LITERARY AND DOCTRINAL ASPECTS OF THE DAMASCUS COVENANT IN THE LIGHT OF KARAITE LITERATURE

By Norman Golb

The Damascus Covenant (hereafter CDC) is no less an enigma to scholars today than when it was first edited and translated by Solomon Schechter forty-seven years ago. His task, and that of the scholars who followed him, was to elucidate the text, to show its historical pertinence, and to indicate the relationship of its legal doctrines to the Jewish laws in general. With the discovery of the Scroll of Discipline (DSD), the Habakkuk Commentary (DSH), and the other Dead Sea fragments, which were subsequently shown to be related to CDC, the issues at stake, rather than becoming clarified and simplified, were further complicated by the problem of that very relationship. How, and in what ways, are the legal injunctions of CDC related to those of DSD and of the Jewish sects in general? Do the documents reflect the same, or different, periods in the history of Judaism? How close is the correspondence between the language of CDC and that of the Dead Sea literature? And, finally, are the literary and doctrinal relationships between CDC and the Dead Sea literature closer or more distant than those between CDC and Karaite literature. Many writers have dealt with these and other problems in their quest for an exact understanding of this literature, and it is with this goal in mind that the present writer offers, in the discussion that follows, some of his own observations concerning the last-mentioned of these problems.
In examining our document, we may clearly observe that there are literary connections between CDC and the Karaite epistle which had as its purpose the winning over of new members and the refutation of opposing views. Pinsker and Mann have published in their works on the Karaites many such examples of Karaite literary endeavors; time and again the reader is impressed by the heated charges hurled against the Rabbanites: they do not properly observe the Sabbath or the laws pertaining to incest and purity, they mix freely with gentiles, their laws rest on an oral tradition rather than on the written word of Scripture. But often, in their appeal to the community to follow the Karaite way, the authors rise to heights of sympathy and tenderness: they are the "mourners of Zion,"\(^1\) the "men who sigh and cry,"\(^2\) who refrain in their piety from meat while in exile and who devote their waking hours to poring carefully over the words of Scripture for their true meaning.

Of particular interest in this connection is a letter written by Sahl b. Mašlijaḥ, a well-known Karaite of the second half of the 10th century,\(^4\) to a Jacob b. Samuel, whose exact identity has been debated.\(^5\) This letter is published in full by Pinsker;\(^6\) it contains, among other things, refutations of

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\(^3\) Comp. L. Q. 101, and Sahl's remarks discussed in this study.

\(^4\) Comp. JE X, p. 636, col. 2, and references there cited.


the views of the Rabbanites, and also appeals addressed to
the Karaite communities of Egypt, to which country, it
would seem, Sahl migrated in order to carry on his literary
disputations and his missionary work.7

Sahl strongly criticizes Jacob b. Samuel for his mis-
spelling of the Hebrew words, מָלְפָל, סְדוֹר, and מָסָל,8 and then
goes on to say that he will write a refutation of Jacob’s
criticisms of the Karaites not only in Hebrew but in Arabic
as well, remarking that he has heard rumors conveyed
by more trustworthy men than Jacob and himself מָסָל
(‘אתם מככבים עםڑ), to the effect that Jacob has been making
a practice of gadding about in the streets and market-
places saying untrue and evil things about the Karaites.
Says Sahl: “Thou hast not read the Biblical statement
(Isa. 51.7) ‘Hearken unto me, all ye knowers of righteous-
ness, a nation in whose heart is my Torah’” — reminding
us of the opening exhortation in CDC where this same verse
is quoted.9 Certainly, continues Sahl, God will punish Sam-
uel and all who intend to do harm to the Karaites; for they
“covet truth and peace for all the offspring of Jacob, and
are in consternation at their forsaking the Torah of the
Lord.”10 The quasi-prophetic style, the manner of speaking
in sagacious generalities, the emphasis on peace and truth,
are, of course, characteristic of CDC as well; this is the
style of the missionary, bent upon converting his audience
to what he considers a better way of life.

To continue with our letter: after these words of intro-
duction, Sahl inserts a piyyut11 containing more general

7 Cf. L.Q., p. י"פ for this problem of Sahl’s emigration. Pinsker
believed that he went to Babylonia; however, since Jacob B. Samuel
may have resided in Fustat, Mann is more likely correct in thinking
that he went to Egypt (comp. Texts II, p. 22 n.).
8 L.Q., p. 25.
9 I.e. כ"ד ידר אל לועב ייע扩散 על יהוד לתר דוד על דוד
10 והשׁוֹר אֱלֹהֵי אֲבֵד אָבָה הָסָלְהֵל לְלֵי וּרְאֵה לְלוּתָה עִלֵּיָה עָלֵי דְוָבָה אֵל וּרְאֵה מ"ה
11 This piyyut contains the acrostic SaHL BeN Ma$LIaH HaKoHeN HaQaRa.
criticisms of the Rabbanites. It concludes with a challenge to Samuel to come out into the open and refute Sahl’s accusations if he is able, rather than secretly to corrupt the innocent and young.

