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TRAVELLING THROUGH TIME

Essays in honour of Kaj Öhrnberg

EDITED BY

SYLVIA AKAR, JAAKKO HÄMEEN-ANTTILA
& INKA NOKSO-KOIVISTO



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Edited by Sylvia Akar, Jaakko Hämeen-Anttila & Inka Nokso-Koivisto
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POLISH-LITHUANIAN KARAITE HEBREW ZEMIROT: IMITATION ONLY? A REVIEW ON A MARGINAL GENRE

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During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries Polish-Lithuanian Karaites wrote an extensive array of paraliturgical Hebrew poetry for Sabbaths, familial events, and festivals. These poems, known in the Jewish poetic tradition as *zemirot*, have been published in local prayer books and printed compilations, but many remain hidden in manuscripts and private collections. A few of these original *zemirot* are published in the fourth volume of the *Vilna Siddur*,¹ along with other paraliturgical texts. This article will offer an introduction to some recent developments in the study of the literary use of this particular genre among Karaites. I will reflect upon the nature of *zemirot* from three perspectives: metrics, language, and the contents of the corpus.²

For many years, Kaj Öhrnberg has kindly supplied me with articles, book reviews, and works on mediaeval Hebrew poetry. As an Arabist, the Hispano-Hebrew poetic tradition has been close to his heart. I dedicate this article to him.³

THE THREEFOLD MARGINALITY OF THE POLISH-LITHUANIAN KARAITE ZEMIROT

At the risk of sounding apologetic, certain major issues must be addressed before launching into the main discussion. When approaching such uncharted territory

1 *Siddur bat-tefillot ke-minhag haq-qara'im*, IV: 96–223. Esteemed poems by Rabbanite authors (such as Yehuda ha-Levi, Shelomo ibn Gabirol, and Abraham ibn 'Ezra) and Ottoman poets of later provenance (Yisra'el Najara and Shelomo Mazzal Ṭob) were also included among the cherished poetry of Polish-Lithuanian Karaites.

2 The corpus reviewed for the purposes of this article includes thirty-four *zemirot* by seventeen Polish-Lithuanian Karaite authors, ranging from the early 17th to the mid-18th century. I will refer to the corpus according to the number supplied in the *Vilna Siddur*.

3 This article is based on my presentation delivered at the *Sixth Medieval Hebrew Poetry Colloquium*, Ruhr-Universität Bochum, in July 2011. The subject will be dealt with also in my forthcoming PhD thesis (2013).

of Hebrew poetry, one inevitably meets obstacles I have chosen to identify here as “threefold marginality”.⁴

The first marginality pertains to the Karaite identity of the poets.⁵ The Karaite Jewish movement emerged as a protest against rabbinic hegemony over the interpretation of central Jewish texts in ninth-century Persia and Babylonia.⁶ By rejecting the authority of the rabbinic tradition and only recognizing the religious authority of the Hebrew Bible, the movement promoted individual interpretation of Jewish law. Both in popular and academic literature, Karaites have been portrayed with negatively charged words – such as “sect”, “schismatic”, and “heretical” – in comparison to “normative” Rabbanite Judaism.⁷ Mere mention of the word “Karaite” stirs antiquated or misguided assumptions about the history of Karaism and the practice of the Karaite faith. In a similar vein, the Hebrew poetry written by Karaites has been labelled, at its best, a pale imitation of Rabbanite masterpieces.⁸

On linguistic grounds, Karaites may be divided into three distinct groups. The Karaites in Palestine, Egypt, and Iraq spoke Arabic, while the vernacular of the Byzantine Karaites was Greek (and later Turkish). In the Crimean Peninsula, Poland, and Lithuania, Karaite (or *Karaim*) communities have employed Turkic vernaculars (Karaim and Crimean Tatar). The second marginality pertains to this latter group, poets with an East European Karaite identity. Previous studies of Karaite Hebrew literature have mainly focused on the literary corpus produced by mediaeval Karaite communities in Palestine or in the Byzantine Empire. The study of mediaeval Karaite exegesis has led to important developments in Jewish studies as a whole. In the field of poetics, such eminent figures as Moshe Darʿī⁹ (13th c., Egypt) have been the focus of researchers.

