THE QUMRAN SECTARIES AND THE KARAITES

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In a previous article entitled “The Doctrine of the Two Messiahs Among the Karaites” I dealt with the resemblances between the Qumran sectaries and the Karaites with regard to the belief in two Messiahs. The following pages are a sequel to that article, their object being to draw attention to further resemblances in respect of a number of designations or epithets which both sects applied to themselves. I shall deal with these designations one by one.

I

The Perfect of Way

The designation חכמי דור or the singular חכם דור or simply חכמים, “the perfect ones,” and the cognate forms חוס דור, “perfection of way” and הגלל חוס, “to walk perfectly,” are the most characteristic phrases of the Manual of Discipline where they occur, including the recently published fragment, twenty-three times. They also appear, six times altogether, in the Damascus Fragments. The expression חכמי דור is further found in both the Thanksgiving Scroll and in the Scroll of

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3 Cf. A. M. Habermann, Edah we-Eduth, Index, pp. 152–53.
4 Cf. E. L. Sukenik, The Thanksgiving Scroll, Jerusalem, 1955, Pl. 35, line 36. See also Pl. 38, lines 30–31 (חוס דור) and line 32 (לאתם דור).
the War of the Sons of Light. The cognate forms לְהַלֵּךְ מִתָּה, לְהַלֵּךְ מִי are again present in the Benedictions discovered in the Qumran cave I. The exceptionally frequent occurrence of these expressions testifies to their great importance in the sectarian vocabulary. While the term "the perfect of way" was used as an epithet for the adherents of the sect, the cognate forms were employed to characterize the religious conduct which was in conformity with their conception of Judaism.

It is significant to observe that the expression מִי יְהִי was also used by early Karaite authors as an honorific designation for the members of their own sect, and most especially for the religious and intellectual élite who resided in Jerusalem and led an ascetic mode of life dedicated to continuous study and prayer by day and by night.

The recognition of this fact enables us, in addition, to gain a proper understanding of certain passages in Karaite sources as well as in Rabbanite polemical writings against them.

The evidence adduced derives in the first instance from Karaite writers of the ninth and tenth centuries, but also from the encyclopedic work Eshkol Ha-Kofer (composed 1148) by Judah Hadassi, who made extensive use of earlier Karaite writings.

The first place in our evidence must be accorded to the most prominent Karaite Bible commentator (10th century), Yefet ben 'Ali — and this for three reasons. First, the term מִי יְהִי occurs very frequently in his works. He uses it either in isolation or in conjunction with other epithets

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6 Cf. Discoveries in the Judaean Desert, p. 120, line 2 and p. 127, line 22. See now the complete list of the expressions under discussion compiled by Yigael Yadin in his מִי יְהִי מִי יְהִי, יְהִי מִי יְהִי מִי יְהִי, Jerusalem 1955, pp. 242 f.
6a His work has been aptly described as "a sea into which all the streams of Karaite learning flow" (Jost, Geschichte der Juden, II, 352).
which the Karaites appropriated to themselves. Secondly, on account of the lengthy excursus which he devoted in his commentary on Ps. 119 to pointing out that the term מימי רדך in the superscription of the Psalm referred to the sect of the Karaites (קריתיא). And thirdly, it is in his writings that we find expressed in the most pronounced manner the view, shared also by other Karaite scholars, that the entire Psalm 119 includes nothing but “the utterances and prayers” of the Karaite élite. In other words, the “I” of the Psalm is regarded as the corporate “I” of that élite and the Psalm itself as having been composed by David “on their behalf” (עליל תמא, על למשה ומשר). in the sense that it contains an anticipatory description of the contemporary religious situation, namely the conflict between the Rabbanites and the Karaites. In the following pages this interpretation will, for the sake of brevity, be called the prognostic interpretation of the Psalm.

