WHEREIN LIES THE PESHER?
RE-QUESTIONING THE CONNECTION
BETWEEN MEDIEVAL KARAITE AND QUMRANIC
MODES OF BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

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Introduction

Karaism, a messianic Jewish movement founded in the Middle Ages, sought to redefine Jewish religious practice by re-centering it on the "Written Law" (i.e., the Hebrew Bible) in its entirety, and rejecting the "Oral Law" as codified in the Mishnah and Talmud.[1] The Karaites also reversed the structure of the traditional Jewish canon, placing biblical study and the sub-disciplines related to its literal and contextual analysis (such as grammar, translation and exegesis) at the top of the learning pyramid. The fields of mishnaic and talmudic study, traditionally placed at the pinnacle of Jewish scholarly accomplishment, were thus relegated to the margins, as were the aggadic-type interpolations to the Hebrew Bible, that were typical of rabbinic Midrash.[2] By so doing, the Karaites challenged the intellectual institutions of the geonic period (ninth to eleventh

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[1] Though the scripturalist ethos was a prominent feature of Karaite ideology throughout its history, in order to codify their religious practice the Karaites developed their own concept of tradition. On the influence of rabbinic historical formulations on the development of a Karaite version of the chain of tradition see F. Astren, *Karaite Judaism and Historical Understanding* (Columbia, South Carolina, 2004), pp. 185–216.

[2] On the "genre repertoire" of medieval Jewish literature and the "reversal of the genre hierarchy" through the Karaite choice of the "biblical option," see the illuminating analysis of R. Drory, *The Emergence of Jewish-Arabic Literary Contacts at the Beginning of the Tenth Century* (Tel-Aviv, 1988), 22–54; 81–128.

centuries), and transformed various aspects of Jewish medieval thought and literature, most notably in the field of biblical study, its language and exegesis.[3]

Karaite studies

Karaite Studies are currently in a dynamic state of transition and redefinition, largely due to the recovery and investigation of a wide range of new manuscript sources, known as the Firkovitch Collections (mostly housed in the National Library of Russia, St. Petersburg). These include thousands of Judaeo-Arabic Karaite codices, mostly dating from the tenth to fifteenth centuries. The manuscripts were acquired by the nineteenth-century Karaite bibliophile and scholar, Abraham Firkovitch (1787–1874), but have only been made fully accessible to scholars in the last decade. Most of the codices originate from Karaite synagogues in Cairo, thus reflecting the "medieval Karaite library," i.e., the various fields of learning the Karaites engaged in during their golden era, especially Hebrew grammatical thought.[4] The Karaites' excellence in this field has recently been brought to light in the magnum editions of two central works (Yūsuf Ibn Nūh's *Diqdūq* and Abū Faraj Harūn's *Kitāb al-Kāfī*) that reflect the early and classical forms of Karaite grammatical tradition.[5] According to G. Khan, the ultimate purpose of the early (tenth century) Karaite grammarians was not the analysis of the Hebrew language *per se* but rather the application of grammatical analysis to elucidate the precise meaning of the biblical text. The Hebrew title of Ibn Nūh's work, *Diqdūq,* retains the sense of *diqdeq ba-torah* known

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[3] In comparison, the sectarian literature created *sui generis* in Qumran was of less significance, in my view, to the long-term intellectual history of Judaism.

[4] For an updated survey of research on medieval Karaism in particular, and Karaite Studies in general (and further extensive literature) see, respectively, M. Polliack, "Medieval Karaism," in M. Goodman (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Jewish Studies* (Oxford, 2002), pp. 295–326; "Preface," in M. Polliack (ed.), *Karaite Judaism: A Guide to Its History and Literary Sources* (Leiden, 2003), pp. xvii–xxi.

[5] See G. Khan, *The Early Karaite Tradition of Hebrew Grammatical Thought Including a Critical Edition, Translation and Analysis of the* Diqduq *of 'Abū Ya'aqūb Yūsuf ibn Nūh on the Hagiographa* (Leiden, 2000); G. Khan, M. Gallego, J. Olszowy-Schlanger, *The Karaite Tradition of Hebrew Grammatical Thought in Its Classical Form, A Critical Edition and English Translation of* al-Kitāb al-Kāfī fi al-Luga al-'Ibrāniyya *by 'Abū al-Faraj Harūn ibn al-Faraj* (vols. I–II, Leiden, 2003).

from rabbinic sources, meaning, investigating the fine points of Scripture.[6] As will be shown, the early Karaites' emphasis and mastery of Hebrew grammar is an important point of departure for understanding their exegetical tradition and reassessing its supposed relationship with Qumranic sources.

Another factor that has gained importance in light of the newly recovered sources concerns the historical and intellectual background of the Karaite movement. Lately it has become increasingly clear that Karaism crystallized in the mid ninth century, and derived from at least two distinctive (and heterogeneous) strands of medieval Judaism. The first strand came from the heart of the rabbinic establishment and its leading geonic families (namely, "the House of Anan ben David"). M. Gil's study has fully determined that although Anan was known for his non-normative rulings, he cannot be credited with the founding of Karaism, since his offspring continued to serve as heads of the *yeshivot* in Babylonia and Palestine as late as the mid ninth century. It is therefore more likely that Anan's grandson, Daniel, and his great-grandson, Anan, active during this period, were the true champions of the Karaite cause. Anan's descendants, especially of the Palestinian branch, forged an uneasy coalition with the second strand, composed of Jews originating from Persian circles (such as Benjamin Nihāwandī, Daniel al-Qūmisī and others).[7] The latter appear to have brought with them messianic leanings and political fervor, as well as strong opposition to attempts by the Babylonian geonic establishment to consolidate its position and create uniform Jewish religious practice in the face of Islam. The Persian Karaites also brought with them their long tradition of Hebrew grammatical study.[8] Through their union with the Ananite geonic strand, which was well rooted in the rabbinic traditions of biblical study, whether Babylonian (talmudic analogy) or Palestinian (Masorah), the unique intellectual character of early Karaism was forged.

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[6] See Khan, *The Early Karaite Tradition*, pp. 10–25; 146–147; 539–540.
[7] See M. Gil, "The Origins of the Karaites," in: M. Polliack (ed.), *Karaite Judaism*, pp. 73–118.
[8] As attested in several Judaeo-Persian grammatical commentaries that share many elements with Ibn Nūh's *Diqdūq*, see G. Khan, *Early Karaite Grammatical Texts* (Atlanta, 2000).

The "Qumran" hypothesis versus the "Rabbinic" hypothesis

Although much clarification will be required in future research, this article draws upon the theoretical direction that Karaism is first and foremost an expression of internal crisis within mainstream (rabbinic) Judaism of the geonic period. It primarily reflects dialectic with the intellectual traditions of rabbinic Judaism, as well as deep unease with its socio-political outlook. The more Karaism and its driving ethos are examined in the context of rabbinic Judaism rather than "sectarian" Judaism or Islam, the less probable becomes the supposed impact of Second Temple sects (or Shiite Islam, for that matter) on Karaism. As research progresses, the relative place and degree of importance attributed to each of these three basic contexts in the formation of early Karaite literature will inevitably need re-evaluation.

As part of this process, this article questions the long-held thesis concerning the existence of a viable connection between Qumranic *pesher* and the early Karaite model and method of interpreting biblical prophecy and some other biblical texts, as argued primarily by N. Wieder, and later adopted in other studies.[9] The hypothesis proposed here is that while the parallels identified in the exegetical texts of both groups reflect a similar orientation in the history of Jewish Bible interpretation, this should not be confused with Qumranic sources actually influencing early Karaite literature.

The following analysis of three major aspects of the comparative sources (the conceptual framework of interpretation, its methodology, and its terminology), shows that there is no substantive continuity between the interpretive systems of the Qumranites and Karaites. Hence, the process, style and content of biblical interpretation cannot

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[9] See notes 19–22 below. For general overviews of the scholarly history and arguments in favor of the Qumran-Karaite hypothesis, see A. Paul, *Écrits de Qumrân et sectes juives aux premiers siècles de l'Islam: Recherches sur l'origine du Qaraisme* (Paris, 1969); Y. Erder, "When Did the Karaites First Encounter Apocryphic Literature akin to the Dead Sea Scrolls" [Hebrew], *Cathedra* 42 (1987), pp. 53–68; "The Karaites and the Second Temple Sects," in M. Polliack (ed.), *Karaite Judaism*, pp. 119–143; M. Gil also remains favorable; see "The Origins of the Karaites," pp. 103–104. For skeptical responses and general arguments against the hypothesis, see H. Ben-Shammai, "Some Methodological Notes Concerning the Relationship Between Karaites and Ancient Jewish Sects" [in Hebrew], *Cathedra* 42 (1987), pp. 69–84; F. Astren, "The Dead Sea Scrolls and Medieval Jewish Studies: Methods and Problems," *DSD* 8(2) (1991), pp. 105–123.

be used to support wider claims that presuppose some form of historical linkage between these two dissenting movements.[10]

As introductory background, two additional dimensions of the claim to connection are outlined that do not concern its purely exegetical manifestation, but rather focus on halakhic and historical forms of evidence that have been harnessed to this claim.

Halakhah

A differentiation should be made between comparing phenomena relevant to the history of biblical interpretation, in general, and those relevant to the historical development of Jewish law (*halakhah*), in particular. Although the interpretation of the legal corpus of the Hebrew Bible shares common principles with the interpretation of its non-legal sections, the law's centrality in governing Jewish religious life, its normative impact, and modes of transmission have set its exegesis on a separate course from non-legal exegesis, since antiquity. The difficulty in halakhic interpretation lies in the impossibility of discerning whether a certain legal norm actually preceded the scriptural argumentation adduced in its favor. In other words, it is hard to determine whether a certain interpretation of the law reflects a deeply rooted and ancient judicial practice that was transmitted through "oral" or "common" law long before it was supplied with scriptural proof texts.

Addressing the arguments of those who maintain that "non-normative" or "anti-pharisaic" *halakhah* found its way from Qumranic into Karaite sources is a broad and separate issue that lies beyond the scope of this article. In the early twentieth century, before the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, scholars such as A. Geiger

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[10] In this article, the terms Qumranite/Qumranic etc. are used generically, in reference to the literature of the Dead Sea Scrolls, irrespectively of the debate whether this literature was written or originated in Qumran, and whether it reflects the work of different interpretive communities. In this article, the exegetical texts of Qumran (i.e., the Pesharim Scrolls as well as *pesher*-type exegesis embedded in other writings, such as the Damascus Document) are discussed as one corpus, for the sake of comparison with Karaite literature, which focuses on hermeneutic procedures. The *en bloc* references to "Qumranic literature" or "rabbinic literature" should not be construed as part of a revisionist outlook on Second Temple Judaism, presenting these groups as monolithic in their approach to Scripture. While the variety within each of these groups is well noted, the dominant trends are highlighted to enable effective comparative analysis with Karaite sources.

attempted to uncover connections between Karaite *halakhah* and what was known of Saduccee *halakhah* (as reported in rabbinic sources).[11] These attempts intensified once the work of Abū Yūsuf Yaʿaqūb al-Qirqisānī, the tenth century Karaite philosopher and historiographer, became more accessible to Judaists through L. Nemoy's edition of *Kitāb al-'anwār wal-marāqib* ("The Book of Lights and Watchtowers").[12] The section containing Qirqisānī's survey of Jewish heretical groups up to his time (I, 6–14), including the Sadducees and a certain "sect of the caves" (*al-magāriyah*), was particularly scrutinized and cited as additional proof for the so-called historical linkage between the ancient sects and Karaism.[13]

   Elements of Qumranic literature were first brought into the halakhic discussion in S. Schechter's 1910 publication of a medieval copy of the Damascus Document found in the Cairo Genizah, whose text he dated, correctly, to the Second Temple period, describing it as *Fragments of a Zadokite Work*.[14] A much wider range of texts entered the comparative discussion of Karaite and Qumranic *halakhah* once all the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered.[15] In my view, research

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[11] See his *Judaism and Its History* (New York, 1911, an English translation of *Judentum und seine Geschichte*, Breslau, 1910), pp. 260–269 and cf. B. Revel, "Inquiry into the Sources of Karaite Halakhah,," *JQR* 3 (1912, n.s.) 377 f.; *The Karaite Halakhah and its Relation to Sadducean, Samaritan and Philonic Halakhah* (Philadelphia, 1913, Ph.D. Thesis, Dropsie College; reprinted in P. Birnbaum (ed.), *Karaite Studies*, New York, 1971). The connection, however, was already made in medieval rabbinic sources, mostly for polemical purposes (see, for instance, Abraham Ibn Ezra's Introduction to the Torah, known as *ha-shittah ha-'aheret* (Friedlander 1877, p. 2 of Appendix).

[12] Vols. I–II (New York, 1939–1945).

[13] Although Qirqisānī himself does not actually argue for such a connection. For the Arabic text of this section see *Kitāb al-ʿanwār*, pp. 3–80. For English translations and discussions, see L. Nemoy, "Al-Qirqisānī's Account of the Jewish Sects and Christianity," *HUCA* 7 (1930), pp. 317–397; B. Chiesa and W. Lockwood, *Yaʿaqūb al-Qirqisānī on Jewish Sects and Christianity* (Frankfurt am Main, 1985).

[14] Cambridge, 1910.

[15] Tracing halakhic ties has been a major focus in Y. Erder's work concerning various laws of purity, incest, the Sabbath and the calendar; see, for instance, "The Karaite Sadducee Dilemma," *IOS* 14 (1994), pp. 195–226; "Remnants of Qumranic Lore in Two Laws of the Karaite Benjamin al-Nihawandi Concerning Desired Meat" [in Hebrew], *Zion* 63 (1998), pp. 5–38, and his most recent extensive book, *The Karaite Mourners of Zion and the Qumran Scrolls, On the History of an Alternative to Rabbinic Judaism* [in Hebrew], Tel-Aviv,

concerning the actual absorption of distinctly Qumranic legal traditions in early Karaism remains inconclusive.

