The Karaite Isaac ben Abraham of Troki and his Polemics against Rabbanites*

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Isaac ben Abraham of Troki and his Cultural Milieu

Isaac ben Abraham of Troki, who lived in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, was the most prominent figure in Karaite intellectual history of the 16th century. His fame is due to his celebrated polemical work, *Hizzuk Emunah* (The Strengthening of Faith). It was the only book of its genre to be translated into most European languages, including Latin and Yiddish, and was influential in both the Jewish and Christian worlds. In his arguments, Isaac used no Karaite sources at all but...
referred to a number of rabbinic and several Christian ones. This is why some historians considered this book to be a product of a Rabbanite pen. Yet unlike Rabbanite polemicists, he does not respond to Christian attacks on the Talmud. Isaac ben Abraham composed also another polemical work, *Polemics against Rabbanites*. This text was never published or studied by historians, nor did it circulate among the Karaites. It primarily contains citations from Rabbanite authors, R. Isaac's own remarks and comments being very fragmentary and scanty.

The present article endeavors to reconstruct some of the author's views concerning Rabbanite Judaism. An attempt will be made at establishing the author's self-identity by means of the quotations adduced in his *Polemics against Rabbanites* and his comments there. I will also compare this text with *Hizzuk Emunah*, contributing to our understanding of the method of the author's polemics.

R. Isaac ben Abraham (1533–1594) was born in the town of Troki, near Vilna, in which Karaites had settled at the end of the 14th century. Troki became the cultural and intellectual center of Polish-Lithuanian Karaites in the 16th-17th centuries after the decline of the center in Constantinople. Unfortunately, we do not possess enough data concerning R. Isaac’s biography. In his early years he was a disciple of one of the first Karaite scholars of Lithuania – Zefania ben Mordechai of Troki. At the age of 20 he served as a secretary to the assembly of the Lithuanian Karaites and as a *dayyan* (religious judge) of the Troki
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community, eventually to become a scholar and great spiritual leader of the Eastern-European Karaites in the 16th century. He also trained as a physician. The only biographic records available are his three letters to Karaite scholars. One of them, written in 1558 (only its introductory part has been preserved), is addressed to Isaac ben Israel of Luck, later *hazzan* (a leader) of the Karaite community of Luck, also a disciple of Zefania ben Mordechai. It contains allusions to Kabbalistic concepts and Talmudic quotations. The other letters, sent to Judah b. Aaron, *hazzan* of Halicz in 1581-3, deal mostly with matters pertaining to the calendar. R. Isaac was married, but apparently had no children; his famous disciple Joseph ben Mordechai Malinowski of Troki states that his master's last will was addressed to his wife, to some of his brothers and to Joseph ben Mordechai himself. In his introduction to *Hizzuk Emunah* R. Isaac mentions his contacts with representatives of Polish society, both secular and clerical, and his religious disputations with them.

R. Isaac composed a commentary on selected halakhic issues in the compendium *Adderet Eliyahu* by the Karaite scholar Eliyahu Bashiachi, and a number of *derushim* (homilies) devoted to matters of

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6 Mann (above, n. 4), pp. 1181-1185, no. 121.
7 Mann, p. 1181.
8 Mann, p. 1183.
9 Mann, pp. 1185-1187.
10 Mann, p. 1186. Another biographical detail we know is that R. Isaac visited the Vilna fair which took place on the Catholic feast Gromnic.
11 Mann, p. 1189, no. 123. Joseph ben Mordechai, who was R. Isaac's disciple, was commissioned by him to complete his work *Hizzuk Emunah* (see note 1). Joseph had extensive knowledge of both Karaite and Rabbanite scholarship; he became the leading Karaite scholar in Poland-Lithuania after his teacher's demise. He established a number of ritual customs for Polish-Lithuanian Karaite communities, published in the *Karaite Siddur* I, (Vilna 1890), 456-64. Some of them show close affinity to Rabbanite practice. He wrote a book, *Sefer Minhagim*, on prayer, the reading of the Torah and other subjects. His *Kizzur Inyan Shelitah* on ritual slaughter was printed together with Mordechai b. Nissan's *Dod Mordekhai* (Vienna 1830). Manasseh Ben Israel's press printed his mystical composition *Ha-Elef Lekha* (Amsterdam 1643). Simhah Isaak Lutzki wrote on it the commentary *Kevod Elohim* (Y. Algamil ed., Ramla 2000).
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halakha, musar, and commentaries on the Scriptures. He wrote liturgical poems in Hebrew and the Karaite language, some of which were included in the official Karaite prayer books both of Vilna and of Gozleve (Evpatoria).

The 16th century Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was a vast Empire, stretching from the Baltic Sea almost to the Black Sea, home to a variety of confessions and ethnic groups – Roman Catholics, Greek-Orthodox, Armenians, Muslims (Tatars) and Jews (Rabbanites and Karaites). The religious minorities of the country enjoyed religious tolerance, hence in the second half of the 16th century Poland became a haven for various Protestant refugees fleeing religious persecution in their countries. Among them were the Italians Faust Socin, V. Gentile, D. Blandrata and many others, who greatly influenced the Polish Reformation movement. In 1573 the Polish Diet (Sejm), in spite of Catholic Church protests, drew up the so-called ‘Warsaw Confederation’, guaranteeing religious freedom to all confessions. Among the Protestants were a great number of Unitarians, who rejected the dogma of Trinity, the divine nature of Jesus and other fundamental principles of Christianity. Some of them preferred the Hebrew Scripture to the New Testament and did not pray to Jesus and Mary. Protestantism expanded among the Polish and Lithuanian nobility, many becoming Calvinists, Lutherans and even Unitarians. Among the latter were those who considered the Mosaic Law valid for Christians. They observed the Jewish Sabbath, Jewish dietary laws and they practiced circumcision. Their Catholic opponents called them ‘semi-iudei’, ‘Judaizantes’, ‘Ebionites’, ‘Arians’, and other nicknames.

Usually Arians did not regard themselves as Judaizers and emphasized the differences between their movement and the Jews. At

14 Derushim by Isaac ben Abraham of Troki, Russian National Library SPb, Evr. I, 728. I am preparing this text for publication.
15 Siddur ha-Tefilah ke-Minhag ha-Karaim, Vilna 1890-1892, pp. 94, 106, 156, 208, 210, 223.
17 After the famous heresiarch Arius who lived in the 4th century. This term was used as a collective noun for heretics.
the same time they were interested in the Jewish interpretations of the Scriptures, in the Talmud and in Jewish principles of the faith, a number of their views being close to those of Jewish thinkers. For instance, Michael Servetus, the Spanish Unitarian, whose teachings had a great impact on certain Polish Arians,19 wrote: ‘I am constrained to weep when I see the blind responses which have been adduced against Rabbi Kimhi’s criticism of the Christians on this point’.20 Servetus accepted R. Joseph Kimhi’s translation of the word ‘almah as a ‘young woman’, as opposed to traditional Christian interpretation, ‘virgin’.21

Arians organized synods, lasting for days or even months. During these assemblies theological and social issues were debated, such as the liberation of peasants, religious tolerance, and the like.22 Some of these synods were actually public disputations with their opponents – Catholics, Calvinists and Lutherans. Arians also invited Jews to their meetings. The Jews usually tried, however, to keep their distance from such contacts for fear of possible persecutions by the Catholic Church, which could accuse them of the capital crime of attempting to convert Christians to Judaism. Nonetheless, we have evidence about contacts between Arians and Jews, and about Jewish participation in their synods. Jacob Paleologus23 mentions a twelve-day debate between representatives of several Christian sects and a Jew by the name of Samuel.24 The congenial discussion concerned the Talmud. In Poland the participation of the Jews in religious disputes with Christians in this period, unlike in Western Europe, was on a voluntary basis.

