Royal Attire

*Levush Malkhuth*

AUTHORED BY

*Ḥakham Mordecai ben Nisan*(18th Century CE; Kukizów, Galicia)

VOCALIZED, TRANSLATED AND ANNOTATED BY   
Gabriel Wasserman

Second Edition

Karaite Sources Supplemented by Tomer Mangoubi

Introductory Notes from the Karaite Press

About the Translator: Dr. Gabriel Wasserman (PhD Yeshiva University, 2016) is a scholar of Jewish texts, with a specialty in piyyuṭim, Hebrew liturgical poetry. His doctoral dissertation, Liturgical Poems of Ḥanukka from Europe: Critical Edition and Investigations, involves careful philological work in copying these texts from manuscripts, with variants from different versions, and presenting them to the reader, as well as analysis of their background, genre, and sources. He brings many of these skills to this edition of Levush Malkhuth. Wasserman has translated both Hebrew academic prose and primary sources, as can be seen, for example, in his English translation of the editors’ introduction published in Joseph Yahalom and Naoya Katsumata, eds., Tahkemoni, or The Tales of Heman the Ezrahite, by Judah Alharizi (Jerusalem: Ben-­Zvi Institute, 2010). Wasserman is also the author of a Rabbanite Passover Haggada, Ashira Va’ashannena Baḥashiqoth (Lulu, 2015), which includes both his scholarship and his original poetic compositions. He would like to thank Shawn Lichaa for inviting him to work on Levush Malkhuth, and Tomer Mangoubi for providing him with citations to earlier Karaite authors to include in the notes.

About Ḥakham Mordecai ben Nisan: It is believed that Ḥakham Mordecai ben Nisan was born around 1650 in the city of Troki. In 1688, he followed several Karaite Jewish families who relocated from Troki to Kukizów in Galicia. For this reason, he is also known as Mordecai of Kukizów. He was a prolific author, having penned biblical commentaries and exegetical works. His most famous work is Dod Mordokhai (1699), which answers four questions, posed by a Dutch professor at the University of Leiden, about Karaite Judaism. Ḥakham Mordecai ben Nisan also wrote several poems, including at least one with Kabbalistic overtones. He and his son likely died tragically during a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. In the year 1715, the Karaite sage Solomon ben Aaron of Troki sent the Karaite communities in Damascus and Constantinople a letter, in which he referred to the disaster that had fallen upon Ḥakham Mordecai ben Nisan and his son.[[1]](#footnote-1)

About this Edition: This edition is the only known English-­language translation of Ḥakham Mordecai ben Nisan’s Levush Malkhuth (or Royal Attire).[[2]](#footnote-2) The work was likely written in the early eighteenth century and has received little attention by academics and the Karaite Jewish community itself. Levush Malkhuth first came to light in academic circles in 1866, when Adolf Neubauer published an unvocalized version of the text after examining previously unpublished Karaite manuscripts in the Russian National Library in Saint Petersburg.[[3]](#footnote-3) In 1956, the nascent Karaite community in Israel published an unvocalized Hebrew version of Levush Malkhuth in conjunction with a version of Sefer Appiryon ‘Asa Lo, authored by the Karaite sage Solomon ben Aaron of Troki.[[4]](#footnote-4)

This edition contains a vocalized text of Levush Malkhuth, supplemented by the translator with historical and clarifying footnotes throughout. In order to enhance the reader’s experience, this edition also contains notes with relevant sources and translations from both Rabbanite and Karaite literature. The endnotes are identified in the English translation with a superscripted romanet, like so: i. These sources are particularly useful for readers who wish to understand either the basis of the claims in Levush Malkhuth or the extent to which Karaite Judaism in the day of the author was similar to Karaite Judaism as reflected in classical Karaite literature.

