

HEBREW MANUSCRIPTS AND SCRIBES IN THE CRIMEAN GOLDEN HORDE (SOLKHAT)¹

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Solkhat, the regional capital of the Golden Horde in the Crimean Peninsula, was a multi-cultural city, with two Jewish communities—Rabbanite and Karaite. Unlike other Jewish centres in the Golden Horde, Hebrew manuscripts from 13th–15th century Solkhat have survived. These documents enable a micro-historical glance into its Jewish life, mainly of the Karaite community. However, they provide only a partial picture of the origins of these Jewish communities, circumstances of Karaite immigration to Eastern Europe, and their use of the Qıpçaq language. Parallel social and cultural processes in Solkhat's non-Jewish communities offer directions for a possible solution to these issues.

Key words: Solkhat, the Golden Horde, Karaites, Rabbanites, Armenians, manuscripts, scribes.

Introduction

Our knowledge of the Jews of the Golden Horde is very fragmentary as we lack accurate documentation from this period. Most documentary sources were lost during the Mongol invasion of Central Asia, with its consequent destruction of many Jewish communities and their partial Islamisation. However, one of the few places in the Golden Horde's empire where Hebrew manuscripts survived was the city of Solkhat, which served as a regional capital in the Crimean Peninsula. Solkhat was founded in the 1260s, following the Mongol invasions of the 1230s. These unique documents, together with additional evidence from the 13th–15th centuries, enable a partial reconstruction of the cultural and communal life of the Jewish communities in Solkhat,

¹ I express my gratitude to my colleagues and friends for their important comments and remarks: Meir M. Bar-Asher, Yaron Ben-Naeh, Haggai Ben-Shammai, Mikhail Kizilov, and Mark Kramarovskij.

especially the Karaite one. During the Golden Horde period, these communities were part of a multi-cultural and multi-lingual society. Tracing parallel processes that took place in non-Jewish communities of Solkhat can help to fill some lacunas in our knowledge concerning the Jewish life of Solkhat.

These surviving Hebrew manuscripts enable us to assess, to some extent, the contents of the communities' libraries. The inscriptions on these manuscripts, scribal colophons, sale contracts, notes on synagogue consecration of books, and ownership notes provide valuable data such as names of community members, toponyms, forms of book consumption, and working practices of the scribes. These fragmentary but quite informative documents reveal the existence of at least three Karaite scribes active in the Solkhat community during the 14th–15th centuries.

Jews settled in Solkhat before the advent of Islam in the Crimea: the Byzantine Karaite scholar, Aaron ben Joseph the Physician (c. 1250–1320), mentions in his *Sefer ha-mivhar* a Karaite-Rabbanite calendar dispute that took place in Solkhat in 1278 (Aaron ben Joseph 1835: 14b). This may also indicate that both communities, Rabbanite and Karaite, were already present in this regional capital since its very beginnings. Their origins can be clarified through three primary data categories: (a) the aforementioned manuscripts, with their inscriptions containing names of persons and toponyms from outside the Crimea; (b) the oral traditions of the Crimean Karaite communities; and (c) the historical and cultural processes in the region.

Historical and Cultural Background of Solkhat and Its Jewish Communities

After the Mongol invasion of the Crimean Peninsula in 1236, and during the 1240s, this area became part of a new political entity—Ulus Juchi, or the Golden Horde. The late 13th and 14th centuries saw many other lands, spreading from the Danube to China, incorporated into this same empire. This was a period of development of trade routes and intense urbanisation, with the foundation of more than 120 cities (Крамаровский 2012: 6–7). The city of Solkhat (Solcati—Ital.; Eski Qırım—Tatar; Старый Крым—Russian), located on the Silk Road, was founded in the 1260s as a centre of tax collection. It received merchants from close and distant lands who attended its market and stayed in its *caravansaries* on their journey to Middle Asia, Iran, and China. Solkhat reached the peak of its economic and cultural prosperity in the mid-14th century, with a population which counted more than 8000 citizens. Following the settlement of the Genoese in the 1270s, who built the port city of Kaffa on the southern coast of the peninsula, Solkhat started to use this facility.

In this period, the dominant group among the Crimean population were the Qıpçaqs, part of which lived there before the arrival of the Mongols. According to Guillaume de Rubrouck (1225–1291), the Minorite missionary who visited the Crimea in 1253, the Qıpçaqs (Cumans) were the rulers of the Crimea at the time of the Mongol invasions. According to Guillaume de Rubrouck, as a result of these

invasions (possibly after the Mongol conquest of the southeastern areas of Eastern Europe), large masses of Qıpçaqs arrived in the Crimea as refugees.²

The gradual adoption of Islam by the Golden Horde began in the 1320s, after its introduction by Khan Uzbek (1312–1342) among the Mongol elites. Early Islam in Solkhat had a strong Sufi tendency, with key figures involved in the spread of this new religion belonging to different Sufi schools of thought (Abdulvapov 2006: 140–149). They visited the Crimea or relocated there in the late 13th and early 14th century, coming from Iraq, Middle Asia, and Anatolia. The great Moroccan traveller, Ibn Batuta, who visited the Crimea at the peak of its flourishing (c. 1334) (Kramarovskij 2015: 300), mentions his meeting with Abu Baqr Kalandar of Anatolia. Abu Baqr was a Sufi, who served as an Imam in the biggest mosque in Solkhat and established the Sufi brotherhood of the ‘enamoured’ (*ushaki*).³ Other Sufi institutions existed in Solkhat such as abodes for dervishes and Sufi orders. Abu Baqr arrived in the Crimea with a wave of the Seljuk immigration from Anatolia, who formed quite a large group in the Solkhat population.⁴ Another group, who emigrated to Solkhat from Anatolia, was the Nestorians.

At the same time, the Crimean Catholic establishment conducted active missionary work among the local population. The Gospels were copied in Solkhat (1338) by scribes of Turkic origin, who, although Christian, still bore Muslim and Qıpçaq names (Amin ad-Din Kutlug-Bei and Diya ad-Din Hwadja b. Maula Naib Nur ad-Din), as shown in the colophons (Kramarovskij 2015: 303; Vásáry 1988: 260–271). Local Christians also included the Genoese, Venetians, Orthodox Greeks and Slavs as well as Armenians, both Catholic and Gregorian.⁵ Solkhat included Muslim, Christian, and Jewish quarters with their corresponding public structures. In the Solkhat Christian quarter, a Franciscan monastery and Genoese district could be found.

In the Jewish quarter, dwelled the Rabbanite and Karaite communities. The most important discovery of recent years was the uncovering of a large synagogue by Dr. Mark Kramarovskij, historian and archaeologist of the State Hermitage Museum

² t'Serstevens 1959: 225: ‘... there are forty castles between Kherson and Soldaya; almost every one of them had a special language... Before the arrival of the Tatars [Mongols], Cumans who lived there, forced the above-mentioned cities and castles to pay them tribute. And when the Tatars came, the Cumans, who all fled to the seashore, entered this land in such a huge amount that they devoured each other mutually, and the living ate the dead...’

³ Joining this brotherhood required observing strict moral rules of behaviour, wearing specific dress, and practising a collective worship, which was accompanied by chanting, playing musical instruments, and dancing.

