

Not by Firkowicz's Fault: Daniel Chwolson's Comic Blunders in Research of Hebrew Epigraphy of the Crimea and Caucasus, and their Impact on Jewish Studies in Russia

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Received: February 25, 2020 • Accepted: June 13, 2020

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ABSTRACT

Daniel Chwolson (1819–1911) made a huge impact upon the research of Hebrew epigraphy from the Crimea and Caucasus. Despite that, his role in the more-than-a-century-long controversy regarding Crimean Hebrew tomb inscriptions has not been well studied. Chwolson, at first, adopted Abraham Firkowicz's forgeries, and then quickly realized his mistake; however, he could not back up. The criticism by both Abraham Harkavy and German Hebraists questioned Chwolson's scholarly qualifications and integrity. Consequently, the interference of political pressure into the academic argument resulted in the prevailing of the scholarly flawed opinion. We revisit the interpretation of these findings by Russian, Jewish, Karaite and Georgian historians in the 19th and 20th centuries. During the Soviet period, Jewish Studies in the USSR were in neglect and nobody seriously studied the whole complex of the inscriptions from the South of Russia / the Soviet Union. The remnants of the scholarly community were hypnotized by Chwolson's authority, who was the teacher of their teachers' teachers. At the same time, Western scholars did not have access to these materials and/or lacked the understanding of the broader context, and thus a number of erroneous Chwolson's conclusion have entered academic literature for decades.

KEYWORDS

Jews in the Crimea, Jews in the Caucasus, Karaites in the Crimea, Hebrew Epigraphy, Daniel Chwolson, Abraham Harkavy, Abraham Firkowicz/Firkovich, Jewish Studies in Russia.

1A. INTRODUCTION

Daniel Chwolson (1819–1911) is considered to be the founder of the academic Hebrew and Semitic studies in Russia. He made a huge impact upon the research of Hebrew inscriptions from the Crimea and Caucasus. While the role of Abraham Firkovich / Firkowicz in the controversy about Hebrew inscriptions from the Crimea has been widely recognized,¹ Chwolson's role in this more-than-a-century-long discussion has not been well studied. The objective of this article is to close this gap and to demonstrate that Chwolson's influence led to the broad acceptance by scholars of the authenticity and dating of the inscriptions, which turned out to be erroneous. In addition, we wish to re-examine the inscriptions from Georgia and other places outside Çufut-Qal'eh published by Chwolson and his partisans, in light of modern evidence.²

1B. INTRODUCING THE PERSONAE

In 1855 Chwolson joined the newly established department of Hebrew, Syriac, and Chaldean philology at the Faculty of Oriental Languages of the St. Petersburg University.³ Chwolson published what was seen as pioneering works about Babylonian, Syriac and Hebrew archaeology and epigraphy, Hebrew incunabula, Khazar history, the history of religion, and exegetics. He also translated most of the Hebrew Bible for the so-called 'Synodal Translation of the Bible', the first complete translation of the Bible into Russian. With all these, Chwolson was a significant public figure who played a role in the discussions on the contemporary Russian oriental policy and the Czar's policy towards the Jewish minority.⁴

Despite the broad recognition of Chwolson's role in the development of Semitics in Russia, he remains a controversial figure in Jewish studies, mostly because of his life-long hostilities and polemics with another accomplished Russian-Jewish Orientalist, Dr. Avraham Harkavy (1835–

¹ See Shapira 2008; 2015; 2020.

² We are delighted to thank the two anonymous reviewers for their thoughtful remarks and suggestions.

³ Daniel Abramovich (after his godfather Avraam Norov) Chwolson was born as Joseph David, son of Solomon, on November 21, 1819, somewhere near Vilna, a fourth child in a very poor family. Until the age of eighteen he knew no languages but Yiddish and Hebrew; he struggled to learn Latin letters, and later taught himself German. At the beginning of 1840, Chwolson left Vilna for Riga, and (according to his grandson's somewhat legend-building memoirs), later continued on foot to Breslau and Leipzig, begging for food on the way and seeking shelter in the fields at night. In Riga, he enjoyed the help of Max Lilienthal, and in Breslau he had the support of Abraham Geiger. Geiger helped Chwolson to learn the classical languages; it took him four years to prepare his student for university training. Geiger also introduced Chwolson to Franz Karl Movers, an Anglican divine who served as a professor of Old Testament and helped to teach Chwolson languages including Arabic, and under whose influence Chwolson first became interested in Sabians, and to professor of Oriental languages Heinrich Leberecht Fleischer, who helped to secure Chwolson's doctorate from the University of Leipzig in 1850. Upon his return to St. Petersburg and conversion into Christianity, Chwolson was appointed in 1855 as an extraordinary professor of Oriental languages at St. Petersburg University and, in 1858, also at the St. Petersburg Theological Academy, where he taught Hebrew and Biblical archaeology. He also taught at the Roman Catholic Academy in St. Petersburg. See Reed, 2014; Vasyutinsky Shapira 2018. He wrote his family name in at least three different ways.

⁴ This included his work in defense of the Talmud, against the blood libel accusation during the trials in Saratov (1858) and Kutaisi (1877) and his pamphlet 'About certain medieval accusations against the Jews' (1861). He participated in various governmental bodies, such as the censorship committees, that dealt with the 'Jewish problem'.



1919), who had been Chwolson's most prodigious student.⁵ The most renowned issue between both scholars was the dispute about the authenticity of Hebrew inscriptions from the Crimea, found by Avraham Firkowicz (1786–1874) and published by Chwolson. It is not our intention to review here in detail the history of personal and professional relations between these scholars.

Chwolson wrote a very sharp and biased critical review of a few dozen pages about Harkavy's 1868 MA thesis (IVRRAN archives f. 55 n. 11), to prevent it from being published as a book. He also destroyed Harkavy's university career in 1872.⁶

This controversy about the Hebrew inscriptions from the Crimea involved an argument between Chwolson and Harkavy on whether the Jews lived in the Crimea during the so-called pre-Tatar period, *i.e.*, before 1240CE, and, in particular, in the castle of Çufut-Qal'eh, which was populated in the nineteenth century by Karaites, a Jewish Turkic-speaking non-Talmudic minority sect in Czarist Russia.⁷ Chwolson's viewpoint that Jews indeed could have lived in the Crimea before the thirteenth century was supported by many Karaite (Karaim) scholars and amateur historians, first of all, by the aforementioned Abraham Firkowicz, some of whose dubious discoveries Chwolson published under his own name as his *Habilitationthesis*.⁸

However, today it is obvious that most of Chwolson's argumentation was flawed, biased, and based upon forged inscriptions. In general, Harkavy's critical opinion was correct.⁹ There is no

⁵ Avraham (Albert) Eliyahu Harkavy (spelt Garkavi in Russian) was born in 1835 in Novogrudok / Navahrodak (modern Belarus). His father Ya'akov was a wealthy merchant who settled in the Land of Israel in 1850 and served for forty-three years as *maggid shi'ur* (a Rabbi who lectures on advanced and in-depth Talmudic studies) at the 'Etz Hayyim Yeshivah in Jerusalem; Avraham's brothers followed their father to the Land of Israel. Avraham Harkavy's cousin was the famous Deborah Romm, head of the Hebrew publishing house of Widow & Brothers Romm of Vilna. His other cousin was the important Yiddish educator Alexander Harkavy (1863–1939). Avraham Harkavy studied at the Voložin Yeshivah in 1850–1858; during his Yeshivah years he taught himself Russian and French, and read a lot of *maskilic* literature. Later Harkavy studied at the Governmental Rabbinical Seminary in Vilna whose graduates could qualify for admission to a university. In 1863, he enrolled into St. Petersburg University and then continued his studies in Berlin and Paris. In 1872, Harkavy was granted the degree of Doctor of the History of the Orient for his dissertation 'On the Habitat of the Semites, Indo-Europeans and Hamitic Peoples'. However, as a Jew he was refused a permanent teaching position at the University. Instead, he got attached to the Ministry of Public Education and sent to the Imperial Public Library to sort and study the manuscripts of the First and Samaritan Collections of Avraham Firkowicz. Harkavy worked as a librarian of the Imperial Public Library until his death in 1919. He published more than 400 works on the early history of the Jews in Russia, Biblical history and Hebrew literature, Karaite Studies, and more. Harkavy was an active member of the small but affluent St. Petersburg Jewish community, and became its intellectual *guru*. He was most proud to serve as the *gabbai* (manager) of the Grand Choral Synagogue. The eyewitnesses told that in the early twentieth century, they were brought as children on holidays and Saturdays to the synagogue, where they could not take their eyes off the old, short-statured man in a gold-embroidered uniform. Adults pointed at him, saying: 'This is the famous scholar Garkavi. He did not betray the faith of his fathers, and still was promoted to the rank of general ...' (Yakerson 2009: 47). Harkavy was no General, but by 1900 he was promoted to Civil Councilor (the fifth grade in the Table of Ranks) and granted hereditary nobility. See Vasyutinsky Shapira 2018, 2020.

⁶ Vasyutinsky Shapira 2018.

