



The Turmoil of the Time

1. Rambam (12th century Egypt), Letter to the Jews of Yemen

ויש עליכם לדעת, כי בתחלת מלכות ישמעאל עמד איש בעבר הנהר ואמר שהוא משיח, ויצא בכלל עשרת אלפים מישראל, והיה האות שלו שלן מצורע והשכים בריא, ולא נשלם עסקו ולא עמדה עצתו... וכמו כן עמד איש אחד במערב במדינת פאס היום ארבעים ושמנה שנה, ואמר שהוא מבושר ושלוחו של משיח, ואמר שבאותה שנה יגלה, ולא יצא דברו לאור, והתחדשו לישראל בגללו צרות. והודיעני הדבר הזה מי שהיה מצוי בכל. וקודם זה עשר שנים עמד בארצות ספרד במדינות קרטבה איש אחד ואמר שהוא משיח, וכמעט קט היתה כליה על שנאיהם של ישראל בגללו. וקודם זה כמו שלשים שנה עמד אחד בצרפת ואמר שהוא משיח, ועשה אותות לפי סברתם, והרגוהו הצרפתים, והרגו עמו כלל מקהילות הקודש.

You should know that in the beginning of the Arab Empire, a man arose from the bank of the river and said he was Mashiach, and about ten thousand Jews went with him. His sign was that he went to bed as a *metzora* and he awoke healthy. His pursuit was not completed and his counsel did not endure... And likewise a man arose in the west, in the land of Fez, 48 years ago, saying that he was the herald and emissary of Mashiach. He said that [Mashiach] would be revealed that year, and his words did not come true, and new troubles began for the Jews because of him. Someone who was there for all of it told me about it. And about ten years before this, in the lands of Spain, the region of Cordova, a man declared that he was Mashiach, and destruction almost came upon the "enemies of Israel" because of him. And about thirty years before this, one arose in France and said he was Mashiach, and he performed signs, as they thought, and the French killed him – and with him they killed from the holy communities.

2. Rabbi Yehudah HaLevi (11th century Spain), Kuzari 3:65, Hirschfeld tr.

The next generation was that of the High Priest Simon the Just and his disciples and friends. He was followed by Antigonos of Sōchō of great fame. His disciples were Šādōk and Boethos who were the originators of the sects called after them Saddōcaean and Boethosian... After him came Judah b. Tabbāi and Simon b. Shētaḥ, with the friends of both. At this period arose the doctrine of the Karaites in consequence of an incident between the Sages and King Jannai who was a priest. His mother was under suspicion of being a 'profane' woman. One of the Sages alluded to this, saying to him: 'Be satisfied, O king Jannai, with the royal crown, but leave the priestly crown to the seed of Aaron.' His friends prejudiced him against the Sages, advising him to browbeat, expel, and scatter or kill them. He replied: 'If I destroy the Sages what will become of our Law?' 'There is the written law,' they replied, whoever wishes to study it may come and do so; take no heed of the oral law.' He followed their advice and expelled the Sages and among them Simon b. Shētaḥ, his son-in-law. Rabbanism was laid low for some time. The other party tried to establish a law built on their own conception, but failed, till Simon b. Shētaḥ returned with his disciples from Alexandria, and restored tradition to its former condition. Karaism had, however, taken root among people who rejected the oral law, and called all kinds of proofs to their aid, as we see to-day... The Karaites turned their attention to the fundamental principles, deducing the special laws from them by means of arguments. The damage often extended to the roots, through their ignorance rather than intention.

3. Rabbi Avraham Ibn Daud I (12th century Spain), Sefer haKabbalah, Seder haGaonim: Dor Shlishi

ובימיו היה ענן ושאוול בנו שר", וענן זה מבית צור היה ותלמיד חכם היה בתחלה והכירו בו שמץ פסול, מפני כן לא נסמך לגאון וגם לא סייעוהו מן השמים להיות ראש גלות. ומפני הטינא שהיתה בלבו העלתה שירטון ועמד להסית את ישראל מעל קבלת חכמים מפי הנביאים עדים כשרים מפי עדים כשרים כמו שסדרנו ספר זה, ונעשה זקן ממרא על פי ב"ד לבתי שמוע אל השופטים. וחבר ספרים והעמיד תלמידים ובדא מלבו חוקים לא טובים כי אחר החרבן נדלדלו המינים עד שעמד ענן וחזקם...

And in his days was Anan, and his son Shaul, may the name of the wicked rot. And this Anan was from the house of Tzur, and he was a Torah scholar at first, but they saw in him an element of disqualification. Therefore he was not ordained as Gaon, and he was also not aided from Heaven to become Exilarch. And because of the filth in his heart, silt accumulated and he arose to seduce Israel away from the tradition of the Sages, from the prophets, righteous witnesses from righteous witnesses, as we have put in order in this book. He became a rebellious elder against the word of the beit din, not listening to the judges. And he composed books and established students and invented from his own heart bad laws, for after the Churban the heretics became weaker until Anan came and strengthened them...

4. Some Karaite practices
 - No Shabbat candles
 - No Chanukah or Purim
 - Calendar is set by lunar observation
 - Shavuot is always on Sunday
 - Lack of the "bittul b'shishim" principle

The Calendar Controversy

5. Some calendar facts
 - In Jewish law, the hour is divided into 1080 *chalakim*. (Each *chelek* is 3.33 seconds.)
 - The *molad* is the purported time of conjunction of the Sun and the Moon – the moment of the New Moon
 - Two rules
 - 1: Rosh haShanah cannot start on Sunday, Wednesday or Friday
 - 2: If the *molad* is after midday, Rosh Chodesh is postponed until the next day
 - So if the *molad* for Tishrei occurs on Shabbat afternoon, Rosh haShanah is pushed to Monday.
6. Three theories
 - Israel vs. Bavel regarding when the original molad was
(Rachamim Sar Shalom, <http://www.daat.ac.il/daat/shabat/luach/matay-2.htm>)
 - A stance against rabbinic postponements
 - Israel vs. Bavel