Abraham Dov (Baer) Dubsewitz of Kiev, “One facing the other”

in Dubsewitz, בחדא מחתא (= *At One Stroke: Seven Separate Articles*, Cracow 1888)

The poet, the scholar[[1]](#footnote-1) Abraham Baer Gottlober,[[2]](#footnote-2) in his book *A Critical Review of the History of the Karaites*, began to restore the good poems from the Karaites *siddurim* to their [original] owners, namely the Rabbanites. (See there, from page 32 to the end of folio 81.[[3]](#footnote-3)) I have now found another poem in their *siddur*, volume I (in the Fünn printing, 1868, laments for the Third Sabbath, page 122); any eye that sees it will acknowledge that its author is a Rabbanite. According to Rabbi Dr. N. Brüll (in his *Yearbooks*, volume five,[[4]](#footnote-4) VII, page 89), it is by a certain R. “Judah”, whose name is signed in acrostic (**Y**om … **H**alo… [**V**e]rommati … **Dal** … **H**alamuni). I shall present [the versions] here, one facing the other, so that the Karaite reader, too, with see, and acknowledge our words here, just as the Karaite *ḥazzan* here in Kiev acknowledged it to me, the noble enlightened sage Joseph Sultansky, son of the famous sage R. Isaac Sultansky, who was the *ḥakham* of the Karaites in the city of Svestopol. The Karaites will gain from this, for they will fix this poem (when they publish their *siddur* again), which their copyists ruined, or perhaps they found an erroneous text. (Or another reason…)[[5]](#footnote-5)

**The text of the poem in the Karaite siddurim**

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| O my strength [=God]! In my exile, I have raised my eyes up to you, | אֱיָלוּתִי . בְגָלוּתִי . לְךָ נָשָׂאתִי עֵינָי . |
| For you to find me favorable, as long ago, and to restore my throngs of people | רְצוֹת אוֹתִי . כְקַדְמָתִי . וּלְהָשִׁיב הֲמוֹנָי . |
| To my city and my land, and may I sigh no more. | אֱלֵי עִירִי . וְאַדְמָתִי . וְלֹא אוֹסִיף יְגוֹנָי . |
| *And they that know your name will put their trust in You; for you, Lord, have not forsaken them that seek you!* | ויבטחו בך יודעי שמך, כי לא עזבת דורשיך יהוה . |
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| *And they …* | ויבטחו |
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| Remember the scorn and the blasphemy of the Ammonites and Moabites, | זְכוֹר חֶרְפַּת . וְגִדּוּפַת . עַמּוֹנִים וּמוֹאָבִים . |
| On the day when they said, in the Temple of the lofty [God], upon seeing the Cherubim. | בְּיוֹם אָמְרָם . בְּהֵיכָל רָם . בִּרְאוֹתָם הַכְּרוּבִים . |
| "Didn't you say that you worshipped none other than [God], who rides the clouds?! | הֲלֹא אֲמַרְתֶּם . לֹא עֲבַדְתֶּם . לְבַד רֹכֵב עָבִים . |