The best known Judeo-Christian disputation in the 16th century

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19 Michael Servetus was burned at the stake in Geneva in 1553 as a heretic by the verdict of John Calvin.
21 Bainton, p. 100.
22 L. Hmaj, Bracja Polscy, ludzie, idee, imp³ywy, Warsaw 1957, p.27.
23 Jacob Paleologus, one of the Arian leaders, was an adherent of Servetus. He wanted to unite the three monotheistic religions and claimed that the only impediment for the salvation of Jews was their disbelief in Jesus’ prophecy, because Jesus did not come to abolish the Law, but to call the Jews to repentance. See A. Pirnat, ‘Jacobs Palaelogus’, in: L. Chmaj ed., Studia nad arianizmem, Warsaw 1959.
24 A. Pirnat, p. 103.
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took place between R. Jacob from Bełzyce (near Lublin) and Marcin Czechowicz (1532-1613), called by historians ‘the father of Arians’, the leader and ideologist of the radical stream of anti-Trinitarians and author of a number of books. R. Jacob, who occasionally attended synods organized by Czechowicz, wrote a reply to the arguments of the latter on Jews, Judaism and Talmud. Czechowicz’s reasoning was elucidated in his book *Rozmowy Chrystyjańskie (Christian Dialogues)*, which was a form of reply R. Jacob from Bełzyce, and reveals the cordial, even close, relations between the two.

Isaac ben Abraham, who maintained associations with Christians as well as Rabbanites, lived in an age when many of the cultural barriers between groups were weakened. Polish-Lithuanian Karaites found themselves between the two dominant cultures: Christian society, more tolerant than ever, and the Rabbanite world, from which they usually tried to keep a distance. None the less this world also attracted the intellectual elite of the Karaites by its spirit of Enlightenment, and quite a few of these elite scholars studied under Rabbanite teachers.

**R. Isaac’s Ḥizzuk Emunah and his Polemical Method**

What was R. Isaac’s target audience and what was the purpose of his *Ḥizzuk Emunah*? As he states in the introduction: ‘The faith was lost and cut from their mouth, and they would be swallowed up by the nations, learn their ways and worship their icons … because they didn’t know what to answer [the Christians]’. R. Isaac accumulated the materials of his theological disputes with Catholic, Protestant, Unitarians and Greek Orthodox clergymen, and turned them into an arsenal of Jewish apology.

Did he write this book as a Karaite Jew for Karaites or as a Jew for all the Jews? Trying to answer this question we should analyze the

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26 *Marcin Czechowicz, Rozmowy Chrystyjańskie, które zgreckiego nazwiska dialogami zowią (Dialogo); Tzech dni rozmowa o dzieciokrzewstwie, Raków 1575; Odpis Jakóba Zjda z Belżyce na Dyalogi Marcina Czechowica: na który zaś odpowiada Jakóbowi Żydowi tenże Marcin Czechowiec, Raków 1581.*

27 *Ḥizzuk Emunah*, p. 10: ‘אבדה האמונה נכרתה מפיהם, ויתערבו בגויים וילמדו מעשיהם, ויעבדו את עצבתם ... אחר שלא ידעו להשיב על דבריהם.’
sources he used and his controversial methods in both his polemical treatises – Hizzuk Emunah and Polemics against Rabbanites. Hizzuk Emunah consists of two parts. Every chapter begins with a question posed by an adherent of one of the Christian currents. These are mostly questions common in the anti-Jewish polemics; the proffered answers are the result of his philological and historical analyses of the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament. In the second part he presents his commentaries on New Testament texts. The main innovation of Hizzuk Emunah is in R. Isaac’s method. He borrows many of his arguments from anti-Trinitarians, by means of which traditional dogmas, postulates and exegesis of his opponents could be refuted.28 For instance, R. Isaac quotes the book by Marcin Czechowicz, ‘Christian Dialogues’, and De Uno Vero Deo by the Italian anti-Trinitarian Niccolo Paruta (153?-1581) to demonstrate, that some Christian writers reject the tenet of Trinity:

In our generation many of their scholars – called in their language the sect of Ebionites, Sarocianists [=Socians], Arians (who are divided into two, the Cuthalish and the Lutherans) – believe in the unity of God and reject the belief in the Trinity, as the scholar Niccolas Paruta wrote about the Unity of the Creator, blessed be He, in his Latin book De Uno Vero Deo, that is to say, the Unity of God. And likewise, the scholar Marcin Czechowicz in his Polish book, Dialogues in part 2, repudiates the belief of Trinitarians by mighty proofs based on both Scriptures and reason. In his book Three Days (pp. 28-69),29 he negates all the evidence cited by Trinitarians from Avon Gilayon.30 In the same manner other scholars from the above mentioned sects


29 Marcin Czechowicz, Trzech dni rozmowa o dzieciokrzczenstwie, Losk 1578 (on the rejection of the baptism of children).

30 Avon Gilayon (עון גליון) is a pejorative pun referring to the New Testament.
permanently uprooted in their writings the arguments of Trinitarians.  

R. Isaac made ample use of the Bible translated into Polish by Szymon Budny (1530-1593), the Lithuanian leader of Arian Nonadorants, who regarded Jesus as having a human nature, defended the Talmud and accepted the Seven Commandments of Noah as valid for all mankind. R. Isaac considered Budny’s translation of the Bible the most accurate of Christian translations. R. Isaac mentions that:

The Christian scholar Szymon Budny in his Obrona [Apology] wrote that the Divine Torah, given to Israel by Moses on the Mount Horeb, is perfect and valid forever, and there is no other Divine Law beside it. All those who proclaim that there are two Torahs, one the Torah of Moses and the second the Torah of Jesus, are mistaken. Jesus did not give us a new Torah but he himself ordained that the Torah of Moses should be observed, and he substantiated it with prophetic and rational proof.  

