And

23 The quote contains the word “doubt” instead of “statement.”

he instructed him to write this letter to Jehoram on his behalf, to carry it to him, and to tell him that this letter was sent to him from heaven by ⁵ Elijah. All this was done to frighten Jehoram, a sinner, and to humble his heart so that he would turn away from the evil deeds ⁶ he had committed. And the author of *ha-Shemen* said that it was said in the *Seder Olam* that it had been already seven years after Elijah was hidden when ⁷ the letter came to Jehoram.²⁴ To this point, his words. And I will also share my opinion and say that perhaps the view of the Rav of blessed memory, when he said, “And do not be deceived by the ⁸ statement: *A letter came to him from Elijah* [para. 516],” was referring to the case of verses with missing text (*mikra haser*). And it should have been said: “A letter came to him from Elisha, ⁹ the disciple of Elijah.” There are numerous such verses with missing text, such as “he said him bread” [1 Kings 11:18], with the intention of “he said to give him bread.” ¹⁰ And similarly, “the donkey bread” [1 Sm 16:20], (instead of) “the donkey carrying bread,” etc. And as he said: “It is like: *Let there be luminous bodies*” [para. 520]. This means that he said in the singular ¹¹ instead of the plural. And when he said: “The shortening of the years, as you may know, was because of the depravity of his generation – lest they deprave him [para. 520].” This point is similar to what is written: ¹² “Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His righteous.” As we will discuss this issue, God willing, in parasha *Shemini* [Lev. 9:1–11:47] in the verse, “And they died before the Lord” [Leviticus 10:2], in which ¹³ the Rav of blessed memory mentioned the verse, “Precious in the sight of the Lord.” And as he said: “The prolongation of life should be explained in the manner of a miracle” [para. 520], the Rav, the author of *ha-Shemen* said that “It is the opinion of the Rav, of blessed memory, that it is ¹⁴ a great miracle among these people that they lived for many years, just as sometimes it can be said of a certain type of person that he will be greater ¹⁵ than the rest of the people. And sometimes there will be this question for some reason, for example, because of being in a climate called the equator, ¹⁶ where night and day are always equal. Or as a result of food, when he gets used to special food ¹⁷ to maintain elemental humidity. Or by getting used to eating and drinking and having sexual intercourse according to the necessary order and only to satisfy ¹⁸ the needs of life. And not out of lust, or to kill, or to protect oneself from cold or heat, etc. Or by a miracle, referring to what ¹⁹ was determined in the act of creation.” To this point, his words.

2. Commentary on the Edited Text

In the quoted passage from *Maamar Mordekhai*, the explanations written by Aaron ben Judah and Mordecai ben Nisan are intertwined. Mordecai ben Nisan quotes Aaron ben Judah’s explanations, presumably in the order in which they appear in his manuscript,

²⁴ See *Seder Olam Rabbah*, ch. 17. Cf. David Kimhi’s commentary on 2 Kings 21:12: היה כי כבר היה בסדר עולם אמר כי כבר היה. “It was said in the *Seder Olam* that it was after seven years since Elijah was hidden, when a letter from him came to Jehoram.”