4 The aspect of marginality pertains here to a literary genre, which has been pushed to the margins of academic research. This is, for instance, due to the non-normative background of its authors or its non-classical status (as opposed to classical Hebrew poetry written in al-Andalus between the 10th and 12th centuries).

5 The origin of the word “Karaite” most likely stems from the Hebrew root *qrʾ* (‘to read’) demonstrating the desire to return to the biblical scriptures (*miqra*).

6 On the early history of Karaite movement, see Gil 2003.

7 In a very recent work on the history of Jews in Poland and Russia (Polonsky 2010: 444), the entry on “Karaite” reads as follows: “Follower of a *heretical sect* of Judaism who recognized the validity of the written (Hebrew *kara*: read) but not the Oral Law (the Talmud).” (Emphasis mine.)

8 On such scholarly views on Karaite Hebrew poetry, see my article (Tuori 2011). Imitation may encompass the poetic form and contents of the model. By using the term “imitation” I do not intend to discredit the literary value of the corpus.

9 The most recent work in this area is Joachim Yeshaya’s critical edition (2010) of Darʿī’s secular Hebrew poems.

The Polish-Lithuanian Karaite poets of the epoch under scrutiny here represent the learned members of their communities in Eastern Europe: Lithuania, Galicia, and Volhynia of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Their origins in Northern Europe and the adoption of Turkic language (Karaim) are shrouded in mystery, mostly due to a severe lack of reliable source material.¹⁰ From the sixteenth century onwards, East European Karaite communities composed a vast amount of historical, religious, and poetic literary products in Hebrew.¹¹ Yet, only recently have they attracted more academic attention, most notably in relation to the historical development of their communities and ethnic identity.¹² East European Karaite Hebrew works have, for the most part, not been touched upon by academic research.

The third marginality pertains to the literary genre of *zemirot*. *Zemirot* are Hebrew or Aramaic paraliturgical poems adapted into melodies and recited on Sabbaths and at festivals, weddings, and circumcisions.¹³ The term includes a broad range of types of poems. By the late mediaeval period, the singing and writing of *zemirot* had become popular in most Jewish (including Karaite) communities. For the last century, the study of mediaeval Hebrew poetry has been dominated by the invaluable poetic texts uncovered from the Cairo Geniza. These fragments contain very few fragments of paraliturgical poetry.¹⁴ Indeed, both the texts and music of *zemirot* are often portrayed as aesthetically modest.¹⁵ Most modern works on the subject are either reviews of individual poems or popular collections with homiletic commentaries.¹⁶ Interest has mainly been directed at their

10 On their arrival in Lithuania in the late 14th century, at the earliest, see Harviainen (2003) and Akhiezer & Shapira (2001).

11 Akhiezer & Shapira 2001: 45; Astren 2004: 244–245.

12 During the Soviet era, many Karaites opted for Turkic rather than Jewish identity. According to Lasker (2010: 125–127, n. 12), most Russian and Lithuanian scholars of Karaism now take it as a fact that East European Karaites are of Turkic origin. Suffice it to say that the ethnic identity of East European Karaites is a highly debated topic in current research.

13 Paraliturgical poetry is recited in parallel with the public service in the synagogue, for instance, before or after the beginning of the liturgy, or at homes during ceremonial gatherings (Kollender 2003: 476).

14 Beeri 1988: 419–423.

15 See Werner 1976: 136–138.

16 Such popular modern collections include *Zemirot: Sabbath Songs with additional Sephardic Zemirot. A New translation with a commentary anthologized from Talmudic, midrashic, and rabbinic sources, Translation, Commentary, and an Overview: Sabbath and Zemirot* by Rabbi Nosson Scherman (Coney Island Avenue: Mesorah Publications, 1981; 1st edn 1979); Menahem Hakohen & Benny Don-Yechiya (eds), *Shalom le-bo shabbat: Zemirot ve-shirim le-shabbat* (Tel Aviv: Hoša'at don, 1977); and Neil Levin & Velvel Pasternak (eds), *Z'mirot Anthology* (Cedarhurst: Tara Publications, 1981).

distribution in the Jewish world, which has assisted in establishing literary and cultural connections between mediaeval Jewish communities.