Yefet ben ‘Ali’s excursus, extolling in graphic terms the merits of the Karaites and denouncing the Rabbanites, may be summarized as follows:—

The מימי רדך are the members of the Karaite sect who hold fast to the Torah of the Lord (חרת). They have abandoned the “commandment of men, learned by rote”

7 Cf. below note 94.
8 Since the Karaite ascetics in the Holy Land believed that they were living in the eschatological epoch of the “final days” (see below), their method of interpretation which applied the biblical text to contemporary events is, at the same time, “eschatological interpretation.” — Ever since the discovery of the Habakkuk commentary scholars have been searching for a parallel to the peculiar type of biblical interpretation exhibited in it. In a recent discussion of the problem (C. Rabin, V. T., 1955, p. 148) it has even been suggested that to find an exact parallel “we have to go outside Jewish literature.” Actually what scholars were seeking is to be found in the biblical expositions of Karaite authors, beginning with Anan, which furnish a parallel of surprising congruity. A number of examples will be found in this paper. However, the subject deserves a separate study.
9 See Appendix no. 1, at the end of this paper.
and do not rely on the Mishnah and Talmud; they have forsaken the ways of the former generations whose eyes were not opened properly; they have separated themselves from their parents and brothers who partake of meat and wine, wear the best of garments, use oil to anoint themselves, offer incense, and at the same time hate and persecute the Karaites. The תוממי דרכ, on the other hand, are dedicated to continuous study of the Torah by day and by night, wear sackcloth and wallow in ashes; they pray incessantly for themselves and for the people of God and yearn for the messianic salvation.

It is not necessary to emphasize that the schismatics depicted here and on whom the epithet “the perfect of way” is conferred are none other than the Karaite ascetics in Jerusalem in the ninth and tenth centuries who sometimes called themselves “the Mourners for Zion” (אبول ציו) and to whom Yefet ben ‘Ali himself belonged. Indeed, in his commentary on the Song of Songs he explicitly equates the Mourners for Zion with “the perfect of way.” In the same passage he draws a clear distinction between the Karaite scholars who remained in the Diaspora and those who settled in the Holy Land; only the latter are invested with the title תוממי דרכ:

כפי, וכר הל חורר, ישר באל כאליכ, תוממי דרכ,
זירא אלכרינו ומאלולתו אחרא ישראל ופרואם חפשם
❋לאכל ולהבש השולחنة והתקנה על אלוהים אלו נשורי ענו דך
אלא וכל חפור למד אלישע. ונהמה כלא אלפמי ישוע, עאימ על
המורתיר ירשה ימד הפקר, שרימה וה, ואלא חצורי
שתניי רמי פאיב, והשה תמי רמי אלקריו וצימו חפשם
בככל못 אלולעוואזע תנייה אלן אלך ואלאRepublicה כזכלה
שבר, ולחרמה פיר ו, והם אלא החלקה כזכלה: וכר חרי


 MS. British Museum of Yefet’s commentary on the Song of Songs
The words the voice of the turtle is heard in our land (Cant. 2.12) refer to the terebinths of righteousness, the mourners for Zion (Isa. 61.3) who will go from the exile to the Land of Israel and separate themselves for the purpose of continuous study, prayer and supplication. They will not flag in doing so until the salvation will come. Of these said the prophet Isaiah (62.6): I have set watchmen on thy walls, O Jerusalem, etc.; and give Him no rest, till he establish, and till He make Jerusalem a praise in the earth (ver. 7). They are identical with “the perfect of way” who described themselves as those who study the Torah and [claimed] that the Law is more precious to them than money and riches, as it is said: The law of Thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver (Ps. 119.72). They are those who keep night vigils as it is stated in Ps. 119, verses 55, 62, 147, 148, and Ps. 130.6. Therefore he said: The voice of the turtle, etc. The scholars of the Diaspora are designated as “flowers” (נזרים) because they will flourish in their

(Oriental 2513, fol. 75b) reads in both places ולא תكثر וסה, “as they said,” that is, “the perfect of way.” This is undoubtedly the correct reading, since it is in conformity with Yefet’s view on the character of Ps. 119, according to which the collective “I” of the maskilim is speaking through it (see further on in the text). This manner of quoting is usual with Yefet not only in the case of Ps. 119 (cf., e. g. his commentary on Hosea, ed. Philip Birnbaum, pp. 94, 108, 220), but also in connection with other Psalms which the Karaite prognostic exegesis assigned to the sectarians, cf., for example, op. cit., p. 178 (translated below) with reference to Ps. 22, which was given an eschatological interpretation. See Der XXII Psalm . . . von R. Jephet ben Eli Ha-Bacri, ed. Theodor Hofmann, Tübingen 1880, p. 7. This interpretation of Ps. 22 was shared by David al-Fasi (infra) and by Elijah ha-Melammed (infra).
own places, but “the perfect of way” are compared with the turtle because they will come from the ends of the earth to the Land of Israel, just as the turtle emigrates to a cultivated region when the summer comes.