⁴ Another Sufi leader, who became a subject of folklore, although his existence is beyond doubt – Sary Saltuk – arrived in Solkhat as the head of a large group of immigrants from Anatolian Seljuk Sultanate, accompanying ‘Izz ad-Dīn Kaykāwus II, after he lost power and escaped to the Crimea (Babinger 1993: 171–172). The origins of Muslim immigrants settling in Solkhat can be identified by their eponym (*nisba*), derived from their place of origin, on the tomb inscriptions of the 13th–15th centuries. Among them are found people originating from Central and Eastern Anatolia (Konia, Sivas, Tokat, Akhlat), Aleppo and Irbil, as well as immigrants from Khwarazm and Tabriz (Akchokrakly 1927: 5–18).

⁵ Surb Khach (Սուրբ Խաչ) Armenian Monastery was established in 1358 outside the city borders.

(St. Petersburg). Whether this was a Rabbanite or Karaite synagogue remains an unsolved question. According to the preliminary results of his work (Kramarovskij 2016: 69–81), the synagogue dates from the 1260s, and it accommodated more than 200 people, an indication that the Jewish congregation could count more than 1000 souls, and that a single Jewish community could account for about eight per cent of Solkhat's total population.

The mountain massif of Aġarmış,⁶ at the northeast of the city, was also a populated area.⁷ Some of the Hebrew manuscripts from Solkhat seem to support a tradition of Jewish settlements on the slopes of this mountain. This oral tradition was reported in the 19th century by R. Joshua ben David ha-Koen, the head of the Kaffa Karaite community (*hazzan*), to Abraham ben Samuel Firkovich (1787–1874), the leader of the East European Karaites and manuscript collector. Joshua helped Firkovich to look for ancient Hebrew manuscripts and other artifacts in the Crimea, and interviewed elderly people concerning the history of the Crimean Karaite communities. Joshua wrote in his letter (1843): 'We have an [oral] tradition that there were synagogues on the mountainside of Aġarmış.'⁸

One of the Hebrew inscriptions from Solkhat may include confirmation of this tradition: a colophon on a Pentateuch by the Karaite scribe, Hizkiya ha-Levi, from 1360, records: 'I copied this Torah here, in Solkhat, on the margins of Aġarmış.'⁹ Since this mountain was contiguous to the Jewish quarter, the term 'margins' used by Hizkiya can be understood as referring to the quarter itself but also to the mountainous area. In a later sale contract from the same book (1376), we find another wording, namely that this book was sold 'in the city of Solkhat, on the mountainside of Aġarmış...' (1r). However, this location remains unclear, and Joshua's evidence is not corroborated by further sources.

There was a Jewish cemetery outside the quarter in close proximity to the Muslim one. Abraham Firkovich, who examined its tomb inscriptions in 1839, claimed that this was a Karaite cemetery, and that the earliest dates on its tomb inscriptions were from the 10th–12th centuries (Firkovich 1872: 210).¹⁰ However, his claim is unreasonable, since the city did not yet exist. The two earliest tomb inscriptions, which have survived to the present day, are dated 1511 and 1517. The first one bears the name of Joseph ben Abraham, and another that of Mordechai ben Mordechai (Markevich 1879: 128).¹¹ The latter was engraved on stone, bearing a previous dedicational inscription from the local mosque dated 1309. This secondary use of the stone is evidence of the abandonment of some parts of Solkhat by the Muslim community. After Firkovich, there were no excavations made there, and, in 1944, this

⁶ There are preserved the ruins of medieval city walls and of the plumbing, which supplied water to the city.

⁷ In addition, Greeks and Armenians conducted a yearly sanctification of water on Aġarmış.

⁸ National Library of Russia (further NLR), f. 946, op. 1, no. 674, 12v.

⁹ NLR EVR I A 6.

¹⁰ He published in his book five inscriptions from Solkhat.

¹¹ This tombstone is preserved in the Central Museum of Tavrida, Simferopol.

cemetery, together with the neighbouring Muslim one (following the deportation of the Crimean Tatars by Stalin's order), was destroyed by excavators.

The origins of the Jewish communities of Solkhat are quite obscure, and this issue raises many questions. There were a number of Karaite oral traditions, in the Crimea and in Eastern Europe, concerning their origins. For instance, the Russian historian, Piotr I. Keppen, reported in 1833 one of the narratives of Crimean Karaites. According to it, the Karaites relocated to the Crimea together with the Tatars, Bucharans, and Cherkessians (Keppen 1837: 290). Concerning the early residence of the Karaites in Solkhat, the Karaite leader from Evpatoria in the 18th century, Benjamin Duvan, claimed that the Karaite settlement there was already present 500 years ago (Yaari 1996: 463). This period of settlement fits quite well with the aforementioned evidence of Aaron ben Joseph, and the dating of the synagogue found by M. Kramarovskij.

Some inferences related to this issue can be drawn from a number of sale contracts. There is a manuscript in the First Firkovich collection, from the most ancient Rabbanite codex of the late prophets with Babylonian punctuation, copied in 916,¹² and apparently brought to Solkhat from the Middle East or Persia. This manuscript contains 12 inscriptions from different periods, some of them written in Islamic countries, and others in the Crimea. For instance, one of its sale contracts dated 1127 (Harkavy and Strack 1875: 231, inscr. no 9) testifies about a woman, named [...] bat Joshua, who bought this book from one Abraham ha-Levi, and mentions Shahrastan, Nishapur (the main city of Horasan) and Vakarastan (Bactria?). As the text of this contract is in a rather degraded condition, it is not clear whether this region was the location of the deal.¹³ It is impossible to verify the authenticity of this sale contract, as Firkovich smeared on it some ink, which, with the passing of time, has made the text unreadable.¹⁴ Therefore, we can only base ourselves on the reading(s) by Abraham Harkavy and Herman Strack. If we take this manuscript as authentic, we can surmise that it was brought in a later period from the area of Khwarazm, which was part of the Golden Horde (1221–1359), by Jewish immigrants to Solkhat.

Evidence concerning the Persian origin of members of the Solkhat community can be found in the sale contract on another Pentateuch codex.¹⁵ The owner of this

¹² NLR EVR I B 3.

¹³ Harkavy and Strack refer in this case to the reading of Khvolson (1884: 104, Anm. 4).

¹⁴ Firkovich claimed that the Karaites settled in the Crimea before the crucifixion of Jesus, and therefore had been uninvolved in this act, and that they were the descendants of the ten lost tribes. All these claims made them different from the Rabbanite Jews, and fit the criteria for emancipation, which he tried to obtain for his community. To substantiate his claims Firkovich forged dozens of manuscript inscriptions by changing their dates to earlier ones, or adding his own colophons with ancient dates. Therefore, a considerable part of the inscriptions from his collections require careful examination. The theme of Firkovich's forgeries is a separate topic which cannot be discussed in the present paper. See research dealing with his forgeries and ahistorical theories, which he tried to support by faked colophons (Akhiezer 2018: 256–293; Harkavy 1876; Shapira 2007: 303–393; Iakerson 2014: 63–76).