Sahl then remarks12 that Samuel has made other mistakes in the spelling of Hebrew; he has, for example, said of Sahl that he “trembles to warn the people and to serve as their witness in a place of prostration and a house of prayer” (אמרה שאמתה חזרה לה impunity ויהיה ile מסקים קורי ועבירות). The word קורי, says Sahl, is correctly spelled קורא. What is for us of interest, however, is the phrase (השמעת) קורי נאמר; for underlying it is the same idea as that involved in the הב השמוות ב CDC XI.22, which many scholars have associated with the Arabic masjid.13 While this latter comparison may be strained,14 the similarity of the two Hebrew expressions can not be denied.

After more criticisms of Samuel, our author remarks that he has come from the הבית המקרש (i.e., Jerusalem)15 to warn his fellow (Karaite?) Jews against Samuel (הسمعתי המקרש trial ניि;16 if we are correct in assuming that the terms הבית המקרש and ניि המקרש in CDC17 refer to Jerusalem, then we are again dealing with a similarity between Karaite usage and that in CDC.

There follows an extensive criticism of rabbinic observances and practices which, Sahl believes, are not in keeping

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12 Ibid., p. 27.
14 Is the Arabic a reflection of some such Aramaic word or expression as בית זלאמה?
16 L.Q., p. 27, bottom.
17XI.1-2; B,verso,22. We find the same term in the זיוו בכרўו הלימואים ורבעים, L.Q., p. 101 top. DSH, however, uses ירושלים.
with the spirit of the Torah. The Rabbanites eat of the food of גויים (gentiles) — reminding us of this usage of the words in CDC and especially of the exclusivism there suggested in regard to dealings with the gentiles. The Rabbanites do not properly observe the ritual laws of purity, and they allow intercourse with a woman who has given birth, before the period specified in the Torah (comp. Lev. 12.1–8) has elapsed. This of course suggests the accusation against the בתי הדת of CDC V.6 f. to the effect that they defile the “sanctuary” (המקדש) by “not distinguishing properly (between pure and impure) and by having intercourse with women who can see their blood still issuing forth,” and is also reminiscent of the several laws in CDC which place great emphasis on ritual purity.

At this point in Sahl’s letter it is remarked that the Rabbanites allow one who has suffered nocturnal pollution to perform ablutions in the morning; this, says Sahl, is against the express words of the Torah, and it is incumbent upon every man, “whether in the house or field, on the sea or dry land, in the city or ‘encampment’ (מחנה)” to wait for the “turn of evening” (לפนา ערב, comp. Deut. 23.12) before performing such ablutions. We find this term used

18 L.Q. p. 28, top.
19 IX.1; XI.15; XIV.15. The term גויים for gentiles considered as individuals, goes back to the Mishnaic period, but in DSH it is not used of gentiles but rather of foreign nations (comp. DSH III.4–5; V.3–4; XII.13; XIII.1).
20 XI.14 f.; XII, 6 f. The statement (XI.4 f.) probably refers to mixing with gentiles on the Sabbath; I deal with this problem more fully in my as yet unpublished article “The Sabbath Laws in CDC and as Practiced among the Karaites.”
21 L.Q., p. 28:
22 נוהمصאום הוה הא מקדש אשיאו והם בריריאו (ה华尔 תוקביים יבר דלא) או לוהנה את דיו יבר.
23 X.10 f.; XI.3 f., 18 f.; XII.1, 15 f.; XIII.4 f. L.Q., p. 28.
24 אס בכריי アא בושה אס ביכיcreature and as Practiced among the Karaites, see Qirqisani, K.A. X.46–7 (pp. 1055–1058).
in a similar sense in CDC, where two kinds of communities — מנוחת רעים and מנוחות רעים — are spoken of.

Sahl then states that he has come to warn the people against eating certain kinds of animal food (בשרים), such as a pregnant beast and her foetus, or an impure animal found within a pure one, and afterwards he returns to the question of one who has given birth, stating that it is not permissible for one to have intercourse with her for forty days following the birth of a boy or for eighty days following the birth of a girl. We can not be sure that this is the matter referred to in CDC V.6, but it seems likely, since the strictness in rabbinic law regarding the menstruant would hardly give rise to an accusation against the בתי הזרחיים — that is to say, the Pharisaic Jews or Rabbanites — involving this matter. On the other hand, the rabbis abrogated the law of waiting after birth, as prescribed in the Torah, after the destruction of the Second Temple. It is in general doubtful if this statement in CDC could be made to reflect pre-exilic conditions, for it would then have no pertinence.

