

## Genesis 5:24 in Karaite Exegesis: Printed Commentaries

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**ABSTRACT:** This article addresses the niche problem of interpreting the text of Gen 5:24 “Enoch walked with God and he was not, for God took him” in Karaite exegetical literature. It aims to investigate with what technique this crucial text for Enochian literature was read and explained in biblical commentaries belonging to the canon of Karaite exegetical literature, and especially how the meaning of the verb “took” was interpreted. The subject of this study is the passages concerning the character of Enoch that are attested in three Hebrew-language commentaries published in print, dating from the 13th, 14th, and 19th centuries. These are *Sefer ha-mivhar ve-tov ha-mishar* by Aaron ben Joseph, *Sefer keter Torah* by Aaron ben Elijah, and *Tirat kesef* by Joseph Solomon ben Moses Lutski. All these commentaries were printed by the Karaite printing press in Gözleve (Eupatoria) in the 19th century and were used for educational purposes, including in the Polish-Lithuanian Karaite communities. Except for small fragments, these commentaries have never been translated or critically edited. The editions of the commentaries on Gen 5:24 included in this article provide a representative illustration of the peculiarities of Karaite biblical exegesis in the period from the late Middle Ages onward.

**KEYWORDS:** exegesis of Genesis 5:24, Karaite exegesis, Enoch, Enochic literature

Genesis 5:24, which is the cornerstone of Enochic literature, has undoubtedly stirred the emotions of theologians since antiquity and has caused controversy as to the proper meaning of the unique phrase contained therein, “And he was not, for God took him.” The presence of eleven Aramaic manuscripts of the *Book of Enoch* (*1 En.*) in the Essene library at Qumran is a testimony to the importance that the Essenes, among others, attached to the figure of Enoch and at the same time an indication of how they understood the passage of Gen 5:24. It is well known that the New Testament is also evidence of a similar reception of the text of Gen 5:24 in the community of early Christians.<sup>1</sup> The fact that this text was later also read in many Jewish circles as a testimony to Enoch’s being taken up into heaven during his lifetime is well attested by both apocryphal literature (*Hekhalot* texts) and Midrashic and Kabbalistic literature.<sup>2</sup> Adherents of the mystical varieties of Judaism were evidently

<sup>1</sup> See Heb 11:5; see also the Epistle of Jude, verses 14–15, which quotes the text of *1 En.* 1:9.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, the *Targum of Jonathan* (Gen 5:24): “Enoch truly worshipped the Lord. And behold, he was not with the inhabitants of the land, for he was taken away. He ascended into the firmament at the command of the Lord. And He called him Metatron, the Great Scribe”; Tractate *Derekh Eretz Zutta* 1:18: “Nine entered the Garden of Eden during their lifetime. They are: Enoch son of Jared, Elijah, Messiah, Eliezer servant of

inclined to see Enoch as a supernatural, even angelic figure – a man of perfect piety who was rewarded by God with a transfer to heaven during his lifetime. This approach, however, was not shared in dogmatic rabbinic Judaism, where the indicated text of Gen 5:24 was generally legalistically read as a mere, albeit stylised, textual account of death, and Enoch himself was regarded as a fully human figure (see, for example, the comments on Gen 5:24 by Saadia Gaon [882–942] and Solomon Yitzhaqi, Rashi [1040–1105]). Such an approach is, of course, an implication of Judaism’s theological doctrine, in which a clearer distinction is made between the earthly material world and the heavenly spiritual world, and one of the core dogmas concerns God’s incorporeality. Nevertheless, Rabbanite biblical commentaries note the existence of midrashic mystical literature describing Enoch’s ascension during his lifetime (see, for example, the authoritative commentaries of Abraham ibn Ezra and Radak).

This study analyses three Karaite biblical commentaries published in the Crimea in the Karaite community of Gözleve (Eupatoria) in 1834/1835 and 1866/1867. They were apparently intended for the study and teaching of the Torah text. Two of them – *Sefer ha-mivhar ve-tov ha-mishar* and *Sefer keter Torah* – date from the late Middle Ages (i.e., the Byzantine period<sup>3</sup>), while one – *Tirat kesef* – dates from the 19th century and is a supercommentary on *Sefer ha-mivhar ve-tov ha-mishar*. They undoubtedly testify to the normative interpretation of Karaite exegesis in the period since the 13th century. Although they are a continuation of the early Judeo-Arabic Karaite school of exegesis (represented by Yefet ben Eli and Yeshuah ben Judah, among others),<sup>4</sup> they apply a new type of exegesis that took

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Abraham, Hiram king of Tyre, Ebed king of Kush, Jabez son of R. Judah the Prince, Bithiah daughter of Pharaoh, Serah daughter of Asher. Some say, also R. Joshua son of Levi.”; *Midrash Aggadah on Genesis 5:24*: “Enoch walked with God. With the angels he walked three hundred years. In the Garden of Eden he was with them. He learned from them the counting of time, the seasons, the constellations, and much wisdom. And he was not, for God took him. Because he was righteous, the Holy One, blessed be He, took him from among men and made him an angel. He is the Metatron. There is a controversy between Rabbi Akiba and his companions on this point. The scholars say that Enoch was once righteous and once sinful (see *Midrash Bereshit Rabbah* 25). The Holy One, blessed be He, said: ‘As long as he remains in his righteousness, I will take him out of the world.’ That is, ‘I will kill him,’ just as it was said: ‘Behold, I take away from you that which pleases your eyes through the plague’” (Ezek 24:16). Cf. also Radak’s commentary on Gen 5:24: “According to the opinion of the Targum and some of our scholars (the treatise *Sefer Derekh Eretz [Zutta]*), Enoch and Elijah were brought into the Garden of Eden alive, soul and body. They are still living there, eating the fruit of the tree, serving the Lord, just as the first Adam did before he sinned. And they will be there until the Messianic days.” (Similar statement also appears in the commentary on 2 Kgs 2:1). In the case of Kabbalistic literature, a good testimony to the mystical reception of the figure of Enoch is the commentary of Bahya ben Asher (1255–1340), a disciple of Nahmanides, see the comments on Gen 5:24 and Lev 18:5; see also A. Afterman – I. Pinto, “On Apotheosis in the Kabbalah of Rabbi Bahya ben Asher,” *Turbiz* 87/3 (2020) 463–499.

3 See, for example, D. Frank, “Karaite Exegesis,” *Hebrew Bible / Old Testament. The History of Its Interpretation*. I. *From the Beginnings to the Middle Ages (Until 1300)*. 2. *The Middle Ages* (ed. M. Sæbo) (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2000) 126–128; D. Frank, “Karaite Exegetical and Halakic Literature in Byzantium and Turkey,” *Karaite Judaism. A Guide to Its History and Literary Sources* (ed. M. Polliack) (Handbook of Oriental Studies 73; Leiden – Boston: Brill 2003) 536–548; M.Z. Cohen, *The Rule of Peshat. Jewish Constructions of the Plain Sense of Scripture and Their Christian and Muslim Contexts, 900–1270* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press 2020) 32, 167–168, 172.

4 See, for example, Frank, “Karaite Exegetical,” 538–539; D.J. Lasker, *From Judah Hadassi to Elijah Bashyatchi. Studies in Late Medieval Karaite Philosophy* (Supplements to the Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy 4;

shape under the strong influence of the rabbinic-philological and contextual Andalusian school of exegesis.<sup>5</sup> In particular, such exegetes as Abraham ibn Ezra (1089–1164), David Kimhi, Radak (1160–1235), and Moshe ben Nahman, Nahmanides (1194–1270). Importantly, this new Karaite exegetical school was also strongly influenced by the rationalist ideas of Moshe ben Maimon, Maimonides (1138–1204), which were disseminated in Karaite circles through, among others, Aaron ben Elijah's (ca. 1329–1369) famous treatise *Sefer es hayyim* of 1346 (the Karaite equivalent of *More nevu'chim*). Thus, the ideas of Greek philosophy, especially Aristotelianism, heavily infiltrated into Karaite theology.<sup>6</sup>

This study does not examine the early Karaite exegetical literature in Judeo-Arabic. However, it quotes the Hebrew version of the commentary on Gen 5:24 by Yeshuah ben Judah (a prominent representative of the Jerusalem school of exegetics, 11th century), which is its representative testimony.

The commentaries that are the subject of this article were, as a rule, written according to the methodology developed in early Karaism.<sup>7</sup> The basic principle of Karaite exegesis was logical inference by the method of analogy (*heqesh*), which involved confronting the textual segment under analysis with other relevant textual segments of the Hebrew Bible. This usually revealed the basic meaning of the text, i.e., reading at the level of the literal and exact meaning determined by the context, which was called פֶּשַׁט *peshat*<sup>8</sup> (hence this method is called 'literal-contextual' or 'philological-contextual,' which does not exclude readings of figurative meanings). Great attention was paid to the grammatical and semantic aspects of

Leiden – Boston: Brill 2008) 62; J. Yeshaya, "Aaron ben Joseph's Poem for *Pānāshat Yitrō* Considered in Light of His Torah Commentary *Sefer ha-mivhar*" *Exegesis and Poetry in Medieval Karaite and Rabanite Texts* (eds. J. Yeshaya – E. Hollender) (Karaite Texts and Studies 9, Études sur le judaïsme médiéval 68; Leiden – Boston: Brill 2017) 220.