¹⁵ Contains today Genesis and Prophets. EVR I BIBL 6, 1r (Harkavy and Strack 1875: 240–241).

book, ‘Elijah, the son of Abraham, called Ibrahim Hoja... here, in city of Solkhat, on the mountainside of Ağarmış...’, sold it in 1376 for 375 Crimean coins to R. Eliya ben mar Zadok ha-Kohen. This same individual is also mentioned as ‘Ibrahim Hoja Shah ben Joshua’ in another sale contract, as the buyer of two books of the Prophets (former and latter), and a copy of the grammar work *Sefat Yeter* by the exegete, philosopher, kabbalist and grammarian Abraham ibn Ezra (1089–1167).¹⁶ We also find in this contract the name of one of the witnesses—Suleiman ha-Parsi (the Persian), the son of David ha-Parsi. Some of the Torah manuscripts brought by Firkovich from the Crimea also include a Persian translation.¹⁷ Unfortunately, none of them have inscriptions indicating their origin.

There are also numerous Greek names in the manuscript inscriptions (as well as on tomb inscriptions in the Karaite cemeteries of Çufut Qaleh and Mangup), such as Euphrosyne, Khursi (Χρυσση), Kusdini, Caprisino and others. All these data lead us to conclude that immigrants from the Persian region were an important element in the Solkhat community, possibly originating from those lands which were a part of the Mongol Empire, as well as from Byzantium. The same paths of immigration are also found for the Muslim and Armenian communities of Solkhat.

The Languages Used by the Solkhat Jews

The linguistic situation in Solkhat, as well as in the whole Crimean Peninsula, was quite complex. There is no full consensus on the epochs of use and mechanisms of development of the local Turkic languages and dialects, including the rise of what is called today the Crimean Tatar language. However, the aim of this paper is not to reconstruct the local language picture from its linguistic aspects, but to focus on the use of the existing languages by the Crimean Karaites in Solkhat in its historical perspective. As previously shown, Solkhat was a multi-cultural and multi-ethnic city, and quite a large number of languages, dialects and ethnolects were used by the local populations, including the Jews. As in other Jewish communities of the East and West, Hebrew was the written and liturgical language. There were intellectuals whose language proficiency level of Hebrew was very high, judging by the written sources from Solkhat in the 14th century.

Following the Islamisation of Solkhat, its institutions tended to use more Arabic in their documentation and correspondence. This process possibly affected the Jewish communities—for instance, a silver bilingual seal (Figure 1) with the name of its owner in Hebrew and Arabic has been found in the excavations of M. Kramarovskij in Solkhat.

¹⁶ NLR EVR I B 12, 150 b (Harkavy and Strack 1875: 259–260, inscr. 5). Unfortunately, during my visit to the National Library of Russia in St. Petersburg in October 2018, this manuscript, unlike others, mentioned here, could not be found, therefore I could not check it.

¹⁷ See NLR EVR I BIBL 139, 140, 141, 142.



Figure 1. A silver seal in Hebrew and Arabic (the State Hermitage, St. Petersburg)

The owner's name in Hebrew is written as [משה ב'כ"ר מלכיצ'דק]—Moshe [Moses] ben [the son] of Honourable Rabbi Melchiz[edek]. His father's name—Melchizedek—is shortened into Melchiz' due to lack of space on the seal. However, the same name in the Arabic version is written in its full form ¹⁸موسى بن ملك صادق (Musa bin Malik Sadiq), although in two words. Two points should be emphasised regarding this seal. Melchizedek is a rare name among Jewish communities,¹⁹ and not usually found among Karaites. If its owner was a Rabbanite, it must be dated before the end of the 14th, early 15th centuries. After this period, most of the Rabbanite community relocated to Kaffa, Qırq Yer (Çufut Qaleh) or Mangup, due to the economic and political decline of Solkhat. The second point is that the use of the Arabic language on the seal may be supporting evidence for the hypothesis that some members in the Solkhat Jewish community were involved in the system of local administration, as was common in many other places, both in Muslim and Christian countries, including the Crimea, at various times. This was the case with the Jewish community leaders of Çufut Qaleh, who were involved in coin-minting (Akhiezer 2003: 737–738).

The language of Cuman-Qıpçaqs served as a *lingua franca* throughout the Chingizid Eurasian realm, from Eastern Asia to the Crimea (Golden 2014: 183–203). Y. Dashkevich claims that the Qıpçaq became a *lingua franca* following the emergence of the Mamluk rulers who spoke this language (Dashkevich 1994: 83). According to the aforementioned evidence of Guillaume de Rubrouck, the Cuman population of the Crimea was quite numerous.²⁰ As a result of the missionary activity of the

¹⁸ Prof. Meir Bar-Asher pointed out that since the word *بن* looks on the seal like *בר*, it can be read, instead of 'bin', as 'bar'—as well as in the common Hebrew abbreviation *ב"ר = בן רב*—the son of Rav/ Rabbi (here, without the word 'honourable', which is never compulsory).

¹⁹ These rare names can sometimes be found in Oriental or Italian Rabbanite Jewish communities.

²⁰ See above, Note 2.

Franciscan order in the Crimea (possibly in Solkhat), the *Codex Cumanicus* was composed, as a practical handbook of the Cuman language, with glossaries in Italo-Latin, Persian, and Cuman. Also included was a collection of religious texts and folkloric materials. The *Codex Cumanicus* is the most important surviving record of the Qıpçaq language, spoken by the local Turkic population during the period of the rule of the Golden Horde (and by other ethnic groups as well, including the Armenians and the Karaites), and in Mamluk Egypt (Golden 1992: 33–63).²¹

The Qıpçaq language was brought from the Crimea to Eastern Europe (Lithuania, Podolia, Volhynia and Galicia) by Karaite and Armenian immigrants. In this context, two main questions remain unsolved: when was the Qıpçaq language brought to Eastern Europe and were only immigrants from Solkhat involved in this process? Concerning the first question, there are a number of late Karaite traditions, recorded in the 19th century, that apparently have some historical basis. According to these traditions, the Karaites were brought as captives from Solkhat to Lithuania, and later were settled also in Poland by the Lithuanian dukes. One of these traditions appears in the book written by the Karaite East European leader and scholar, Mordechai Sultanski, 1772–1862 (Sultanski 1920: 108–109).²²

Some of these Karaite oral traditions²³ seem to have been modified by Karaite authors in the 19th century, and there is no documentary evidence supporting the involvement of Lithuanian or Crimean rulers in the process of Karaite relocation from the Crimea to Eastern Europe.²⁴ The dating of these events to the 13th century is also unreasonable,²⁵ since it is the beginning of the Crimean Jewish settlement in the Crimea. This dating by Sultanski stems from the tendency of Karaite leaders in the 18th–19th centuries to claim that the Karaite community's history was more ancient than it really was, and to present the special benevolence it enjoyed from the local rulers in order to receive wider privileges from the Russian authorities. In any case, all Karaite traditions, including the one reported by Duvan (see above, Yaari 1996: 463) present the city of Solkhat as the first centre of Karaites in the Crimea, and the place from which they emigrated to Eastern Europe. However, the scarcity of sources does not enable a clear and unambiguous picture of the issue, and whether

²¹ The *Codex Cumanicus* is presently housed in the Library of St. Mark, in Venice, *Cod. Mar. Lat. DXLIX*.

²² According to Sultanski's anachronistic text, in 1218 '... the Great Duke of ... Lithuania, called Witold Jagiełło... in going to war against the Tartars in the kingdom of Crimea and in defeating them, invaded the Crimea and took much booty and a great captivity ... and carried off some Karaites who were in Solkhat ... and brought them to his land, to Lithuania...'