Historical information

The only piece of concrete historical information relevant to the claim of sectarian linkage comes from the report made by the Nestorian catholicus of Baghdad, Timotheus, in an epistle written around 815 C.E. He mentions that a Jewish scholar of his acquaintance recounted that ten years earlier, a Bedouin and his dog had discovered books in a cave near Jericho (strikingly similar to the way the Scrolls were discovered in 1947). The Bedouin informed Jews in Jerusalem of his discovery, and a large group of them supposedly went to the cave, where they found biblical and other books in Hebrew script. Timotheus mentions that he used to consult his Jewish informant over passages in the New Testament ascribed to the Old Testament, which were found neither in its Jewish nor Christian versions. His informant told him that these passages were attested in the manuscripts from the cave.[16]

An attractive theory developed, based on this report, positing that the Karaites discovered some Qumranic texts when they immigrated to Palestine in around 880. The medieval copy of the Damascus Document, discovered in the Cairo Genizah, is viewed as concrete proof that such a discovery was made, and it is presumed that the Karaites brought it with them to Cairo when they fled from the Crusaders in Palestine. The discovery is also seen as proof that the Karaites came into some form of contact with a Jewish stream of thought that had, since antiquity, copied and kept Qumranic literature alive.[17]

2004. Some of the halakhic analogies are also reflected in what Qirqisānī and Muslim historians report concerning the religious practices and beliefs of messianic Jewish-Christian movements (led by Abū 'Īsā al-Iṣfahānī, Yudgān, Mishwayh al-Ukbārī), which flowered in the Persian regions during the eighth and ninth centuries. See the discussions of Erder in "The Doctrine of Abu 'Isā al-Iṣfahānī and Its Sources," *JSAI* 20 (1996), pp. 162–199 and Gil, "The Origins of the Karaites," pp. 100–110.

[16] See O. Braun, "Ein Brief des Katholikos Timotheos I über biblische Studien des 9. Jahrhunderts," *Oriens Christianus* 1 (1901), pp. 299–313; Gil, "Origins of the Karaites," p. 103, and other sources cited therein (note 32) on the early discovery of the Scrolls in the Judean Desert.

[17] Wieder's original idea of a "genetic" continuity, i.e., that live remnants of the Qumranites were absorbed into nascent Karaism (see *Judean Scrolls and*

Without addressing the full scope of this evidence in detail, certain questions raised in past discussions concerning this report, have not yet been settled.[18] Firstly, why is the report unsubstantiated in any other contemporary source? It seems unlikely that the exciting discovery made by the Jews of Palestine would have no surviving echo in Rabbanite, Karaite or Muslim literature of the period. Secondly, there is a chronological discrepancy: Timotheus mentions that the discovery took place ten years previously (circa 805), whereas the Karaites began to arrive in Palestine almost a century later. Nevertheless, aside from the concrete proof provided by the medieval copy of the Damascus Document, this report remains the most tangible historical account of the Karaites' possible contact with Qumranic sources, and as such, cannot be dismissed. Its relevance to the overall issues of influence, discussed below, will only be enhanced, however, by further discoveries of such historical data.

The theory of the Karaite "pesher"

As stated above, setting the historical and halakhic issues aside, this article concentrates on the wider textual claims for the influence of Qumran literature on the Karaites. These were developed by N. Wieder, who in a series of publications during the 1950s, culminating in his influential book *The Judean Scrolls and Karaism* (London, 1962), argued that "a close kinship exists between the people of Qumran-Damascus and the Karaites."[19] Wieder introduced a new

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Karaism (London, 1962), pp. 254–255), has generally been rejected by historians. The more common opinion—that nonetheless accepts Wieder's textual argumentation—voiced by Gil and Erder, is that there exists an "accidental" continuity. According to this idea, upon their arrival in Palestine, the Karaites discovered some manuscripts originating from the region of Jericho, and these writings greatly influenced their literature and self-perception.

[18] See Ben-Shammai, "Some Methodological Notes"; Astren, "The Dead Sea Scrolls."

[19] *Judean Scrolls and Karaism*, p. v (of the Introduction). His earlier articles on this topic include: "The Doctrine of the Two Messiahs among the Karaites," *JJS* 6 (1955), pp. 14–25; "The Qumran Sectaries and the Karaites," *JQR* 47 (1956/7), pp. 97–113, 269–292; "The Dead Sea Scrolls Type of Biblical Exegesis among the Karaites," in A. Altmann (ed.): *Between East and West, Essays Dedicated to the Memory of Bela Horovitz* (Oxford and London, 1958), pp. 75–106. Wieder's theory was widely adopted as the standard view on early Karaite exegesis (see notes 21–22 below).

dimension to the comparative study of the literatures of both groups by focusing on their non-halakhic interpretations. To this end, he coined the term "*pesher* exegesis" in reference to what he viewed as common methods of "prognostic" interpretation, used by Qumranic and Karaitic sources alike, especially in their readings of the Prophets and Psalms. According to Wieder, both groups saw these books as containing prior knowledge (pro-gnosis) of their respective schisms. Since this type of prognostic exegesis, generic to the Dead Sea Scrolls, was known by the technical term *pesher*, Wieder posed the existence of a "Karaite *pesher*."[20] Wieder's forceful argumentation concerning the influence of Qumranic *pesher* exegesis on early Karaism was widely adopted in Jewish Studies. On this basis, R. Drory suggested the existence of a "*pesher* model" in early Karaite exegesis.[21] Thus, the "Karaite *pesher*" became an accepted notion in other discussions on medieval Karaite literature, re-iterated as an established fact without being scrutinized in detail.[22]

This article closely examines the three major comparative categories that arise from Wieder's discussions: (I) the overall interpretive approach or conceptual framework of prognostic

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[20] On the terms "Karaite *pesher*" and "prognostic exegesis" see *Judean Scrolls and Karaism,* pp. v–vi, 198–213. According to Wieder's definition, the aim of *pesher* exegesis "is to interpret the biblical prophecies and also certain psalms, which were treated as prophecies, in terms of contemporary history. Underlying this procedure is the thesis that the prophetic utterances are prognostications, foreshadowings of the future history of mankind and concern, in particular, the events of the "last era" prior to the advent of the Messiah…This type of exegesis is at the same time prognostic as well as messianic and eschatological exegesis" ("The Dead Sea Scrolls Type of Biblical Exegesis," p. 75). Nonetheless, Wieder noted that the actual terminology of the *pesher* is lacking in Karaite sources; see below.

[21] Drory, *The Emergence*, pp. 106–110. Drory relied on Wieder's assumptions and on the overall theory that when the Karaites rejected the repertoire of rabbinic literature, they were compelled to use "unoccupied" genres, available in sectarian Jewish sources or Arabic literature; see further discussion below.

[22] For strong echoes of Wieder's theory see Erder, "The Karaites and the Second Temple Sects," p. 121 and elsewhere in his works (see note 15 above). The "Karaite *pesher*" is also acknowledged by D. Frank, "The *Shoshanim* of Tenth-Century Jerusalem: Karaite Exegesis, Prayer, and Communal Identity," in D. Frank (ed.), *The Jews of Medieval Islam* (Leiden, 1992), pp. 199–245; H. Ben-Shammai, "Jerusalem in Early Medieval Jewish Bible Exegesis," in L. I. Levine (ed.), *Jerusalem, Its Sanctity and Centrality to Judaism, Christianity and Islam* (New York, 1999), pp. 447–464.

interpretation, (II) its methodology, and (III) its terminology, as reflected in central Qumranic and Karaite texts. Its purpose is to clarify whether the common elements exhibited are substantial enough to establish the claim that the Karaites were familiar with Qumranic texts and adopted similar modes of interpreting Scripture.

I
THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF EXEGESIS

The theoretical study of the history of hermeneutics in general and that of biblical interpretation in particular cautions from a linear conception of their development. Today's synchronic models were preceded by nineteenth-century thoughts of chronological chains of influence, in which grammatical forms of interpretation (the earliest recorded forms of biblical interpretation) were perceived as necessarily preceding allegorical (non-literal) forms of interpretation. P. Szondi's study of the history of hermeneutics poses the continuous coexistence of two major orientations in the history of understanding texts: the grammatical (literal) and the allegorical (non-literal). One orientation does not necessarily stem from the other, and both may exist side by side. In essence, both derive from that same impulse experienced by the interpreter to overcome the gap (whether linguistic, historical or conceptual) between the sanctified text and its current interpretive community. The tension between these orientations stems from the fact that they rely on "contrary procedures to solve the problem of the aging of texts."[23] Non-literal, "allegorical," interpretations overcome the gap by emphasizing the immediate concerns of the interpreter, while literal "grammatical-historical" readings highlight the boundaries of the original text.[24] On the whole, Szondi suggests that "the impulse to actualize, to annul the historical distance between reader and author, is even clearer in allegorical

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[23] See P. Szondi, *Introduction to Literary Hermeneutics*, trans. M. Woodmansee (Cambridge, 1995), p. 8 ff.

[24] Szondi (*Introduction*, p. 9) includes under "allegorical" interpretation, "all other forms of interpretation that point to a meaning beyond the immediate contextual sense, and that build a system of understanding of Scripture which is consciously beyond that sense." It "begins with the sign that has become alien; it gives the sign a new meaning derived not from the conceptual world of the text but from that of the interpreter. It does not have to call the *sensus litteralis* into question in the process because it is based on the possibility of manifold textual meaning."

interpretation than it is in grammatical interpretation."[25] In other words, when non-literal methods are employed, they reflect a stronger urge on the interpreter's part to highlight the contemporary relevance of Scripture, thereby reaffirming its authority and relevance to his community.

In the comparative study of Qumranic and Karaite exegesis, the application of this hermeneutic theory is fruitful, in that it enables us to view their common modes as manifestations of shared tendencies in the history of scriptural interpretation. The questions that need clarification are, firstly, whether these common modes necessarily reflect an identical system of interpretation. In other words, did the Karaites actually engage in *pesher* exegesis commensurate with the *pesher sui generis* of Qumranic literature, or does their work reflect a non-literal orientation? Secondly, even if it is possible to isolate elements of methodology and terminology unique to the Qumran *pesher* in Karaite sources, does this prove the existence of a chain of influence in which the Karaites were necessarily exposed to Qumranic texts? Is it not possible that they conjured similar mechanisms of non-literal interpretation since they experienced, to a similar degree, the impulse of annulling the historical distance between their time and that of Scripture? Effectively, could this not have led the Karaites to draw from the same limited pool of interpretive procedures, and highlight the long-lasting relevance of Scripture, especially biblical prophecy, to their times?

The predicative function of prophecy
One of the major functions of classical Hebrew prophecy was predication, i.e., foretelling the future.[26] Hence, eschatological interpretations of the prophetic books are longstanding features of the history of Jewish Bible exegesis. Many conflicting streams of thought in ancient and medieval Judaism held the common belief that the words of the prophets had relevance to their lives and their political future as Jews. M. Fishbane's classical study on inner-biblical interpretation demonstrates the varied and wide extent to which interpretive processes, in general, had already taken place within the biblical canon, as part and parcel of the formation and redaction

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[25] See Szondi, *Introduction*, p. 6.
[26] See, for instance, R. R. Wilson, "The Prophetic Books," in J. Barton (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 213–215.

process of biblical material. The tendency to re-apply and re-interpret prophetic predications in the context of a later era is particularly salient in biblical literature of the Second Temple period.[27] In this light, as rightly stressed by W. H. Brownlee, "the reapplication of the ancient prophecies to the historical times of the Qumran covenanters is merely carrying on the traditions of late Hebrew prophecy and early Jewish apocalyptic."[28]

The rabbinic tradition of biblical exegesis from antiquity to medieval times and beyond also engaged in the re-interpretation of prophetic visions. The Tannaim and talmudic Sages conceived of biblical prophecy as charged with long-term significance, describing it as "a prophecy given to generations," thus accentuating its longstanding eschatological and moral value.[29] On the other hand, the Sages downplayed the messianic tendency to apply the prophecies to specific periods and events, due to their apprehensions of the existential dangers inherent in such readings that had been experienced since biblical times. Mainly, they feared the creation of false expectations and consequent disappointments, which shook the nation's identity and threatened its survival.[30] The classical medieval rabbinic exegetes followed a careful balance, highlighting the

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[27] The post-exilic prophecies of Deutero- and Trito-Isaiah, Deutero-Zechariah and post-exilic sections in Jeremiah and Ezekiel all engage in re-applying earlier prophecies to later expectations in the Persian and early Hellenistic periods. See M. Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford, 1985), especially Part Four (Mantological Exegesis), pp. 443–505.

[28] See *The Midrash Pesher of Habakkuk* (Montana, 1979), p. 29. An emblematic case, in Brownlee's view (see p. 28), is the reworking of the oldest conception of the "day of the Lord" (see Amos 5:18), from a day of doom and punishment of Israel, into a day of judgment of Israel's foes and deliverance (Jeremiah 49:7–22; Ezekiel 28:24–26). He cites Ezekiel 38–39 as a text that "declares specifically that Gog will fulfill events predicted by earlier prophets: 'Are you he of whom I spoke in former days by my servants the prophets of Israel, who in those days prophesied for years that I would bring you against them?' (38:17); 'Behold it is coming and it will be brought about, says the Lord God, That is the day of which I have spoken' (39:80)."

[29] See Babylonian Talmud, *Megillah* 14a. In this and other statements and references to the Prophets it is apparent that the Sages conceived of them as imparting an eternal message that may be realized beyond the specific limitations of historical time and place, over and over again, throughout history.

[30] See the classical study of E. E. Urbach, "When Did Prophecy End?" [in Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 17 (1946), pp. 1–11 and cf. the critique of E. E. Greenspan, "Why Prophecy Ceased," *JBL* 108 (1989), pp. 37–49.

longstanding relevance of prophecy, while deferring its specified actualization.[31]

Defining the Qumran "pesher"

Conceptually, the Qumran *pesher* reflects a form of actualization of biblical prophecy taken to an extreme, of the kind rejected by the Tannaim. Its methodology, however, is very close to that of tannaitic *midrash,* in that both *midrash* and *pesher* gravitated towards non-literal interpretation, which constituted the overall dominant orientation in Jewish Bible exegesis of the Second Temple period. It has been widely demonstrated that the *pesher* has common interpretive techniques with *midrash*, which is why Brownlee named his pioneer edition *The Midrash Pesher of Habakkuk*.[32]

   A thorough comparison of the interpretive techniques of *midrash* and *pesher* was undertaken in B. Nitzan's edition of *Pesher Habbakuk*.[33] Nitzan demonstrated that the difference between them

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[31] See, on the one hand, the accentuation of Isaiah's moral teachings and the rejection of their predicative aspects in Saadiah's tenth-century commentary, in H. Ben-Shammai, "Rabbi Saadiah Gaon's Preface to Isaiah, An Introduction to the Later Prophets" [Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 60 (1991), pp. 371–404. On the other hand, Moses Ibn Chiqatilla's eleventh-century commentaries, which limited the sense of prophecy to its historical horizon, to the point that its eschatological relevance was completely annulled, were deeply criticized by Ibn Balaam, Moses Ibn Ezra and Abraham Ibn Ezra. See U. Simon, "Ibn Ezra Between Medievalism and Modernism: The Case of Isaiah XL–LXVI," *VTSup* 36 (1985), pp. 257–271; "The Religious Significance of the Peshat" (trans. E. Greenstein), *Tradition* 23 (1988), pp. 45–53; *Four Approaches to the Book of Psalms* (trans. L. Schramm; New York, 1991), pp. 113–115. In Radak's twelfth-century commentaries, the eschatological and messianic emphasis grows in proportion; see note 84 below.