After dealing with this problem of the יולדת for some length, Sahl once more accuses the Rabbanites of making the laws of purity less severe, and of only partial adherence to the laws in general. They allow lights to burn on the Sabbath, whereas the Torah ordains otherwise. They have made less severe the conditions under which water may be drawn on the Sabbath; this is of course reminiscent of CDC XI.1 f., which states that “one should not draw (water) into any vessel (on the Sabbath).” They do not

\[27\] L.Q., p. 28.
\[28\] See JE IX, 301 and references there cited.
\[29\] See ibid, IV, 28 f. Only the Samaritans were stricter (comp. Nid. IV.1.).
\[30\] L.Q., pp. 29–30.
\[31\] In my article, “The Sabbath Laws in CDC and as Practiced among the Karaites” I deal with this more fully.
observe the festivals at their proper times, a charge reminiscent of the prescription in CDC VI.18 f., which ordains that the Covenanters properly observe the Sabbath, the festivals, and the תיוסף (fast) day — i.e., in distinction to others. They further allow incestuous marriages, as in the case of a man marrying his father’s wife’s daughter; they have added unnecessary expansions to the dietary laws (as in the prohibition against cooking chicken in milk); they allow the slaughter of a pregnant beast and the eating of its foetus; and they also permit eating different kinds of fats which should really be prohibited. (On this latter point Sahl dwells at length.)

“And now, oh my brother Jacob b. Samuel,” continues Sahl, “know that I have come from the בית המקרא (Jerusalem) to give instruction about things like these which the ancients (הראשונים) did, and they are only a few things among many! (And I have also come) to turn the hearts of those who fear God back to his Torah. Oh, that I might be able to go through every city warning and awakening the nation of God....” Here we again have a reference to the ב ת המקרא used for Jerusalem, as we have הרשיאים or רחמים in CDC. The term לואם, is used in a very similar sense in CDC, where it refers to the ancients or forefathers of the people.

After more criticisms of Jacob b. Samuel, Sahl offers a supplicatory prayer, asking God when He will have pity on the Jewish people, and offering other words to this effect. The Mourners of Zion (i.e., the Karaites of Jerusalem and other locales) have cut themselves off from

32 Ibid., p. 30.
33 L.Q., p. 30.
34 See above, n.17.
35 I.4, 16; IV.8, 9; VI.2; B, recto, 29; B, verso, 9–10.
36 L.Q. 31.
37 See above, n. 2.
the pleasures of the world, says Sahl, and cling to the Torah of the Lord; they have forsaken the lands of their birth, they have left the cities and gone to the mountain-tops where they bewail the fate of Israel — they are “the men who sigh and groan” (comp. Ezek. 9.4). This latter phrase reminds us of CDC B, recto, 10 ff. where we read: “These (i.e., the keepers of the Torah) shall escape at the time of the visitation, and they that remain will be delivered to the sword, when there will come the Messiah of Aaron and Israel; just as it happened at the time of the first visitation, as (God) commanded through Ezekiel to 'set the mark upon the foreheads of the men who sigh and groan,' while those who remained were delivered to the sword that 'executes the vengeance of the Covenant.'”

We find a still closer comparison to the situation described in CDC further on in Sahl’s letter, as we shall see below.

Sahl now continues with his exhortations. He has come not for the sake of gain, but “in order to awaken the hearts of Israel and have them return to the Torah of the Lord; to stimulate their feelings and thoughts that they fear their Lord; to cause them to stand in fear of the Day of Judgment which is coming (upon them) with wrath and fury, and of the day of God’s avenging those who have forsaken His Torah; and also to warn them against relying upon ‘the commandment of men learned by rote’ (comp. Isa. 29.13) and against the religious principles of the ‘two women’ (i.e., the academies of Sura and Pumbeditha) who will not be redeemed in the Day of Judgment.” This passage calls to mind the several places in CDC where the author warns of the coming days of wrath when all those

38 Reading אָשֶר אָמַר יְהוֹעֵכַל בִּרְיָי יְהוֹעֵכַל for אָשֶר אָמַר אֶצְרָיִן יְהוֹעֵכַל.
39 Comp. Ezek. 9.4; Lev. 26.25.
40 See Pinsker’s note a.l.; also L.Q., pp. 42, 43. (Are these puns directed against polygamous practices?)
who do not follow the laws of God will be punished, as in B, recto, 5 ff.: “But upon all those who despise the laws and statutes there will be visited the recompense of the wicked man when God brings a visitation upon the land.” Comp. also ibid., 9 ff.: “Those who observe (the commandments) are the ‘poor of the flock’ (comp. Zech. 11.7, 11), and these will be saved at the time of the Visitation; but those who remain will be given over to the sword when the Messiah of Aaron and Israel comes.” The further attack upon the Rabbanites is also characteristic of our document, as we have shown above. To this may be added the suggestion that, if the reference to the two women in Sahl’s letter is also a pun directed against polygamous practices, then this passage would have a bearing on CDC IV.20 ff., where the are accused of such practices.

