

THE QUESTION
OF THE EXISTENCE
OF THE CRIMEAN KARAIM
AND ITS RELATION
TO WESTERN
KARAIM ☉ *Henryk Jankowski*

1. TURKIC LANGUAGES OF THE CRIMEAN KARAIMS

If we accept the view that the Crimean Karaims adopted a Turkic language, we can accept the existence of a few varieties of Karaim:

1. Kipchak or Kuman Karaim, the predecessor of Western Karaim, the first extant documents being from the 18th century.
2. Turkish Karaim in two variants:
 - a) Turkish Karaim in Turkey, first documented in 1528/1529;
 - b) Turkish Karaim in the Crimea, evidenced from the 16th century.
3. Tatar Karaim¹.

¹ The question of Khazar Karaim may not be settled because of the lack of evidence. As is known, the scholars of Karaim descent claimed that the Karaims originated from the Khazars (*Zajaczkowski A.* O kulturze chazarskiej i jej spadkobiercach // *Mysł Karaimska*, Seria Nowa. 1946. T. 1, s. 26–33; *Zajaczkowski A.* Karaims in Poland. History, Language, Folklore, Science. La Haye, Warszawa, Mouton, p. 13, 20–23; *Szyszman S.* Le Karaïsme. Ses doctrines et son histoire. Lausanne, 1980, p. 73; *Szyszman S.* Les Karaïtes d'Europe // *Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis. Studia Multiethnica Upsaliensia*. Vol. 7, 1989, p. 17–26. See also the discussion by Pritsak (*Pritsak O.* Das Karaimische // *Deny Jean, Grønbech Kaare, Scheel Helmut, Togan Zeki Velidi* (eds.). *Philologiae Turcicae Fundamenta*. Vol. 1, Wiesbaden, 1959, p. 318. This claim is difficult to prove (*Golden P. B.* Khazars // *Tütüncü Mehmet* (ed.) *Turkish-Jewish Encounters. Türk-Yahudi Buluşmaları. Studies on Turkish-Jewish Relations through the Ages. Tarihte Türk-Yahudi İlişkileri Araştırmaları*. Stichting SOTA, Haarlem, 2001, p. 48). Kowalski was more careful, and he only admitted a mixed anthropological type with Jewish and Pontian-Turkic components (*Kowalski T.* Karaimische Texte im Dialekt von Troki. Kraków, 1929, s. ix–x). The question of a Khazar substratum in Karaim is even more difficult, for we do not have Khazar language material (*Pritsak O.* Das Karaimische..., p. 318) other than glosses, and the evidence provided by Moskovich and Tukan (*Moskovich W., Tukan B.* Caraimica. The Problems of the Origin and History of East European Karaites in the Light of Linguistic Evidence // *Slavica Hierosolymitana*. 1985, p. 91–93) is not convincing. Pritsak also remarked that we do not know whether the Jewish religion of the leaders of the Khazar state was of Karaite or Rabbinical doctrine. According to Ankori, the first authentic record of Karaism in the Crimea dates back to the last quarter of the 13th century (*Ankori Z.* Karaites in Byzantium. The Formative Years, p. 970–1100. Columbia University Press, The Weizmann Science Press of Israel, New York, Jerusalem, 1959, p. 60). Some scholars predate the evidence of Karaism in the Crimea to Petahya's of Regensburg record in the year 1175 (e.g. *Moskovich W., Tukan B.* Caraimica..., p. 88).

Kipchak Karaim must have been adopted, if ever, at least four or five generations, i.e. 100–120 years, before the migration of some Karaims to the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the 14th century². Unfortunately, the documentation available of the early stage of this language is very scarce and does not go earlier than the 18th century (lexical material of the Bible translation in Gordlevskij³, fragments of another translation of the Bible, probably the 18th century, in Jankowski⁴, the prayer printed in 1734, published by Sulimowicz⁵).