[32] See note 28 above.

[33] See B. Nitzan, *Pesher Habakkuk, A Scroll from the Wilderness of Judea (1QpHab)* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem, 1986), pp. 29–79. Earlier comparative studies on the *pesher*'s interpretive methodology, include: Brownlee's first publication, isolating 13 principles of *pesher* (in light of the 13 midrashic *middot*), "Biblical Interpretation among the Sectaries of the Dead Sea Scrolls," *BA* 14 (1951), 3, pp. 54–76; Brownlee's *The Midrash Pesher*, pp. 23–36; M. P. Horgan, *Pesharim Interpretations of Biblical Books* (Washington D.C., 1979), pp. 229–247; G. J. Brooke, *Exegesis at Qumran* (Sheffield, 1985), pp. 1–79. For a discussion of the *testimonia*-type commentaries that developed in Qumran, collating various biblical verses on different topics, as distinctive of the *pesher,* and the appearance of both genres in Christian writings*,* see F. G. Martines and

lies more in their exegetical motivation than in their methods. *Pesher* is motivated by a messianic outlook deeply informed by an apocalyptic and deterministic vision, whose purpose is to explain the fulfillment of the prophetic words in the historical eschatological process; moreover, the sole significance of prophecy is to enable this process. In contrast, tannaitic *midrash,* to which *pesher* is most akin in its methods, is deeply motivated by a didactic concern with the moral and educational content of prophecy.[34]

The definition of the Qumran *pesher,* as used in this article, follows that offered by Nitzan:

> The application of the *pesher* method to prophetic texts is meant to unravel the *details* of the fulfillment of the prophetic visions in *specific* historical events…The aim of the *pesharim* in the Scrolls is to discover the figures and events at which the prophecies were aimed, identifying them as persons and events from the "last generation," or, connected to the immediate future of the present generation. These *identifications* solve the prophetic "mysteries" (*razim*). Thus, the Sect authors use the term *peshe*r when they uncover the *details* of the fulfillment of a prophecy. [35]

J. T. Barrera, *The People of the Dead Sea Scrolls, Their Writings, Beliefs and Practices* (Leiden, 1993), pp. 111–121. For a recent work on the relationship of the *pesher* to the biblical verse, S. I. Berrin, *The Pesher Nahum Scroll from Qumran* (STDJ 53), Leiden and Boston, 2004.

[34] See Nitzan, *Pesher Habakkuk*, p. 79.

[35] See Nitzan, ibid., pp. 29, 32. The English translation and emphases are my own. G. Vermes (*The Dead Sea Scrolls: Qumran in Perspective* (London, 1977)), distinguishes between two overall types of Qumranic exegesis. "Pure exegesis" aims at clarifying or making more intelligible the biblical text (reflecting a literal orientation); "applied exegesis" (reflecting the non-literal orientation), applies the biblical text to a new situation, or tries to discover in it the reply to topical questions, of which the *pesher* is the main genre. See Martinez and Barrera, p. 112, who offer the definition (p. 113): "the interpretation *pesher* is a type of non-literal exegesis of apocalyptic character." For other definitions of the *pesher* genre, see W. Brownlee (ibid., p. 5f.): "one notes its preoccupation with explaining the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy in the recent past of the commentator or in the imminent consummation of history…a *systematic* and *detailed* discussion, showing how each prophetic word has already been fulfilled, or soon, imminently would be fulfilled"; and Martinez and Barrera (ibid., p. 113). Rabinowitz ("'*Pesher/Pittaron.*' Its Biblical Meaning and Its Significance in the Qumran

Is there a Karaite "pesher"?

As stated above, Wieder based his theory of sectarian linkage mainly on the assumption that the unique conceptual framework of the Qumran *pesher* is apparent in various ninth- and tenth-century Karaite works, especially those of Daniel al-Qūmisī and Yefet ben ʿEli. He identified the common element as "prognostic exegesis."[36] In other words, just as the Qumranites decipher reality and their imminent future on the basis of prophetic texts, the Karaites too relate to certain texts of the Torah, Prophets, and Psalms, as containing prior knowledge (pro-gnosis) concerning the rise, and specific history, of their movement. In his words:

> Just as their spiritual kinsmen in Qumran Damascus have found the history of their own time and sect mirrored in Scripture, so the Karaites firmly believed that contemporary events, the division of the nation into two opposing camps, the apostasy of the rabbis and the rise of their own movement, its mission and destinies, its suffering and ultimate triumph in the messianic era were forecast by the prophets and portrayed in the biblical records. Their conviction of the legitimacy and cogency of this method may be gauged from the fact that many *pesher* interpretations became part and parcel of the intellectual

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Literature," *RQ* 8 (1973), pp. 219–232) highlighted the *pesher*'s affinity to the biblical concept of dream interpretation (*pitron*) in that both reflect a presaged reality. In his definition: "The term *pesher*, in fine, never denotes just an explanation or exposition, but always a presaged reality, either envisaged or emergent or else observed as already actualized" (p. 225), he showed that the only Hebrew occurrence of the word in the Bible (Ecclesiastes 8:1) מי כהחכם ומי יודע פשר דבר is already attributed a prophetic dimension by the Aramaic Targum to the verse: מדע פשר מליא כנבייא. Hence, the Hebrew and Aramaic cognates פושר/פותר (literally: loosen/open a knot) refer to those individuals who have the special gift of being able to foretell the future (on the basis of a dream or prophecy).

[36] See the above discussion on pp. 8–9. Other, less salient, aspects of the exegetical linkage proposed by Wieder include: the gradual and difficult process that both groups considered necessary to uncover the Bible's legal teachings ("*midrash ha-torah*"), and transform them from "hidden" (*nistarot*) to "apparent" *(niglot)*; the subjection of all twenty-four books of the Canon to this process; the use of "testimonia" (proof texts) from the entire Bible. See *Judean Scrolls and Karaism*, pp. 53–94 and cf. further discussion of these elements in the following sections on methodology and terminology.

equipment of the Karaite propagandists who used them for polemical and missionary ends, purporting to provide scriptural documentation for their own theses against their opponents whom they obviously hoped to impress, if not indeed convert, by this kind of argumentation.[37]

Common prognostic elements, however, do not suffice as burden of proof in establishing a vital connection between early Karaite exegesis and the Qumran *pesher.* Such proof strongly depends on the generic definition of *pesher* (as provided above). In other words, the fact that the Qumranites and Karaites gravitated towards the same "pole" of non-literal (messianic) interpretation of prophecy, by suggesting it had predicative relevance for their times, only proves an analogous tendency. The matter that ultimately needs to be addressed, therefore, is whether the Karaites interpreted prophetic texts with the intention of unraveling details of the fulfillment of prophetic visions in specific historical events related to the current or imminent history of their movement.

In order to examine this matter more carefully let us concentrate on one of several examples discussed by Wieder as evidence of "prognostic-eschatological interpretation" amongst the Karaites, Yefet ben 'Eli's commentary on Canticles 2:12:[38]

> The words *the voice of the turtle (dove) is heard in our land* (Cant. 2:12) refer to the terebinths of righteousness, the mourners of 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

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[37] See Wieder, *Judean Scrolls and Karaism,* pp. vi, 104–117.

[38] In Wieder's English translation (see "The Qumran Sectaries and the Karaites," pp. 100–102). For the Arabic text, transcribed and edited by Wieder [therein into Hebrew characters], see J.J.L. Barges (ed.), *Rabbi Yapheth Abou Aly...in Canticum Canticorum Commentarium Arabicum* (Paris, 1884), pp. 32–33. For similar comments by Yefet in which the Karaites of Palestine are designated "roses," see his works on Psalms 45:1, Canticles 2:1–2 (discussed by Wieder, ibid., p. 280, note 80; Frank "The *Shoshanim,*" p. 201, note 6). For general background on Yefet, his commentaries and further literature, see M. Polliack*, The Karaite Tradition of Arabic Bible Translation, A Linguistic and Exegetical Study of Karaite Translations of the Pentateuch from the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries C.E.* (Leiden, 1997), pp. 37–45.

Isaiah (62:6–7): *I have set watchmen on thy walls, O Jerusalem* etc.; *and give Him rest, till he establish, and till He make Jerusalem a praise in the earth*. They are identical with "the perfect of the way" (=*temimey derekh*) 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 (Ps. 119:55, 62, 147, 148; Ps. 130:6).[39] Therefore he said: *The voice of the turtle*, etc. The scholars of the Diaspora are designated as "flowers" (=*niṣṣanim*) because they flourish in their own places, but the "perfect of the way" are compared with the turtle (dove) because they will come from the ends of the earth to the Land of Israel, just as the turtle (dove) emigrates to a cultivated region when the summer comes.

In this, as in other examples, the problematic nature of attributing this type of *pesher* exegesis to the Karaites becomes evident. On the one hand, Yefet does relate to Canticles 2:12 (and to the other verses quoted in this passage) as containing some form of prophecy or eschatological message concerning the rise of the Karaite movement. He interprets the scriptural verses as containing a hidden or symbolic meaning directed beyond biblical times, to the time of the Karaites. On the other hand, there is no attempt on Yefet's part "to unravel *details* of the fulfillment of the prophetic visions in *specific* historical events" (to use Nitzan's formulation). Yefet does not relate to these verses as containing a detailed prognostication concerning the specific historical circumstances of the Karaite movement, nor does he attempt to decipher this message point by point. There is no serious endeavor to interpret the Karaites' political reality in Jerusalem on the basis of these verses, or to predict their imminent future by "breaking their code" in the typical Qumran *pesher* manner.[40]

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[39] In the Judaeo-Arabic original the *incipits* of all these verses are cited in Hebrew. Wieder suggests that the early Karaites saw especially Psalm 119 as prophesying their movement and hence it was incorporated into their prayers (ibid., pp. 110–111). See Yefet's comment on Daniel 12:13, cited by Wieder (ibid., 102–103) as "even more explicit evidence for Yefet ben 'Ali's conception of Ps. 119 as reflecting the religious situation of his own time."

[40] Possible exceptions include some isolated comments in Yefet's interpretation of Psalms and the Book of Daniel. The latter's eschatological content has

In effect, the conception underlying Yefet's comment is more akin to that voiced by the rabbinic Sages, who described prophecy as "given to generations," i.e., it is charged with long-term significance, aimed at generations beyond the prophet's time. Since the full realization of the prophetic word is always deferred to a later era, in which salvation is at hand, Yefet believes that the Karaites' return to the Holy Land and settlement in Jerusalem represents the beginning of this realization. God's promise, as recorded in the Bible, concerning the ultimate redemption from Exile through the return to Zion and the restoration of Jerusalem is expressed through them. In language familiar to Jewish messianic thought on the whole, Yefet is proclaiming the emergence of Karaism as the dawning historical realization of the eschatological hopes voiced by the biblical prophets.[41]

Against this background, the non-literal reading of Canticles 2:12 offered by Yefet is more accurately defined as "prescriptive" rather than "prognostic," in that he corroborates his interpretation with a string of biblical proof texts that appear to prescribe the Karaite cause. The Karaite presence in Jerusalem is explained as a form of fulfillment of these verses, of what was prescribed by the wise men, poets and prophets of biblical times. Yefet's exegetical practice may also be designated as a form of actualization, since he is awarding the scriptural passages "actual" (live) significance, highlighting their present relevance to his interpretive community, in a manner that was also quite common in the rabbinic tradition of his time (see below, Methodology).

In contrast, the *pesher* writers did not see in their brethren's activities a fulfillment of biblical promises, and concentrated on the details of prophecy as a key to deciphering their socio-political reality. This key was essential in their eyes, not only for understanding this reality, but also for foreseeing their immediate future, and hence

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informed various prognostic interpretations since antiquity, amongst Rabbanites and Karaites alike. Yefet, for instance, interprets it as prophesying the Arab invasion of Mecca, and sees it as hinting at historical events in the international scene of his time; see H. Ben-Shammai, "Fragments of Daniel Commentary on the Book of Daniel as a Historical Source," *Henoch* 13 (1991), pp. 259–281. Wieder exaggerates, in my view, the overall significance of such comments, and often misinterprets them, by rushing to the conclusion that they follow or draw upon the Qumran *pesher*; see "The Pesher Type," pp. 99–105.

[41] On these messianic paradigms see, for instance, D. S. Russell, *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic* (London, 1971).

enabling them to control their destiny. The famous *pesher* to Habakkuk 2:15, "Woe to him who causes his neighbors to drink; who pours out his venom to make them drunk that he may gaze at their feasts," for instance, identifies the subject of the verse as the "Wicked Priest." The prophetic passage contains prior knowledge of the event in which the latter attacked the sect's spiritual leader ("the Teacher of Righteousness") and other members on the Day of Atonement. [42]

The ample proof texts cited by the Karaites affirming their symbolic interpretations, polemics or ideological causes, were designated by Wieder as "Karaite *testimonia*," whose function is akin to Qumranic forms of biblical citation. [43] In effect, however, as reflected in Yefet's above-quoted comment, the Karaite practice is closer to the function of biblical citation in classical rabbinic sources (especially formulae such as: "*ke-de-'amar*," "*kemo she-ne'emar*" and "*le-qayyem mah she-ne'emar*"). [44] In both rabbinic and Karaite usage the purpose of these citations is to strengthen the connection between non-literal interpretations and their scriptural foundation. The Karaites wished to ground Karaism as a legitimate historical phenomenon of medieval Judaism by demonstrating its biblical foundations, even the fact that it was predicted or prefigured in the Hebrew Bible. By their time, the use of proof texts of this sort was well known and established for consolidating the connection of a particular ideology to Scripture. In essence, the rabbinic Sages turned to the same strategy in order to formulate and cement the dependency of Oral Torah on

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[42] See Nitzan, *Pesher Habakkuk*, p. 11 lines 2–8 (and pp. 58–51, 190–191). For further debate on the Wicked Priest's identity see W. H. Brownlee, "The Wicked Priest, the Man of Lies, and the Righteous Teacher—The Problem of Identity," *JQR* 73 (1982), pp. 1–37; A. S. van der Woude, "Wicked Priest or Wicked Priests?," *JSS* 33 (1982), pp. 349–359. Nitzan suggests this was King Alexander Yannai, ibid., p. 177, but the majority opinion amongst Qumran scholars today is that the wicked priest is Yonathan ben Matityahu, the great Priest (143–152 B.C.E.).

