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Two *Piyyutim* and a Rhetorical Essay in the Northern (Troki) Dialect of the Karaim Language by Isaac ben Abraham of Troki

by *Mikhail Kizilov**

The Karaite communal leader, scholar and polemicist Isaac ben Abraham Troki (ca. 1533 – ca. 1594) first attracted the close attention of European scholars as early as the first half of the seventeenth century.¹ There has been a new wave of interest in the life and literary achievements of this Karaite author during the last few decades. A number of valuable studies dealing with different aspects of Isaac ben Abraham's literary activities have been published by Stefan Schreiner (Tübingen), who is currently preparing a new critical translation of Isaac ben Abraham's

* *Mikhail Kizilov* (Simferopol/UA), PhD student, Merton College, GB – Oxford OX1 4JD. – I would like to express my gratitude to Vadim Mireev (Simferopol', Crimea) for his linguistic advice and proofreading of my translation. For the translation I used the two most authoritative dictionaries of the Karaim language to date: Alexander Mardkowicz (ed.), *Karaj sez-bitigi. Słownik karaimski. Karaimesches Wörterbuch*, Łuck 1935, and N. A. BASKAKOV, A. DUBIŃSKI, CH. F. ISKHAKOVA, CH. F. IZHBULATOVA, K. MUSAEV, A. ZAJĄCZKOWSKI, W. ZAJĄCZKOWSKI & S. M. SZAPSZAŁ (eds.), *Karaimsko-russko-pol'skii slovar'*, Moscow 1974. A word of thanks goes to Golda Akhiezer and Dan Shapira for their comments on earlier drafts of this article. I would also like to thank Ol'ga Vasil'eva and Boris Zaikovskij, assistants of the Manuscript Department of the National Library of Russia in St. Petersburg, for their help with my work in the Abraham Firkowicz archival collection.

¹ E.g. numerous polemical refutations of Isaac ben Abraham's *Hizzuq Emunah* by Christian scholars: BRANDAN HEINRICH GEBHARD, *Centum loca Novi Testamenti quae R. Isaac ben Abraham in suo Chizzuq Emuna i.e. Munimine Fidei depravaverat vindicata*. Greifswalde 1699; JAKOB GOUSSET, *Controversiarum adversus Judaeos ternio in specimen operis jam effecti quo R. Isaaci Chissuk Emmuna confutatur...* Dordrecht 1688; JOHANN MÜLLER, *Judaismus oder Judenthum, das ist ausführlicher Bericht von des jüdischen Volckes Unglauben, Blindheit und Verstockung*, Hamburg 1644; JOHANN PHILIPP STORR, *De veritate religionis christianae oder Evangelische Glaubenskraft: gegen das Werk Chissuk Emuna*, Tübingen 1703.

most well-known work, his treatise *Hizzuq Emunah*.² Golda Akhiezer (Jerusalem) has uncovered two previously unknown works of Isaac ben Abraham's: *Drushim* (= Homilies) and, of particular importance, his *Polemics against Rabbanites*.³ In general, however, it seems that current research is focused solely on Isaac's literary activities in the Hebrew language, which explains why his writings in his native language, Karaïm,⁴ have not yet received the attention they deserve. Isaac was, perhaps, the first Karaite author to use Karaïm as a literary language, and not only for everyday purposes. His *piyyutim* (= liturgical poems) and his rhetorical essay seem to be the earliest samples of the Karaïm language in existence at all. Hence, the aim of this paper is to present Isaac's writings in Karaïm.

There are certain methodological problems related to his *piyyutim*.

² See STEFAN SCHREINER, R. Gamli'els Antwort und das Gespräch zwischen den Religionen, in: SYLVIA KÄPPELI (ed.), *Lesarten des jüdisch-christlichen Dialogs*. Festschrift zum 70. Geburtstag von Clemens Thoma, Bern / Berlin / Frankfurt/M. / New York / Oxford / Wien 2002, pp. 259-274; IDEM, Isaak of Troki's Studies of Rabbinic Literature, in: *Polin* 15 (2002), pp. 65-76; IDEM, Rabbanitische Quellen im 'Buch der Stärkung des Glaubens' des Karaërs Isaak ben Abraham aus Troki, in: *Frankfurter Judaistische Beiträge* 26 (1999), pp. 51-92; IDEM, Vom Sinn des Exils. Anmerkungen zu Isaak von Trokis Deutung der 'galut', in: *Judaica* 55 (1999), pp. 34-50.

³ GOLDA AKHIEZER, The Karaite Isaac ben Abraham of Troki and his Polemics against Rabbanites, in: CHANITA GOODBLATT AND HOWARD KREISEL (eds.), *Tradition, Heterodoxy and Religious Culture: Judaism and Christianity in the Early Modern Period*, Be'er Sheva 2007, pp. 437-468.