Budny reached his conclusions by means of logical, historical and philological analysis. The same can also be said about R. Isaac, when he tried to demonstrate the disparity between the meaning of New Testament texts and the later Christian interpretations. He treated these texts as historical documents, basing many of his arguments on the accounts they bring. This is evident, for instance, in R. Isaac’s response
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to the traditional assertions proposed by his Christian-Orthodox opponents, who claimed that God ceased to consider the Jews as the chosen nation, seeing they rejected the faith of Jesus, and consequently the Jews no longer had their own king. To this statement R. Isaac responded that the Jews had lost their kingdom and were oppressed by Nebuchadnezzar and later by Greeks and Romans – long before the birth of Jesus:

> And you, Greek nations [=Greek Orthodox], who were the first to accept the faith of Jesus and to believe [in him] – you lost your kingdom and have no king today, as you had before. The king of Ishmael called Tugar [=Turkey] rules over both the Land of Israel and Greece ... and many Christian kingdoms, which had their own rulers in the past, all serve Ishmael [=the Muslim Turkish king], although the nations of Ishmael do not believe in Jesus.35

When R. Isaac refers to historical facts, he cites from the *History of the World* by the Polish historian Marcin Bielski.36 In addition to Christian sources, R. Isaac utilized many Rabbanite ones, including Talmudic literature, history, grammar, halakha and exegetical literature. He did not, however, use any Karaite sources (see Appendix 2).

**The Relations between the Karaites and Rabbanites and their Polemics**

The first documented evidence regarding Karaite presence in Troki is from 1400.37 During the 15th century a process of development within

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35 *Hizzuk Emunah*, p. 29: ‘והנה אתם אומות גרציא”ה קבלתם אמונת ישו קודם שאר האומות ושלום ולא דדו ע yı ושבים הם topLevel פלדה אחר אשר yüzden שלב שלוחים שבחרו בידך את ארץ ישראל מסדרת חמשת מלכים אשר בנו עמים ולא קיבלו את אמונת ישו... ו ...........................................


the Karaite communal organization and educational institutions took place. Educational and legal views were strongly influenced by the Karaite spiritual centre in Constantinople. In the 15th century young students from Troki, Kiev and Luck came to Constantinople to study. They were taught by the most prominent teachers of the generation – Eliyahu Bashiachi and Caleb Afendopolo, who instructed them in matters of halakha and sent books to Lithuania. The literature brought from Constantinople used in Karaite study-houses (batei midrash), was mostly by Byzantine Karaite authors, such as the commentaries on the Bible by Toviah ben Moshe (11th c.) and by Jacob ben Reuben (Sefer ha-Osher, 12th c.); Eshkol ha-Kofer by Yehuda Hadassi (12th c.); Keter ha-Torah, Ez Hayyim and Gan Eden by Aaron ben Eliyahu from Nikomedia (14th c.); Sefer ha-Mivhar by Aaron ben Yosef (13th c.). Adderet Eliyahu by Eliyahu Bashiachi and writings by Caleb Afendopolo were also popular among the Polish-Lithuanian Karaites.

The influence of Constantinople on Eastern European Karaites can be seen by analyzing the hundreds of manuscripts from Poland-Lithuania, the oldest belonging to the 15th century, which were brought mainly from Constantinople. Most of them are manuscripts of the above mentioned treatises, copied by generations of the Karaites of Troki, Luck and Halicz from the fifteenth century on. The Karaites of Poland-Lithuania brought from Constantinople samples also of Rabbanite literature, such as the writings of Maimonides, books of exegesis, musar (ethics) and grammar.

In 16th century Poland cultural influence of the Rabbanite environment on the Karaite communities became more conspicuous, mainly as a result of changes in the cultural and spiritual life in the Rabbanite communities. The process was aided by the development of educational institutions and the establishment of printing houses in Eastern Europe,38 as well as by the delivery and distribution of Jewish books from Italy. Many of the Sefardic and Italian Jews, who settled in Poland (especially in Krakow), were imbued with the Renaissance spirit; they played an important role in awakening the interest both in Kabbalah and the hakhamot hizoniyyot (secular sciences). They introduced books on philosophy, astronomy, mathematics, history, and Kabbalah,

38 In Prague in 1512, in Krakow in 1534, in Lublin in 1547.
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and taught these subjects to the members of the local communities.\(^{39}\) Children of wealthy Jewish community members, as well as the sons of Polish *szlachta* (nobility), studied medicine abroad, especially at Padua University, famous for its rational-scholastic philosophical bent. In the second half of the 16\(^{th}\) century Aristotelianism became the leading stream in Polish thought. At the same time there was a revival of scholastic philosophy in the intellectual circles of Polish society.\(^{40}\) These processes in Polish spiritual life, primarily around Krakow University,\(^{41}\) affected the educated members of the Jewish community.

The Karaites in Poland-Lithuania were few in number.\(^{42}\) They lived mainly in small towns, on the periphery of the Jewish world. Rabbanites were not influenced by their doctrines. A number of Karaite intellectuals, on the other hand, were affected by the changes which occurred within Rabbanite society. On the whole, the educational level of most of the Karaites remained quite poor. R. Isaac expressed his discontent regarding this fact: ‘And we, the Karaite sect, do not strengthen ourselves by Torah; we do not spread it and we are far from it. For this reason the peace among us has been extinguished’.\(^{43}\)

The relations between Karaites and Rabbanites were ambiguous. There was strong economic rivalry, serious conflicts between the two communities.\(^{44}\) At the same time we have evidence of Karaite support for the local Rabbanite community by lending them the use of charters, granted to the Karaite community by the Polish officials.\(^{45}\)

The Karaites in general rejected the authority of the Oral Tradition, although in different periods of their history they studied it under the

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\(^{39}\) Y. Ben-Sasson, *Mishnato ha-Iyyunit shel ha-RaMaḥ*, Jerusalem 1984, p. 4.

\(^{40}\) Ben-Sasson, pp.2-3.

\(^{41}\) The Jagellonian University of Krakow - the first Polish university - was established in 1334 by Kazimir the Great and reestablished by Wladislaw Jagello in 1400. In the 15\(^{th}\)-16\(^{th}\) centuries it served as the center of intellectual life in Poland. Nicolas Copernicus studied there.

\(^{42}\) Most communities numbered less than 100-150 people. The larger communities, such as Troki, Luck and Halicz counted several hundreds.

\(^{43}\) *Derushim* (above, n. 14), f. 135b: ‘אין מרביצים אותה בתורה ויאם אנחנו כת הקראים נתחזק ורחוקים ממנה לכן מסיבה זו השלום מביננו כבה’

\(^{44}\) In addition to this competition Karaite communities occasionally suffered from a heavy burden of taxation, whose rates were determined by the Rabbanite Vaad; see Mann (above, n. 4), pp. 623-663.