The documentation of Turkish Karaim of Turkey is also very scarce. This language may be examined on the basis of two documents. One of them is a Greek poem with the Turkish refrain, published in a prayer book printed in 1528/1529 in Venice. The Turkish refrain is the following:

İbadetlen baş urarım, şu 'alem[i] yaradana;
 bir münazi' padişahdır, karar olmaz aklına;
 evvel ahır ol gendidir, kimse ermez sırına;
 ancak ki az şefa'atın eyler ese kuluna
 'I am praying to the Creator of this world knocking the head;
 The disputant is a king, there is no judgment but His'
 He is always himself, nobody knows His secret;
 Unless He gives some of His mercy to His servant'⁶.

² Jankowski H. Position of Karaim among the Turkic Languages // *Studia Orientalia*. Vol. 95, 2003, p. 131.

³ Гордлевский В.А. Лексика караимского перевода Библии // Доклады Академии наук СССР. 1928. Т. V, с. 87–91.

⁴ Jankowski H. A Bible Translation into the Northern Crimean Dialect of Karaim // *Studia Orientalia*, Vol. 28, 1997, p. 1–84.

⁵ Sulimowicz J. Materiał leksykalny krymskokaraïmskiego zabytku językowego (druk z 1734 r.). I // *Rocznik Orientalistyczny*. 1972. T. 35, zes. 1, s. 37–76; Sulimowicz J. Materiał leksykalny krymskokaraïmskiego zabytku językowego (druk z 1734 r.) II // *Rocznik Orientalistyczny*. 1973. T. 36, zes. 1, s. 47–107.

⁶ There is much misunderstanding with this refrain. It was quoted by Poznański (*Poznański S.* Karäisch-tatarische Literatur // Keleti Szemle. Vol. 13, 1912–1913, p. 40) as a sample from a 1742 publication in Qale and named “tatarisch”. In the second supplement to this bibliographical article, Poznański added that “[...] von mir p. 40 zitierte Hymne [...] sich nebst Übersetzung bereits in der sehr seltenen (und mir unzugänglichen) ed. pr. des karäischen Gebetbuches (Venedig 1528–9) Bd. IV, p. 212, findet. Dann dass in der Übersetzung nur der Refrain [...] usw. tatarisch, die Übersetzung selbst aber neugriechisch ist.” (*Poznański S.* Zweiter Nachtrag zur «Karäisch-tatarischen Literatur» // Keleti Szemle. Vol. 14, 1913–1914, p. 224). Unfortunately, Ananiasz Zajączkowski (Karaims in Poland..., p. 89), who did not check the original publication of 1528/1529, observed on the basis of Poznański's paper that “[...] there developed almost in a parallel way native literature in the Kipchak-Karaim language. Thus both the Bible translations and the numerous religious hymns were widely known among the Karaims, and the oldest editions of the prayer-books already had noted the publishing of these works, for instance in Venice, 1528”. This statement of such an authority as Zajączkowski, although inexact, was repeatedly delivered as an argument for a “Kipchak-Karaim” literature printed in the 16th century. It was until Shapira first corrected Zajączkowski's mistake (*Shapira D.* The Turkic Languages and Literatures of the East European Karaites // *Polliack M.* (ed.) Karaite Judaism. A Guide to its History and Literary Sources. Brill, Leiden, Boston, 2003, p. 691–692).

In this short sample, we see some features that differ from Standard Turkish, but all may be found in Turkish dialects or Turkish historical documents, e.g. the instrumental / comitative +*lan* vs. Standard Turkish +*la*, *ur-* 'to hit; to strike' vs. *vur-*, *gendi* '-self' vs. *kendi*. All these features are also encountered in Turkish Karaim of the Crimea. The form *ese* stands alone, since normally it should have the Standard Turkish form *ise*. The form *ese* is a typical Kipchak form attested in Sulimowicz⁷. The case of the predominance of Greek in this poem is indicative. We know that the Karaimms in Turkey use rather Greek than Karaim⁸.