| O contemptible people! Aren't these your gods, standing there?" | עַם נִקְלֶה . הֲלֹא אֵלֶּה . אֱלֹהֵיכֶם נִצָּבִים . |
| I remained silent and mute, and did not raise my face. | דּוֹמַמְתִּי . וְנֶאֱלַמְתִּי . וְלֹא נָשָׂאתִי פָנַי . |
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| *And they…* | ויבטחו |
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| Destroy the glory of the Kedarites, who made me an object of scorn, | כַּלֵּה הֲדַר . בְּנֵי קֵדָר . אֲשֶׁר שָׂמוּנִי לְשֶׁמֶץ . |
| When I fled, with my spirit in anguish, from the hand of the cruel and ruthless. | בְּיוֹם בָּרְחִי . בְּצַר רוּחִי . מִכַּף מְעַוֵּל וְחֹמֵץ . |
| From Jezreel [in the Land of Israel] to Ishmael I went wandering, with no strength. | וּמִיִּזְרְעֵאל . לְיִשְׁמָעֵאל . נוֹדַדְתִּי בְּלִי אֹמֶץ . |
| They put gall in my bread, chiefly, and gave me vinegar to drink. | וְנָתְנוּ רֹאשׁ . בְּבָרוּתִי רֹאשׁ . וַיַּשְׁקוּנִי חֹמֶץ . |
| And they destroyed and killed eighty thousand of my priests. | וְהִשְׁחִיתוּ . וְהֵמִיתוּ . שְׁמֹנִים אֶלֶף כֹּהֲנָי . |
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| *And they …* | ויבטחו |
|  |  |
| They threw me into confusion, and wounded me -- Caesar and Vespasian. | הֲמָמוּנִי . פְצָעוּנִי . קֵיסָר וְאַסְפַּסְיָנוֹס . |
| They chased me and threw me into desolation -- Titus and Hadrian. | רְדָפוּנִי . הֱשִׁמּוּנִי . טִיטוֹס וַאֲדִרְיָאנוֹס . |
| They pushed me and trod over me, and I had no way of escape. | הֲדָפוּנִי . רְפָסוּנִי . וְאָבַד מִמֶּנִּי מָנוֹס . |
| They scattered me and led me astray, to the point that my dispersed could not be gathered back. | הֱפִיצוּנִי . הֱדִיחוּנִי . עַד אֵין נְפוּצוֹתַי לִכְנוֹס . |
| I was ashamed and humiliated to lift up my face, O God. | וּבֹשְׁתִּי . וְנִכְלַמְתִּי . לְהָרִים אֱלֹהַי פָּנַי . |
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| *And they …* | ויבטחו |
|  |  |
| Sit down, O poor one [=the Jewish people], who is looking [forward to redemption], for there is hope for you at the end, | שְׁבִי עֲנִיָּה . צֹפִיָּה . כִּי יֵשׁ תִּקְוָה לְאַחֲרִיתֵךְ . |
| I will comfort you and have compassion on you, when I hear your cry. | וְנִחַמְתִּיךְ . וְרִחַמְתִּיךְ . בְּשָׁמְעִי אֶת נַאֲקָתֵךְ . |
| Your sin is over, O Daughter of Zion; He will no longer exile you. | תַּם עֲוֹנֵךְ . בַּת צִיּוֹן . לֹא יוֹסִיף לְהַגְלוֹתֵךְ . |
| Lo, I am going to get up on vengeance day, and take vengeance for you. | הִנְנִי קָם . בְּיוֹם נָקָם . וְלָקַחְתִּי נִקְמָתֵךְ . |
| When the peoples are gathered together, and the kingdoms, to serve the Lord. | בְּהִקָּבֵץ עַמִּים יַחְדָּו וּמַמְלָכוֹת לַעֲבוֹד אֶת יְהֹוָה. |
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| *And they …* | ויבטחו |
|  |  |