supplements them, and comments on them. These explanations are usually factual and easy to understand. Only occasionally does he add his polemical comments. Statements on the soul, intellect, and matter, based on the metaphysics of Aristotle and Plato, relate to considerations on the subject found in *More nevu'khim* (*Guide of the Perplexed*) and *Eš hayyim* (*Tree of Life*). The commentary refers to, among other things, the concept of the immortal soul as an intellect *in actu* (see folio 52 recto, 40). Regarding the controversial issue of the “body of the pious,” Aaron ben Judah admits that the body can conform to the soul (see folio 52 verso, 4: “it also resembles the soul and follows it, as was the case with Elijah”), but essentially rejects the possibility of bodily ascension. The use of the phrase “for He took him” is interpreted by both exegetes to mean that Enoch’s soul was transferred directly to the Garden of Eden because of his piety, as Mordecai ben Nisan writes, “that He took his soul before the Shekhinah” (folio 52 recto, 42). Aaron ben Judah explains that “for God took him” is an allusion to the fact that God took him and he united with the angels and became a spiritual being. And the body was destroyed by the element of fire, which is under the sphere of the moon, and it returned to its elements” (folio 52 verso, 9–10). Regarding “And he was taken to his ancestors”²⁵ [para. 513], he comments: “It means that it is written in the plural because the body goes to the holy bodies, and the soul to the holy souls (folio 52 verso, 7–8).”²⁶ It is also worth noting that Mordecai ben Nisan seems to indicate that providence was at work, stating that “it seems to me that the intention of the Rav of blessed memory was that God’s support would be with him in all bodily and spiritual matters, to ensure his success in fulfilling the commandments, and that he would have an inheritance in both worlds” (folio 52 recto, 41–42). It is also interesting that Aaron ben Judah was clear on the issue of Elijah’s cloak (cf. folio 52 verso, 11), stating that it fell on purpose, destined for Elisha to strike water with. He thus addressed the logical problem of the fate of other parts of Elijah’s garment raised by Rabbanite exegetes. Mordecai ben Nisan’s logical and insightful argument on the question of the chronology of Elijah’s letter (see 2 Chronicles 21:12) is motivated by the requirement that “the biblical passages must be clarified so that there is no contradiction in them” (folio 52 verso, 40–41). Interestingly, Aaron ben Judah, in the quoted statement, seems to imply that Elisha might have been instructed to send the letter by Elijah, who was already in the Garden of Eden, implying the providential activity of Elijah after the ascension (folio 53 recto, 2–6). Mordecai ben Nisan’s own opinion is definitely rational and points to the possibility of an error in the text of the Bible, specifically an error involving the omission of a passage of the text. That is, the correct text should read: “A letter came to him from Elisha, the disciple of Elijah” (assuming that there was an omission of the passage in brackets

25 Literally, “and was gathered to his peoples.”

26 In this connection, see also the statement of Isaac of Troki (1533/4–1594) in the eleventh chapter of *Hizzuk emunah*: “[...] in the case of the righteous it is the opposite; and the intention of what was said of the righteous: *And he was gathered to his peoples* (Gen. 49:33; Deut. 32:50), is that he was gathered and united with the spirits of the righteous who are called ‘his peoples.’” Cf. D. Deutsch, *Befestigung im Glauben von Rabbi Jizchak, Sohn Abrahams s. A.* (Sohrau O.-Schl.: Selbstverlag des Herausgebers 1865) 89.

מ[אלישע תלמידו של] אליהו, i.e. the two words: “Elisha, the disciple of”). Similarly, in the case of ויהי כל ימי הנוך he implies that there may have been an error of omission of the letter *vav*. The correct form should be ויהיו כל ימי הנוך “All the days of Enoch were...”. It is also worth noting that Aaron ben Judah quotes a statement from the *Seder Olam* (folio 53 recto, 6), apparently taken from David Kimhi’s commentary. The text of the *Maamar Mordekhai* is very insightful, rational, and based on logical premises. It is undoubtedly explanatory and complementary with regard to problematic passages (i.e. considered problematic by the commentators) in the text of *Sefer ha-Mivhar*. It shows well the method of argumentation of both exegetes, who undoubtedly had extensive knowledge and theological training, and at the same time were open to different logical solutions. The rationality of the argumentation is remarkable; both exegetes certainly tried to explain the problematic issues as rationally as possible, in accordance with “common sense” but also with theological doctrine, which of course does not necessarily meet the criteria of rationality.

3. The Impact of *Maamar Mordekhai* on Karaite Exegesis

Maamar Mordekhai significantly influenced both *Tirat kesef* (written c. 1825) by Joseph Solomon Lutski and *Mahberet sukkat David* by David ben Nisan of Kukizov (written c. 1848 and published in St. Petersburg in 1897), two later comprehensive commentaries on *Sefer ha-Mivhar*. The *Tirat kesef* commentary, which undoubtedly draws on the explanations contained in *Maamar Mordekhai*, is in the form of a textbook. It is a systematic didactic lecture on the text of *Sefer ha-mivhar*. Compared to *Maamar Mordekhai*, it has a decidedly more practical and utilitarian character. The lecture in it is in the form of an *ex cathedra* and is more theologically cautious. Undoubtedly, Joseph Solomon ben Moses Lutski, who was well acquainted with *Maamar Mordekhai* (he was involved in making manuscript copies of this commentary, see manuscript D80, folio 15 verso), used it in preparing *Tirat kesef*, although his explanations are not necessarily in agreement with those found in *Maamar Mordekhai*. Undoubtedly, the strong influence of *Maamar Mordekhai* is evident in the text of the *Mahberet sukkat David* commentary. This becomes quite understandable if we recall how much David ben Mordecai appreciated this commentary and advocated its publication. The following is an English translation of the passage in *Mahberet sukkat David*, which refers to Genesis 5:24, and which deals with the issues discussed in para. 516–519 of *Sefer ha-mivhar*. The reliance on *Maamar Mordekhai* is evident in the concept of sending a letter from the Garden of Eden, as well as in the repeating of information regarding the *Seder Olam*. Nota bene, this passage illustrates well the specific categorical style of David ben Mordecai’s lecture.