[43] See, for instance, "The Pesher Type," p. 86; *Judean Scrolls and Karaism*, pp. vi, 295 (general index).

[44] For other examples of the use of proof texts see Yefet's comment to Jeremiah 31:15 (Wieder, "Qumran Sectaries and Karaites," p. 290, note 124) and cf. the comments by Byzantine Karaites (cited by Wieder, "The Pesher Type," p. 88) such as Elijah ben Abraham (in S. Pinsker, *Lickute Kadmoniyyot*, Vienna, 1860, p. 104) and Eliyahu Hadassi (*Eshkol Ha-Kofer* 10b): זממו עם... ומשכילי לעלות בעיר הקודש לבכות... חשו לקיים 'על חומותיך ירושלים הפקדתי שומרים'... טעמם לקיים 'רחל מבכה על בניה'

Written Torah.[45]

The Qumranites' deterministic and apocalyptic approach to history required that their interpretations be vested with a unique understanding of both the historical events themselves and of the prophecies that foresee these events. They studied prophecy in order to find out what specific historical event or process the prophet was predicting. For this reason, the prognostic interpretation characteristic of the Qumran *pesher* was executed with existential trepidation unknown in Karaite sources. Moreover, the unique and authoritative status of the Qumran "chief interpreter" (the "Teacher of Righteousness" or "the Cohen"), who was perceived as living close to the time of the fulfillment of the prophecies, was given central significance that fitted the existential implications of his practice. This status was based on the belief that God endowed him with special knowledge that enabled him to unravel the hidden essence (*razzim*), i.e., the apocalyptic meaning, of the prophetic word, which was unknown to the prophet himself.[46]

Compared to this approach, Yefet's actualizations are more midrashic than *pesher*-like, in several aspects. Firstly, they lack the unique attribute of the *pesher*, namely, the unraveling of the details of the fulfillment of the biblical vision in specific historical events. Secondly, they reflect a different self-conception on the part of the interpreter, who is one of many and has no special powers of interpretation. As will be shown in the following, the Karaite interpreter is not endowed with the status of prophet. Thirdly, the conception of the interpretation offered is multiple, in that it represents one form of understanding the biblical text, not the "ultimate" or "only" possible form.[47]

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[45] There are interminable examples. See, for instance, the use of "*she-ne'emar*" in the *midrash* of Ben-Azzai (*Tosefta Yevamoth* 8:7), as analyzed by Y. Fraenkel, *Midrash and Agadah* [Hebrew], I (The Open University of Israel, Tel-Aviv, 1996), pp. 37–40.

[46] See *Pesher Habakkuk* II:8–10 (Nitzan ed., p. 152; trans. G. Vermes (*The Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (London, 1968) p. 341): "that he might interpret all the words of His servants the Prophets, through whom he foretold all that would happen to His people and [His land]." Also cf. *Pesher Habakkuk* VII:4–5.

[47] Similar differences also exist between *midrash* and *pesher* concerning the role of the interpreter; see Fraenkel, *Midrash and Agadah*, pp. 79–80. For more on the terminology of "The Teacher of Righteousness," see below.

A further difficulty in Wieder's juxtaposition of the Qumranic and Karaite interpretive conceptions concerns the biblical genre and particular books that form the basis for comparison. Canticles, Lamentations, Psalms, Daniel and the Servant Songs in Isaiah have been prone to non-literal (typological, allegorical or messianic) interpretation throughout the history of Jewish Bible exegesis, including in distinctly rabbinic sources. The Karaites' self-identification as the "rose" amongst their Rabbanite enemies (in interpreting "as a rose among thorns"), for instance, is similar to the typological identification of the rose with Israel and the thorns with its enemies in the Targum and Midrash of the Song of Songs.[48] Of a similar nature is the distinction made by Yefet at the end of the above-quoted commentary between the "buds of spring" (*niṣṣanim*) and the "Turtle Dove" (*tor*) as metaphorical depictions of two groups of Karaites: those who remained in the Diaspora (Iraq) and those who came to Jerusalem.

Ample allegorical, symbolic and typological readings of this sort are found in a range of midrashic and talmudic sources and are by no means idiosyncratic to the *pesher*.[49] The Karaites need not have had any access to the Qumran *pesher* to apply such symbolic readings to their history, anymore than Rashi needed to have access to it in eleventh-century France when interpreting the Song of Songs in light of the Jewish Christian polemic of his time.[50] Analogous phenomena are amply attested in the classical works of Jewish medieval exegesis. The twelfth-century Provencal exegete David Kimhi, reads various texts from Psalms and the Prophets as relating to his co-religionists' plight "in this exile" and their awaited salvation. He interprets the awesome metaphor of David's enemies in Psalms 22:17, "dogs surround me, a pack of evil ones closes in on me, like lions [maim] my hands and feet" in relation to the Jews' medieval oppressors, as follows:

> We cannot escape those who devour us, for if we leave the dominion of the Ishmaelites (Arabs) we enter the dominion of

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[48] See, for example, *Song of Songs Rabbah* 2:6–9, in Dunski (ed.), *Midrash Rabbah Shir ha-Shirim* (Jerusalem, 1980), pp. 53–56.

[49] See Fraenkel, ibid., pp. 181–199 for further examples and literature on various forms of "allegorica" interpretation in tannaitic sources.

[50] See S. Kamin, *Jews and Christians Interpret the Bible* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem, 1992), pp. 31–61.

the uncircumcised (Christians)…We cannot escape with our feet nor fight with our hands.[51]

According to M. Cohen, "Radak reads Israel's suffering into the divine historical plan revealed in Scripture, which culminates in messianic redemption," yet being a Rabbanite, I may add, he has not been suspected of engagement in *pesher* exegesis.[52] Kimhi's comment, similarly to Yefet's comment, cited above, does not reflect any wish to demonstrate how the detailed fulfillment of the psalm takes place in the historical eschatological process, as part of an existential concern to decipher what the immediate future holds for the interpretive community.

In summary
Karaite acquaintance with the conceptual framework of the Qumranic *pesher* can only be proven through the isolation and identification of elements indigenous to the *pesher* in Karaite writings, the very same elements that differentiate the *pesher* from rabbinic Midrash. The idiosyncratic element of the *pesher*, namely, detailed and specified prognostication of the kind defined above, is generally missing from the non-literal Karaite actualizations of Scripture. These do not offer a detailed and specified "decoding" of the biblical verse or passage, nor do they reflect a belief that such a reading is actually possible (see further below). Moreover, the technique of biblical proof texts and the particular biblical genres and texts that were subjected to actualization by the Karaites are known from rabbinic tradition, which engaged in vibrant forms of symbolic (non-literal) interpretations since antiquity. All of the above lead to the conclusion that there is no clear-cut indication that the Karaites actually adopted the prognostic conception typical of Qumranic exegesis.
As will be shown below, the examination of interpretive methodology and terminology, the two other aspects of comparison

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[51] In the English translation of M. Cohen, "The Qimhi Family" (p. 412) in: M. Saebo (ed.), *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament, the History of Its Interpretation*, I (Gottingen, 2000), pp. 388–415, and cf. his detailed discussion of Radak's "religious inspiration" on pp. 410–413.
[52] See Cohen, ibid., p. 412. Moreover, he sees these types of comments by Radak as giving new color to "the pattern of rabbinic zeal for relevance at the expense of scientific exegesis… Midrash typically applies prophecies to the far future."

that have also served as argumentation for a Karaite *pesher*, yield similar doubts upon closer examination.

II
INTERPRETIVE METHODOLOGY

The interpretive methods and techniques common to *pesher* and *midrash* have been widely categorized and analyzed since the 1950s.[53] In the most systematic of these studies, Nitzan identified four major methods common to *midrash* and *pesher*. These include: paraphrase, allegory, atomization (or "de-contextualization," meaning the isolation of the biblical verse or part of it from its immediate context), and the use of variant readings or multiple meanings of a word or phrase.[54] Two additional methods of "unifying" the text of the *pesher* were distinguished by her as unique to this genre: the use of added elements, ungrounded in the biblical text, to consolidate the connection between the individual *pesharim* to each biblical verse so as to make the *pesher* as a whole into a cohesive literary unit; and the creation of overt and covert associative links with other biblical verses, outside the span of the particular *pesher*, and even with another *pesher* scroll.[55]

   Had Wieder compared the interpretive methodology specific to the Qumran *pesher* and early Karaite exegesis, he might have been more cautious in his conclusions about the use of midrashic or *pesher*-like techniques. The following discussion focuses on the interpretive methods of early Karaite exegesis. How they differ from Qumranic methodology is highlighted by comparing examples from Daniel al-Qūmisī's commentary on Habakkuk and parallel sections in *Pesher Habakkuk*.

The Two-tier Karaite Bible commentary of Daniel al-Qūmisī

Daniel al-Qūmisī, who was born in the city of Damagan in the region of Qūmīs (Tabaristan), led the Karaite "returnees" who came from Persia-Iraq to Palestine in around 880.[56] Amongst his extant works

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[53] See the works cited in note 33, above.

[54] See Nitzan, *Pesher Habakkuk*, pp. 40–54.

[55] See Nitzan, ibid., pp. 54–78. These methods will not be addressed in what follows with regard to the Karaite sources; yet, as a general impression they are not distinctive of Karaite exegesis.

[56] See Ben-Shammai, "Fragments," pp. 267–268; M. Gil, *A History of Palestine, 634–1099* (trans. E. Broido, Cambridge, 1992), pp. 784–787.

(written in Hebrew with some Judaeo-Persian and Judaeo-Arabic glosses) are various zealous epistles devoted to his missionary cause, and several biblical commentaries. The most extensive of these is his Commentary on the Minor Prophets, *Pitron Shneim 'Asar*, which survived in a unique medieval manuscript.[57]

The literal tier

As pointed out by M. Zucker, in the late 1950s, and in various studies since, al-Qūmisī's writings represent a novel approach to biblical interpretation. His main innovation lies in the systematic introduction of grammatical and contextual criteria to the exegetical process, which is reflected in the formal structure of the commentary itself.[58] Three major characteristics typify al-Qūmisī's works: a strong philological concern, expressed in various lexical and grammatical comments; a cohesive analysis of the biblical text, which highlights its inner boundaries and connections by use of thematic, literary and stylistic criteria; a sensibility towards the Bible's poetic formulations (the use of metaphor, simile, etc.).

In terms of their formal structure, al-Qūmisī's commentaries are the earliest documented examples in which the citation of successive verses (or their first words, i.e., *incipits*), is followed by a comment, in a consecutive manner, reflecting the interpreter's continuous reading of the biblical text. In contrast, the classical midrashic anthologies (of *halakhah* and *aggadah*) are edited as comments on consecutive verses, yet this arrangement is external to the actual exegetical discussion, which often offers "atomized" explanations to each given verse, a part of it, or a cluster of verses. In this respect, the *pesharim* offer a fascinating structural precedent to al-Qūmisī's work in that they too expound the biblical book verse by verse. In general, however, the

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[57] Edited by I. D. Markon, *A Commentary to The Twelve Minor Prophets by Daniel al-Qūmisī* (Jerusalem, 1958). On the doubts raised concerning al-Qūmisī's authorship of this work, which remain unconvincing, in my view, see the bibliography in Polliack, *The Karaite Tradition*, p. 31, note 33.

[58] See M. Zucker, *Rav Saadya Gaon's Translation of the Torah: Exegesis, Halakha and Polemics in Rav Saadya Gaon's Translation of the Torah* [Hebrew] (New York, 1959), pp. 168–183. For other discussions of al-Qūmisī's exegetical texts and innovations see J. Mann, *Texts and Studies in Jewish History and Literature,* II: *Karaitica* (Philadelphia, 1935), pp. 8–18; H. Ben-Shammai, "Karaite Exegetes and Their Rabbanite Environment" [Hebrew], *Peamim* 32 (1986), pp. 43–46; Drory, *The Emergence*, p. 105; Polliack, *The Karaite Tradition*, pp. 23–36.

cohesive nature of the *pesharim*, which is reinforced by certain interpretive procedures meant to unify its text,[59] concentrates on the *pesher* itself; in other words, its subject is the text of the *interpretation*, and not the *interpreted,* namely, biblical text. Al-Qūmisī appears to have been the first, or among the first, Jewish commentators who introduced a sequential structure to biblical exegesis that reflects the commentator's cohesive understanding of the biblical unit as part of a wider contextual whole, and his consecutive reading of it from beginning to end.

Al-Qūmisī's literal orientation is mirrored not only in the formal structure of his commentaries but also in his many remarks on the relationship between verses within the biblical unit, such as: "כי כתוב אחריו", "על כן כתוב אחריו", "ולכן כתוב למעלה", "ולמטה כתוב", "שב אל ראש דברו". The systematic contextual reading made evident by these comments cannot be equated with the tannaitic tendency to remark on the juxtaposition of various pericopes in the Torah (*semikhut parshiyot*). al-Qūmisī introduced a form of discourse analysis to Jewish Bible exegesis, which is unknown in rabbinic literature of his time. His analysis is not only concerned with the syntactic demarcations of sentence units or their parts, but also with the techniques in which the biblical writers bound the part to the whole.

R. Drory explained that the innovative contextual approach of the Karaite exegetes was the result of Arab influence, in particular the adoption of the "Arab composition model," a literary form that was unknown in Hebrew literature at the time.[60] Although he appears to have led this approach, it is difficult to judge al-Qūmisī's level of Arabic, since most of his work is in Hebrew.[61] Nevertheless, Drory holds that the Arabic exegetical model was internalized by Karaites in the tenth century, with the growing use of the Arabic language, whereas in the ninth century, Karaites turned to "alternative" non-normative modes (clandestine, peripheral or sectarian) of Hebrew and Aramaic Jewish literature, thus adopting the Qumranic "*pesher* model."[62] However, this theory does not explain how the initial shift to contextual exegesis occurred in Karaite writings of the ninth century, especially those of al-Qūmisī, before Arabic composition

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[59] I.e., added elements and associative links, cf. note 55, above.

[60] See Drory, *The Emergence*, pp. 110–123.

[61] For examples of the Arabic glosses attested in his writings, see below and cf. the wider discussion in Polliack, *The Karaite Tradition*, pp. 31–36.

[62] See Drory, ibid., pp. 106–110, 118–119.

models set in amongst the Jews.