Now I will copy what I found in *Shadal’s Correspondence* (published by R. Sh[ealtiel] Ai[zik] Grober, may his lamp shine!, the publisher of the yearly periodical *Oẓar Ha-sifruth*), numero CCIX, in his selections from a manuscript Spanish maḥzor, which had been in the hands of the sage Yashar [=Yiẓḥaq Shemuel Reggio, close friend of Shadal], which Shadal called “Maḥzor Calabrese”, in a dirge fror the Ninth of Av, which begins (p. 501): איך מקדשי / ברוב כחשי / נחרב פעמים [“How was my Temple, due to my great faults, destroyed twice?”] There, in the middle of the poem, we find the poem that is found in the Karaite *siddur*!

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| O my strength [=God]! In my exile, I have raised my eyes up to you, | אֱיָלוּתִי . בְּגָלוּתִי . לְךָ נָשָׂאתִי עֵינָי . |
| O God of vengeance, gird yourself in rage, and pay back vengeance to my neighbors! | אֵל נְקָמוֹת . חֲגוֹר חֵמוֹת . וְהָשֵׁב נָקָם לִשְׁכֵנָי . |
| Overturn like Sodom the Land of Edom [=Rome and its successor states], who destroyed my Palaces. | הֲפוֹךְ כִּסְדוֹם . אֶרֶץ אֱדוֹם . מַחֲרִיבֵי אַרְמוֹנָי . |
| *Pursue them in anger, and destroy them, from under the heavens of the Lord!* | תִּרְדּוֹף בְּאַף וְתַשְׁמִידֵם מִתַּחַת שְׁמֵי יְהֹוָה . |
|  |  |
| Remember the scorn and the blasphemy of the Ammonites and Moabites, | זְכוֹר חֶרְפַּת . וְגִדּוּפַת . עַמּוֹנִים וּמוֹאָבִים . |
| On the day when they said, in the lofty Temple,[[6]](#footnote-6) upon seeing the Cherubim: | יוֹם אָמְרָם . בְּהֵיכָל רָם . בִּרְאוֹתָם הַכְּרוּבִים . |
| “Didn’t you say that you worshipped none other than [God], who rides the clouds?! | הֲלֹא אֲמַרְתֶּם . לֹא עֲבַדְתֶּם . לְבַד רֹכֵב עַל עָבִים . |
| O contemptible people! Aren't these your gods, standing there?”[[7]](#footnote-7) | עַם נִקְלֶה . הֲלֹא אֵלֶּה . אֱלֹהֵיכֶם נִצָּבִים . |
| I remained silent and mute, and did not raise my face. | דּוֹמַמְתִּי . וְנֶאֱלַמְתִּי . וְלֹא נָשָׂאתִי פָנַי . |
|  |  |
| Remove the glory of the Kedarites,[[8]](#footnote-8) who made me an object of scorn, | דַּל הֲדַר . בְּנֵי קֵדָר . אֲשֶׁר שָׂמוּנִי לְשֶׁמֶץ . |
| When I fled, with my spirit in anguish, from the hand of the cruel and ruthless. | יוֹם בָּרְחִי . בְּצַר רוּחִי . מִכַּף מְעַוֵּל וְחוֹמֵץ . |
| From Jezreel [in the Land of Israel] to Ishmael I went wandering, with no strength. | וּמִיִּזְרְעֵאל . לְיִשְׁמָעֵאל . נָדַדְתִּי בְּלִי אֹמֶץ . |
| They put gall in my bread, chiefly, and gave me vinegar to drink. | וְנָתְנוּ רֹאשׁ . בְּבָרוּתִי רוֹשׁ . וַיַּשְׁקוּנִי חֹמֶץ . |
| And they destroyed and killed eighty thousand of my priests.[[9]](#footnote-9) | וְהִשְׁחִיתוּ . וְהֵמִיתוּ . שְׁמֹנִים אֶלֶף כֹּהֲנָי . |
|  |  |
| They hit me, and threw me into confusion -- Caesar and Vespasian. | הֲלָמוּנִי . הֲמָמוּנִי . קֵיסָר וְאַסְפַּסְיָאנוֹס . |
| They silenced me and threw me into desolation -- Titus and Hadrian. | הֲדִמּוּנִי . הֲשִׁמּוּנִי . טִיטוֹס וְאַדְּרִיָאנוֹס . |
| They pushed me and chased me, and I had no way of escape. | הֲדָפוּנִי . רְדָפוּנִי . וְאָבַד מִנִּי מָנוֹס . |
| They scattered me and made me run, to the point that my dispersed could not be gathered back. | הֱפִיצוּנִי . הֲרִיצוּנִי . עַד אֵין נְפוּצַי לִכְנוֹס . |
| They swallowed me and gulped me down, and filled their bellies with my delights. | בְּלָעוּנִי . וְלָעוּנִי . וּמִלְּאוּ כְרֵסָם מֵעֲדָנָי . |
|  |  |
| Sit down, O poor one [=the Jewish people], who is looking [forward to redemption], for there is hope for you at the end, | שְׁבִי עֲנִיָּה . צֹפִיָּה . כִּי יֵשׁ תִּקְוָה לְאַחֲרִיתֵךְ . |
| I will have compassion on you and comfort you, when I hear the sound of your cry. | רִחַמְתִּי . וְנִחַמְתִּי . בְּשָׁמְעִי קוֹל צַעֲקָתֵךְ . |
| Your sin is over, O Daughter of Zion; He will no longer exile you. | תַּם עֲוֹנֵךְ . בַּת צִיּוֹן . לֹא יוֹסִיף לְהַגְלוֹתֵךְ . |
| Lo, I am going to get up on vengeance day, and take vengeance for you. | הִנְנִי קָם . בְּיוֹם נָקָם . וְלָקַחְתִּי נִקְמָתֵךְ . |
| Then your adversaries and your persecutors will perish from my presence. | וְשׂוֹטְנַיִךְ . וּמוֹנַיִךְ . אָז יֹאבְדוּ מִפָּנַי . |

I think that anyone that understands Hebrew, and has read poems by the earlier Karaites, will immediately have the sensation that this poem comes from the pen of a Rabbanite poem. However, in case one wants to obstinately argue the opposite, I will present here the sources and bases on which the foundations of this wonderful poem are based.

