Jerusalem in the Karaite Mind in the Early Modern Period: Connections, Bonds and Symbolic Value

Dotan Arad

The Karaite community of Jerusalem enjoyed a golden age in the 10th and 11th centuries. During this period, many Karaites settled in the city and engaged in a rich spiritual life of Torah study and mourning for the destructed Temple. An important study institute was established and the community was known for its large number of scholars – commentators, philosophers, and halakhists. After the Crusader conquest of 1099 tragically demolished it, the community never regained its days of glory. During the Mamluk and Ottoman periods, it remained very small, in some years amounting to no more than two or three families. As a double minority – Jews amongst Muslims and

Karaites amongst Rabbanite Jews – its members had to struggle to maintain their identity and preserve their religious and cultural heritage.

Towards the end of the Middle Ages, the Karaite center of gravity shifted northwards to Istanbul and the Crimean Peninsula and later to Lithuania and Poland. Although two important centers remained in the East – Cairo and Damascus – most Karaites lived at a great geographical remove from Jerusalem, many never even being able to visit the city. Zion remained the object of yearning.

Jewish and Christian traditions regard Jerusalem as both an earthly city and a utopic symbol. The utopia of New Jerusalem was developed in the Apocrypha and in Qumran scrolls following Ezekiel's vision of Jerusalem in the time to come, and the building of the third temple. This symbolism developed further in the "New Jerusalem" vision of early Christianity, and in the "Heavenly Jerusalem" of Talmudic literature. These symbols continued to ignite the imagination of mystics and philosophers from both religions for centuries. However, unlike the stable Christian and Jewish-Rabbanite communities that resided in the city during the Ottoman period, the Jerusalem Karaite

3 The Book of Revelation 3:12, 21:2.
community fought for survival, and Jerusalem was soon to become a utopian idea in the Karaites' mind in place of a tangible one.

Thus the Karaites in the diaspora clearly felt the tension between the "heavenly" and the "earthly" Jerusalem. Jerusalem symbolized for them the glorious past of the Karaites and they focused upon the city their hope for future redemption. Simultaneously, it was a city in the present, a place of residence for a poor and weak community. Alongside their passion and longing, they felt obligated to support their brethren in Jerusalem, in order to preserve the embers of the glorious past.

How did the Karaites in the diaspora maintain their association and connection with Jerusalem, despite not living there?

**Pilgrimage**

The first way in which the Karaites in the diaspora preserved their links with Jerusalem was through pilgrimage. Visiting the city was regarded

---

as the pinnacle of their spiritual experience. It demanded repentance and purification before the journey was undertaken. A Karaite from the Crimean Peninsula who made the pilgrimage in 1785 gives us first-hand testimony of this practice:

> When a person goes to the Holy Land, he asks forgiveness of the entire community [...] and they shall forgive him. He shall not carry upon him any sin in this regard and they shall give him good blessings. He also prepares his heart before God by thinking that, after all the toil and labour and expense, if his heart is not pure before God, “what good will I draw from the Holy Land?”, and “God will not receive my prayer”.  

The centrality of the pilgrimage in the Karaite mind is well reflected in their pre-nuptial agreements. These agreements outlined the couple's obligations towards one another, and usually forbade the husband from travelling long distances without his wife's consent. This condition appears in both Rabbanite and Karaite agreements. However, making a pilgrimage to Jerusalem was often an exception to the rule.

