

Yosef ben Mordekhay Malinowski: On the Date of his Death

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Abstract

According to Jacob Mann, Yosef ben Mordekhay Malinowski, a prominent pupil of Yiṣḥaq ben Avraham of Troki, died after 1624. This article quotes some new data on the date of his death and proves it should be established within a few years after 1603. It points out that most probably Malinowski left Troki and moved to Łuck in 1602. The article also gives a brief genealogy and a list of his works.

Keywords

Yosef ben Mordekhay Malinowski (Joseph ben Mordecai Malinowski), Yiṣḥaq ben Avraham of Troki (Isaac ben Abraham of Troki), Polish-Lithuanian Karaites, Karaites in Troki, Karaites in Birže

Yosef ben Mordekhay Malinowski is one of the best-known Karaite scholars from Lithuania at the turn of the 16th and 17th centuries. He was a student of the famous Yiṣḥaq ben Avraham of Troki, who entrusted him with the completion of *Ḥizzuq 'Emuna*.¹ He also authored numerous works. The most known of them are *Seṓer ha-'Eleṓ Leḳa (Šelomo)*,² *Qiṣṣur 'Inyan haš-Šeḥita*³ and *Seṓer Minhagim*,⁴ which appeared in print. Moreover, his oeuvre includes a

¹ See the introduction to *Ḥizzuq 'Emuna* by Yosef ben Mordekhay (*Haqdamat Talmid ham-Meḥabber*).

² Edited by Menashe ben Israel in Amsterdam, 1643.

³ This treatise is also known under the title *Qiṣṣure haš-Šeḥitot*, based on *'Adderet 'Eliyyahu*. Edited in Wien, 1830, cf. [MALINOWSKI] 1830.

⁴ Edited in *Siddur hat-Tefillot haq-Qara'im* in Wilno, 1891, cf. SZYSZMAN 1891: 457–464.

number of works of poetry⁵ and commentaries to various passages of *'Adderet Eliyyahu*⁶ and *Toḳaḥat 'aken yeš li-ḥida*.⁷

Simḥa Łucki (Luşqi/Lutski) gives the following description of his literary output in *Ner Şaddiqim*:⁸

“The prominent scholar, divine philosopher, *rav ribbi* Yosef, son of the honourable sir *rav* Mordekhay, the martyr, may the Lord avenge his blood, was a student of *rav ribbi Yişḥaq*, mentioned above, righteous of blessed memory. He wrote an excellent explanation and esteemed commentary to *'Ešer 'Iqqarim* in the *'Adderet* book. In addition to this, he wrote an excellent and profound commentary on *'Arayot* in the *'Adderet* book. Moreover, he wrote a summary of *'Inyan haš-Šeḥita* in the *'Adderet* book. What is more, he wrote

⁵ אל נערץ בסוד בקדושים רבה: SZYSZMAN 1892b: 83–84; Schocken Institute for Jewish Research 13555, 127v–130v; Bodleian Library 2777, 2r–3r; Abk 3, 180v–182v; אפיל תחנת' לפני ה': BEZEKOWICZ and FIRKOWICZ 1909: 20; NLI (the National Library of Israel) Heb. 8°5195, 41r–41v;

מאסר העון ותפישתו: Mann 1935: 1228–1231; NLI Heb. 8°5204, 108v–109v; (the Karaite language version:) ניציב קושצון טוטקוגולו: NLI Heb. 8°5204, 109r–111r;

איזכיר תהלות נורא עלילות: NLI Heb. 8°5204, 80r–80v; JSul.III.5, 560r–560v;

יה שמע קולי ורחם: NLI Heb. 8°3795, 42r; NLI Heb. 8°5204, 25r;

ישתבח אל עליון: Abk 1 (no pagination); JSul.III.79, 160r;

איכה אפתח שפתי: Abk 3, 214r–216v; Abk 3, 157v–[158v];

אבוא ביתך בפחד וחרדה: JSul.III.79, 254r;

אנעים קולי לפני אלי: NLI Heb. 8°5204, 24v–25r; (Karaite language version:) אדם בולינכ כי

טופרקסין: NLI Heb. 8°5204, 148r–149r;

קיסקא וגדייני צנים בלימוסין: NLI Heb. 8°5195, 24v;

בלשון ראש עבר: Abk 3, 342v, 10–18;

עורי יחידה משנת אולת: BNU (Bibliothèque Nationale et Universitaire, Strasbourg) 3974: 168r;

אכונן דברי ואמתיק זמירי: NLR Evr II a 156–1, 7r–8v; NLR Evr II a 5, 94r; Russian State Library, Moscow, Schneerson Collection, Evr 225, 2r–2v (with an introduction, the *הקדמה*, to *Minḥat Yehuda*. Cf. MANN 1935: 732).

⁶ Among others to *'Ašara 'Iqqarim*, *Šabbat*, *Seder Našim*, *Mila*, etc. Cf. NLR Evr I 664, 1r–31v; JTS (Jewish Theological Seminary) 3459, 303r–323v; JTS 3359, 70r–81v; BNU 3974, 89r–116v; Abk 3, 331v, 1–332v, 6; 341r, 4–341r, 13.

⁷ Cf. SZYSZMAN 1892a: 22–23. IOM (the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts of the Russian Academy) C 74, 3r–3v; IOM B 415, 5v–6v; IOM C 74, 3r–3v; NLI Evr II a 156–1, 4v–6v.

