

Who Are the People in Our Neighborhood?

#3 Karaites

Timeline

600 – 1000 Period of the Geonim

622 Beginning of Islam

638 Muslim conquest of Jerusalem, Jews allowed back under certain restrictions

691 Umayyad caliph Abd el Malik builds the Dome of the Rock and expands al Aksa

Circa 750 Anan ben David creates a breakaway sect

9th century Daniel al Kumisi comes to Jerusalem

10th – 11th century Karaite Golden Age: Thinkers like Benjamin al Nahawendi, Yaakov al Kirkisani Yefet ben Ali and Salman ben Yeruham write works of philosophy, commentary and law

882-942 Rabbi Saadia Gaon

930 Aleppo Codex written in Tiberias

1099 Crusader conquest of Jerusalem, Karaite community there is destroyed

1956 Most Egyptian Karaites leave Egypt and come to the State of Israel

Exilarch in Babylonia

The members of the two academies [Sura and Pumbedita], led by the two heads [the geonim] as well as by the leaders of the community, assemble in the house of an especially prominent man before the Sabbath on which the installation of the exilarch is to take place. The first homage is paid on Thursday in the synagogue, the event being announced by trumpets, and every one sends presents to the exilarch according to his means. The leaders of the community and the wealthy send handsome garments, jewelry, and gold and silver vessels. On Thursday and Friday the exilarch gives great banquets. On the morning of the Sabbath the nobles of the community call for him and accompany him to the synagogue. Here a wooden platform covered entirely with costly cloth has been erected, under which a picked choir of sweet-voiced youths well versed in the liturgy has been placed. This choir responds to the leader in [prayer](#), who begins the service with 'Baruk she-amar.' After the morning prayer the exilarch, who until now has been standing in a covered place, appears; the whole congregation rises and remains standing until he has taken his place on the platform, and the

two geonim, the one from Sura preceding, have taken seats to his right and left, each making an obeisance. (Nathan the Babylonian, 10th century)

Gathering for Study

God has appointed the two academies ("yeshibot") for the good of Israel. In them day and night are devoted to the study of the [Torah](#); and to there come the scholars from all places twice a year, in [Adar](#) and [Elul](#), and associate with one another in discussions on the Torah." (Tanhuma Noach)

יקום פורקן מון שמייא חנא וחוודה ורחמי ומי ארכיכי ומזוני רוייני וסיעטה דשמייא ובריות גופא אונהורא מעלייא. זרעא פיא וקיימת זרעא די לא יפסוק ודיא לא יבטול מפטגמי אוריתא. למראנו ורבנן סבירתא קדיישתא די באראעא דישראל ודיא בבל לריישי כליה ולריישי גלויתא ולריישי מתייבטה ולדייני די בבא. כלל תלמידיוון ולכל תלמידי תלמידיוון ולכל מאן דעסוקין באוריתא. מלכא דעלמא יברעה יתהוון יפיש פיהוון וויגא יומיהוון ויתן ארכא לשנייהוון. ויתפרקן ווישטצבען מון פל עקא ומן כל מרען בישין. מראן די בשמייא יהא בסעדהון כל זמן ועדן. ונאמר אמן

Islam and Jerusalem

Glory to Him who made His servant travel by night from the sacred place of worship to the furthest place of worship, whose surroundings We have blessed, to show him some of Our signs. He alone is the All Hearing, the All Seeing. (Koran Sura 17:60)

Who Are the Karaites/Bnai Mikra?

Anan and Saul his son – may the name of the wicked rot - lived in the days of Yehudai Gaon (Sura 760-764) This Anan was a descendant of the house of David and a scholar originally, but people discovered something wrong in him and for this reason he was not appointed Gaon and the fates decreed that he should not become Exilarch either. Because of the envy and chagrin in his heart he . . . enticed the Jews away from the traditions of the Sages . . . He composed books and raised disciples and of his own accord devised statutes that are no good. . . (Abraham ibn Daud, 1161)