⁷ The Karaites formed a Jewish sect that rejected the Talmud. In East Europe, Karaites (Karaims) constituted a separate ethno-confessional group, whose members spoke at least three different Turkic languages (Turkish, Crimean-Tatar and Karaim) and were scattered in certain communities in the Crimea, Lithuania and East Poland (modern Ukraine). Since the nineteenth century, the Karaites have gradually developed into a separate ethnic entity, and many of their descendants today reject any connection with the rest of the Jews. Abraham Firkowicz / Firkovich was an active proponent of a special form of the Karaite separatism from the rest of Jewry.

⁸ See Chwolson 1865; on the polemics between Chwolson and Firkowicz regarding this work, see Vasyutinskaya 2003; Vasyutinski 2011.

⁹ For details, see the studies in Shapira 2008.



reliable evidence of uninterrupted Jewish presence in the Crimea between the first centuries CE and the thirteenth century. Historical arguments also suggest that the Jewish communities known to us, Karaites included, emerged in the Crimean Peninsula after the Tatar conquest (Shapira 2008).

Nevertheless, and rather surprisingly, Chwolson's viewpoint was supported, at least partly, by many serious Russian-Jewish scholars during the twentieth century. The most prominent among them being Shimon Dubnov (1860–1941), who wrote that 'among all inscriptions in Firkowicz's collection, only inscriptions of the Tatar period and, *partially, of the two preceding centuries, starting from the eleventh century*, may be considered authentic' (Dubnov 1914: 10; the italicization is ours). However, it should be noticed that Dubnov never studied the inscriptions in question *in situ* and relied on copies. Now, when we have an electronic corpus of the Jewish Inscriptions from the Crimea, Dubnov's readings and datings can be proven as tainted.¹⁰

The St. Petersburg Jewish Historical and Ethnographical Society (JHES) was publishing the journal *Jevrejskaja Starina* ('Jewish Antiquities'), an important collection of historical documents *Regesty i Nadpisi*, and the Russian *Jewish Encyclopedia* in the beginning of the twentieth century. Many scholars working with the JHES apparently supported Chwolson's attitudes, though, in fact, his views on the matter had already changed several times, which went mostly unnoted by the general public and by many specialists.

Leading Russian Hebraists of the next generation shared the views on the Crimean Hebrew inscriptions generally associated with Chwolson. This included Prof. P. Kokovtsov and the Georgian scholar G. Tsereteli, both former students of Chwolson, as well as other Georgian scholars, A. Krikheli and N. Babalikašvili (both Tsereteli's students), and some other Soviet scholars. Although almost none of them had studied in depth and *de visu* the inscriptions from Çufut-Qal'eh and Mangup, or studied them in a superficial manner, and, therefore, their opinions can be explained in each case by different reasons; we speak here about the most prominent figures in Russian Semitics of the twentieth century.

It was generally considered among the Russian / Soviet scholars that A. Harkavy never reiterated his opinion after 1879 and seemingly left the last word in the argument for Chwolson. Despite that, evidence from outside of Çufut-Qal'eh as published by Chwolson in 1882, such as the newly-found inscriptions from Theodosia, Partenith, Mtskheta, has nothing to do with Firkowicz's forgeries and has never received critical analysis, being thus accepted by scholars at their face value. Furthermore, new evidence that could be interpreted as indirectly contradicting Harkavy's opinions was found during the twentieth century, such as the Tepe-Kermen / Tepe-Kermen inscriptions, the second inscription from Mtskheta, and the new inscriptions from Taman and Armenia.¹¹ Indeed, these inscriptions have been interpreted by scholars in light of Chwolson's monograph. This general acceptance of Chwolson's theories by the scholarly community resulted in an uncritical attitude of epigraphists toward the Çufut-Qal'eh monuments, as is evident, in particular, in the publication by N. Babalikašvili of several tombstones allegedly of the eleventh-twelfth centuries, which in fact were Firkowicz's forgeries.¹² Along with new spurious 'findings' of Karaim scholars, such as S. Szyszman (1975), this seemed to further support the Chwolson's case.

¹⁰ See Shapira 2008; Fedorchuk and Shapira 2011; Kashovskaya and Ezer 2020; Fedorchuk, Shapira, Vasyutinsky-Shapira, 2020–21, and further volumes in preparation.

¹¹ See further. Not to be confused with the inscriptions from Armenia published in Amit and Stone 2002.

¹² Babalikašvili 1987; for a re-evaluation of Babalikašvili's readings and datings, see Ezer and Shapira 2008.



All this complicates the task of Chwolson's critics, who now must explain the forgeries made by Firkowicz, but also should provide a critical analysis of publications by Chwolson and Babalikašvili, explain the non-Çufut-Qal'eh evidence as well, and also explain why, actually, the above-mentioned scholars tended to accept, albeit cautiously, the attitudes which could be defined as 'Chwolson-tilted'. In fact, this requires a revision of a significant part of scholastic literature of the twentieth century on Hebrew epigraphy published in the Russian Empire and the former Soviet Union. In any case, it is obvious today to all, that Chwolson's dates of inscriptions as having been 'based on paleographic considerations' are nonsense, that his conclusions often contradict historical evidences and are based upon flawed arguments and sources, while his field-work does not meet modern academic standards. Furthermore, he had his own agenda whilst trying to prove authenticity of some of Firkowicz's findings, since his *Habilitation* dissertation was based upon them.¹³ It is clear also that currently the Çufut-Qal'eh cemetery has no Hebrew monuments older than the fourteenth century, and the Mangup cemetery in the Crimea has no monuments older than the fifteenth century.¹⁴

But first, we will discuss how and why the views of Chwolson were accepted by the scholarly community and then will consider the actual monuments.

2. HEBREW EPIGRAPHY AND THE LEGACY OF DANIEL CHWOLSON

2.1. The Chwolson–Harkavy controversy

The starting point for the controversy was the argument about the old Jewish cemetery near the abandoned Tatar castle of Çufut-Qal'eh in the Crimea.¹⁵ The Karaite amateur scholar, A. Firkowicz,¹⁶ claimed in the 1840–60s that he found tombstones as old as of the first century CE (Firkowicz 1872). Firkowicz's findings were enthusiastically accepted by D. Chwolson and became the core of his dissertation 'Eighteen Hebrew inscriptions from the Crimea' published in 1866, while Firkowicz accused Chwolson of breaking a written contract and of unauthorized use of the inscriptions.¹⁷

Later, Firkowicz published his own version of hundreds of Crimean Hebrew tomb inscriptions in 1872. After Firkowicz's death in 1874, his collection of Jewish manuscripts was sold to the Russian Imperial Library. Scholars such as A. Harkavy, A. Kunik, and H. Strack stated that much of the material coming from or through Firkowicz was false or deliberately forged, or that Firkowicz changed dates on many tombstones and on many colophons or marginalia of the manuscripts. According to his critics, Firkowicz tried to present the tombstones – which in fact are not older

¹³ Cf. note 8 above. Chwolson's *Habilitation* dissertation (Chwolson 1865) was based on Firkowicz's findings (Vasyutinskaya 2003).

¹⁴ See note 9 above.

¹⁵ Çufut-Qal'eh, in Tatar 'The Jewish fortress', known also as Qırq-Yer, is a castle near Bâhçesarây, which was the Tatar capital of the Crimean Khanate in the fifteenth century. After transferring the capital into Bâhçesarây, Çufut-Qal'eh was inhabited mostly by the Karaites and since the 18th century almost exclusively by them. See Shapira 2003; Kizilov 2003b.

¹⁶ Abraham Firkowicz was born in 1787 in Łuck (Luts'k, now in Ukraine). He became a *Ḥazzān* (a community leader, technically meaning 'a cantor'; among Polish and Lithuanian Karaites this position was more or less equivalent the position of *Ḥakham* among the Oriental Jews or Rabbi among the European Jews).

¹⁷ See Vasyutinskaya 2003; Vasyutinski 2011.



than the fourteenth century CE or even younger – as being ancient, in order to claim Karaites' priority over the Rabbinical Jews as well as their innocence of 'crucifying of Christ'. According to Firkowicz's critics, the main ways of forging the inscriptions were (1) changing the first letter *he* / ה (meaning 5,000) into taw / ת (meaning 400) and thus pretending that an inscription is dated 'according to the minor era' (without millennia) and belonging to the fifth Hebrew millennium (rather than the sixth), thus making it 600 years older; (2) changing *he* / ה (5,000) into *dalet* / ד (3) ;(4,000)) adding words ארבעת אלפים, 'four thousand', and other words with dates, (4) forging chronograms by marking some letters in a Biblical quotation with dots.

There was personal animosity between St. Petersburg University Professor, Daniel Chwolson, who was a baptized Jew, and A. Harkavy, who, as an Orthodox Jew, could not become a Professor and was forced, instead, to serve as the librarian at the Imperial Public Library, where he became, *de facto* and in particular, the keeper of Firkowicz's collections of Jewish manuscripts (of course, there was no such thing as a *keeper of Firkowicz's collections* at Harkavy's time. It is true that he spent most of his 40 years in the library studying, cataloguing and publishing manuscripts from Firkowicz collection, but he was officially the Head of the Department of Hebrew Books, or the 'Hebrew Department').