In the following discussion I will focus on these three elements of marginality while analysing the metrics, language, and contents of the *zemirot*. Is one bound to accept as an irrefutable fact that Polish-Lithuanian Karaite *zemirot* are aesthetically inferior poems written by a miniscule group of obscure sectarians living in the outskirts of Eastern Europe?

THE METRICS OF IMITATION

Most Polish-Lithuanian Karaite *zemirot* follow Hispano-Hebrew quantitative metres.¹⁷ This originally Arabic system is based on quantitative differences between the (perceived) lengths of syllables, without taking into account such prosodic elements as stress. Quantitative metrics rapidly became the dominant basis in Hispano-Hebrew poetry, both secular and sacred, as well as in later Hebrew poetry written under its influence from the mid-tenth century onwards. The use of quantitative metre in the corpus is hardly surprising. According to Weinberger (1998: 413), “[t]he most notable influence on Karaite poetics came from the Golden Age Hispano-Hebrew poets”.

Conspicuously, fifteen of the *zemirot* in the corpus appear in an identical quantitative scansion.¹⁸ This amounts to almost half of the corpus. The same metre is employed in two classical poems for the Sabbath, *Ki eshmera shabbat*¹⁹ and ‘*Al ahabateka eshte gebi’i*.²⁰ The poems are credited to Abraham ibn ‘Ezra (1089–1164, Spain) and Yehuda hal-Levi (1075–1141, Spain), respectively. Both of them were published already in previous East European Karaite *Siddurim*.²¹

In addition to metrics, the strophic form of these popular Rabbanite *zemirot* is also faithfully repeated by the authors: the *muwashshah*-like organization of four lines per stanza,²² embellished with refrains, each stanza having its own individual rhyme, and the last rhyme being common to all stanzas and the refrain

17 For a concise listing of classical metres, see Schirrmann 1954: 722–734.

18 In the classical system, the metre may be defined as follows: two *tenu’ot*, one *yated*, two *tenu’ot* / two *tenu’ot*, one *yated*, and one *tenu’a*.

19 Published in *Maḥzor viṭry*: 178 (Idelsohn 1932: 155); see also Davidson (1970, II: 471).

20 Published by Harkavy in the *ḏiwān* of Yehuda hal-Levi (Halper 1913–1914: 224). See also the critical edition of Dov Yarden (1982: 643–644) and Davidson (1970, III: 266).

21 In the Vilna *Siddur* (pp. 103–104), the Gozlow *Siddur* (1836: 3), *Seder berakot* (Chufut-Kale, 1804: 2).

22 On *muwashshah*-like Hebrew poems, see Fleischer (1975: 349 ff.). According to Einbinder (1989: 167), this form became exceedingly popular in later Hebrew poetry as hybrid, non-liturgical forms (represented also by Polish-Lithuanian Karaite *zemirot*).

(e.g. *aaab bb cccb bb*). This strophic organization is typical of the genre of *zemiro*, explicitly for poems intended for public recital with a participating audience.²³

This metric form was so popular that not only poems for Sabbath, but also poems for other festivals (for Sukkot, Pesah, and Shabu'ot) were written in this metre. Polish-Lithuanian Karaite manuscripts are replete with unpublished *zemiro* written in this very metre.²⁴ Use of the same scansion implies that these poems were probably sung with the same melody.²⁵ The technique of appropriating an older melody for a new text is known as *contrafactum*.

Imitation is not limited to metrics and strophic form: the choice of rhyming syllables and wordings may also be extracted from model poetry. Abraham ben Yoshiyahu (1636–1687, Troki), in his *zemer* for Sabbath (no. 8, 2: 1–4) quotes *verbatim* Yehuda hal-Levi's '*Al ahabateka* (quotations are in italics):²⁶

רָצָה וְקִדַּשׁ לֵי יוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי
שֶׁבֶת קִרְאָהּ מַלְכֵי וְרוּעֵי
בּו יוֹם אֲנִי אֲשַׁכַּח נוֹדֵי וְנוּעֵי
אֶקְדִישׁ בְּשִׂמְחָה רַב תּוֹךְ כָּל קְהֵלוֹת

He was delighted to sanctify the seventh day!