Sahl has great pity for his people, many of whom have been led astray. The Rabbanites have not caused the sick to become well or the poor to regain their sustenance; on the contrary, they exercise a tyrannical rule over all the unfortunate Jews, “prevailing over them with niddui and with herem and with the rulers (rulings?) of the gentiles” (המדברים עליהם בכריווה והרים וכארים והבירים). This passage reflects the same idea as CDC IX.1, where we read: “Anyone who puts under the ban any man (banning him) from men (?) through the statutes of the gentiles is to die.” The striking similarity between these two passages is all the more interesting in view of the difficulties involved in the latter passage, which has long been a crux interpretum.

After this criticism, Sahl continues: “And they (i. e.,

Comp. also I.2 f.; VII.9 f.; VIII.1 f.; B, recto, 13 f., 24 f.

I refer to Sahl’s charges concerning the Rabbanites’ eating Gentile food and improperly observing the laws of purity.

Here also we should notice the violent attack upon the Rabbanites.

Cf. Rabin, Zadokite Fragments (1954), p. 44. I hope to discuss this passage, and other penal laws in CDC, more fully in another connection.

L.Q., p. 31 (bottom) ff.
the Rabbanites) oppress their poor and make them so needy that they must lend and borrow on interest . . . And they take (things) from them and give (what they take) to rulers who strengthen their hold over them. They act holy and pure, and ask them (i.e., the poor) to bring them all kinds of delicacies and ‘wine of the oppressed’ (comp. Amos 2.8) that they may eat and drink; they supply their own souls with food, but the flocks they do not feed (הָאָשֶׁר לֹא יְדֻעַ) . . . . Far be it from me to be silent, for I know and hear that some of the ‘shepherds’ and leaders of God’s nation, who have given themselves over to the task of leading them to pasture and who claim that they are a Sanhedrin, come into the houses of Jews on the Sabbath in order to eat and drink; and with them are some of the gentiles, people who eat and drink in banquet-halls, and they mix with them (והם מתרעבים והם) as with the sons of Aaron the priest . . . . How shall I contain myself when the Jews go forth from their homes to their gatherings with burdens and carrying bundles, with separated garments on their limbs and ornaments on their women (i.e., on the Sabbath) — and as they go from house to house on a week-day, so also do they do on Sabbath.”

The references here to oppression of the poor have their counterpart in CDC VI.11 ff., where we read: “And all those who are brought into the covenant without ‘kindling fire on the altar gratuitously’ shall be the ‘shutters of the door,’ as God said, ‘Who among you shall close His door? — you (who) shall not kindle fire on my altar gratuitously’; if they are not observant in carrying out (the laws) according to the Torah at the time of evil, separating themselves from the men of the pit, removing themselves from the

46 כָּל means either “in vain” or “gratuitously”, but it is obvious that here the latter is meant. For a similar interpretation of Mal. 1.10, see David b. Abraham, Agron (ed. Skoss), I.50, 185.

47 The quotation is freely after Mal. 1.10, while the whole passage is a peculiar interpretation of that verse.
wealth of the wicked which is defiled with the vow, the confiscated goods\textsuperscript{48} and the wealth of the sanctuary — (they having) stolen from the poor of the nation in that widows be their booty and in that they murder orphans — differentiating between\textsuperscript{49} impure and pure . . . .\textsuperscript{50} Later on in this passage the covenanters are told to be kind to the stranger and needy one (VI.21).

In this same quotation from Sahl we notice other similarities as well. Thus, the accusation against the rabbinic leaders to the effect that they mix with gentiles on the Sabbath may well have an important bearing on CDC XI.4 f. this passage has been often emended by scholars, but it is most likely that here means simply ‘to mix’, i.e., with gentiles. Secondly, Sahl’s complaint to the effect that the Rabbanites carry burdens on the Sabbath, which is a reference to the device of ‘\textit{\text{erub}}’, reminds us of the laws in CDC XI.7 ff. prohibiting the carrying of various kinds of burdens on Sabbath; these laws, since no provision is made in them for the ‘\textit{\text{erub}}’, are much more severe than the rabbinic laws of carrying, and closely resemble Karaite legislation on this subject.\textsuperscript{51} Furthermore, we find in CDC (B, recto, 7 f.) the use of the metaphor “poor of the flock” (\textit{\text{y})); comp. Zech. 11.7) for those who wish to observe the law, reminding us of the use of “flock” in Sahl’s letter for the devout poor Jews who are oppressed by their leaders, which usage also is probably a reflection of the passage from Zechariah used in CDC.