Relations between the two scholars were strained somewhere between 1865 and 1867 and continued almost till Chwolson's death in 1911. We do not know exactly what the reason for this confrontation was, but Chwolson's thesis, *Achtzehn hebräische Grabinschriften aus der Krim*, appeared in 1865. If Harkavy somehow opposed Firkowicz's theories in 1865 or 1866, this would have been a hard blow for Chwolson as well as a good reason for personal hatred, because his own position at the University was still shaky. By destroying Harkavy's university career in 1872, Chwolson would also be getting rid of a potential rival, and this consideration may already have been relevant in 1865–67. At that time, Harkavy was an extremely able student in his early thirties; Chwolson was in his early forties and was just embarking on a fast-paced and brilliant career. Both were of very humble means; both were struggling to master Russian. Harkavy came from a relatively wealthy and much-respected family, while Chwolson was a poor widow's son, and Harkavy's traditional Jewish training was infinitely better. Last but not least, given all that we know about the mixture of sincerity and cynicism that was behind Chwolson's baptism (Reed 2014: 70–98), he could have hated or envied (or both) Harkavy for being a stubbornly loyal Jew.

In 1875, Harkavy and the German Lutheran Hebraist, Hermann Strack, published a book in which they proved that Firkowicz had interfered heavily with the evidence of Biblical manuscripts in his possession, adding and/or changing colophons and marginalia, and in 1876 Harkavy published a monograph in German, in which he analyzed historical sources and demonstrated that the Çufut-Qal'eh epitaphs could not have been composed in the first millennium CE. Later, Ernst-Eduard Kunik, an important scholar of Ancient Russian history, entered the fray.¹⁸

According to Harkavy's well-supported opinion on the basis of numerous sources, Jews did not live in the Crimean castle cities (such as Çufut-Qal'eh and Mangup¹⁹) until the Tatar invasion in the mid-thirteenth century. He also showed that elaborated Hebrew epitaphs with numerous blessing formulas (which he called 'eulogies') did not appear in the first millennium (now we

¹⁸ Harkavy and Strack 1875; Harkavy 1876; Strack 1876; Kunik 1876; Strack 1880.

¹⁹ Mangup (Mangup-Qal'eh, earlier Theodoro or Doros, etc.) is a castle in the mountains to the south of Bâhçeşarây, a capital of the medieval Hellenistic Principality of Theodoro. Mangup was the second most important Karaite settlement in the sixteenth-eighteenth century. For the Hebrew inscriptions from Mangup, cf. note 10 above.



know that he was not right on the last point). According to Harkavy, the Hebrew epitaphs hardly existed at all in the first millennium. Moreover, the ‘Era from the Creation of the World’ was not in use in the first millennium, while local eras that had been allegedly used in Çufut-Qal’eh inscriptions were invented by Firkowicz. The inscriptions attributed by Chwolson to the period prior to 1240 CE were forged or ‘doctored’ by Firkowicz, and this ‘Era’ was of his own making.

Chwolson, whose scholarly reputation was questioned by the work of Harkavy, felt challenged both professionally and personally. He traveled twice to the Crimea in 1878 and 1881, where he investigated the Çufut-Qal’eh cemetery and brought some sawn tombstones to the St. Petersburg Asian Museum, where they were seen by scholars in the 1870s, but since then they have been lost (Vasyutinskaya 2002). Recently, *Abklatsch* copies / squeezes made by Firkowicz and Chwolson were discovered in the Manuscript Department of the Russian National Library, inside an album of illustrations for the Russian version of Chwolson’s book. It appears from the work of Natalia Kashovskaya, who found them, that even the squeezes of the ‘older’ inscriptions kept in Institute of Orientals Manuscripts in the former Russian capital were made from inscriptions whose texts had already been ‘doctored’, and in quite a number of cases, the squeezes were taken not from the original stones, but from their wooden carvings (a lecture at the July 2019 SEFER Conference in Moscow and private email communications).

Chwolson presented his counter-arguments in his book published in 1882.²⁰ In this work he claimed that although Firkowicz did forge many monuments, nevertheless, in many cases Harkavy’s criticism was unjustified, and that the oldest Çufut-Qal’eh inscriptions are dated by at least the seventh century CE. Besides the Çufut-Qal’eh inscriptions, Chwolson’s book included vast epigraphic material from different places in the Crimea and Caucasus, recently published inscriptions from Italy, Jerusalem, Yemen, and other places, as well as colophons of manuscripts. Chwolson was defensive with respect to Harkavy’s historical arguments, while quite offensive in presenting numerous paleographic arguments, which, in his opinion, were clearly indicating that some inscriptions are still of the first millennium. In fact, he tried to create, perhaps for the first time in the literature on the subject, the systematic paleography of Hebrew medieval inscriptions in order to defend his claim. He used several publications on Jewish epigraphy that had appeared several years before, claiming that these publications provide new proof of his theory.

He insisted that the eulogies could have been used in the first millennium CE. In order to prove this point, Chwolson refers to the Hebrew inscriptions from Italy which had been published several years earlier by G.I. Ascoli (1880). These inscriptions of the first millennium CE indeed included blessing formulas. Chwolson dropped his claim that unknown local eras were used at Çufut-Qal’eh (in fact, the use of these eras indicates that the inscriptions in question are forged). In general, Chwolson recognized that many inscriptions were forged by Firkowicz; however, he insisted that the Çufut-Qal’eh cemetery still had monuments from the seventh and possibly the fifth century.

We should stress two points: 1) Chwolson’s work in the Crimea carried out in order to repudiate Harkavy’s criticism was funded by both the University and by the Crimean Karaite community, whereas Harkavy would never get such support; 2) any serious reader of Chwolson’s 1882 book would see that the ‘new’ evidence was often self-contradicting (see APPENDIX), and that Chwolson simply was juggling with words. For example, Chwolson claimed that he found forty

²⁰ Chwolson 1882; a Russian version, in which personal attacks on Harkavy were smoothened, by the latter’s demand: Chwolson 1884.



old inscriptions which Firkowicz ‘did not see’, *ergo*, they are genuine and old. In reality, Chwolson himself stated that nineteen of them (almost a half!) are ‘suspicious’; five others have only four letters or less; one has eleven letters; therefore we are left with only *fifteen* inscriptions, not *forty*. Despite this, Chwolson concluded that these *forty* newly found inscriptions *prove* that there are genuine and old inscriptions not seen by the *forger* Firkowicz (the italicization is ours). What Chwolson did not know is that almost all of them are found in the drafts of Firkowicz book *Abnei Zikkaron* and on Firkowicz’s maps: Firkowicz removed them from his publication because he was urged to diminish the number of the pages. The drafts were found in the 1990s by Artem Fedorchuk in Firkowicz’s Personal Archive kept at the Russian National Library²¹ (see also APPENDIX).

It should be stated clearly, that the fact of Firkowicz’s forgeries has been proven beyond any doubt and they were recognized as such by Chwolson, so the issue at the center of the Chwolson–Harkavy controversy was not whether Firkowicz committed forgeries or not, but whether the Jews could have lived in the Crimean ‘castle cities’, such as Çufut-Qal’eh and Mangoup in the pre-Tatar period, *i.e.*, before the thirteenth century. In the consequent decades, many researchers questioned with some degree of certainty Harkavy’s viewpoint.²²

Surprisingly, Harkavy never criticized other presumed inscriptions of the first millennium CE presented by Chwolson, such as the inscription from Theodosia dated 909 CE, two inscriptions from Parthenith, *etc.* As noted before, Harkavy would never enjoy such luxury conditions – if any – as those Chwolson had while working in the Crimea. Harkavy, as the librarian, had the enormous newly bought Jewish collections on his hands. Maybe we should add here that Harkavy was a very dry and systematic German-style scholar. He had obviously no hard feelings towards Firkowicz with whom he maintained working relations until the end of Firkowicz’s life. We doubt he kept nurturing any hard feelings he might have had for Chwolson too. He did his duty as an honest scholar by exposing Firkowicz’s falsification techniques; he repelled Chwolson’s attacks. The story was over, and Harkavy moved on to more meaningful tasks.

A serious reader of Chwolson’s second book would see that this work cannot be considered as unflawed, to use an understatement. And, simply, Harkavy would have lost the interest to this topic. But the general public did not at all. Quite oppositely, the events of the late nineteenth to the early twentieth centuries increased attention to the history of the Jews in Russia.

2.2. Emergence of the Jewish studies in St. Petersburg in the 1890s

The Jewish Historical and Ethnographic Society (JHES) emerged in St. Petersburg in 1890.²³ This society was at first established as a small circle by a number of young Jewish lawyers who managed to get education and practice in the Russian capital by that time, despite the restrictive measures of the government. The governmental service was prohibited for most of them, so they had to serve as assistants to *prisjažnyj poverennyj* (barrister) and combine their job with literature,

²¹ See Fedorchuk 2008; Shapira 2008a. Field studies in 1997–2005 showed that the cemetery has no epitaphs older than the fourteenth century.

²² Regarding Çufut-Qal’eh, cf. Dubnov 1914; Babalikašvili 1987. Regarding the nearby Teppe-Kermen, cf. Weissenberg 1913; Gidalevič 1914; Maggid 1914.

