

BOOK REVIEW

Henryk JANKOWSKI, Gulayhan AQTAY, Dorota CEGIOŁKA, Tülay Çulha and Michał NÉMETH 2019. *The Crimean Karaim Bible* (Turcologica 119). Volume 1: *Critical Edition of the Pentateuch, Five Scrolls, Psalms, Proverbs, Jan, Daniel, Ezra and Nehemiah*, XXIX + 647 pp. Volume 2: *Translation*. 526 pp. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz. ISBN 978-3-447-11196-6

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When linguists want to do research on almost or fully extinct languages, they have to rely on texts. In the case of Crimean Karaim there are probably no speakers of the language left, as the vast majority of the Karaims stemming from the Crimean Peninsula has switched to Russian one or two generations ago. Thus research on the language of the Crimean Karaites focuses on written sources, and as the Bible is of special importance for this religious minority, linguists are especially interested in its translation into Crimean Karaim. From 2013 to 2017 a project conducted by researchers based in Poland (Gulayhan [Gülayhan] Aqtay, Dorota Cegiołka [formerly Smętek] and Henryk Jankowski, Poznań; Michał Németh, Kraków) and Turkey (Tülay Çulha, Kocaeli) has transcribed, annotated and translated into English the first and the fourth volume of a four-volume manuscript of the Crimean Karaim Bible that had been rediscovered by Henryk Jankowski in the collection of the British Foreign Bible Society at the Cambridge University Library (Aqtay 2016: 38). The transcription has been compared with other sources, and the result is a critical edition of the Crimean Karaim Bible based on several manuscripts. All the researchers involved in the project have expertise in Karaim studies, both in research on religious literature including the Bible and in linguistic research on the Crimean Karaim dialect.¹

Thanks to corresponding source evidence, we have precise information about how the manuscript that served as the basis for the project came into the possession of the Bible Society: it had been bought by the Scottish missionary Robert Pinkerton in June 1816 in the town of Bakhchisaray on the Crimean Peninsula. The missionary didn't purchase the manuscript out of an academic interest, but for purely practical reasons: he was hoping to obtain a text that might be used

¹ The publications of Aqtay (2016), Jankowski (1997, 2009 and 2018), Németh (2016) and Cegiołka (Smętek 2016) are linked either to the subject of Crimean Karaim Bible manuscripts or to the project itself. Apart from this, Németh has published a Bible manuscript in the North-Western dialect of Karaim (Németh 2014, 2015a + b), and Çulha has written a Grammar of Karaim and published widely on the Crimean Karaim dialect.

directly for missionary purposes among the Muslim Turkic population of the Russian Empire (Pinkerton, 1817: 17–20). Ten years later the manuscript has been studied and commented upon by Ebenezer Henderson, another missionary, in the town of Astrakhan in Southern Russia (Henderson 1826: 331–339; Kırımlı 2004: 80).

In his introduction to the edition (the first volume of which contains the critical edition of the text, the second one a translation into English) Henryk Jankowski, the coordinator of the project, gives an overview of the history of the research on the Crimean Karaim bible, before describing the manuscripts that have been used for the critical edition in detail. Fortunately for the reader, parts of one of the two voluminous manuscripts used additionally in this project have been published by Jankowski (1997) himself in an easily available edition; another manuscript, a handwritten text of the Book of Ruth, has been edited and published by Németh (2016), so the reader has the opportunity to check the editorial work of the project by comparing the text of the present edition with the previous ones.

A look at the critical edition reveals both the way the editorial team has worked and peculiarities of the presented text itself: footnotes provide information on variants of words or phrases in other manuscripts, the explanation of the origin of Hebrew and Greek words, information on Turkish influence on the Karaim language and possible parallels in languages like Armenian. As the language of the Crimean Karaim Bible has already been described by Cegiółka (Smętek 2016) and Jankowski (1997: 7–25),² we won't dwell on it any further. We might confine ourselves to mentioning that the language of the different manuscripts of the Bible is characterized by relatively few variations.