\(^{45}\) Mann, pp. 1022-1023, nos. 54-55.
influence of their Rabbanite environment. Polish-Lithuanian Karaites also studied Mishnah and Talmud, *mussar* literature and Kabbalah under the guidance of Rabbanite teachers. Small Karaite communities lacked prominent teachers, therefore most Polish-Lithuanian Karaite intellectuals sought out Rabbanite teachers or studied Talmud and Kabbalah by themselves. Though we have no documentary evidence to the fact, apparently certain Rabbanite works were studied by Polish-Lithuanian Karaites in study houses, as was the case with the Karaite communities of Constantinople and the Crimea.46

Public disputations between the Karaites and Rabbanites in Poland-Lithuania were rare. The famous polemics between the prominent Rabbanite rabbi Moshe ben Jacob ha-Goleh of Kiev47 and the Karaites of Kiev, Troki and Luck concentrated mostly on legal matters. These polemics, in which Eliyahu Bashiachi and Caleb Afendopolo participated by sending letters of instruction to the community leaders of these cities,48 had a significant impact on the development and formation of Karaite identity as an entity separate from the Rabbanite world. Other Karaite-Rabbanite polemics are testified to in manuscripts dating back to the 15th-18th centuries.49 Some of these polemical texts are written as dialogues between Karaites and Rabbanites. These disputations remained topical for about four centuries, mainly due to the fact that the temptation of conversion to Rabbanism was sometimes stronger than that to Christianity.


47 R. Moshe (1449-1520) was one of the first prominent Jewish scholars in Slavic countries, the author of a number of treatises on Kabbalah and halakha. Native of Shadow (Lithuania), he studied Torah and astronomy with E. Bashiachi in Constantinopole, where he began his polemic against Karaite halakha which he continued in Kiev, Troki and Luck. He died in the Crimea, where he was sent by the Tatars as a captive; he was ransomed by Rabbanites and Karaites of Crimea, In the Crimea he united a local Rabbanite community. See Mann, pp. 700 ff.; Sergei Cinberg, ‘Avraham Krymsky i Moisei Kievsy’, *Yevreiska Starina* 11 (1924), s. 92-109; A. Epstein, ‘R. Moshe ha-Goleh me-Kiyov ben Ya’akov ben Moshe’, *Ha-Eshkol* 1 (1898), pp. 146-150.

48 Mann, pp. 1165-72, nos. 114-117.

49 For instance, in the collection of A. Harkavy in the Ukrainian National Library of Kiev there are fifteen mss containing polemics against Rabbanites, written or copied in Poland-Lituania or brought there from other countries.
R. Isaac's Polemics against Rabbanites

R. Isaac’s Polemics against Rabbanites, written in the days of arguments involving different sects within Polish society, sheds light on the author's views concerning Rabbanite Judaism, his self-identity, the methods of his polemics, and the ways of teaching in Karaite study-houses. The manuscript, which I discovered in the second Firkovich collection, contains 10 folios. There seems to be no other copy of this highly important source. No date for the manuscript is given. Possibly, the scribe copied it for his own use. The handwriting appears to indicate that the manuscript was written in the 17th or 18th century. The text is introduced by the following sentence of the copyist:

These are the arguments put forward against the Masters of the Tradition [ba'alei ha-Kabbalah = Rabbanites] in the true words from their [Rabbanite] books, by our master and teacher the exceptionally wise, the Torah philosopher, our venerable teacher and master Rabbi Isaac Troki, may his righteous and holy memory be blessed, the son of our venerable teacher Abraham the Elder of blessed memory, the author of Ḥizzuk Emunah.51

This short text relies on many more sources than Ḥizzuk Emunah, which is twenty times as long.52 Most of them are from Rabbanite literature, including Mishnah, Talmud and midrashim, commentaries on Scriptures, halakhic texts, as well as works of other genres (such as the Kuzari by Judah Halevi). Several Karaite and one Christian source are also utilized. Some of the sources are cited by name, others are difficult to identify.

This text itself (designated ‘a book’ by the copyist) has neither foreword, nor conclusion; it is not divided into chapters according to topics, nor is it systematically arranged. It seems to be a compilation of varied matters, not necessarily connected to each other. It may have been teaching material collected by R. Isaac for his students, a type of ‘reader’. We have no proof that the original text was written in his own hand, or that he planned to turn it into a book. It may also be that

50 Russian National Library SPb, Evr. II, A 75.
51 See below, Appendix 1, frag. 1.
52 For a comparison between the sources of these two works see Appendix 2.
we are dealing with summaries of his lessons made by a disciple for his own use. On the other hand, the exactness of the citations of a number of the sources leads us to believe that this text was written by R. Isaac himself.

At the end the copyist wrote: ‘Here concludes the arguments of our teacher and master Rabbi Isaac Troki, of saintly memory, against the Rabbanites’ (10 b). There follows a passage of R. Isaac's arguments against Eliyahu Bashiachi’s rulings concerning the fixing of fast days. This short passage, unlike the core of the text, is written in the third person, while *Polemics against Rabbanites* is in the first person. Thus, we are most probably dealing here with a composition written by R. Isaac himself.

Both the purpose and the method of R. Isaac's anti-Rabbanite polemics were generally similar to those he used in his anti-Christian treatise *Hzizzuk Emunah*. He sets forth the rabbinic interpretation of certain Scriptural passages and the halakhic rulings derived from them, subsequently demonstrating the inconsistency and arbitrariness of the rabbinic approach. He then goes on to show the inconsistency and arbitrariness of the Rabbinic approach. R. Isaac formulated his purpose in the following words:

> In the arguments of the Rabbanites, one should cite all the controversies between Rabbanite sages and demonstrate the truth of the Scriptures by strong arguments based on Scripture and reason ... and that some of their [Rabbanite] sages, who are considered true sages, agree with us.\(^5\)

From this passage one can deduce that his aim was to amass contradictions in the arguments of Rabbanite sages, to elucidate their main points and to propose contra-arguments, which, on occasion, were presented by other voices in Rabbanite authority. The methods he employed in his *Polemics against Rabbanites* and in *Hzizzuk Emunah* were similar. In the latter he demonstrated the Jewish truth and rejected the Christian exegesis and principles of faith by means of the arguments of other Christian sects (anti-Trinitarians in this case). Similarly, in his *Polemics against Rabbanites* he rejects the rabbinic tradition employing

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\(^5\) See below, Appendix 1, frag. 1.
arguments of other Rabbanites, ‘who are considered true sages’. However, as we will see below, despite his claim concerning the division of the teachers between ‘true’ and ‘false’, R. Isaac does not refrain from utilizing the opinion of certain Rabbinic authorities in some cases, even when he rejects them in others. R. Isaac frequently cited the views of Abraham Ibn Ezra, Maimonides, Gersonides and other rabbinical authorities, mainly in those instances in which their opinion differed from that of the majority of the Rabbanite establishment, and coincided with those of the Karaites.

To whom did he address his work? Supposedly, he directed it to learned Karaite disciples, who were, to some extent, familiar with rabbinic literature and did not always need detailed explanation of every issue. Thus, many citations in the text are shortened by the author, or just hinted at. This is why at times it is not easy to identify his sources. Since this text contains mainly ‘raw material’, the task of revealing its main tendencies is not simple. One must therefore infer R. Isaac’s views and concepts from the content of his quotations in a specific context.