What the Rav said regarding *Enoch walked with God and was not, for God took him* is in reference to the prophet Elijah. “And the hardest thing is that he was not separated from him until he ascended. But let us leave it at that [para. 518–519]”. The Rav also complicates this for those considering it, because

the letter that came from Elijah to Jehoram after his ascension was brought from the Garden of Eden. And Rav complicates it. If it was as they think, how could Elisha not know that Elijah, after his ascension, was to reveal himself to the need of the generations, to understand and teach? And why was he so inseparable from him until his ascension? Even though he insisted on separating from him on several occasions? And what the Rav said, “But let us leave it at that”, (literally, “We will turn our face away from it”) means that there is no proof for their opinion to be challenged. And similarly, he wrote in the commentary on Psalm 27, [10] regarding *Though my father and my mother forsake me*: “Fathers, when their will is done, turn away their faces”, etc. Similarly, Radak wrote that Elisha did not part with Elijah until he ascended. And it was still said: *who poured water*, in the past tense, and if he had not yet ascended, it would have been said: “who pours water”. And it was said in the *Seder Olam* that there were 7 years between Elijah’s ascension and the coming of the writing from him to Jehoram.²⁷

The authority of the *Maamar Mordekhai* commentary among the Polish-Lithuanian Karaites in the early 19th century was reflected in the custom of copying the *Sefer ha-mivhar* with short explanatory glosses (Hebrew: נמוקים *nimmukim*) based on its text, spontaneously added by the copyists. A good example of this custom is the Reggio 4 manuscript in the Bodleian Library. The glosses in this manuscript were graphically emphasised by writing in reduced type in compact sections of text. The creator of this manuscript, written in Kukizov in 1826, is Yeshuah Joseph ben Moses Mordkowicz (1802–1884). He served as hazzan in the Kukizov community (for several years starting in 1822) and in Halich (Pol. Halicz) (1867–1884)²⁸.

Presumably, the author of the same type of commentary (i.e., *nimmukim*) was also Shalom ben Zachariah (Zachariasiewicz, 1765–1813), a hazzan in Halich (1802–1810).²⁹ We know of its existence from a note by Shalom ben Zachariah in the colophon to the manuscript of the Torah that he copied (it has probably not survived). This note is reported in an anonymous article published in *Karaj Avazy* in 1932, where we read about Shalom ben Zachariah (p. 16):

Our teacher was very anxious to have a copy of the *Mivhar*. Finally, in 1801, he set to work. He transcribed this work together with the glosses of Mordecai son of Nisan of Kokizów (these glosses are called

27 See David ben Mordecai Kukizov, *Sefer Semah David*, III. *Mahberet sukkat David* (ed. Nisan ben David Kukizov) (St. Petersburg: Tipografiya Berman i K. 1897) 140.

28 He is known for the many manuscripts he copied. On Yeshuah Joseph ben Moses Mordkowicz, see Kizilov, *The Karaites of Galicia*, 110–112.

29 Cf. Kizilov, *The Karaites of Galicia*, 105: “He was the author of the grammatical treatises *Dover Shalom* (Peaceful speaker) and *Eder ha-Yakar* (Costly garment), as well as *Nimmuqim* (Explanations) to Mordecai ben Nisan’s supercommentary on *Sefer ha-mivhar*.” Kizilov cites Fürst’s note in *Geschichte*, pp. 138–139, saying that: “Auserdem werden ihm noch Nimmukim zu einem alten Werke zugeschrieben.” It is now known that both of the aforementioned treatises (the second of which is actually a commentary on *Adderet Eliyyahu*) have survived, their manuscripts being in the collection of the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts in St. Petersburg (cf. Kizilov, *The Karaites of Galicia*, 105, note 81, where he states that “it seems that none of these works has survived”). Concerning Shalom ben Zachariah, see also R. Tuori, “Defining Karaite Faith in Early Nineteenth-Century Europe: A Poem on the Five Principles of Faith,” *Frankfurter Judaistische Beiträge* 39 (2014) 86–88.

nimmukim), and, well understanding the obligations of those who read the Law, he made it even more difficult with his own words.³⁰