5 See, for example, Frank, "Karaite Exegesis," 127–128; Frank, "Karaite Exegetical," 540, 546; Cohen, *The Rule of Peshat*, 68–94.

6 Of note, later Karaite commentaries cite Themistius and Alexander of Aphrodisias by name, in addition to Aristotle himself (see the *Maamar Mordekhai* commentary). Cf. also Saskia Dönitz's characterization of the Jewish exegetical schools of Shemarya ben Eliyya ha-Parnas of Crete (d. 1360). Shemarya ben Eliyya singles out as one of the currents in the Karaite community (which rejected the oral Torah) the rationalist (philosophical, Aristotelian) exegetical school, using external sciences. Cf. S. Dönitz, "Shemarya ha-Ikriti and the Karaite Exegetical Challenge," *Exegesis and Poetry in Medieval Karaite and Rabanite Texts* (eds. J. Yeshaya – E. Hollender) (Karaite Texts and Studies 9, Études sur le judaïsme médiéval 68; Leiden – Boston: Brill 2017) 234–236.

7 On the specificity of Karaite exegesis in Judeo-Arabic Bible translations and commentaries, see, for example, M. Polliack, *The Karaite Tradition of Arabic Bible Translation. A Linguistic and Exegetical Study of Karaite Translations of the Pentateuch from the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries C.E.* (Études sur le judaïsme médiéval 17; Leiden – New York – Köln: Brill 1997); M. Polliack, "Medieval Karaite Methods of Translating Biblical Narratives into Arabic," *VT* 48/3 (1998) 375–398; M. Polliack, "Major Trends in Karaite Biblical Exegesis in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries," *Karaite Judaism. A Guide to Its History and Literary Sources* (ed. M. Polliack) (Handbook of Oriental Studies 73; Leiden – Boston: Brill 2003) 363–413; M. Zawanowska, *The Arabic Translation and Commentary of Yefet ben Eli the Karaite on the Abraham Narratives (Genesis 11:10–25:18). Edition and Introduction* (Karaite Texts and Studies 4; Études sur le judaïsme médiéval 46; Leiden – Boston: Brill 2012) 59–90, 155–190; Cohen, *The Rule of Peshat*, 27–67.

8 Note that the term *peshat* was used to refer to translations of the biblical text into everyday languages used by Karaites, including when teaching children.

the lexemes. A search was made for a correct meaning, logical and at the same time consistent with other passages of the biblical text (sometimes alternative solutions were proposed). In doing so, it programmatically rejected the supremacy of traditional rabbinic exegesis and avoided its characteristic midrashic interpretations as well as limited allegorical interpretations. As a rule, the mode of exegesis was not conditioned by *halakhab* (there was no requirement for the reading to be consistent with the rabbinic exegetical tradition).<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, over time, exegetical norms developed within the Karaite milieu itself, which were respected and transmitted (they were called *sevel yerushah* “yoke of inheritance,” or *baataqah* “translation” / “transmission,” in the sense of a transmitted way of reading/understanding).<sup>10</sup> As in Rabbanite exegesis, the basic types of textual interpretation in Karaite exegesis are contained in the mnemonic term *pardes* “orchard,” in which the individual letters correspond to the initials of the terms *peshat*, *remez*, *derash*, and *sod*. *Peshat* denotes the aforementioned literal and widely used technique of interpretation, in which the meaning is determined based on the semantic information contained in the lexemes and phrases, as well as the usus and, moreover, the biblical context. *Remez*, usually translated as “allegory” or “allusion,” refers to the presumed meaning of a passage (not derived from usus) determined also by reference to other passages of the Bible. Both of these terms are common in Karaite commentaries. *Derash* is a type of homiletical and midrashic interpretation (symbolic, figurative, determined also by premises outside the biblical text, characteristic of targums, among others),<sup>11</sup> and *sod* is a type of interpretation relating to esoteric meaning.

9 Cf., e.g., Polliack, *The Karaite Tradition*, 192. In this context, it is worth quoting Ibn Ezra’s statement on Karaite exegesis, i.e., the exegesis of the pre-Maimonidean period, which, although subjective and critical, reveals some of its specificities. In the introduction to the “Commentary on the Torah,” in which he describes the methods of exegesis, he writes (in poetic language): “The second method. It was chosen by the twisted, though they were Israelites. Those who thought they had reached the core, although they did not find out where it was. This is the way of the Sadducees (Heb. *tzedukim*, in the sense of ‘Karaites’), such as Anan, Benjamin, Ben Messiah, Yeshuah and all the sectarians who distrust the words of the interpreters of the Law, turning this to the left and that to the right. Each one interprets verses according to his own will, even concerning commandments and laws. They have no knowledge of the sources of the sacred language. That’s why they err even in grammatical matters. How can one rely on their opinions regarding the commandments? They often change position from one to the other, depending on how they recognise it. And this is because one will not find in the Torah a single commandment that is explained in all that it requires.” And in the last paragraph: “And God forbid that we mix with the Sadducees, who say that their (i.e., the ‘Rabbanites’) translation contradicts the Scripture and the grammatical rules.” For the meaning of the term *tzedukim*, see J. Fitzmyer, J., *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Christian Origins* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 2000) 249–260. For criticism of Ibn Ezra, see G. Margoliouth, “The Writings of Abu’l-Faraj Furkan ibn Asad,” *JQR* 11/2 (1899) 195; D. Frank, “Ibn Ezra and the Karaite Exegetes Aaron ben Joseph and Aaron ben Elijah,” *Abraham Ibn Ezra y su tiempo* (ed. F. Díaz Esteban) (Madrid: Asociación Española de Orientalistas 1990) 102–103; D. Frank, *Search Scripture Well. Karaite Exegetes and the Origins of Jewish Bible Commentary in the Islamic East* (Études sur le judaïsme médiéval 29; Leiden – Boston: Brill 2004) 248; Cohen, *The Rule of Peshat*, 226.

10 Cf. Frank, “Karaite Exegetical,” 537–538.

11 For a discussion of the semantic relationship between *derash* and *peshat*, see L.R. Charlap, “Peshat and Derash in Karaite Biblical Exegesis in Byzantium: A Study of Aaron ben Joseph,” *Pé amim* 101–102 (2004–2005) 199–220; L.R. Charlap, “The Interpretive Method of the Karaite Aaron ben Joseph: Uniqueness versus Conformity,” *REJ* 172 (2013) 125–143. On the semantic functions of these terms, see also Ph. Miller, [with revisions by J. Yeshaya and E. Hollender], “The Methods of Judah Gibbor’s Biblical Exegesis in *Mimhat Yēbūdā*”

## 1. Karaite Commentaries under Study

### a) *Sefer ha-mivḥar ve-tov ha-miṣḥar* (hereafter cited as *Sefer ha-mivḥar*)

Undoubtedly, the most influential Karaite commentary on the Torah is the *Sefer ha-mivḥar ve-tov ha-miṣḥar* (Book of What Is Most Choice and What Is Best to Trade), written in 1294. Its author is Aaron ben Joseph, the Elder (also known by the nicknames ‘the First’ and ‘the Physician’). He lived between 1250 and 1320 and did his literary work in Constantinople (he was a native of the Crimea). The *Sefer ha-mivḥar* was published in print in 1834/1835 in the Karaite community of Gözleve, along with a supercommentary by Joseph Solomon Lutski entitled *Tirat kesef* (Watchtower of Silver). It should be noted here that in the edition compiled by Joseph Solomon Lutski, the texts of the two commentaries, which are placed side by side (*Sefer ha-mivḥar* in the edition in square script, and *Tirat kesef* in Rashi script), are divided (in addition to the division into books and parashot) into short paragraphs marked with numerical symbols (with separate pagination for each parashah). Aaron ben Joseph is also the author of commentaries on the books of the Writings and Prophets (published in print under the title *Sefer miḥar yesharim* with a commentary by Abraham Firkovich *Zekhor le-Avraham* in Gözleve in 1834), as well as the Psalms.

The commentary *Sefer ha-mivḥar* is characterised by its brevity and communicativeness. The explanations of the biblical passages are factual, but not exhaustive, as if they were written for educated readers, representing a reasonably advanced level of biblical and theological knowledge, for whom there is no need to describe in depth and detail all the issues raised. At the same time, one might have the impression that this technique of formulating statements was dictated by caution. It enabled one to avoid controversial issues easily. It was this concise style of commentary that gave rise to several supplementary supercommentaries to *Sefer ha-mivḥar* in the following centuries, the most famous of which is the aforementioned *Tirat kesef*. A distinctive feature of *Sefer ha-mivḥar* is its references to Rabbanite exegesis, especially the contextual-philological exegesis represented by Ibn Ezra. The commentary is philological in nature and abounds in linguistic observations. Importantly, references to Aristotle’s metaphysics (absent in earlier Karaite commentaries) are evident.<sup>12</sup>

### b) *Sefer keter Torah*

The second widely known Byzantine commentary on the Torah is the *Sefer keter Torah* (Book of the Crown of the Torah) from 1362. Its author is Aaron ben Elijah, the Younger (also known by the nicknames ‘the Latter’ and ‘of Nicomedia’). He wrote his works in Constantinople, Byzantium. He died in 1369 (his date of birth is uncertain). He was one of the most authoritative Karaite scholars of the rationalist current and has been

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*Exegesis and Poetry in Medieval Karaite and Rabanite Texts* (eds. J. Yeshaya – E. Hollender) (Karaite Texts and Studies 9, Études sur le judaïsme médiéval 68; Leiden – Boston: Brill 2017) 256–264.