The second volume of the edition offers an English translation of the Crimean Karaim text. Both Aqtay (2016: 43–44) and Jankowski (introduction to the present volume, p. XXVIII–XXIX) point out that the translation has the goal to convey the content of the original as closely as possible, without making it inaccessible for readers not familiar with the Crimean Karaim language by sticking too literally to the wording. At first sight their statement that the project preferred making use of already existing English translations of the Bible (namely the King James Bible, the King James 2000 Bible and the English Standard Version, the last two translations being modernized versions of the King James Bible) instead of offering an own English text might make the reader question the need of such a translation altogether, yet a closer look at a concrete example will show both the necessity and the importance of a translation immediately. For this purpose we will examine the transcription of the Crimean Karaim translation of first two verses of the first chapter of the Book of Numbers (Vol. I: 219) along with the English translation of this text (Vol. II: 173) and the three English translations of the book mentioned above:³

As the Crimean Karaim text contains Hebrew loanwords for central concepts (e.g. *ohel mo'eddä* 'in the tent of meeting' [first verse], with a Karaim locative added to the Hebrew word;

² Although Jankowski's article from 1997 deals, as he himself points out in the introduction to the present volume (p. XX–XXI), with the language of the second lengthy manuscript of the Bible, the grammatical information he provides is relevant for the four-volume main manuscript as well as only minor differences can be seen. Accordingly, Jankowski rightfully limits the presentation of peculiarities of the language to those few examples that had not been covered by himself in 1997.

³ For this purpose we make use of the website <https://biblehub.com> which had been used by the project, too. For the English translations of the Book of Numbers see URL <https://biblehub.com/numbers/1-1.htm> and <https://biblehub.com/numbers/1-2.htm> [all last accessed on June 8, 2020]. When citing the Crimean Karaim text, we use the same transcription as the edition.



mišpaḥalarina ‘to their families’ [second verse], with Karaim plural and possessive suffixes and the dative added), a rendition of these words will inevitably come close to those English translations that convey the Hebrew original appropriately as it is the case with the three translations the project made use of. A look at the beginning of the second verse makes the need of a translation of the Crimean Karaim immediately understandable: while the English Standard Version and the King James 2000 Bible offer ‘Take a census of all the congregation of the people of Israel’ and ‘Take you the sum of all the congregation of the children of Israel’ respectively, the translation of the Crimean Karaim text reads as ‘Count the number of all the congregation of the sons of Israel’. Here ‘Count the number’ is a literal rendition of the original *Sanajiz šol sanin*. Generally speaking, the translation sticks to existing renditions of the text where it is possible, but differs from it at those places wherever necessary. For instance, *barča jama tinij oğlanlarınij Yisra’ elnij* is translated correctly as ‘of all the congregation of the sons of Israel’, with ‘congregation’ being also the usual translation in existing English-language Bible translations; ‘sons of Israel’, however, conveys the wording of the Crimean Karaim phrase exactly, while existing English-language translation including those used by the project offer ‘children of Israel’ or ‘people of Israel’. These examples show that the translation successfully manages to find a balance between conveying the exact wording of the Crimean Karaim original and following the example of existing translations.

There is only one aspect where the editors might have decided otherwise: obviously for fear of repeating unnecessarily things that have been written before, Henryk Jankowski refers the readers for further information on the project to Gulayhan Aqtay’s Polish-language article from 2016 and for a presentation of the language of the Crimean Karaim Bible to his own article from 1997. Even if both texts are easily available, the editors might have included some of the information presented there into the introduction of the present volume as well; apart from this, not everybody interested in the project will be able to read Polish. However, the decision is legitimate and cannot be regarded as mistaken.

With *The Crimean Karaim Bible* the scientific community now disposes of a text in transcription that will give Turkologists the opportunity to do further research on the language of the Crimean Karaites, while scholars in Jewish studies will welcome the opportunity to get acquainted with the central text of the Crimean Turkic branch of Karaism. The critical edition of the text has been carried out carefully, central manuscripts of the Crimean Karaim Bible have been taken into account. As the English translation of the text is close to the original, yet might at the same time be read independently from the latter, it will serve those readers who are interested in the history of the Crimean Karaites, but not familiar with their language. Hopefully the edition will get its due recognition by the scientific community.



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