*My king and my shepherd*²⁷ called it "Sabbath".

On that very day *I will forget my aimless wanderings*;²⁸

I will joyfully sanctify [Sabbath], great [it is] within all congregations.

Polish-Lithuanian Karaite poets were not the only later Hebrew poets inspired by these particular Hispano-Hebrew *zemiro* for Sabbath. An anonymous Yemenite poet – perhaps the most famous of the Yemenite poets, Shalom Shabbezi (c.1619–1680) – was inspired by '*Al ahabateka* and wrote his *Shalom le-bo shabbat*

23 Schirmann (1956: 706), for instance, defines *zemiro* as poems designated for Sabbath evening, recited before the afternoon prayer on Sabbath or on Saturday evenings (for *habdala*). Arranged in stanzas, they are sung with various popular melodies.

24 For example, manuscript AO65 (dated 1861, Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy, studied from the microfilm F52313 at the Jewish National and University Library, Jerusalem, Israel) contains twenty-seven unpublished, contemporary Polish-Lithuanian Karaite *zemiro* written in this metre.

25 Today these melodies are mostly lost. The recital of non-liturgical religious songs has suffered more than the recital of liturgical melodies, which are still practiced in most Karaite synagogues in Israel and Eastern Europe (Lithuania). On the liturgical and paraliturgical music of modern Lithuanian Karaims, see Firkavičiūtė 2001; 2003.

26 All the English translations of the poems from the corpus are mine.

27 Cf. '*Al ahabateka* (6th stanza, last line): קִרְבוּ אֵלַי שְׁלֵחוּן / מַלְכֵי וְרוּעֵי.

28 Cf. '*Al ahabateka* (4th stanza, last line): עָרַב וְאֲשַׁכַּח / כָּל נוֹדֵי וְנוּעֵי.

as a poetic response to Yehuda ha-Levi's poem. This imitative literary style was known in Judeo-Arabic as *jawāb* ('response').²⁹

Zemirot written in other metres were also inspired by earlier, quite well-known rabbinic poems. It will suffice to mention two examples here: the poetic blessing for meals (no. 138) by Mordokai ben Nisan (d. c.1709, in Kukizów) is a poetic response to the rabbinic poem *Node la-'el mif'alo* by al-Ḥarizi (no. 145 in the *Vilna Siddur*, IV: 181),³⁰ and Yehuda ben Aharon's poem *Adon 'olam she'e shav'i*, dedicated for the ten Karaite principles of faith (no. 147, IV: 182–183), with its metre of *ham-marnin* and its main rhyming syllable (*-ra*), is an obvious imitation of the famous rabbinic *piyyuṭ*, *Adon 'olam*.³¹

To put it briefly, in terms of prosody most Polish-Lithuanian Karaite *zemirot* represent imitations of earlier, highly esteemed Hebrew poetry. It is likely that the Polish-Lithuanian Karaites wrote poetry in accord with existing patterns, partly in homage to the original poems, and partly as a kind of a shortcut to a faster adoption of the new product.

THE LANGUAGE OF THE ZEMIROT: AN ELEMENT OF INNOVATION

Despite their denial of the rabbinic oral tradition, Karaites did not extend this refutation to the use of post-classical Hebrew in their texts or to the study of rabbinic literature.³² Rabbinic works studied by contemporary Polish-Lithuanian Karaites include a vast range of Hebrew literature, from Maimonides's works to the classics of sixteenth-century Safedian Kabbalah, such as the *Pardes rimmonim* by Moshe Cordovero.³³ The second Firkovich collection in Saint Petersburg is filled with rabbinic works previously owned by East European Karaites: the *Mishne tora* by Maimonides,³⁴ Mishnaic tractates, and tractates from the *Zohar*.³⁵

29 Rosen-Moked 1982: 137.

30 *Node la-'el mif'alo*, a poetic blessing for meals, is a complete metrical counterpart to no. 138. It contains eight and six syllables per line and avoids *shewas* and *ḥatafim*. In addition, both poems contain six lines per stanza, with an alternating rhyme scheme (hemistichs are made to rhyme). According to the poem's heading, *Node la-'el* was written by Yehuda al-Ḥarizi (1165–1225, Spain). However, according to Davidson (1970, III: 206), this was written by the slightly earlier poet, Abraham Ḥarizi (c.1100, also of Toledo, Spain).