⁴ Jacob Mann was, perhaps, the first scholar to pay attention to Isaac's literary activities in Karaïm. Mann himself, however, had no knowledge of Turkic languages and could not fully introduce Isaac's "Tatarish" (as Mann called them) *piyyutim* to the reader (JACOB MANN, *Texts and Studies in Jewish History and Literature*, vol. II: *Karaïtica*, Philadelphia 1935, p. 715). The correct name of this language is *Karaïm* (in English a. k. a. Karaïmo-Kypchak / Qaraïmo-Qıpchaq; in Turkic languages: *K(Q)aray tili*, *K(Q)arayçe* or *K(Q)araïmçe*). This language belongs to the Kypchak languages of the Oguz-Kypchak sub-group of the Common Turkic languages belonging to the Turkic branch of the Altaic family of languages; for details see now: DAN SHAPIRA, *Miscellanea Judeo-Turkica. Four Judeo-Turkic Notes* (*Judeo-Turkica* IV, in: *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 27 (2002), pp. 475-496; MIKHAIL KIZILOV, Faithful Unto Death: Language, Tradition, and the Disappearance of the East European Karaite Communities, in: *East European Jewish Affairs* 36 (2006), pp. 73-93. On Northern (Troki) Karaïm, see (with caution): TIMUR KOCAOĞLU, MYKOLAS FIRKOVIČIUS, *Karay. The Trakai Dialect*, Munich 2006; MYKOLAS FIRKOVIČIUS, *Mień karajče iurianiam*, Vilnius 1996.

Unfortunately, Isaac's authographs or early manuscript versions of his poems have not yet been discovered. One has, therefore, to rely on later manuscripts or published editions of his Karaim *piyyutim*. So far, only two of these have been published, and only one of them is known in the nineteenth-century manuscript version.⁵ Nevertheless, it seems that there is no apparent reason to doubt Isaac's authorship, if one is to trust the Karaite editors who published poems and manuscripts of his, which were in their possession. The *piyyut Ne była utrułajym / How shall I greet Thee?* (no. I) was published in 1930 by Aleksander Mardkowicz in his famous collection of Karaite religious poetry entitled *Zemerłer*. That *Ne była utrułajym* was the first *piyyut* published by Mardkowicz in this collection, clearly demonstrates the fact that he considered it to be the oldest sample of Karaim poetry available to him.⁶ Unfortunately, Mardkowicz, who himself was a native speaker of the Luck-Halicz dialect of the Karaim language, apparently decided to "emend" the northern phonetics of the Troki Karaim dialect, which was used by Isaac, and to change it in accordance with Luck-Halicz phonetics.

One more *piyyut* (*Yigit' oyan, ne yuqleysin?/ Wake up, o young one, why are you sleeping?* (no. II)) was published in 1989 by the late Lithuanian Karaite *hazzan*⁷ Mykolas Firkovičius (Michał Firkowicz / Mikhail Firkovich, 1924-2000).⁸ It is also available in a manuscript which, surprisingly, due to errors made by a nineteenth-century scribe seems to be less accurate than the printed version.⁹ It seems, therefore, very likely that Mykolas Firkovičius possessed a comparatively old manuscript version of Isaac's poetry.

Of especial interest and importance is Isaac's rhetorical essay. The abridged variant version, in Cyrillic transliteration, was likewise pub-

⁵ Jacob Mann (with reference to MS Kahana I, fols. 20b, 61a, 111a) mentions three other "Tartarish" (i. e. Karaim) compositions by Isaac ben Abraham (J. MANN, *Texts and Studies*, p. 715, n. 151). For technical reasons, I have not been able to consult this manuscript as yet..

⁶ ALEXANDER MARDKOWICZ (ed.), *Zemerłer (Karaj sezinde)*, Luck 1930, p. 1.

⁷ *Hazzan* is the term to denote a religious (and sometimes administrative) head of a Karaite community in Eastern Europe, similar to a *Rabbi* in Rabbanite communities. Its functional meaning is not identical to the Rabbanite *hazzan* (= cantor in a synagogue).

⁸ MYKOLAS FIRKOVIČIUS (ed.), *Karay Yirlary*, Vilnius 1989, p. 181.