²³ See also a chronicle on the same topic, fabricated by Abraham Leonowicz, a *hazzan* of the Halicz Karaite community (Akhiezer 2018: 232–242, 331–333).

²⁴ The earliest surviving Karaite documents from Eastern Europe belong to the 15th century (Mann 1935: 556–563, 698–709).

²⁵ The text of Sultanski contains a number of anachronisms. Among them that the Lithuanian duke Witold, called Jagiełło, brought 483 Karaite householders from Solkhat to Troki in 1218 after his victory over the Tatars. However, Witold ruled from 1392 to 1430 and he confused Witold with Władysław II Jagiełło who ruled Poland in 1386–1434 (Akhiezer 2011: 177–181).

Karaite (and to large extent also Armenian) immigration was only from Solkhat remains an unsolved question.

As Dan Shapira and myself have suggested in an article on the beginnings of Karaism in Eastern Europe (Akhiezer and Shapira 2002: 34–35), the fact that Karaites and Armenians in Eastern Europe spoke the same Qıpçaq language²⁶ may indicate that both communities possibly arrived in Lithuania and Poland from the areas ruled by the Golden Horde, in particular from one of its capitals, Sarai Berke on the Volga and possibly Tabriz. However, no document supports the claim of the presence of Jews in Sarai Berke (as opposed to Armenians),²⁷ as well as their immigration from Tabriz to Eastern Europe. The inspection of additional documents led me to the conclusion that, at least for Karaites, Solkhat was the main source of emigration to Eastern Europe.²⁸ One of the earliest Karaite documents confirming this direction is a sale contract on a copy of the book *Midrash ha-ḥokhmah*²⁹ from Solkhat. This contract was signed in Troki in 1598. We learn from a previous sale contract written on the same page that it was brought from Solkhat: ‘Joseph ben Samuel ha-Koen, and Sulamith bat Jacob, his mother in law, sold [this book] to Samuel ben Abraham... in 5194 [=1389] in the community of Qırım [Solkhat]....’ This hypothesis can be strengthened by a similar fact related to the Armenian community: their books written and copied in Solkhat were found later in Galicia and Podolia. For example, according to an Armenian colophon (1394), Sinan Kotlubei of Crimean origin donated to the Armenian church of Kamenetz Podolski a book (lectionary) compiled in Solkhat in 1349 (Sargsjan 2010: 198–199; Vasiljeva 2015: 310–311). Schütz also suggested that the early Armenian settlement in Lwów and Kamenetz Podolski was from Solkhat (Schütz 1980: 124).

The Armenian texts in Turkic-Qıpçaq did not appear in Eastern Europe before the 16th century (Dashkevich 1994: 86–88; Sevortjan 1967; Tryjarski 2010). The same can be said of the Karaite texts. Among the earliest Karaite texts in this language, we find piyyutim from 16th-century Troky by the Karaite scholar, R. Isaac ben Abraham the Physician (Jankowski 2014: 35–57; Kizilov 2007: 64–75). Notably, both communities started using this language as a written literary one in Eastern Europe, but not in the Crimea, where it served only (or primarily) as a spoken tongue (Dashkevich 1994: 83). Due to this situation, we can conclude that the Karaites and the Armenians gradually adopted this language in Solkhat and its vicinity, prior to the 14th century. Their first waves of immigration to Eastern Europe, as early as the end

²⁶ On its origins and germination, see Dashkevich 1981: 87–89; Shapira 2003: 657–707.

²⁷ For Armenian settlements from the Middle Ages to Modern Times, see Schütz 1980: 116–135.

²⁸ Armenians also emigrated from other parts of the Crimea over a larger span of time, including refugees from Kaffa to Poland in 1475 (Schütz 1980: 132–133).

²⁹ MS Mich. 551, 210a, Bodleian Library. The book itself was written in Arabic by Judah ben Shlomo ibn Matka of Toledo around 1247, who afterwards translated it into Hebrew. This was the first Jewish encyclopaedia of scientific and philosophical knowledge, providing a survey of Aristotelian natural philosophy and metaphysics and their interpretation by Ibn Rushd. It also contains material on Euclidian geometry, astronomy, astrology, alchemy, and the mystical meanings of the Hebrew letters.

of the 14th century (due to the declining of Solkhat), came from this city, and brought Qıpçaq to Eastern Europe. After the collapse of the Golden Horde and the development of the Tatar language in the Crimea, the remaining communities adjusted themselves to this change,³⁰ while their brethren in Eastern Europe preserved Turkic-Qıpçaq as a spoken and written language. The East European Karaites, surrounded by non-Turkic speaking populations, preserved ‘archaic’ forms of their Cumanic-based language and adopted some Slavic words, while the language of the Crimean Jewish communities shifted together with the surrounding Turkic and Turkicised populations.³¹

An important factor involved in the linguistic changes among the Solkhat Jewish population was its gradual migration from this city after the rise of the Crimean Khanate, beginning in 1443, when Haji Devlet Giray proclaimed himself the khan of a state independent from the Golden Horde, and established its new capital in Qırq-Yer, only to subsequently relocate it to Bakhesaray. The Karaites of Solkhat migrated to Qırq-Yer, to the Christian principality of Mangup (Theodoro), or to Genoese Kaffa. Even before the emergence of the Khanate, the Rabbanite population of Solkhat had started relocating to Kaffa. The Tatar dialect which developed in the Crimean Khanate after the Ottoman conquest of 1475 (in Bakhesaray, Çufut Qaleh, Karasubazar, and Gözleve) was different from the language of the *vilayet*—the territory under direct Ottoman rule (Mangup, Kaffa, Sudak, and Balaklava), influenced by Oghuz Turks (Shapira 2003: 660–662). The Crimean Rabbanites used the same language as the Karaites, but they did not immigrate to Eastern Europe. Due to all these linguistic changes, which occurred over hundreds of years, the Crimean and East European Karaites in Modern Times no longer understood one another.

Scribes and Books in Solkhat

As a result of the spread of Islam in the Golden Horde, Solkhat became an important centre of copying the Quranic manuscripts, and some original Islamic texts were composed there. One of them was ‘Qalandar-Nameh’, written in Persian by the aforementioned Sufi scholar, Abu Bakr Qalandar Rumi, who relocated from Anatolia, and became the imam of a mosque in Solkhat. Qalandar-Nameh is a work consisting of five volumes, and deals with the basic concepts of Sufi Islam.³² There are also other Sufi compositions from Solkhat and other Crimean cities (Kemal 1930: 159–168).

³⁰ According to Vásáry (1988: 270) ‘...in the second half of the 14th century ... the *Quman* language became *Tatar* language, i.e. the term *Quman* was irrevocably replaced by the term *Tatar*’. This terminological shift, however, may not reflect the real linguistic changes.

³¹ I am very grateful to Professor Peter Golden who shared with me his knowledge on this subject.

³² Abu Bakr Kalandar, ‘Kalandar-name’ Arkhiv Instituta vostokovedeniia im. Abu Raikhana Biruni, Uzbekistan, No. 11668. This was translated into Russian (Gibadullina and Shamsimukhametovoj 2017).