31 *Adon 'olam* is also published in the *Vilna Siddur* (IV: 74).

32 Tirosh-Becker 2003: 334. On Karaite Hebrew, see Maman 1998; 2003.

33 Lasker & Akhiezer 2006: 15, n. 29; Fenton 1983: 14, n. 35.

34 One of the authors of the corpus, Zeraḥ ben Natan (1578–1663, in Troki), wrote a commentary on the *Mishne tora* (St Petersburg, B383, in JNUL, 53563).

35 This has been verified on my own visit to the National Library in St Petersburg.

Rabbinic Hebrew was fluently employed in Polish-Lithuanian prose texts as well.³⁶ The familiarity of certain tractates of the Talmud and Mishna (especially *Abot*, *Baba qama*, and *Kilayyim*) is apparent in the texts written by contemporary Polish-Lithuanian Karaites.³⁷ For instance, Yosef ben Mordokai Malinowski (d. before 1625, in Lithuania) quotes from *mAbot* (2:5) in the preface of his *minhagim* (printed in the first volume of the Vilna *Siddur*: 456): “In a place where there are no men, try to act like a man.” The Karaite scholar Shelomo ben Aharon (1670–1745, Troki) cites *mAbot* (3:17) in his treatise on Karaite faith (*Appiryon*: 12): “If there is no sustenance, there is no Torah learning.”

Hence it is no surprise that the language of the *zemiroth* is not particularly biblical. Rather, the language of the *zemiroth* contains an assortment of different layers of Hebrew. There is a tendency to avoid archaisms of biblical Hebrew, such as the use of the *way-yiqtol* type of verbal forms,³⁸ *infinitivus absolutus*, and cohortatives. Later Hebrew elements are frequent, specifically in the field of lexicon. Rabbinic Hebrew noun patterns (such as *qeṭila*, *qittul*, and the nominal morpheme *-ut*) are common. Both rabbinic and mediaeval Hebrew words and expressions abound: עֵין ‘to study’, יַעַד ‘to promise’, נָכַס ‘to enter’, פָּרְסָם ‘to make public’, כָּל שָׂבֹן and קָל וְחוֹמֶר ‘all the more so’, and הִלְוִיאִי ‘if only’. Biblical words may appear also in their later, rabbinic, or mediaeval meanings.³⁹ Often rabbinic words are used, even though an equivalent biblical word exists.⁴⁰ On the other hand, the most manifestly rabbinic Hebrew elements are avoided and biblical Hebrew is preferred. For instance, all the infinitives are biblical, never rabbinic (תַּת instead of לִיתֵן ‘to give’). The biblical relative pronoun אֲשֶׁר is preferred over -שׁ.⁴¹ The Mishnaic conjugation *nitpa’al*, while typical for Polish-Lithuanian Karaite prose, occurs only once in the corpus (no. 68, 4:4: נִתְפַּעְלִי ‘be frightened’).

Reminiscent of prose texts, quotations from rabbinic literature are found in the corpus. For instance, in his *zemer* no. 138, Mordokai ben Nisan circuitously quotes the Talmud in the first stanza and the refrain, “blessed is he of whom we have eaten”. This quote, appearing also in the Rabbanite model poem *Node la’el*, originates from the Babylonian *Talmud* (*bBer.* 50a).⁴²

36 See the private correspondence published in Mann 1931.

37 Akhiezer & Lasker 2006: 15, n. 29.

38 These appear only few times (see, e.g. no. 61, 3:1 וַיֵּט; no. 7, 4:1 וַיְהִי).

39 For instance, the noun מִקְשֵׁד (no. 19, 3:4) occurs in BH only once (1K 10:12), referring to an unspecified architectural term. In Rabbinic Hebrew, definition is broadened to include “support” (Sáenz-Badillos 1993: 226).

40 מְחַל instead of קָלַח ‘to forgive’.