⁹ See the *macuma* (= copybook) of Rafael Grigulewicz in the Manuscript Division of the Library of the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences (Lietuvos Mokslų Akademijos Biblioteka, Vilnius), F. 305, no. 220, fols. 6-9.

lished by Mykolas Firkovičius in 1989, under the title *Yanhur yuvsā / If rain comes down* (no. III).¹⁰ The fact that Firkovičius included it into his collection of Karaite poetry clearly indicates that he considered it to be a poetical work. Nevertheless, in December 2006 I found a complete version of this composition in the Abraham Firkovich Collection of the National Library of Russia in St. Petersburg (= NLR), among the eighteenth-century collection of various prosaic and poetic works in Hebrew and Karaim (in Hebrew script).¹¹ A short introduction by the anonymous compiler of this collection and a commentary by Judah ben Zerubabel made it clear that both of them interpreted this work not as a *piyyut*, but as a rhetorical composition (מליצה נפלאה *melisah niflah*).¹² Both the Karaim text of the composition and Judah ben Zerubabel's commentary have survived in two copies, one preserved in St. Petersburg and the other one as part of Ms. Kahana in Tel Aviv.¹³ Easily discernible Turkic syntax, difficult phraseology and absence of Slavic loan-words clearly corroborate the sixteenth-century origin of this text. What makes it absolutely unique is the fact that it seems to be the only known poetic or prosaic work in Karaim which uses alliteration: the reader might notice that every word of this unusual prosaic composition starts with the letter "yod" (see *Plates I and II* below).

Isaac ben Abraham's authorship of this composition is attested to, not only in the introduction to the manuscript, but also in the last line of the composition itself, where the author metaphorically refers to his community as "those modest of Isaac" (see below, III:5). In spite of the fact that the original manuscript of this composition has not survived, we possess a fairly early copy of this work made by Judah ben Zerubabel, together with a lengthy rhyming commentary in Hebrew by the same author. Judah ben Zerubabel was an inhabitant of Troki and, apparently, a younger contemporary of Isaac ben Abraham and his disciple, Joseph

¹⁰ M. FIRKOVIČIUS (ed.), *Karay Yirlary*, p. 182.

¹¹ NLR F. 946, Evr. II A, no. 161/9.

¹² Ibid., fol. 5. Of interest is the fact that one of the commentators called the language of this essay *lešon Yišma'el*, while the other referred to it as *lešon Qedar*. In Jewish tradition both terms mean roughly "the language of the Muslims." Nevertheless, among the Karaites the former term was normally used to denote Arabic or Turkish, while the latter was used to designate Karaim.

¹³ Ms. Kahana II, fols. 91-94a (Judah ben Zerubabel's commentary is partly published in J. MANN, *Texts and Studies*, pp. 1193-1195).

ben Mordecai Malinowski.¹⁴ Feeling sad after Malinowski's departure for Łuck (Volhynia) "on account of the evil of the inhabitants of his town" (i.e. Troki), Judah ben Zerubabel found consolation in the compilation of a collection of Karaite poetry in Hebrew and Karaim.¹⁵ According to his own rhyming commentary to Isaac ben Abraham's rhetorical composition, he decided to translate this into Hebrew: **ואכטוב מליצותיו** – **בלשוננו הקדושה שהיא האבן הראשה ha-qedušah še-hi ha-even ha-rošah** ("I wrote his rhetorics in our sacred language [i. e. Hebrew], because this language is the corner-stone").¹⁶

What makes Isaac's composition yet more interesting: written originally in Karaim it was later translated into Hebrew! Normally, Karaite authors followed a different pattern: having composed their works in Hebrew, they later translated them into Karaim for wider dissemination amongst the less-educated Karaite masses.¹⁷ Nevertheless, Isaac, who was, undoubtedly, the most educated and talented Karaite intellectual of his time, decided not to follow this pattern and wrote several compositions directly in Karaim, without the mediation of Hebrew. This once again demonstrates the unusual nature of his literary talents and world-view. Let me stress once again the fact that his Karaim compositions represent the earliest samples of the Karaim language known to us to date.

Stylistically, there is a quite considerable amount of Hebrew loanwords in the aforementioned *piyyutim* and in the rhetorical composition. Nevertheless, many of Isaac's later contemporaries, such as the seventeenth-century Volhynian Karaite poet, Joseph ben Joshua, used even more excessive amount of borrowed Hebrew words in their writings.¹⁸ Most of the Hebrew loanwords used by Isaac were of a religious character: *tefillah* ("prayer"), *šabbat* (Sabbath), *mišwah* (commandment),

¹⁴ According to J. MANN, he might still have been alive during Khmielnickyj's massacres (J. MANN, *Texts and Studies*, pp. 720, 1195).

¹⁵ NLR F. 946, Evr. II A, no.161/9, fol. 5v-6r; J. MANN, *Texts and Studies*, p. 1194.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ M. KIZILOV, *Faithful Unto Death*, p. 75.