²³ Lukin 1993. The group existed first as ‘Historical and ethnographic commission’ and acquired the name of JHES in 1908.



research, educational, and other activities in the public sector (Lukin 1993: 14). The original purpose of the group was apologetic: to collect and publish data scattered in old legal codices, censuses, and statistical reports, in order 'to present a documented and proven picture of the history of the Jews in Russia from the ancient time'. Certainly, this was a form of resistance to the anti-Jewish policy of the authorities. M. Vinaver,²⁴ an active lawyer, soon became the leader of the group. Within several years the society grew and attracted a number of qualified historians and ethnographers, including S. Dubnov,²⁵ S. An-sky,²⁶ A. Harkavy, S. Bershadsky,²⁷ Harkavy's student, Baron D. Günzburg,²⁸ D. Maggid,²⁹ M. Vishnitzer, and I. Zinberg. By 1918, the Society included some 300 members in St. Petersburg and 500 in other parts of Russia and abroad (Lukin 1993: 20). The Society became an umbrella organization for several academic groups ranging from the 'Society for the Jewish Music' (1908) to the 'Society for Distribution of Scientific Knowledge about the Jews'. During almost forty years of its existence, the JHES formed the first para-academic school of Jewish Studies in St. Petersburg, which produced a number of important publications,³⁰ created one of the first Jewish museums in Europe, and even established an (unrecognized) institution of higher education.³¹ This activity had a tremendous impact upon Jewish Studies in the twentieth century far beyond St. Petersburg.

Thus, two schools dealing with Hebrew and Jewish studies emerged in St. Petersburg: first, the Russian school of Semitics established by Chwolson himself and associated with the St. Petersburg University and, secondly, the community of independent – and, sometimes amateurish historians associated with the JHES. The members of this latter school were part of the Jewish National Movement and of the liberal political trend in general. Most JHES members shared the view that history should play an important role in the development of the self-consciousness and self-identification of the Jews. Although the society promoted and maintained high academic standards, a romantic view of Jewish history and ethnic folk-life prevailed.

²⁴ Maksim Vinaver (1863–1926) was a lawyer, writer, and liberal politician. He later became one of the founders of the centrist Constitutional Democracy ('Cadet') party and Minister of Foreign Affairs in the Crimean Russian Government during the Civil War in Russia.

²⁵ Simon Dubnov (1860–1941), a Jewish historian, one of the leaders of the JHES, editor of the *Evreyskaya Starina* journal and of the Russian *Jewish Encyclopedia*.

²⁶ Semyon A. An-sky (Shloyme-Zanvl Rappoport, 1863–1920) was a Yiddish playwright and a prominent researcher of Jewish folklore.

²⁷ Sergey Bershadsky (1850–1896) was a Gentile historian, the author of publications on the history of the Jews in Poland and Lithuania.

²⁸ David Günzburg (1857–1910) was an Orientalist and philanthropist who supported many scholastic activities in the Jewish Studies.

²⁹ David Maggid (1862–1942) was a Hebraist and bibliographer; since 1918 he worked in the Public Library in Petrograd. After Harkavy's death in 1919, and till 1930, Maggid stood at the head of the Hebrew department. Maggid catalogued and annotated manuscripts and correspondence from Harkavy's private archive, which was kept at the time at the Society for the Promotion of Jewish Enlightenment. Because of his progressive blindness (which later made it impossible for him to correspond with friends in foreign countries), Maggid was merely dismissed from service but was neither arrested nor executed. He died of hunger during the siege of Leningrad.

³⁰ Among the important publications are the *Russian-Jewish Archive* (vol. 1 prepared yet in 1882 by S. Bershadsky) 'Registries and Inscriptions' (*Regesty i Nadpisi*, vol. 1 in 1899), the almanac *Perežitoje* (1908), the academic quarterly *Jevrejskaja Starina* (since 1908), a 16-volume *Jewish Encyclopedia* (1910–1915).

³¹ The 'Baron D. Günzburg's Advanced Courses in Oriental Studies (высшие Курсы Востоковедения)' were launched by David Günzburg in 1906. In 1919, the Petrograd (Leningrad) Jewish University was established, which existed until 1925. Lukin 1993: 21–22; see also Lukin 1991.



Publication of old Jewish inscriptions was among the primary objectives of the JHES. The first volume *Regesty i Nadpisi* ('Registries and Inscriptions') appeared in 1899 (edited by M. Vinaver, A. Gornfeld, L. Sev, and M. Syrkin, none of them being an Orientalist or a qualified Hebraist³²) and included the oldest Jewish inscriptions in Russia and other documents mentioning Jews in a chronological order.

The history of the Jews in the Crimea was another topic of interest of the JHES historians. S. Dubnov published in 1914 in *Jevrejskaja Starina* ('Jewish Antiquities') a review article about the history of the Jews in the Crimea entitled 'Historical *Enigmas* of the Crimea'. As noted above, he stated there that among all Firkowicz's findings, 'only inscriptions of the Tatar period and, partially, of the two preceding centuries, starting the eleventh century, can be considered authentic.' Apparently, he hesitated on whether the Jews could have lived in Çufut-Qal'eh prior to the thirteenth century.

In 1914, *Jevrejskaja Starina* published a discussion of short graffiti in Hebrew letters found in Teppe-Kermen, a caved rock near Çufut-Qal'eh which served as a cave monastery so typical for the Crimea. These three short inscriptions were discovered in the early 1900s by N.A. Borovko, and the finding yielded a discussion of the origin of these inscriptions. A Jewish philanthropist and amateur scholar, Gidalevič, showed the inscriptions to P. Kokovtsov, who concluded 'on the basis of paleographic considerations' that these inscriptions could be dated with the pre-Tatar period of the seventh to ninth centuries.³³ D. Maggid went even further and suggested that the graffiti could belong to Judeo-Christians who, in his opinion, could have settled in the Crimea in the first century CE.³⁴ Clearly, the historians of the JHES considered it quite possible that the Jews or Jewish Christians could have lived in the Crimean castle cities before the thirteenth century, while Harkavy's arguments were either not known for them or did not sound convincing.

Harkavy himself participated in the JHES seminars³⁵ and was a member of the editorial board of the Russian *Jewish Encyclopedia*. He wrote an article about Çufut-Qal'eh for this encyclopedia in which he presented his opinion that the Jewish communities emerged there only in the thirteenth century CE. However, the Theodosia / Caphá / Keffeh inscription of 909 CE is mentioned in the same encyclopedia in another entry as genuine. We have to conclude that dealing with the Chwolson–Harkavy controversy, the Jewish historical school tended to adopt Chwolson's position, despite Harkavy's association with this school.

People tended to forget the context of Chwolson's academic career: in 1850, he wrote his PhD thesis on the Sabians of the Qur'an and other Islamic sources, and six years later, this work was published in two huge volumes;³⁶ the work is still important, mostly as a collection of texts.

Later, he published a book on what he saw remnants of Old Babylonian literature preserved in Arabic (Chwolson 1859), and on the Mesopotamian god Tammuz (Chwolson 1860); he claimed that the *Nabatean Agriculture* in Arabic is an Old Babylonian text going back to the sixteenth cen-

³² A. Gornfeld (1867–1941) was a journalist, editor and literature criticism; L. Sev (1867–1922) was a journalist and editor, and M. Syrkin was an ethnographer, journalist and editor.

³³ Gidalevič 1914 (cf. note 22 above). This date was suggested by P. K. Kokovtsov on 'paleologic considerations'.

³⁴ Maggid (1914) believed that the concentric circles and the cross could belong to 'first Judeo-Christians, who came to the Crimea with Greek colonists'. It should be noted, however, that neither Maggid, nor Kokovtsov studied the inscriptions *de visu*. Cf. Ezer 2008: the graffiti were made in the eighteenth century by Karaites from Çufut-Qal'eh, who used Teppe-Kermen caves as a place of their seasonal temporary housing.

³⁵ Lukin 1993: 15. It should be noted that Chwolson also maintained contacts with the JHES scholars. In particular, a jubilee volume of articles devoted to Chwolson was published in 1899 by Baron Guenzburg.

³⁶ Chwolson 1856; compare Kunik 1852.



tury BCE. We should remember that the deciphering of the Akkadian cuneiform had just begun in 1857 (Rawlinson, Talbot, Hincks and Oppert 1857). Nevertheless, these Chwolson's books, and especially the first one, became the subject of harsh criticism by Gutschmid (1861: 1–110), and a bit later, by Nöldeke (1876: 445–455). According to the last scholar who dealt with the *Nabatean Agriculture* (Hameen-Anttila 2006), 'the detailed criticism by von Gutschmid (1861) actually put an end ... to the scholarly production of Chwolsohn' (p. 5). Probably, Hameen-Anttila did not know much about the Russian storms around Chwolson, as the Russian participants of the storming debates around the Chwolson–Harkavy controversy were not aware of the controversy about the *Nabatean Agriculture*.

So, Chwolson was jumping from one subject to another. However, at the time when he was publishing these books he was working for Firkowicz for money. The both men had a written contract, and Prof. Caetan Kassowicz (1814–1883), the Russian translator of Gesenius' *Hebrew Grammar*, a pioneering Sanskritologist and Avestologist, was appointed as referee.