His critique of the rabbinic way of interpretation dwells upon different aspects of the Rabbanite approach. A large part of his arguments focuses on the question of what should be considered as the literal meaning, the *peshat* of Scripture, while rejecting those commentaries, which he considered contradictory to the *peshat*. For instance, when he discusses the passage from Deuteronomy 24:16: *The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers; every man shall be put to death for his own sin*, R. Isaac dismisses the widespread rabbinic interpretation, which maintains that this verse decrees that the fathers shall not be put to death through the testimony of children (and vice versa). He refers to the opinion of Ibn Ezra on this passage, who interprets ‘fathers for the children’ (*avot al banim*) as meaning that everyone should be put to death for his own sin, and not that they should not be put to death on the testimony of their children (and vice versa). This opinion concurs with that of Karaites. R. Isaac’s method is to comment upon a verse by

54 See, for example, the commentary of Rashi on this verse.
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counting it to another biblical verse. In this treatise he also attacks rabbinic exegetes who employ oral tradition for their interpretation.

Like some other Karaite authors, R. Isaac disapproves of the use of midrash for interpretation. This is why part of his commentary is devoted to the rejection of rabbinic commentaries based on midrash. He often refutes these by arguments of Rabbanite authorities, or by adducing midrashim (especially anthropomorphic ones), which he perceived as striking instances of false belief: ‘If you search the words of Talmudists, you will find that many of them divert from the way of the true faith, which is accepted by all Israel’ (10a). Here the Karaites are alluded to as ‘all Israel’. The ‘true’ Rabbanite sages will be considered by him as ‘all Israel’ only if their opinions are close to those of the Karaites. To support his criticism R. Isaac refers (in his own phrasing) to Maimonides’ Commentary on the Mishna, Pereq Ḥelev (Sanhedrin 10:3):

Those sayings which are not relevant to matters involving practice or legal judgment one is not obliged to believe, unless they agree with the principles of the Torah and its matters. For those conjectures [sevarot] were not a halakha given to Moses at Sinai, but just a thought and a speculative conjecture, nothing more.

R. Isaac shows that there is no unity between Rabbanite sages on crucial issues, therefore even a great Rabbinite scholar such as Maimonides could reject certain opinions of the Sages in matters of belief as not legally binding (and by implication not true). This is the method in R. Isaac’s treatise – to reject the opinions of Rabbanite sages by citing the opinions of others.


56 See below, Appendix 1, frag. 4. Maimonides’ original phrasing reads: ‘כל מחלוקת שתותיה בין החכמים ואינה תלויה במעשה אלא קביעת סברה בלבד אין מקום לפסוק הלכה כאחד מהם’ (משנה עם פירוש הרמב“ם: נזיקין, תרגום י’ קאפח, ירושלים תשכ”ה, עמ’ קמה).
R. Isaac's general exegetical approach is based on rationalism. He rejects all interpretations which are contradicted by reason. Therefore in his anti-Christian and anti-rabbinic polemics he employs the tenets of rationalistic thinkers, be they Unitarians or Rabbanites. For instance, on the question of Rebecca’s age at marriage he refers to a rabbinic comment giving her age as two, without specifying the source. About this view he says: ‘Rebecca is said to have been two (sic) years old when she was married to Isaac but this is not true, and those who love the truth know it; it is known even to some of their [Rabbanite] sect, especially to Ibn Ezra, of blessed memory’ (5b). R. Isaac tries to demonstrate that certain interpretations distort the biblical meaning because they are contrary both to logic as well as to the peshat of the text. He refers to Ibn Ezra’s commentary on Gen. 24:59, And they sent away Rebecca their sister, and her nurse: ‘The word “nurse” (from which one could conclude that Rebecca was still at the age of nursing), he (Ibn Ezra) interprets as: “from the past”.

His rationalistic approach comes to light in his comparative analyses of different verses of Scripture. In Hizzuk Emunah he claims:

You, Christians, in your claims and answers use the words of prophets in order to prove your beliefs without scrutinizing the previous and following words in the text and without comparing them to similar prophetic texts, because you don’t wish to know the truth.

Though R. Isaac does not usually treat philosophical issues in either of his polemical treatises, he touches upon the question of immutability of God’s will. He cites the verses from Gen. 1:29-30: And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat; And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creeps upon

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57 As stated in many Rabbanite commentaries, based on the computation of Seder Olam Rabbah, according to which Rebecca was three and Isaac 40 years old when they married.

58 Hizzuk Emunah, p. 99: עられます מברוך הוא בפליוגיה רבים שבאפים ולכל אחד מברוך הוא בפליוגיה רבים שבאפים ולכל אחד מברוך הוא בפליוגיה רבים שבאפים ولכל אחד מברוך הוא בפליוגיה רבים שבאפים ולכל אחד מברוך הוא בפליוגיה שלם מברוך הוא בפליוגיה שלם מברוך הוא בפליוגיה שלם מברוך הוא בפליוגיה שלם מברוך הוא בפליוגיה שלם מברוך הוא בפליוגיה שלם מברוך הוא בפליוגיה שלם מברוך הוא בפליוגיה שלם מברוך הוא בפליוגיה שלם מברוך הוא בפליוגיה שלם מברוך הוא בפליוגיה שלם מברוך הוא בפליוגיה שלם מברוך הוא בפליוגיה שלם מברוך הוא בפליוגיה שלם מברוך הוא בפליוגיה שלם מברוך הוא בפליוגיה שלם מברוך הוא בפליוגיה שלם מברוך הוא בפליוגיה שלם מברוך هو...
Golda Akhiezer

The earth, wherein there is life, I have given every green herb for meat; and it was so; and Gen. 9:3-4: Every moving thing that lives shall be meat for you; even as the green herb have I given you all things. But flesh with the life thereof, which is the blood thereof, shall you not eat. R. Isaac implies that the common rabbinic opinion finds a contradiction between these verses, from which it could be concluded that God changed his will. To prove his point, he quotes the commentary of Gersonides in order to refute this accepted rabbinic opinion, which R. Isaac regards as unacceptable and false: ‘This (view) is a great lie, which every reasonable person should flee … one is not obliged to believe everything that our Teachers of blessed memory said, for one finds by them some contradictory matters’. Nevertheless, R. Isaac did not avoid the use of Rabbanite commentaries as a matter of principle. He calls upon his disciples to follow a critical approach towards Rabbanite interpretations and tries to give them the appropriate tools for doing so.

R. Isaac discusses the issue of reincarnation (gilgul neshamot), even though he himself discounts the phenomenon: ‘And they [Rabbanites] accepted the gilgul in their tradition, which contradicts both the Torah and common sense, as it is a belief of the koferim [heretics], whom R. Benjamin mentioned in his travel book’ (10a). In this context he refers to the custom of levirate marriage (yibbum), which in his opinion refutes the existence of the phenomenon of gilgul.