¹⁸ E. g. JOSEPH BEN JOSHUA, Tarłyhyndan gałutnun, in: *Karaj Awazy* 2 (4) (1932), pp. 20-21; IDEM, Bijler Biji, nek cydajsen..., in: *Karaj Awazy* 2 (4) (1932), pp. 19-20; IDEM, Karanhy bułut, in: A. MARDKOWICZ (ed.), *Zemerłer*, pp. 20-21; cf. the different version of the last poem in: JAN GRZEGORZEWSKI, *Caraimica. Język Łach-Karaitów. Narzecze południowe (łucko-halickie)*, in: *Rocznik Orientalistyczny* 1:2 (1916-1918), pp. 268-270; and Manuscript Division of the Library of Lithuanian Academy of Sciences, F. 305-220, fols. 17r-18r.

Torah (the Torah, Pentateuch). Some were references to Biblical topoi: *gan 'eden* (“Garden of Eden”), *raša geyinnom* (“evil Gehenna”), while the names *Γaman* (Haman) and *Murdeχay* (Mordecai) were used to illustrate events described in the Book of Esther. Three Hebrew loan-words are used as toponyms: *Yavan* (Greece and / or Orthodox Christian countries and peoples), *Yišma'el* (Muslims and Muslim countries), *Yerušalayim* (Jerusalem); three are used to designate the Jewish community in general: *yiyini Yisra'el'nin* (“community / crowd / army of Israel”), *yuvuz yur'eklil'ari Yitsqaqnin* (“modest of Isaac”), and *yiyinlari Yeyudanin* (“communities of Judah”); one has historical meaning (*galut* – “exile”); and one is philosophical (*yešer* – “nature, impulse, instinct, desire”).

The existence of these Karaim compositions shows a new, hitherto unknown facet of Isaac ben Abraham’s literary activities: apologete of Karaite Judaism¹⁹ and champion of the Jewish faith in general, at the same time he pioneered the usage of Karaim for literary purposes. Apparently, he was one of the earliest Eastern European Karaite thinkers to become aware of the importance and potential of Karaim as the language of dissemination education and religiosity amongst the great Karaite masses, who were largely unable to understand Hebrew, the *leshon ha-qodesh* of their learned intellectual contemporaries. It is interesting to note, however, that in his Karaim writings Isaac uses imagery which is almost identical to that used by Rabbanite authors of that time, whilst translating it into Karaim. Thus, for example, Isaac directs his rhetorical composition to “the community of Israel,” “modest of Isaac,” and “communities of Judah.” He urges them to “rebuild the destruction of Jerusalem” (*yasayay yiyilyanların Yerušala'imn*) and “create a new heart for the communities of Judah” (*Yaratkay yiyinlarına Yeyudanın yanyı yur'ak*). In his first *piyyut* he implores the Lord to gather those “who live in Exile” (*galut bołhanłarny*; see I:6). Similar appeals are typical also of Eastern European Rabbanite authors of that time. This shows once again the close relationship between the world-views of Karaite and of Rabbanite intellectuals in Eastern Europe during the Early Modern period – a close relationship which is evident, not only in the writings of Polish-Lithuanian Karaite sages, but also in the adoption of such purely Rabbanite practices as the kindling Sabbath candles and the hanging of *mezuzot*.²⁰

¹⁹ G. AKHIEZER, The Karaite Isaac ben Abraham, pp. 437-468.

²⁰ J. MANN, Texts and Studies, pp. 682-685.

Finally, in spite of the fact that the three compositions, translated below, seem to be the only Karaim writings by Isaac ben Abraham Troki known to be in existence, it is highly probable that a more careful examination of archive collections of Rabbanite and Karaite manuscripts may reveal other works of his written in Karaim..

A few words need to be said on the subject of transliteration. The first *piyyut* follows the Łuck-Halicz Polish transliteration of Karaim in accordance with its first publisher, Aleksander Mardkowicz. The second *piyyut* which is known to us not only in its Cyrillic transliteration, but also in its nineteenth-century Hebrew version, has been transliterated into Latin. The rhetorical essay has also been transliterated into Latin. The letter *tsade* (צ) will be transliterated as *dž* (e.g. *džan* – “soul, person”) and *ts* (e.g. *mitsvah*), the letter *hey* (ה) as *γ* (Γ at the beginning of the line).