<sup>12</sup> On the distinctive features of the exegetical school of Aaron ben Joseph, see Frank, “Ibn Ezra,” 99–107; Frank, “Karaite Exegetical,” 536–541; Charlap, “Peshat and Derash,” 199–220; Lasker, *From Judah Hadassi*, 60–68; Charlap, “The Interpretive Method,” 125–143; Yeshaya, “Aaron ben Joseph’s Poem,” 220–222.

compared to Maimonides. He is the author of two fundamental theological treatises: *Eš hayyim* (The Tree of Life) (from 1346) and *Gan Eden* (The Garden of Eden) (from 1354). The *Sefer keter Torah* was published in print in 1866–1867 in Gözleve. In this edition, prepared by Abraham Firkovich, the text of the commentary is divided only into books, parashot and chapters (there is no division into paragraphs or numerical markings). It should be noted that small portions of this commentary were translated into Latin and published in print, first by the Swiss theologian Johann Ludwig Frey (1862–1759) under the title *Excerpta nonnulla ex commentario inedito R. Aharonis ben Joseph Judaei Caraitae* (1705, Amsterdam) and then by the German theologian and Orientalist Joannes Godofredus Ludovicus Kosegarten (1792–1860) under the title *Libri coronae legis* (1824, Jena). *Sefer keter Torah* bears characteristic similarities to *Sefer ha-mivhar* in the method and scope of its explanations while containing additions and corrections to that commentary. At times it is characterised by a more rigorous and rationalistic approach to the text of the Bible, while at the same time displaying a certain exegetical originality.<sup>13</sup> Of note, at the beginning of the explanation of Gen 5:24, Aaron ben Elijah refers to the commentary of Yeshuah ben Judah (Jerusalem School, 11th century), which represents early Karaite (pre-Maimonidean) biblical exegesis.

### c) *Tirat kesef*

As mentioned above, the commentary *Tirat kesef* (The Watchtower of Silver) was published together with the text of *Sefer ha-mivhar* in 1834/1835 in Gözleve. The author of the commentary is Joseph Solomon ben Moses Lutski (of Lutsk, Pol. Łuck), known by the nickname *Yashar* – ‘Righteous’ (an acronym for ‘Josef Shelomo Rav’). He was born in Kukizov (Pol. Kukizów) near Lviv and died in Gözleve in 1844 at the age of 75. From 1803, he worked in the Karaite community of Gözleve, where he served as rav, hazzan and teacher (melammed). He was one of the spiritual leaders of the Karaite community in the Crimea. Among other things, he is the author of a primer for the study of Biblical Hebrew, entitled *Petaḥ ha-tevah* (An Introduction to the Words) (1825; printed in Constantinople in 1831).<sup>14</sup>

*Tirat kesef* is a complete, comprehensive supercommentary on *Sefer ha-mivhar*, which systematically explains the comments of Aaron ben Joseph. It was completed by Joseph Solomon Lutski as early as 1825, apparently with the intention of printing it together with *Sefer ha-mivhar*.<sup>15</sup> It is definitely educational in nature, clear, written in precise language,

13 On the *Sefer keter Torah* and the works of Aaron ben Elijah, see Frank, “Karaite Exegetical,” 541–549; Lasker, *From Judah Hadasi*, 69–95.

14 For the biography of Joseph Solomon Lutski, see also S. Poznański, *The Karaite Literary Opponents of Saadiah Gaon* (London: Luzac 1908) 220.

15 See manuscripts D78 (commentary on Genesis and Exodus) and D77 (on Leviticus-Deuteronomy) in the collection of the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts, where the text of *Sefer ha-Mivhar* was transcribed together with *Tirat kesef* in two volumes (dated 1825–1827). It is most likely an autograph. In it, the text, both *Sefer ha-mivhar* and *Tirat kesef*, is divided into paragraphs and marked with numerical symbols, as in the printed text. The commentary on Gen 5:24 is found in manuscript D78 on folio 33 recto-verso.

and relatively easy to understand. The aesthetically pleasing editorial design, with its division into paragraphs and numerical marking of the paragraphs, undoubtedly contributed to the popularization of this authoritative and official commentary in the Karaite community. Joseph Solomon Lutski cited the need to expand on Aaron ben Yosef's concise explanations as the primary reason for its writing. He cited Mordecai ben Nisan's earlier, authoritative supercommentary *Sefer Maamar Mordekhai* (see *Sefer ha-mivhar*, Gözleve 1834/1835, folio 5 verso), which he undoubtedly used extensively. In connection with this edition, a controversy arose between Joseph Solomon Lutski and another prominent Karaite biblical scholar, Lutski's relative David ben Mordecai Kukizovi (of Kukizov, Pol. Kukizów; 1777–1855), who had already made efforts to print *Sefer ha-mivhar* with the commentary *Maamar Mordekhai*.<sup>16</sup>

## 2. Edition of the Commentaries

a) *Sefer ha-mivhar* by Aaron ben Joseph (Gözleve edition 1834/1835, *Bereshit*, folios 29 verso – 30 recto)

Hebrew text:

- Par. 510: ויתהלך חנוך . כענין את האלהים התהלך נח : ברצותו את האלהים<sup>17</sup> (איוב לד) כי לקח אותו אלהים
- Par. 511: לקח כטעם מיתה . או המיר מלת מיתה במלת לקיחה . להורות בהשארות הנפש : בענין כי יקחני סלה (תלים מט) וכן אם תראה אותי לקח מאתך (מלכים ב' ב') :
- Par. 512: ואל תתמה שמלת לקיחה כוללת הגויה והנשמה . שהנשמה היא השרש בחיים ובמות :
- Par. 513: כי גוית החסידים כדמות הנשמה כי יתבטלו כל כחותיה . וכתוב ויאסף אל עמיו (ראשית מט לג') :
- Par. 514: והמתבונן באליהו סוסי אש ורכב אש יבין דבר :
- Par. 515: ואדרתו עדות לגויתו :
- Par. 516: ואל יטעך מאמר ויבוא אליו מכתב מאליהו (ד"ה ב' כא) :
- Par. 517: ויהורם בן אחאב ויהושפט שאלו לאלישע הנביא ושם כתוב אשר יצק מים על ידי אליהו (מלכים ב' ג') בעד שהיה ולא בעד שעתידי :

16 Cf. *Iggeret Shigayon le-David* (folio 1 verso) by Josef Solomon Lutski (letter included at the end of the printed edition of *Sefer ha-mivhar*, Gözleve 1834/1835; in it, Josef Solomon Lutski cites and responds to David ben Mordecai's 14 criticisms of his commentary). See S. Poznański, "Karäische Drucke und Druckereien," *Zeitschrift für Hebräische Bibliographie* 21/4–6 (1918) 78–79; cf. also "Preface" (ראשית דבר) by Yosef Algamil in: David ben Mordecai Kukizov, *Sefer šemah David*. I.3. *Mahberet sukkat David* (ed. Joseph ben Ovadya Algamil, Ashdod: Tiferet Yosef le-ḥeqer ha-yahadut ha-qarait 2004) 29. Notably, later (1848), David ben Mordecai wrote his own supercommentary on *Sefer ha-mivhar* entitled *Mahberet sukkat David* (The Book of David's Sukkah) (printed in St Petersburg in 1897), which is strongly influenced by *Maamar Mordekhai*. Regarding Gen 5:24, he wrote only a short passage on the statement relating to Elijah in par. 516–519 of *Sefer ha-mivhar* (Gözleve edition 1834/1835). See David ben Mordecai Kukizov, *Sefer šemah David*. III. *Mahberet sukkat David* (ed. Nisan ben David Kukizov) (St Petersburg [s.n.]: 1897) 140.

17 Instead of אלהים עם.

- Par. 518: והקשה שבכלם כי לא נפרד ממנו עד עלותו :  
 Par. 519: ונסב פנים מזה . ואשר זכר ויהי כל ימי חנוך ולא אמר ויהיו כמו שכתוב בכלם :  
 Par. 520: והוא כמו יהי מאורות (ראשית א') ומעוט שניו אולי תדענו מקלקול דורו שלא יקלקלוהו .  
 ואריכות הימים י"ל מדרך נס . או נאמר כי האדם נברא במעשי ידי הבורא והנולדים כדמות המולידים .  
 וכאשר בא המבול ונתקלקל האיור עליהם והלכו ימיהם הלוך וחסור .