59 See below, Appendix 1, frag. 5.
60 In his travelogue R. Benjamin of Tudela described a pagan nation which lived in the area of Mount Hermon, had no king, no rules, practiced incest marriages and believed in reincarnation. See M. N. Adler ed. and trans., The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela, New York 1964, p. 18 (Hebrew, p. 20).
61 יְכַן מָצָא חַסְדָּאָשׁ בְּקַבּוֹלָתוֹת וַגָּלוֹת הַנְּשָׁמָה שֶׁחָכַם כְּרִי חַמְּרִי הַכֹּל הָאָדָם הַכֹּל הָאָדָם שלַחְיָהוֹ הֵפִיקוֹ לְרָאוּ. ר"ב ע"ש מס"ע ע"ש (עיין שם).
62 See: Deut., 25:6: And it shall be that the firstborn that she bears shall succeed in the name of his brother which is dead, that his name be not wiped out in Israel. The proponents of gilgul used this passage to demonstrate the existence of gilgul, asserting that yibbum is a way to enable the soul of the dead to be resurrected in the body of his brother's son.
63 It is an irony of history that the first attack against gilgul in Jewish tradition is presented by the great 10th century Rabbanite Saadia Gaon in response to the views of the Karaites Al-Qirqisani. See H. Ben-Shammai, ‘Transmigration of Souls in Tenth Century Jewish Thought in the Orient’ (Hebrew), Seferot 20 (1991), pp. 117-136. Subsequently gilgul was perceived as a rabbinic doctrine in...
After rejecting the existence of *gilgul*, R. Isaac turns to *Kavvanot ha-Tefillah* by R. Shem-Tov Lipmann Mülhausen, who describes the widespread use of anthropomorphic images and attributes of God in prayer. Mülhausen remarks that the community leaders were unable to overcome this tendency. In both *Sefer ha-Nizzahon* and *Kavvanot ha-Tefillah*, he fought this tendency, comparing it to the Christian worship of saints and treating it as idolatry. Mülhausen wrote in the days of the spreading of the study of Kabbalah among Ashkenazi Jewry, a trend hotly debated by the rabbinic authorities. Mülhausen notes that many people pretended to be Kabbalists, but in fact were involved in the practice of magic.

A focal point of our interest is the question whether such trends existed in the Karaite Polish-Lithuanian milieu. Though the study of Kabbalah was widespread, the only evidence we have regarding its practices is from the pen of the Karaite scholar of the 18th century, Simhah Isaac Lutzki (Lucki), in his *Livnat Sapir*: ‘Many Karaite sages...’
who reside in Lithuanian communities grew wise in the wisdom of Kabbalah and became outstanding in its study and in its practice’. 69

Apparently these trends existed in the 16th century, when the study of Kabbalah was already accepted among Eastern-European Karaites. I believe that the citations from the words of R. Isaac and R. Simha indicate the spread of Kabbalistic practices in the Karaite communities of Eastern Europe.

As in Hizzuk Emunah, R. Isaac in his Polemics against Rabbanites brings linguistic explanations of words that are important for the understanding of the peshat. He writes: ‘And now I will mention some linguistic mistakes found in the prayer books of the Rabbanites’ (9a). 70

As an example he cites the incorrect interpretation of the word tevuah (harvest) presented by R. David Kimhi, who explained it as being only the harvest of the following year. 71 R. Isaac contests this opinion by adducing texts which show that tevuah signifies both new and old harvest. R. Isaac apparently wished to demonstrate to his disciples a certain type of mistake inherent to rabbinic literature and to warn them against over reliance upon rabbinic texts.

The only Christian source R. Isaac quotes in Polemics against Rabbanites is the above mentioned dispute between the Unitarian M. Czechowicz and R. Jacob of Belzyce concerning the Talmud and Judaism. In his Hizzuk Emunah R. Isaac used the arguments of Czechowicz to reject certain principles of Christian faith. 72 Czechowicz


71 See Appendix 1, frag. 7.

72 Only from Polemic against Rabbanites we are aware that R. Isaac was familiar with this text. Rosental (above, n. 25), pp. 84-5, points out the fact of R. Isaac's disciple being acquainted with this text from the marginalium on manuscript of Hizzuk Emunah, which was in the library of a Christian collector of Hebrew mss, pastor Christian Gotlib Unger (d. 1719). This disciple mentioned the dispute against some Christian and R. Jacob from Belzyce.
Isaac ben Abraham of Troki and his *Polemics against Rabbanites*

cites a story in his arguments against R. Jacob of Bęczyce in the discussion concerning the commandments. This Talmudic story (Me'ilah 17b), deals with R. Shimon bar Yohai’s exorcism of Ben Temalyon, the demon, from the body of the emperor's daughter. However, the story was changed by Czechowicz for the purpose of the polemic. R. Isaac apparently regarded this text as belonging to Czechowicz. Yet Czechowicz used the text of P. Galatino,73 who, in turn, adapted the text of *Pugio Fidei* (The Dagger of Faith) by Raimundos Martini74 (without referring to him by name), who had changed and reinterpreted this story.75

It is not clear why R. Isaac cites this passage among his anti-rabbinic arguments, with no obvious connection to the preceding or the following passages. He probably wished to show his disciples the Christian perception of Jews and Judaism. Again, we may conclude from the very presence of the passage that questions regarding polemics with Christianity were discussed in R. Isaac's school and that he apparently employed this Polish source, as well as the polemical sources that he used in his *Hizzuk Emunah*.

**Conclusion**

On the whole, it seems the *Polemics against Rabbanites* does not hold any clearly defined doctrine. Yet this text presents, to a certain extent, the way of thinking and teaching typical of R. Isaac, as well as a

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74 Raymond Martini (1220–1285) was the leading representative of the Spanish Dominican School in the polemics against the Jews. He studied Hebrew, Aramaic and Arabic. In his opus magnum *Pugio fidei adversus Mauros et Iudaeos* (*Dagger of Faith against Moslems and Jews*), written around 1280, he tried to prove Christianity's truth by basing his arguments mainly on talmudic and midrashic literature.

75 See Appendix I, Frag. 8. Perhaps Czechowicz used the commentary of R. Gershom Meor ha-Golah on Me'ilah 17b, which supplied an additional detail to this story concerning the advice Ben Temalyon gave the Sages as to how to obtain an annulment of the evil decree by the emperor.
number of other Karaite scholars and their disciples in Poland-Lithuania. R. Isaac's system of teaching rabbinic literature aimed at preventing an excessive influence of Rabbanite concepts on Karaite intellectuals. This purpose was expressed in the selection and arrangement of his materials: all the passages (except one), presented in his work are examples of the rabbinic exegetical and legal approach. After analyzing each of them he presented their refutation, usually based on the opinion of other rabbinic scholars. The work is rather an attack on the edifice of rabbinic exegesis in his days than an apology for Karaite doctrine, though it does not entirely negate the legitimacy of using rabbinic commentaries.