I. Ne była utrułajym / How shall I greet Thee?

1	How shall I greet Thee, my Lord my God? In place of my sacrifice Let my mouth pray to Thee.	Ne była utrułajym Seni, bijim Tenrim, Kurbanym ornuna Jałbarsyn sa ernim.
2	Straighten my way /when I raise myself to prayer. Be my help In my work when I grow weak.	Tizet mana yzym, Tefiłlegie tursam, Bołhyn bołusłuhum Isimde men tałsam.
3	My Lord my Creator, Forgive my sins, Deliver me from my burden Do not take my daily bread.	Bijim jaratuwcum, Bosat jazyhymny, Kieter awurłuhum Tapma azyhymny.
4	Look Thou at thy servant Even if Thou became angry Take my soul before thy [face] Even if it [the soul] is sinful.	Bakkyn Sen kułuna Acuwłandyn da ese, Ał dzanym ez ałnyna Jazykły da ese.
5	Show thy greatness To all of thine enemies, Because Thou art a hope To all those who hope in Thee.	Ułlułuhun kiergiz Bar dusmanłaryna, Ki umsunctur Sen Bar isanuwcułaryna.
6	Enlighten [these] unwise In their great misery, Living in exile [in galut], Gather them, my Lord.	Kipłe jarłyłarny, Usajt teliłerni, Gałut bołhanłarny Jomdar, bijim, ałarny.

II. Yigit' oyan, ne yuqleysin?/ Wake up, o young one, why are you sleeping?

1	Wake up, o young one, why are you sleeping? Don't you see that the day is short? It dawns already long time ago And you do not have enough time for good	Yigit' oyan ne yuqleysin Kün' qışşadır kör'amus'en' Uzaq vaxttan tan atadır Yaxşı işk'a vaxt qalmeydir
5	Make yourself ready for a road [deeds]. Get up and dress yourself in your white dress. Do not stay sleeping too late Stay hungry and do not eat too much.	Yol alnında yadirl'an'gin' Aş uprayış tur kiyin'gin' K'ec qonmayın yuqlamas s'en' Azıyiş az ač turars'en'
10	Look at your pretty neck in your mirror See much money only in your dreams. If vehemence fills your fists Nothing will help you.	Körqlü boyuň baş küzgünd'a Köp kümüşün kör tüşünd'a Tolsa uvuçlarıň χamas ²³ N'em'asid'a sa boluşmas
15	Praise to him who knows the God Praise to him who follows the truth. He who keeps the Sabbath Is ready to leave the exile [galut].	San bilivčüg'a t'en'rini San iz'l'avčüg'a k'ertini Saqlavču şabbatnı tutma Fadırdır galuttan çıxma
20	If he keeps all the commandments [yar mitsvani] If he treads the path of God He will swiftly evade everything that is evil And will swiftly reach everything that is good.	Gar mitsvani kim saklasa Yolu bila biynin' barsa Bar yamandan ol teyz' k'et'ar Bar yaşşıya ol teyz' yet'ar
25	For everyone who speaks during the prayer Be it in the morning or in the evening There is no place in the garden of Eden Only in evil Gehenna.	Gar söz'l'avčü t'efillada Γem ert'ad'a yem k'eč'ad'a Ornu yoxtur gan eden'd'a Ančač raşa geyinnomda
30	Wake up early if you have sinned And beg your Lord the God [for forgiveness]. Read His Torah everyday day And be enemy to His Enemy.	Qalqsa yaman ert'a turyun Patşayınyı biyni qolyun Torasın yar kün' oχuyun Duşmanına duşman bolyun
35	Joy was to Haman And woe was to Mordecai. They cried and fasted for three days And banished the evil time. ²¹	Yaxşı eg'an'd'a Γamanya Yaman edi Murdeχayya Üč kün' oruč qıçırıldılar Yaman vaxtnı qaçırdılar
	Be our Lord today, He fulfills all our desires.	Γal'ed'a oldur biyimiz' Ol b'er'adir bar kl'agimiz'
	He protects the obedient ones And destroys those who are proud.	Sınıç džanni ol sakleydir Öqt'aml'arnı sindiradir
	O young, return back to your kin in good health, Fulfil the commandments concerning property ²²	Yigit' qaytğun sav eg'an'd'a Qıl mitsvalar mal bolyanda

²¹ A reference to Purim and events described in the Book of Esther.

²² Or “concerning cattle”.

²³ Manuscript version has a marginal commentary *avanlıq* (“sin, evil”) at this place.

40 From all of your possessions only four boards remain] And nothing remains alive in them. Bar malıñdan dört' taxtadır
Olda barçaya bolmeydir

