The Karaite movement emerged in the second half of the ninth century. Very soon after its establishment in the Babylonian and Persian diasporas, the immigration of the Karaites to Jerusalem began. The first Karaite immigrants established a separate quarter in Jerusalem and called themselves the Community of Lilies (ha-Shoshanim). This is the congregation of the Mourners of Zion (ʿaveley ʿiyon). It was headed by the nesiʾim, descendants of the House of ʿAnan. The sages of the community, the Enlighteners (maskilim), made Jerusalem the most important center of Karaite creativity in the tenth and eleventh centuries. Their prolific efforts encompassed many areas: the translation and interpretation of the Bible, books of commandments (sifrei mishwot), polemics, grammar books and lexicons, and important philosophical works that were inspired by Muslim Muʿtazilite literature.

In this article I shall present the messianic doctrine of the Mourners of Zion, which motivated its members to immigrate to Palestine and make Jerusalem the center of their activity. By comparing this doctrine with the outlook of the contemporary Rabbanite leadership, I will demonstrate just how revolutionary the Mourners of Zion doctrine was in their day. In addition, I will discuss the difficult relationship that existed between the Rabbanites in Jerusalem and the Mourners of Zion, which began when the latter took up residence in the city. It seems that these relations were the reason that led the Mourners of Zion to settle in a separate quarter in Jerusalem, the location of which is the subject of a debate among scholars. The article also discusses the complex attitude of the Mourners of Zion toward Islam. On the one hand, they functioned under its aegis and were greatly influenced by it, while on the other hand, they looked forward to its destruction—an unavoidable stage in the process of redemption. Finally, I shall present the major Karaite sages, who
were active in Jerusalem up to the demise of the community during the First Crusade.

The immigration of the Mourners of Zion Karaites to Jerusalem was not a accidental event, but rather an ideological act with a clear messianic purpose in which the settlers played an important role in hastening the “end of days.” According to the accounts of the Mourners of Zion, the name they gave their congregation, $\text{Shoshanim}$ (lilies), had a messianic significance. Just as the flowering of the lily occurs after the end of winter, so too the appearance in the historical arena of $\text{sadiqim}$ (righteous individuals)—who are compared to lilies—occurs at the end of the fourth kingdom, i.e., Islam, the last phase prior to the redemption.\(^1\)

The Karaite quarter in Jerusalem was located in a place called $\text{šela' ha-šelef}$; Mann believed that this was the reason why the Rabbanites adopted the disparaging term for the Karaites, “the šela’ sect” or “the sole’ah (lame) sect.” However, it is not entirely impossible that the Mourners of Zion—who saw themselves as the remnant that would reach the stage of the redemption—adopted the name $\text{sole'ah}$ from the start, based on what is written in Micah (4:7): “And I will make her that halted (ha-sole’ah) a remnant . . .”\(^2\) The $\text{Shoshanim}$ also thought of themselves as the vanguard, leading the nation towards salvation. This was why they undertook weighty responsibilities; in their view, if the advance guard fails, salvation will not come to pass. The tasks they took upon themselves were as follows:

I. Causing the Nation to Repent

Since the destruction of the Temple, the Rabbinic sages had been debating the issue of whether redemption was dependent upon repentance. Rabbi Eli‘ezer declared: “If Israel repents, it will be redeemed, if it does not repent, it will not be redeemed. [...]” Rabbi Yehoshua states: “Whether they repent or not [is of no consequence] because when the end of days comes, they will all be redeemed.”\(^3\) The greatest polemicist who ever opposed the Karaites, Sa‘adiah Gaon, held that redemption is not dependent on repentance.\(^4\)

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\(^1\) Salmon ben Yeruham, Commentary on Psalms, pp. 97–98.
\(^3\) Tanhumah, Be-Ḥuqotai 5 (ed. S. Buber, Jerusalem photographic edition), 1964, p. 56.