41 See Maman 2003: 500. The only exception is no. 138 by Mordokai ben Nisan, who employs the relative pronoun -שׁ and the particle שֶׁל with a double genitive.

42 אמר רבי יוחנן: נברך שאכלנו משלו. Also in *Beresbit rabba*, 49:4 (Beeri 1988: 427, n. 47 and n. 48).

In the style of mediaeval Hebrew poetry, the use of allusions and symbolic names (*kimmuyim*) for God, Israel, and biblical characters is common: *nefesh*, *šura*, *yehida*, and *ayumma* for the configuration of the human soul, “seed of Abraham” for the Karaites, or the “mute man” and “prophet of righteousness” for Moses. Lexical elements are gleaned not only from the Talmud and *midrashim*, but also from the sphere of mediaeval philosophy and science. Neo-Platonic references to the return of the soul to its divine source are also frequent.⁴³ These elements have arrived *via* the Hispano-Hebrew poetic tradition: פְּלָלִים as ‘heavenly spheres’ (no. 43, 5:2), עֵין שְׂכָלוֹ as a mediaeval concept of ‘rational eye’ (no. 18, 2:4),⁴⁴ and נְוִיָּה in reference to a living body, instead of its biblical usage as a ‘corpse’.

To sum up, contrary to common belief, Karaite Hebrew poetry is not an indiscriminate mishmash of biblical verses. Indeed, according to Lasker (2008: 36), “When the Byzantine period ended in the sixteenth century, and the centers of Karaism were transferred to Crimea, Volhynia, Galicia, and Lithuania, Karaites used the same literary language as their Rabbanite neighbors, despite the antagonism between the groups.” Once more this statement is confirmed to be correct.

THE CONTENTS OF THE *ZEMIROT*: IDEOLOGICAL BATTLEGROUND REVEALED

Karaite *zemirot* for Sabbath contain plenty of literary themes and motifs commonly associated with the Sabbath in most Jewish traditions: the creation of the world, the chosen nation and its responsibilities, divine rewards for those who keep the commandments, threats to transgressors of the Sabbath, and promises of retribution and redemption. Such themes appear as a natural part of most Ashkenazi and Sephardic (rabbinic) *zemirot*.

However, Karaite *zemirot* do exhibit certain divergences from the rabbinic tradition. Often both the contents and the topics of the *zemirot* reflect certain elements of Karaite ideology. For instance, Karaites did not adopt rabbinic poems dedicated to non-Karaite festivals (such as *Hanukkah*) in their collections of paraliturgical poetry. Since Karaite proficiency in Aramaic was mostly limited

43 See, e.g. no. 70 by Yosef ben Shemu’el (d. c.1700, in Deražne), addressing the “Jewish soul”: “אַתָּה תִּשְׁבֹּי אֶל יְד בֵּס יְהוָה” (‘you will return to the throne of God’). Such imagery is similar to that seen in Abraham ibn ‘Ezra’s poems on the essence of the soul and debates between the human body and soul (Schirmann 1997: 60–61), as well as in earlier Byzantine and Ottoman Karaite poetry (Weinberger 1991: 39–40).

44 The term occurs in Ibn Gabirol’s *Keter malkut* (Fleischer 1975: 364–365; Weinberger 1991: 587–588). For the Arabic term in Hispano-Hebrew poetry, see also Pagis 1976: 68.

to biblical texts, poetry written in Aramaic was neither absorbed nor composed by Karaites.⁴⁵

Karaite ideological themes discussed in the corpus include the injunction of marital relations during the Sabbath and emphasis on the true Karaite interpretation of the Jewish law. It should be enough to mention two examples from the corpus, the first pertaining to forbidden marital relations on the Sabbath and the second to the differences in the counting of *Shabu'ot*.