⁸ *Ner Şaddiqim*, chapter 10; cf. MANN 1935: 1431 (HUC Ms 849, 137v (227v)):

החכם השלם הפילוסוף האלהי הר"ר יוסף בכמה"ר מרדכי הקדוש ה"ד היה תלמידו של הר"ר יצחק הנ"ל זצ"ל. וחבר ביאור טוב ופרוש נכבד על עשר עקרים של ס' האדרת ועוד חבר פ' טוב ופ' מספיק על ענין העריות מס' האדרת. ועוד כתב ענין השחיטה בקוצר מס' אדרת. ועוד חבר ס' המנהגים שלנו שעל פיו אנחנו נוהגים היום כל קהלות גלילות ליטא ופולין. ועוד חבר ס' א' קטן נחמד וכליל יופי בדרך תפלה ותחנה נקרא שמו האלף לך שבה אלף תיבות וראשית כל תיבה באות הא'. והוא נדפס בדפוס אמסטרדם. ועוד חבר פירוש נכבד על הקדמת אצולה של הר"ר אהרון הראשון קדוש ה'. ושאר חבורים אחרים וכלם נמצאים בידינו כהיום הזה.

our book *Minhagim*, according to which we, all communities of the Lithuanian and Polish areas, act today. Moreover, he wrote a pleasant small book, perfect in its beauty, in the manner of prayer and plea, called *Ha-'elep leka*, which consists of a thousand words, each word begins with *he*. It was published in Amsterdam. Apart from that, he wrote an esteemed commentary to *Haqdamat 'ašula* of *rav ribbi* Aharon the First,⁹ saint of the Lord. And other works. All of them have been in our hands until today.”

Yosef ben Mordekhay Malinowski was a member of one of the most distinguished Lithuanian Karaite families, i.e. the branch of the Malinowski family descended from the *shofet* (Pol. *wójt*) “Pan Jesko” (Sir Jesko)¹⁰. He was a grandson of Yosef, *shofet*, son of Mordekhay, *rofe* and *shofet*¹¹ (it is not clear when he held the position of the *shofet*). It is known that his grandmother Esther, daughter of Nisan (wife of Yosef the *shofet*) came from Łuck (died in 1590). Yosef was born to the marriage of Mordekhay *haq-qadosh* ben Yosef and Malka. His parental uncle was Avraham, the *shofet* (father of nine sons; he held the position of the *shofet* at the beginning of the 17th century¹²). Despite the fact that Yosef ben Mordekhay was married, it is likely that he died childless (with no male descendant in any case). Yosef ben Mordekhay was buried in Łuck.¹³

To date, Yosef ben Mordekhay Malinowski’s biography has been best described by Jacob Mann (cf. MANN 1935: 718–720). However, the exact dates of his birth and death are unknown. According to the widely accepted findings of Jacob Mann, Yosef ben Mordekhay died after 1624 and was born about 1570.

In this article, we quote some data from the manuscripts in the Firkowicz collection which allow for a revision of Jacob Mann’s findings and a more precise determination of the dates of his birth and death.

⁹ We were not able to find this work of Yosef ben Mordekhay Malinowski. Por. SZYSZMAN 1891: 166; MANN 1935: 446–447, note 2.

¹⁰ Probably Jesko Morduchajewicz, the *shofet* about mid-16th century, cf. MANN 1935, 611; GAŚIOROWSKI 2008: 459; the Wróblewski Library of the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences F301–20, 1–4.

¹¹ Another student of Yiṣṣaq ben Avraham of Troki, Yoshiyahu ben Yehuda, was also a great-grandson of Mordekhay, *rofe* and *shofet*, son of Yosef, a *shofet*, cf. ABRAHAM FIRKOWICZ’s notes in NLR F 972 no. 130, fol. 14v; NLR Evr II A 161–2 fol. 14r.

¹² Cf. MANN 1935: 619; GAŚIOROWSKI 2008: 461–462.

¹³ Cf. Evr II a 161–2, 1r; SZYSZMAN 1891: 459 (*Seṣer Minhagim*); MANN 1935: 720.

The first record is a fragment in the manuscript *Seḇer ha-Reḇu'ot* (NLR Evr I 732) of Avraham ben Yoshiyahu (1636–1687) about his son Yosef, later *hazzan* in the Nowe Miasto community, who was born in 1666. The fragment reads as follows:

[...] וקראתי את שמו לזכר שני חכמים וצדיקי' מבני משפחתי הא' החכם המופלא כמהר"ר יוסף הנקרא מלינווסקי בכמהר"ר מרדכי הי"ד הנפטר בן שלשי' וארבע שני' בלוצקא והלך בלי זכר {בן} בני' והב' כמהר"ר יוסף בן כמ"ר שלמה הגבאי זצ"ל כמו כן המת בלא בני' [...] ¹⁴

“[...] And I gave him a name in remembrance of two scholars and righteous men who were members of my family. The first one is the notable scholar, honourable sir, *rav ribbi* Yosef, called Malinowski, son of the honourable sir *rav ribbi* Mordekhay, may the Lord avenge his blood, who died at the age of 34 in Łuck and passed away leaving no sons to commemorate him. The other one is the honourable sir *rav ribbi* Yosef, son of the honourable *ribbi* Shelomo, the *gabbay*, may the memory of the righteous one be blessed. He also died leaving no sons [...]”

The information in Avraham ben Yoshiyahu’s note that Yosef ben Mordekhay died at the age of 34 was previously unknown. It seems perfectly reliable as it comes from a son of Yoshiyahu ben Yehuda (1588–1663), who was Yiṣḥaq ben Avraham’s student, like Yosef ben Mordekhay, and was written in 1666. It is worth noting that the manuscript *Seḇer ha-Reḇu'ot* is an autograph. This is extremely significant, as the reliability of the document that casts doubt on Jacob Mann’s finding that Yosef ben Mordekhay Malinowski died after 1624 cannot be questioned on the basis of a corrupted text or other reasons.