For example, in 1587 an agreement was made in Cairo between a groom named Israel b. Samuel HaCohen al-Māwardi and his bride, Esther, daughter of Samuel ibn Yaḥya. The wedding date was planned for two years later in Cairo. One of the stipulations in the deed is:

7 The travelogue of Benjamin b. Elijah, 1785–1786, in Abraham Ya'ari, Mas'ot 'Erets Yisrael shel 'Olim Yehudim (Tel Aviv: Gazit, 1946), 463.
8 On this stipulation in documents in engagement deeds from the classic Genizah, see: Shelomo D. Goitein, A Mediterranean Society: The Jewish Communities of the Arab World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Geniza, III: The Family (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 153–156; Amir Ashur, Shidukhin Ve'Erusin 'al pi Te'udot min HaGeniza HaQahirit (PhD diss., Tel Aviv University, 2006), 116–117.
"He [the groom] shall not travel to another city, such as Damascus or Constantinople – with the exception of Jerusalem, the holy city". On 6th of Adar 1575, another groom – 'Abd al-Ḥaq b. Abraham HaLevi – pledged to his bride, Simḥa, daughter of Abraham Tabrizi the scribe, that he would not take another wife for twenty years, would give her a measure of freedom, refrain from beating or cursing her (and pay her a fine if he did so), and "shall not travel from Egypt except with her father and mother's agreement. But if his journey was to Jerusalem, this is permissible".

These stipulations have a clear parallel in rabbinic halakha. According to Maimonides, "If a husband says: We shall go up to live in the land of Israel, but his wife does not wish to go – he may divorce her without a ketubah". In other words, a husband may compel his wife to move to the land of Israel and if she refuses to go she loses her ketubah. This rule appears also in Karaite halakhic literature, maybe due to rabbinic influence. However, while the rabbinic sources speak of a permanent move to the land of Israel or Jerusalem, the Karaite sources appear to refer also to short-term journeys for the purpose of pilgrimage.

**Burial in Jerusalem**

If during his lifetime, Jerusalem remained an object of longing and a destination of pilgrimage for a Karaite, after his death he sometimes sought to be buried there. Many documents attest that those who gained

---

9 [MS St. Petersburg, Evr. Arab. II 1384].

10 [MS St. Petersburg, Evr. Arab. II 1051, p. 3a).


12 See: R. Eliyahu Bashyachi, *Aderet Eliyahu* (Evpatoria, 1834), Seder Nashim, Chap. 9, p. 95c. I want to thank Rabbi Moshe Firrouz who helped me to clarify this issue.
the privilege of being buried in Jerusalem were held in great respect and honor. This fact is mentioned whenever their names were recalled. Thus, for example, a Karaite Levite family from Cairo is described in the following manner:

May God have compassion on the family of great dignitaries, sages, luminaries, Levites, and at their head the excellence of great holiness [...] the glory of all "the men of Scripture", mighty in the Torah and Bible, our teacher, our master, the elder, his excellence Uri the Levite the teacher (המלמד), whose house was open to the Torah and the Bible [...] who is buried in Jerusalem in honor under the Throne of Glory.\

The title "who is buried in Jerusalem in honor under the Throne of Glory" (הנטמן בירושלים בכבוד תחת כסא הכבוד) is very popular in other Karaite Memorial lists from the Mamluk and Ottoman periods. The expression "in honor" points to the significant symbolic value of burial in Jerusalem. The Karaite burial plot, which bordered the Temple

---

13 In Hebrew: בני מקרא, a common name for the Karaites.
14 [ר' ור' שמואל הנטמן בירושלים יר] [ה眼神 אל] [חמו מר' ור' שמואל הנטמן בירושלים יר]; [MS St. Petersburg, Evr. Arab. I 1465 (See p. 5a: [תחת כסא בכבוד תחת כסא הכבוד ואלעזר הנטמן בירוש]; p. 6b: [ אלעזר הנטמן בירוש].) For a description of this list see: Haggai Ben-Shammai, "Meqorot Ḥadashim LeToledot HaKara'im BeMitsrayim BaMe'ah HaTet Zayin (Te'ur Rishoni)", Ginzei Qedem 2 (2006): 23–24.
Mount complex, was perceived as "burial under the Throne of God". It is difficult to determine whether this description refers to people who settled in Jerusalem and passed away in the city, or whether it refers to the deceased whose bones were brought for burial in Jerusalem from the Karaite diaspora. The description may be referring to both phenomena alike.