In light of new research (see above, *Karaite studies*), it seems unlikely, in my view, that al-Qūmisī drew his model of contextual exegesis from non-normative (e.g., Qumranic) Jewish literature. Rather, the most probable and accessible source of influence upon him was the early Karaite grammatical tradition that developed throughout the ninth century. In this tradition, linguistic categories of thought that are inherently formalistic were systematically applied as basic tools in the clarification of the Bible's meaning. In addition, al-Qūmisī appears to have developed his literary-historical sensibility by way of critical dialectic with (rabbinic) midrashic methodology in general, as some of his deprecating comments on the "ways of non-literal interpretation" suggest.[63]

Whatever the background to al-Qūmisī's breakthrough, it is clear that his work has a literal orientation that became dominant amongst Karaites of the tenth and eleventh centuries. The swinging pendulum of literal versus non-literal in the history of Jewish exegesis seems to have gravitated, from al-Qūmisī's time, to the literal option, partly as a response to the dominance of the non-literal orientation underlying rabbinic *midrash*. In this equation *pesher* and its methodology occupies the same rubric as *midrash*, and hence it is even less likely it would have attracted al-Qūmisī and other early Karaite exegetes.

The non-literal tier

Yet the picture, in respect of al-Qūmisī's exegetical practice, is not black and white, for there is never only one orientation active in the history of interpretation, not even in the work of an individual exegete. Al-Qūmisī also engaged in non-literal readings of prophetic texts, as do the tenth- and eleventh-century Karaite exegetes, though to a diminishing degree. In light of Szondi's theory, the contrasting (literal and non-literal) orientations in Al-Qūmisī's work reflect the inner tension or even conflict he experienced in trying to overcome the distance between his interpretive community and Scripture. As a rough quantitative estimate, non-literal comments in al-Qūmisī's work

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[63] As in his statement "אנכם רפעתם אלתאוויליאת פי אלתוריה כי אמרתם יש ארבעים ותשע פנים בפתרון תורה" (=for you have elevated non-literal interpretations of the Torah, saying there are forty-nine ways of interpreting the Torah), see Markon, *Pitron Shneim 'Asar,* p. 78. Al-Qūmisī was also critical of Anan ben David's use of midrashic reasoning; see Ben-Shammai, "The Karaite Exegetes," pp. 52–52. For further discussion and references see Polliack, ibid., p. 30, notes 29–30.

occupy less than 50 percent of his overall comments; the majority of them gravitate towards the opposite, literally orientated pole, reflecting linguistic-contextual methods of interpretation.

The relatively sparse non-literal comments, however, tend to be isolated from their immediate context and over-accentuated in historical discussions seeking a connection with sectarian exegesis. In these discussions, the existence of the more dominant linguistic-contextual strand in the exegetical work of al-Qūmisī, Yefet and other Karaites is generally ignored. Moreover, the fact that the history of interpretation is a dynamic requiring us to view both orientations in relation to each other, and to define influence as a matter of proportions between them and their methodologies in a given era, is generally overlooked. [64]

Al-Qūmisī's non-literal comments have been confused with the *pesher* due to the non-literal orientation underlying both. Careful examination yields that they do not share the *pesher*'s conceptual framework. Rather, such comments consciously actualize a certain verse, by highlighting its relevance to the Karaite movement in the same manner as rabbinic *midrash*, as demonstrated with regard to Yefet's above-mentioned comment on the Song of Songs. Moreover, as will be shown below, al-Qūmisī's juxtaposition of the literal and non-literal tiers reflects a deep hermeneutic awareness on his part of the swinging pendulum of scriptural exegesis. Both methods served him as complementary means of interpreting the biblical text, and he even drew the attention of his readers to the change of register in his commentary—a hermeneutic awareness far removed from that of the *pesher* writers. Finally, al-Qūmisī's interpretive methodology, whose explication is the main concern of this section, is quite different from the ostensibly midrashic techniques employed in the *pesharim* (see their survey above).

The following example, comparing *Pesher Habakkuk* (I:16–III:3)

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[64] Wieder's incognizance of al-Qūmisī's two-tier methodology (and that employed by later Karaite exegetes) is particularly salient in the exemplification offered in his article "The Dead Sea Scrolls Type of Biblical Exegesis among the Karaites." There, non-literal comments are severed from their immediate two-tier context, without reference to the literal tier that usually precedes them and occupies much more place. This sometimes leads to a misunderstanding of the overall meaning of the comment itself, as in the citations of al-Qūmisī's comments on Hosea 1:9 and 10:12 (see note 9, pp. 78–79). Cf. the forthcoming edition of Yefet's commentary on Hosea by Polliack and Schlossberg.

on Hab. 1:5–7 with al-Qūmisī's commentary on these verses, illustrates the difference.[65]

> (1:5) *Behold the nations and see, marvel and be astounded; for I accomplish a deed in your days, but you will not believe it when told.*
> [*pesher ha-davar 'al*/Interpreted, this concerns] those who were unfaithful together with the Liar, in that they [did] not [listen to the word received by] the Teacher of Righteousness from the mouth of God. And it concerns the unfaithful of the New [Covenant] in that they have not believed in the Covenant of God [and have profaned] His holy Name. And likewise this saying is to be interpreted [as concerning those who] will be unfaithful at the end of days. They, the men of violence and breakers of the Covenant, will not believe when they hear all that [is to happen to] the final generation from the Priest [in whose heart] God set [understanding] that he might interpret all the words of His servants the Prophets, through whom He foretold all that would happen to His people and [His land].
> (6) *For behold, I rouse the Chaldeans, that [bitter and hasty] nation.*
> *pesher ha-davar 'al*/Interpreted, this concerns the Kittim [who are] quick and valiant in war, causing many to perish. [All the world shall fall] under the dominion of the Kittim, and the [wicked …] they shall not believe in the laws of [God …]
> [*Who march through the breadth of the earth to take possession of dwellings which are not their own*].
> … they shall march across the plain, smiting and plundering the cities of the earth. For it is as He said, *To take possession of dwellings which are not their own.*
> (7) *They are fearsome and terrible; their justice and grandeur proceed from themselves.*
> *Pishro 'al*/Interpreted, this concerns the Kittim who inspire the nations with fear [and dread]. All their evil plotting is done with intention and they deal with the nations in cunning and guile.

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[65] See Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, p. 341. For the Hebrew text see Nitzan, *Pesher Habakkuk*, pp. 152–157.

The *pesher* expounds Hab. 1:5–7 as relating in detail to the inner and outer enemies, "unfaithful" to the sect.[66] The difference between the Masoretic version of v. 5: "Behold the nations" (*re'u ba-goyyim*) and the reconstructed *pesher* version: "Behold the unfaithful" (*re'u bogdim*), may be explained by a different *Vorlage* (cf. LXX, Peshita). It is more likely, however, that the *pesher* writer is aware of the *ba-goyyim* version and is employing an interpretive method, characterized by Nitzan as "variant reading."[67] This technique is commonly used in tannaitic *midrash*, when the Sages choose to read the consonantal form of a biblical word in a manner that differs from its established vocalization.[68] Another midrashic method apparent in this *pesher* is the atomization of the synonyms "see, marvel and be astounded" (*re'u, habitu, hitamhu tmahu*), in relation to three distinctive groups which betrayed the sect. The first two are in-groups that at one stage formed part of it: those who were unfaithful together with the Liar and the unfaithful of the New [Covenant]. The third is an out-group from among the Jewish parties opposed to the sect, "the men of violence and breakers of the Covenant."[69]

In its syntactic treatment of the passage, the *pesher* disconnects v. 5 from vv. 6–7. The three groups of traitors are the objects to be "witnessed" while "the deed that will not be believed" is the disarray caused by the Romans. The syntactic sense of the passage in Habakkuk, however, is that this disarray is the deed to be witnessed "amongst the nations" (the object of *re'u, habitu, hitamhu tmahu*). Finally, the allegorical identification of the Chaldeans with the Romans (whose symbolic appellation in the Scrolls is Kittim), is yet another technique common to *midrash* and *pesher*. This allegorization is further enhanced in the *pesher* to vv. 6–7.

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[66] See the detailed analysis offered in the notes to Nitzan's edition, ibid.

[67] See Nitzan, ibid., pp. 46–54, 152–153.

[68] Such *midrashim* are often introduced by the formula: *al tiqey x ela y* (do not read so and so but [as if it is written] so and so); see, for instance, *al tiqey "banayikh" ela "bonayikh"*; *al tiqrey "harut" ela "herut" etc.* See Fraenkel, *Midrash and Agadah*, pp. 132–133. In the case of the Qumran scrolls, the consonantal text is actually fitted to the preferred interpretation since there were different versions from which to choose and the Masoretic transmission tradition and text were not fully stabilized nor canonized.

[69] See Nitzan, ibid., pp. 46–51, 153, who highlighted the interpretive connection of the three groups to the three verbs in verse 5. In respect of the identity of the three groups of "traitors," cf. Brownlee, *The Midrash Pesher*, pp. 54–56; Horgan, *Pesharim*, p. 24; *Interpretations*, p. 24.

Habakkuk's words are thus interpreted with the clear intention of unraveling in them the *details* of the fulfillment of the prophetic vision in the *specific* history of the sect. The prophecy is turned into a point-by-point prognostication of the sect's immediate history, which the *cohen* is able to decipher (*liphshor*) through the special understanding God set in his heart (see lines 9–10).

Here is Daniel al-Qūmisī's surviving commentary on this passage:[70]

ותמהו (תמהו): אחרי ראותכם תמיד **כי פעל**: אן פעל פאעל הו[71] נבוכדנצר,
ולא תאמינו, ככ'(תוב) "כי לא האמינו מלכי ארץ (וכל ישבי תבל כי יבא צר
ואויב בשערי ירושלים." (= איכה ד, יב). **איום ונורא:** אמרו הוא נבוכדנצר,
ואצלי יכשר לפתור **ונורא** על אלהי ישראל. **ממנו**: מלפניו **משפטו יצא** כי
הוא ישליטהו על ישראל.

And be astounded: after you have consistently seen *that there has been accomplished (a deed)*: for he who acts has been activated, he is Nebuchadnezzar, *but you will not believe*, as it is written (Lamentations 4:12): "The kings of the earth did not believe (or any of the inhabitants of the world that foe and enemy could enter the gates of Jerusalem)." *Fearsome and terrible*: it has been said, this is Nebuchadnezzar, but in my view it is possible to interpret *terrible* (*nora*) as relating to the God of Israel (i.e., inspires awe, *yirah*). *From him*: from before him *His justice* proceeds for He will make it govern upon Israel.

Al-Qūmisī offers a historical interpretation in which the passage relates to the time span of the Prophet Habakkuk and his contemporaries, and is explained against the political background of the rise of the Babylonian Empire. His syntactic reading emphasizes the cohesive ties between v. 5 and vv. 6–7, in that the astounding event, to be witnessed amongst the nations, is the disarray caused by the Chaldeans (Babylonians), whose leader, Nebuchadnezzar, will change the course of history in general, and that of Israel in particular. To strengthen this historical interpretation al-Qūmisī draws on a biblical parallel (Lamentations 4:12) that echoes the sense of wonder

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[70] See Markon, *Pitron Shneim 'Asar*, p. 52. The English translation is my own.
[71] This is an Arabic gloss of the kind used in al-Qūmisī's commentaries, see below.

and shock concerning Nebuchadnezzar's "works," in the same wording as Habakkuk (*we-lo ta'aminu—lo he'eminu*), underscoring the naive disbelief in the emperor's ability to bring harm to Jerusalem. In al-Qūmisī's presentation Habakkuk appears to cast Nebuchadnezzar's role in accordance with a general prophetic paradigm, as dependent on the will of the Almighty, who "activates" him.

Finally, al-Qūmisī offers two alternatives for understanding the adjective *nora* in v. 7. In the first, it describes Nebuchadnezzar himself, who will rule the universe according to his (distorted) order of justice. In the second option, openly preferred by al-Qūmisī, it describes the awe-inspiring God of Israel, who is the true source of the earthly emperor's dominion and who maneuvers him into punishing Israel and establishing His rule over them. Both options are grounded linguistically and contextually; the latter aiming towards the wider prophetic paradigm, wherein Israel's punishment will be perpetrated via a foreign ruler. This second explanation is introduced by the formula ואצלי יכשר לפתור in which the root *patar* is used by al-Qūmisī in a linguistic-contextual sense, contrary, in fact, to the sense of לפשור as used in the above *pesher* and in the *pesharim* in general.[72]

The interpretive techniques typical of *midrash* and *pesher* that were pointed out above—the "change of version" from *ba-goyyim* to *bogdim*, the atomizing and charging of the repetitive sight synonyms with added meaning, and the allegorical equation of the Chaldeans with the Romans—were not applied by al-Qūmisī. In light of a reconstructed historical reality based on information provided in the Bible itself, his method explains the verse by means of linguistic-contextual analysis, based on a wider literary understanding of the themes and rhetoric of biblical prophecy. Numerous examples of such "one-tier" literal comments in al-Qūmisī's work on the Minor Prophets exemplify the fresh orientation he introduced into the Jewish exegesis of his time. Nevertheless, there are also many instances of "two-tier" comments, in which al-Qūmisī passes from a literal (linguistic-contextual-historical) comment to a non-literal actualization, as in his commentary on Habakkuk 2:1–5:[73]

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[72] For more on the *pesher* terminology, see below.

[73] See Markon, *Pitron Shneim 'Asar*, p. 53. The English translation is my own. In other examples (see below), al-Qūmisī also applies the formula "*ba-galut*" or "*we-gam ba-galut*" in signaling the transition from one tier to another.

ויען [74] **ה' ויאמר כתוב חזון:** כי עוד נשארו ימים עד יתקים החזון הזה כי נבואת חבקוק טרם נבוכדנצר בימים ועל כן אמר: **אם יתמהמה חכה לו. הנה עופלה.** הנה איש עופלה צאחב אללג'אג'ה ואלענאד[75] ולא יאמין **ולא ישרה נפשו בו. וצדיק באמונתו יחיה** כי הוא מאמין. **ואף כי היין בוגד.** אמרו: על יון, ואצלי הוא המלכות האחרונה אשר בגלות.

And the Lord answered (me) and said: write the vision. For there are still some days left until the vision will come to pass because the prophecy of Habakkuk precedes Nebuchadnezzar in time, and therefore he said: *if it seems slow, wait for it.* "Behold 'uplah'": Here is a man of *'uplah*, treacherous and rebellious—he does not believe. *And his soul is not upright whereas the righteous shall live by his faith*: for he believes. *Moreover, the wine is treacherous*: They said: (it refers to) the Greeks, and in my opinion (it refers to) the last kingdom which is in the exile (i.e., the Kingdom of Ishmael).