The passage cited may also serve as evidence for Yefet ben ‘Ali’s conception of Ps. 119 as reflecting the religious situation of his own time. Even more explicit evidence is to be found in the following quotation which is of interest also by reason of another noteworthy point — namely the identification of “the perfect of way” with מַדּוֹרֵי רָבִּים in Dan. 12.3 and with the Suffering Servant of Isa. 54:14.

They [i.e. מַדּוֹרֵי רָבִּים] are identical with the מַדּוֹרֵי רָבִּים; their prayer is recorded and their words expressed in the twenty-two eight-lined stanzas [Ps. 119]; they are those who say to him who seeks instruction: *Ho, everyone that thirstest, come ye to the waters* (Isa. 55.1).15

scholars and saints, and assigning to each expression a distinctive significance was also practised by Sahl ben Ma’zliaḥ, as he tells us in the following passage (Skoss, *Jāmī‘ al-Alfitz*, II, p. cxxxvii):


15 The meaning is: Karaite scholars impart instruction without remuneration, in contrast to Rabbanite scholars who hold paid positions and receive monetary rewards for replying to queries in religious matters addressed to them (cf., e.g., *Seder Rabh Amram*, ed. Warsaw, p. 1a: מַדּוֹרֵי רָבִּים כִּי רָבִּים מִתְלִים לִפְנֵי הָאָרֶץ. Also Sahl ben Ma’zliaḥ expressed the same idea by quoting Isa. 55.1: מַדּוֹרֵי רָבִּים כִּי רָבִּים מִתְלִים מִזְמָנֵי יָמִים (S. Pinsker, *Liqqute Qadmonioth*, Appendices, p. 31). The Isaiah verse seems to belong to the “testimonia” of the Karaite ascetics. Daniel al-Qumisi (Melilah II, p. 201) already condemns the heads of the Babylonian academies for taking money from the people: מַדּוֹרֵי רָבִּים כִּי רָבִּים מִתְלִים מִזְמָנֵי יָמִים... The polemics of an early Karaite (according to S. Assaf, *Tarbiz,*
And in the chapter הוהי יששכר עבדי (Isa. 54) he says: 

*By his knowledge shall my servant justify many.* In that chapter the groaning of the *Maskil* [the Karaite spiritual leader], his griefs and his great knowledge and piety are recorded. These then are referred to in the words the *Maskilim shall shine as the brightness of the firmament.*

Of particular significance is the fact that this prognostic-eschatological interpretation of Ps. 119 is shared, as indicated, by other prominent representatives of Karaism. It evidently represented a prevalent exegetical tradition among the early Karaites. It is highly probable that it goes back to Anan himself, as it will be shown at the end of this section of our study. According to this tradition the “arrogant” (זmdi) are the Rabbanites who scorn (v. 51) “the perfect of way,” oppress them (v. 122) and forge lies against them (v. 69). The whole Psalm was elevated to a grand Karaite hymn, portraying the intellectual elite, describing their meritorious deeds, their fervent devotion to study, their fidelity to the Law, their night vigils, their prayers, the affliction and persecution they suffer at the hands of their Rabbanite antagonists. The Psalm may perhaps be styled “the Evangelium of the Karaites.”

