

# On the Date of Composition of the *Book of Commandments* by the Qaraite Levi b. Yefet

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## Abstract

The *Book of Commandments* of the influential Qaraite scholar Levi b. Yefet is traditionally dated 1006/7 CE. This date is based on the Hebrew translation of the *Book of Commandments* and is irreconcilable with a calendrical characteristic of this year provided by Levi b. Yefet. In this article I propose to revise the date of composition of the *Book of Commandments* to 1009 CE. This date is given in a copy of the Arabic original of the code and is calendrically consistent. I also discuss events in the calendar of Palestinian Qaraites that prompted Levi b. Yefet to mention the year in which he was writing and that took place due to irregular weather patterns.

## Keywords

Qaraism – Levi b. Yefet – manuscripts – Firkovitch Collection – calendar – climate

## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Levi (Abū Saʿīd) b. Yefet was one of the most important medieval Qaraite legal scholars.<sup>2</sup> Active in Jerusalem in the first half of the 11th century he composed

- 1 This article was researched and written as part of the project 'Qaraite and Rabbanite calendars: origins, interaction, and polemic' funded by the Fritz Thyssen Foundation.
- 2 H. Ben-Shammai, 'Sefer Ha-Mitzvot of the Karaite Levi ben Yefet,' *Shenaton ha-Mishpat ha-Ivri: Annual of the Institute for Research in Jewish Law* 11–12 (1984–1986) 99–133 [Hebrew]; J. Mann, *Texts and Studies in Jewish History and Literature*, vol. 2: *Karaitica* (Philadelphia 1935) 32–33; G. Margoliouth, 'Ibn Al-Hitī's Arabic Chronicle of Karaite Doctors,' *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 9, no. 3 (1897) 429–443, esp. 433 (text), 439 (translation); S. Poznanski, *The*

legal and theological works, short Bible commentaries, a masoretic treatise, and abridgements of earlier Qaraite works. Levi b. Yefet's most important work is a code of Qaraite religious law, *Book of Commandments*.<sup>3</sup> Composed in Arabic, Levi b. Yefet's code was translated into Hebrew in the course of the Byzantine Qaraite translation movement and had a significant impact on later Qaraite religious law in Byzantium and in the Middle East.

Levi b. Yefet's *Book of Commandments* is traditionally dated 1006/7 CE.<sup>4</sup> This date was first proposed by Simḥa Pinsker on the basis of the following passage in the Hebrew translation of discourse 1 of the code:<sup>5</sup>

ומקצת חכמינו העביר ב' שנים מעוברות מדובקות כמו שיהיו ב' חדשים מלאים וכן ישים ג' שנים פשוטות ולא שמענו כי זה היה על דרך אחינו המעברים אלא השנה העשירית מזה המחזור והשמונה עשרה ממנו והוא שנת שצ"ז קרן זעירא

One of our scholars allowed two consecutive intercalated years as there can be two full months. He also set three plain years. We have not heard of this ever happening according to the method of our brothers who intercalate, other than in year 10 of this 19-year cycle and in year 18 of it, which is year 397 of the Small Horn.

Year 397 of the Small Horn, i.e., of the Era of the Hijra (henceforth AH for *Anno Hijrae*) corresponded to October 1006 CE–September 1007 CE.<sup>6</sup> The same date and examples of years in the 19-year cycle are given in the four known manuscripts of the Hebrew translation, namely, Oxford, Bodleian (henceforth Ox. Bodl.), Reggio 5, fol. 25v; Russian National Library (henceforth RNL), Evr I 613, fol. 38r; Saint Petersburg, Institute of Oriental Studies (henceforth SPB IOS),

*Karaite Literary Opponents of Saadiah Gaon* (London 1908) 42–46; M.G. Wechsler, 'Levi (Abū Sa'īd) ben Japheth,' in N.A. Stillman, ed., *Encyclopedia of Jews in the Islamic World*, consulted online on 28 November 2021, [http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1878-9781\\_ejiw\\_SIM\\_0013600](http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1878-9781_ejiw_SIM_0013600).