During the 13th century, Solkhat was one of the major centers of production of Armenian books for the Crimea and Byzantium. From the early 14th century, this role gradually passed to Kaffa (Sargsjan 2010: 23–24). The Catholic missionaries of Solkhat supervised in 1338 the copying of the four synoptic Gospels, which were translated from Syriac, and the Gospel of John from Latin (Pritula 2004: 27). The *Evangeliarium*, a copy of a Persian translation of the mid-13th century, was copied in 1374 in the Nestorian scriptorium of Solkhat (Pritula 2004: 34–35).

As a rule, Jewish communities, both Rabbanite and Karaite, did not maintain scriptoria. However, this did not prevent the existence of a developed book culture. According to Malachi Beit-Arié, the copying of manuscripts in the Jewish communities was a private initiative, and it usually was neither regulated, nor funded by the community leadership (Beit-Arié 2000: 441–451).

Surviving manuscripts from Solkhat from the period of the Golden Horde provide a general picture of the intellectual interests and practices of book consumption. In addition, they have preserved the names of some community figures active in this period. Most of the surviving manuscripts are part of the First Firkovich Collection. Firkovich found them in Karaite and Rabbanite *genizot* of synagogues and study halls—in Kaffa, Karasubazar and Çufut Qaleh, where their owners relocated from Solkhat, bringing their libraries with them.³³ According to their colophons and other inscriptions, these manuscripts belonged to the Karaite community of Solkhat or to its individuals. Among these we find Torah books written by Karaite and Rabbanite scribes (both codices and Torah scrolls), copied in the Crimea and outside of it, and a number of treatises by Karaite and Rabbanite authors. Some of these manuscripts originate from other lands (possibly in Persia or the Middle East), but bear inscriptions dating from the period of the Golden Horde's Solkhat. In contrast to the inscriptions made by members of this Karaite community, we do not find among them Rabbanite inscriptions from this city.

According to the existing colophons, we can identify at least three Karaite scribes who originated or lived for some period in Solkhat. One of them was from Adrianople, and he possibly relocated to the Crimea. One of his colophons at the end of the book of Deuteronomy is as follows:³⁴

In the year 5150 [=1390] from the Creation [of the world], according to our counting, that we use here in the community of Bnei Miqra' [=Karaites] in Solkhat, today, Eliya ha-Koen the son of honorable R.

³³ The early inscriptions from his collection were not used in this study, as their authenticity is doubtful and they were possibly falsified by Firkovich. Among them are those which are attributed to Solkhat, and dated before the 14th century (see Note 14 above). Some of them contain stories on the consecration of Torah books by members of the Solkhat community to its Khazar community (see for instance Harkavy and Strack 1875: 203–205; NLR EVR I A 11). Firkovich invented a narrative about the Khazars' conversion to the Karaite version of Judaism, and on the genetic and cultural connections between Karaites and Khazars (Shapira 2002–2003: 223–260; Akhiezer 2018: 284–293; Kizilov and Mikhaylova 2005: 31–53). This narrative is also rooted in East European Turkology, see the research of Zajączkowski 1961, who believed it.

³⁴ New York, Columbia University X 893, B 4776.

Zaddok ha-Koen, be his soul in Paradise, consecrated this Torah to be Holy before God, and he consecrated it in the name of his mother, Malka the daughter of honorable R. Moses [the late?], for being in the Great Synagogue ... and so as to bless be anyone who safeguards it from any damage, and cursed be anyone who takes it out, desecrates, exchanges or pawns it ...

I, the scribe, a worm, not a man [Ps 22:7], [...?] ben Eliyahu of Adrianople [Adrianopoliti].

We find here important data, shedding light on some aspects of the life of the Solkhat community. The name R. Eliya ben mar Zadok ha-Kohen appears in an earlier inscription—a sale contract dated 1376 as a buyer of a Pentateuch codex.³⁵ Another point is the mention of a ‘Great Synagogue’. This may refer to the synagogue which has been uncovered in archaeological excavations headed by Kramarovskij. This would indicate that this synagogue, disregarding the identity of its original founders, was in the possession of the Karaite community at the end of the 14th century. An important issue is the mention of a phenomenon, quite common among Jewish communities of the Islamic countries—the practice of consecrating books to synagogues. Books were consecrated by men and women for atonement of sins, cure of diseases, or in memory of their family members. This phenomenon, also widespread among the Crimean communities, used to be an important factor in the creation of public libraries in the synagogues, or in study halls (Ben-Shammai 2014: 1–4). These books were usually allowed to be used by community members, but their removal was forbidden.³⁶

The name of the scribe is unreadable here, but we find it in another, earlier inscription—a colophon and sale contract simultaneously, of a Torah scroll written by this same scribe, which he copied by request of patrons. Only one page has been preserved, with the following inscription (Harkavy and Strack 1875: 220–221).³⁷

I, the scribe Judah the son of Eliyahu of Adrianople [Adrianopoliti], blessed memory, completed this Torah scroll in the fourth day of the week, in the month of Sivan 17, in the year 5123 [=1363] for the Creation, and I sold it to Eliya, the son of honorable R. Jacob, be his soul in Paradise, and his sister Pusira [Fusira?] for one silver coin [*zakuk*], and they consecrated it for the community of Köksü, to be Holy before the God of Israel, for their own souls, and the soul of their father ...

³⁵ See, above, Note 15.

³⁶ One of the striking examples of such a library is a large list of books in a register (*pinqas*) of the Rabbanite community of Karasubazar ‘from the consecrated property of the holy community of Kaffa’. It included the warning: ‘These are the books consecrated and placed in the synagogue and in the study hall of the holy community of Kara Sub. No son of Israel may remove them from the yard of the synagogue except by permission of the community’ (Akhiezer 2018: 322–326).

³⁷ NLR EVR IA 35 (Harkavy and Strack 1875: 220–221). According to the letter of Joshua to Firkovich, he exhumed it from the site near Kaffa, where he buried some years before old manuscripts from the *genizah* of the Karaite synagogue, and they were mostly rotten. This manuscript was not found in the NLR, therefore, unlike most of the other manuscripts I could not examine it.

According to this inscription, Judah ben Eliya copied the Torah scroll for two patrons—brother and sister, possibly from the Jewish community of Kōksü, and this is the only existing mention of this community, about which we have no other evidence. According to Harkavy and Strack, it was a village near Mangup, although we have no documents confirming this location. Nevertheless, this toponym was not invented by Firkovich, since we find it in at least two Armenian colophons from the same period as ‘a newly built city’ ‘in the world of the Huns’ (the Crimea), without specifying its location (Sargsjan 2010: 25). It was possibly located near some river, according to the second half of this toponym (su). Additional information about Kōksü is suggested by the aforementioned Joshua in his letter to Firkovich. He claimed that he heard from the elders in the Kaffa Karaite community that Kōksü was located in Taman (on the Taman bay, eastward of the Crimean Peninsula), or in the land of the Circassians (southeast from Taman). Joshua also mentioned this same scribe, Judah ben Eliya of Adrianople. According to him, Judah copied two other Torah scrolls, one in 1365 for the community of Trabzon and the second in 1367 for the community of Taman.³⁸ We cannot verify his words, although they are not unreasonable.

Another scribe, Hizkiya ben Eliya ha-Levi, lived and was possibly born in Solkhat. We find his name in a number of inscriptions as a scribe and witness of deeds of sale, and also the name of his father, and of two of his sons. These data provide us a partial micro-historical perspective on Karaite community life and the activity of its members. These inscriptions seem to indicate that this Levi family was part of the educated Karaite elite from Solkhat.