We meet this conception of the Psalm in the writings of Daniel al-Qumisi, who next to Anan and Benjamin al-Nahawandi ranks as the third eminent expounder of Karaism. The following three facts bear this out: (a) he interprets the “arrogant” as referring to the Rabbanites;\(^{16}\)

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\(^{16}\) Cf. the extracts from his commentary on the Minor Prophets, published by I. D. Markon in *Melilah*, II, p. 195.
(b) he states that the prayer, *Open Thou mine eyes, that I may behold the secrets of Thy law* (v. 18) was offered by David on behalf of the Karaites;\(^7\) and (c) he proves that the words *I have gone astray like a lost sheep* (v. 176) refer to “the shepherds of the dispersion” (רוֹעִי נַחַת), i.e. the Rabbanite spiritual leaders.\(^8\)

Other tenth-century authors who hold this view are Salmon ben Yeruḥīm, the famous controversialist of Saadya Gaon, the grammarian and lexicographer David al-Fasi, and probably also Sahl ben Maẓliḥ.

Salmon ben Yeruḥīm’s commentary on the Psalms is still in manuscript and is at present inaccessible to scholars in the West. The few published extracts,\(^9\) however, furnish sufficient data to substantiate our contention. He interpreted the “arrogant” in two passages as denoting the Rabbanites. In the first he says that the verse (51) *the arrogant have derided me greatly* alludes to the Rabbanites who composed “works of mockery” (рабבּוֹ יָלָה).\(^20\) In the second passage he comments on verse 122 as follows: “Why does he designate them [the Rabbanites] as arrogant? On account of their arrogance against the Lord’s Torah. First, they maintain that God gave Moses on Mount Sinai two laws... and secondly, they changed the divine precepts.”\(^21\) These two comments already warrant the conclusion that he applied the Psalm to contemporary history.

\(^{17}\) See the fragment printed by L. Ginzberg, *Genizah Studies*, II, p. 473:

\(^{18}\) Cf. *JQR*, N. S., XII, 1921, p. 279, lines 12–14:

\(^{19}\) Cf. Mann, *Texts and Studies*, II, p. 5.

\(^{20}\) Ibid., p. 85. In his diatribe against Saadya Gaon (*The Book of the Wars of the Lord*, ed. I. Davidson, New York, 1934) Salmon ben Yeruḥīm calls Saadya ḫa several times (41,19; 42,60; 54,76; 74,47). See also pp. 91,118; 101,65; 103,11.
This conclusion is confirmed by his exposition of the last verse of the Psalm, where he categorically declares: “Without doubt, the entire Psalm is said with reference to the people of the dispersion” (הַדָּרָה אֲלֵמֹמְרָה כָּלָה מְקוֹל עַלָּיְאַדָּה).\(^{22}\)

That also David al-Fasi followed this interpretation is evidenced by the fact that he took the term רְויַם to be a designation for the Rabbanites, and, moreover, explicitly asserted that the complaint contained in ver. 69 was made by the Psalmist on behalf of those who turned away (Karaites = última אְלָמְאוֹת אֵלֶּה =尚书 =שְּבֵי פֶסֶע).\(^{23}\)

It is also very probable that Sahl ben Mazliah shared this view, as it may be inferred from the statement in his polemical poem against Jacob ben Samuel:\(^{24}\) המיתו רְרֶךְ ... וְלַעֲנִי, “The perfect of way supplicate: Open Thou mine eyes.” In other words, v. 18 represents the prayer of the Karaite élite, a view already expressed by Daniel al-Qumisi.

Judah Hadassi, too, uses the epithet “the perfect of way,” or simply “the perfect ones,” several times, either in isolation or together with other epithets. Thus commenting on the words (Dan. 12.12): Happy is he that waits, he says:\(^{25}\) כְּמוֹכָם הוֹדִידָה רְרֶךְ אֲבָל יִץ רוֹשֶׁלֶם. Again, the following passage may be quoted which contains a typical accumulation of honorific designations and in which the superscription of Ps. 119 is cited in full:\(^{26}\)

All that (or, more exactly) עֵדֶּמָלִים בֵּעֲלִי מְכָרָא אוֹדוֹי, תְּלֶמַרָי אֲתַנָּא שְׁפַרָא יְוִדִּי תַּהַר אֲיוֹ נוֹרָא אַטִּי אַמֵּאוֹת אֵלֶּה, וּמְעַנְקַי אָסָרָי תְּמוּנָא רְרֶךְ הָוֹלֵכָא בּוֹהָהוֹי.