3 The Arabic original of Levi b. Yefet's *Book of Commandments* is still unedited. The Hebrew translation is available in a non-critical edition (Y. Algamil, *The Book of Commandments of R. Levi ben Yefet ha-Levi* [Ashdod 2002] [Hebrew]).

4 Z. Ankori, *Karaites in Byzantium: The Formative Years, 970–1100* (New York 1959) 227–228 n. 44; M. Gil, *A History of Palestine, 634–1099* (Cambridge 1997) 789 (para [925]); Poznanski, *Karaite Literary Opponents*, 42. Wechsler, 'Levi (Abū Sa'īd) ben Japheth.'

5 S. Pinsker, *Zur Geschichte des Karaismus und der Karäischen Literatur* (Vienna 1860) 87, 90 (with an erratum on p. 224) [Hebrew].

6 See e.g., the Fourmilab calendar converter at <https://www.fourmilab.ch/documents/calendar/>.

D 24, fol. 26r; and Leiden University Libraries (henceforth Leiden), Or.4760 (Warner 22), discourse 1, section 27.<sup>7</sup>

This date was questioned by Haggai Ben-Shammai, who drew attention to the fact that it was calendrically problematic.<sup>8</sup> The passage states that 397 AH was year 18 of the 19-year cycle. The meaning of this statement is as follows. In the mainstream rabbinic Jewish calendar, the 19-year cycle is a scheme for deciding which years will be plain (of 12 months) and which years will be intercalated (have an additional 13th month). But it is also frequently used for expressing dates. Years are divided into groups of 19 counting from Creation, and each group is separately numbered: cycle 1 stands for years 1–19 of the Era of Creation (henceforth AM for *Anno Mundi*), cycle 2 for years 20–38 AM, and so on. The date of any year can be expressed as the number of the cycle to which it belongs and its position within that cycle. For example, year 21 AM is year 2 of the 19-year cycle 2. Ben-Shammai pointed out that year 397 AH corresponded to year 4767 AM, which was year 17 of the 19-year cycle and not year 18 as stated in the passage, and suggested to correct the date to 398 AH (4768 AM, 1007/8 CE). Writing that the passage was on the whole unclear, he called for a further investigation of its meaning and of the date. In addition, Ben-Shammai observed that MS British Library (henceforth BL), Or 2577, containing discourses 5 and 6, as well as fragments of discourse 2<sup>9</sup> of the Arabic original of Levi b. Yefet's *Book of Commandments*, included two colophons which did not mention a scribe or the act of copying but described the completion of the work simply as 'this was completed in Rabī' 1' (after discourse 5) and 'it was completed in Rabī' 11 of 415 [AH]' (after discourse 6).<sup>10</sup> This wording led Ben-Shammai to tentatively conjecture that BL Or 2577 may represent Levi

7 I was unable to consult the original or images of Leiden Or.4760. However, a transcription of its text is included in the database of The Historical Dictionary Project of the Academy of the Hebrew Language (<https://maagarim.hebrew-academy.org.il/Pages/PMain.aspx?mishibbur=665000&page=36>, consulted on 6 October 2022). References to this manuscript are given according to the divisions in the database.

8 Ben-Shammai, 'Sefer Ha-Mitzvot,' 100 n. 2.

9 The surviving parts of this discourse are on the laws of Passover. In Ben-Shammai's reconstruction, the laws of Passover and other festivals belonged to discourse 3 ('Sefer Ha-Mitzvot,' 108). In a Judaeo-Arabic copy of the *Book of Commandments* preserved in RNL Evr Arab 1 3920 the laws of Passover and other festivals, together with the laws of Sabbath, belong to discourse 2 *On the Sabbath and festivals and on other related matters* (discourse 2 begins on fol. 109v, the laws of Passover begin on fol. 128r). I follow the arrangement of RNL Evr Arab 1 3920.

10 BL Or 2577, fols. 102r and 159r. Here and in the following square brackets in the translation indicate my explicatory additions. For the translation of the full text of the colophons, see Ben-Shammai, 'Sefer Ha-Mitzvot,' 103.

b. Yefet's autograph.<sup>11</sup> Since discourse 6 is close to the end of the code,<sup>12</sup> this would imply that the *Book of Commandments* was completed around Rabi' II of 415 AH, June–July 1024 CE.