The phenomenon of bringing the deceased to Jerusalem for burial is documented throughout the Middle Ages and the early modern era. Both Rabbanite and Karaites Jews occasionally made wills before their death in which they ask that their bones be taken for burial in Jerusalem – some even setting aside a sum of money for this purpose. This is a known phenomenon already in the classic Geniza period, and plentiful evidence of it appears in the Geniza documents. For example, in a will written in Fustāt in 1006, an anonymous woman requests that "two parts of this compound be sold and spent for what I need, that my bones be carried up to Jerusalem, the Holy city, may it be rebuilt soon".16 This custom remained common also during the Mamluk17 and Ottoman periods.18

---

16 שני חלקים מחצר זו ימכרו ויצאו בצרכיי כדי להעלות עצמותי לירושלים עיר הקודש תיבנה במהרה

17 See for example: Reiner, 'Aliya Ve'Aliya LaRegel Le'Erets Yisrael, 68.

Karaites buried in Ḥevron are also noted in the memorial lists. For example, Noah al-Kāzirūni, son of Joseph the physician "who is buried in Ḥevron, in the holy land" (והקטום והבאר מאריס הקדרש), is mentioned in a memorial list published by Mann. Another Karaite buried in Ḥevron and mentioned in this list is Ḥesed'el b. Pinḥas HaCohen.

**Donations**

Not all the members of the Karaite diaspora communities were able to afford the pilgrimage to Jerusalem or have their bones buried in the city. A simpler way to express their solidarity was by sending a contribution to the Jerusalem Karaite community. The local community in Jerusalem was diminutive and weak, and could not subsist on its own without help from others. Monies were sent to support the poorest members, help pay off communal debts, and defray the synagogue's running costs. While evidence for such donations exists from all of the Karaite communities in the diaspora – such as Istanbul, Cairo, and Damascus – the central burden was carried by the Karaites of the Crimean Peninsula. Regular contributions from the Crimean communities of Mangup, Chufut-Kale

---

19 On the Karaite community in Hebron see: Ze’ev H. Erlich, "Qehilat HaKara'im BeḤevron", *Kenes Mehqere Ḥevron Vi(Ye)huda: Divre HaKenes HaShishi* (Ḥevron: Midreshet Ḥevron, 2017), 69–120.

20 MS St. Petersburg, Evr. Arab. I 1465; Mann, *Texts and Studies*, 282. Erlich thought Noah's father was Moses (Erlich, "Qehilat HaKara'im BeḤevron", 101), but I think Moses was his uncle.

21 Mann, *Texts and Studies*, 269; Erlich, "Qehilat HaKara'im BeḤevron", 101.
and Feodosia (known also as Caffa) prevented the Karaites in Jerusalem from drowning under the burden of debt. For example, in a letter sent by Simḥa b. Solomon to Jerusalem in 1791, he sought to encourage the heads of the community there by promising: "With God's help, in the months of Nisan and Iyyar, we hope that the boats from Crimea, may God protect it, will arrive, including all the monies for your debts and needs that will reach your hands safely and quickly without the loss of a cent".22

In addition to the contributions sent via pilgrims, the Jerusalem Karaite community itself sent envoys from time to time to raise funds abroad. Thus, for example, David b. Yeshu'a the Cantor, the community's leader in the middle of the 17th century, embarked on a number of trips to various diaspora communities to raise money. His communication with the European Karaites was difficult. On a visit to Halicz (southern Poland) in 1646, he struggled to find a common language with the community, few of them knowing Hebrew and David not being familiar with their Turkish dialect.23 Like the Rabbanite envoys from the land of Israel (שד"רים), their Karaite counterparts were highly respected and honored by the communities they visited – as representatives of the Jerusalem community. David b. Yeshu'a created a strong impression amongst the Karaite communities he reached. The communities in the Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth composed several laments for him after his death.24

22 בֶּשָלָךְ נַחֲשׁ וַיַּבָּרֵשׁ לִמְדוּד יְיָא לֶחֶם מָה שָׁם לְכָל לְעַצָּםָם מַעִירָם וֵיַעֲקֹב בֶּחֶם מָה שָׁם לְכָל לְעַצָּםָם מַעִירָם (Mann, Texts and Studies, 432). On the financial support of the Crimean communities to Jerusalem, see also: Akhiezer, "Ziqat Kara'ei Krym", 306–310.