Translation:

Par. 510: *Enoch walked. As in With God walked Noah [Gen 6:9],<sup>18</sup> and his desire is to be with God [Job 34:[9]]. For God took him.*

Par. 511: *Took* in the sense of “death.” Or: He replaced the word “death” with the word “taking” to indicate the remaining of the soul. As *for He will take me* (Ps. 49:[16]). And likewise: *If you see me when I am taken from you* (2 Kings 2:[10]).

Par. 512: Don't be surprised that the word “taking” includes both body and soul. For the soul is the core in life and in death.

Par. 513: As for the body of the pious, which is in the likeness of the soul, all its powers are abolished. As it is written: *And he was taken to his ancestors*<sup>19</sup> (Gen 49:33).

Par. 514: And whoever considers Elijah, the horses of fire, and the chariot of fire, will understand. [2 Kgs 2:11]

Par. 515: And his cloak is a testimony to his body. [2 Kgs 2:13]

Par. 516: And do not be deceived by the statement: *A letter came to him from Elijah* (2 Chr 21:12).

Par. 517: Jehoram the son of Ahab and Jehoshaphat asked Elisha the prophet. And it is written, *who poured water on the hands of Elijah* (2 Kings 3:[11]). With reference to what was, not with reference to the future.

Par. 518: And the hardest thing is that he was not separated from him until he ascended.

Par. 519: But let us leave it at that.<sup>20</sup> And as for what is to be remembered, *Let there be all the days of Enoch*. He did not say: *were*,<sup>21</sup> as it is written of all (others).

Par. 520: It is like: *Let there be luminous bodies* (Genesis 1:[14]).<sup>22</sup> The shortening of the years, as you may know, was because of the depravity of his generation – lest they deprave him. The prolongation of life should be explained to be by means of a miracle. Or it may be said that Adam was created by the acts of the Creator's hands, and that those who are born are like those who give birth. But when the Flood came and their air became polluted, their life span began to decrease.<sup>23</sup>

18 The brackets [] include words added in translation.

19 Literally, “and was gathered to his peoples”: ויאסף אל עמיו.

20 Literally, “We will turn our face away from it.”

21 I.e., ויהיו, but ויהי.

22 Cf. Bahya ben Asher's commentary on Gen 5:23, quoted below in footnote 37.

23 Reference to *More newukhim* II:47. Parallels are evident with Nahmanides' commentary on Gen 5:3–4: “*And he begat (a son) like him, looking like him* (Gen 5:3). It is well known that all who are born of the living will be like those who give birth and look like them. But since Adam was exalted by his likeness and appearance, as was said of him: *In the likeness of God He made him* (Gen 5:1), he explains here that his descendants also displayed



b) *Sefer keter Torah* by Aaron ben Elijah  
(Gözleve edition 1866, folios 32 recto – 32 verso)

Hebrew text:

Folio 32 recto

ויתהלך חנוך את האלהים . אמר ר' ישועה נ"ע בשביל בעלי הקבלה שדברו בו דברים תסמר שערת הבשר שהשכל לא יכיל והפשט לא יסבלם ואפילו שהיה סובל אותם הפשט הואיל והכתוב דבר באמת ומעבר דין היה

Folio 32 verso

להוציאם מפשרטם אחרי שלא יכילם השכל כאשר עשינו במקומות אחרים כיוצא בהם . אמנם מה שאמר : ויתהלך חנוך את האלהים . כבר מצאנו כיוצא בו את האלהים התהלך נח (בראשית ו ט) . ומה שאמר : ואיננו כי לקח אותנו אלהים . כיון שמצאנו הנני לוקח ממך את מחמד עיניך (יחזקאל כד טז) ונאמר ותמת אשתי (שם ושם יח) אפשר שיהיה ענין מיתה . ואפשר בעבור שאספת הצדיקים מכנה אותה הכתוב בלשון לקיחה כיון שנאמר בו ויתהלך חנוך את האלהים יהיה דמיון ואיננו כי לקח אותנו אלהים כמו כי יקחני סלה (תהלים מט טז) . ואחר כבוד תקחני (שם עג כד) . ואין הטעם הגויה עם הנשמה . ואם מצאנו אם תראה אותי לקח מאתך (מלכים ב ב י) ספק הוא לחכמים שרוצה הנפש עם הגויה . והנה סוסי אש ורכב אש פירוק היסודות ואדרתו עדות לגויתו . והמביאים ראייה מן ויבא אליו מכתב מאליהו (ד"ה ב כא יב) שהוא אחרי שלקח הנה כתוב ואת אלישע בן שפט תמשח לנביא תחתיך (מלכים א יט טז) אכן מה שיש להחזיק ידי אמונה במה שנאמר לאלישע ממה שהשיב להם המשכיל יבין דבר . ואולם ממעוט שני חנוך למדו אנשי דורו כדי שלא יתקלקל בקלקול אנשי דורו הלך בקוצר ימים כי מפני הרעה נאסף הצדיק . על כן נאמר ואיננו כי לקח אותנו אלהים ואריכות הימים יש אומרים מדרך נס כדי שיהיה חדוש העולם נמסר במעוט פרקי דורות שלא יסופק . ויש אומרים מפני שהנולדים שנולדו מאדם היו בחזקת הטבע ועל כן האריכו ימים עד שבא המבול ונתקלקל האויר ונתמעטו ימיהם מעט מעט .

Translation:

Folio 32 recto

*Enoch walked with God.* R. Yeshuah,<sup>24</sup> may he rest in the Garden of Eden, said about the Rabbanites who said about him words – that make your hair stand on end – that the mind cannot grasp and the *peshat* cannot bear,<sup>25</sup> and even if the *peshat* could bear them, since the Scripture speaks the truth, it would be a breach of principle

this exquisite likeness in the same way. [...] The reason for their long life is that the first Adam was the work of the hands of the Holy One, blessed be He. He was made absolutely perfect in beauty, strength, and height. Even though he was later punished with mortality, it was in his nature to live a long time. And when the earth was visited by the Flood, the air became polluted for them, and their days became shorter and shorter. And some of them lived longer than Adam. [...] And the statement of the Rav [Maimondes], which he recorded in *More newukhim* (II:47), that the long years (of life) were only for those individuals who were mentioned, and the rest of the people of those generations had years of natural, ordinary life, does not seem to me to be appropriate. And he said that this transformation of this person occurred through lifestyle and nutrition, or by means of a miracle. But these are empty words. [...]” See also Radak’s comments on Gen 5:3, 24 and Joseph Bekhor Shor’s commentary on Gen 5:24 (quoted below in footnote 29).

<sup>24</sup> A reference to Yeshuah ben Judah’s explanation in *Beresbit Rabbah*, quoted below.

<sup>25</sup> I.e., they cannot be derived from the meaning of the text of Gen 5:24 (and its parts) in accordance with linguistic and logical norms.

## Folio 32 verso

to exclude them from the literal meaning, while the mind cannot grasp them. This is what we have done in other similar places. Indeed, with regard to what he said, *Enoch walked with God*, we have already found a similar (statement): *Noah walked with God* (Gen 6:9). And what he said, *And he was not, for God took him*, we have also found: *Behold, I take away from you that which pleases your eyes* (Ezek 24:16). And it was said: *And my wife died* (Ezek 24:18). It is possible that this refers to death. And it is possible that since Scripture calls the “gathering”<sup>26</sup> of the righteous by the term “taking,”<sup>27</sup> as it says there: *Enoch walked with God*, then there is a similarity to this: *And he was not, for God took him*. The same as *For he will take me. Sela* (Ps 49:16) (and) *And afterwards, in glory, you will take me* (Ps 73:24). And this is not in the sense of the body with the soul. And if we find: *If you see me when I am taken from you* (2 Kgs 2:10), it is doubtful to scholars that this is about the soul with the body. And behold, the horses of fire and the chariot of fire are the disintegration of the elements,<sup>28</sup> and his cloak is the testimony of his body. And as for those who derive proof from the letter that came to him from Elijah (2 Chr 21:12), after he was taken up, behold, it is written: *And you shall anoint Elisha son of Shaphat to be a prophet in your place* (1 Kgs 19:16). So this is what is to strengthen confidence, by what was said to Elisha and by what he answered them. The wise will understand. On the other hand, the people of his generation deduced from the small number of years of Enoch that so that he should not be depraved like the people of his generation, his years (of life) were cut short, *for because of evil the righteous is taken away* [Isa 57:1].<sup>29</sup> Therefore it was said: *And he was not, for God took him*. Some say that the prolongation of life is by means of a miracle so that the renewal of the world would take place. There is a message about this in only a few paragraphs about generations, which is beyond doubt. And some say it’s because those who were born of Adam had power over nature and therefore life was prolonged. Until the coming of the Flood. And (then) the air was polluted and their lives were greatly shortened.<sup>30</sup>

26 Heb. אָסַף. Cf. Rashi’s commentary on Gen 49:29; Ibn Ezra’s commentary on Gen 5:24; Bahya ben Asher’s commentary on Gen 25:9.

