

Stylistic Explanations of Theological Cruxes in the Medieval Karaites' Arabic Commentaries on the Hebrew Bible

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The paper explores the ways in which medieval Karaite exegetes and Bible translators interpreted biblical expressions whose literal meaning undermines fundamental theological tenets, such as the doctrine of an incorporeal, perfectly transcendent and omniscient God. It demonstrates that they developed a consistent and compelling, theoretical (“scientific”) justifications for different kinds of theologically challenging formulations in Scripture, by explaining them in conventional linguistic terms and making subtle distinctions between different stylistic modes of expressions (e.g., *majāz wa ’ittisā’* [figurative speech and extension of meaning], *ikhtisār* [ellipsis], or *leshon gedulah* [majestic plural]). At the core of their approach lied the conviction that “the Torah speaks in the language of man” (*dibbērāh Tōrah kē-lāshōn bēnē ādām*) for didactic purposes, to be better understood by humans not all of whom are mentally capable of conceiving abstract ideas. The article attempts to demonstrate that by doing so, the Karaites built firm foundations for the later anti-anthropomorphic Jewish exegetical methods, including Maimonides’ one. In this sense their exegetical achievements constitute a missing link between the old, ancient rabbinic and medieval gaonic tradition of interpreting the Bible and its later developments in Spain.