Another document is the text of a Bible translation published in Ortaköy (at present, district of Istanbul) in 1832–1835. Despite the general opinion that the language of this translation is standard Turkish, analysis shows that it shares some lexical, and to some extent also grammatical, features with Kipchak Karaim. These features are the following:

1. Lexical, e.g. *yarık* (Gen 1:3) 'light', *keñeş* (Deu 32:28) 'counsel'.

The word *yarık* is a well-known word for 'light' in many Kipchak languages, in contrast to Turkish in which the equivalent word is *ışık*. The word *keñeş* 'advice, counsel' is evidenced in the Turkish historical dictionary, but two of four occurrences stem from Evliya Çelebi's Crimean material and must be attributed to Crimean Tatar, and there are only two similar words *keñeç*, one from a 1394 Divan of Kadı Burhaneddin and the other from a 1436 history of the Seljukids.⁹

2. Phonetic, e.g. *suv* (Gen 1:2) 'water'; *evle* (Deu 32:28) 'such; so'.

The writing of the first word *suv* is clearly indicated by the final *beth* in a few occurrences. This form is absolutely impossible in Turkish and must be attributed to a Kipchak influence. The Turkish dialect dictionary gives evidence of the word *évle*, but in the meaning 'midday; noon'. However, this evidence is uncertain, for it was recorded from two villages the inhabitants of which may be Turks from outside Turkey¹⁰.

3. Semantic, e.g. *yeli Tañrımuñ* (Gen 1 : 2) 'Spirit of God'.

Such an expression of the idea of 'spirit' and 'Spirit of God' is absolutely alien in Turkish, but shared by many, if not all, other old Karaim translations of the Bible

⁷ Sulimowicz J. Materiał leksykalny krymskokaraimskiego zabytku językowego (druk z 1734 r.). 1972, s. 57.

⁸ See Wexler P. Is Karaite a Jewish Language? // Mediterranean Language Review. Vol. 1, 1983, p. 27; Tukan and Moskovich call it Karaite-Greek od Karaite-Yevanic (Moskovich W., Tukan B. Caraimica ..., p. 94). Wexler assumes that the Karaims in the Crimea might have used Greek before they had shifted to Turkic. However, no Greek substratum has been evidenced in Karaim Turkic (Wexler P. Is Karaite a Jewish Language? p. 29–30).

⁹ Tarama Sözlüğü. Vol. I–VI. Türk Dil Kurumu. Ankara, 1963–1972, p. 2437.

¹⁰ Derleme Sözlüğü I–XI. Türk Dil Kurumu. Ankara, 1963–1979, p. 1810.

(e.g. the Manchester manuscript¹¹, the 1841 edition, the 1889 publication¹²). Therefore, it is obvious that all these translations reflect a common tradition.

Tatar Karaim must be as diversified as the Crimean Tatar. As is known, the Crimean Tatar falls into three dialects. The southern dialect is very similar to Turkish, the northern is a Kipchak dialect most similar to the other languages of the North-Western group, whereas the central dialect has both southern and northern features and is adopted as a standard. Most of the available Crimean Karaim texts demonstrate the southern and the central features. Therefore, it may be interesting to show some typical northern features from a song published by Jankowski:¹³

1. Phonetical, e.g. *y-* → *c-*, *cigirmi* 'twenty', *cilda* 'in the year', *cayavman* 'with infantry'; *yığla-* → *cıla-* 'to weep'; lenition of word-medial strong stops in verbs, e.g. *çığar* 'it gets out'; deletion of [r] before [t], *qutar-* 'to save; to rescue'.
2. Morphological, *ay man yıldız* 'star and crescent'; *man* is a typically Northern Crimean Tatar clitic expressing instrumental and comitative; *qatesin* 'what do you do' ← *qa(y) etesiñ*;
3. Lexical, e.g. *nek* 'why', *tuvar* 'cattle'.

It must be noted that this song, as most of the Crimean material, is linguistically mixed and also contains central and southern features.

2. ARGUMENTS FOR THE CRIMEAN KARAIM

Prior to Shapira's thesis, hardly any specialist had questioned the existence of Crimean Karaim. The best argument for it is the existence of Western Karaim. Even if some doubts arise about the origin of Halicz Karaim, the emergence of Troki community from the Karaims migrated from the Crimea was largely accepted. Not only all Turkologists agree that the forefathers of Troki and most probably Halicz Karaims migrated westwards from the Crimea, but also some investigators of Jewish languages share this opinion¹⁴. An additional support for this supposi-

¹¹ Jankowski H. A Bible Translation..., p. 29.

¹² Kowalski T. Karaimische Texte..., p. 46–51.