The present article responds to Haggai Ben-Shammai's call for a further investigation of the date of Levi b. Yefet's *Book of Commandments*. It suggests a correction of the date in discourse 1 on the basis of a Judeo-Arabic copy of the original code and discusses whether this date or the date in the colophons of BL Or 2577 should be seen as the date of composition of Levi b. Yefet's *Book of Commandments*. It also provides an interpretation of the above quoted passage in discourse 1, which was previously found unclear.

### The Date of Composition of Levi b. Yefet's *Book of Commandments* according to the Arabic Original of the Code

The passage quoted by Pinsker corresponds to the following text in the Arabic original of the *Book of Commandments* (I include the preceding sentence in angular brackets, for context):<sup>13</sup>

>פעלי אלאצל אלדי קדמנאה ליס יכון אכתר מן בסיטתין מתצלתין ולא יכון כביסטין מתצלתין אדא כאנת אלסנין עלי נטאמהא. < פאמא בעץ עלמאנא פאגאזו אן תכון כביסטין מתצלתין כמא תכון שהרין שלמין ולם ילתפת אלי מסיר אלשמס. וכדלך תלת בסאיט מא סמענא אנהא כאנת עלי מדהב אלכבאסין אלא אלסנה אלעאשרה מן הדיא אלמחזור ואלתמניה עשריה מנה והי הדיא אלסנה והי סנה תסעה ותסעין ותלת מאיה

<According to the above-mentioned principle, there cannot be more than two consecutive plain years and there cannot be two consecutive intercalated years if years follow their [expected] order.> However, one of our scholars permitted that there be two consecutive intercalated years as there can be two full months, and paid no attention to the movement of the sun.<sup>14</sup> Likewise, we have not heard of there ever being three plain years according to the method of those who intercalate other than

11 Ben-Shammai, 'Sefer Ha-Mitzvot,' 102–103 and n. 12.

12 Ben-Shammai, 'Sefer Ha-Mitzvot,' 109.

13 RNL Evr Arab I 3920, fol. 105r. This passage has not survived in other manuscripts known to me.

14 The phrase 'and paid no attention to the movement of the sun' is missing in Pinsker's quotation but is found in Ox. Bodl. Reggio 5, fol. 25v, RNL Evr I 613, fol. 38r, Leiden Or.4760, discourse 1, section 27, and SPB IOS D 24, fol. 26r.

year 10 of this 19-year cycle and year 18 of it, which is this year, and it is year 399 [AH].

It is immediately clear that this text gives a different date: year 18 of the 19-year cycle is dated 399 AH (1008/9 CE) rather than 397 AH (1006/7 CE) as in the Hebrew translation. Confusion between the numerals 7 and 9 is common in Arabic because these two words have the same consonantal shape when spelled without diacritics, compare سبع (without diacritics سبع) 'seven' and تسع (without diacritics تسع) 'nine.' The original of Levi b. Yefet's *Book of Commandments* circulated in Arabic characters (e.g. BL Or 2577), and the date may have been misinterpreted either when transcribed into Hebrew characters (in the Judeo-Arabic version of the original) or when translated into the Hebrew language.

In order to identify the correct date, it is necessary to establish which of the years 397 AH and 399 AH can be correctly called year 18 of the 19-year cycle. Year 397 AH corresponds to year 4767 AM, year 399 AH to year 4769 AM. As noted already by Ben-Shammai, year 4767 AM is year 17 of the 19-year cycle. 4769 AM is year 19 of the cycle. It would appear that neither date can be reconciled with the year's position in the 19-year cycle. However, this assumes that Levi b. Yefet's reckoning of the cycle corresponded to our current scheme, known under the mnemonic גוה אדזט. In this scheme the counting of the years starts from 3761 BCE and the intercalated years are numbered 3, 6, 8, 11, 14, 17, and 19.<sup>15</sup> Although it is exclusively used today, this was not the only way of counting 19-year cycles known in the Middle Ages.<sup>16</sup> In another commonly used scheme the counting of the years started from 3760 BCE and an intercalary month was inserted in years 2, 5, 7, 10, 13, 16, and 18 of the cycle (summarized in the mnemonic בהז יגוה).<sup>17</sup> The schemes גוה אדזט and בהז יגוה differ only superficially: in both schemes the intercalation occurs at the same time, but the counting begins from different epochs. 10th- and 11th-century Qaraites associated with the Jerusalem center referred to the 19-year cycle with the mnemonic בהז יגוה and did not mention the scheme גוה אדזט. This includes Levi b. Yefet's father