Many Karaite authors in different periods of history turned to Rabbanite sources for distinct purposes, regarding them as a part of their own legacy. Still, this did not prevent them from arguing with Rabbanites — and R. Isaac was no exception. His primary motive for studying Rabbanite literature is not quite clear from this text; it may have been the recognition of the fact that Rabbanite sources were part of the Karaite legacy, and certain elements may be relevant for the understanding and interpretation of the Scriptures. Alternately, it may simply be the result of his desire to refute concepts he finds unacceptable. As *Polemics against Rabbanites* implies, R. Isaac made his disciples study rabbinic exegesis in order to acquire the skill of polemics and to learn how to counter the Rabbanite exegetical approach and their way of adjudication of the halakha.

R. Isaac perceived Christianity as a deviation from Judaism, a kind of paganism. For him Christianity presented a socio-political, rather than a theological problem, whilst his anti-Rabbanite polemics were based on aspects Karaism and Rabbanism had in common. This fundamental difference did not prevent him from employing the same methods for both polemics. He rebutted unacceptable concepts in Christianity by means of arguments of other Christians and those of Rabbanites — by the learning of ‘true’ Rabbanites. In his *Polemics against Rabbanites* he does not support his interpretations by turning to Karaite sources, except in a few instances.

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Both in anti-Christian and anti-Rabbanite polemics R. Isaac employed rational discourse trying to demonstrate the inconsistencies of his opponents. By means of reason he rejected both Christian doctrine and the rabbinical approach and explained their ‘false faith’ as due to lack of common sense or misreading, resulting from incapacity or evil intention. The correct conclusion, according to him, is to be based on comparative analyses of texts, understanding their context, as well as their historical and linguistic background. Rational analysis was for him the basis of correct understanding and interpretation of the Scriptures and of true belief. This approach brings him in line with the most outstanding Karaite sages of the Islamic and Byzantine periods.

In his Polemics against Rabbanites we hardly find any discussion of philosophical issues; exceptional is his touching upon the matter of changes in God's will, which he did not elucidate himself, but only referred to Gersonides' opinion. Despite his acquaintance with the works of most prominent representatives of Jewish thought, and the increasing interest in philosophy among Rabbanite intellectuals in Poland in this period, R. Isaac did not write a single philosophical treatise. He introduced some philosophical questions in his Derushim, but did not develop them into serious discourse. It may well be that R. Isaac had no appropriate audience for such issues; he was the only Karaite thinker in his generation who possessed deep knowledge of such varied spheres; there existed a noticeable intellectual gap between him and his environment, including his disciples.

Concerning R. Isaac's self-identity, it should be mentioned that his familiarity with rabbinic literature and the Rabbanite way of thinking, testified to by the wide selection of rabbinic quotations in his works,

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do by no means bear witness to his views being close to those of Rabbanites. His approach in *Polemics against Rabbanites* was not aimed at rapprochement between the two factions, but an instruction in the careful and correct use of rabbinic literature and the development of polemic skills against it.

R. Isaac wrote his *Hizzuk Emunah* as a Jew who belongs to the Jewish world, in a language acceptable to all Jews, not only to Karaïtes. I believe that this is why he did not use any arguments from the Karaïte sources in this book. In *Polemics against Rabbanites* his purpose was to strengthen Karaïte faith by the refutation of certain fundamental Rabbanite concepts.

**Appendix I**

*Extracts from Polemics against Rabbanites* by Isaac ben Abraham of Troki

1b These are the arguments which were put forward against the Masters of the Tradition [*ba'alei ha-Kabbalah* = Rabbanites] in the true words from their [Rabbanite] books, by our lord and teacher the exceptionally wise, the Torah philosopher, our venerable teacher and master R. Isaac Troki, may his righteous and holy memory be blessed, the son of our venerable teacher Abraham the Elder of blessed memory, the author of *Hizzuk Emunah*. 

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Golda Akhiezer
One should specify all the disputes that exist between us and the Rabbanites, elucidate each of them by well-founded arguments, since we have support from some of the Rabbanites for most of our arguments …

In the arguments of the Rabbanites one should cite all the controversies between Rabbanite sages and demonstrate the truth of the Scriptures by strong arguments based on Scripture and reason ... And that some of their [=Rabbanite] sages, who are considered true sages, consent with us in many points, such as Maimonides, Ibn Ezra, Gersonides, the author of Kuzari, Abravanel, the author of Kavanot ha-Tefillah, R. Pinhas ben Yair, the author of Sefer ha-Nizzahon, the author of Even Boṭan, the author of Pardes Rimmonim, the author of Megor Hayyim, the author of Sefer Masaot Binyamin, and the author of Zedah la-Derekh.79

6a It is written in the Torah: The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers; every man shall be put to death for his own sin (Deut. 21:20). The Rabbanites [ba'alei ha-Kabbalah] spoke fallaciously concerning this verse and interpreted it in a strange manner that is other ... than its literal meaning. They said that this passage intends to prohibit accepting evidence of relatives about each other, as can be seen from the numeration

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79 See the itemization of these and other books used by R. Isaac in Appendix 2.
of the commandments, and in Maimonides (Book of the Commandments) in [negative commandment] no. 287, and in Ta’amei ha-Mitzvot80 – 347, and in Humash ha-Gadol81 commandment number 287, and in Targum Onkelos. We have convincing evidence from Scriptures that the verse is in accordance with its literal meaning and not in accordance with their interpretation, as it is written in Kings (2 Kings 14:6) and in Chronicles (2 Chronicles 25:4) concerning Amatzia the King.82 But he did not put to death the children of the assassins, in accordance with what is written in the Law of Moses, where the Lord Commanded: Parents shall not be put to death for children etc. Here we see that their aim is to lead astray and not to straighten. But Ibn Ezra commented on parshat Tevye: ‘The fathers shall not be put to death for their children (Deut. 24:16), unless the children are merit death by the verdict of the court and vice versa, but every man shall be put to death for his own sin’. And the proof is: This our son is stubborn and rebellious (Deut. 21:20).83

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10a It is also said: ‘Said the Shekhinah: Woe to my head, woe to my arm’ (Mishnah Sanhedrin 6, 5). And it is also said: ‘And He shook his head: Woe to me, that I destroyed my Temple’ (BT Berakhot 3a). Far be it to attribute to Him, who is beyond any deficiency, such things, confounding the ear that hears them. And they also said that the Holy One blessed be He puts on phylacteries …84

80 The reference is to the treatise by Menahem Recanati. Ta’amei ha-Mitzvot was first printed in Constantinople in 1544 and reprinted many times.
81 The reference is to Mikraot Gedolot (first published in Venice in 1525).
82 R. Isaac borrowed this argument from Aaron ben Elijah; see Keter ha-Torah: Commentary on Deuteronomy, Ramle 1972, p. 28a.
83 Compare Ibn Ezra’s commentary on Deut. 24:16: והני יה שאל ב ארב מהבך אלה: ולא אני אמר הכתוב לא יומתו אבות ובמקום אחר אומר פוקד עון אבות ושאלתם תהו כי לא יומתו אבות על בנים מצוה על ישראל ופוקד עון אבות על בנים הוא הפוקד וכבר פירשתיו במקומו. The citation brought by R. Isaac is from the Karaite treatise Sefer ha-Mivhar by Aaron ben Joseph on Deuteronomy (Evpatoria 1835, p. 21a).
84 See BT Berakhot 6a.
2b In his commentary to Pereq Heleq Maimonides wrote as follows: ‘Those sayings which are not relevant to matters involving practice or legal judgment one is not obliged to believe, unless they agree with the principles of the Torah and its matters. For those conjectures [sevarot] were not a halakha given to Moses at Sinai, but just a thought and a speculative conjecture, nothing more ...’.