The approximate date of Yosef ben Mordekhay’s death, i.e. after 1624, established by Mann was based on Noaḥ ben Yeshaya’s letter marked in his edition with accession no. 124 (= NLR Evr I Dok II, 49).¹⁵ This letter was sent to Yosef ben Mordekhay Malinowski by Noaḥ ben Yeshaya, *melammed* and *shoḥet* in Birze (or Birzes), who had most likely moved to the town with a group of Troki Karaites. The town belonged to the Lithuanian Prince Krzysztof Radziwiłł at

¹⁴ Cf. NLR Evr I 732, fol. 56r. See fig. 1.

¹⁵ Cf. MANN 1935: 1196–1198.

that time.¹⁶ The following date can be found in this letter: Sunday, 25th *Eytanim* (i.e. *Tishri*) 385 according to the short count.¹⁷ It must be emphasised that this is the only dated document quoted by Mann which mentions Yosef ben Mordekhay Malinowski. However, the examination of the note in the manuscript NLR Evr II a 49, fol. 1v (see fig. 2) on which Mann's edition was based, calls this finding into question. It can be clearly seen that the year was added by a different hand (i.e. not by Noah ben Yeshaya), probably the same which added the note beginning with words אלו אגרות on the margin (we suppose, it might be the hand of Gabriel, Abraham Firkowicz's son-in-law). Doubtlessly, the year 385 was added according to the calendar of new moons for 384 and 385, which are on the left side (see fig. 2). Contrary to Mann's statement (cf. MANN 1935: 1198), the notes were not written by Noah ben Yeshaya's (they are written in different hand-writing, a cursive style known from Constantinople, and were possibly added about 1624 on the reverse side of the folded letter)¹⁸. It is not known whether a year was included in the date in the letter at all, or if it was illegible and was added for this reason. The above findings are confirmed by Abraham Firkowicz's note about the manuscript Evr I Dok II, 49 from the mid-19th century, in which he pointed out that the letter originated in 363, or later:

לכמה"ר יוסף הנ"ל בכמ"ר מרדכי הקדוש (במקום הי"ד)
מאת כמה"ר נח החזן המחבר בכמ"ר ישעיה בק"ק בירז,
על אודות תלמידו אלישע בן מרדכי אשר נתן לו רשות
לשחיטה משלם תודות, ועל הדרש אשר דרש בקהל בירז
ושם הרב יוסף הנ"ל הגדיל בו ומיעד לשלוח הנסח אליו
וגם על אודות מלחמת שוועציאן שמלחמים עם אילי
אדום עתיד לשלוח לו, ומזכיר את כה"ר משה הדין בן

¹⁶ It is likely that the Karaite community in Birze developed some time after 1589 when King Sigismund III Vasa granted special privileges to the inhabitants of the town which exempted them from paying tolls and customs for 25 years. Cf. BARDACH 1990: 199.

¹⁷ Cf. MANN 1935: 1198: נכתב ביום א' לשבוע כ"ה לר"ח איתנים שפ"ה לפ"ק

¹⁸ The same hand is found in the manuscript Evr II A 439 which includes a sermon (derash) given in Luck in 1635, cf. folio 3 recto (the name of the preacher and the copyist was not noted; perhaps it is the hand of Işhaq ben Simḥa, cf. MANN 1935: 718). The list of new moons in Evr I Dok II 49, 1 verso was probably based on the calculation guidelines sent by Josef Delmedigo to Zarah ben Natan, cf. FÜNN 1867–1868, MANN 1935: 678. Delmedigo exemplified them with the year 1624 (5384/5385).

שמחה , ומודיע לו כי יצר הקראים רע מנעוריהם
 ביחוסם רעים הם ובניהם ואין חדש ביניהם ולא יבצר
 מהם כל אשר יזמו לעשות אם לא תהיה יד הרב לחזק כל
 התנאים וכמר' משה הדין יגיש כל דבר באמונה ולו לב
 יותר מכלנו לדרכי האמת וכו'

On the right margin: 4. שס"ג או יותר¹⁹

“To the honourable sir *rav* Yosef, mentioned above, son of the honourable sir *ribbi* Mordekhay, the martyr (instead of: may the Lord avenge his blood) from the honourable sir, *rav* Noah, *ḥazzan*, author, son of honourable sir *ribbi* Yeshaya in the holy community of Birze, regarding his student Elisha ben Mordekhay, who gave him the licence to practice as a ritual slaughterer. He is thanking him. On the sermon (*derash*) which he gave in the community of Birze. There he raised the above-mentioned *rav*. He intends to send him the text. Also [one] about the war against the Swedes who are fighting with the hetmans of Edom he is to send him. He mentions the venerable *rav* Moshe, the *dayyan*, ben Simḥa, and informs him that the Karaites' inclination has been evil since their youth and they and their children have been evil for generations. There is nothing new among them; they succeed in nothing they undertake unless the *rav* has a hand in strengthening all arrangements. The honourable sir *ribbi* Moshe, the *dayyan* will present each case truly. Among us all, his heart is the biggest heart for the paths of truth, etc.

On the margin: 4. 363²⁰ or later.”

The mention of the war against Sweden is important for the determination of the actual date the letter was written. Noah ben Yeshaya writes:

ונשארתי בבושת פנים ובכלמה על אשר לא יכולתי להקדים פני אדוני בכתב האמת והדרש
 אשר דרשתי בפני ק"ק דב"רזיס ושם אדוני הגדלתי ולא יכולתי לכתוב ולשלוח לאדוני
 שהמלאכה לא ליום ולא לשנים ואם אהיה בחיים אכתוב ולכמע"ת ואגדל את שם אדוני
 ואשלח לכמע"ת מבלי איחור וגם החדושים אודות מלחמת שווצי"א אשר הם נלחמים עם
 אילי אדום אשר הוא כתוב בפני אלא מחוסר הזמן לא יכולתי לכתבן. ואצייר בציורים נאים

¹⁹ Evr 946 no. 130, fol. 4r.