\(^{22}\) Ibid., p. 84.
\(^{24}\) Cf. Pinsker, Appendices, p. 23. The author of the poem is not Yefet ben Ali, as stated on the copyist’s heading, but Sahl ben Mazliah, see Mann, op. cit., pp. 26, 117.
\(^{25}\) Eshkol ha-Kofer, p. 155, col. 2, bottom.
Finally, he too followed the tradition as to the character of the Psalm under discussion, as is attested by the following two statements:

(א) "על אל של המרדו תפלל המשכילים נל עיני ואביו..."
(ב) "על אלה שנל המשכילים ו_MONTH_ (חכמים)
(כמ. 19): 'והאמין בא конструкци על שלח ותרוק ממני' (שם את י')

The close association of the epithet “the perfect of way” with the Karaite ascetics in the Holy Land is perhaps best illustrated by a reference in David al-Fasi’s Kitāb Jamī’ Al-Alfāz. In order to understand the full significance of the reference, it is necessary to say a few words about the eschatological thinking of the ascetics mentioned. The dominant force in their life, like in that of the Qumran sectaries, was the deep sense of the approaching messianic era; the conviction that they were living in the period of the “final days”; the belief that by abandoning the sinful life of the former generations and by returning to the true observance of the Torah as conceived by them, and by means of continuous study and prayer they would open the gate for the advent of the Redeemer. Not only would the final salvation occur in their own days, but it would be achieved by them and through them, the שמא והי ישראל ודרר and hence also the שמאיה ישראל.

Now David al-Fasi speaks of two attempts made by some scholars to calculate the “end” (כמ) on the basis of the well-known messianic verse "זאת עין שפה" (Gen. 49.10). One of the calculations consisted in the discovery that the numerical value of the letters making up the words: והי ישראל ודרר was somehow contained in the verse mentioned. This calculation must at first sight appear wholly enigmatic. The object of all messianic calculations is to figure out the

27 Kitāb Jamī’ Al-Alfāz, II, p. 665, lines 16–18: "זאת עין שפה" (Gen. 49.10).
period of the advent of the Messiah, but one fails to see how this arithmetical equation could be taken as indicating this period. What is the ideology underlying it? But knowing that המתייה נכי רֶּה was an appellation for the Karaite elite, and bearing in mind their messianic belief referred to, we find that the object and tendency of this calculation becomes quite clear: the Karaite "calculators of the end" מֵהֶשֶב בִּמְצוֹן endeavored to advance pentateuchal proof for their belief that the coming of the Messiah would take place in their own time, in the time of "the perfect of way" and — one may add — through their efforts.

I now pass on to an interesting illustration — this time from a polemical treatise against the Karaites by an unknown Rabbanite author, in which the former are referred to as "the perfect of way," evidently in a sarcastic tone. The treatise is couched in paytanic phraseology and many of its polemical allusions have not yet been recognized. The example I am quoting contains such an allusion hitherto unrecognized. It runs as follows

which may be rendered thus: "The perfect of way imagine in their heart that they behold secret things." Against whom is this dictum directed and what is its polemical implication? As to the first question, the identity of "the perfect of way" has by now become evident beyond doubt. But what about the claim to behold secret things? What is the nature of these secrets?

28 See infra.
29 The fragment from which this citation is taken was first published by L. Ginzberg (Genizah Studies, II, pp. 494–96) who assigned it to the circle of Benjamin al-Nahawandi. Mann (op. cit., p. 60) however correctly identified it as part of the polemical tract by an unknown Rabbanite, cf. now Judah Rosenthal, HUCA, XXI, 1948, pp. 37–54 (Hebrew part).
To answer these questions the remarkable fact — which I shall demonstrate elsewhere — must be pointed out, namely that the Karaites believed that their interpretation of the Bible was the result of a special divine inspiration; it was this inspiration that enabled them to perceive the mysteries of the divine words and guaranteed the authenticity of their interpretations. The polemical implication of the above dictum is now obvious: The Rabbanite author of the treatise, whose whole work was devoted to challenging the Karaite claim to possess the genuine interpretation of the Bible, ridicules the boast on the part of the self-styled “perfect of way” to behold the mysteries of the Law, i. e. the boast to be the sole possessors of the true understanding of Scripture, vouchsafed them through divine inspiration.