24 Mann, Texts and Studies, 1209–1211.
In conclusion, there were different ways to preserve the bonds between the Karaite diaspora to Jerusalem: pilgrimage, and sometime complete emigration, bringing the bones of the deceased to the city's cemetery, and donations to the local community.

**The symbolic value of Jerusalem**

How did the Karaites construct Jerusalem's status and enhance its symbolic value in public consciousness? As we have seen, one of the ways they did so was by honoring and holding in high esteem those who lived or were buried in Jerusalem.

As noted above, the burial of various Karaite figures in Jerusalem was keenly noted in the memorial lists. These lists were read aloud in synagogue and reaffirmed the congregation's valued set of symbols, and the centrality of Jerusalem in the Karaite consciousness. However, the burial of Karaite members in Jerusalem (and Hebron) was noted not only in liturgical contexts, but in intellectual contexts as well. In many colophons, book copiers prided themselves on being related to ancestors buried in Jerusalem. For example, Abraham Ha-Levi Matsliaḥ, who copied in 1785 the commentary on Job of Yefet B. 'Eli, mentioned in the colophon his great-grandfather, Abraham, who was buried in Jerusalem "under the throne of Glory".  

---

25 MS Oxford, Bodleian Library, Opp. Add. Qu. 165 (Cat. Neubauer 2485), p. 164a–165a. For earlier examples see: MS St. Petersburg, Evr. I 555, p. 135b (Commentary on Psalms of Salmon b. Yeroḥam, copied in Damascus in November 1391). The copyist, Isaac b. Samuel, mentions his great-grandfather, Samuel Kujik, who is buried in Jerusalem (僵尸 בן שמואל בן יוסף בן שמואל הנמטה ;יצחק בן שמואל בן יוסף בן שמואל הנמטה ... בירושלים כבוד תחת כסא הכבוד].) Nine months later he finished copying a summary of the polemical work of Daniel b. Sa'adia, *Kitāb al-'Imāta wal-'aār 'an al-Rabānīn wal-Aāthār*, by Abū al-Majd al-Hītī. Here again, the scribe mentioned his great-grandfather, including his burial in Jerusalem (MS St. Petersburg, Evr. Arab. I 859, p.1). Another polemic work, *Sefer Teshuva of Yefet al-Barqamnī*, was copied in Damascus in 1558 for Mūsa al-Skandarī. In the colophon, the scribe of this manuscript mentioned Mūsa's father, Samuel, who
Ancestral burial in Jerusalem was noted by Karaites in more personal contexts as well, for example, in owners' signatures on books in their possession. The book was not considered a personal item. It was clear to the owner that the book would serve many members of the community in their studies, which is why he found it important to state his family's genealogy, and take pride in the burial of his ancestors in Jerusalem. For example, on a copy of the Commentary of Yefet b. 'Eli on the Pentateuch, the owner, El'azar HaLevi, mentioned that his grandfather and great-grandfather were buried in Jerusalem.26

Noting the burial of ancestors in Jerusalem in various contexts27 is an indication of the city's symbolic value in the consciousness of the Karaite diaspora and the pride they took in any familial affiliation with the city.

Particular prestige was accorded to those who took an active part in the running of the ancient Karaite synagogue. Thus, for example, Solomon the Cantor, son of David the Cantor, son of Abraham ibn al-Kāzirūni, a Karaite scribe, mentioned his grandfather in a colophon of

was buried in Jerusalem (וּלְכָּנַיִם כְּלָלַיֵּם בְּכָפָר תַּחַטְתָּאִים) in MS St. Petersburg, Evr. Arab. I 1723, p. 205a).