²⁰ I.e. 1603 in the Gregorian calendar.

ויקרים ואשים כל ענין וגדר בלחוד ושם אדוני וגדולתו ארים כגדולת נשר אלא אדוני אל
תמהר הליכתך עד שתבוא חבורי לפניך וכבר הרכבתיהו על מרכבת המ"שנה ונתאחרתי
בעד הצוירים אשר התחלתי לצייר כאשר יגיד לכמע"ת פי כה"ר משה הדיין ב"כ שמחה
יעמ"ש אשר אני דר בבית כ"מ.²¹

“I was left shamefaced and in dishonour because I did not manage to welcome you, my sir, with “The writing of truth and the sermon (*derash*), which I preached before the holy community of Birze. I exalted the name of my sir. Yet I did not manage to write it and sent it to my sir as this work cannot be done in a day or two. And if I stay alive, I shall write to the honourable sir and exalt the name of my sir. I will send it to the honourable sir without delay. Also news about the war against the Swedes who are fighting with the hetmans of Edom, which is written in front of me, but I was unable to write it for the lack of time. I shall draw in nice and valuable pictures and present each matter separately. And I will exalt the name of my sir, like the greatness of the eagle. Only, do not hurry to go on your way, sir, until my writing reaches you. I have already made a rough copy but I have a delay because of the pictures I began to draw, of which you will be informed by the mouth of the venerable Moshe, the *dayyan*, son of the venerable Simḥa, may he rest on his bed in peace, the honourable sir whose house I dwell in.”

We learn from the letter that the war against the Swedes was taking place at the time it was written. Mann presumed the letter was dated to 1624 and assumed that it was the Third Swedish War of 1621–1629 (MANN 1935: 1196). Yet for obvious reasons, if we rely on Avraham ben Yoshiyahu’s information that Yosef ben Mordekhay died at the age of 34, we should assume that it is rather the Second Swedish War of 1600–1611.

In the date in Noah ben Yeshaya’s letter (Evr I Dok II 49, fol. 1v) only the year was corrected. The day of the week and the month seem authentic, they are: יום א' לשבוע כ"ה לר"ח איתנים “Sunday, 25th *Eytanim* (*Tishri*)” (see fig. 2). In the Rabbanite calendar, 25th *Tishri* was on a Sunday only in 1601 (362) and 1608 (369) during the war of 1600–1611. Unfortunately, the data available to us are not sufficient to determine the Karaite calendar at the period in question.

²¹ Cf. MANN 1935: 1196–1197; EVR I Dok II 49, fol. 1 r.

Doubtlessly, the date of Yiṣḥaq ben Avraham of Troki's death serves as an important premise for resolving the question of the date of the letter as well. It is known that when he died, Yosef ben Mordekhay, his student, was a young man, probably around 20 years of age. Geiger established that Yiṣḥaq ben Avraham died in 1594 (cf. GEIGER 1853: 38, 44). Geiger based this date on the information in *Seṣper 'Elim* (Zarah ben Natan's first letter to Yosef Delmedigo), where we read:

ותבוא בת שבע אל המלך שלמה
גזרה חכמתו העליונה לבן הא שנה להביאני במסבות מתהפך בתחבולותיו
גנת הביתן של יצחק אבי אהי' אצלו אמון ואהיה שעשועים בפרי האלף ומעלותיו
געלה נפשו בי בשנת קדש הלולים ויצא יצחק לשוב לפנות ערבי בגרם מעלותיו²²

“And Bathsheba went in unto Shelomo. His highest wisdom decided when I was five years old, to bring me turning around and round by his guidance (Job 37:12) in the palace garden of Yiṣḥaq, my father let me be beside him, a master craftsman, let me be a delight (Prov. 8:30), for the fruit of his thousand (Song of Sol. 8:11) and of his upper chambers (Amos 9:6). His soul rejected me in the year ‘an offering of praise’ (Lev. 19:24). Yiṣḥaq went out to pray (Gen. 24:63) towards evening in his upper chambers.”

The date of birth was read by him from the words קדש הלולים²³, according to the numerical value of the last letters in both words (קדש הלולים = 354). It is worth emphasising that 1594 as the date of Yiṣḥaq ben Avraham's death was also found in Mordekhay ben Nisan's note in *Dod Mordeḳay* (in the 1714 edition).²⁴ Mann questioned Geiger's reading of the date from קדש הלולים. He pointed out that no diacritical marks had been preserved above the relevant letters and emphasized some other data from Zarah ben Natan's letter, i.e. the author's statement that he was 40 years at the time the letter was written (the letter contained the internal date of 380, i.e. 1620²⁵) and that 32 years had passed since the death of Yiṣḥaq ben Avraham from Troki. Mann assumed that the diacritical marks for the numerical value were contaminated and initially were not placed

²² The Odessa edition from 1864: 3.

²³ This term also has the meaning of the fourth year, cf. LEV 19:24.

²⁴ Wolfius and Triglandii 1714: 150: זמן פטירת המחבר ע"ה שנת שנ"ד לאלף.