2.3. Karaite National Movement and historical publications

The Ashkenazic Jews in St. Petersburg (Greenbaum 2006) were not the only group that was interested in the investigation of their history and used their history for self-identification. Almost at the same time, in the late nineteenth / early twentieth century, the Karaite National Movement was shaped by its own interest towards the history (Akhiezer 2018). The earlier work of Mordecai Sultanski (see Akhiezer 2011) and later, works of A. Firkowicz paved the way to the idea that the Crimean Karaites have origins separate from the rest of Jewry. As a result of successful lobbying, in the first half of the nineteenth century, the Russian Government adopted several decrees stating that the Karaites should not be subjected to the Russian anti-Jewish restrictive laws. According to Firkowicz, the Karaites originated from the Judaeans of the Exile of Samaria – which was frequently misinterpreted as if 'from the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel' – and not from the exiles of the Judean Kingdom as the Rabbinical Jews. The concept according to which the Karaites originated from the Khazars had been introduced by the Russian Orientalist V. Grigoriev (1876), and this idea gained popularity in the Karaite historical discourse by the last third of the nineteenth century. It was developed further by S. Shapshal (see Shapira 2005), who became the leader of East European Karaites and who tended to deny any connection of the Karaites with the Jews and sought pan-Turkist connections of the Karaites (Shapshal 1896).

Vasiliy Grigoriev, head of the Department of History of the Orient, was one of Harkavy's university curators. Grigoriev seems to have played a very important part in building the concept of what a Russian Orientalist, or at least a University Orientalist, should be. This concept was very Slavophilic in the sense that Grigoriev wanted to see the Orientalist as first and foremost a true Russian patriot. Grigoriev was a teacher of Baron von Rosen and made him an enthusiastic proponent of Russian science.

He argued in his early 1846 article 'Jewish religious sects in Russia' that the language of the Karaites did not contain any Hebrew loan words and that they were the descendants of the 'Turko-Khazars who, as is known, professed the Law of Moses and owned the Crimea from the VIII to the XI century'.³⁷ This work of Grigoriev was filled with anti-Talmudic rhetoric and dis-

³⁷ Grigor'ev quoted this phrase from M. C. D'Ohsson, *Les peuples du Caucase*. Par. Paris, 1828.



cussed the whole of Jewish history and thought with complete ignorance and self-confidence (Grigoriev 1847: 31).

With respect to the Çufut-Qal'eh inscriptions, Karaite authors remained apologetic towards Firkowicz and denied any forgeries, even the obvious ones, and they insisted that these were genuine mistakes by Firkowicz, etc. (Kokizov 1910). Many Karaite leaders were supporters of the Czar and had to flee Russia after the revolutions of 1917, so a Russian-Karaite community emerged outside Russia. Simon Szyszman was a prominent member of that community who made field trips to the Crimea in 1980s and published his account, claiming that he found some inscriptions of the tenth-thirteenth centuries. Karaite publications in Russian, which claim that the Karaites originate from the Khazars and that Firkowicz was 'falsely accused' by 'Rabbanites and Jews' in forgeries, keep emerging in the Crimea even today. They are not a part of the academic scholarship; however, they have a certain influence upon local press and authorities in the Crimea.

2.4. Hebrew and Semitic Studies in the Soviet Union

The Jewish and Semitic Studies and Semitics after the Bolshevik revolution in Russia had a hard time. Petrograd (since 1914; Leningrad, since 1924) remained the center of scholarly activity in these areas. After a number of re-organizations in the 1920s, the Philological Department of Leningrad University, as well as the Institute of Oriental Studies, became the primary institutions where research was conducted. The leading disciple of Chwolson was Pavel Kokovtsov (1861–1942), who became Professor of the Department of the Oriental languages in 1900 and was elected a fellow of the Academy of Sciences in 1903. Among his primary interests was Semitic epigraphy, mostly Aramaic and Syriac, and Khazar documents. The Department of Semito-Hamitic Languages was established at the University in 1920, headed by an Assyriologist A.P. Riftin (1900–1945).

The Bolshevik authorities shut down the JHES, which was considered as nationalist, 'bourgeois' and unnecessary. Some people involved in Jewish studies emigrated, as did Dubnov, An-sky, Rechtman, while others were arrested (Y. Ravrebe, I. Zinberg) or changed the foci of their activity.

Towards the end of the World War II in 1944, a new Faculty of Oriental Studies was established at the Leningrad University that had, during its first years, a department of Semitics. However, in 1948 – during Stalin's anti-Semitic campaign – the Semitic department was closed at the university. Teaching Hebrew and Aramaic was resumed in 1957 when a Department (*sic!*) of Semitics within a Chair (*sic!*) of Arabic Philology was established, headed by the ethnographer and philologist I.N. Vinnikov (1897–1973). This small 'department', with two to five instructors and ten undergraduate students to be admitted every two years, still exists.

Klavdia Starkova (1915–2000), a student of Kokovtsov, was a leading Semiticist at the Institute of Oriental Studies; she held Chwolson in great esteem as the founder of Semitic Studies in Russia. When after the WWII there was not a single librarian in the Public Library who could read Hebrew, Starkova wrote a *Key to the Firkowicz Collections* (1952, F. 946 op. 1 n. 1080), to direct librarians who could not otherwise find the requested manuscripts on the shelves.

Although Starkova did not work directly on Hebrew epigraphy, she has certainly influenced researchers who were interested in Çufut-Qal'eh inscriptions and in the Chwolson–Harkavy controversy, such as V. Lebedev, N. Babalikašvili, V. Vikhnovič, and N. Kashovskaya.



Between the 1960s – early 1990s the leading figure in the study of the manuscripts of Firkowicz's collections was Victor Lebedev, the keeper of the Oriental Collection of manuscripts of the Public Library in Leningrad. Lebedev found Harkavy wrong in many cases, like over-criticizing Firkowicz, etc.³⁸ According to V. Vikhnovič, who popularized the story of Firkowicz and the Chwolson–Harkavy controversy, both Lebedev and Starkova believed that Firkowicz was rather a victim of antiquity traders who tried to present the manuscripts as older than they were, rather than an intentional producer of forgeries.

Another important Hebraist from Leningrad was M.N. Zislin, who spent many years studying the manuscript of a Karaite grammatical work *Me'or 'Ayin* from the Firkowicz collection (Zislin 1990). The manuscript was composed in the eleventh century (and copied in 1208) in the town of Gagra, which was identified by many scholars³⁹ with Gagra in western Georgia (Abkhazia) on the Black Sea. Since there is no other evidence of a Karaite community in Gagra in Abkhazia, it was also suggested that the manuscript was composed in Ga(n)gra in Byzantium.

In general, most Soviet scholars who investigated Karaite inscriptions from the Crimea in the 1980s⁴⁰ tended to believe that Harkavy was overcritical and overzealous against Chwolson due to his personal religious and ideological opinions, and 'there *should be something* real, after all'. The main problem with the Hebrew and Jewish studies during the post-war years in the USSR was, of course, that, the field was highly suspicious for both the State authorities and the Soviet academic establishment, as it was deemed to be associated with Zionism and with the Jewish religion. In the situation of the centralized organization of the Soviet society with a total control of most scholarly activities, the scholars behind the Iron Curtain often did not have access to contemporary research publications and, in fact, could not use their full scholarly potential. This is why the Chwolson–Harkavy controversy, aged by a century, still mattered for the Soviet Semitists. This old news was still new for them, as it was for their teachers, when they were young students, before the revolutions.

2.5. Semitics in Georgia

In the 1960–1980s, the Hebrew language was taught only at three universities in the Soviet Union, namely at the Leningrad (St. Petersburg) State University, Tbilisi State University, and, to an extremely limited extent, at Moscow State University.⁴¹ While the Oriental Studies Faculty in Leningrad somewhat maintained the old Russian tradition of the nineteenth-century German Semitics as founded by Chwolson, and Moscow was the new Soviet capital, it is quite remarkable that during the Soviet era a new center of Semitic Studies emerged in Tbilisi, Georgia.

Christianity is the most important part of the Georgian self-identification; according to Georgian mythologized historical perceptions, this country received Jesus Christ from and through the Jews of Mtskheta, the ancient capital and the sacred center of the country, located about half

³⁸ Lebedev 1987; Lebedev 1990; Lebedev and Vasil'eva 1990; Vikhnovič and Lebedev 1991; cf. also Lebedev 1998.

³⁹ This includes Harkavy and Tsereteli.

⁴⁰ This includes N. Kashovskaya, M. Ezer, N. Babalikašvili, A. Hertzen (Gertsen) and others.

⁴¹ Modern Hebrew was taught also in Moscow at the semi-secret Institute for Military Interpreters. While the emphasis at the Moscow University (Institute of Asian and African States) was upon the Modern Hebrew as spoken in Israel, the Leningrad and Tbilisi universities remained virtually only two places in the USSR where the Biblical Hebrew and Aramaic languages were still taught.



an hour drive away from Tbilisi. So, the link between ‘Hebrews – Mtskheta – First Christian Centuries – Georgia’ definitely rings a bell in Georgia.⁴²

From another quarter, the Georgian language was categorized in the past as ‘Japhethic’ – after Shem, Ham and Japheth. Indeed, there are many interesting traits connecting Georgian grammatically to, say, Hebrew or Arabic, as was always felt by the learners.⁴³

So, the combination of these two facts – the presupposed importance of the Jews in the early formative centuries of the Georgian history and a presumed linguistic affinity with Jews and the language of Jesus – much inflated, in fact – prompted the emergence of a Semitist center of study in Georgia.