This information (perhaps distorted by the translation from the Hebrew) indicates that Shalom ben Zachariah added glosses taken from the text of the *Maamar Mordekhai* commentary.³¹

Interestingly, the text of *Maamar Mordekhai* itself has also been the subject of commentaries (i.e. supercommentaries), either polemical or supplementary. This is evidenced by a manuscript with the text of *Maamar Mordekhai* copied (on order) by Joseph Solomon ben Moses Lutski (manuscripts D80, Genesis–Exodus, and D81, Leviticus–Deuteronomy, from the collection of the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts, copied in 1819, written in the Crimean script). While transcribing the text, Joseph Solomon Lutski added his own glosses in the margins (in smaller type in compact sections of text). Glosses with his explanations were inserted selectively in various places (in the D80 manuscript, however, there is no gloss on Genesis 5:24). He titled the entire commentary (i.e., a collection of his *nimmukim*) created in this manner עוללות אפרים “Gleaning of Ephraim” (cf. Judg 8:2), see manuscript D80 folio 15 recto.

A similar practice is evidenced by the commentary titled *Kaf Nahat* (“Handful of Tranquility,” Ecc 4:6), a copy of which is preserved in the manuscript Evr II a 163, 5, folios 1–21 verso. This is a commentary by Abraham ben Levi *Harosh* (Abraham Leonovich, Pol. Leonowicz) of Halich, dated 1838. Abraham Leonovich was a hazzan in the Halich community from 1810 to 1851.³² The commentary contains 15 glosses on the comments contained in *Maamar Mordekhai* (concerning the text of Genesis and the beginning of Exodus, i.e. up to parasha *Shemot*, Exodus 1:1–6:1), which he found controversial. As the author explains in the introduction, he only had access to the text of the commentary on Genesis and the beginning of Exodus (see folio 1 verso; 21 recto) in *Maamar Mordekhai*; i.e. to the beginning of the manuscript of *Maamar Mordekhai* copied by Moses ben Joseph of Kukizov, father of Joseph Solomon Lutski.³³ In the *Kaf Nahat*, questions concerning Enoch appear indirectly in the context of comments concerning the construction of heaven and the disintegration of Elijah’s body, folio 14 verso, and about the Garden of

30 Translated from the Polish translation from the original in Karaïm by Anna Sulimowicz, see A. Sulimowicz, “Tislemleri Askanlyknyn – Okruchy przeszłości. Zapomniani nauczyciel,” *Awazymyz* 13/2 (2006) 16. The original text in Karaite was published in *Karaj Awazy* in 1932 (part 1, issue 1(3); part 2, issue 2(4)). The author published it under the pseudonym ‘Karaucu’ (presumably the author is Zarach Zarachowicz (1890–1952), see Kizilov, *The Karaites of Galicia*, 106).

31 According to the same source, Shalom ben Zachariah sold this copy to Joseph Solomon Lutski in Halicz in 1804. See Sulimowicz, “Tislemleri Askanlyknyn,” 16.

32 Regarding Abraham Leonovich, see Kizilov, *The Karaites of Galicia*, 107–109.

33 He visited Halich before leaving for Crimea; he died in Crimea in 1808 without completing his copy of the *Maamar Mordekhai*, which was to be a memento for his son, Joseph Solomon. The copy was completed by Joseph Solomon himself. See manuscript D80 folio 15 verso. Nota bene, this note may indicate that there was no *Maamar Mordekhai* manuscript in Halich in the early 19th century (sic!).

Eden and the meaning of the verb לַהֲתַהֲלֵל, folio 15 recto–16 recto (I do not discuss their contents here).

At this point, we should also mention the Crimean supercommentary to *Sefer ha-mivhar* titled *Meil Shemuel* (*Samuel's mantle*, unpublished), which was written almost half a century after *Maamar Mordekhai*. The author of the commentary is Samuel ben Joseph, a teacher (*melammed*) in the community of Kale. The commentary was not completed because Samuel ben Joseph died prematurely in early 1754. He only completed the text of the commentary up to parasha *Shemini* (Leviticus 9:1–11:47). The comments on the other parashot, which he had begun, remained unfinished. The text of the commentary in this form was rewritten, edited, and provided with an introduction by the Polish Karaite Simhah Isaac ben Moses Lutski (1716–1760), who settled in Kale c. 1754.³⁴ While it is not clear whether Samuel ben Joseph was familiar with the text of *Maamar Mordekhai* and may have been inspired by it, it is still worth quoting in this context.³⁵ The text of the commentary refers to selected topics which the author subjectively considered important and on which he wished to comment.