²⁵ נכתב ביום בית ויא' לאייר ויום כ"ג למספר שנת שף לעלמו, *Seṣper 'Elim*, the 1864 Odessa edition, p. 3.

above the last two letters in the two words קדש הלולים. He put forward the thesis that Yiṣḥaq ben Avraham from Troki died in 1586, in accordance with the information in Zarah ben Natan's letter stating that 32 years had passed between the date of his death and the writing of the letter, i.e. 1618.²⁶ Mann established the year to be 1618 by modifying the date 1620 to make it correspond with the numerical value of the letters in קדש הלולים (he assumed it was possible that the relevant paragraph referred to an earlier period). He deemed the details in *Dod Mordeḳay*, which was created dozens of years later (late 1600s), unreliable as they contradicted the information from Zarah ben Natan, who was Yiṣḥaq ben Avraham's student and a witness to his death. Mann accordingly established that Zarah ben Natan was born eight years before Yiṣḥaq ben Avraham's death, that is, in 1578 (cf. MANN 1935: 726–727). It is noteworthy here that like Mann, Simḥa Łucki established that Yiṣḥaq ben Avraham died in 1588, apparently by deducting 32 from 1620, which is the supposed date of the first letter from Zarah ben Natan to Yosef Delemedigo.²⁷

In spite of the fact that most researchers accept the date established by Geiger, the dispute described here still seems unresolved. The controversy is evident in, for example, the entry about Yiṣḥaq ben Avraham of Troki in *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (by Leon Nemoy), which gives the year 1594 as the date of his death; however, provides it with the remark that: “according to Mann's hypothesis, he was born and died eight years earlier than the above dates”.²⁸ Similarly, the entry about Zarah ben Natan (by Golda Akhiezer, the second edition of 2007), dates his birth to 1578,²⁹ and thus repeats the supposed date of Yiṣḥaq ben Avraham's death in 1586 after Mann. In regard to the discussed debate, we would

²⁶ Cf. *Seḥer 'Elim* (Odessa 1864, p. 4): זה שלשים ובי' שנה אחרי מות יצחק אבי והגני בן הכות ארבעים: זלעפה אחזתני על אסיפת הורי ומורי...

²⁷ HUC Ms 849 (*Ner Ṣaddiqim*) 137v (227v): החכם השלם הר"ר יצחק בכמ"ר אברהם הזקן הטרוקי: היה תלמדו של הר"ר צפניה הנ"ל והוא חבר את הס' היקר והנכבד הנקרא חזק אמונה שהוא וכו' בין חכמי ישראל ובין חכמי הנוצרים ונחלק לשני חלקים וכל חלק לפרקים רבים. וחברו בסוף ימיו בשנת שש"ס לחייו. ונפטר בשנת השמ"ח לפ"ג.

“The esteemed scholar *rav ribbi* Iṣḥq ben Avraham, the elder, of Troki, was a student of *rav ribbi* Ṣefanya, mentioned above. He wrote a valuable and venerable book called *Ḥizzuq 'Emuna*, which is a discussion between Jewish and Christian scholars. It is divided into two parts, and each part into many chapters. He wrote it at the end of his days, in the 60th year of his life. He died in 5348 according to the long count”.

²⁸ Cf. NEMOY 2007.

²⁹ Cf. KOMLOSH, AKHIEZER 2007.

like to mention two premises in the manuscripts of the Firkowicz collection which were not noticed by Mann. Firstly, the NLR Evr I 728 *Derushim* manuscript includes sermons preached by Yiṣḥaq ben Avraham from Troki, and one of them is dated 1592.³⁰ Secondly, the Evr I Dok II 59–64 manuscript includes Zarah ben Natan's work, and there is a clear reference to the date of Yiṣḥaq ben Avraham's death in the work entitled "Ve-ze ḥibbur Zarah ben *ribbi* Nat[an]", marked with no. 28.59. The following passage can be found in lines 12–15:

. עניי מרודים ותוהי ובוהים	. זכור נא אלהי אשר בגבוהים
. לאיש חי מדבר ומטיף ומזה	. קדורי פניהם ראותם עלי זה
. שרידים הלא אחריהם לקבר	. ומשנת שנ"ד לפ"ק ואין איש וגבר
. ואם יש כמו איש פתני בארבים	. אנשים אנוסים הלא הם בקרבים

"[...] Remember, o Lord, the one who is among the highest, poorest and homeless³¹. Amazed and astonished.

Their faces fall when they see me.

It is to the alive man I speak, preach and sprinkle (with water).

And (so) since 354,³² according to the short count. There has been no human or man.

Those who are left, [will] they not follow them to the grave?

Are there no hurt people among them?

And if someone like a viper when they lie in wait [...]"

It appears that the two indicated texts allow us to ultimately disprove Mann's thesis. The contradiction which was analysed by Mann and results from Zarah ben Natan's information that Yiṣḥaq ben Avraham had been dead for 32 years, can probably be explained by textual corruption. There is likelihood that in the original note the diacritical marks were above *shin*, *pe* and *waw* of the second word (שף לעלמו), which gives us the number 386, that is, the year 1626 (32 years after 1594). Therefore, Zarah ben Natan's letter to Yosef Delmedigo should then be dated 1626 not 1620, and the date of Zarah ben Natan's birth should be determined as 1585/6.

³⁰ Cf. fol. 151 r: בק"ק טרוקי ר' עניי מרודים ותוהי ובוהים.

³¹ Cf. Isa. 58:7.

³² 1593/1594 in the Gregorian calendar.

Assuming as certain that Işḥaq ben Avraham died in 1593/4 (and was born 60 years earlier, i.e. in 1533/4), we can presume that Yosef ben Mordekhay Malinowski had to be at least 18 years old at that time (Zaraḥ ben Natan reports that he became his teacher immediately after Yişḥaq ben Avraham's death³³). If so, he would have been 34 years old in 1610. Consequently, the year 1610 seems *terminus ad quem* for his life.