This ‘Tbilisi School’ was established by Georgi Tsereteli⁴⁴ (1904–1973), who was a student of Kokovtsov. An important representative of that school was Aharon Krikheli⁴⁵ (1906–1974), who served as a director of the Jewish Ethnographic Museum in Tbilisi until the museum was closed in 1951, during Stalin’s anti-Semitic campaign.⁴⁶

Nissan Babalikašvili (1938–1986), a son of the Georgian Rabbi Israel Babalikašvili (1899–1971), was a student of Tsereteli and Krikheli, whose primary interest was Hebrew epigraphy; his PhD Dissertation (1972) was on Hebrew inscriptions in Georgia, but he also studied Çufut-Qal’eh monuments believing that it had inscriptions of the tenth-twelfth centuries.⁴⁷ He worked at the Çufut-Qal’eh cemetery for a couple of days in 1983 (and, probably, in 1984, too); his notes on nine Çufut-Qal’eh tombstone inscriptions were published posthumously (Babalikašvili 1987). In his unedited notes, Babalikašvili seems to have accepted the old datings of Firkowicz and Chwolson. From Babalikašvili’s posthumous paper it seems to appear that Firkowicz did not see these inscriptions, *ergo*, they are genuine. In fact, among the nine published in the paper four were already published in Firkowicz’s book *Aḥnei Zikkaron* as NN 105, 106, 203, 210, and two more appear in Firkowicz’s drafts to his book. The inscription Babalikašvili 4 (attested in Firkowicz’s draft RNL OR F. 946 op. 1 N. 89 f. 14v No. 209) is not found now on the ground. All the inscriptions in

⁴² Cf. Shapira 2006; Shapira 2007; Shapira 2008b; Shapira 2010.

⁴³ Cf. Marr 1908. Marr has also penned the entry ‘Georgian Language’ (‘Грузинский язык’) for the Russian *Jewish Encyclopedia* (Еврейская Энциклопедия), see Marr 1907; on Marr and the problems of Georgian-Semitic linguistics, cf. Libin and Shapira 2008.

⁴⁴ Georgi Tsereteli (Cereteli) was born in 1904 in Eastern Georgia in a noble family. His father, Prince Vasil Tsereteli (1862–1937) was a well-known Georgian physician, journalist and public activist, while his uncle Mikhail Tsereteli (1878–1965) was a distinguished historian. Georgi graduated from Tbilisi University in 1927 and became a postgraduate student of P. Kokovtsov in Leningrad. In 1928–1931 he was an Associate Professor of Leningrad Institute of Living Oriental Languages. Since 1933 he was Associate Professor and since 1942 a Full Professor at Tbilisi University. In 1945 Tsereteli founded the Faculty of Oriental Studies there; in 1945–1973 he was the Chief of the Department of Semitics at this Faculty. His interests included Arabic linguistics and folklore, Hebrew and Aramaic studies, ancient languages of the Near East, history of writing systems, and Oriental sources on the history of Georgia and Georgian literature. In 1946 he was elected a member of the Georgian Academy of Sciences. In 1960 Tsereteli founded the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Academy and was its first director. In 1968 he became a member of the Academy of Sciences of Soviet Union. In 1967–1970 he was the Vice-President of the Georgian Academy.

⁴⁵ Aharon Krikheli (1906–1974) was a Georgian Jewish historian, ethnographer and linguist, in 1934–1949 at the Historical and Ethnographic Museum of the Jews of Georgia. He was arrested and imprisoned in 1949. In 1973 he immigrated to Israel.

⁴⁶ Attempts to establish Jewish ethnographic museums was made in 1920–1930 several parts of the Soviet Union (Odessa, Samarqand, Tbilisi). These museums followed the ethnographic concepts of An-sky (I.S. Lurie was the student of An-sky). The Museum in Georgia was the only one that survived after the 1937 Great Terror campaign.

⁴⁷ Cf. Babalikašvili 1971; Babalikašvili 1983. Cf. also note 22 above.



Babalikašvili's posthumous paper begin in *H* / ה, which was read in the paper as *T* / ת and they were dated as ranging between 956–1051 CE; in reality, the dates are between 1575–1650 CE. In most cases, the initial *H* (indicating the thousands according to the Major Era) was doctored to *T* (making thus the date 'according to the Minor Era'), but in a couple of case this change was made by the forger in the printed text of *Alhnei Zikkaron* only. Babalikašvili was misled by the similarity of these two letters (indeed, in the 16th–17th centuries these letters were sometimes similar in the inscriptions).

3. RE-EVALUATION OF CHWOLSON'S PUBLICATIONS IN LIGHT OF MODERN DISCOVERIES

3.1. Mtskheta

Two old Jewish tombstones were found in Mtskheta / Mc'xeta, the ancient capital of Georgia and the traditional seat of the Georgian Greek-Orthodox Patriarch. In 1870, during paving works at the old Georgian capital of Mtskheta, an ancient cemetery of Samtavro was accidentally found, adjacent to the Upper Church of Samtavro in direction of the fortress of Bebrisc'ixe (Tiger's Fortress). As a consequence, archeological diggings were carried out at the spot, directed by Friedrich Bayern (1874).

In fact, the first inscription, a Greek one from the time of Caesar Vespasianus Augustus and the Iberian King Mithridat son of P'arasman, was found in Mtskheta three years earlier, in 1867.

Very soon it became apparent that the huge cemetery goes back, partly, to the pre-Christian period. During Bayern's work there was found, in secondary use, the Aramaic inscription of Judah called Gurk (گورگ, *gurg*, means 'wolf' in Persian); no datable material accompanying this inscription was, nevertheless, revealed. This Jewish inscription was dated by Daniel Chwolson (who had difficulties to read the text) as belonging to the 4th–5th centuries, according to his own paleographical rules, untenable nowadays. The actual text reads:⁴⁸

This is the tomb	הדין קברא
of [my] dear father	דאבא יקרא
Yehudah who is called	יהודה דמתקרי
GWRQ, his lying	גורק שכבה
with the righteous [ones]	עים הצדיקים
his rising with	עמידתה עים
the decent [<i>kosher</i> ones]	הכשירים

Chwolson referred to the name of the late 5th century Georgian King, Vaxtang Gorgasal, as a parallel to the name *Gurk*, adding, that this name, *as he was assured*, cannot be found at a later date; however, the Georgian and Mingrelian names *Mgeli* and *Geri*, both meaning 'wolf', were still in use.⁴⁹ Chwolson also brought some paleographic arguments related to the shape of the letter

⁴⁸ See Shapira 2008b; however, in this publication, the Hebrew words became printed backwards, for a reason unknown to the author!

⁴⁹ Chwolson 1884, see also Chwolson 1882: 129–133, 136; Chornyj 1875.



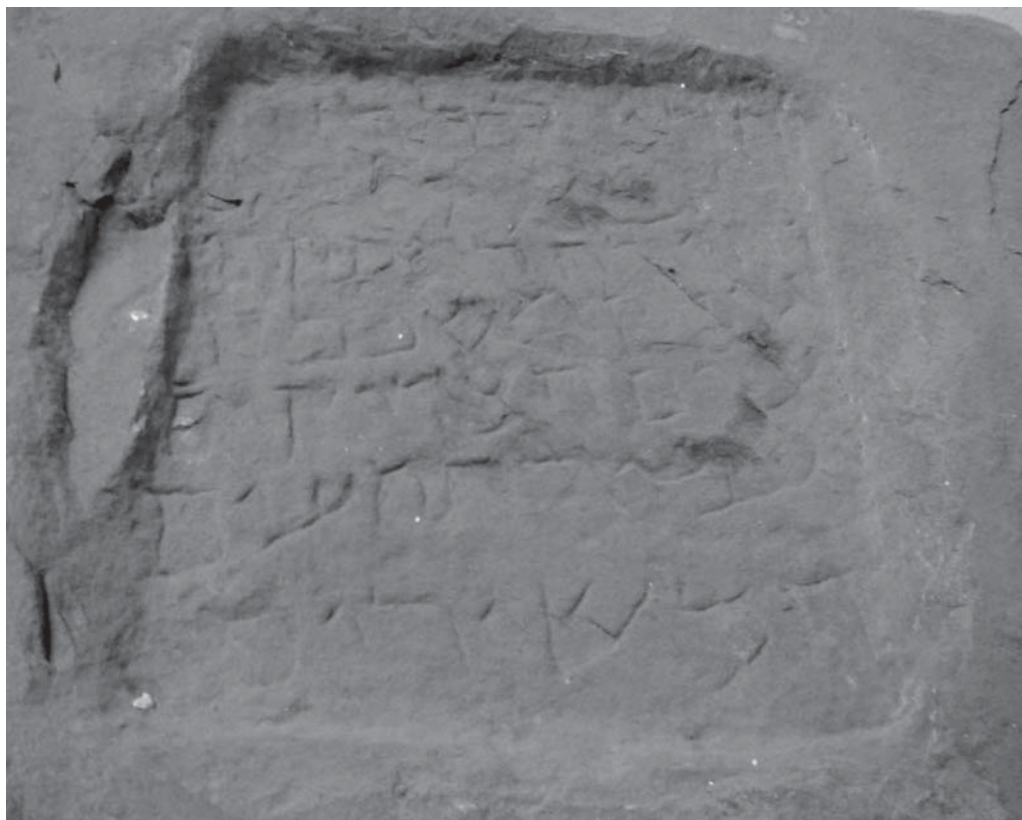


Figure 1.