A further inscription from Solkhat is a Karaite sale contract of a Pentateuch codex, published by Efraim Deinard (1846–1930), a self-educated historian from the Russian Empire (Deinard 1878: 129–130):

[This is] the testimony we, undersigned, bear, [today] first weekday, the 18th of the month of Iyar, 5082 [=1322] of the Creation, according to our counting here the city of Solkhat, in the land of the Crimea. On this day Eliya ben R. Joseph sold this book to Eliya ben R. Caleb for 280 Crimean coins from the kingdom of King Uzbek. He, Eliya ben R. Joseph, received the money from the hand of Eliya ben R. Caleb ... and thus was completed the transaction—no refund, no ruling, and nothing else—and anyone who will object [to this deal]—his words will be null and void, as a broken pottery—be it from a son, a daughter, brother, sister, or any close or distant relative. Everything we have heard from both parties, we have written down as evidence for the day of tomorrow and the days after, to attest for the record that [this] testimony is valid and in effect.

R. Joseph ben Mar Abraham the late,
Abraham ha-Ger [the proselyte]
and I..., Eliya ben Hizkiya the teacher, be the Spirit of the God will rest on him.

³⁸ See the letter of Joshua ben David ha-Koen, 13r, above, Note 8.

Unfortunately, we have no information on the fate of this manuscript, and so cannot verify its authenticity.³⁹ However, the names mentioned here appear in a number of inscriptions from the First Firkovich Collection. If we accept its authenticity, this is one of the two earliest inscriptions from Solkhat. We find here the name of ‘Abraham ha-Ger [the proselyte]’, who appears also in a sale contract from the previous year (1321), on an undated book of prophets.⁴⁰ The mention of a proselyte is quite fitting for the situation prevalent during the rule of Uzbek Khan, when Islam was just beginning to spread among the Crimean population, and inside the various ethnic groups, individuals could belong to different religions or change their confessional affiliation.

Among the witnesses mentioned in the sale contract of this last book, we also find Eliya ben Hizkiya, the teacher, and we can assume that he was the father of Hizkiya ben Eliya.⁴¹ This same name Eliya ben Hizkiya appears in the same book, as a witness of a later sale contract (1337).⁴² We also find his name on the most ancient existent Rabbanite manuscript—the aforementioned codex of the latter prophets with Babylonian punctuation.⁴³ This unique manuscript has 12 inscriptions, the first one dating from 916 (when it was copied), possibly in Persia or the Middle East, and the latest ones written in 14th-century Solkhat and Kaffa, where the codex was brought by migrants from the Solkhat community. In addition, we find Eliya ben Hizkiya’s name (1350) and of his son Hizkiya ben Eliya, the teacher (1378) as witnesses on two further sale contracts of this same book.⁴⁴

Hizkiya ben Eliya, the teacher, according to surviving manuscript inscriptions, was active as a copyist during the period of 1359–1376 (some of his colophons are undated).⁴⁵ In some of the books he reproduced (for instance a Torah scroll dated 1360), he mentioned his full name and genealogy for seven generations at the end of the scroll: ‘Hizkiya ha-Levi the scribe, son of R. Eliya, son of R. Hizkiya, son of the honorable R. Eliya the teacher, son of Abraham, son of Rav Shemuel, son of R. Eliezer’, and added that he copied it ‘on the margins of Aḡarmış’.⁴⁶

The codex of Deuteronomy, which he copied in 1371, contains Large and Small *Masorah*.⁴⁷ He writes in his colophon that he made great efforts in the editing

³⁹ Deinard had a large collection of Rabbanite and Karaite manuscripts, and he sold many of them to private collectors.

⁴⁰ NLR EVR I B 12, 211r (Harkavy and Strack 1875: 255–256, No. 1).

⁴¹ It is a common Jewish custom to give a first born son the name of his grandfather.

⁴² NLR EVR I B 12, 212r (Harkavy and Strack 1875: 257, No. 3). This book of prophets was sold five times, apparently, in the Solkhat community from 1321 to 1388.

⁴³ NLR EVR I 3 (Harkavy and Strack 1875: 223–235).

⁴⁴ See his father’s name NLR EVR I 3, 225v (Harkavy and Strack 1875: 233, No. 11), and Hizkiya’s signature on 225v (Harkavy and Strack 1875: 235, No. 12). Possibly, Hizkiya already signed in Kaffa, where he relocated about 1368.

⁴⁵ His last signature as a witness appears in the sale contract of 1380, on the aforementioned undated book of prophets; see above, NLR EVR I B 12, 221r (Harkavy and Strack 1875: 259, No. 4).

⁴⁶ See above, Note 9.

⁴⁷ The edition system of the Biblical text in the Torah codices aimed at standardising the pronunciation, cantillation, and paragraph and verse divisions for all Jewish communities. It includes critical annotations on the margins, between the lines, or at the end of the weekly portion. The Small

process, asking the reader for indulgence on possible mistakes.⁴⁸ The command of *Masorah* evidences the fact that Hizkiya was one of the most educated Karaite scholars, not only in Solkhat, but also among the Crimean Jewish communities.

Before 1368, Hizkiya relocated to Genoese Kaffa, where Karaite and Rabbanite communities flourished before the Ottoman conquest in 1475.⁴⁹ In his colophon on the copy he made of the book, *Sefer ha-Osher*, by the 11th-century Byzantine Karaite scholar, Jacob ben Reuven, he points out that he completed his work ‘in the city of Kaffa, which is located on the seashore’.⁵⁰ Later, in 1376, Hizkiya copied the *Sefer ha-Shorashim* on Hebrew Grammar by David ben Joseph Kimḥi (1160–1235), the Provençal Jewish exegete and grammarian, and, after the colophon, added a poetical composition of his own on faith and wisdom in a high and rich Hebrew. In his colophon, he asks God to forgive him for his sins and to pity his sons—Eliya and Moses. This codex was sold by his son, Moses ben Hizkiya, the teacher, in 1393, in Kaffa, as can be seen from the sale contract appearing at the end of this book.⁵¹

Hizkiya also copied the Karaite treatise, *Sefer ha-Mivḥar*, by Aaron ben Joseph.⁵² This codex, as we can see from its later sale contract dated 1484 (129r), was sold in Istanbul by a certain Isaac ha-Zarzur to the prominent Karaite scholar from Adrianople, Caleb Afendopolo (d. 1509), and was signed by a witness named Shabbatai ben Mordekhai Bashyachi. The deal took place about 30 years after the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople, and after the forced deportation (sürgün) of all the populations, including the Karaite community of Adrianople, to repopulate the destroyed former Byzantine capital. The exact circumstances of Hizkiyah’s copy of this book arriving there remain unknown.

Two consecration inscriptions related to Solkhat in the copy of the Pentateuch⁵³ reveal some additional information about the functioning of its educational institutions. We learn from the first inscription that this Pentateuch codex was consecrated by a certain Shefi ben Abraham to the community of Solkhat so that ‘the orphans can use it for studying’. The missing date of this inscription can be estimated through the names of the witnesses, which appear in the inscriptions of the other manuscripts (in 1337 and 1350).⁵⁴ One of the witnesses of the consecration was ‘Abraham ha-Levi,

Masorah consists of short notes including remarks on spelling and on abnormally written letters, as well as statistics showing the number of times a particular form is found in the Scripture. The Large Masorah is arranged alphabetically, and details what is written in the small Masoretic text.