27 Heb. לִקְחָהּ.

28 I.e., matter composed of 4 elements, which are fire, air, water, and earth.

29 Cf. Radak’s commentary on Isa 57:1–2: “[...] *For because of evil the righteous is taken away* (literally gathered) (Isa 57:1), that is, the righteous and the upright have been taken away prematurely from this generation because of the evil that was about to come upon this generation, and that they should not see this evil [...] *He comes in peace*. When the righteous is taken away prematurely, for his good, as he said, *because of evil*, and yet that during his death he enters into a good rest and enters into peace, for before the coming of evil he dies in peace, as in *you will come to your fathers in peace* (Gen 15:15).” This motif also appears in Joseph Bekhor Shor’s (a 12th-century exegete from northern France) commentary on Gen 5:24: “*Enoch walked with God*. Since his life was shorter than that of others who lived a little less than nine hundred years each, and he lived three hundred and some years, it was thought that because of his sinfulness he died in the middle of his days, therefore it is said that *Enoch walked* – that he was fully pious, and he was not in the world, for he died in a third of his days, *for God took him*, took him out of the midst of sinners, because *He does not trust his servants* (Job 4:18).”

30 The final passage shows similarities to Nahmanides’ commentary on Gen 5:4. Cf. also Radak’s commentary on Gen 5:3, 24.

c) *Tirat kesef* by Joseph Solomon ben Moses Lutski  
(Gözleve edition 1834/1835, *Bereshit*, folios 29 verso – 30 recto)

Hebrew text:

Par. 510: כענין את האלהים התהלך נח : ר"ל שהיה צדיק תמים ושלם בשלמות הנפש :

Par. 511: לקח כטעם מיתה . צריך להתבונן שאמר הרב בכף הדמיון כטעם מיתה . והרמז בזה שלא היתה מיתתו כמיתת שאר האדם אשר נאמר בהם אכן כאדם תמותון וגו' ועד שאמר אחר זה או המיר מלת מיתה במלת לקיחה שזו סברה אחרת זולת הראשונה : ומ"ש וכן אם תראה אותי לוקח הוא חוזר לעיל למ"ש כטעם מיתה :

Par. 512: <sup>31</sup>שהנשמה היא השרש בחיים ובמות . לכן במיתת השלמים נזכרה מלת לקיחה בכלל על הגויה והנשמה . אבל הגויה הזו איננה הגוף המורכב המעוּד להפסד המורכב מן ארבע יסודות הנראה לעיני בשר . אלא לפי דעת סיעת אפלטון ולפי דיעת המקובלים גוף בהיר נקרא מרכב שמימי לאפלטוניים ולמקובלים מלבוש והוא אשר תשימהו בשלמים הנפש המדברת בחיים בלי שום אמצעי

כי גוית החסידים כדמות הנשמה וכו' וזהו סוד זכוך החמר וקרון הפנים בפעל :

Par. 513: סוסי אש ורכבי אש וכו' שזה אות שלא יוכל לעלות עם הגוף המורכב מן ד' יסודות אלא סוסי אש הפרידו הרכבתו ושב כל א' ליסודו :

Par. 515: ואדרתו עדות לגויתו : ר"ל מה שהשליך אדרתו הוא עדות על פרוד הרכבת גופו ולא כפי דעת ההמון של הרבנים שחושבים שאלוהו והנוך ז"ל יושבים בג"ע עם גוף ונפש כאשר היו בחיים .

Par. 516: אל יטעך מאמר ויבוא אליו מכתב מאליהו : ר"ל שלא תחשוב שהמכתב הוא השלוח מיד אליהו מגן עדן אלא הרצון בזה שאלוהו הנביא בחייו נתנבא על יהורם בן יהושפט היעוד הרע ההוא ומסר לתלמידו אלישע ע"ה או כתב בספר והמכתב בא אחר כן ליהורם ע"י אלישע :

Par. 517: ויהורם בן אחאב ויהושפט שאלו לאלישע וכו' : ר"ל איך יתכן להאמין הנאמר ויבוא אליו מכתב וגו' כפשוטו שהרי עדיין בחיי יהושפט לא היה אליהו אלא שאלו יהושפט ויהורם לאלישע הנה גם יהורם בן יהושפט קבל מכתב היעוד מאת אלישע . ושם כתוב אשר יצק בל' עבר וצריך ללמוד מזה כי כבר בעת ההיא אליהו היה מת .

Par. 518: והקשה שבכלם כי לא נפרד וכו' ר"ל כל הפסוקים המורים לפי פשוטם שעלה אליהו השמימה בגוף ונפש נתישבו ונסתלקו הקושיות . אבל הקשה לישוב שבכלם יען שפירשנו שסוסי אש ורכבי אש הם רמז לפרוד הרכבת גופו כטבע האש להפריד ההרכבה . והרי מצאנו כתוב אחד זהו ופרידו בין שניהם ויעל אליהו בסערה השמים . ואלישע רואה והוא מצעק וכו' זה המאמר קשה לישוב ולהוציא מפשוטו . כי אחרי שלא נפרד אלישע ממנו עד עלותו איך לא נפרדה הרכבת גוף אלישע ג"כ ועצר כח להשאיר בחיים . לכן אמר הרב אחר זה :

Par. 519: ונסב פנים מזה : ר"ל נסב פי' זה המאמר על פנים אחרים זולת הפנים המורים ע"פ פשוטו אחר : שכל הענין הזה איננו כמשמעו א"כ גם ואלישע רואה איננו ראית העין : או ירצה ונסב פנים מזה : שלא נחטא בדבור במה שלא תושג .

Par. 520: כמו יהי מאורות . שם פי' הרב כי מפני השתמשם במלת היות לרוב נמצא יחיד לרבים ולשון נקבה לזכר . כן יהיה ג"כ ויהי כל ימי חנוך ל' יחיד על רבים :

31 The following sentence is not cited: "Don't be surprised that the word 'taking' includes body and soul."

Translation:

Par. 510: “As in *With God walked Noah*.” This means that he was absolutely righteous and perfect in the perfection of his soul.

Par. 511: “*Took* in the sense of ‘death.’” It should be noted what Rav said to illustrate: “in the sense of death.” There is an allusion in this to the fact that his death was not like the death of the rest of the people, as it was said: *Nevertheless, like men you shall die, etc.* [Ps 82:7]. And this is evidenced by what he said afterwards. “Or: He replaced the word ‘death’ with the word ‘taking,’” which is another explanation besides the first one. And what he said: “And likewise: *If you see me when I am taken* [2 Kings 2:10],” again refers to the above, when he said, “in the sense of death.”

Par. 512: “For the soul is the core in life and in death.” Therefore, in reference to the death of the perfect ones, the word “taking” is mentioned in general for both body and soul. But this body is not a composite body, destined to decay, composed of four elements, which is visible to the eyes of the carnal (beings). But in accordance with the opinions of Plato’s followers and those of the Kabbalists, the luminous body is called a “heavenly component” by the Platonists and a “garment” by the Kabbalists.<sup>32</sup> And this is that which, in the case of the perfect ones, is clothed by the speaking soul during life, without any intermediary.

Par. 513: “As for the body of the pious, which is in the likeness of the soul, etc.” This is the mystery purified of matter and the radiance of the Countenance *in actu*.

Par. 514: “The horses of fire, and the chariot of fire, etc.” This is a sign that he cannot ascend with a body composed of four elements and that the horses of fire caused his structure to disintegrate and each (component) returned to its element.

Par. 515: “And his cloak is a testimony to his body.” This means: the fact that he threw off his cloak is a testimony to the decay of the structure of his body, and not, as is the opinion of the mob of Rabbanites, who believe that Elijah and Enoch, of blessed memory, are living in the Garden of Eden with body and soul as they were in life.<sup>33</sup>

Par. 516: “And do not be deceived by the statement: *A letter came to him from Elijah*.” It means, lest you think that this letter was sent by the hand of Elijah from the Garden of Eden. For the intention is that Elijah, while still alive, made a prophecy concerning Jehoram son of Jehoshaphat, this announcement of evil, and gave it to his disciple Elisha, the servant of God, or wrote it down on a scroll, and the letter then reached Jehoram through Elisha.

Par. 517: “Jehoram son of Ahab and Jehoshaphat asked Elisha the prophet, etc.” It means, how can one believe in what was said: The letter came to him, etc.? While the basic understanding is that behold, while Jehoshaphat was still alive, there was no Elijah, so Jehoshaphat and Jehoram asked Elisha. Behold, also Jehoram ben Jehoshaphat received the letter

32 See Nahmanides’ commentary on Gen 18:1; Bahya ben Asher’s commentary on Gen 18:8; *More Nevukhim* 1:72. See also J. Klatzkin, *Thesaurus philosophicus linguae hebraicae et veteris et recentioris* (Berlin: Eshkol 1928) I, 46 (entry מְדַיֵּר), 73 (entry מְרַבֵּי); M. Kurdzialek, “Średniowieczne doktryny o człowieku jako obrazie świata,” *RF* 19/1 (1971) 11–12; M. Idel, “Enoch is Metatron,” *Imm* 24–25 (1990) 224, 229–231, 235–236.

33 See Radak’s commentary on Gen 5:24, quoted above; cf. Idel, “Enoch is Metatron,” 227.

informing him of his appointed fate from Elisha. And it says there that he poured out in the past tense. It should be inferred from this that at that time Elijah was already dead.