¹³ Jankowski H. Reading Loose Sheets of Paper found among the Pages of Karaim *Mejumas* // Mediterranean Language Review. Vol. 16, 2005, p. 153–155. Note that another version of this song with central Tatar features, found in a manuscript of 1903–1910, was discussed by Akhtayeva (*Akhtayeva Gulaikhan. Eliyahu b. Yosef Qilci's Mejuma*. Critical Edition of the Crimean Karaim Manuscript with Introduction, Notes, Comments and Indexes. Uniwersytet im. Adama Mickiewicza, Poznań [unpublished doctoral dissertation], 2007).

¹⁴ See e.g. "From the Crimea, a variant of Kipčak was transplanted to Eastern Europe" (Wexler P. Is Karaite a Jewish Language? p. 29–30).

tion is the case of Armeno-Kipchak, which is also believed to have emerged from the Crimea.

Shapira argues that “the Crimean dialect of Karaim” has never existed, and he calls it “a ghost dialect in the Crimea”¹⁵, referring to Musaev’s grammar and Pritsak. In his opinion, the Karaims in the Crimea “spoke the language of their Muslim and Christian neighbours”¹⁶. In fact, Musaev did not deny the existence of the Karaim dialect of the Crimea. He only claimed that the language of the Karaims in the Crimea in the course of time had completely assimilated to the Crimean Tatar, but at the same time he stressed that once the Karaims of “Lithuania, Ukraine and the Crimean peninsula” probably spoke a common language and there are no reasons to deny it.¹⁷ Moreover, in his short grammar of Karaim, published in 1977, initially designed for the Karaim-Russian-Polish dictionary¹⁸ but not included in it, Musaev distinguishes three dialects, Crimean, Troki and Halicz¹⁹, although he only describes the two latter ones. As for Shapira’s reference to Pritsak, it is also inexact. In fact, the referred paragraph in Pritsak sounds: „Die Karaimen teilen sich jetzt sprachlich in zwei Gruppen: die Ost- und die Westkaraimen. Die Ostkaraimen hatten in den letzten Jahrhunderten ihr Hauptsiedlungsgebiet auf der Halbinsel Krim; deswegen werden sie gewöhnlich Krimkaraimen genannt.“

Shapira tries to demonstrate that all Karaim Turkic texts known from the Crimea were composed in the West and were only copied, edited and printed at Crimean publishers, including *Meqabbeş Niddehei Yisra’el*, published in Qale in 1734, in Turkic studies better known as the *Meqabbeş*. In his view, the same holds true of a Bible translation edited in portions by the author of these lines (Jankowski 1997), see Shapira (2003)²⁰. One of his crucial arguments is based on the occurrence of a Slavic word in this Bible translation “which is hardly possible in a Turkic Crimean text from the early 18th century, and there are many forms and words characteristic of Halicz-Luck Karaim”²¹. This argument is easy to invalidate. Slavic loanwords are well evidenced in Middle Turkic languages as far as Central Asia, see e.g. *sa-mala* ‘pitch’ and *tögit* ‘birch tar’, attested in the 13th century Khwarezmian Turkic in

¹⁵ Shapira D. The Turkic Languages and Literatures..., p. 662.

¹⁶ Shapira D. The Turkic Languages and Literatures..., p. 662, 690. This point of view is quite old, see e.g. Radloff (*Radloff V. V. Proben der Volksliteratur der Nördlichen Türkischen Stämme. Theil VII. Die Mundarten der Krym*, St. Petersburg, 1896, xvi); it was rejected by Samojlovič.

¹⁷ Мусаев К. М. Грамматика караймского языка. Фонетика и морфология. Москва, 1964, с. 36.

¹⁸ Баскаков Н. А., Зайончковский А., Шапшал С.М. Караймско-русско-польский словарь. Москва, 1974.

¹⁹ Мусаев К. М. Краткий грамматический очерк караймского языка. Москва, 1977, с. 5.

²⁰ Shapira D. The Turkic Languages and Literatures..., p. 692–693, 696–698.

²¹ Shapira D. The Turkic Languages and Literatures..., p. 693.

Zamakhshari's dictionary²², see also a similar qualification of Slavic loanwords in Karaim by Moskovich and Tukan²³. Besides, Slavic loanwords are also evidenced in *Codex Cumanicus* whose language is very closely related to the Old Crimean Karaim, spoken before the Karaim communities in Troki and Halicz had come into existence²⁴.