1b-2a There is much heresy in them [the rabbinic literature]. On the verse And God said: Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed etc. (Gen. 1:29) in parshat Bereshit Gersonides commented:85 ‘And God said: Behold, I have given you every herb etc. – it is the creation and giving of nature, not a commandment. Reliable evidence [for this interpretation] is in the concluding words: And it was so. And the manner of this creation is that He bestowed on man the ability to attain nourishment from the herbs although they are very different from his nature; the same ability He bestowed also upon the rest of the animals.'

From this passage is resolved the [following] problem – namely, it is clarified by speculation and by the Torah that God’s will is immutable, while one might conclude from this passage that God’s will concerning the commandments He decrees changes. That is to say, one may think that God, the sublime, forbade Adam to eat meat, and afterwards allowed Noah to do so, saying: *Every moving thing that lives* etc. (Gen. 9:3). This [view] is a great lie, from which every reasonable person should flee. Some of our Teachers of blessed memory stated it in their homilies, but in these and similar matters we should not look to who utters the saying … but follow what is in harmony with the principles of the Torah and with speculation. It is clear that one is not obliged to believe everything that our Teachers of blessed memory said, for one finds by them some matters that are contradictory’.

8b In *parshat* Ki-Te泽 about *yibbum* [=levirate marriage] you will see marvelous things essentially refuting the belief in *gilgul* [=reincarnation]. In *Kivvun ha-Tefillah* [it is written]: ‘The later Sages in their prayers increased the use of anthropomorphism and attributes (of God). In our ignorance we widened this breach completely, [this custom] spreading to most of the Diaspora. We do not know what to do. It is not possible to leave our communities, for we receive payment [lit. libations] from the ignorant [‘amei ha-arez], though their clothes are a source of impurity [midras], in order to prevent each one from building his own altar [that is to say, acting in accordance with his false views]...’

86 Alternate reading: דת (religion).
87 See Sanh. 57, 14; 59, 2. Most of the ‘rishonim’: Rashi, Rashbam, Ibn Ezra, Radak, Rambam and others, considered that the meat was forbidden to Noah.
89 In other words, we remain in the communities and serve as communal leaders...
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7

א-ב רד"ק כתב בס' השרשי' שלו כתב בשרש בוא: וזל"ל. ייבוחות הכותם של כלל פרי
מקהל. נק" מ"תבואה" פע Shawnא שלח תבואה. ייב משנתך שקבל"י" עמרא. עיון
יכ תבואה שלכל בן להבואה תוטש בן להבואה ישתו. ייב טענות ואצלתתן של התבואה יש
ונוש.

9a-b R. David Kimhi in his Sefer Shorashim regarding the root בוא wrote as follows:90 The tevuah [harvest] of the vineyard is a collective noun for all edible fruit. It is called tevuah for it is from the next year, because [if it is] from the past year it would be called “avur” [past]’. This is not correct, because tevuah is a collective noun for both new and old harvest, as we find: And ye shall eat old store long kept (Lev. 26:10).

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9b A Christian, Marcin Czechowic, wrote in his book of polemics against R. Jacob of Be¬˛yce, that it is written in the Talmud that one day the Evil Kingdom forbade the Jews to observe circumcision, the Sabbath and niddah [the laws of menstrual purity]. The Jewish sages went to the demon Ben Temalyon and asked him to torment the daughter of the Emperor. The sages then commanded him to leave [her body] and the maiden was cured. The Emperor was happy and decreed that they may enter the royal treasury and take from there whatever they wanted. They entered and did not want to take anything. They looked for the document of the evil decree, found it, took it, tore it up and went out. The decree was annulled. This Christian asserted that all

90 Sefer ha-Shorashim, H. R. Biesental and F. Lebresht eds., Berolini 1847, p. 36. The root import אב designates ‘come’ and is treated as the root of the word tevuah, harvest.
those commandments had been taken away from you by that emperor, but Ben Temalyon, the demon, returned them to you. Let the lips of liars be sealed forever.

**Appendix 2**

**Sources Utilized by Isaac ben Abraham of Troki**

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<td>Sanhedrin, Baba Qama,</td>
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<td>Eliyahu (Bahr) ben Asher ha-Levi</td>
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<td>Ashkenazi (1468/9-1549): <em>Masoret ha-Masoret; Sefer Tishbi</em></td>
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<td>R. Bahya ben Asher (1255-1340): <em>Be’ur ‘al ha-Torah</em></td>
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<td>Benjamin of Tudelal (c.1110-1173):</td>
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<td>Moshe Cordovero (1522-1570): <em>Pardes Rimonim</em></td>
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<td>Eliezer ben Judah from Worms (1140-1225): <em>Yoreh Ha’ataim</em></td>
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Isaac ben Abraham of Troki and his *Polemics against Rabbanites*

Gersonides (1288-1344): commentaries on Pentateuch

David ben Solomon Ganz (1541-1613): *Zemah David*

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Seder ʿOlam Rabba

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Seder ʿOlam Zuta

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Targum of Jonathan ben Uziel

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Targum Onkelos

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Samuel Zarza (14th c.): *Meqor Hayyim*

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Marcin Bielski (1495-1575):
Kronika świata

Simon Budny (1530-1593):
O przedniejszych wiary chrystiańskiej artykułach, to jest o Bogu jedynym, o Synu jego i o Duchu świętym (=Obrona)
[Polish translation of the Bible]

Marcin Czechowicz (1532-1613):
Rozmowy Chrystiańskie, które z greckiego nazwiska dialogami zowią (Dialogo); Tzch dni rozmowa o dzieciokrztęstwie

Marcin Czechowicz: Odpis Jakóba zdądzą z Belżyc na Dyalogi Marcina Czechowica: na który za odpowiada Jakóbowi zdądzą tenże Marcin Czechowic

Martin Luther (1483-1586)

New Testament

Niccolo Paruta (1532-1581): De uno vero
Deo

Aaron ben Eliyahu of Nikomedia (14th c.):
 Ez Hayyim

Aaron ben Joseph (c.1250-1320):
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Jacob ben Reuven (11th-12th c.):
Sefer ha-ʾOsher

Jacob Lowill (from Lwow?): treatise on ritual slaughter