It seems that a crucial argument for the dating of Noah ben Yeshaya's letter is the NLR Evr II a 71a manuscript, entitled *Seḥer ham-Meliša*. This manuscript consists of 43 leaves which include a collection of works by Noah ben Yeshaya. This was previously discussed by Israel Zinberg in his *Toldot Siḥrut Isra'el*.³⁴ This manuscript is not an autograph. The palaeography suggests it might be dated to the first half of the 18th century. Two dates were noted in the manuscript, the former on fol. 10r (bottom pagination): Monday, 26th *Menaḥem*, 5363 from the creation of the world,³⁵ and the latter on fol. 43r: Wednesday, 19th *shevat* 5363 from the creation of the world.³⁶ These notes indicate that the first part of the text (i.e. 1r–10r) was created later, at the beginning of August 1603, whereas the other earlier one (i.e. 10r–43r), at the end of January 1603. The part which is finished by the second colophon, namely from fol. 10r to fol. 34r, is particularly significant. It begins with the words: "The speech of Noah, son of my lord and father, esteemed Yeshaya, let the one who walks uprightly enter into peace and rest on his bed (cf. Isa. 57:2)". The contents of the work clearly indicate that we are dealing with the work mentioned in letter no. 124, i.e. "Ketav ha-'emet ve-had-derash", which was to be sent to Yosef ben Mordekhay Malinowski. This text, partially written in a poetic form, is Noah ben Yeshaya's account of the situation in the Karaite community of Birze in the early 1600s. Yosef ben Mordekhay is the recipient of the text. On fol. 19r–19v, we read:

ראיתי בבית יוסף נין יוסף מבין דבר ואיש תאר וה' עמו וכל אשר יפנה ירשיע והצלחתי
הדרתו תומתו וגדולתו לעומתו צדקתו וכל בני גילו גללו עליו אבן בוחן בו חן וממשלה ורוח
ה' נשאו למעלה עד כבוד שבע חכמות רמות ערובות מחכמות עליו נתן קולו שכל ודעה

³³ Cf. *Seḥer 'Elim*, in the Odessa edition from 1864, p. 4:

... דרך ככב יוסף מתחת כנפי יצחק ויהי מקץ שנה השקוני יין ענושי.

³⁴ ZINBERG 1958: 385–388.

³⁵ יום ב' למלאכה כ"ו לחדש מנחם שנת חמשת אפלים ושלוש מאות וששים ושלוש לתאריך בריאת העולם.

³⁶ והשלמתי זה החבור פה ביישוב בירז"ס יום ד' למלאכה י"ט לחדש שבט בשנת חמשת אפלים ושלוש מאות וששים ושלוש לתאריך בריאת העולם.

לגאון שמהו צפי תפארת עמידתו על שכיות החמדה הקדימני השקני מי סמי התבונה ועוד ריחו תקוע בלבי מעת הליכתו כאשר רכב על ע"ר ובן פר"ד ואם השאירני לזנב בין זנבות האודים עקודים נקודים וברודים .. אבל אני בחרתי חכמת חמוץ בגדים . וציירתיהו על אבן תרות על לוח לבי לזכר עד בוא חליפתי אחריו ארדוף שרב הדרי ואורי מרפא למחלתי [...]

“I saw in the house of Yosef, great-grandson of Yosef – the one who understands the word, a handsome man, and the Lord is with him (cf. 1 Sam. 16:18), and wherever he turns he is victorious (1 Sa 14:47), and his success is his glory – his integrity, greatness, next to his righteousness. And all his peers rolled a granite stone on him (Isa. 28:16). In him there is grace and domination. The Lord’s spirit raised him up to the circle of the seven highest pleasant wisdoms. By the powers of the Most High he uttered his voice of discretion and knowledge. For pride he set him. The beauty of adornment is the pride of his name. He stood upon the beautiful pictures (Isa. 2:16). He accepted me and gave me the aromatic water of understanding to drink. His scent is still in my heart, from his leaving, when he rode a donkey-foal and a mule (cf. Zech. 9:9).³⁷ Although he left me, like a tail, like smouldering tails,³⁸ striped, spotted and piebald (cf. Gen 31:10–12), I chose wisdom and crimson garments (Isa. 63:1). I drew him on a carved stone and on the table of my heart (Prov. 7:3), to commemorate. Until my turn comes, I will follow him, for *rav*, my light and my glory, is the healing for my sickness [...].

In the next part, Noah turns directly to Yosef many times. For example, he writes on fol. 21r – 21v:

[...] ולך הרב אשלח בשלח לקראת מנאצי ולא אסתיר ואתיר כל אגודות מוטה למטה וארמוס בצווי הרב כל עוול ואיש אין בשת וכל הרוצה לשמוע יבוא וישמע והרוצה לראות

³⁷ A parallel note in *Bet Zerubbabel* of Yehuda ben Zerubbabel: (Abk 3, fol. 161v, 5–10) “[...] And this also added to my sadness to my sorrow, and grief to my grief, that our honourable great teacher, *ribbi* Yosef, scholar, son of our honourable great teacher *ribbi* Mordekhay, the martyr, may he rest on his bed in peace, a man who has the Lord’s spirit in him, left his house and abandoned his legacy, he saddled up his donkey and left because of the evil of the inhabitants of his town.[...]” Cf. MANN 1935: 1193–1195.

³⁸ Play on words. The translation has been adapted to fit the context. The meaning based on Isa. 7:4: “smoking brands”.

יבוא ויראה וכל בר דעת יבוא ויראה ויחזיק הלצתי ויאמר אמת . ע"כ הרב תן לי ברכה וברכתך תהיה במנה אחת אפי"ם לשבך מעלי חרון האפרתים עגלי שפה האומרים סבלת מבלי יכלת הבווערי"ם בווערי"ם אש לחנם ובערו כל מנהג ונימוס והחכמים ולומדי התורה בלא חשיבין . ואפתח שפתי ואדבר . ושני הרשעים אשבר .