\textsuperscript{48} This rendering seems best to fit the context.
\textsuperscript{49} Here the subject reverts to the original “they”, and no longer refers to the wicked.
\textsuperscript{50} This extremely involved passage continues with other such prescriptions until it finally ends with the statement (VII.4 f.) — referring here to those who are not “shutters of the door.”
\textsuperscript{51} This is discussed in “The Sabbath Laws in CDC and as Practiced among the Karaites.”
After these remarks, Sahl reiterates some of his earlier charges against the Rabbanites, which we have discussed above. In the course of his discussion, he remarks that many of the Jews are not careful about slaughter regulations; furthermore, the eating of the flesh of cattle and sheep is not allowed in exile. As I have sought to demonstrate in another connection, there is in CDC XII.11 ff. a similar prohibition.

Sahl wishes that he could make the rounds of all the Jewish communities in order to make them understand the truth. Truly, the Jewish leaders are vain and conceited, and do not permit the righteous ones of the community the right to carry out the commandments as they themselves see fit. “I speak the truth,” he says, “for I have written these things only through compassion for my brethren and my loved ones, that he who has sight may see and he who reads may read, (that) he fear his Lord and the day of ‘abundant wrathfulness’ (comp. Isa. 54.8), that he forsake the way of evil and stay far from the tikkun which is contradictory to the Torah; for the days of the ‘refiner’ have come (ך) and there have arrived ‘time and judgment’ (comp. Eccl. 8.5,6) to render unto God. Praised be he who awakes from his sleep, and woe unto anyone who shuts an eye, for he shall destroy his soul, and into Topheth shall he fall.” The use of the term מְצוֹרָה is peculiar; obviously it refers to the passage Mal. 3.1 ff.: “Behold, I send my messenger, and he shall clear the way before Me . . . and he shall sit as a

52 L.Q., p. 32.
53 My discussion entitled “The Dietary Laws in CDC and as Practiced among the Karaites” considers this problem at length.
54 L.Q., p. 32, bottom.
55 The term מְצוֹרָה in this passage is a hapaxlegomenon, but the above rendering seems to fit the context (in Sahl’s letter).
56 This refers to the rabbinic practice of making taqqanot; see JE XI, p. 669, col. 2 f.
refiner and purifier of silver (יהש מצרך ומเธอ דכסף), and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver.” In CDC, B, verso, 25 ff. we read: “And all of those entering the covenant who have broken through the boundary of the Torah will be cut off from the . . . encampment when the Glory of God appears unto Israel, and with them all the wicked of Judah, in the days of his (His?) smeltings (המי מצרפים וספחים).” This sentence also evidently utilizes the passage in Malachi already referred to, the smeltings here being the deeds of the ‘refiner’—i.e., the Messenger (or Glory) of God. The term מצרך is also met with in a few passages in DSD; but the meanings are here somewhat different.

After these remarks, Sahl goes on to say that not all the Rabbanites are guilty of the sins he has described. Those who live “on the Holy Mount and in Ramleh” act as the Karaites, and have learned from them. Many of them “do not eat of the flesh of sheep and cattle in Jerusalem”; they do not partake of any of the food of gentiles, and they observe all the laws of purity. Furthermore, says Sahl, these “do not take as wife the brother’s daughter, the sister’s daughter, or the daughter of the father’s wife (i.e., the stepsister)” — a statement reminiscent of the passage in CDC V.7–11 in which the “builders of the fence” are accused of niece-marriages, contradictory to the implications of the Biblical law. (In the passage from Sahl’s letter, it is clear that most of the Rabbanites permit this kind of marriage, only those “on the Holy Mount and in Ramleh” abstaining.)