26 MS St. Petersburg, Evr. Arab. I 104, p. 8b (בעפר רגליהם עבדכם (כַּלַּב הַכָּלַיֵּם בְּכָפָר תַּחַטְתָּאִים אֲלֹא כְּלַיֵּם בְּכָפָר תַּחַטְתָּאִים כְּלַיֵּם בְּכָפָר תַּחַטְתָּאִים). Baruch HaLevi mentioned his father Mordechai and his grandfather Simon who were buried "in the holy land" (Hebron?) on his private copy of the commentary of Yefet on Genesis (קרָבָּנָא הַטָּהַר תַּחַטְתָּאִים כְּלַיֵּם בְּכָפָר תַּחַטְתָּאִים כְּלַיֵּם בְּכָפָר תַּחַטְתָּאִים) in MS St. Petersburg, Evr. Arab. I 1723, p. 1a). Baruch's son, Elazar, also mentioned that his grandfather Mordechai was buried "in the holy land" (Hebron?) in his copy of the commentary of Yefet on Judges and Daniel (כְּלַיֵּם בְּכָפָר תַּחַטְתָּאִים כְּלַיֵּם בְּכָפָר תַּחַטְתָּאִים כְּלַיֵּם בְּכָפָר תַּחַטְתָּאִים) in MS St. Petersburg, Evr. Arab. I 1846, p. 1a).

27 For example, in a letter from Jerusalem to Yevpatoria (Gözleve), the writer mentioned the leaders of the community, among them Berakha, son of Joseph the Jerusalemite, "who is buried in Jerusalem" (מֵרְכָּבָּא הַנָּהָר הָעִשְׂרֵי הַטָּהָר תַּחַטְתָּאִים בְּכָפָר תַּחַטְתָּאִים כְּלַיֵּם בְּכָפָר תַּחַטְתָּאִים) in MS Moscow, Russian State Library, Fond 182, no. 446).
manuscripts he copied in the 1530s: "Abraham, who served in 'the house of the lord' [the synagogue] in Jerusalem and is buried in the city".28 His grandfather was thus responsible for the running of the synagogue in Jerusalem, also being buried there, both of which facts were a source of pride for his grandson. In another example, a Judeo-Arabic minute book recording matters relating to the Cairo Karaite community contains a copy of a deed from December 1576 which states that R. Isaac Abū al-Faraj agreed not to take another wife for ten years. His wife's father is described in the deed as "The honourable master R. 'Abd al-Karīm, the physician, who served as the beadle of the synagogue in Jerusalem, may God establish it forever, may he rest in peace".29 The groom's father-in-law was, therefore, the beadle of the Karaite synagogue in Jerusalem. The community's scribe emphasized this fact in honor of the bride.

Not only were those who lived in Jerusalem accorded prestige and honor. The epithets "Yerushalmi" (Jerusalemite) in Hebrew – or "Kudsi" in Arabic – is common amongst the Karaites. It reflects the fact that their owners had once lived in – or even made a pilgrimage to – the city. Despite the fact that some scholars maintain that this designation was only given to men, I have found it applied on some occasions to women as well.30

28 [Notation in Hebrew]: "ונטמן בה [הלים] אברהם אשר היה משרת בית ה' בירוש (British Library, Or. 2517). In another manuscript in his handwriting, BL Or. 2521: ראשו היה מנשה רבי [ישו] דוד התשובה, [and] see: Malachi Beit-Arié, "Kitve Yad 'Ivriyim She-Hu'atqu Bi(Ye)rushalayim 'Oh 'al yede Yotse Yerushalayim", in Benjamin Z. Kedar and Zvi Baras (eds.), Peraqim BeToledot Yerushalayim Bi(Ye)me HaBenayim (Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi, 1979), 261. The Hebrew term משרת here renders the Arabic khādim, the title given to the beadle, a person appointed to maintain and clean the synagogue.