III. Yanyur yuvsə / If rain comes down²⁴

- 1 Yanetur²⁵ yuvsa yuzün' yernin' yaşarır. Yemin' yes'a yesi yolnun yuvurur. Yuvruğ yalçı yalın yet's'a yubanır. [Yigit' yen's'a yaman yetserin' yubanır] Yigit' yigit' yuvuryun yoluna yaratuvçuynun yalbaryn yılamax bila. Yuvyun
- 2 yuzün' yur'agiyinin'. Yen'gin' yaman yetseriyini. Yarlıyaşıy yalınley yarır. Yigit'ligiy yaştayıley yanırır. Yuvulur yazıcıyı. Yaşırlır yamanlıyı. Yoluyursın yaşıyı yolluyusylarya yet'arsin' yaşılıxını. Yigit' yigit' yuvruğlar yaşıyı yolya. Yarlıyaşına yoşaryının yet'arl'ar.
- 3 Yuvunyanlar yazıxlardan yulduzley yarırlar. Yuvuz yur'aklil'ar yapraçley yaşarırlar. Yaştan yigitt'an' yoluna yaratuvčunun yuvururlar. Yetip yillarda yasavulundan yolunun yoşaryının yubanırlar. Yomulup yerd'an' yoşarı yarlıyaşlarya yet'arlar.
- 4 Yigit' yigit' yıllar yamanlıx yesisi yalından yamanlıyının. Yadar yet'kirüvü yoluñ yıllarının. Yiyılır yaman yiyilmaç yılıs etüvüçü yalın yalçının. Yabulur [yuvuz yerd'al] yiyini yamanlارının. Yamanın yur'agi yarılır yarası yazıxlارının yayılır. Yemişin' yollarının yiştirir.
- 5 Yiyini Yisra'el'nin yalbaryn yaratuvçumuzya. Yapkay yazıxlarımızni. Yiyinylaltkay yuklarımızni. Yiyitizl'at'kay²⁶ yulunmaç yollarımızni. Yiyanay²⁷ yiyinin yesirl'an'yanlarnı. Iştiroyay yadayanlarnı Yavanda. Yuluay yulkunyanlarnı yeusta yelamda [?].²⁸ Yomdaryay yuzakl'an'yanlarnı Yişma'el'da. Yasaçay yiyilanların Yeruşala'imnин. Yuvutkay yayyylanlarnı yayınır yav bila yoluna yumuşunun. Yaratkay yiyinlarna Yeyudanın yanı yur'ak. Yiyitkiryay yur'akl'arımızni yaşıyı yolya. Yanırtkay yollarımızni yarlıyaşlı yollar kibik. Yalçiyaylar yuvuz yur'eklil'arı Yitsyaqınin.

Translation:

- 1 If rain comes down the face of earth will flourish. A wayfarer will run if he is bound by a promise. An envoy will rejoice if he gets a sufficient reward. [A youth will rejoice if he overcomes his evil desires]
- 2 O youths, rush to the path of the Creator, pray with weeping. Wash away the

²⁴ I am using here the complete archival version transliterated by myself from Hebrew script into Latin characters (NLR F. 946, Evr. II A, no. 161/9, fol. 5). Firkovičius's version has only the first four parts and does not include the last, and perhaps most important, fifth part (MYKOLAS FIRKOVIČIUS [ed.], *Karay Yirlary*, Vilnius 1989, p. 182). On the other hand, his version has some additional phrases and words, which are quoted here in square brackets.

²⁵ Or *yamyur* – “rain”. In Hebrew characters: יַמְיֻר (yamyur).

²⁶ *Tizl'at'* – “make even”; cf. Russ. *vyravnivat'*.

²⁷ Cf. *vivenelevcí* = "possessor, proprietor".

²⁸ יְעַמְּדָא יְעַשְׂטָא

face of your soul.²⁹ Overcome your evil desires. Your salvation will shine like fire. Your youth will come back.³⁰ It will wash away your sins and hide your evil [deeds]. You will meet good companions, you will reach grace.

O youths, you, who strive to reach the path of virtue.³¹ You will reach the 3 salvation of the Most High. Purified from the sins they [i.e. youths] will shine like the stars. [Their] modest souls will appear green like leaves. From their most young years they will rush to the path of the Creator. When they reach [ripe] years they will be awarded by the Master³² of heavenly path³³. Gathered from the earth they will reach salvation of the Most High.

O youths, the wicked lord will groan from the fire of his wickedness. He, who for years had been catching destiny,³⁴ will grow feeble. There will be no shortage,³⁵ 4 he, who had been destroying reward of servants [of the Lord], will fall. The multitude of his evil [deeds] will be hidden [deep below]. His heart will break, the wound of sinners will grow wider. The fruit of his life will be gathered.

Community³⁶ of Israel, pray to our Creator. Hide our sins. Gather our burdens. Make even salvation of our years. Take into [your] possession the crowd of those in captivity. Gather those exhausted among the Greeks.³⁷ Save those 5 getting weak in despair and pain [?].³⁸ Gather those locked in Ishmael.³⁹ Rebuild destruction of Jerusalem. Draw nearer those oiled with oil to [walk along] the path of labour. Create a new heart for the communities of Judah.⁴⁰ Direct our hearts to the path of virtue. Renew our years similar to the years of salvation. Rejoice, those modest of Isaac.⁴¹

²⁹ Or “the surface of your heart”.