Sahl again exhorts the Jews to return to the right way “in which are the living waters”. The Karaites do not

57 Schechter translated (p. xlv) “in the days of his trials”, which involves emending מקריבס וספחים to מקריבס וספחים.
58 Comp. DSD I.17, מקריבס וספחים וספחים; also VIII.4.
59 L.Q., p. 33; comp. Mann, Texts II, p. 22 for the reading יהושע וספחים in place of יהושע וספחים.
maintain that they are the leaders of the people, but that they study very carefully the “Torah of Moses” and the prophetic literature, and also “look into the sayings of the early scholars” (ראהוונין). There are many differences of opinion among the Karaites as to the interpretation of various laws, says Sahl; but “if we disagree for the sake of the Almighty (SYS εαμε), when the Teacher of Righteousness comes he will reconcile everyone’s differences” (ובנוא מורה הצדק ישיב אלוהי Alvarez). We find a “teacher of righteousness” mentioned in both CDC and DSH, but it is highly questionable whether the same individual, or concept, is indicated in both. In DSH the מורה הצדק is spoken of only as an historic personage who lived before the time of the writer of the document; in CDC, however, while the מורה of I. 11 is an historic individual (“... and he established for them a teacher of righteousness to lead them in the way of His heart”), yet the מורה הצדק of VI.11 and the מורה הצדק of B, verso, 32 refer to a Messianic personage who will appear in the end of days, as in the case of the מורה הצדק of Sahl’s letter. The use of the same, or similar, terms in DSH and CDC does not imply that the same individual is meant of necessity; it is very possible that the author of CDC is utilizing historical material such as is found in the other Dead Sea literature, that his first mention of the teacher of righteousness is an allusion to such historical matters, and that he later on engages in a discussion of the Messiah who will come in the end of days. We should also notice that the מורה הצדק of B, verso, 1 is an historical individual, while the מlâש מאורר ומיישראל of the same line is quite clearly a reference to the Messiah.

Like the author of CDC, Sahl is fond of extensive allegorical interpretation, as were many Karaites of preceding

60 L.Q., p. 34.
generations and of his own day. "At first," he says, "in the days of the prophets when the wise men of Israel were familiar and well-acquainted with the Holy Tongue... the commandments were not hidden from them; but during the Exile, because of the multiplicity of sins and misfortunes, wisdom was lost and understanding was hidden, and 'Israel forgot their resting-place' (comp. Isa. 50.6) — this is the Torah — and they forsook 'the footsteps of the flock' comp. Cant. 1.8) — these are the students of Moses who came into the land, as it says, 'And he made his own people to go forth like sheep... and he brought them to His (God's) holy border' (Ps. 78.52-4). And 'the footsteps of the flock' are (also) the ways of their children and their deeds and customs in general, in which they did not differ (one from the other) ... In this sentence are two warnings. The first is: 'Go forth in the footsteps of the flocks', which is as we have explained; and the second is: 'And feed thy kids by the tents of the shepherds' — the 'shepherds' are the shepherds of righteousness (ר׳וּחִי הָאָדָם) who guide them in truth and compassion, and these are the prophets who speak from the mouth of God, and (also) the priests and judges who do according to the Torah, and the 'tents of the shepherds' are their books and prophecies which were transcribed with the Torah by Israel, and it is a transcription which everyone acknowledges."

As is well known, many kinds of allegorical interpretation exist; L. Ginzberg, in his article on this subject in the Jewish Encyclopedia, has given examples of the various types found in the rabbinic literature, while Poznanski has

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61 This is most notably seen in Benjamin al-Nahawendi. Comp. JE III, p. 32, col. 1, and references there cited, and especially Mann, Texts II, pp. 11-12, 17 n., for many additions and corrections to the article in JE. Another example was Salmon b. Jeruham.

62 L.Q., p. 34, bottom.

63 This is somewhat different from the traditional interpretation of the verse, which assumes that God, rather than Moses, is the subject of "made".
elsewhere discussed the allegorical interpretation of Scripture among the Karaites. To define these types carefully, however, would involve making a highly accurate study of the various shades of meaning that can be read into a text. Different allegorical hierarchies exist, some being closer to the literal meaning of the text, while others by degrees become more and more remote until no objective correlation exists between the allegory and the allegorized text except the author’s imposed judgment. Sahl’s allegories are for the most part in the latter category, for the comparison of the ‘tents of the shepherds’ to the prophetic books, or the ‘footsteps of the flocks’ to the students of Moses, cannot be well sustained. The same is true of many of the allegories in CDC, one of which especially, in this respect, bears a striking resemblance to the passage from Sahl which we have quoted above. This passage (VII.9 ff) reads: ‘But upon all who despise (the commandments and the statutes) will be sent the recompense of the wicked when God brings a visitation upon the land; when that thing happens which is written in the sayings of Isaiah ben Amoz the prophet, who said, ‘There shall come upon you, and upon your people and the house of your fathers, days the likes of which have (not) come since the time that Ephraim parted from Judah’ (comp. Isa. 7.17). When the two houses of Israel separated, Ephraim turned away from Judah, and those who turned back were delivered to the sword, while those who held fast escaped into the land of the north — as He said, ‘And I shall exile the tabernacles (תּוֹבֵּע) of your king and the surnames