“[...] and I will send to you, *rav*, sending against those who spurned me, and I will not hide anything, I will undo all the bands of the yoke (cf. ISA. 58:6) downwards and trample, on the command of *rav*, all indignity and a man of no shame. And everyone who will want to, will be able to come and listen. And everyone who will want to see, will be able to see. Each enlightened one will be able to come and see. He will hold my rhetoric. And he will speak the truth. Thus, *rav*, give me your blessing. And your blessing will be like a double portion (cf. 1 Sam 1:5), so that you draw out your anger towards me. The Ephrathites,³⁹ stutterers, who say *sibboleth* (cf. Judg. 12:6), unable (differently), who burn, burn fire in vain, and burned all ways and customs. They do not regard sages and scholars of the Torah. I will open my mouth and speak. I will knock out the teeth of sinners”.

Noah writes about the situation in Birže. The local *ḥazzan*, who had been chosen shortly before, is an object of very emotional accusations, and so are his supporters, who play the dominant role in the community. Individual persons are not named but are given pseudonyms. Noah accuses the incumbent *ḥazzan* of lacking the knowledge and skills required of a *ḥazzan*, breaking the law and indecent behaviour (e.g. lighting a fire and strolling on Shabbat, insult, anger, spitting in the synagogue, various violations of the rules of liturgy, a lack of sufficient knowledge of the holy language, etc.). Indeed, the content of the text gives us certainty that we are dealing with the work mentioned in Noah's letter, i.e. “Ketav ha-'emet ve-had-derash”. In this context, it is important that according to the information in the colophon on fol. 43r the work was completed in January 1603. It can be deduced from its content that at that time Yosef ben Mordekhay left Troki and moved to Łuck, but was definitely alive (he is also mentioned in the first part, finished in 1603).

The data above prove that the letter from Noah ben Yeshaya to Yosef ben Mordekhay (Evr I Dok II 49) should be dated most probably to 1601 or 1602.

³⁹ A term used to describe members of the Karaite community in Birže.

Unfortunately, we are not able to settle the problem of the date in this letter definitively. Dates from the year 5363 in preserved Karaite documents are not coherent. The calendar used by Noah ben Yeshaya in Birże probably differed from the one in Troki. Moreover, we were not able to find any dated Karaite documents from the year 5362 to contrast the date in the letter of Noah ben Yeshaya with it.⁴⁰ The date 1602 seems to be favoured if we consider that “Ketav ha-’emet ve-had-derash”, which was mentioned in letter no. 124, was completed in January 1603. Historical data on the Second Swedish War of 1600–1611 indicate that in the period under consideration, Birże played an active role in the war. The hetman Krzysztof Radziwiłł, “Piorun” (“the Thunderbolt”), the owner of Birże, was one of the commanders in chief of the Polish-Lithuanian army during the campaign of 1601–1603.⁴¹ In the light of the presented data, it seems most probable that Yosef ben Mordekhay died after August 1603, but not later than 1610 (if we assume that he was at least 18 years old in 1594). Therefore, his life can thus be generally established as dating from 1569 to 1610.

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⁴⁰ Among the other documents from the Firkowicz collection, there is only one dated 5363, i.e. Evr I Dok II 19 (MANN 1935: 792). It is a deed from Troki which bears the date Wednesday (*yom dalet*), 18th of *Tevet*, 5363. This date is in accordance with the Rabbinical calendar for the year 5363. However, the 25th of *Tishri* 5363, according to this calendar, falls on Thursday, not on Sunday (as in Evr I Dok II 49, fol. 1v). In the Rabbinical calendar, the 25th of *Tishri* falls on Sunday in the preceding year, i.e. in 5362. If the date in Evr I Dok II 49 was in accordance with the Rabbinical calendar, the letter of Noah ben Yeshaya would have to be dated to 5362, i.e. to October 1601 in the Gregorian calendar. However, we are not able to settle this, as we have no comparative material from this year. Moreover, it is noteworthy that the two dates in NLR Evr II a 71a are not consistent with the calendar of Troki as evidenced in NLR Evr I Dok II, 19. It suggests that the calendar of the Karaite community in Birże for 5363 was not coherent with the calendar (or calendars) of other Karaite communities.

⁴¹ PODHORODECKI 1982: 56–113; BALCEREK 2012: 75–78; WIMMER 2013: 21–28.