³⁰ Literally: “your youth will be renewed in youthful manner”.

³¹ Literally: “runners to the good path”.

³² Turkish *yasavul* – “leader, master, superintendent”; cf. Russian *есаул* – “казачий чин, первый после атамана” (MAX VASMER, *Etimologičeskij slovar' russkogo jazyka*, vol. II, Moscow 1986, pp. 27-28).

³³ Or “heavenly/high destiny”.

³⁴ In Firkovičius's variant *yet'kirüvčü yalin yillarnin* (“who for years has been sending fire”).

³⁵ Literally “evil fall will fall”.

³⁶ Or “crowd / army”.

³⁷ I.e. perhaps, in Christian countries in general.

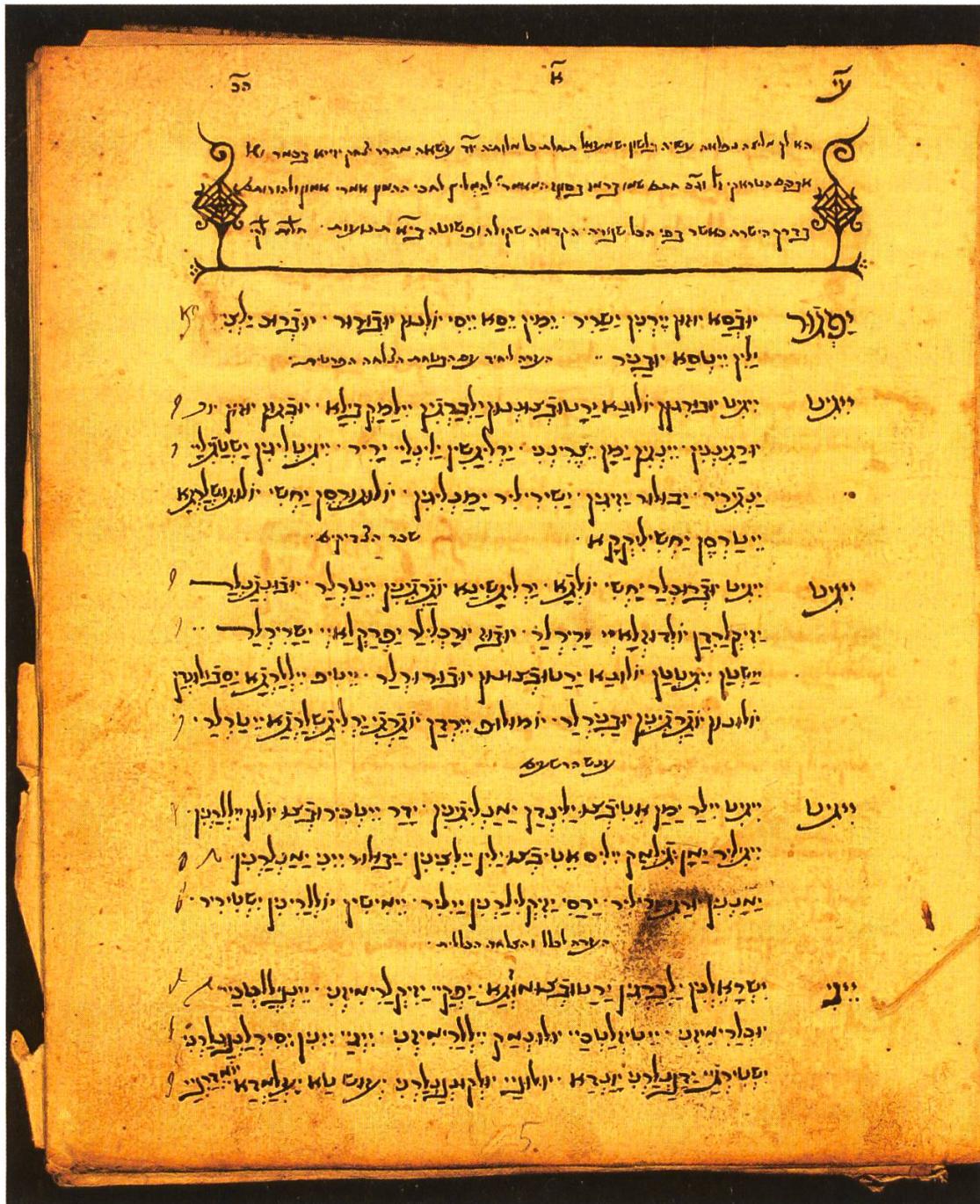
³⁸ Unclear. Dan Shapira with caution suggested to read it as a corruption of Hebrew *עוֹשֶׁה* (*ye'uš* – “despair”) and Arabic loanword **אָלָם** (*elem* – “pain”).