It demanded a high level of morality and ethical conduct from those honored with it. Benjamin b. Elijah writes in 1785 that a pilgrim must walk uprightly "so that people will not scorn him, because he carries the name of Jerusalem upon him and cannot walk on unworthy pathways".31

The appellation remained with a person until their death, and it was also inscribed on their tombstone. For example, many of the tombstones in the cemetery in Chufut-Kale bear it, attesting to the numbers of Karaites who had made the pilgrimage to Jerusalem.32

While attribution of this epithet attests to the central place Jerusalem held in medieval Karaite consciousness, it also reflects Islamic cultural influence. The cradle of Karaite Judaism lying in the Muslim east and the deep impact of the Muslim world on Karaite culture have been discussed by various scholars.33 As is well known, those who make the pilgrimage to Mecca are welcomed in a celebration, the walls of their

Eliyahu Bashyachi, Aderet Eliyahu.

31 והלא יאמרו לעג עליו的人ים, כי שם ירושלים נקרא עליו ואילו הוא ילך על דרכי העואים (Ya'ari, Mas'ot 'Erets Yisrael, 462). On the term "Yerushalmi" on Karaites' tombstones in Chufut-Kale, see: Dan D. Y. Shapira, "Mishpahat Yerushalmi", in Shapira (ed.), Matsevot Bet Ha'Almin shel HaYehudim HaKara'im, 218–232; Akhiezer, "Ziqat Kara'e Krym", 301.

32 On this cemetery see: Shapira (ed.), Matsevot Bet Ha'Almin shel HaYehudim HaKara'im. The question of the correct dating of the tombstones there provokes a heated debate among scholars (Karaites and non-Karaites) since the 19th century till this day. For full bibliography see: Barry D. Walfish and Mikhail Kizilov, Bibliographia Karaistica: An Annotated Bibliography of Karaites and Karaism (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 289–296.

house are adorned with pictures, and they are given the title ḥāj. The Karaite custom thus seems to echo the Muslim practice.

Jerusalem thus functioned simultaneously in Karaite consciousness on several planes. The city aroused memories of the sacred biblical past and the glorious history of the community during the early Muslim period. It kindled hopes for the future redemption and the coming of the Messiah. And in its status as a historical city in the present, it was also home to a minute, impoverished Karaite community that existed by grace and through donations. How did the Karaites conceptualize the status of the city they encountered when they came on pilgrimage?

One of the most prominent ways in which they did so was by asserting the symbolic value of the community's most important property – its synagogue. Throughout much of the 16th century, Jerusalem only boasted two synagogues – the Rabbanite synagogue and its Karaite counterpart. The Jews had no permission to visit Temple Mount (Ḥaram al-Sharīf), their most sacred place. In such a situation, both synagogues of Jerusalem – the Rabbanite and Karaite – became "little temples" possessed of great symbolic value. This is illustrated, for example, in a brief chronicle written by a Jerusalem Rabbanite Jew in 1546 – a year in which the city experienced an earthquake that caused extensive damage. The author notes the destruction suffered by the non-Jewish religious structures:

Many of the Ishmaelite abominations also fell, as well as

[...] the idolatry of the Ḥaram, near the Temple [place], which is the building that was rebuilt around the foundation stone. The idolatry of the uncircumcised erected over Jesus' [tomb] also fell [...] Thanks to God, our synagogue was undamaged.36

The author contrasts the Dome of the Rock and the Church of the Holy Sepulcher with the Jewish (Rabbanite) synagogue, and in this manner gives the synagogue central status as the holiest place of the Jews at the time in Jerusalem. The fact that the non-Jewish shrines were damaged but the Jewish synagogue was left intact was a sign, in his mind, of God's providence over His people.

