**Meshovah Nitzahat: The Jewish-Christian Polemic in *Kaf Naki* by R. Kalifa Ben-Malka (1650?-175?) of Agadir (Morocco)**

1. Introduction

R. Kalifa ben-Malka was born in Safi in Western Morocco during the second half of the seventeenth century. He was orphaned at an early age and apparently studied in his youth with Joseph Bueno de Mesquita. At some point, he departed for Fez, and there he studied with Judah ben Attar (1656-1737) and Samuel Tzarfati (1660-1713), who were among the city’s senior rabbis at the time. After this, Ben-Malka returned to Safi and continued studying with De Mesquita who also saw to his physical needs. Shortly thereafter, Ben-Malka emigrated to Agadir, which is in southwestern Morocco, where he became a successful merchant, married, established his home, and authored *Kaf Naki.* He lived to a ripe old age, passing away in Agadir in the second half of the eighteenth century.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Kaf Naki is composed of five parts: 1. *Kaf Naki* – a commentary on the Sephardi Mahzor (a prayer book containing the cycle of Jewish liturgy), published in Amsterdam 1728 (5588). Ben-Malka commented on the liturgical prayers for weekdays, the Sabbath, the New Moon, Hannukah, Purim, the Pilgrimage Festivals, the four fasts, and the High Holidays. 2. *Parpra’ot le-Hokhmah* [The Desserts of Wisdom] – on matters of Jewish law, ethics, history, and more. 3. *Shekhihah* ve-*Leket* [Forgotten Fruits and Gleanings] – omissions from the two prior parts. 4. *Maskil le-Asaf* [A *Maskil* of Asaf] –novellae on the words of Our Sages, of blessed memory 5. *Meshovah Nitzahat* – this part is comprised of 14 sections, 13 of them relate to the Jewish-Christian polemic and one relates to Islamic arguments.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Kaf Naki survived in two manuscripts: A. MS 1006 in the National Library of Israel in Jerusalem, which only contains a small part of the entire composition. B. MS Gunzburg 315 in the Russian State Library in Moscow which is complete. Moshe Halamish and Moshe Amar edited the first part of the composition and published it (Lod, 5772), and the complete edition, containing all five parts, was published by Amar about eight years ago (Lod, 5774) along with a comprehensive introduction.

A few studies have been dedicated to Ben-Malka and his works. Bloch has researched his serially nomadic life.[[3]](#footnote-3) Zafranu and Ben-Ami addressed the diverse stories told about him.[[4]](#footnote-4) Zafranu and, especially, Elkayam worked on his poetry.[[5]](#footnote-5) The latter also devoted some of his research to the study of language in Ben-Malka’s composition,[[6]](#footnote-6) and to his commentary on the Sephardi Mahzor that was published in Amsterdam.[[7]](#footnote-7) Kenan elaborated upon Elkayam’s research, addressing Ben-Malka’s tendency to preserve certain liturgical versions and customs.[[8]](#footnote-8)

1. Nachum Netanel Kenan, *Studies in 'Kaf Naki': The Prayer Book of Rabbi Kalifa Ben Malka* (Sources, Textual Variants, Customs and Trends), M.A ///, Bar-Ilan University 2011, 17-20 (Heb.); *Sefer Kaf Naki ha-Shalem*, edited and redacted from manuscript form with additional commentary – Moshe Amar (Lod, 5774), 29-45. Henceforth all references are to this edition of the work. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. I will not address the section on the Jewish-Muslim polemic in this paper. Very little research has been devoted to scholarship on this polemic in Morocco, see Sarah Lazarus-Yaffe, “*Terumato shel Mumar Yehudi mi-Morocco le-Pulmos ha-Muslemi* *Neged ha-Yehudim ve-ha-Yahadut”* *Pe’amim* 42 (5750), 83-90. I plan to devote a separate study to this topic which will include Ben-Malka’s case. For now, I will just note that throughout his composition, Ben-Malka quotes sayings and poetry in Arabic and translates them into Hebrew (even though, he did not always agree with them). For instance, see pages 234, 238, 239, 240, 267, 306, 313. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. I. Block, “*Kalifa Bem Malka - Notes et Me'langes*”, REJ 14 (1887), 114- 115. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. H. Zafranu, “*Une Letre-Homme D'Affaires Juif du Maroc Meridionak des XVIIe-XVIIIe Siecles: Rabbi Khalifa ben Malka*”, in: *Hommage a Georges Vajda* (Louvain 1980), 399- 405.; Issachar Ben-Ami, *Ha’aratsat Kedoshim be-Kerev Yehudei* *Morocco* (Jerusalem, 5744), ??? [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Haim Zafrani…?; Shlomo Elkayam, “*U-ve-Khen ha-Aniyim ve-ha-Evyonim Mevakshim Mayim: Piyyut le-Atsirat Geshamim mi-tokh ‘Kaf Naki’* [manuscript version] *le-R. Khalifa Ben Malka*” *Berit* (27) 5768, 86-90.; idem, “*Piyyutei Tehinah be-Mahzor Fes*” Y. Dishon & E. Hazzan (eds.), *Pirkei Shira* 4 (5768), 107-123; idem, “*Shir Todah al Batei ha-Knesset shel Agadir ve-She’ar Arei ha-Sus ‘she-Hazru le-Yishuvan*” *Berit* 21 (5763),44-49. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Shlomo Elkayam, “*Inyyenei Lashon be-Haghut ha-Siddur le-R. Khalifa Ben Malka*” in *Proceedings of the Eleventh World Congress of Jewish Studies*, Division 4, Volume 1 (Jerusalem, 1993), 201-204. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Shlomo Elkayam, “*Nusah ha-Tefillah shel Bnei Morocco al pi Sefer Kaf Naki le-R. Khalifa Ben-Malka*” *Pe’amim* 78 (5759), 61-72. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Kenan, Studies, 72- 98. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)