³⁹ I.e. perhaps, in Muslim countries in general.

⁴⁰ I.e. for the Jews in general.

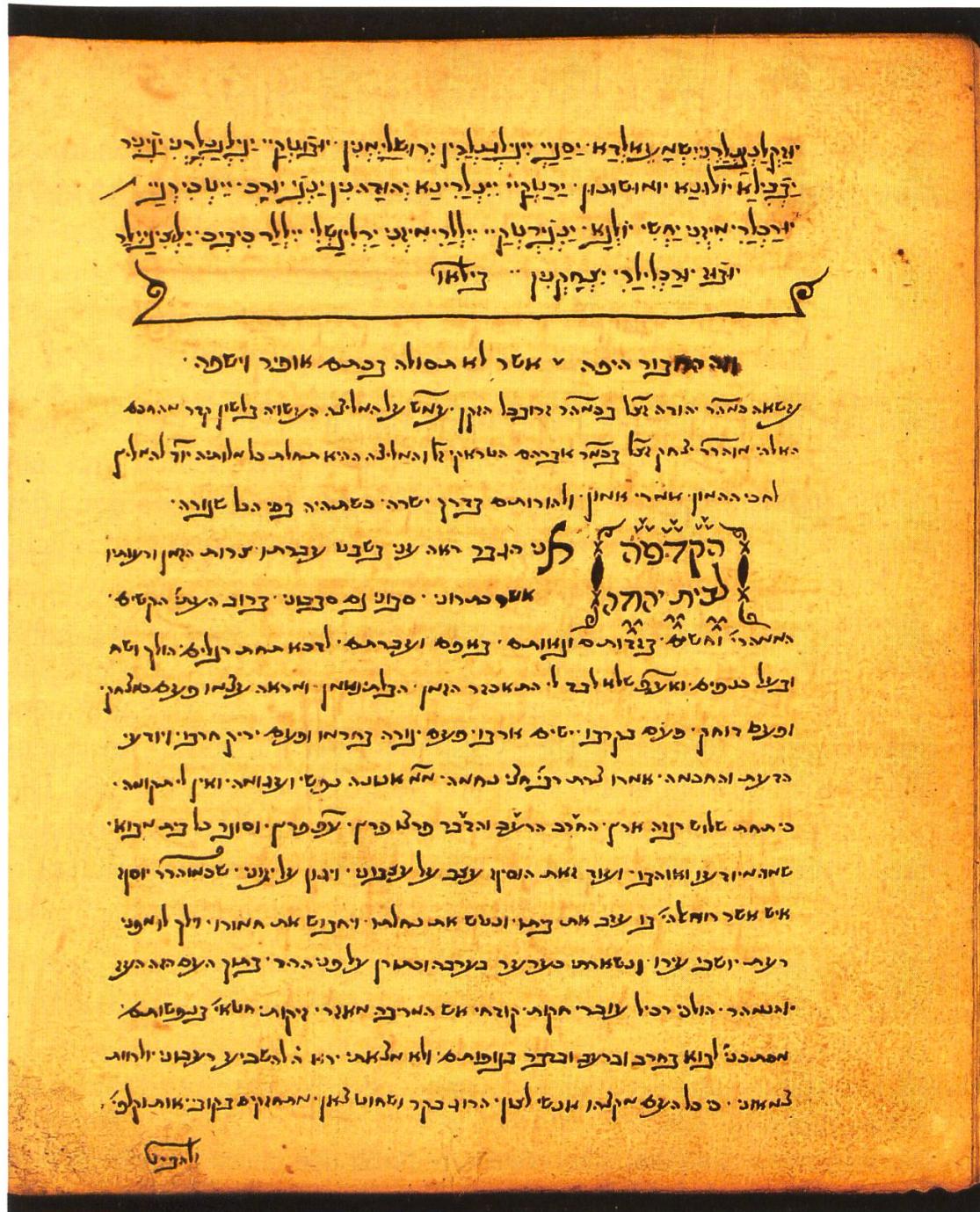
⁴¹ I.e. the Jews; at the same time an allusion to the author's name.

Plate I:



*Beginning of Isaac ben Abraham's rhetorical composition
(National Library of Russia in St. Petersburg
F. 946, Evr. II A, no. 161/9, fol. 5r).*

Plate II:



*Final part of Isaac ben Abraham's rhetorical composition
and beginning of the rhymed Hebrew commentary by Judah ben Zerubabel
(National Library of Russia in St.Petersburg
F. 946, Evr. II A, no. 161/9, fol. 5v).*