7 and claims that the form *‘amida* (lit., ‘standing’) was not in use after the 9th century with the meaning of ‘resurrection’; in addition, the *scriptia plena* with the letter *yod* in the words *‘im* and *saddiqim* also indicates the Judeo-Aramaic language of the Talmudic period.

Obviously, Chwolson’s absurd paleographic ‘opinions’ are irrelevant here.⁵⁰ However, we still cannot date this inscription precisely, for we have no comparable material.⁵¹ Nevertheless, this inscription cannot be as old as the date given by Chwolson.

In October 1938, on the site of the Samtavro cemetery, while laying foundations for a veterinary clinic, two inscriptions were found just by chance, one Greek and one Jewish, said to belong to the 5th or the 6th centuries. The finds were made on the quarter close to the one where Bayern had been working in 1872 and where the first Jewish inscription was found; the gravestone was brought to the Jewish Ethnographic Museum and the epitaph was published by Tsereteli in Georgian and by Krixeli (1941) in Russian.

⁵⁰ See Shapira 2008, Chapter 5 *et passim*.

⁵¹ Eulogies are used beginning from the 9th century; the expression *de-mitqarē*, ‘called by / known as’, is used in an inscription from Busk, 1520 CE, the earliest in Ukraine and Eastern Poland.





Figure 2.



Both Jewish Inscriptions (No. 1 & No. 2) photographed together:⁵²



Figure 3.

This is how Krikheli read and translated the text:

הדן קברה דיוסף בר האזן דכור לטב לאך אתה דכור בשלמה שלום

‘This grave of Joseph / son of Ḥazzan (?) remembered / for good, passed away with peace / came (and) remembered / with peace.’

Krikheli amended the reading of Tsereteli, who believed that *two brothers* were buried in the grave:

הדן קברה דיוסף בר האזן דכור לטב ואף שלום אההו דכור בשלמה

‘This grave of Joseph / son of Ha’azen (?) remembered / for good, and Shalom, / his brother remembered / with peace.’

Tsereteli arrived to his reading after having a consultation with Kokovtsov. Both Tsereteli and Krikheli agreed that the inscription should be dated by the 4th or 5th centuries CE.

Krikheli discussed the use of the blessing formula and completely complied with Chwolson, referring to the Italian inscriptions published by Ascoli back in 1882.

Thus, the readings of Krikheli, Tsereteli and Kokovtsov were influenced by Chwolson’s shadow, the teacher of two of the three, who had argued against Harkavy that the eulogy לטב ‘of good memory’ could have been used in pre-medieval texts.

⁵² Photos by Daria Vasyutinsky-Shapira.



However, of no less influence was the fact that the Georgian chronicle *Kartlis-Tskhovreba* did mention Jews in Mtskheta in 4th century BCE, as harbingers of the light of Christianity to Georgia: Jews *must* be there at Mtskheta in the early fourth century, and here they are found, at the precise period of time when they should be expected (however, the mention of the Jews at Mtskheta at this time is purely legendary, though they *could* be there). Our reading is:⁵³

This is the tomb of Yosef
son of Ḥazzan let he be remembered
for the good and also Šallūm
his brother⁵³ remembered
in peace.

הדן קברה ד'יוסף
בר חזון דכור
לטב ואף שלום
אחהו דכור
בשלמה

As in the case of the former Jewish inscription, the language here is also non-grammatical Aramaic, and the inscription is also undated. The name of the father of the deceased can be read differently; Krixeli (1941: 114–117) opted for חזון, comparing to יאזוניהו (II Kings 25:23). Tsereteli thought that the second Jewish inscription belongs to the same epoch as the first,⁵⁴ although the script is much later. D. Vasyutinsky-Shapira believes that the second inscription should be dated from the paleographic point of view, by the ninth-tenth centuries, albeit we have no comparable material.

So far, these are the only two Jewish stonetomb inscriptions from Mtskheta, both found in an undatable state and in secondary use, but together both became hailed as *the* evidence for ancient Jewish presence at Mtskheta. The reasons why there 'should have been' Jews at Mtskheta during the first Christian centuries and why scholars, especially the Georgian ones, put so eagerly these two inscriptions into this timeframe, have been explained above. Meanwhile, we shall discuss some other discoveries made in Mtskheta-Armazi, in order to comprehend that these Jewish findings should be taken in their broader local context.

Some short Greek inscriptions appear on the gems found in 1840 in one of the tombs at Armazi (just across the river from Mtskheta), one of them with the Greek inscription *Karpak Zeuachēs zoē mou* (where both names are Iranian); at the same tomb there was found a silver chalice with the Greek inscription *egō basileus Phl. Davēs echarisamēn Bersouma pitiaxē* (mentioning an Aramaic-named person). Beginning from 1937, hundreds of tombs in the old cemetery of Mtskheta have been discovered, and in quite many of them different artifacts have been found. As already said, in the fall of 1938 there was found a tomb where one Jewish and one Greek inscription were used in secondary usage. Two years later, at Armazi a tomb was found in which the so-called 'Armazi bilingual' and the monolingual 'Aramaic' inscriptions were found together.⁵⁵

⁵³ Or, 'his wife', if one accept the reading אהתה; this observation belongs to the late Professor Joseph Naveh.

⁵⁴ Tsereteli 1940; Tsereteli 1948: 50.

⁵⁵ Tsereteli 1941; Tsereteli 1962; Tsereteli 1994.





Figure 4. – The Monolingual Armazi Inscription



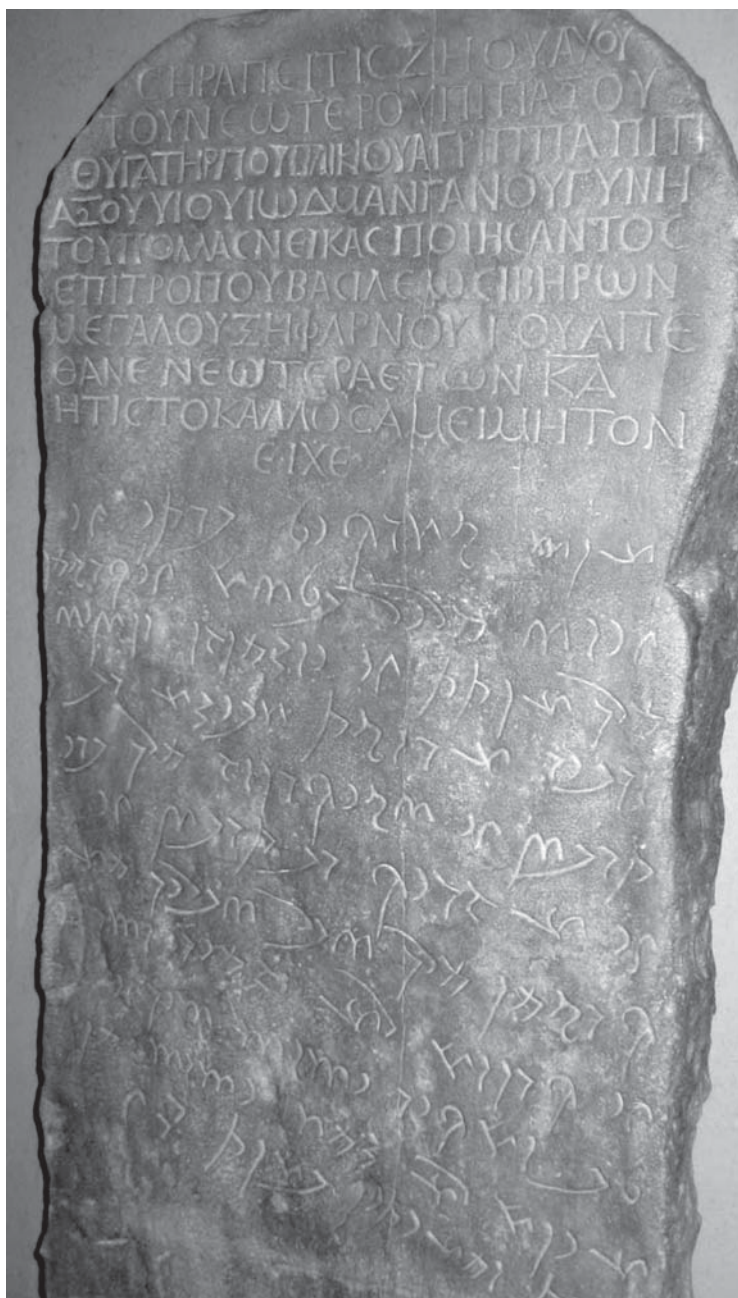


Figure 5. – The Bilingual Armazi Inscription⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Photos by Daria Vasyutinsky-Shapira.



Thus, we have:

- 1) two datable Aramaic inscriptions in the newly-found Armazi Aramaic script, both from a very closely related period, as is revealed from the contents, and found together;
- 2) two undated Jewish inscriptions found separately, and, apparently, of different dates;
- 3) different Greek texts and fragments (while one Armazi inscription – the ‘bilingual’ – bears also a Greek text, with the second Jewish inscription found together with a Greek one).