Regarding Genesis 5:24, Samuel ben Joseph of Kale discusses two problematic issues, namely the ascension of the body (of Elijah and Enoch) and the chronology of the letter in 2 Kings 21:12. Of course, like other commentators, he argues that in the case of both Elijah and Enoch, only their souls were taken up to heaven. He also appeals to Aristotelian metaphysics, pointing out that the body was to be burned with the clothes “in the fire of the elements or in the highest air” (folio 20 recto, 26–27). Moreover, he optionally assumes that the phrase “horses of fire” is an allusion to the disintegration of the elements, not the burning of the body (folio 20 recto, 28–29). He suggests that the cloak fell when the body was separated from the soul (before the body disintegrated into the elements). He emphasises that Elijah “was alive until he ascended into the highest air” (folio 20 verso, 6–7). As for the problem of when the letter was sent, he seems to allow for the possibility that it could have been after Elijah’s ascension (folio 20 recto, 30 – folio 20 verso, 1), as does Aaron ben Judah. The following is the translation of the relevant passage based on manuscript B26 of the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts, folio 20 recto–20 verso):

folio 20 recto

23 “And whoever looks at Elijah, the horses of fire, and the chariot of fire, will understand. [2 Kings 2:11]” 24 This means that even in the case of Elijah it was said: If you see me when I am taken from you (2 Kings 2:10). His taking was not with his body, but with his pure soul. 25 Likewise in the case of Enoch. And when he says, “will understand,” it means that when Elijah ascended into heaven in the storm, 26 his pure soul was separated from his

34 He completed his work in 1860, according to the date recorded in the “Introduction” (see manuscript B26, folio 4 verso).

35 It is perhaps worth mentioning at this point that when Mordecai ben Nisan left Kukizov for Crimea in 1709, he took a copy of the recently written commentary with him for this very Karaite community, among others. Cf. manuscript D80, folio 15 verso.

body. And he ascended to heaven. The body burned with his clothes in the fire of the elements,²⁷ or in the highest air. And this is what was said: “The horses of fire and the chariot of fire. The body separated, and his cloak fell.”³⁶ 28 If he had lived, his cloak would not have fallen. Or: What was said: The horses of fire, etc., is an allusion to the disintegration of the elements. And not 29 that his body burned. And before he arrived there, each element returned to its element. That’s why his cloak fell. And not 30 burned. “And do not be deceived by the statement: A letter came to him from Elijah” (2 Chronicles 21:12). This means that Elijah

folio 20 verso

1 was alive at that time. For there is no evidence in it that he could have written this letter while he was still alive 2 and deposited it with someone for safekeeping. And what is written (shows) that he receives it as if it came now from Elijah. Or these were the words of 3 Elisha, and because of his relation to Elijah, it was written that it was him instead of Elisha. As it was said: *Elisha the son of Shaphat, you shall anoint 4 as a prophet in your place* [1 Kings 19:16]. And likewise it is written, *Who poured water on the hands of Elijah* [2 Kings 3:11]. And it is not said, “He pours” or “will pour”. It is in the 5 past tense. “That he was not separated from him until he ascended [para. 518]”. That means he was separated and saw Elijah ascend, 6 fully with his own eyes, with his body. And his body was not destroyed. And his cloak fell off. We have already said that he was alive until he ascended 7 into the highest air. And there his soul went out, and his body was destroyed.

Conclusion

The supercommentary to *Sefer ha-mivhar* presented in this article, titled *Sefer maamar Mordecai*, by Mordecai ben Nisan of Kukizov (and co-authored by Aaron ben Judah), was written in the early 18th century, at the peak of the intellectual flourishing of the Karaite community in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. It testifies to the development and achievements of the exegetic work of the Polish-Lithuanian Karaites and their excellent knowledge of the Bible. It demonstrates the nature of Karaite exegesis, its insights, its premises (based on the principles of logical reasoning), its theological and philosophical foundations (including those based on the ideas of Plato and Aristotle), as well as the manner in which statements were formulated and arguments were developed. It contains original exegetical ideas and certainly deserves to have a place in the history of biblical exegesis. It also makes a significant contribution to the exegetical study of the text of Genesis 5:24. The commentary excerpt edited in the article, which deals with the character of Enoch, is representative of the nature and specificity of Karaite exegetical thought in the 17th and 18th centuries.

³⁶ Reference to 2 Kings 2:13.

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