The earliest occurrence, as far as I know, of the term “perfect ones” as a Karaitic epithet is in a poem by the renowned Tiberian Massorite, Moses ben Asher, father of Aaron ben Asher. I have deferred calling attention to this up till now, because it is only now that we are in a position fully to appreciate the significance of the fact that Moses ben Asher designated those whom he regarded the spiritual forebears of Karaism as הָもらってֶים.

I refer to “the poem of the vine,” an allegorical composition based on the comparison of Israel with “vine,” in which the comparison is extended to the various parts of the vine, such as the roots, branches, grapes, flowers, etc., all of which are taken to represent the leaders of the nation, beginning with the patriarchs. In this poem the following lines occur:

חָמוּךְ חַמָּךְ דִּמְעָה יְהוָה יַרְכֹּשׁ חַמָּךְ יִזְכֹּר יִזְכֹּר גְּבוּלַת.
פִּנְיָה פִּנְיָה מְגָשִּׁים חֲזִידָה. לָבֶם מְגָשִּׁים חֲזִידָה בְּנֵי לָבֶם.

31 See B. Klar, Tarbiz, XV, 1943, pp. 43–44 (מש tys, pp. 310 f.).
32 Tarbiz, p. 44, lines 22 f. (Mekgarim, p. 311).
"The perfect ones of the vine are the Elders of Bathyra, the inheritors of the prophets, the possessors of understanding. Deep waters that utter mysteries; their heart comprehends wisdom like a flowing brook."

As B. Klar rightly observed, Moses ben Asher traced the chain of Karaitic tradition to the Elders of Bathyra, the spiritual ancestors of Karaism who had inherited the prophetic traditions and transmitted them to the Karaites. The latter are thus in the direct line of descent from the prophets.

Now it is highly significant that the epithet Moses ben Asher conferred upon the Elders of Bathyra is precisely "the perfect ones." This epithet was considered a sufficiently clear identification mark to indicate their religious affiliation.

And now from the father to the son. Also Aaron ben Asher uses the term "perfect ones" in a context which leaves no doubt as to the identity of those to whom the term is applied. In an interesting passage he emphasizes that although the cessation of prophecy resulted in religious confusion in the nation, nevertheless one is still capable of discovering the secrets of the Torah, if only one thoroughly searches in it with one's heart directed to heaven. In fact, he says, the secrets of the Torah are known to the wise, God-fearing perfect ones ("ה(AFc('{n'nknn)33a

In conclusion, attention should be drawn to the fact that

33 Cf. *Digduge ha-Te'amim*, ed. S. Bear and H. L. Strack, Leipzig, 1879, pp. 53 f. That Ben Asher was a Karaite may now be regarded as an established fact, see Klar's study referred to. To the arguments adduced by him further evidence may be added.

33a Also the use of the term "perfect ones" is not gratuitous; it is borrowed from the sectarian vocabulary, see al-Qumisi (infra note 104 and *JQR*, N. S., XI, p. 284, line 25); Salmon, *op. cit.*, p. 124, line 76; Sahl in Pinsker, *Appendices*, p. 33; Yefet on Dan. 12.4 (ed. Margoliouth, *Arab. part*, p. 141) and infra Appendix, n. 1.
Ps. 119 was incorporated in the Karaite liturgy, which, as is well known, consists of a conglomeration of biblical passages, chiefly Psalms. The question as to the guiding principle, or principles, which determined the selection of the passages is still unexplored ground and cannot be fully discussed here. For the present purpose, however, it will suffice to state briefly that a number of biblical quotations that were accorded a place in the Karaite order of prayers owe their selection to a distinctive sectarian interpretation given to them — an interpretation which associated them with aspects of Karaite history, practice and doctrine.