Par. 518: “And the hardest thing is that he was not separated, etc.” This means that all the paragraphs indicating that Elijah ascended to heaven with body and soul according to the basic understanding have been clarified and the difficulties have been removed. However, the most difficult one is the solution, as we have explained that *the horses of fire and the chariots of fire* [cf. 2 Kgs 2:11] are an allusion to the disintegration of the structure of his body, according to the nature of fire, which causes the structure to disintegrate. In one place we found recorded: *They separated the two of them, and Elijah ascended into heaven during the storm* [2 Kgs 2:11]. *And when Elisha saw it and he cried, etc.* [2 Kgs 2:12]. This statement is difficult to explain and deduce from the basic meaning. For since Elisha was not separated from him until his ascension, how is it that Elisha’s physical structure did not also disintegrate and he retained the strength to remain alive? Therefore, Rav said afterwards:

Par. 519: “But let us leave it at that.” It means, let’s direct the explanation of this statement to another aspect besides the aspect that instructs following the basic understanding because the whole issue is not consistent with the meaning. Besides, *And Elisha saw* [2 Kgs 2:12] is not eyewitness evidence either. And if someone wants to, let’s leave it at that so that we don’t sin by talking about something that is incomprehensible.

Par. 520: “It is like: *Let there be luminous bodies* [Gen 1:14].” The explanation of Rav refers to the use of the word “to be.” Often the singular is used instead of the plural, and the feminine instead of the masculine. Similarly, in *All the days of Enoch were* [Gen 5:23] above, the singular is used instead of the plural.

With regard to the texts edited above, it should be noted at the outset that Aaron ben Joseph’s *Sefer ha-mivhar* became the most authoritative Karaite commentary in the post-13th century. It was undoubtedly known and respected by later Karaite commentators. The way it was written, in a concise, slogan-like style, with downright understatement, meant that its proper understanding required biblical and theological preparation, which became a motive for the emergence of new commentaries (supercommentaries) in subsequent centuries – collections of explanatory notes on this very commentary, such as the commentary *Tirat kesef* by Joseph Solomon Lutski. It should also be emphasised that not all of the later commentaries systematically discuss the entire textual material of the Torah (i.e., the difficult passages that require explication). Some deal only with explanations of selected places and topics.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Comments on the text of Gen 5:22–24 regarding Enoch, in addition to those discussed in this article, can be found in three other Karaite commentaries, namely, *Yemin Moshe* by Moses Messorodi (Constantinople 1620), *Maamar Mordekhai* by Mordecai ben Nisan (Kukizov c. 1609), *Meil Shemuel* by Samuel ben Joseph (Kale 1754). Due to editorial requirements, it was not possible to include the textual evidence from these commentaries (preserved in manuscripts) in this article. It will be published in a separate article. Of note, the text of Gen 5:24 was not included in Yehuda Gibbor’s *Minhat Yehudah* (15th/16th century), and accordingly the comments on it are not included in the supercommentaries to that commentary, viz: *Qibbus Yebuda* by

In terms of thematic structure, there are two main themes in the explanations of Gen 5:24 in the *Sefer ha-mivhar* (as well as in other commentaries) that relate directly to the biblical text. These are: 1) the meaning of the phrase ויתהלך חנוך את האלהים *Enoch walked with God*, and 2) the meaning of the phrase ואינו כי לקח אותו אלהים *And he was not, for God took him*. The exegetes, both Rabbanites and Karaites, generally agree that the first phrase is a metaphor for perfect piety,<sup>35</sup> while the second is a metaphor for death. The issue of death, however, is controversial. The subject of polemic in the commentaries is the question of the meaning of the verb “to take.” What exactly does it mean? Although belief in a bodily “ascension” appears in some strands of Judaism, in normative Judaism the possibility is questioned as a matter of principle. Aaron ben Joseph takes a particularly unique position in this regard, asserting that “the word ‘taking’ includes both body and soul” (par. 512) and introducing the idea of a spiritual “body of the pious” (par. 513), modelled on the bodies of heavenly beings (a reference to ideas propounded by Plotinus and Aristotle, among others). He analyses the problem of ascension in terms of the body, as do other exegetes, with reference to the description of Elijah’s ascension in 2 Kings. He cites the argument of Elijah’s cloak, a well-known argument against bodily ascension.<sup>36</sup> In doing so, he notes and explains the problem of the chronological inconsistency of the textual sequence in 2 Chr 21:12 (Elijah’s letter to Jehoram and Jehoshaphat). This problem is raised in many commentaries (generally using similar logical arguments and speculations). Its importance lies in the fact that it can be a premise for questioning the reliability of the description of Elijah’s ascension. In addition, he raises a theme regarding the reason for Enoch’s relatively short life (only 365 years) in the context of the life span of the other persons mentioned in Genesis 5, which obviously refers to Gen 5:23. Aaron ben Joseph cites the argument of the depravity

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Judah ben Aron of Troki (d. 1602), *Sror ha-mor* by Eliah ben Barukh Jerushalmi (17th century), *Beṣir Eliezer* by Eliezer ben Judah Gibbor (18th century), *Beer Yishaq* by Simhah Isaac ben Moses Lutski (18th century). Commentaries on Gen 5:24 are also omitted from *Maḥberet sukkat David* by David ben Mordecai of Kukizov (19th century). For the *Minhat Yehudah* commentary, which is a poetic paraphrase of the parashot of the Pentateuch, see Miller, “The Methods of Judah Gibbor’s,” 249–270.

- 35 It is worth noting that on the question of Enoch’s perfection, a controversy among the Amoraites is attested in the Midrashic literature (see *Bereshit Rabbah* 25; *Yalkut Shimoni on Genesis* 5:24; *Midrash Aggadah on Genesis* 5:24). Abarbanel writes about this in his commentary on Gen 5:24: “But there were other opinions about this. They said that Enoch was once righteous and once sinful (*Bereshit Rabbah* 25). The Holy One, blessed be He, said that He would take him while he was still in his righteousness. But I didn’t find out where they got this from, unless they read it as sinfulness that he was in a hurry to marry and (they recognised) that he conceived sons and daughters all the time and that he didn’t separate himself from a woman when he walked with God and clung to Him. For this reason, they say that he was once righteous and once sinful.”
- 36 In this context, cf. Radak’s commentary on 2 Kgs 2:11: “Elisha saw him ascending from the earth, and while he was in the air, he saw the image of a chariot of fire with horses of fire, which separated them, that is, when he saw that he was separated from him from the moment he was lifted up, and also his garments were destroyed in the fire, except his cloak, which fell from him, for Elisha to take it, to strike water with it.” And further, “And if you say that Elijah’s cloak did not fall because of Elisha’s need, but because he became a spiritual being the cloak fell from him, why then did not the other pieces of clothing also fall from him?” Cf. also Abarbanel’s commentary on 2 Kgs 2:12: “Did Elijah’s cloak fall from him accidentally or deliberately? If deliberately, why did it fall? And if accidentally, how is it that other garments did not fall from him?”

of the people at that time (before the Flood) and the motif of God's protective action – “lest they deprave him” – referring to Isa 57:1–2 (which is rare in explanations of Gen 5:24 at that time). In this context, he draws attention to a peculiar grammatical feature, namely, that the singular form ויהי (in the phrase ויהי כל ימי חנוך) occurs in Gen 5:23, while the plural form ויהיו (cf. *Sefer ha-mivhar* par. 519–520; *Tirat kesef* par. 520) occurs in reference to other persons. He contrasts this form with the jussive form יהי “let there be” (meaning: *let there be luminous bodies in the firmament of the heaven*) in Gen 1:14.<sup>37</sup> Noteworthy is Aaron ben Joseph's explicit reference to the Nahmanides commentary (quoting Maimonides' statement), which shows similarities to Radak's commentary.

The chronologically second Karaite commentary, Aaron ben Elijah's *Sefer keter Torah*, written less than 70 years later, is broadly similar in its thematic structure and method of argumentation, although it differs in some points. The main interpretive difference concerns the semantics of the verb “took.” Although Aaron ben Elijah admits that “It is possible that this refers to death,” he categorically states that “this is not in the sense of the body with the soul.” He seems to maintain a safe legalistic distance from Aaron ben Joseph's statement in *Sefer ha-mivhar*. In the analogous case of Elijah, he interprets the vision of the horses of fire and the chariot as “the disintegration of the elements” (referring to the concept of the four elements that constitute matter in Greek metaphysics), i.e., the physical annihilation of the body. Therefore, he argues, the reference is to the death of the body and the transfer of the soul alone to heaven. In doing so, he eloquently silences the idea of a spiritual “body of the pious.” The final section of the explanation shows a dependence on Nahmanides' commentary (as does Aaron ben Joseph's explanation).