15 In the mnemonic גוה אדזט only the units are given for 11, 14, 17 and 19, but not the tens, e.g., ט stands for 11.

16 Thus, a late 10th-century responsum by Hayye Gaon mentions 4 different intercalation schemes (J. Mann, 'Gaonic Studies,' *Hebrew Union College Annual Jubilee Volume* (1875–1925) (Cincinnati 1925) 223–262, esp. 244–246).

17 On the two different ways of counting the Era of Creation, from 3761 BCE and 3760 BCE, see A. Gordin, 'How to Avoid Some Pitfalls while Interpreting Dates in Hebrew Manuscripts,' *Revue des Études Juives* 178/1–2 (2019) 159–184, esp. 175–184.

Yefet b. 'Eli and Levi's contemporary Joseph al-Baṣīr.<sup>18</sup> The scheme בָּהֵז יָגוּחַ was also presented as the most straightforward, unmarked way of counting the 19-year cycle by contemporary Rabbanite authorities, such as Saadiah Gaon and Hayye Gaon.<sup>19</sup> Although Levi b. Yefet himself did not explicitly state how the 19-year cycle had to be reckoned, it is likely that he, too, used the scheme בָּהֵז יָגוּחַ. Counted from this scheme's epoch in 3760 BCE, year 397 AH corresponds to 4766 AM, and is year 16 of the 19-year cycle. Year 399 AH corresponds to 4768 AM, and is year 18 of the cycle. It is clear that 399 AH fits the description 'the 18th year of the 19-year cycle,' and must have been the date originally intended by Levi b. Yefet. The date 397 AH in the Hebrew translation must have arisen by a transmission error, due to the graphic similarity of the consonantal shapes of the numerals 'seven' and 'nine' in Arabic script.

Does 399 AH represent the actual time of composition of Levi b. Yefet's code, or at least of discourse 1 in it, or is it simply an example of a year that had certain calendrical characteristics? Could it have been copied from an earlier source that discussed this year? Pinsker never expressed any doubts that the mentioned date is the code's date of composition but did not provide any arguments in favor of this supposition. The context in which this date appears supports Pinsker's assumption. Firstly, the Arabic passage refers to year 18 of the 19-year cycle as 'this year,' a phrase omitted in the Hebrew translation and not used in connection with year 10. Year 18 is also referred to as 'this year' when the same two years are discussed earlier in the *Book of Commandments*, and in this case the appellation is also retained in the Hebrew version.<sup>20</sup> In this context 'this year' can only mean 'the current year.' Levi also appears to have had information about the year that he himself obtained from peasants rather than from books. Immediately after mentioning year 18 and its AH date he continues:<sup>21</sup>

18 Yefet b. 'Eli, as quoted in Levi b. Yefet's *Book of Differences between Yefet b. 'Eli and Sahl b. Maṣliḥ* (BL Or 2573, fol. 24r), Joseph al-Baṣīr, *Kitāb al-Istibṣār*, discourse 3, chapter 4, RNL Evr Arab I 1793, fol. 105r. See N. Vidro, 'The Medieval Qaraite Calendar in the Diaspora,' *Aleph: Historical Studies in Science and Judaism* 22, no. 1 (2022) 279–308, esp. 304–305.

19 Saadiah Gaon, *Kitāb al-Tamyīz*, RNL Evr Arab II 1189/12, fols. 25r, 29r. Mann, 'Gaonic Studies,' 244.

20 Judeo-Arabic: RNL Evr Arab I 3920, fol. 86\*r, RNL Evr Arab I 983, fol. 145r, JTS ENA 2689.2v. Hebrew: Ox. Bodl. Reggio 5, fol. 18r in the margins, RNL Evr I 613, fol. 25r, Leiden Or.4760, discourse 1, section 18, and SPB IOS D 24, fol. 15v.