For most of this comment al-Qūmisī continues his historical interpretation, stating clearly that "the prophecy of Habakkuk precedes Nebuchadnezzar in time." His last comment concerning v. 6 (ואף כי היין בוגד), nonetheless, refers to those who interpret *yayin* as a word-play on *yawan*, inferring Habakkuk had prophesied on the next evil empire after the Chaldeans, namely, the Greeks. Al-Qūmisī suggests an alternative symbolic reading of "*wine is treacherous*," relating it to the "last kingdom of the exile." This is a clear case of actualization on his part—in that the prophecy is interpreted as relating to al-Qūmisī's own period, predicting that the Arab yoke would be the last to be borne by Israel.[76]

Is this a *pesher*, however, or simply a symbolic-eschatological reading of prophecy, which derives from the familiar rabbinic conception of prophecy as having lasting significance "for generations"?

For the sake of comparison let us consider, by way of synopsis, the

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[74] In the Masoretic text: **ויענני.**

[75] This is an Arabic gloss of the kind used in al-Qūmisī's commentaries; see below.

[76] On the symbolic level, "treacherous wine" may refer to the Muslim prohibition on drinking wine, or to the relative lenience that the Muslims demonstrated, at first, towards the Jews, which was later substituted by forms of oppression.

interpretation of *Pesher Habakkuk* (VII:1–VIII:10) to the very same verses. According to the *pesher*: "God told Habakkuk to write down that which would happen to the final generation, but He did not make known to him when time would come to an end." The one to decipher this important date, based on Habakkuk's wording, is the sect's spiritual leader, "The Teacher of Righteousness, to whom God made known all the mysteries of the words of His servants the Prophets."[77] The continuation of the prophecy (until v. 4) is interpreted in relation to the negative fate of the sect's enemies, and the positive fate of its members. The latter are identified as those who "live by their faith," "whom God will deliver from the House of Judgment because of their suffering and because of their faith in the Teacher of Righteousness." As to verse 5 אף כי היין בוגד the *pesher* reads הון (wealth) rather than יין, in what appears as another instance of a deliberate change of version (cf. above). The prognostic interpretation refers this verse to the "Wicked Priest," the symbolic appellation of the sect's arch-enemy, whose "heart became proud, and he forsook God and betrayed the precepts for the sake of riches." This is a specified individual reading, far removed from al-Qūmisī's symbolic identification of "treacherous wine" with the Empire of Islam. It relates the cryptic prophetic description to the actual dealings of a man who began as a friend but eventually turned on the sect.[78]

The differences in exegetical technique, reflected in the above comparisons, cast doubt on al-Qūmisī's supposed engagement in any kind of *pesher*, even if we set aside the question of whether he was familiar with the text of *Pesher Habakkuk* or Qumranic texts. His actualization of v. 5 does not suggest Habakkuk is prognosticating on the state of the Karaites. What al-Qūmisī implies is that the eschatological element in this prophecy may be extended to the last Kingdom, i.e., "in the exile."

In other examples from al-Qūmisī's commentary on the Minor Prophets, the literal-contextual interpretation is clearly marked off from the actualization (a contemporary polemical or topical reading), by the formula *we-gam ba-galut* (= and also in our exile), as in the comment on Hosea 2:8–9 (=2:6–7):[79]

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[77] See Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, pp. 343–344. For the Hebrew text, see Nitzan, *Pesher Habakkuk*, p. 177.

[78] Cf. note 42 above.

[79] See Markon, *Pitron Shneim 'Asar*, p. 3. The English translation is my own. For a detailed comparative analysis of Karaite and Rabbanite exegetes on

לכן הנני סך: מעני סך הוא גדר כמסגר וסתום אשר אין שם מעבר. סך הוא
דומה **כמסוכת חדק** ועל כן אמר אחריו בסירים הם קוצים. כי הגוים אשר
כנעתי לפניהם והם למדו חוקותיהם אעמיד עליהם לשנאה ככ'(תוב): **אין לה**
מנחם מכל אוהביה וכת'(וב) **היו לה לאויבים** <u>וגם בגלות</u> באחרית הימים בימי
מלכות ישמעאל ישבור ה' עול רבאנין מישראל מעט מעט **וישוטטו רבים**
ותרבה הדעת מן התורה ונלוו על ה' לשמור מצותיו ורבים ידרשו נתיבות
רבאנין ולא ימצאו כאשר דבר **ונתיבותיה לא ידעה**.

Therefore I will hedge up her way: the meaning of *sakh* is a
fence which is closed and shut where there is no passage, as in
(Prov. 15:19): "(the way of a sluggard is) overgrown with
thorns"—therefore he said after it *basirim* which are thorns. For
the nations, which I have made surrender to them and they
(=Israel) had learned their habits, these I shall make rule over
them in hatred, as it is written: "among all her lovers she has
none to comfort her" (Lam. 1:2) "they have become her
enemies."

    And also in exile at the end of days, in the time of the
Kingdom of Ishmael God shall break the yoke of the
Rabbanites from Israel little by little. And "many shall run to
and fro, and knowledge shall increase" (Daniel 12:4) of the
Torah, and they shall follow the Lord, keeping his
commandments. And many shall seek the ways of the
Rabbanites but shall not find, as he spoke: "and her paths she
did not know" (Hosea 2:7, "she cannot find her paths").

In the first "tier" of his comment al-Qūmisī explains Hosea's
metaphorical language in accordance with its immediate and wider
contexts. The rare Hebrew words *sakh* and *sirim* are interpreted by
referring to parallels in the Bible and in relation to each other. Hosea's
metaphorical depiction of Israel as an unfaithful wife, is extrapolated
and corroborated in light of similar imagery in the Bible (see the
comparison to Lamentations).

    The transitory formula *we-gam bagalut*[80] is used to pass onto the

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Hosea, see M. Polliack and E. Schlossberg, *Yefet Ben 'Eli's Commentary on
Hosea, A translated and annotated critical edition* (forthcoming).

[80] The term "exile" is often used by al-Qūmisī and the other early Karaite
exegetes in reference to Israel's continuous exile, from the Hellenistic period
until Islamic times.

second "tier" of al-Qūmisī's comment, which offers a non-literal interpretation of Hosea's words, as alluding to the state of religious confusion and spiritual search typical of al-Qūmisī's time. In his view, the same situation is predicated in the Book of Daniel, with regard to the end of days. Al-Qūmisī identifies this period of "increased knowledge" with his present-day nascence of Karaism, in the reign of Islam (=the Kingdom of Ishmael). The wish, expressed by some Jews, to follow the Karaites, and return "to God's true worship and the correct observance of his commandments" is interpreted as corresponding to the wish, expressed by the estranged wife in Hosea's prophecy, to return to her first husband. Many others, however, would follow the misleading way of the Rabbanites. They are analogous to the same wife's disability to break away from her lovers and find her way back to her husband. In other words, they are unable to find what they seek, which is the true way to God.

Unlike in the reading strategies of the Qumran *pesharim,* at this level of his commentary, al-Qūmisī does not attempt to decipher Hosea's imagery in existential detail as to what is happening or what is in store, day by day, for the Karaite community. Rather, his method uses the symbolic identifications common in rabbinic *midrash*, in which the evildoers described in the biblical text represent Israel's enemies (or those of a select group amongst it), while the role of the righteous is reserved for the group with which the commentator is identified.[81]

Both levels of al-Qūmisī's interpretation are clearly independent of each other. Methodologically and conceptually, both the literal and non-literal forms of reading can be applied to the text, irrespectively. Furthermore, actualization, when it occurs, almost always appears after the linguistic-contextual interpretation, as if secondary to it. Nevertheless, al-Qūmisī does not create an overall structure that integrates the literal and non-literal modes in a detailed manner (as found, for instance, in medieval Christian exegesis). The first level forms the basis on which the second level rests; without a detailed understanding of the essential lexical and syntactic meaning of the Hebrew verse, it is impossible to substantiate the symbolic-actualizing

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[81] There are many examples of such readings in *Song of Songs Rabbah*; see, for instance, the *midrashim* on "the rose"—Israel/Rebecca, and the "thorns"—her enemies/Laban (2:5–10).

interpretation.[82]

In summary

The conceptual and graphic divisions, alongside the transition formula, which introduces the actualization, all suggest that al-Qūmisī's focus was on the linguistic-contextual analysis of the Bible. It was this analysis that laid the foundations for an accurate understanding of the biblical text, without which there is no interpretation. What comes later, in the form of the commentator's associations, is regarded as a legitimate personal response to the metaphoric imagery or symbolism embedded in the prophecy, and is seen as a different, disconnected form of reading, which is not essential to the establishment of the text's basic meaning.

Al-Qūmisī instituted a functional division between two levels and methods of interpretation: a linguistic-contextual-historical reading bound to the concerns of the prophet, his time and place, and an actualizing-symbolic reading, focusing on the concerns of the interpreter and his community. The latter, however, does not constitute a type of "*pesher* exegesis," nor is it written like its "model." It does not reflect the general outlook and methodology unique to the *pesher*, for it has no intention of deciphering the details of the prophetic vision in relation to the specific circumstances of al-Qūmisī's day. The mere fact that the actualization stands aside a literal reading means that it cannot function as a *pesher*. For the *pesher* has binding existential implications, whereas actualization is a conscious form of alternative reading, one that highlights the longstanding relevance of biblical prophecy to the commentator's time.

As noted in the introductory section, the view that the Hebrew Bible, in general, and the books of the Prophets, in particular, are texts charged with timeless significance for the believer is basic to post-biblical Jewish hermeneutics, and manifests itself in various interpretive communities, to this day. The functional division instituted by al-Qūmisī reflects his developed exegetical awareness, and his conceptualization of the limitations of any exegetical system. This level of awareness is no different from that reflected in the works

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[82] For another example of this functional differentiation between the literal and non-literal levels of his interpretation, see al-Qūmisī's comment on Hosea 6:89 (Markon, *Pitron Shneim 'Asar*, pp. 9–10), discussed in M. Polliack, "Major Trends in Karaite Biblical Exegesis," in Polliack (ed.), *Karaite Judaism*, pp. 384–386.

of twelfth- and thirteenth-century Rabbanite commentators, like David Kimhi or Nahmanides. In their mindset, eschatological-messianic readings are an intellectual exercise no less legitimate than the search for historical-contextual meaning. The interpreter's choice of method, or the pressure he feels to express a more topical opinion, sets the tone in each case.[83]

A sophisticated hermeneutic of this sort is adverse to that of the *pesher* and, in fact, can hardly be reconciled with it. For it is inherently alien to the idea that Prophecy may be seriously regarded as an encoded message, retaining immediate existential relevance. For al-Qūmisī there are no codes to be broken, no hidden truths to be extracted from the text that may guide the community in burning matters of the day. There are only different possibilities of reading the text, multiple ways of reviving its symbolism, and making it relevant to one's own time.

In the same vein, al-Qūmisī's view of the role of the interpreter is not reconcilable with that of the Qumran interpreter in whose hands alone lies the ultimate key to the Bible's meaning, and who has been divinely ordained for this purpose.[84] On the contrary, as is apparent in

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[83] In Radak's twelfth-century commentaries, the eschatological and messianic emphasis grows in proportion. Concerning Isaiah, he states: "All [prophecies of consolation] are for the days of the Messiah" (40:1). "[He] will open eyes deprived of light, and rescue prisoners from confinement, from the dungeon of those who sit in darkness" (42:7). In his comment on Psalms 97:1, he claims that Scripture describes the messianic era extensively "to reassure those who have lost all hope for redemption on account of the length of the [current] exile." For other citations and an illuminating discussion see M. Cohen, "The Qimhi Family" pp. 412–413. On the four-tier interpretations developed by Nahmanides, see, for instance, A. Funkenstein, *Styles in Medieval Biblical Exegesis, An Introduction* [Hebrew] (Tel-Aviv, 1990), pp. 41–45.

[84] In this context it should also be added that the *pesher* technique may be found outside Qumranic texts; see, for instance, M. H. Goshen-Gottstein, "Hebrew Syntax and the History of the Bible Text: A Pesher in the MT of Isaiah," *Textus*, 8 (1973), pp. 100–106; M. Kister, "A Common Heritage: Biblical Interpretation at Qumran and its Implications," M. E. Stone and E. G. Chazon (eds.), *Biblical Perspectives: Early Use and Interpretation of the Bible in Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (STDJ, 28; Leiden, 1998), p. 104. This aspect stregthens the assumption that the *pesher* represents a particular interpretive mode, which was not applied by the Karaites, and even if it were applied, this cannot be used as proof for a specific connection between Qumranic and Karaite literature, since it was not exclusive to Qumran. I would like to thank Professor Hanan Eshel for his helpful comments and references on this and

al-Qūmisī's many references to the opinions of other commentators, all who master the linguistic and contextual tools of Hebrew Scripture may offer their individual understanding, and voice their personal view on the text's historical context or contemporary relevance.[85]

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III
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Terminology
The third aspect of comparison to be addressed in this article concerns the Hebrew terminology and vocabulary of self-designations, considered common to Qumranic and Karaite sources.[86] The terms in question are all exclusively derived from biblical Hebrew, whether relatively prevalent nominal forms (such as שבים, השארית, עניים, אביונים) or other appellations that are more dependent on a specific biblical context, including: תמימי דרך (see, for example, Psalms 119) and משכילים (see Amos 5:13; Daniel 1:4, 11:33–35).

To the above list, Wieder added some central exegetical terms that he believed the Karaites drew from Qumranic sources, especially: מדרש התורה, תורת משה, נגלות ונסתרות. In his view, the semantic field of these terms was identical amongst both groups. *Niglot* and *nistarot* refer to the apparent (obvious, undisputed) laws and the hidden (unknown, derivable laws) which are uncovered through *Midrash ha-Torah*—a term designating the gradual and difficult process of 'uncovering' the correct form of its laws. The *Torah of Moses*, underlines the exclusiveness and sanctity of the scriptural source in its entirety (the Bible in general, not only the Torah), as the only source of knowledge divinely revealed to Moses, in opposition to the rabbinic

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other aspects relating to Qumranic studies, which have found expression in the footnotes.

[85] On the Karaite emphasis on the free expression of individual opinion, and its egalitarian background, see M. Polliack, "The Emergence of Karaite Bible Exegesis" [Hebrew], *Sefunot* 22 (1999), pp. 299–311.