A case in point is our Psalm which, as has been sufficiently shown, was considered a basic religious document of Karaism; hence its inclusion in the liturgy. Support for this explanation may be found in the introductory verses with which the reading of the Psalm is prefaced:

The question as to appropriateness of these verses as an exordium (מייסד) to the recitation of the Psalm had already puzzled a Karaite scholar of the calibre of Aaron ben Elijah of Nicomedia (d. 1369) who, however, advanced a highly strange explanation:

In the light of what has been said about the character of the Psalm, the appropriateness of the introductory verses

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34 See further on.
35 Cf. infra.
36 Gan Eden 75d.
appears obvious to us, if we bear in mind that these verses formed the basis for the pre-eminent custom of the Jerusalem ascetics to hold night vigils devoted to study and prayer at the temple site. The opening verses—which are frequently and on every possible occasion cited in the works of those ascetics—indicate as it were the identity of the “perfect of way”: they are none other than the “night-watchmen” on the walls of Jerusalem. It is instructive to recall the words of Yefet ben ‘Ali, cited above:37 “... they [the Mourners for Zion] are identical with “the perfect of way”... they are the night-watchmen...”

If our assumption that Ps. 119 owes its inclusion into the Karaite liturgy to the sectarian interpretation placed upon it is correct, then we are in a position to draw a very important conclusion as to the origin of the Karaite conception of the Psalm in question: it goes back to Anan himself, as it was he who introduced it into the liturgy.

This conclusion recommends itself all the more as we have definite information that Anan was in fact motivated in the selection of Psalms for liturgical use by his interpretation of these Psalms as referring to some aspect of the conflict between the Rabbanites and himself. Thus al-Qirqisani38 records the significant fact that Anan prescribed Ps. 74 for the liturgy of the New Moon and festivals (with the exception of Pentecost) on account of verse 4 (and also 8): Thine adversaries (= Rabbanites) have roared in the midst of Thy festivals; they have set up their own signs for

signs, i.e. the Rabbanites had abolished the festivals appointed by God, and instead of the moon which according to Gen. 1.14 was set up as a sign for the festivals, they appointed other signs. The recitation of the Psalm was thus intended by Anan as a public condemnation of the Rabbanite calendar and at the same time as a glorification of his own practice of fixing the festivals by observation of the moon—a subject which figured prominently in the polemics between the two camps from the very inception of the schism.

We gather from a Genizah fragment of his Book of Precepts that Anan introduced Ps. 119 into the liturgy. At a certain point during the service, which cannot be determined owing to a lacuna in the fragment, three strophes of the Psalm were recited together with two Psalms from the first part of the Psalter and two from the group of Psalms commonly known as “the Songs of Ascents”:

The reading of the twenty-two strophes of Ps. 119 and that of the fifteen “Songs of Ascents” is to be extended over the whole week: three strophes (on Sabbath: four) of the former and two Psalms (on Sabbath: three) of the latter are to be read on each week-day. This was in fact the Karaite custom as late as the fourteenth century, as we learn from Aaron of Nicomedia.

41 See Gan Eden, 75d. Cf. also Hadassi, Alphabet 17, letter ס. In the later Karaite ritual the reading of Ps. 119 was limited to the seven
The Hebrew term פִּקְרֵים is here used by Aaron of Nicomedia in the same sense as the Aramaic פסכִּים by Anan. The latter term denotes “sections” and refers either to whole Psalms or, in the case of Ps. 119, to the eight-lined alphabetical strophes.

That this is the meaning of the passage is further borne out by the Prayer-book of the Karaites in Jerusalem which preserved the custom of reciting the “Songs of Ascents” during the week, beginning on Sabbath with the recitation of Psalms 120–22.

Of special significance is the fact that Anan prescribed the aforementioned recitations also for the “Morning Watch” (משמרא ד затפרא), i. e. the third of the three night watches. It is also noteworthy that the recitation itself was conducted in a ceremonious fashion: the priests and Levites took their stand on a mat on the left side of the Ark, while the right side was occupied by certain people whose identity cannot be determined because of a lacuna in the MS. The ceremony was evidently calculated to lend special dignity and solemnity to this act of worship.

(To be continued)