Karaite scholars were well-versed in rabbinic literature and often embedded rabbinic material in their writings. The large volume of rabbinic citations adduced by the Karaites was extracted from a broad range of tannaitic, amoraic and geonic sources, including the Mishnah, the midrashim and the Talmudim. These quotations appear in Karaite manuscripts either in Hebrew script or transcribed into Arabic characters. In addition to explicit Hebrew citations drawn from rabbinic treatises, Karaite manuscripts include paraphrases of passages from rabbinic sources, Arabic translations of such paragraphs, rabbinic terms and phrases as well as linguistic comments. The Hebrew used by Karaite scholars in their Hebrew compositions also reflects an influence of rabbinic literature. This influence is manifested by a rabbinic Hebrew component, both in the lexicon and in the morphology.

The Karaite Attitude Towards Rabbinic Sources

Many of the works composed during the Karaite Golden Age (10th–11th centuries) reflect the prolonged polemic between the Rabbanites and the Karaites. Undoubtedly, Karaite sages were acquainted with rabbinic literature. Their treatises indicate that they studied rabbinic sources, referred to them in their arguments and even embedded rabbinic quotations in their writings, either in disagreement or in approval with the rabbinic opinion. It seems that the Karaites’ interest in rabbinic sources was motivated by their wish to fully understand the arguments of their opponents, as well as by their desire to make their own reasoning conspicuous to their Karaite readership.

Karaite literature reflects different opinions with regard to whether a Karaite scholar should study rabbinic sources. While some Karaite
scholars supported this practice others did not encourage their community to do so. Explicit support for the study of rabbinic texts is found in the list of twelve virtues, which Nissi ben Noah (11th century), in his *Tract on the Ten Commandments*,\(^1\) attributes to a “wise man” (ḥakham).\(^2\) The twelfth virtue is to be well-versed in the Mishnah, the Talmud and the halakhot, and to study tosaftot (probably the Tosefta)\(^3\) and haggadot. Nissi’s statement was referred to in later centuries by other Karaite scholars such as Aharon ben Yosef ha-Rofe (13th century), Moshe Bashyachi (15th century), Yosef ben Moshe Beghi (16th century), indicating that his view was adopted by many Karaites.

On the Karaite motivation to study rabbinic sources we learn from comments made by the renowned Jerusalem scholar Yeshu’ah ben Yehudah (11th century). In his *Commentary on Leviticus* (Lev 6:2) he presents his reasons for citing passages from Mishnah, *Tamid* explaining that this tractate contains evidence that is not found in any other source. Although this evidence is not supported by the biblical text it is not contradicted by it either. Elsewhere in this commentary (Lev 5:1) Yeshu’ah states that he introduced in his writings explicit citations from rabbinic sources to assure his readers that the cited opinions were represented accurately.\(^4\) Another reference to a reliance on rabbinic sources is found in the introduction to the dictionary *Kitāb jāmī’ al-alfāz* composed in the 10th century by the famed Karaite grammarian David ben Avraham al-Fāsī. In his introduction al-Fāsī implies that he turns to rabbinic Hebrew when the biblical word in a specific lexical entry does not have additional references in the Bible.\(^5\) In such cases he documented in his dictionary the use of the corresponding words in rabbinic Hebrew.

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1 For a detailed discussion of this tract and its English translation see Nemoy, “Nissi ben Noah”.
3 In this sentence Pinsker adds in brackets the form tosaftot, it is not clear whether it is an original variant reading or a correction by Pinsker. See Nemoy, “Nissi ben Noah”, p. 341, n. 66. The word tosaftot denotes the Tosefta in several sources, for example in Midrash Tanhuma (S. Buber edition, va-‘ethanan 3, p. 15). Cf. the word tosaftot denoting the Tosefta in Avot de-Rabbi Natan (S. Schecter edition, version A, Chapter 28, p. 43b).