This is the case with the old and Middle Crimean Karaim. As for the present, it is true that the Crimean Karaim, before it was fully replaced with Russian, was strongly affected by the Turkic languages of the Muslim Turkic majority in the Crimea, i.e. Turkish and Tatar. In fact, the influence of these languages is evident quite early, including the first examined documents of the 18th century. It is evident that religious texts, such as *Meqabbeç* and Bible manuscripts retained more archaic features than other texts. Features distinguishing the Crimean Karaim from the Crimean Tatar have been presented in Jankowski²⁵, but the further study is needed to elucidate this problem; more generally, we need more documentation.

At this point, we have to call attention to the question of the so-called Chaghatai language in the Crimea. The evidence of the designation the Chaltai dialect (чалтайский диалект) was delivered by Šapšal²⁶ who had argued that the Crimean Karaims called so their Turkic tongue, which Šapšal identified with Chaghatai. According to Rebi, Ačkinazi and Ačkinazi²⁷ as well as Rebi²⁸, the term "Chaghatai" was also used by the Krymchaks to designate their Turkic language. As is known, Chaghatai was a literary language used in Central Asia between the 15th – 20th centuries, although it existed much earlier in the Gengisid dominion of Chaghatai in Transoxania and Eastern Turkistan. In the time of the Golden Horde to which the Crimea belonged in the 13th – early 14th centuries, the official language was Khwarezmian Turkic, the successor of which was Chaghatai. This official Eastern Turkic language was substituted for Turkish after the Turkish conquest of Kaffa in 1475 and imposing control over the whole territory of the Crimea and the Black Sea. The Karaim and Krymchak denomination "Chaghatai" probably recalls that old language.

²² Yüce N. Mukaddimetü'l-Edeb. Hvarizm Türkçesi ile Tercümelî Şuŝter Nüŝhası. *Türk Dil Kurumu*, Ankara, 1993, p. 25.

²³ Moskovich W., Tukan B. Caraimica ..., p. 101.

²⁴ E.g. Grønbech K. Komanisches Wörterbuch. Einar Munksgaard, København, 1942, p. 212, 213.

²⁵ Jankowski H. On the language varieties of Karaims in the Crimea // *Studia Orientalia*. Vol. 95, 2003, p. 120–123.

²⁶ Шапшал С. Краткий очерк тюркско-караимской литературы // *Известия Караимского духовного правления*. 1918. Т. 1, с. 6.

²⁷ Реби Д. И., Ачкинази В. М., Ачкинази И. В. Крымчакский язык // *Тенишев Э. Р (ред.) Языки мира. Тюркские языки*. Бишкек, 1997, с. 309.

²⁸ Реби Д. Крымчакский язык. Крымчакско-русский словарь. Симферополь, 2004, с. 4.

3. THE QUESTION OF JUDEO-TURKIC

Jewish scholars term Karaite (Turkic Karaite, Karaim) and Krymchak Judeo-Turkic. Wexler also admits the possibility of Kareo-languages, i.e. Kareo-Greek, Kareo-Arabic and Kareo-Turkic; the latter will encompass Karaite, Krymchak and probably Khazar²⁹. However, in the final conclusion to his article, Wexler³⁰ says that only future studies may explore if “Karaite should be classified as a member of the “Jewish” group of languages, and if so, in which subtype”. Moskovich and Tukan are more decisive when they proclaim an opinion that “the East European Karaites are an ethnically Jewish group that acquired a Turkic language”.³¹

The final answer may be delivered after a detailed examination of the Hebrew stratum in Karaim. This examination should explore which words and structures pertain to the Hebrew substratum transmitted through a few language shifts, and which should be assigned to an adstratum acquired by the Karaite receptivity to Hebrew through religion.

Whatever the origin of the language of the Crimean Karaites, the existence of the Crimean Karaim is, in my view, unquestionable.

²⁹ Wexler P. Is Karaite a Jewish Language? p. 29.

³⁰ Wexler P. Is Karaite a Jewish Language? p. 48.

³¹ Moskovich W., Tukan B. Caraimica..., p. 104.