⁴⁸ The Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford, Oxford, England Ms. heb. c. 06, 4v.

⁴⁹ They continued their existence in Kaffa after the conquest, but this marked the gradual economic decline of the city—this region became closed to Christian merchants, part of its population was massacred or fled, and others were relocated to Istanbul. As a result, the Jewish population of Kaffa was gradually relocated to the other cities of the Crimea—Çufut Qaleh, Karasubazar, and later Gözleve.

⁵⁰ Leiden—Universiteitsbibliotheek Cod. Or. 4769, 165v.

⁵¹ NLR EVR I 78, 246v (colophon by Hizkiya), 247v (sale contract).

⁵² Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Opp. Add. Qu. 46. The name Hizkiya ha-Levi is marked on fol. 71v.

⁵³ NLR EVR I B 5, 124v (Harkavy and Strack 1875: 238–239, Nos. 1 and 2).

⁵⁴ See comment in Harkavy and Strack 1875: 239.

the legislator' (*ha-meḥokek*). A short note under this first inscription written apparently by this witness at some point in time after this consecration appears on this Pentateuch: 'It was consecrated by myself, Abraham ben R. Hizkiyah, in the study hall (*be-midrasho*) of [...], in the month of Tammuz, in 5096 [=1336] from the Creation.' These words indicate that there was a Karaite study hall in Solkhat, chosen by Abraham ben Hizkiyah to be the place of this book (which, apparently, before this was in the synagogue). Concerning the identity of this person, his name and the date of the contract may point to an uncle of the scribe Hizkiya son of Eliya ha-Levy, who was a contemporary of Abraham ben Hizkiyah and also designated himself as ben Hizkiyah.

Another scribe who originated from Solkhat was a Karaite named Joshua ben Naḥamu Qırımı, who lived in the late 15th to early 16th centuries and relocated to Kaffa. He copied some fragments from the Karaite books of Eliyahu Bashyachi and Caleb Afendopolo,⁵⁵ and explained his purpose in his colophon (1502) full of critics against his coreligionists in Kaffa. He decided to copy these fragments because he was worried that the local Karaites

'...leave our Torah ... and are exerting themselves only with money, silver and gold, and pursuit the fulfillment of their desires—food and drink ... thus I decided to disseminate the Torah among them [inserted from the left side: and among all communities of Israel, among communities of Yeshurun].⁵⁶ I lift up my eyes to You, to You who sit enthroned in heaven [Ps. 123]' (8r).

The manuscripts in Joshua's library include other texts, both copies and his own original compositions. Among the latter can be found a treatise on ritual slaughter (32v–35r) and a text dealing with biblical chronology which calculates the intervals between various events such as Creation, the Deluge, or the Exodus from Egypt (35v–36r). Joshua further mentions the Hasmonean and Roman periods, and concludes with Muhammad's escape from Mecca to Medina. This collection contains a poem by the Jewish philosopher, David ibn Elazar ibn Pakuda of the 12th century, 'Amon yom zeh', and the tractate *Milot ha-higayon* by Maimonides. In 1504, Joshua also copied the treatise *Eshkol ha-kofer* (*A cluster of Henna*) by the Byzantine Karaite scholar of the 12th century, Judah Hadassi. The last mention of Joshua ben Naḥamu is found in a sale contract (1548) appearing in one of the texts of the miscellaneous collection of Rabbanite texts in possession of Joshua's grandson, Baba, who sold it in Çufut Qaleh, where he (or his father) relocated from Kaffa, bringing with him Joshua's library. These texts, with Joshua's own acrostic (22r), may have been acquired by him from the Rabbanites of Solkhat or Kaffa.⁵⁷ From this and other evidence, the

⁵⁵ NLR EVR I 635. Firkovich forwarded these texts with the following words: 'Here are the words of Joshua ben Rav Naḥamu Qırımı of blessed memory in the city of Solkhat' (1r).

⁵⁶ He probably means all the communities, including the Rabbanite Jews.

⁵⁷ There are mentioned *The Guide of Perplexed* by Maimonides, the vocabulary by Samuel ibn Tibbon (1v–14r), and the commentary by Al-Tabrizi (Abu Abdallah Muhammad ibn Abu Bakr

pathways of the books from Solkhat to Kaffa and other Crimean communities can be traced.

A single piece of evidence on Rabbanite intellectual life from the Golden Horde period can be found in the book by Abraham Qırımı (Bernstein 1958: 465; Tsinberg 1924: 97–101), *Sefat ha-Emet*, a commentary on the Pentateuch written in 1358.⁵⁸ This book reflects a rationalistic tendency quite common among Byzantine Jewish scholars of this period, with a strong focus on the linguistic and philosophic textual commentary.⁵⁹ According to his foreword and introductory poem, the author composed this book at the request of his Karaite student, Hizkiyah ben Elhanan, a scion of a Karaite scholar named Gedaliya (1r–1v). Qırımı called his student ‘a friend in thoughts, full of knowledge, a Karaite prince’. According to these definitions, Hizkiyah was apparently a Karaite community leader of Solkhat. The name of Gedaliya ben Elhanan *ha-nassi* appears in two inscriptions of the aforementioned earliest codex of the Prophets.⁶⁰ The first of these inscriptions tells that Gedaliya bought this manuscript and is given there the title of ‘Head of the Diaspora’.

The scholar, Samuel Abraham Poznanski (1864–1921), expresses some doubts in his unpublished *Encyclopedia of Benei Mikra* about the existence of this figure and about the authenticity of these two inscriptions mentioning his name.⁶¹ He correctly claims that there were no Karaite *nesiim* in the Crimea.⁶² He adds that these two inscriptions were falsified by Firkovich in order to demonstrate the presence of great Karaite historical figures in Solkhat, while linking Gedaliya to the disciple of Qırımı—Hizkiya ben Elkhanan. Poznanski claims that the 17th-century manuscript, where A. Qırımı praises and glorifies his student, had also passed, during the 19th century, through Firkovich’s hands. Therefore, this original manuscript should be examined to check whether it indeed originated in the 17th century. In addition, the absence of reference to Gedaliya ha-Nasi or to Hizkiya ben Elkhanan in any of the other existing inscriptions from the times of Qırımı raises a question. We find, instead,

Al-Tabrizi, a Persian Muslim scholar of the second half of 13th century) on Maimonides in its Hebrew translation from Arabic. These texts according to the colophon (14r) were copied by the Rabbanite scribe Haviv ben Eliyakim ben Haviv in 1331.

⁵⁸ Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Opp. Add. fol. 45, copied in the 17th century. See its other manuscripts (both were copied in the 18th century): NLR EVR I 50 and IOS D 54. None of these manuscripts are autographed, and written in the typical Crimean script.

⁵⁹ Among the sources employed by the author, both directly or obliquely, we find Maimonides’s *Guide for the Perplexed* and *Sefer ha-Mad’a*, Rashi, Byzantine scholar Shemariya Ikrity, Ibn Ezra, the grammarian Yehuda Hayyuj, *Sefer Melamed ha-Talmidim* by R. Jacob (Jacob ben Aba Mari Anatoli, who wrote this treatise in the middle of the 13th century, aimed at encouraging readers to study philosophy and sciences), *The Book of Stones* (the anonymous treatise on minerals, their characteristics and magical traits, attributed to Aristotle), *Midrash ha-Hokhma*, etc.