It should be emphasised that Aaron ben Elijah refers at the beginning of his explanation to Yeshuah ben Judah's explanation of Gen 5:24.<sup>38</sup> Yeshuah ben Judah represents the eleventh-century Jerusalem school of Karaite exegesis (operating in a Muslim religious and

37 Interestingly, Joseph Solomon Lutski explains that this is simply a case of using the singular in the sense of the plural. This is a rather trivial explanation. It is obvious, since grammatically the punctuation excludes the possibility of any other explanation, i.e. that it could be a form of the jussive “may all the days of Enoch . . .” In fact, it seems that Aron ben Joseph's remark may allude to the Kabbalistic interpretation of this form by Bahya ben Asher of Saragossa, a contemporary of Aaron ben Joseph, as a reference to the primordial light of the week of creation, see his *Midrash to the Torah*, commentary on Gen 5:23: “I have already informed you above that there are luminous bodies for luminous bodies, and they are all a continuation of the supreme light that this righteous one received. And for this reason, he mentions him with the form ויהי, which you will not find in the case of the first generations. Each of these generations is mentioned by him with the use of ויהיו, to allusively indicate that he was elevated in the supreme light, of which it is written, *Let there be light. And the light became.*”

38 Also known as Abul al-Faraj Furqan ibn Asad. On Yeshuah ben Judah, his technique of reading the biblical text (“structural literalism”), and the manuscripts attesting to his Arabic translation and exegesis of the Pentateuch, see Margoliouth, “The Writings,” 187–215; M. Schreiner, *Studien über Jeschu'a ben Jehuda* (Berlin: Itzkowski 1900); Poznański, *The Karaite Literary*, 65–70; H. Ben-Shammai, “Yeshuah Ben Yehudah—A Characterization of a Karaite Scholar of Jerusalem in the Eleventh Century,” *Pe'amim* 32 (1987) 3–20; M. Polliack, “Alternate Renderings and Additions in Yeshu'ah ben Yehudah's Arabic Translation of the Pentateuch,” *JQR* 84/2–3 (1993–1994) 209–225; M. Polliack, “Medieval Karaite Views on Translating the Hebrew Bible into Arabic,” *JJS* 47 (1996) 72–76; Polliack, *The Karaite Tradition*, 46–53; Frank, *Search Scripture*, 20–21.

cultural context).<sup>39</sup> Therefore, the concept of interpreting the text of Gen 5:24 as in the rabbinic midrashim quoted above, allowing for the possibility of interpenetration between the realms of the earthly and heavenly worlds, must have met with his criticism.<sup>40</sup> This authoritative exegete, in his commentary on Gen 5:24 (see the text quoted below), firmly declares that the content of this passage does not mention the taking up of Enoch's body to heaven. He emphasises that he finds no logical justification for such a reading of the text (which is contrary to the principles of faith). He points out that this is not a case of anthropomorphism and that there is no need to modify the literal reading of Gen 5:24.<sup>41</sup> He argues that the text speaks of ordinary death, albeit metaphorically ("taking" as "an allusion to the taking of his spirit at his death"). He speculates that the statement *And he was not* may be because Enoch was secretly buried in an unknown place. Like other exegetes, he uses the method of analogy but cites the reference to other places in the Bible only for the phrase *Enoch walked with God*.

The present author is not sure if the Arabic original of this explanation has survived, but certainly, its Hebrew translation, which is preserved in his exegetical treatise *Bereshit Rab-bah* (it is probably this text that Aaron ben Elijah is referring to) has survived. Below, the text of this explanation is quoted based on the manuscript of Or. 4779 (Leiden University, 16th century):<sup>42</sup>

39 As the commentary of Yeshua ben Judah, quoted below, shows well, this school represented a technique of reading the biblical text that paid special attention to solving the problem of anthropomorphisms. For the anthropomorphisms in the Judeo-Arabic Karaite translations of the Hebrew Bible, see M. Zawanowska, "Where the Plain Meaning Is Obscure or Unacceptable . . . : The Treatment of Implicit Anthropomorphisms in the Medieval Karaite Tradition of Arabic Bible Translation," *EJJS* 10 (2016) 1–49; M. Zawanowska, "The Bible Read through the Prism of Theology. The Medieval Karaite Tradition of Translating Explicit Anthropomorphisms into Arabic," *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 24 (2016) 163–223.

40 The programmatic struggle against midrashic mystical interpretations of the text of Gen 4:24 in early Karaite exegesis is also evidenced by the statement of Judah ben Elijah Hadassi (12th century), who in his treatise *Sefer eshkol ha-kofer*, in a critique of the rabbinic midrashim, wrote (ch. 85): "Some of them added a third, who is Enoch son of Jared, for it was written about him: *Enoch walked with God and was not, for God took him*, his God. This taking is death, as it was said: *Take my soul from me* [Jonah 4:3], and the like, for he is not mentioned as having to come in the future with Elijah, of blessed memory, being still alive." Cf. D.J. Lasker, – J. Niehoff-Panagiotidis – D. Sklare, *Theological Encounters at a Crossroads. An Edition and Translation of Judah Hadassi's Eshkol ha-kofer, First Commandment, and Studies of the Book's Judaeo-Arabic and Byzantine Contexts* (Karaite Texts and Studies 11; Études sur le judaïsme médiéval 77; Leiden – Boston: Brill 2019) 596–597.

41 In this context, see Zawanowska's commentary ("Where the Plain," 25–26) on the translation of the phrase *Enoch walked with God* in Gen 5:24 by Yefet be Eli: "An example of an attempt to avoid an anthropomorphic pitfall entailed in biblical verses of the first category, what I call 'positive,' is presented in Yefet's rendering of Gen 5:22–24, which states that 'Enoch walked with God' (*va-bihalekh Hānōkh et hā-ēlōhīm*). [...] Our exegete translates this cryptic statement into Arabic to mean that 'Enoch was obedient to God' (*wa itsā'ir Hānōkh fi tā'at rabb al-ālamīn*, lit. 'walked in the obedience of the Lord of the Universe'). [...] Later on, it can also be found in the Karaite milieu: in the *Talkhīs*, that is, the commentary on the Torah written by Yūsuf Ibn Nūh and abridged by his student Abū al-Faraj Hārūn, [...] as well as the exegetic works of Ya' qūb al-Qirqisānī [...] and Yeshu' ah ben Yehudah [...]. The interpretative readings provided by these translators and exegetes attempt to circumvent the impression created by the Hebrew Bible that some mortals may have attained proximity to the Eternal."

42 An electronic edition of this text is also available on the website of the Academy of the Hebrew Language. See <https://maagarim.hebrew-academy.org.il/Pages/PMain.aspx?mishibbur=662000&page=44>.



Hebrew text:

Folio 97 verso

19 שאלה. א"א<sup>20</sup> בארו הדיבור בחנוך. נ"ל כי יסופר על מקצת אחינו בו דברים יסתמר שעת הבשר מהם  
21 ולא יעבור ממני לספר אותם ואך לקשור אותם. ולא ידעתי הגרמת הקריא לומר בו מפני כי<sup>22</sup> גילוי הכת'  
לא יגוש אותו ומן השכל וגם כי אילו היו הכת' יגוש אותו היה מן החוב להוציא אותו<sup>23</sup> ממשמעו לחיוב כמוהו  
באש' אמ' וירד י"י. ויתצב י"י. וכיוצא בו. ואיך כי לא יחייב אותו<sup>24</sup> הכת' ועל הקושר אש' יאמ' בגללו  
הוא באין פוגה כופר בעקר. וחוב להבדל ממנו ולקללו<sup>25</sup> ולשאול הקב"ה למנוע אותנו מידי חטא. א"א  
בארו לי אש' ישא זה הדבר. נאמ' כי<sup>26</sup> אמ' ויהי כל ימי חנוך חמש וששים שנה ושלוש מאות שנה יגוש כי זה  
כל שנותיו בלבד. שנ'<sup>27</sup> כל ימי. ולא יעבור להיות כבר היה יותר מהם. ואש' ישראל בדיבור /בו/ הוא בב'  
מקומות. הא'. באמ'<sup>28</sup> ויתהלך חנוך את האלהים. והב' כי אמ' ואיננו. ולא אמ' וימות. והתשובה על האופן  
29 הראשון. כי רצה בו צדקות מפני כי הגלוי בלשון הקודש כאש' יזכור לש' ליכה אצל האלהים<sup>30</sup> או לפניו  
החפץ אש' אמרנו. את האלהים התהלך נח. אש' התהלכו אבותי לפניו. זכר נא את

Folio 98 recto

1 התכלתי לפניך. מתהלך בתומו צדיק. וכיוצא בזה הרבה. וכי יתקיים זה היה החפץ בו כי היה ע"ה  
2 צדיק תמים אין כמוהו בצדקות בחילוף אנשי דורו. וכבר היה גם בהם צדיקים ואולם לא הגיעו<sup>3</sup> אליו  
במעשים הטובים. והתשובה על האופן השני כי כבר מצאנו {ב} <sup>43</sup> זכרון המות מקוצר<sup>4</sup> מדורות בני נוח. וכי  
יהיה הכת' כבר יזכור אותו וכבר יקצר זכרו יתם להיות פה מקוצר. וגם<sup>5</sup> כי אמ' כי לקח אותו אלהים יתכן  
להרמז בו אל קחתו ורוחו בעת פטירתו וצאתו מן העו' ולא ספדו עליו<sup>6</sup> אבל קברו אותו ובמסותרים  
מתיראים מאנשי דורו שלא יעשו בו דבר רע וכאש' בקשו<sup>7</sup> אותו ולא מצאוהו אמ' כי לקח אותו אלהים  
אל השמים. ואך כי ידעו כי היה צדיק גמור ומעלתו<sup>8</sup> גדולה. וזהו אש' ישא אותו הכת'. וכבר ביארנו כי  
אילו היה הכת' יגוש אש' אמ' אותו הממרה היה<sup>9</sup> מן החוב להוציא אותו ממשמעו. ואך כי הוא לא יגוש זה  
הקב"ה יעזור לכל מי יראה לעצמו<sup>10</sup> בטוב ונשוב מן הקשורים<sup>11</sup> הנשחתים.