Anan of blessed memory lived in Bagdad and belonged to the party of the Zaddikim. Because of his great wisdom. . . the whole house of Israel chose him to be president of the court and exilarch. . . Anan desired to restore the crown of the Law to its pristine glory and began to preach in public and to argue against the Oral Law, the Mishnah, to deny it and repudiate it completely. . . Then Anan rose and took with him his sons and disciples and they all went to Jerusalem the Holy City and settled there, There he built a synagogue . . . (Simhah Isaac Lutzki, a Karaite scholar, 1757)

Treasures of the Genizah

"It is a battlefield of books, and the literary production of many centuries had their share in the battle, and their disjecta membra are now strewn over its area"
Solomon Schechter

Daniel al Kumisi and the Mourners of Zion

You should know that it is the villains of Israel who say to one another "We are not obliged to go to Jerusalem until He gathers us just as He has scattered us." These are the words of those who anger God and of fools. Even if God had not commanded us to go to Jerusalem from the countries of the Diaspora in lamentation and bitterness, we would nevertheless know, by virtue of our own intelligence, that there is an obligation upon all those who suffered from God's anger to come to the Gate of the Angry to supplicate Him, as I have written above...

You, God-fearers, must therefore come to Jerusalem, dwell there and become its guardians until the rebuilding of Jerusalem... One should not say: "How can I go up to Jerusalem for fear of bandits and robbers or for fear of not being able to earn a livelihood in Jerusalem?..." Are there not nations besides Israel who come from the four corners of the earth to Jerusalem every year to be in the awe of the Lord? Why is it that you, our brethren of Israel, do not do as the other nations of the world do and come and pray..? If you do not come because you covet and are obsessed with your merchandise, then at least send five men from each city with enough money to support them, so that we can become a united group to supplicate our Lord continuously in the mountains of Jerusalem... You will have no excuse before God if you do not return to God's Torah and His commandments, as it is written in His Torah... (Daniel al-Kumisi, 9th century)

Rabbi Saadia Gaon Takes on the Karaites

Rabbi Saadiah says that we cannot interpret this verse according to its plain meaning. For if a man struck his neighbor's eye and the eye lost a third of its sight, how is it possible to punish the culprit with an equivalent blow, that is, with a blow which is neither greater nor lesser? There is a possibility that the culprit will lose his entire eyesight. Burns, wounds, and stripes present even greater difficulties, for if they were inflicted on a dangerous area it is possible for the culprit to die. The mind cannot accept this . . . The general rule is that we cannot fully explain any commandment written in the Torah unless we rely on the words of our sages of blessed memory. Just as we received the Torah from the sages, so did we receive the Oral Law. There is no difference between them. Now the interpretation of eye *for* eye is, it is fitting for the culprit to give his eye in place of his victim's eye if he does not pay ransom for it. (Ibn Ezra on Shmot 21:24)

דת אלוקינו חלפו לנתר
המותר לאסור וה אסור להתר
בלי יראה ובלי אימה. . .
לולי המשנה והתלמוד
אשר כל זה בם למוד
(asha mashi)

Solomon ben Yerucham Fights Back

I have looked again into the six divisions of the Mishnah,
And behold they represent the words of modern men.
There are no majestic signs and miracles in them,
And they lack the formula: “and the Lord spoke unto Moses and unto Aaron,”
I therefore put them aside and I said there is no true law in them. . .
I have set the six divisions of the Mishnah before me. . .
And I saw that they are very contradictory in content,
This one Mishnaic scholar declares a thing to be forbidden to the people of Israel
while that one declares it to be permitted.
My thoughts therefore answer me
And most of my reflections declare unto me,
That there is in it no Law of logic,
Nor the Law of Moses the wise. . . (Solomon ben Yeruham, Sefer Milhamot Hashem)

Karaites and the Keter

The copy on which I relied is the well-known Egyptian codex which contains the twenty-four books of the Scriptures and which had been in Jerusalem for several years—used as the standard text for the examination of scrolls. Everyone relied upon it because it had been examined by Ben Asher who closely studied it for many years and examined it again whenever it was being copied. This codex was the text on which I relied in the scroll of the Law that I wrote according to the rules. (Maimonides, Laws of Writing a Torah Scroll 8:4)