⁶⁰ NLR EVR I B 3. See Harkavy and Strack 1875: 229–230, Nos. 6 and 7.

⁶¹ The file of this encyclopaedia is preserved in the Ben-Zvi Institute for the study of Jewish communities in the East in Jerusalem.

⁶² According to the Karaite tradition, *nesiim* were the descendants of King David, with Anan ben David, a Davidic descendant, considered by Karaites from the 11th century as the founder of Karaism. However, they lived in Egypt and Syria, not in the Crimea.

mention of the name of Hizkiyah ben Eliya, one of the intellectual leaders of the Solkhat Karaite community, an infrequent name, the repetition of which occurs generally only inside the same Karaite family. At this stage, no explanation can be offered for this puzzle, and further research of the sources may be helpful.

The last mention of a Rabbanite presence in Solkhat appears in the context of the case of R. Moses ben Jacob ha-Goleh, 'the Exile', 1449–1520 (Mann 1935: 700–713; Taube 1862: 315–353). Originally from Kiev, R. Moses, an author of books on astronomy, Bible exegesis, and kabbalah, was taken captive in 1506 by the Tatars who invaded Lithuania. He was brought to Solkhat, where he was ransomed by the common effort of the Karaite and Rabbanite communities. According to the colophon in his book, *Otzar Nehmad* (Nice treasure), a commentary on Ibn Ezra (completed in Solkhat in 1515), he lived in Solkhat for about ten years, and, after that, he relocated to Kaffa, where he became the leader of its Rabbanite community.⁶³ The fact that he lived in Solkhat for such a long period of time can indicate that there was still a Rabbanite community there or at least some Rabbanite presence.

A small Karaite community continued to exist in Solkhat in the 18th century. Pages from the Solkhat community register (*pinqas*) of the 17th century, written in Tatar, have survived.⁶⁴

From two letters (one from 1755 and an undated letter from the same period) sent by the Karaite community of Çufut Qaleh to the communities of Kaffa and Gözleve (Evpatoria), we learn that these Crimean communities tried to support Eliya Pasha, who planned to relocate from Çufut Qaleh to Solkhat, apparently to fulfil the role of head of this community.⁶⁵ In addition, at least two Karaite marriage contracts from Solkhat have survived, dated 1610 and 1650, and are presently preserved in the National Library of Russia in Saint Petersburg.

Further evidence can be found in a letter by the Karaite scholar, Simḥah Isaac Lutski (Lasker 2015), who relocated from Eastern Europe to Çufut Qaleh. In this letter, from around 1755, concerning the Karaite communities in the Crimea, he mentioned: 'In the city of Solkhat, close to the holy congregation of Kaffa, earlier there had been a great congregation and the synagogue, which was much larger than all the other synagogues. And now, there is only a *hazzan* there who watches over this synagogue' (Mann 1935: 1326, No. 156).⁶⁶ It was in the 18th century, in this same 'Great Synagogue', that Moses Pasha, possibly the last Karaite scholar of Solkhat, delivered a sermon on the wedding of his son David.⁶⁷

⁶³ R. Moses unified the various Rabbanite communities in Kaffa by creating a unified rite known as the Kaffa Rite (*Maḥzor minhag Kaffa*), which included everyday prayers and prayers for holidays, as well as 18 rulings concerning marriages, divorces, property issues, etc.

⁶⁴ St. Petersburg, Institute of Oriental Manuscripts of the Russian Academy C 130.

⁶⁵ NLR EVR I DOC I D 36 and NLR EVR I DOC I D 29.

⁶⁶ Cited by the friend of Simḥah Isaac Lutski, Isaac ben Isaac from Lutsk in his letter dated 1755 to Avraham, the judge from Troki.

⁶⁷ The text of this sermon, with philosophic content, is preserved in a number of manuscripts. See, for instance, Cincinnati, Hebrew Union College 83.

Conclusion

The history of Solkhat is typical of the cities which rose up during the period of the rule of the Golden Horde. The city was built out of nothing, flourished for less than 150 years, but developed quite a rich culture as a result of the confluence of immigrants from various ethnic groups and religions. Jewish communities were part of this ethnic and religious mix. The existing manuscript inscriptions, combined with other documental evidence, although in small number, enable a partial reconstruction of the picture of Jewish Solkhat's communal institutions, demonstrating their high level of education and book culture. However, the few surviving documents do not fully provide answers to the issues of the origins of the Solkhat Jewish communities, circumstances of Karaite immigration to Eastern Europe, and the development of their use of the Qıpçaq language. For these issues, we are able to trace parallel processes in their neighbouring communities—the Armenian and Muslim populations of Solkhat. These parallels are useful indicators, enabling us to define a working hypothesis for solving these issues, that can be confirmed or disproved in future research following the emergence of further documental evidence.

Manuscripts

- Arkhiv Instituta vostokovedeniia im. Abu Raikhana Biruni, Uzbekistan, No. 11668: Kalandar Rumi, Abu Baqr, *Kalandar-name*.
- Cincinnati, Hebrew Union College 83: Pasha, Moses. A Sermon on the Wedding of His Son David in Solkhat.
- IOS (Institute of Oriental Manuscripts of the Russian Academy) D 54: Qırımı, Abraham, *Sefat ha-Emet*. Copied in the 18th century.
- IOS C 130: Register (*pinqas*) of the Solkhat Karaite community of the 17th century, in Tatar. St. Petersburg.
- Leiden – Universiteitsbibliotheek Cod. Or. 4769: Jacob ben Reuven, *Sefer ha-Osher* [The book of wealth], copied by Hizkiya ben Eliya ha-Levi in Kaffa, in 1368.
- MS Mich. 551, 210a, Bodleian Library: Judah ben Shlomo ibn Matka of Toledo, *Midrash ha-hokhmah* [The exposition of wisdom].
- New York, Columbia University X 893, B 4776: Deuteronomy. Copied by Judah ben Eliyahu of Adrianople, consecrated in Solkhat, in 1390.
- NLR (National Library of Russia, St. Petersburg) EVR I 50: Qırımı, Abraham, *Sefat ha-Emet* [The true language]. Copied in the 18th century.
- NLR EVR I 78: David ben Joseph Kimḥi, *Sefer ha-Shorashim*. Copied by Hizkiya ben Eliya ha-Levi in Kaffa, in 1376.
- NLR EVR I 635: Collection of Karaite and Rabbanite texts. Fragments from Eliyahu Bashyachi and Caleb Afendopolo copied by Joshua ben Naḥamu Qırımı in 1502.
- NLR EVR IA 6: Pentateuch, copied in Solkhat in 1360.
- NLR EVR IA 11: Pentateuch from Solkhat.
- NLR EVR IA 35: Torah scroll from Solkhat, copied by Judah ben Eliyahu of Adrianople in 1363.
- NLR EVR IB 3: Rabbanite codex of the late prophets, copied in 916.
- NLR EVR IB 5: Pentateuch from Solkhat with two consecration inscriptions.

- NLR EVR I B 12: Abraham ibn Ezra, *Sefat Yeter*.
 NLR EVR I BIBL 6: Pentateuch. Contains only Genesis and prophets.
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