[86] See Wieder, "The Qumran Sectaries and the Karaites"; *Judean Scrolls and Karaism*, pp. 53–82 (the following references to Wieder refer to these works). This claim has been widely reiterated in later studies. Erder ("The Karaites' Sadducee Dilemma," pp. 195–200; 208–215) has added the actual name of the Karaite movement, *qara'im*, to the inventory of common phraseology, suggesting it derives from the term "*qeri'ey ha-shem*" in the Damascus Document.

concept of Oral Law.[87]

Wieder also drew attention to similar metaphorical expressions, used in both literatures to describe the hardship and challenge of the scriptural endeavor, particularly with regard to legal interpretation, such as "digging a well" (לחפור באר) amongst the Qumranites and "searching for treasures" (חיפוש מטמונים) amongst the Karaites.[88]

There is no doubt that there is a correspondence between the groups' vocabularies, as highlighted by Wieder, which is sometimes even striking. The problematic nature of the comparison, however, lies in the origin of the vocabularies and in the interpretation given to the correspondence. Firstly, all of these terms and metaphors are attested in biblical Hebrew and in the Bible's poetic imagery. There is no compelling reason, therefore, to suppose that the Karaites, who were ardent scripturalists, adopted cognomens such as "Returnees from Sin" (שבי פשע)[89] or "The Perfect of the Way" (תמימי דרך)[90] from Qumranic literature, when these were readily available to them in the Hebrew Bible.[91] In fact, a mere "search" in Scripture could have led them to view themselves in terms of the biblical righteous no differently to the way in which the Qumranites sought to define their identity through this biblical semantic field.

The common exegetical terms highlighted by Wieder are also of a disputable borderline nature. *Midrash ha-Torah* and *Torah of Moses* are already related to exegetical and scriptural notions in Second Temple biblical literature (see, for example, Ezra 6:10, Nehemiah 8:1 ff., Malachi 3:22), and are amply used in these senses in post-biblical rabbinic sources. There is no necessity to suppose that the Karaites could only have adopted them from the Qumranites. In the same vein, *Nistarot* and *Niglot* are used in key biblical passages relating to the nature of the Torah (see especially Deuteronomy 29:28).[92]

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[87] For a detailed discussion of some of the above terms in the context of Qumranic halakhic terminology, see L. H. Schiffman, *Law, Custom and Messianism in the Dead Sea Sect* (chapter 1).

[88] Based on the common etymology of חפר and חפש (cf. Job 3:21), see Wieder, "The Qumran Sectaries and the Karaites," pp. 60–67.

[89] See Isaiah 59:20 (the root *shuv* is highly frequent in the Bible).

[90] See Psalms 119:1; Proverbs 11:20 (the noun *tamim* appears frequently in the Bible, in various construct formulations).

[91] On these specific appellations see Wieder, ibid., pp. 97–113, 269–278.

[92] On the latter terms see Wieder, *Judean Scrolls and Karaism*, pp. 53–62 and cf. Shiffman, Law.

By contrast, terms known as generic to Qumranic Hebrew, such as *yaḥad*, *serekh* and even *pesher* are unattested in Karaite sources. The latter term is of specific interest in the context of comparable exegetical procedures.

Pesher and Pitron

The Karaites were clearly unaware of the use of *pesher* in Qumranic sources; they did not employ this term or any of its derivatives, not even as an introductory formula to their non-literal actualizations.[93] In fact, as we have seen, al-Qūmisī often uses the Hebrew root *patar* (cognate of Aramaic *pashar*), in its nominal forms (*pitron*, *liftor*) as a technical exegetical term, in introducing a lexical or grammatical comment within the literal level of his commentary. It usually appears before an explanation of *hapax legomena*, rare or difficult biblical words or phrases. In such contexts *patar* precedes a Judaeo-Arabic or Judaeo-Persian gloss that clarifies or pinpoints the exact semantic sense of the word. Here are some examples: ויקב פתרון בלשון ישמעאלי ולקב (=the *pitron* of *wa-yiqov* (Leviticus 24:11) in the language of Ishmael (i.e., Arabic), is "and he called by a swear word");[94] ופתרון ונכאה ויצ'עוף (= the *pitron* of *we-nikh'ah* (Daniel 11:30) is "and he will become weak");[95] הניחו פתרונו כ'פפו (=the *pitron* of *henihu* (Zechariah 6:8) is "made light" (relieved)).[96]

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[93] The Hebrew noun *pesher* is attested once in the Hebrew Bible (Ecclesiastes 8:1). The Aramaic Targum of this verse leans *pesher* the sense of "understanding the meaning of the words of the Prophets." The few biblical appearances of the Aramaic form *pishra* (e.g., Daniel 2:4, 5:16) are specifically related to the interpretation of dreams. This led Rabinowitz ("'Pesher/Pitron,'" see note 35 above) to compare the *pesher* with biblical dream interpretation (*pitron*) in the sense that both decipher a presaged reality, and cf. Nitzan, *Pesher Habakkuk*, pp. 29–33. Wieder ("The Dead Sea Scrolls Type," pp. 76–77, notes 4 and 5) found indirect (and, to my mind, scarcely convincing) evidence for the Karaite use of *pesher* in two Byzantine texts which claim the Karaites used to chant Eccl. 8:1 at the end of the weekly pericope. He also refers to al-Qūmisī's remark that the interpretation of Zechariah 6:1–8 is "like the interpretation of difficult dreams (דומה לפתרון חלומות קשות; see Markon, *Pitron Shneim 'Asar*, p. 67)—although this is clearly a metaphorical statement that does not include the term *pesher* itself.

[94] See J. Mann. "A Tract by an Early Karaite settler in Jerusalem," *JQR*, 12 (1921/22), p. 277.

[95] See J. Mann, "Early Karaite Commentaries," *JQR*, 12 (1921/22), p. 518.

[96] See Markon, *Pitron Shneim 'Asar*, p. 67.

It appears, therefore, that al-Qūmisī used *patar* in the opposite sense of Qumranic *pashar*, in introducing linguistic-contextual comments. It is likely that he borrowed this sense from the Arabic cognate *fasara*, which is widely used in Islamic exegesis to refer to a literal translation or interpretation (*tafsīr*), in contrast to a non-literal, allegorical (or other) interpretation, designated by the term *ta'wīl*. The latter term is in fact mentioned by al-Qūmisī more than once in criticism of rabbinic *midrash*, and its (non-literal) "ways" of interpretation.[97] The technical usage of *pitron* in al-Qūmisī's works is not at all like *pishro 'al* or *pesher ha-davar 'al* in Qumranic sources. Al-Qūmisī's terminology introduces semantic clarifications within the literal level of his commentary, whereas the *pesher* terminology serves to introduce prognostic, non-literal interpretations in the *pesharim*.[98]

Moreh ha-Ṣedeq and Moreh Ṣedeq
The only term that is indigenous to Qumranic theology and literature, and also appears in Karaite literature, is מורה צדק. While in Qumranic sources it appears in the definite form (*moreh ha-ṣedeq*), in those of the Karaites it is always indefinite (*moreh ṣedeq*). Though the term is derived from biblical Hebrew (see *yoreh ṣedeq* in Hosea 10:12, and *moreh li-ṣedaqah* in Joel 2:2),[99] the particular nominal form, *moreh ṣedeq*, is not attested in the Bible nor in classical rabbinic sources. The manner in which it came to be used by the Karaites certainly beckons the question as to their possible reliance on a Qumranic source in this case. A detailed examination of the occurrences of this term in the writings of al-Qūmisī and Yefet shows, nonetheless, that the meaning attached to it by the Karaites is different from that attested in the Dead Sea Scrolls. In the latter *moreh ha-ṣedeq* serves as the symbolic appellation of the spiritual leader of the sect, a specific individual, whose role is to direct the *pesher* process, i.e., the type of prognostic

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[97] See note 63, above. For further discussion of al-Qūmisī's use of *pitron* and *ta'wīl* see M. Polliack, *The Karaite Tradition*, pp. 26–31, and further bibliography provided therein.

[98] Even in Qumran genres which reflect "pure exegesis" (as in the "re-written Bible," e.g., the Genesis Apocryphon), as opposed to the "applied exegesis" of the *pesharim* (see note 35, above), the grammatical-contextual understanding of Scripture is not the focus of the exegetical process. There are no exegetical terms, moreover, which reflect an awareness of the literal orientation as distinctive from the *pesher*.

[99] In these phrases, however, the root *yr"h* may be understood as referring to the first rains (*ha-yoreh*), most evidently in Joel 2:2.

interpretation peculiar to the sect, through the special understanding which God set in his heart.[100] The Karaites, however, use *moreh ṣedeq* to refer to an eschatological figure, a messiah, who will appear in the distant future. He will supply the ultimate solution for the exegetical debates amongst the Jews (Karaites versus Rabbanites) and amongst the Karaites themselves, which at the moment allude consensus, by providing instruction, as does a teacher (*moreh*), concerning the correct, or right (*ṣedeq*) interpretation of the hidden aspects of the Law.[101] This messianic role of *moreh ṣedeq* is reminiscent of the role of Elijah, the Tishbi, the "solver of riddles" in rabbinic sources, wherein he is portrayed as the messianic figure entrusted with putting to final rest the exegetical cruxes of the Hebrew Bible. Elijah is mentioned alongside *moreh ṣedeq* in various Karaite sources, as for instance in Yefet's introduction to his commentary on Deuteronomy:[102]

ומן ואהב אלחכמה אסל אן יחדי אלי טריק אלצואב במנח ולטפה ואן יכשף
בצרנא פי שריעתה כמא טלבו אלאכ'יאר מן אללה וקאלו "הורנו יי דרך
חקיך" וג' "גל עיני ואביטה נפלאות מתורתך". ונסלה ג'ל תנאוה אן יתג'איז
עמא יג'י מן אלזלל ואלגלט ואן יברינא מן אלמטאלבה באן הו עאלם אלקצד
מנא אנא גיר קאצדין מכ'אלפתה בל טאלבין אלחק ואד' נחן מעברין אקאויל
אלעלמא רחמה אלהה עליהם ואת'אבהם אד' פתחו אבצאר אהל אלגלות
אלגילוס פי אלט'למה אלד'י נחן פיהא ועלמוהם וארשדוהם והדאוהם מן
אלצ'לאלאה אלתי כאנו עליהא אלטריק אלחק ואלי שריעה רב אלעאלמין.

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[100] See *Pesher Habakkuk* VII:4–5: "The Teacher of Righteousness to whom God has made known all the mysteries of the words of his servants the prophets." Also called *moreh ha-ṣedaqah Pesher Habakkuk* II:2), and "The Priest" (*ha-kohen*), see *Pesher Habakkuk* II:2, 8–10: "The priest in [whose heart] God has put [understandi]ng to give the prophetic meaning to all the words of His servants the prophets, [through] whom God foretold all that is coming upon His people and His c[ongregation]. Cf. Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, pp. 343, 341; Brownlee, *The Midrash Pesher,* pp. 107, 53; Nitzan, *Pesher Habakkuk*, pp. 152, 171–172, and see her discussion of the apocalyptic role of the *moreh ṣedeq* on pp. 27–28.

[101] For this reason, it is more accurate in my view, to translate "*moreh ṣedeq*" in Karaite sources as "the teacher of the right (interpretation)," while the translation "teacher of righteousness" is already pre-charged with the Qumranic context of this term.

[102] See MS B369, fols. 15–16, of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences [Mic. No. IMHM 53542]. The English translation is my own.

ויסתענא בטול מקאמהם ואסרי לנא **במורה צדק** כמא ועד ג'ל תנאוה וקאל
"הנה אנכי שלח לכם את **אליהו הנביא**" ותמאם אלקול. וקאל "ואזניך
תשמענה דבר" וקאל "עד יבא **ירה צדק** לכם" אמן ובזמן קרוב ברחמיו**.**

From the Giver of Knowledge I ask that he sharpen (my senses) in the correct way (of interpretation) benevolently and with kindness, and that he open our eyes in (the right understanding of) his laws, as the masters of old requested from God and said: Teach me, O Lord, the way of thy statutes," and so on, "Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things of thy law" (Psalms 119:33, 18). And we ask of Him whose mention is exulted that he forgive the errors and mistakes which may transpire (in the process of interpretation), and that He absolve us from any claim. For He knows our intention, that we do not intend to be at variance with Him, but we seek the truth, and that we are (simply) interpreting the words of the (deceased Karaite) scholars, may God have mercy on them, and may He establish them. For they opened the eyes of the people of Exile who dwell in darkness, that in which we are now, and taught them, and instructed them and directed them away from transgression, on which they were set, to the way of truth and the Law of the Lord of the Universe. And may He grant us being brave in their place, and may He make pervade upon us a *Teacher of Right,* as He promised, may His Name be exulted, and said: "Behold I will send you *Elijah the prophet*" (Malachi 4:5) etc.[103] And He said: "(yea, O people of Zion who dwell in Jerusalem, you shall weep no more… yet your teacher will not hide himself anymore, but your eyes shall see your teacher) and your ears shall hear a word (behind you saying: "This is the way, walk in it," when you turn to the right and when you turn to the left, Isaiah 30:20–21). And He said: "(Sow for yourselves righteousness, reap according to love, break up your fallow ground for it is time to seek the Lord) until he may come and *teach right* to you.[104] Amen Amen and let this be soon in his mercy."

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[103] The verse continues: "before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers."

[104] For another possible translation of *yoreh ṣedeq* (cf. note 99 above), see NEB: "that he may come and rain salvation upon you."

The biblical proof texts cited by Yefet portray a *moreh ṣedeq* who functions, similarly to Elijah in rabbinic tradition, as the categorical "teacher" who will instruct the Jewish nation as a whole about the right path in interpreting God's Law. This teacher is the messiah who will appear at the end of time. For the present, however, the Karaites must content themselves with the frustrating and error-ridden process of the search for the Law's true meaning. To help in this process they may turn to the teachings of their masters, and to prayer for divine guidance, asking forgiveness for possible mistakes that occur in their understanding of Scripture.

It is clear from this and other passages in which the Karaites refer to a *moreh ṣedeq* that he is an eschatological figure, a messiah of the kind depicted in rabbinic tradition.[105] In contrast, the role and identity of the *moreh ṣedeq* in Qumranic sources is not identified with that of the Qumran Messiah.[106] Rather, the *moreh ṣedeq* is a figure specific to the history and social structure of the sect, and to its apocalyptic vision of the end of days, which is the time of his appearance. He is a spiritual leader who conducts the *pesher* process, by being vested with special knowledge as to its exegetical procedures.