21 RNL Evr Arab I 3920, fols. 105r–105v. The Hebrew translation also uses the first person: שְׁמַעְתִּי (Ox. Bodl. Reggio 5, fol. 25v, RNL Evr I 613, fol. 38r, and SPB IOS D 24, fol. 26r, omitted in Leiden Or.4760, discourse 1, section 27).

ועלי מא סמעת מן אלפלאחין אן סבב דלך תקדם אלאמטאר אול אלסנה ואתצאל  
אלצחו פי תוסטהא חתי אנה לם ירד פי כואנין שי מן אלמטר פאשרפת אלזרוע עלי  
אלתלאף פאשתעלת אלזרוע

According to what I heard from the peasants, the reason for this was that rains came in early at the start of the year and it was continually sunny in the middle of it, so that there was no rain at all in the two Kānūns.<sup>22</sup> And so, crops were close to being destroyed and started to burn.

To conclude, Levi b. Yefet's *Book of Commandments*, or at least discourse 1 of the code were most likely composed in 399 AH, which corresponded to September 1008 CE–August 1009 CE. Considering that Levi had information on the state of crops in 399 CE and reported that Qaraites celebrated Passover in February of that year,<sup>23</sup> the date can be further narrowed to spring–summer 1009 CE.

How then should the date in the colophons in BL Or 2577 be interpreted? As mentioned above, this Arabic-script manuscript was tentatively viewed by Haggai Ben-Shammai as an autograph, based on the fact that its colophons do not mention a scribe or refer to the act of copying. BL Or 2577 contains parts of discourses 2, 5, and 6 of Levi b. Yefet's code, the latter two dated Rabi' I and Rabi' II of 415 AH (May–July 1024 CE). The discrepancy between this date and the date in discourse 1 may be explained in two ways: (1) the colophons of BL Or 2577 are scribal, and the dates reflect the time of copying rather than the date of composition of the *Book of Commandments*; (2) the *Book of Commandments* was composed over a long period of time so that discourses 5 and 6 (and possibly also discourse 2) were composed 15 years after discourse 1. In my view, option 1 is more likely especially since other colophons exist that are identically worded but are clearly scribal. This was pointed out already by Ben-Shammai himself,<sup>24</sup> and will be demonstrated here with two examples. The completion of the work is expressed in BL Or 2577 with the phrase *kāna al-farāgh minhu* (fol. 102r) or *kāna al-farāgh min dālīka* (fol. 159r) 'it/this was completed.' The same wording, without the mention of a scribe or of copying, is found in RNL Evr Arab I 832, a 1048 CE copy of *Kitāb al-Anwār wal-Marāqib*, a legal code composed by the Qaraite Jacob al-Qirqisānī in the first half of the 10th century.<sup>25</sup>

22 The Syriac months Kānūn I and Kānūn II correspond to December and January, respectively.

23 See footnote 34.

24 Ben-Shammai, 'Sefer Ha-Mitzvot,' 103 n. 12.

25 RNL Evr Arab I 832, fol. 124r.

וכאן אלפראג מנהא יום אלתלתה אלכאמס ועשרין מן די אלחגה סנה ארבעין וארבע מאיה למלכות קרן זעירה אלהים ישימה קץ לגלותנו ויחיש כל בשורותיו בימינו אמן

It was completed on Tuesday, 25 Dū al-Ḥijja year 440 AH, may God make it the end of our Dispersion and may he quickly bring all of his good news in our times, amen.

Likewise, RNL Evr Arab I 1259, dated 1035 CE, contains a commentary on Leviticus by the 10th-century Qaraite scholar Sahl b. Maṣliāḥ. Its colophon reads:<sup>26</sup>

ברוך יי לעולם אמן ואמן לה אלחמד ואלמנה וכאן אלפראג לילה אלכמיס אלראבע עשר מן צפר סנה זכ וארבע מאיה.

Blessed be the Lord forever, amen and amen. To him be praise and he is kind. It was completed in the night of Thursday, 14 Ṣafar year 427 [AH].