For several reasons, readers would be well-­advised to read the notes. First, the author almost certainly wrote Levush Malkhuth with knowledge he had committed to memory, rather than by direct reference to Karaite, Rabbanite, or even biblical sources. This is most evident by the fact that, on occasion, he misquotes a biblical passage or provides an incorrect biblical citation for the passage.[[5]](#footnote-5) Second, the author was writing from a Karaite Jewish perspective to a Gentile king about, inter alia, the differences between Karaites and Rabbanites. Given the era, it is not surprising that the work reads (in many respects) like a polemic. As such, the author did not always take great care in portraying a fully accurate summary of rabbinic Judaism.[[6]](#footnote-6) Third, even with respect to Karaite Judaism, in a few instances, the author’s views do not reflect historical Karaite norms.[[7]](#footnote-7) Finally, in many instances, the author was relying on prior historical sources whose information is now outdated in light of modern research and scholarship. This edition preserves the substance – correct or incorrect – of Mordecai ben Nisan’s Levush Malkhuth; in most instances, notes have been added to clarify errors and inaccuracies.

Despite the foregoing, the author, Mordecai ben Nisan, has proven himself a learned student of both Karaite and Rabbanite Judaism, and his work is an important contribution and a font of information to those seeking a quick reference on the differences between the two movements. The notes are intended to serve as an additional resource in that regard.

About the Hebrew Text: The primary text employed for this edition of Levush Malkhuth is Neubauer’s 1866 publication. Where Neubauer’s publication contains an apparent corruption, typographical error, or other matter needing clarification, the translator consulted and incorporated text from the following three manuscripts:

St. Petersburg –­ Russian National Library Evr. I 752;

St. Petersburg – Inst. of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy B 563; and

St. Petersburg –­ Inst. of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy B 243.

Incorporations from these manuscripts are described in notes, which are identified by a superscripted, unbracketed Hebrew letter throughout the Hebrew text of this edition, like so: א. [*In the digital edition, these notes have been converted into regular footnotes for ease of use.*] These manuscripts are referred to as A, B, and C, respectively, and the Neubauer printing is referred to as Ed. Neubauer.

In addition to fixing corruptions and errors in Neubauer’s edition, the translator has made the following adaptations:

Vocalization-­driven spelling changes: Neubauer’s edition and manuscripts A, B, and C contain an orthography that is customary in unvocalized post-­biblical texts, which involves using many instances of vav and yud that would not be present in biblical spellings. In order to produce the vocalized text, the translator followed the common convention of removing these extraneous letters when adding vowels.[[8]](#footnote-8)

Modernized Punctuation: The manuscripts do not reflect modern punctuation norms, and the translator has added punctuation to the Hebrew text of Levush Malkhuth.[[9]](#footnote-9)

Expanding abbreviations, including numbers: As was common during the time of the author, Levush Malkhuth contains many words and numbers in abbreviated form. The translator has expanded abbreviations in order to assist the modern reader.[[10]](#footnote-10)

The reader should be assured, however, that these adaptations do not impact the substance of Levush Malkhuth. Academics will take comfort in the fact that Neubauer’s publication of Levush Malkhuth is available online via Google Books; and scholars can compare any variations in this edition from Neubauer’s publication. In order to assist this type of comparison, this edition contains bracketed, superscripted page numbers corresponding to the page number in Neubauer’s publication, like so: {31} or {לא}.

Karaite Works Referenced in this Edition

**Ḥakham ‘Anan ben David** (ca. 715–795 CE): The citation to Ḥakham ‘Anan in this work is from a translation provided by Dr. Leon Nemoy in his *Karaite Anthology: Excerpts from the Early Literature*, Yale Judaica Series, 1952.

**Ḥakham Daniel Al-­Qumisi** (tenth century): The citation to Ḥakham Daniel in this work is from the Academy of Hebrew Language’s version of his commentary on Leviticus 23:24.

**Ḥakham Ya‘aqov Qirqisani** (first half of tenth century): The edition of Ḥakham Ya‘aqov’s *The Book of Lights and Watch Towers* referenced in this work was published by Dr. Leon Nemoy under the name, *Kitāb al-Anwār wal-marāqib: Code of Karaite Law*.

**Ḥakham Levi ben Yefet HaLevi** (late tenth to early eleventh century): The edition of Ḥakham Levi’s *Sefer Miẓvoth* referenced in this work is a modern publication by Yosef El-­Gamil (Ashdod, Israel).

**Ḥakham Jacob ben Reuben** (eleventh century): The citation to Ḥakham Jacob in this work is a translation of Hebrew text from Dr. Zvi Ankori’s *Karaites in Byzantium: The Formative Years, 970–1100*, Columbia University Press, 1959.