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[105] See al-Qūmisī's similar depiction, in his commentary on Psalms 74:5 (A. Mamorstein, "Fragments du Commentaire de Daniel al-Kumissi sur les Psaumes," *Journal Asiatique* 7 (1916), p. 196): "ודע כי לכל דבר אשר במקרא יש לו פתרון אחד ולא שנים כי לא ידעו את אפניו זה יפתר כזה וזה יפתר כזה עד יבא מרה צדק" (=Know that every expression in the Bible has only one and not two (viable) interpretations; some interpret it in one way, while others interpret it in another way, until the coming of the teacher of the right [interpretation]). Also cf. his comment on Joel 2:3: "כי נתן לכם מורה צדק אליהו אשר יתן לישראל להורות חוקים לישראל ככתוב עד יבוא ויורה צדק לכם" (=For He gave you *a moreh ṣedeq* Elijah, whom he gives to Israel to teach laws to Israel, as it is written (Hos. 10:12) "that he may come and teach the right [interpretation] to you").

[106] On the Qumran conception of the Messiah, see J. J. Collins, "Messiahs in Context: Method in the Study of Messianism in the Dead Sea Scrolls," in M. O. Wise *et al.* (eds.), *Methods of Investigation of the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Khirbet Qumran Site, Present Realities and Future Prospects* (New York, 1994), pp. 213–229; I. Knohl (*The Messiah Before Jesus* [Hebrew] (Tel-Aviv, 2000, pp. 18, 106, 147) also distinguishes between the Qumranic Messiah and the *moreh ṣedeq* as an existing spiritual leader of the sect. Similarities between the Qumranites and the Karaites with regard to the belief in two Messiahs were discussed by Wieder, "The Doctrine."

The three quotations that seal Yefet's introduction suggest that the combination of *moreh* and *ṣedeq* was easily come by through biblical sources, for both the Karaites and the Qumranites. It is probably incidental that both groups coined the term *moreh ṣedeq,* charging it with different meanings. The Karaites' developed exegetical consciousness was such that they understood the possibility of mistake. Their prayers for Divine guidance in the process of interpretation should not be equated with the Qumranic references to the Divine inspiration of the *pesher* writers or with the special understanding which God gave the *moreh ṣedeq/cohen* in interpreting the "mysteries of His servants the prophets."

Unlike the Qumran *moreh ṣedeq,* the Karaite commentators did not conceive of themselves as divinely inspired exegetes, active agents in the process designated by Wieder as "illuminational exegesis," who take up the role of the biblical prophets in conveying God's message.[107] As expressed so poignantly by Yefet, they did not view their work in prophetic terms. The literary-historical ambiance of their writings made such an approach essentially impossible. The religious zest and piety that prompted their requests for divine guidance should not be confused, therefore, with the conception of divinely inspired prophetic exegesis, typical of the *pesharim*.

A further difference concerns the exclusive status of the *moreh ṣedeq* in Qumran, whose unique exegetical powers ensure that his individual opinion overrides that of his brethren; his interpretation is conclusive and must be followed unquestionably on the path to salvation. The early Karaites rejected the idea of authoritative and conclusive interpretation. The exegetical process was conceived as open-ended, as well as open to all who wished to master the biblical text, and is described in egalitarian as well as individualistic terms.[108]

Yefet's stress on the possibility of error in the above-quoted passage is most typical of the writings of the "Mourners of Zion," as is the prayer for divine guidance and forgiveness.[109] These are authentic expressions of the Jerusalem Karaites' self-conception, in that no one was conceived as having an absolute hold on the truth.

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[107] Wieder (*Judean Scrolls and Karaism*, pp. 82–89) suggested both phenomena reflect a common concept of "illuminational exegesis."
[108] Cf. Polliack, "The Emergence," pp. 299–311.
[109] On the Karaite use of prayer in this respect, see Frank, "The *Shoshanim*."

Conclusions

The driving force behind Karaism, and its major *raison d'être* lay in the conviction that the rabbinic Sages of the post-biblical era and their followers in talmudic and geonic times had committed a grave error that amounted to a religious sin. They misconstrued the basis of biblical interpretation, leading to the establishment of a "false" system of oral law, partly by mistake and partly by conceit, through their wish to retain and enhance their political and social power. By doing so, they derailed the Jews from their true religious and historical course, turning them into a rejected and powerless people, strewn amongst the nations. Rabbinic Judaism and its interpretive foundation were thus deeply connected in the Karaites' vision with the political state of the Jews, and equated by them with the physical and spiritual concept of Exile ("*galut*").[110] Re-inventing biblical interpretation was thus identified as one, or maybe even the central way, of reversing the "state" of Exile. The ousting of oral law as a body of mistaken readings was thus a necessary step in the re-establishment of Scripture, God's Word, as the basis for the process of rectification and ultimate redemption.

The messianic and nationalist fervor of the Karaites, as well as their scripturalist solutions, indeed correspond to some of the central characteristics and solutions of the Qumran sect, as reflected in its exegetical literature, which was also deeply informed by the Jews' political state at the time. By further extension of such historical parallelisms, they may also be said to resemble aspects of the modern Zionist movement. Resemblance, however, especially when a millennium separates between the subjects of comparison, provides no more proof of direct influence between the Qumranites and Karaites than between these respective phenomena and aspects of modern Zionism. From a wide historical perspective, these movements reflect an analogous tendency in Jewish intellectual history to accentuate, under particular socio-political circumstances, the importance and centrality of Scripture, in general, and the eschatological or messianic content of biblical prophecy, in particular.

While the Qumran sect was extinguished by the Romans, Karaism did not cease to exist after its messianic-political agenda was dealt a fierce blow by the Crusaders. Rather, it reestablished itself, borrowing

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[110] Further on this central concept of Karaite theology, see the illuminating discussion of Y. Erder, "The Negation of Exile in the Messianic Doctrine of the Karaite Mourners of Zion," *HUCA* 68 (1997), pp. 109–40.

extensively from the traditionalist models of rabbinic Judaism and sustaining a mitigated scripturalist ethos in the Diaspora. Karaism admitted certain concepts of oral transmission and consensus for the sake of regulation and unification.[111]

Medieval Karaite exegesis and rhetorical consciousness is essentially different from the modes of interpreting Scripture that developed in Judaism between the Second Temple and early Islamic periods. Despite their divergence, interpreters, be they Hellenistic Jews, Tannaim, early Christians or Qumranites, who took part in what has been described as the "vast exegetical enterprise" of ancient Judaism,[112] all had in common a certain vision of biblical language as a manifestation of divine language. They were generally reluctant to interpret it according to the conventions of human language, even when aware of these conventions.[113] They had a common interest in uncovering its "hidden" meanings through forms of "creative philology,"[114] applying varied techniques, such as "atomization," all of which reflect a non-literal orientation in biblical interpretation.[115] For the Qumran sect, in particular, this process was charged with immediate existential significance, to the point where they ceased to exist once their interpretation was proven wrong.

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[111] This trend is already apparent in Qirqisānī's work, yet greatly intensifies from the twelfth century in the work of the Byzantine and Eastern European Karaites (see note 1).

[112] See M. Fishbane, "Use, Authority and Interpretation of Mikra in Qumran," in *Mikra*, p. 339.

[113] By this I do not propose a reductionist view of the Qumranic or tannaitic approach to Scripture, as homogeneous or static. The literature of these groups reflects different interpretive communities that held a rich array of opinions on the Bible. Some of their statements and exegetical genres suggest, moreover, that they were aware of modes of literal interpretation, yet these were not the dominant modes through which they sought to address the Hebrew Bible.

[114] See Y. Heinemann, *Darkhey ha-Aggadah* (Givatayyim, 1970), pp. 4–7.

[115] See I. Gruenwald's description of the "midrashic condition" (which is also representative of Qumranic exegesis) as one that "points to a mental attitude or disposition in which the interpretive attention expressed entails more than a concern for the lexicographical or plain-sense meaning of the text or piece of information. What really matters, therefore, is not the mere act of understanding texts, but the creation of the meaning that is attached to them." ("Midrash and the "Midrashic Condition": Preliminary Considerations," in M. Fishbane (ed.), *The Midrashic Imagination, Jewish Exegesis, Thought and History* (New York, 1993), p. 7.

The rise of Islam in the seventh century and the dissemination of Arabic culture amongst the Jews throughout the eighth to ninth centuries had deeply affected Jewish identity, community life and religious thought. It generated various paradigmatic shifts, especially in relation to the place occupied by the Hebrew Bible and its study in Judaism in light of the central status that was afforded the Qur'an in Islam. At some time in this period, biblical language ceases to be explained predominantly as an embodiment of God's Word. New-sprung notions, inspired or reinforced by the Arab disciplines of grammar and rhetoric, effect a scientific conception of biblical language as a manifestation of universal human language, in that it, too, is bound to the formal, universal rules of language as such.[116]

The medieval thinkers deliberately adopted the famous dictum attributed to Rabbi Ishmael, "the Bible speaks in the language of human beings," in order to soften their break with rabbinic hermeneutics. They removed this dictum from its original context, which was concerned with the limits of Rabbi Akiva's *midrash halakhah*, and turned it into an abstract rule, a guiding principle of exegesis. Accordingly, "speaking in the language of human beings" meant that a differentiation existed between the form of the biblical text (its wording, language, texture), which is similar to that of any other text in any other human language, and its Divine (abstract) "content," or "meaning." The form–content dichotomy, as explicated by M. Cohen, became the axis of Jewish exegesis in Spain from the tenth century, expressed through contrastive metaphors such as "body" and "soul" or "cloths" and "body."[117]

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[116] The Karaites and Saadiah Gaon were responsible for developing this conception of biblical language as a manifestation of the universal rules of language. Regarding the Karaites, see Khan's studies, cited above (note 5). On Saadiah, see the preface to his long commentary on the Pentateuch, in which he asserts the Torah "came down in one of the human tongues" (M. Zucker, *Saadya's Commentary on Genesis*, New York, 1984, p. 17/191). For studies on the influence of Karaite exegesis on Saadiah and Rabbanite exegesis in the Orient and Spain, see Drory, *The Emergence*, especially pp.156–178, and most recently Daniel Frank, *Search Scripture Well, Karaite Exegetes and the Origins of the Jewish Bible Commentary in the Islamic East*, Leiden, 2004, especially pp. 248–257.

[117] For an illuminating discussion of the adaptation of Rabbi Ishmael's dictum in medieval (Oriental) exegesis, see M. Cohen, "'The Best of Poetry': Literary Approaches to the Bible in the Spanish *Peshat* Tradition," *The Torah U-Madda Journal,* 6 (1995/6), pp. 15–57.

Karaite exegesis forms an important stage in the introduction of this new conception. The early Karaites, including al-Qūmisī, discovered the force of applying linguistic, literary and rhetorical tools when analyzing biblical texts. Throughout the ninth to eleventh centuries, they developed these tools to the point that enabled complex analysis of the form of Scripture and highlighted the connection between form and meaning. As shown by G. Khan, the idea that form and meaning are intimately connected deeply informed the early Karaite grammatical tradition.[118] The Karaites appear to have reached a more sophisticated solution to the problem of the hermeneutic status of the Divine Word than did the Spanish exegetes. Instead of arriving at a form–content dichotomy, which separates analysis of the Bible's language (form) from its divine content (meaning), they offered a functional model, akin to formalist and structuralist models in modern criticism, which analyzed and clarified how the specific structures of biblical language, its syntax and discourse convey meaning.

Against this general background, the differences between the three aspects of the exegetical process brought to comparison in this article, namely, the conceptual framework, methodology and terminology, are further accentuated. A universal, linguistically bound understanding of the biblical text moves the interpreter to an awareness of his own hermeneutic. It obliges him to differentiate between his approaches, the literal from the non-literal, resulting in a scientific distancing from the act of commentating, in which, nonetheless, he is fervently engaged. Consequently, the exegete relents here and there to topical comments, actualizations, of the kind identified in the secondary level of al-Qūmisī's commentary, or in the work of Yefet and other Karaite exegetes. The actualizing tendency of Karaite exegesis is an expression of the urge for relevance typical of devotional interpretation in general. For all interpretive communities that uphold the revelational basis of Scripture must find ways to relate the text to their own time, by providing some insight into its existential relevance, whether educational, messianic or eschatological. Prophecy is particularly prone to such readings (as are eschatological texts in general) since the biblical prophet is conceived already in inner- as well as post-biblical circles as conveying a message of eternal relevance to every generation.

These actualizations exhibit no features that are distinctively unique to the "prognostic exegesis" typical of the Qumran *pesher*. The

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[118] See the section "Karaite Studies," above.

Qumranites concentrated on the details of the prophetic message as a key to a specified understanding that would enable them to decipher their place within history and even predict, as a dream interpreter would predict, their imminent future. If prophecy is like an encoded message and the *moreh ṣedeq* has the key to breaking the code, then there is only one key that fits the code. The Karaites, on the other hand, interpret their appearance on the stage of history as the dawning of the messianic fulfillment of prophecy; they have neither *pesher* nor the concept of one spiritual leader (the *moreh ṣedeq*) who is capable of offering the ultimate interpretive solution.

The only undisputed element these literatures have in common is an underlying non-literal orientation in the reading of prophetic literature and the accentuation of its eternal significance, features that the Qumran *pesher* shares with ancient rabbinic *midrash*, and which are also acknowledged in medieval rabbinic literature.[119] This orientation, as well as the scripturalist-messianic mindset and biblically derived terminology attested in the literatures of the Karaites and Qumranites, may convincingly be explained as phenomenological parallels, typical of the history of religion in general, and of the history of scriptural interpretation, in particular.[120]

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[119] As such, one may say they share in the disposition or mental attitude of what Gruenwald termed the "midrashic condition" (see note 115 above), or in what M. Fishbane describes as the "midrashic mode of correlating Scriptures among themselves and with new values, virtues or events. From this perspective, 'Midrash' is not only a (multifaceted) literary genre but itself a generic structure of Jewish tradition" (*The Midrashic Imagination*, p. 1).

[120] As an afterthought it may be remarked that the focus on so-called Qumranic parallels somewhat de-railed the study of medieval Karaism by setting its investigation on an unfruitful path. This is mostly the result of a certain tendency in the research of Judaism to contain such phenomena by assigning them to an "alternative" history, outside that of "rabbinic Judaism." The gradually emerging picture of medieval Judaism and literature, particularly in the Orient, suggests much still needs to be addressed: What constituted medieval Judaism following the nascence of the Islamic era, and what place did Karaism occupy in its intellectual formation? For a bold attempt in this direction, see Astren, *Karaite Judaism*.