Marital relations on the Sabbath

The Bible (*Is.* 58:13) encourages one to draw delight (*'oneg*) from the Sabbath. The traditional rabbinic *'oneg shabbat* includes the three prescribed meals, wearing clothes of higher quality, studying the Torah, and sexual relations between husband and wife on Friday evening.⁴⁶

While all labour is forbidden during the Sabbath, Karaites (as opposed to Rabbanites) consider marital relations to be a type of labour.⁴⁷ The Egyptian Karaite *ketubbot* of mixed marriages found in the Cairo Genizah contain passages where the Karaite wife is not obliged to have marital relations on Friday night.⁴⁸ Early Karaite Mourners of Zion rejected the rabbinic interpretations of *'oneg shabbat* as inappropriate for Jews living in the sorrow of exile. Such a stance was expressed by Byzantine Karaites in the eleventh century: when in exile one should inflict austerities on oneself rather than enjoy the Sabbath.⁴⁹

In the corpus, however, there are many references to various aspects of *'oneg shabbat*: eating well, resting, wearing better clothes, and studying the Torah are counted as part of its delights.⁵⁰ In contrast, the lyrics fiercely criticise so-called physical pleasures on Sabbath and recommend spiritual delights, referring to the study of the Torah, the “superb light” illuminating the Sabbath. *'Oneg shabbat* is to be understood as bringing spiritual and intellectual benefits. Shelomo ben

45 Famous omissions from the Karaite tradition of singing the *zemirot* include Yisra'el Najara's Aramaic *Yab ribbon* and Yiṣḥaq Luria's three Aramaic *zemirot* for the Sabbath.

46 Ginsburg 1989: 64–65. For more on the commandment in the Babylonian Talmud to have sexual intercourse on Sabbath eve, see *bKet.* 62b. For later Jewish interpretations on the subject, see Maimonides's *Mishne tora* (*Hilkot shabbat* 30:14), and *Shulḥan 'aruk* (*Orah ḥayyim*, 280:1).

47 Lasker et al. 2007: 798.

48 Mann 1931: 158.

49 Ankori 1959: 268.

50 See, e.g. Shelomo ben Aharon's no. 19, 3: 1–4, which lists the following elements for a successful Sabbath: study, cleanliness, fine clothing, remaining at home, going to the synagogue, and fine dining.

Aharon⁵¹ guarantees good things in the future for those who observe spiritual pleasures and abandon “the bodily service” (no. 17, 2: 7–10):

כְּבֵר בָּא עֵת עֲזֹבֶה עֲבֹדַת הַגּוֹיָה
וְהִטִּי אֶת לִבִּי עֲבֹדָה דְּשָׁמַיָא

The time has already arrived for you to leave the bodily service;
incline your heart towards the service of the heaven.

This “bodily labour” may be interpreted as not only referring to the daily labour of the congregants, forbidden on Sabbath, but also to sexual relations.

Abraham ben Yoshiyahu (1636–1687, in Troki) exhorts the congregants (no. 8, 4: 1–2):

מִתַּעֲנוּגֵי גוֹף סוּרוּ וּבְרַחוּ
אֶף תַּעֲנוּג שְׂכָלֵי רִדְפוּ וְדַרְכוּ

From the pleasures of the body, turn away and flee!
But chase and stride after pleasures of the mind!

These passages inform of the Polish-Lithuanian Karaite attitude towards marital relations on Sabbath: the truly pious scholars (the Karaites, “the ones who *know* the foundation of the Scriptures”) discern the truth and enjoy the Sabbath delight appropriately.⁵²

Shabu'ot (Pentecost)

The next example is taken from the *zemirot* dedicated for *Shabu'ot* (nos 67, 68, 69, and 70 in the corpus). Karaites begin the counting of the grain offering known as the *'omer* (forty-nine days before *Shabu'ot*) on the “morrow after Sabbath”,

51 According to Shelomo ben Aharon's *Appiryon* (p. 9), the Karaite rationale for the injunction against marital relations on Sabbath is taken from *Ex.* 20:7 and *Gen.* 2:3.