The Karaites exhibited a similar attitude. The Karaite synagogue in Jerusalem was one of – if not the – most ancient synagogues in the city, possessing ancient Torah scrolls and constituting a source of pride for the Karaite community in Jerusalem and the diaspora alike. Not only were the beadles who served in it highly respected and honored, but many members of the Karaite diaspora also sought to take an active part in it by contributing funds for its upkeep and services, olive oil for its candles, books for its library, and so forth. Like the Karaite community itself, it also labored under difficult physical conditions. It lay below road level, those entering descending twelve steps into a dark underground space without windows, the sole source of light – apart from oil lamps hanging from the ceiling – coming from several chimneys. How was it thus possible to contract the symbolic value of such an edifice?

One way the Karaites sought to do so was to find a founding father. Like the ancient Rabbanite synagogue in Jerusalem, whose erection

36 Yosef Braslavski (Braslavi), "HaRa'ash U-Khritat HaYarden BiShnat 1546", Zion 3 (1938): 328.
was attributed to a venerable "founding father" – Nahmanides – the Karaites asserted that theirs had been built by 'Anan b. David, regarded as the founder of the Karaite movement.

The date of the creation of this tradition is unclear. A Torah scroll colophon which was allegedly redeemed from the crusaders in Jerusalem in 1106, notes that Karaite worshippers gathered in President 'Anan's synagogue and blessed King Baldwin, who had retrieved their sacred books, on the 10th of Av fast 1417 sel. (1106 CE). It seems as though this colophon confirms that the foundation of the synagogue was attributed to 'Anan as early as the crusader period. However, the manuscript is not accessible today and Firkovitch is suspected of having fabricating this list, as Deinard and Mann claimed. Indeed, Hagai Ben-Shammai recently stated that the list appears to be authentic overall.

However, it is important to emphasize that the list does not

---

37 Nachmanides (d. 1271) wrote that he had founded a new synagogue in Jerusalem. At least since the 16th century the Jews in Jerusalem identified their old synagogue with the edifice described by Nachmanides, but this attribution is probably wrong; see: Elchanan Reiner, "Ve'Ekh? She-Hare Yerushalayim Leḥud Ve'Tsiyon Leḥud!: HaShekhuna HaYehudit Bi(Ye)rushalayim Le'aḥar HaTequfa HaTsalvanit (HaMe'ot HaYod Gimel–HaTet Vav", in Yossi Ben-Artzi, Israel Bartal and Elchanan Reiner (eds.), Nof Moladto: Mehqarim BaGe'ografia shel 'Erets Yisrael U-VeToldoteah, Mugashim Li(Ye)oshua Ben-Arieh (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1999), 277–321. On Nachmanides as "founding father" of the Sephardi community of Jerusalem, see for example: David Bunis, "The Dialect of the Old Yišuv Sephardic Community in Jerusalem: A Preliminary Linguistic Analysis", in Moshe Bar-Asher (ed.), Studies in Jewish Languages, Bible Translations and Spoken Dialects (Jerusalem: Misgav Yerushalayim, 1988): 2*, n. 3.

38 אנחנו נקהלנו לכניסת רבינו ענן נשיאנו ומברכים את המלך יחי לעולם היום יום ששי צום עשרה באב (Published by A. A. Harkavy in HaTsefira, 10.2.1875, pp. 47-48 and again by Jacob Mann, The Jews in Egypt and in Palestine under the Fatimid Caliphs, I [London: Oxford University Press, 1920–1922], 200). I want to thank Dr. Moshe Yagur for drawing my attention to this source.

39 Ephraim Deynard, Mas'a Krym (Warsaw: Isaac Goldman, 1878), 52; Mann, Texts and Studies, 137.

state that 'Anan founded the synagogue, and may indicate that the synagogue was named after him. Furthermore, during the early Muslim period the Karaite neighborhood was not situated in the Jewish quarter of Jerusalem as it is today, and even if its synagogue was attributed to 'Anan, is not to the same synagogue as the one found on the Karaite street since the Mamluk period.