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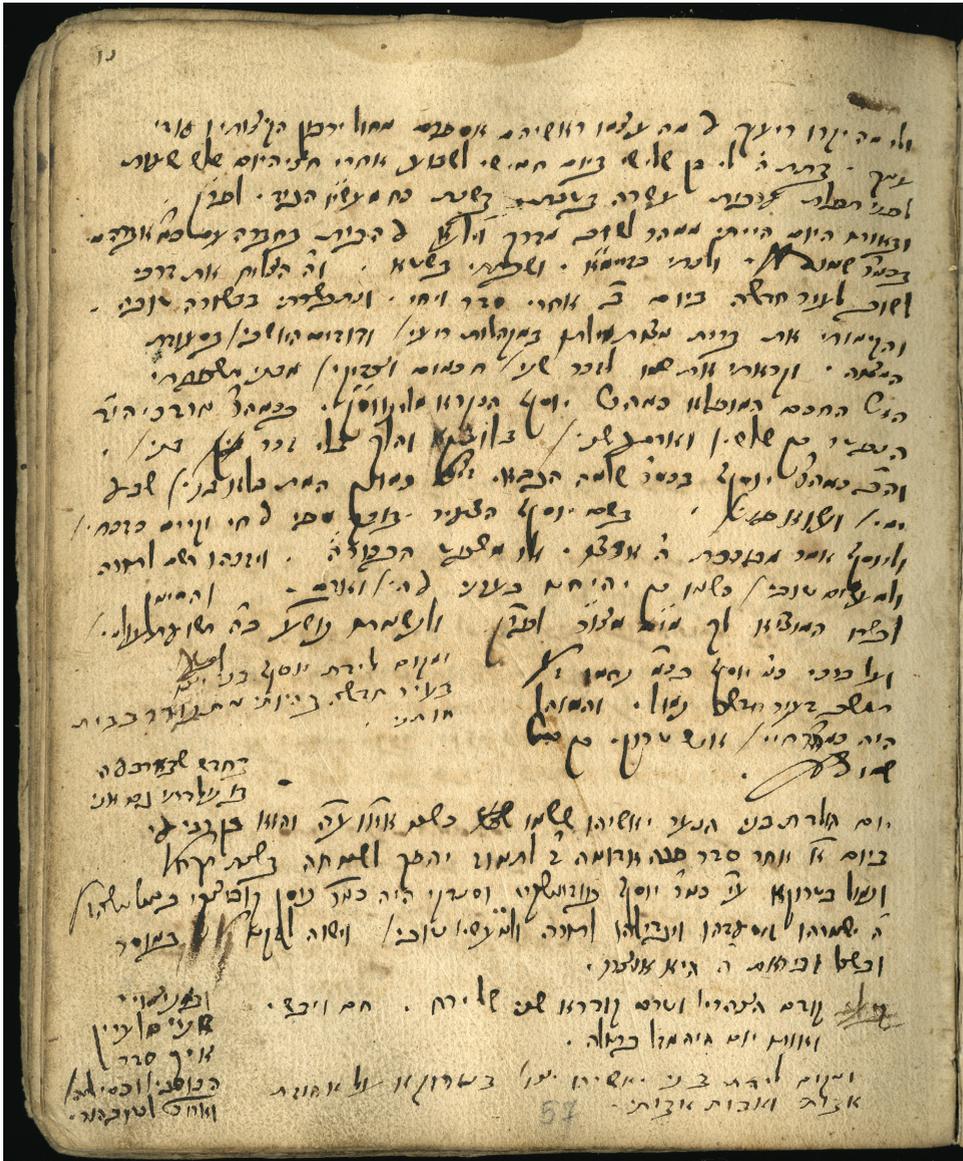


Fig. 1 NLR Evr I 732, fol. 56 recto

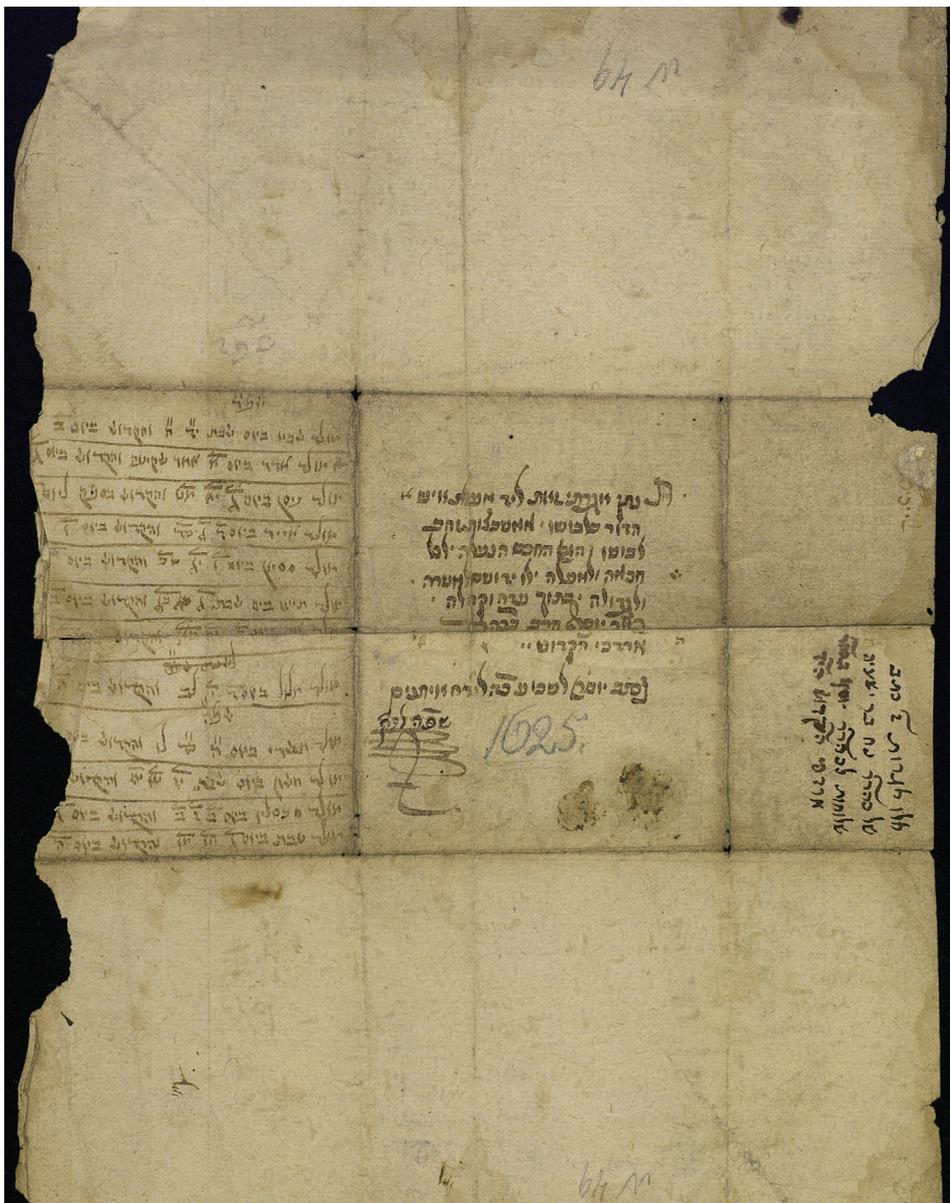


Fig. 2 NLR Evr I Dok II, 49, fol. 1 verso