52 Earlier Karaite poems (for the *zemer* by Yisra'el *dayyan* on Sabbath candles, see Weinberger 1990) deal with the issue, too. In addition, an anonymous Karaite poet raises the issue polemically (in the Vilna *Siddur*, IV, no. 6, בַּיַּת יִשְׂרָאֵל יְרָאֵי יְיָ, p. 101): ‘If you are to declare it [Sabbath] [the day of] pleasure, may it only be for the pleasure of the Lord.’ (עוֹנֵג אִם יִקְרָא לוֹ / אִזּוּ יִתְעַנֵּג עַל יְיָ) The prohibition of marital relations on Sabbath was so authoritative that even rabbinic *zemirot* were later subjected to editing before being published in Karaite prayer books. In *Ki eshmera*, for instance, the fourth stanza of the Karaite versions in the Vilna and Gozlow *Siddurim* states, “Those who have sexual intercourse during the Sabbath, shall be withdrawn” (מִשְׁתַּמְשִׁים הֵם בּוֹ אַחֲזוֹר נְסוּיִם) instead of the standard rabbinic, “Those who rejoice, will reach joy” (הַשְּׂמֵחִים בּוֹ הֵם שִׂמְחָה מִשִּׂינֵיִם).

as required in *Lev. 23:15*⁵³ (that is, on the following Sunday after Pesah). Hence *Shabu'ot* always falls on Sunday. In contrast, according to rabbinic interpretation, the “morrow after Sabbath” is any day after the first day of Pesah. The Karaite interpretation is emphasized by ‘Ezra ben Nisan (1595–1666, in Troki) (no. 68, 6: 1–2):

נְסַפּוּר לְשַׁבּוֹתוֹת / שְׁבַעַתַּתְּמִימוֹת
 מִמְּחֻרַת שַׁבָּת / עַד יוֹם נְעִימוֹת
 שַׁבָּת בְּרֵאשִׁית הוּא / שְׁכֵן מְרוֹמוֹת
 גָּזַר לְכָל דּוֹרוֹת / לְהִיְוֹת נְצוּרָה

We shall count seven complete Sabbaths,
 from the day after Sabbath (*Lev. 23:15*) until the exquisite day [Shabu'ot].
 This is the *Sabbath of the creation*, which the one who dwells on high (*Is. 33:5*)
 has decreed all the generations to safeguard.

Shabbat bereshit is a Talmudic epithet for the regular Sabbath. As ordained in the account of Creation in the Book of *Genesis*, it is distinct from other days of rest, such as Pesah.⁵⁴ This rabbinic phrase is employed – slightly ironically for a Karaite community inherently antagonistic to the Oral Torah – to refer to the valid Karaite interpretation of the day as a “genuine” Sabbath day (מִמְּחֻרַת הַשַּׁבָּת). As discussed above, such use of prominent Rabbinic Hebrew elements does not come as a surprise to anyone acquainted with Karaite Hebrew literature.

CONCLUSION: POLISH-LITHUANIAN KARAITE ZEMIROT – IMITATION AND INDEPENDENCE

Above I have attempted to demonstrate that Polish-Lithuanian Karaite *zemirot* borrow heavily from earlier Hebrew poetic traditions. This paraliturgical poetry is highly conventional, formally imitative, and contains passages extracted *verbatim* from earlier poems. Imitation of earlier, esteemed Hebrew poems was very common during the mediaeval period. The Hispano-Hebrew style represented the ideal poetic form for many pre-modern Middle Eastern and Sephardic Jewish communities. The northern Polish-Lithuanian Karaites learned the style via their literary contacts with the Byzantine and Ottoman Karaites.⁵⁵ Despite

53 “And ye shall count unto you from the morrow after the day of rest, from the day that ye brought the sheaf of the waving; seven weeks shall there be complete.”

54 Cf. *bNed. 78a*: ולא נאמרה שבת בראשית עמהם.

55 Of connections between these Karaite communities, see especially Mann 1931: 698 ff.

their geographical settings in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, they absorbed religious, literary, and cultural influences from the East, rather than from the surrounding Ashkenazi-Rabbanite culture, which often reacted with hostility to the “sectarians”.

Nonetheless, in my opinion, this poetry should not be disdained as mere imitation, and, due to this imitative nature, as second-rate poetry. While formally (in terms of metre, strophic form, and rhyme) the poets owe almost everything to their predecessors, distinctive elements may be found in the language and the contents of the poems, as demonstrated by textual examples in the corpus. While the poetic form of *zemirot* represents yet another result of the manifold influences stemming from the literary enterprises produced by the Hispano-Hebrew Golden Age poets, their content and language reflect the life, cultural milieu, and Hebrew skills of one small community at the peak of its creative force.

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