As far as we know, the explicit tradition that attributes the building of the synagogue to 'Anan only appears in the 18th century, as indicated in the travelogues of Karaite pilgrims from that time. In any case, the assertion that 'Anan had established the synagogue and prayed within it walls conferred upon it great symbolic value, linking the impoverished present with its past glory.

Another way to enhance the symbolic value was to reinforce its theological significance as a unique sacred center. In 1749, a Karaite scholar named Samuel b. Abraham HaLevi settled in the city and sought to revive the languishing Karaite community, inter alia, by engaging in legal battles in the Shar'i court for the return of assets belonging to the community that had been appropriated by the Rabbanite community. Attempting to identify the reason for the small number of Karaite Jews in Jerusalem, he concluded that one of the causes was the high level of spirituality demanded of the inhabitants.

As is well known, Karaite law stated that no meat should be eaten within Jerusalem. This prohibition was among the most well-known features of ancient Karaism. Based on Sahl b. Matsliah's testimony, 10th-century Rabbanites in Jerusalem were also affected by this prohibition:

---

41 See: Haggai Ben-Shammai, "The Karaites", 204–208.
"There are many among them who will not eat the meat of sheep and cattle in Jerusalem". References to this prohibition were made in ketubot written in the city during the early Muslim period and reveal its importance to Jerusalem Karaites of that era. From the 12th century onward, some Karaite sages demonstrated a more lenient approach toward this prohibition. However, it appears in Aderet Eliyahu without reservations. R. Eliyahu Bashyachi concluded and declared: "slaughter of cattle and sheep in [the time of] the Galut is permitted anywhere, apart from the chosen place [Jerusalem ...]. However, animals and poultry are allowed anywhere, even in the chosen place". It seems this prohibition was practiced in the city during the Ottoman period, up until the 18th century.

In order to make it easier to live in the city, Samuel HaLevi offered a halakhic composition entitled Zivhe Tsedeq (Righteous Sacrifices) in which he set out to prove that in order to revive the Karaite community in Jerusalem, this ruling should be canceled.

Samuel HaLevi also stressed the great importance of the Karaite synagogue and its superiority over all others:

If there is no prayer in Jerusalem, may it be built and established, prayer outside the land of Israel is not accepted. The synagogue in Jerusalem, may it be built and established – all the synagogues outside the land of Israel are maidservants to it and serve it. Due to it, all the

45 Bashyachi, Aderet Eliyahu, 'Inyan Shehita, ch. 12, 65a–66a.
46 Ibid., 65c.
47 MS New York, JTS, Mic. 8918; MS 3331.
synagogues exist—and if it is abandoned, all the others will also be abandoned and God will not hear their prayers.\textsuperscript{48}

According to Samuel, the city of Jerusalem, and the Karaite synagogue in particular, possessed tremendous spiritual energy. Samuel viewed all of prayers in the Karaite diaspora to be mere imitations of the central prayer uttered between the walls of the synagogue in the Karaite neighborhood.

**Conclusion**

The Karaites adopted various ways to maintain their connection with Jerusalem and reinforce its symbolic status in their eyes. Over the centuries, the Karaite community in the city declined and diminished. Virtually disappearing by the beginning of the 12th century, its synagogue was run by Karaites in Egypt. When the latter community was demolished in the 1950s, the community in Israel was revitalized. Although its center is now located in Ramla rather than Jerusalem, the synagogue continues to serve as the community's most sacred site, the focus of the memories of its past glory and hopes for a no less glorious future.

\textsuperscript{48} אין תפלת חוץ לארץ מקובלת. כי כנסת ירושת"ו [בירושלים תיבנה ויכונן] א"א תפלת ויהי לארץ مؤólica. כי בכננט ישראל נברת כל הנסיות שנעורית לארץ שפוחת ה马来עריר ומשרותיה זוהות. זוכותה כ"א הנסיות קימיו (MS JTS, Mic. 8918, 3a–3b).