65 III.21–IV.4; IV.14–19; VI.2–11; VIII.9–12.
66 Supplying בְּמִזֵּה הַמִּשְׁפָּט, from the parallel text in B, recto, 5.
67 Supplying עָלָיו.
68 Reading, with LXX, קָרָן, which the context requires.
(or ‘firm establishments’) of your images, (the star of your Lord which you made for yourselves) from my tent Damascus-ward’ (comp. Amos 5.26–27). The books of the Torah are the ‘tabernacles’ (םוכז) of the king, as it says, ‘And I shall establish the tabernacle of David that is fallen’ (comp. Amos 9.11). The ‘king’ is the congregation, the ‘surnames’ (firm establishments) are the books of the Prophets whose sayings Israel despised, and the ‘star’ is the interpreter of the Torah who came to Damascus, as it says, ‘A star came forth from Jacob, and a scepter arose from Israel’ (Num. 24.17) . . .’

The same style of allegorizing as is apparent in Sahl’s letter we notice here in CDC and in numerous other places in the text as well. Most interesting is the fact that in both cases the “tents” or “tabernacles” symbolize the books of the Bible.

Our author goes on to say: “And if anyone says that the ‘footsteps of the flocks’ are the ways of the many, and that the ‘tents of the shepherds’ are unquestionably the words of the wise, he is not correct. For we know that the Ten Tribes were more numerous than the tribe of Benjamin and Judah, and that they transgressed laws, usurped statutes, and annulled the Eternal Covenant, except for a few of them who feared the Lord and performed

69 While “firm establishments” would be closer to the meaning ofל‘י, it remains that in line 17 we have the words רכסי. Since ל‘י = “surname”, and since in a sense the prophetic books are to the Torah what the surname is to the name, this latter rendering is to be preferred.

70 I supply this passage from Amos 5.26, because the following passage in CDC is in part dependent on it.

71 Our text has מֶלַחְתָה לִדְמֶשֶׁק, while MT reads מֶלַחְתָה לִדְמֶשֶׁק. Cf. Rabin, Zadokite Fragments, pp. 28–29.

72 The fact that CDC speaks about a migration to Damascus (which Rabinowitz, JBL, LXXIII, pp. 11 ff. believes is fictitious) would make this rendering necessary.

73 See note 69, above.

74 See note 65, above.

75 L.Q., p. 34, bottom.
His commandments secretly. Their kings, judges, and 'wise men' changed the manner of worship, the dates of the festivals, the place of prayer, and most of the commandments — even though they were the majority. Toward the end, Judah and Benjamin also strayed from the path and usurped the commandments except for a few people who hid from the eyes of the public through the fear of heaven in order to perform the commandments of God. And thus is it written, 'Run ye through the streets of Jerusalem, to and fro' (Jer. 5.1); and it is (also) written, '... and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and cry' (Ezek. 9.4) — to indicate that the people of truth and those who feared God were only a few of the community. And how can it be correct to walk in the ways of the many in all cases, since the Torah says, 'Do not go after the multitude to do evil' (Ex. 23.2)? Indeed, after the cessation of the vision and of the prophet, the hand of the leaders became strong, the controversy between the school of Shammai and the school of Hillel grew, and they killed off one another until they were leading the people according to their wont, and as they saw fit in their own eyes. The students of the Torah and those who did according to the words of the prophets were not able to stand before them, and would perform the commandments in secret; but the Holy One, praised be He, helped them and kept them hidden as he had hidden Jeremiah the prophet, peace be unto him, and Baruch b. Neriah, peace be unto him. And so God sealed up in the eyes of these leaders the well of wisdom, and poured out upon them the spirit of deep sleep, as it is written, 'For the Lord has poured out upon you the spirit of deep sleep, and has shut your eyes...' (Isa. 29.10), and it is also written, 'We grope for the wall like the blind...' (Isa. 59.10). And by the grace of our Lord has he now lit up the eyes of the latter
generations (נ'לנ'ין) and uncovered their eyes that they might perceive wondrous things in his Torah...