The whole stanza “Remember the scorn and the blasphemy of the Ammonites and Moabites”, etc., is based on the story told by Ḥazal (Yoma 54): “Resh Laqish said: When the idolaters entered the Temple, they saw the cherubs enlocked with one another (=clinging and embracing each other). They brought them out to the street, and said: ‘These Jews – whose blessing is a blessing and their curse is a curse – occupy themselves with things such as this!’ Immediately, they scorned them, as it is said: *All that honored her now scorn her, for they have seen her nakedness.*”

Similarly,[[10]](#footnote-10) in the dirges for the Ninth of Av, in the poem that begins “For the destruction of the Temple”, etc., the poet based his poem on this story, saying there: “The Ammonites and Moabites were in error, and they brought out the cherubs, and brought them around in a cage: ‘Look, the House of Judah are like all the nations!’”

In the end of the third stanza: “And they destroyed eighty thousand of my priests” – the number 80,000 is based on the words of R. Jochanan (Gittin 57b; Yerushalmi Ta‘anith 4:5, Ekha Rabba on verse 2:2): “Eighty thousand young priests were killed for the blood of Zechariah.”

The Qalliri, too, based [a line] on this in his poem “If women eat their own progeny”: “If, for innocent blood, the necks are broken of eighty thousand anointed priests”. (He adds the word “anointed”, *meshuḥim*, for the sake of the rhyme *-ḥim*; for in the Talmud it says “young priests”. On the other hand, in the poem “How can you console me in vain”, etc., it says, more accurately: “He killed multitudes, anointed with oil, in [the place] desired by the faithful; young priests, eighty thousand.”

I write and sign this here in Kiev, ‘Erev Rosh Ḥodesh Menaḥem Av, in the year *Teraḥem Ẓiyyon*.[[11]](#footnote-11) May the good Lord once again have compassion for us. Amen.

1. D. Dubsewitz
1. The letter *hé* here likely stands for *he-ḥakham*. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Dubsewitz writes simply the initials, *alef-beth-gimmel*. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Dubsewitz explicitly that the Arabic numerals refer to page numbers; the Hebrew numerals probably refer to folio numbers. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The *hé* seems to be a Hebrew numeral for “five”; however, if so, then it is unclear what the Roman number “VII” means, directly following it. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Dubsewitz means: There are three possibilites for how the Karaites ended up with a changed text. (a) Copying errors within the Karaite tradition; (b) the Karaites received a Rabbanite text that had already been marred by errors within the Rabbanite copying tradition; (c) a third reason, which he will not mention here; this clearly refers to intentional censorship, something best not discussed outright, especially in the Russian Empire, hence the ellipsis at the end of his words. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. I would have expected the vocalization בהיכַל רם, with *pathaḥ*, in the construct state, and thus: “in the Temple of the Lofty One [=God]”, but both Vilna and Dubsevitz have *qameẓ*. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. See Midrash Ekha Rabba, Proem §9: “When the enemies entered Jerusalem, Ammonites and Moabites entered with them, as it is said: *The adversary hath spread out his hand upon all her treasures; for she hath seen that the heathen are entered into her sanctuary, concerning whom Thou didst command that they should not enter into Thy congregation.* (Lam. 1:9) They entered the Holy of Holies, and there they found the two Cherubim. They took them and put them in a cage, and brought them all around the streets of Jerusalem, and said: “Didn’t you say that this nation did not worship idolatry? Look what we have found of theirs, what they worship!” The identification of the people “whom Thou didst command that they should not enter into Thy congregation” as Ammon and Moab is based on Deuteronomy 23:3: *An Ammonite or a Moabite shall not enter into the congregation of the Lord*.” [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. The Ishmaelites; according to Genesis 25:13, the second son of Ishmael was named Kedar. (Later on, “Kedar” came to be a Jewish term for the Turks; Turkish languages, including the Karaim language, were called *leshon qedar*.) According to Midrash Tanḥuma (regular printed edition), Yithro §5 (and other rabbinic sources), when the Babylonians led the Israelites in chains into exile, they begged their captors to bring them by the way of the land of the Ishmaelites, their cousins; their captors indeed led them their, but the Ishmaelites treated them there with terrible cruelty, giving them very salty bread and brine, and containers filled not with water but with burning hot air. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. According to Ekha Rabbai, Proem §23, Nebudazaran killed 80,000 young priests. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. This paragraph is not about our poem; rather, Dubsewitz, is citing a parallel from a different poem. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. A chronogram for [5]648, i.e. 1888 CE; the words mean “May You have compassion for Zion,” a verse recited in the Rabbanite liturgy of the Fast of Av, and I would guess also the Karaite liturgy. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)