**Ḥakham Judah Hadassi** (twelfth century): The edition of Ḥakham Judah’s *Eshkol Ha-­kofer* referenced in this work was published in Gozlov in 1836.

**Ḥakham Aaron ben Joseph** (ca. 1260–1320): The edition of Ḥakham Aaron’s *Sefer Ha-­mivḥar* referenced in this work is the three volume edition published in Ramla, Israel in 2010.

**Ḥakham Israel Ha-­ma‘aravi** (late thirteenth to early fourteenth century): The citation to Ḥakham Israel in this work is from in Sh. Asaf and L. E. Meyer, *Sefer Ha-­yishuv*, volume 2, Jerusalem, 1944.

**Ḥakham Aaron ben Elijah** (ca. 1328–1369): The edition of Ḥakham Aaron the Younger’s *Gan ‘Eden* referenced in this work is the 1864 Gozlov edition, as stored in Stanford University’s library and scanned by Google Books.

**Ḥakham Elijah Bašyachi** (ca. 1420–1490): The edition of Ḥakham Elijah’s *Addereth Eliyyahu* referenced in this work is the 1835 Gozlov edition, as scanned by Google Books.

1. The Karaite Press extends its gratitude to Dr. Riikka Tuori for providing extensive biographical information, from which we cultivated this section. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The words levush malkhuth are a reference to the passage in the Book of Esther in which Mordecai was dressed in “royal attire” (Hebrew: levush malkhuth): And Mordecai went forth from the presence of the king in royal apparel of blue and white, and with a great crown of gold, and with a robe of fine linen and purple; and the city of Shushan was elated and glad (Esther 8:15). For centuries, it has been a common practice of Jewish sages named Mordecai to use the title levush malkhuth for books that they have authored. It is also a fitting name for this book because Levush Malkhuth itself is a letter to a king, serving as a second allusion in the word malkhuth, or “royal.” [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Neubauer published this text in his German work, Aus der Petersburger Bibliothek: Beiträge und Documente zur Geschichte des Karäerthums und der Karäischen Literatur (1866) [English: From the Petersburg Library: Contributions and Documents Regarding the History of Karaism and Karaite Literature]. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The main title of that publication was Sefer Appiryon ‘Asa Lo, and did not identify for readers that the final 30 or so pages were in fact a reproduction of Levush Malkhuth. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. In at least two instances, the author’s mistakes were of a substantive nature. For example, he claims that Yavan (Greece) was descended from Noah’s son Ham, but the Torah tells us that Yavan was from Noah’s son Japheth. In another instance, he states that (aside from the Sabbath and Yom Kippur) only Yom Teru‘a is referred to as a shabbathon. Yet, in fact, the first day of Sukkoth and Shemini ‘Aẓereth are also referred to as shabbathon (see Leviticus 23:9). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. For example, the author states that Rabbanite sage R. Abraham ibn ‘Ezra agreed with the Karaite view regarding the definition of ben ha‘arbayim. This is only partially true, in that R. Abraham ibn ‘Ezra agreed only that the Karaite interpretation is a possibility. In other instances, the author’s description of rabbinic practice and belief may reflect the norms of the rabbinic communities with whom he was in contact, even if those norms do not reflect rabbinically binding Talmudic law. The translator has endeavored to provide clarifications on these points in the notes. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. For example, the author states that the Karaite sages obligated Karaites to separate the dishes in which a mother’s milk was boiled from the dishes in which her offspring was boiled. As far as the collaborators on this edition are aware, this separation is not attested to in any of the classical Karaite works. It may, nonetheless, reflect actual practice and belief of Karaites of the author’s generation and location. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. For example, כולם would be distracting to the modern reader if it were vocalized as כֻּולָּם. Accordingly, כולם will be vocalized herein as כֻּלָּם. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Similarly, this edition generally retains the paragraph structure of Ed. Neubauer, except in a few instances in which the translator believed that a different structure would enhance comprehension. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. For example, יר"ה is intended to be read as “yarum hodo,” not as “yara.” Consistent with the expansion of abbreviations, the translator has replaced יר"ה with יָרוּם הוֹדוֹ. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)