There are several elements in this passage which call to mind statements in CDC. We notice an emphasis upon the idea that only a remnant of the people was destined to continue the right tradition of the Torah, and that this remnant alone knew the truth. So also in CDC we read (III.10. ff.): “Those who first entered the covenant took on guilt because of it (i.e., the wrath of God), and they were delivered to the sword when they forsook the covenant of God and did according to their own will and sought the stubbornness of their own hearts, each man doing what he wished. But with those who held fast to the commandments of God, who were left over from them (i.e., from those who first entered the covenant) did God establish his covenant for Israel to eternity, revealing to them hidden things in which all Israel had gone astray: His holy Sabbaths, His honored festivals, His righteous testimony, His truthful ways, and the desires of His will which man shall perform, and thereby live.” Whether Sahl’s remnant — i.e., those who were the forbears of the Karaites — included men from Israel and Judah is not easy to say, but a perusal of the context would argue in favor of this view. Also in the epistle known as "The Difference between Karaites and Rabbanites" it is mentioned that some of the righteous ones who later became the Karaites were the remnants of the Ten Tribes, most of whom were exiled. In this case, we must bear in mind the passage from CDC (VII.9 ff.) quoted above which also implies that men from both Judah and Israel were involved, here fleeing to ‘the land of the North’.

76 L.Q., p. 100–1; for this matter, see also Zeitlin, Zadokite Fragments, pp. 21–2.
77 I refer to the passage beginning “But upon all those who despise . . .”
78 This means either Damascus, or, as Rabinowitz, ibid., thinks, Babylonia.
We have finally, in this passage from Sahl quoted above:
(a) the use of the term אבות地毯 for the latter-day members of the sect, reminding us of CDC B, recto, 9–10,降临 the term נבשנים地毯 and נבשנים地毯; (b) the recurrent quotation of Ezek. 9.4, והחיים הוא לע מכה האנשים והאנושים והאנושיות, referring to those few who performed the commandments of the Torah in secret, which may be compared to CDC B, recto, 10 f. and the use there of this same quotation in a similar context, as we have already seen; (c) the use of Isa. 59.10, מששה עברים קיר, reminding us of CDC I.9, ויית עברים וכספים יד עינים עשירים.

There are other statements in Sahl’s letter to be compared with usages in CDC, which are in themselves not highly significant but which, taken together with the evidence already accumulated, lend further support to the consideration that CDC is a document closely related to Karaite literature.78a We find the term חכם used of the learned man (as frequently in Karaite literature), and in both CDC and DSD as well is it so used. In Sahl’s letter we have the statement80 עלון כל מאה ולשון, reminding us of a similar phrase in CDC I.2, וכבר אל שיש מעשה caret. The phrase משברח in CDC VI.7 and VII.18, furthermore, is reminiscent of the passage in Sahl’s letter which reads עלון ששון רביעי החופרים והורישים בצאתה.81

As is to be expected, there are many differences between Sahl’s letter and CDC. The former discusses its topics in a more thorough and extensive way, and treats of several matters which are not mentioned in CDC. The Hebrew used is much more exact, and abounds in all kinds

78 In addition to the present essay, the reader is referred especially to the learned studies of Dr. N. Wieder, JJS IV, pp. 158–175; JQR (N. S.) XLVII, pp. 97–113, 269–292.
79 See Mann, Texts II, pp. 28, 39 n., 45 and references in Index s. v.
80 L.Q., p. 37.
81 Ibid., p. 35.
of nuances and turns of expression not met with in the
Covenant. The Biblical quotations are more accurate, and
the historical references and allusions are more easily recog-
nizable, and better relegated to the context. In general,
Sahl's letter is a document which is more characteristic of
the early Karaite literature that we know than is CDC. At
the same time, we must bear in mind that sectarian authors
writing in Hebrew of necessity differ from one another in
many respects, both as regards style and content. The
Karaite authorities, furthermore, are even at variance with
one another with regard to the general principles of law and
to the particular applications of those principles;\(^{82}\) indeed,
we often find them engaging in violent debates among
themselves about such matters.\(^ {83}\)
Surely, however, the similarities between the Karaite
literature and CDC are many. We may observe this in the
area of language and ideas, and most definitely in the field
of law.\(^ {84}\) In most cases these similarities are weighty, only
occasionally deriving their importance from association with
other factors. They are to a considerable extent peculiar
to CDC and Karaite literature alone. Indeed, our knowl-
edge of the various factions in early Karaism — so called —
at least entitles us to the consideration that CDC may shed
further light on the early Karaite period, and aid us, per-
haps, in determining when that period began. The presence
among the Qumran finds of fragments of the Covenant
bears witness to its antiquity; but in exactly which way
this affects the Karaite problem has yet to be determined.

\(^{82}\) Qirqisāni throughout his Kitāb al-anwār discusses these differences
at length.

\(^{83}\) The classic example of this, of course, is Daniel al-Qumisi, who
at first called Anan "the chief of the scholars" (ראש החכ水利工程) but
afterwards combatted his views and began to call him "the chief of
the fools" (ראש הცמא水利工程). Comp. JE, IV, p. 432, col. 2.

\(^{84}\) Legal problems are discussed in my articles referred to above, and
also in my studies on the laws of purity and marriage, and the civil laws,
in CDC.