Translation:

Folio 97 verso

19 Question. If he says:<sup>44</sup> 20 Clarify what is said about Enoch. We will tell him that some of  
our brethren<sup>45</sup> say things about him that make your hair stand on end. 21 And I am not able  
to utter them, but only to bind them.<sup>46</sup> And I have not learned the reason for such a read-  
ing, so that such words may be spoken about him. 22 For what is revealed in the Scripture  
does not dictate it. Nor does it follow from reason. And even if the Scripture were to dictate  
it, it would be obligatory to exclude it<sup>23</sup> from its literal meaning, because of an obligation,  
such as with regard to what was said: *And the Lord came down* [cf. Gen 11:5, Exod 19:20,  
Ex 34:5, Num 11:25, Num 12:5], *And the Lord stood* [cf. Exod 34:5; 1 Sam 3:10], and the

43 Letter crossed out with a vertical slash.

44 The abbreviation א"א here in the meaning: א.א.מ.

45 I.e., some of the Rabbanites.

46 In the sense of "forbid them."

like.<sup>47</sup> And since the <sup>24</sup> Scripture does not oblige one to do so, as for an intransigent one who would speak because of it, he certainly denies the principle (of faith).<sup>48</sup> And it is obligatory to distance oneself from him and to curse him. <sup>25</sup> And ask the Holy One, blessed be He, to protect us from sin. If he said: Explain to me what is to be said when someone speaks of it. We shall say that <sup>26</sup> what he said: *All the days of Enoch were 365 years* [Gen 5:23], imposes (the conclusion) that these are absolutely all his years, for it was said <sup>27</sup> *all the days*. And it cannot be that there were actually more. And what remains of the statement /about him/ is contained in two places. The first is when he said: <sup>28</sup> *Enoch walked with God*. And the second, when he said: *And he was not*, and did not say: *And he died*. The answer by the first way. <sup>29</sup> For he showed favour to him, because of his righteousness, which is evident in the holy language when the word ‘walking’ with God is mentioned <sup>30</sup> or before Him, whom he desires, as we said. *Noah walked with God*. [Gen 6:9] *Before whom my fathers walked*. [Gen 48:15] *Remember, please*,

Folio 98 recto

<sup>1</sup> *how I have walked before you*. [cf. Isa 38:3] *The righteous walks in his integrity*. [Prov 20:7] And there are many such. Because that’s how it happens. He desired him, because he was God’s servant, <sup>2</sup> the righteous perfect one. There was none like him in righteousness among the people of his generation. And yet there were righteous among them. And nevertheless, they were not equal to him <sup>3</sup> in good deeds. Answer in the second way. For we have already found in the death records that (the life of the people) was shortened <sup>4</sup> beginning with the generations of the sons of Noah. And that the Scripture mentions him, but shortens the remembrance of him. And he is perfect in being here for a shorter time. And although <sup>5</sup> it was said, for God took him, it is possible that this is an allusion to the taking of his spirit at his death and passing from this world. They did not mourn him, <sup>6</sup> but buried him secretly and by stealth. God-fearing men of his own generation, so that no evil would be done to him. And when they looked for him, <sup>7</sup> they did not find him. They said that God had taken him to heaven. Though they knew that he was a righteous perfect one, and that his virtue was great. <sup>8</sup> And this is what the Scripture proclaims about him. We have already explained that if the Scripture, as said, were to impose this destroyer, it would be <sup>9</sup> obligatory to exclude it from the literal meaning. But it does not impose it. And may the Holy One, blessed be He, help everyone who chooses for himself <sup>10</sup> good. And let us turn away from the corrupt bonds.

The third commentary, *Tirat kesef* by Joseph Solomon Lutski – one of the spiritual leaders of the Karaite community in the second half of the 19th century – is a concise, insightful explication of the *Sefer ha-mivhar* commentary. He explains how each comment should be understood, mostly repeating statements familiar from earlier commentaries, but

<sup>47</sup> Reference to anthropomorphisms.

<sup>48</sup> I.e., the interpretation of the text of Gen 5:24, according to which Enoch was transferred to heaven with his body during his lifetime, contradicts the dogmas of faith.

also introducing his own supplementaries. For example, Joseph Solomon Lutski emphasises that the use of the verb “*Took* in the sense of ‘death’” is meant to indicate that Enoch’s death was not an ordinary one, “was not like the death of the rest of the people” (par. 511). He explains that when Aaron ben Joseph wrote that “the word ‘taking’ includes both body and soul,” he did not mean the ordinary material body (made up of four elements), but the spiritual “luminous body” (par. 512). He thus refers to a concept familiar from Aristotelianism and Neoplatonism. Interestingly, he comments on the concept of the “body of the pious” only with the enigmatic, restrained explanation: “This is the mystery purified of matter and the radiance of the Countenance *in actu*” (an interpretation of the *sod* “mystery” type) (par. 513). Concerning Elijah, he points out that the horses of fire and the chariots of fire, like the cloak, are a sign of the disintegration of his body and testimony that one cannot ascend to heaven “with a body composed of four elements” (par. 514). He writes: “This means: the fact that he threw off his cloak is a testimony to the decay of the structure of his body, and not, as is the opinion of the mob of Rabbanites, who believe that Elijah and Enoch, of blessed memory, are living in the Garden of Eden with body and soul as they were in life” (par. 515). This last statement refers to Radak’s commentary quoted above. On the question of the chronology of the letter of Elijah, he warns – apparently jokingly – “lest you think that this writing was sent by Elijah’s hand from the Garden of Eden,” and then postulates that the writing was prepared in advance by Elijah while he was still alive (par. 516). Joseph Solomon Lutski’s commentary is eminently educational. There is a subtle apologetic tone towards some of the controversial statements of Aaron ben Joseph, whose authority was still prevalent in the 19th century.

## Conclusion

The commentaries on the text of Gen 5:24 presented here demonstrate the topics and method of interpretation of that passage developed in the Byzantine Karaite exegetical school represented by Aaron ben Joseph, author of *Sefer ha-mivhar*, and Aaron ben Elijah, author of *Sefer keter Torah*. Both exegetes used a similar characteristic pattern of description and a similar concise style of expression. As the quoted explanatory passages clearly show, for semantic purposes they used the method of analogy, which consists in determining the meaning of lexemes and phrases by confronting them with other similar lexemes and phrases in the text of the Hebrew Bible. In this respect, they were close to the Andalusian school of exegesis. A spectacular feature of the commentaries presented here is the use of concepts of soul, matter and cosmos in terms of Aristotelian metaphysics (and thus the use of extra-biblical knowledge for exegesis). This feature clearly distinguishes these commentaries from the cited commentary of Yeshuah ben Judah of the Jerusalem school of exegesis, which predates

*Sefer ha-mivhar* by more than two centuries and reflects the shift in Karaite exegesis in the 13th/14th centuries, which included the incorporation of elements of Greek philosophy.<sup>49</sup>

The main subject of the comments is the meaning of two sentences: “Enoch walked with God” and “And he was not, for God took him.” Undoubtedly, the most serious problem of interpretation is to determine the meaning of the lexeme “took.” Aaron ben Joseph’s interpretation is surprising and undoubtedly the most cognitively interesting issue in the analysed textual corpus. Aaron ben Joseph made an obvious break with the strict Karaite approach to the text of Gen 5:24, for by appealing to Aristotelian and Neoplatonic ideas, he introduced the concept of “the body of the pious, which is in the likeness of the soul” and stated that “‘taking’ includes both body and soul.” This innovation undoubtedly caused consternation among Karaite theologians, as Aaron ben Elijah made clear when he replied that “it is doubtful to scholars that this is about the soul with the body.” It seems that this innovative explanation by Aaron ben Joseph, who was undoubtedly familiar with the exegesis of the Nahmanides (and probably of his disciple Bahya ben Asher) and open to Greek philosophy, was an attempt to reconcile the dogmatic and mystical reading of the text of Gen 5:24. This statement by Aaron ben Joseph, who enjoyed immense authority of successive generations of Karaites, remained forever controversial, as the quoted explanation by Joseph Solomon Lutski also attests.

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49 Cf. D.J. Lasker, “The Interplay of Poetry and Exegesis in Judah Hadassi’s *Eshkol ha-köfer*,” *Exegesis and Poetry in Medieval Karaite and Rabanite Texts* (eds. J. Yeshaya – E. Hollender) (Karaite Texts and Studies 9, Études sur le judaïsme médiéval 68; Leiden – Boston: Brill 2017) 191.

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