These colophons are found in manuscripts copied decades and over a century after the composition of the works contained in them, and must be scribal. They demonstrate that colophons such as those in BL Or 2577 do not necessarily indicate an autograph. Hence, the discrepancy between the dates in BL Or 2577 and in discourse 1 of Levi b. Yefet's *Book of Commandments* is best explained by assuming that 415 AH (1024 CE) is the time of copying of BL Or 2577 and not the date of composition of the code.

### Events in the Palestinian Qaraite Calendar in the First Decade of the 11th Century

In this section I will suggest an interpretation of the passage in discourse 1 that mentions the year 399 AH. This passage is part of a discussion of plain years (of 12 months) and intercalated years (of 13 months). Levi b. Yefet states that as a rule there cannot be more than two consecutive plain years and more than one intercalated year in a row. This rule always holds in the Rabbanite calculated calendar where a single year is intercalated either after one or after two plain years as dictated by the 19-year cycle. However, pre-modern Qaraite in the Mediterranean did not determine which years to intercalate by means of the

<sup>26</sup> RNL Evr Arab I 1259, fol. 2v.



19-year cycle.<sup>27</sup> Instead, they decided when to insert an additional 13th month by inspecting barley crops in Palestine.<sup>28</sup> Fields were examined twelve months after the previous Nisan. When barley in the correct stage of ripening (known as *aviv*) was found, the year was made plain and Passover could be celebrated. If barley was not sufficiently ripe, the year was intercalated by adding a 13th month. This procedure involved many parameters of *aviv* barley, for example, what exact ripening stage should one look for? When should barley in the correct stage be found? How much barley should be present in order to celebrate Passover? Depending on their answers to these and similar questions, different Qaraite groups made different decisions about whether a particular year should be plain or intercalated. They also had different opinions about the allowed sequences of plain and intercalated years. In our passage, Levi b. Yefet tells us that at least one scholar allowed there to be two intercalated years in a row. This is, indeed, attested in an 11th-century calendar chronicle preserved in RNL Evr Arab I 1151.<sup>29</sup> Whether there could be three consecutive plain years depended upon a group's views on how much barley in the correct stage of ripening had to be present. Earlier in the *Book of Commandments* Levi b. Yefet explained that those Qaraite who celebrated Passover upon finding only a small amount of *aviv* barley could end up with three consecutive plain years. Those who demanded a large amount of *aviv* barley did not generally have sequences of three plain years in their calendar (because after two plain years only a small amount or no ripe barley could generally be found at the end of Adar).<sup>30</sup> Qaraite had a special term for those who demanded a large amount of *aviv* barley – *kabbāsūn* 'those who intercalate', as opposed to *mu'ayyidūn* ('those who celebrate') used for proponents of a small amount of *aviv* barley.<sup>31</sup>

27 On the Qaraite use of the 19-year cycle in other regions, see Vidro, 'The Medieval Qaraite Calendar in the Diaspora.'

28 Ankori, *Karaites in Byzantium*, 292–293, 322–324; N. Vidro, 'Aviv Barley and Calendar Diversity among Jews in Eleventh-Century Palestine,' *Journal of Jewish Studies* 72, no. 2 (2021) 283–312.

29 Vidro, 'Aviv Barley,' 302–303.

30 This passage is parallel to our passage with the date, RNL Evr Arab I 3920, fol. 86\*r:

מא ערפנא לאצחאב אלחסאב תלתה בסאיט ואצחאב אלאביב פמן קאל מנהם באלדון פתתפק להם תלתה בסאיט ומן קאל מנהם באלאנבתאת ואלבאלג פלם נגד להם תלתה בסאיט עלי יקין אלא סנתין פי הדא אלמחזור אלואחדה אלעאשרה מנה ואלאכרי אלתמניה עשריה.

To our knowledge, supporters of calculation do not have three [consecutive] plain years. As for supporters of the *aviv*, those of them who opine that it can be scanty can have three plain years. As for those who opine [that *aviv* barley must be] wide-spread and ripe, we did not see them having three indisputably plain years other than two years in this 19-year cycle: first – year 10 of it and second – year 18.

31 Vidro, 'Aviv Barley,' 299.

It is this term *kabbāsūn* that is used in the Arabic original of our passage with the date and that is translated into Hebrew as אחינו המעבריים ‘our brothers who intercalate.’ Levi b. Yefet reported that years 10 and 18 of his 19-year cycle were unusual in the calendar of the *kabbāsūn* – each of them was the third of three plain years in a row, i.e. in this 19-year cycle there were two sets of three consecutive plain years, years 8–10 and 16–18.

This arrangement was, as explained by Levi b. Yefet on the authority of peasants, due to irregular weather patterns.<sup>32</sup> In 1009 CE (399 AH, year 18 of the 19-year cycle) barley ripened very early and started to burn because in the previous autumn it rained earlier than usual and the winter was warm and sunny instead of cold and wet.<sup>33</sup> The unusually early ripening of the crops led Palestinian Qaraites to celebrate Passover in February,<sup>34</sup> two months before the Rabbanites.<sup>35</sup> While for some Qaraites this simply meant that they fixed a third consecutive plain year, others found themselves in a more difficult situation. Levi b. Yefet reported that some Qaraites intercalated the previous year.<sup>36</sup> As a result, when crops ripened early in 399 AH for them it was only the beginning of Adar and time to celebrate Purim, not Passover. These Qaraites faced a dilemma – whether to disregard the aviv despite the biblical injunction ‘Observe the month of aviv by keeping Passover to the Lord your God’ (Deut. 16:1) or to skip Purim despite the obligation to observe the 14th and 15th of Adar ‘every year’ (Esther 9:21, 27). They decided in favor of celebrating Passover in

32 See above, near footnote 21.

33 In addition to the quotation above, near footnote 21, see also RNL Evr Arab I 3920, fol. 86<sup>r</sup>:

ולמא סאל אהל אלצ׳יאע מן אלפל׳אחין וגיריהם ען אלסבב פי תקדים זרועהם קאלו אן אלסנה בכרת לכתרה אלדף ותקדם אלמטר אלוסמי וחמא אלומאן פי וקת כאנת אלעאדה גאריה בשדה אלברד לאתצאל אלמטאר והדא כאן שאיע פימא ביניהם.

When one asked the farmers and other villagers why their crops ripened early they said that this year was earlier than usual because of a lot of heat and because the autumn rain was earlier and it was hot at a time when it is usually very cold due to continuous rains. And this [opinion] was wide-spread among them.

34 RNL Evr Arab I 3920, fol. 105v: עיד אלנאס פי אסבאט אלעגם ‘the people celebrated in Shubāt of the Christians,’ where אסבאט must stand for Shubāt, February and not for the plural form *asbāt* ‘tribes.’ For the translation ‘Christians’ for *al-ʿajam*, see J. Blau, *Dictionary of Medieval Judaeo-Arabic Texts* (Jerusalem 2006) 424. See also the Hebrew translation שבט העלגים (Ox. Bodl. Reggio 5, fol. 25v, RNL Evr I 613, fol. 38r, Leiden Or.4760, discourse 1, section 27, and SPB 10S D 24, fol. 26r), where שבט cannot stand for the Jewish month Shevat because Passover must be celebrated in Nisan.

35 In the Rabbanite calendar the year was intercalated and Passover fell in April (see e.g. <https://www.fourmilab.ch/documents/calendar/>).

36 RNL Evr Arab I 3920, fol. 86<sup>r</sup>.

'the month of aviv.' This occasion was so memorable that it continued to be mentioned in Qaraite works for centuries to come.<sup>37</sup>

### Conclusions

In this article I proposed to revise the traditional date of composition of the *Book of Commandments* by Levi b. Yefet from 1006/7 CE (397 AH) to 1009 CE (399 AH). The new date is based on manuscript RNL Evr Arab I 3920 of the Arabic original of the code and is consistent with the mentioned position of the year in the 19-year cycle as it was most probably reckoned by Levi b. Yefet. In contrast, the date 1006/7 CE cannot be reconciled with the 19-year cycle. Levi b. Yefet mentioned the year in which he was writing in connection with unusual events in the calendar of Palestinian Qaraites, when three consecutive years were made plain and Passover was celebrated as early as February. My analysis of this passage in its wider context allowed the identification of Qaraite groups involved in these events and demonstrated that the events were caused by irregular rainfall patterns and unusually hot weather.

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37 Ankori, *Karaites in Byzantium*, 326 n. 66.