Albeit parts of the Samtavro cemetery most probably *do* go back to the pre-Christian period, it seems, nevertheless, that the bulk of the graves are from the Christian period. The latest *medieval* coin found in a tomb at Armazi is a Mongol one, of Arghun Khaan (1284–1291); among other coins found at the Samtavro cemetery are Russian *kopeks* from the period of 1762 (before the Russian occupation) till 1851. In one and the same tomb there were found such coins as one of Augustus, one of Leo of Byzantium, and an Arab *filis / fals* (from Roman *folles*) from the eighth century, implying that the site continued to serve as a cemetery even in the modern Christian period. Some of the coins found together in the burial sarcophagus are more than a thousand years younger than the others in the same ark.⁵⁷ This implies that it could be not impossible to find together, in secondary use, stones from the ancient period and from the, say, fifteenth century. However, blinded by ethnic and religious prejudices, scholars clearly overlooked this possibility. In short, the two undated Jewish tombstones, bearing Aramaic inscriptions, and found in secondary use, at the Samtavro cemetery can tell us nothing substantial about the Jewish presence in Mtskheta and, in any case, cannot be used as evidence for a pre-Christian, or early-Christian, Jewish community there,⁵⁸ or as evidence for veracity of the traditional Georgian account about St. Nino.

While it is difficult to come to a final conclusion on when the inscriptions were composed since there is no parallel material, they are more likely to be dated with the end of the first millennium CE – beginning of the second millennium CE. This is the period when blessing formulas were already in use, but the date could yet be omitted in the inscription, and Aramaic was widely spread among the Jews in the region.

3.2. Theodosia

Hebrew inscriptions from the old synagogue in Theodosia (Caphá / Keffeh, Feodosija) in the Crimea were another subject of the Chwolson–Harkavy controversy. The synagogue, apparently one of the oldest in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, was blown up during the Second World War.⁵⁹ According to Chwolson, the oldest inscriptions in the synagogue were dated by 909 CE, 1018 CE, and 1309 CE. The inscription which he considered to be the oldest (Fig. 10.7) says:

בְּחִכְמָה יִבְנֶה בֵּית וּבְחִבּוֹנָה יִתְבּוֹנֶן שְׁלַח גּוֹאֵל לְקַבֵּץ יִשְׂרָאֵל לִפְנֵי כִתְרֵיהֶּ
be built and by mind will be constructed (Pr 24:3), send the Redeemer to gather Israel, b[y the] E[ra], crown.

⁵⁷ Kapanadze 1955: 161 & tablets.

⁵⁸ However, recently a short-living medieval Jewish community in Armenia has been found, something hardly thinkable before, see Amit and Stone 2002, 2004. However, a Jewish tomb inscription from the area was known as early as 1912 and was published, anonymously, in Marr 1912. Cf. <http://berkovich-zametki.com/Nomer7/MN17.htm>, where illustrations are republished.

⁵⁹ Kizilov 2003a.



In the word כתר, ‘crown’, the letters *kaph* and *resh* were marked (Chwolson insisted that the *taw* is not marked), which gives the year 220, so, according to Chwolson, the year 1220 of the Seleucid Era or 909 CE.⁶⁰ This takes us to the Khazar period, although the city is not mentioned in the ‘Letter of the Khazar King Joseph’ (while several other towns on the Crimean Coast *are*; see below). Obviously, the chronogram reading is at least dubious. There is no reference to the Seleucid Era; in fact, *li-p* לפ normally means a date according to the Creation Era rather than the Seleucid Era called in Hebrew *li-štar* [oth]. This inscription can hardly refute historical arguments suggesting that neither the Jewish community nor the city of *Kaffa, itself, existed in the early tenth century CE. This questionable date, however, entered the scholarly literature.⁶¹ Modern researchers believe that the old synagogue in this city of many names was built in the mid-thirteenth century (the town itself hardly existed before that time) and the oldest inscription there was dated with 1292 CE (Kizilov 2003b).

3.3. Partenith

Partenith was a village at the southern shore of the Crimea under the mountain Ayu- Dağ. In the eighth century CE, it was an important town with a monastery; the archbishop of Gothia, St. John of Gothia, known for his resistance to the Khazar rule, was born there; the ‘Letter of the Khazar King Joseph’ mentioned this place as lying inside the Khazar realm.⁶²

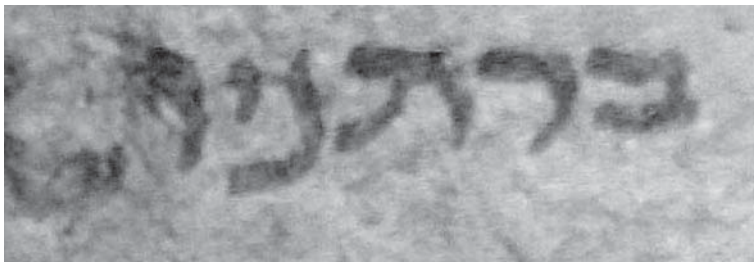


Figure 6.

⁶⁰ Chwolson 1882.

⁶¹ Weissenberg 1913, the same claim of the 909 inscription is repeated in Vinawer et al. 1899, in the *Jewish Encyclopedia* (New York, 1905, Vol. 7: 408), in the Russian *Jewish Encyclopedia* (despite the fact the Harkavy took part in its preparation). Also the article ‘Feodocia’ in *Encyclopedia Judaica* (Vol. 6, col. 1224–1225), which follows the Hebrew book by Farfel 1912, and the paper by I.D. Markon in the *Memorial Volume for A. Harkavy* published by Baron Guenzburg (however, this paper deals with the Kaffa tradition of the Mahzor prayer book rather than the history of the synagogue). Farfel just follows Chwolson; interestingly, he made an attempt to get an ‘approbation’ letter from Harkavy to be included in his book. The letter says that Harkavy was not able to read this book, because he just returned from Germany, however, he will read it when he will get a chance. The article on Theodosia was prepared for the first edition (the early 1970s) of the *Encyclopedia Judaica* by Yehuda Slutski, a specialist on Israeli Labor movement. The article for the second edition (2007) was revised by Shemuel Spector (Vol. 6: 758); however, the same information about ‘the 909 CE inscription’ was kept. This synagogue was held in such a fame that Saul Tschernichowski, born in the Tavrida *Gubernia*, wrote a sonnet about the synagogue in Theodosia, stressing its antiquity. On the date, cf. Goldenberg 2002, where the question is finally settled.

⁶² See Kokovcov, 1932: 31 (Hebrew), p. 102 (Russian translation).



In the 1860s, three Hebrew inscriptions were found in Partenith, brought to St. Petersburg, and were published by Chwolson in his 1882 monograph.⁶³ One of the inscriptions reads על ישראל שלום 'peace upon Israel', another one has an image of the menorah and reads 'Herfidil the priest, let his soul rest'.⁶⁴ According to Chwolson, the inscription should be dated *circa* the fifth century CE and the name *Herfidil* may be interpreted as Gothic *Harja-Frithila*, a variant of German *Heri-frid*; this reconstructed form is not corroborated by existing Gothic sources.⁶⁵ Once a connection between Jews and Crimean Goths was made, it would prompt, in the 1940s, the weird theory of the Israeli Orientalist and Khazar scholar Abraham Polak that Yiddish had developed in the Crimea from the Gothic language, and not from German in Poland, as everyone was thinking (Polak 1943: 256ff.).

3.4. Taman

Taman is a town at the very western part of the North Caucasus, at the Taman Peninsula's shore of the Azov Sea, just opposite the Crimean Peninsula across the Kerch Strait. In the Classical Antiquity, a Hellenistic Bosporean Kingdom existed here at both shores of the Kerch Strait. Greek colonies of Phanagoria and Germonassa were located near modern Taman. Jews lived in Phanagoria since at least the first century CE. Later a Jewish community of Matarcha (Tamataarcha, or Russian T'mutarakan') existed nearby until the ninth century CE. A number of Jewish inscriptions were found here during the last century and a half, including epitaphs and manumissions (inscriptions on occasion of freeing a slave) in Greek, Latin, or Hebrew.⁶⁶ An interesting example is the tombstone found in 1869/70 at the site of ancient Phanagoria. The limestone, size 46×33×12 cm, has images of the *menorah* and the *shofar* accompanied by a Hebrew inscription: בזה הקבר תנה מר[ים] 'in this grave Mir[yam] would rest'. The inscription was brought to St. Petersburg and published by Chwolson among other Hebrew inscriptions from the Asian Museum. Chwolson believed that the inscription should be dated with the eighth-ninth centuries and hoped that it can help to prove the authenticity of those Çufut-Qal'eh inscriptions that he had dated as belonging to the same period.⁶⁷

⁶³ The monuments were part of the collection Asian Museum's Lapidary along with the stones from Çufut-Qal'eh (see 10.1.1.1) and Taman (see 10.3). The collection disappeared during evacuation of the Institute of the Oriental Studies from Leningrad at the time of the Second World War. Cf. also Vasyutinskaya 2002.

⁶⁴ The inscription is mentioned as 'a Teutonic name' in the *Encyclopedia Judaica* (the article 'Crimea' by Y. Slutsky, Vol. 5: 299 in the 2007 edition).

⁶⁵ Dr. Mikhail Kizilov has observed that the name *Herfidil* is absent among the Gothic names discussed in Stearns, 1978. See also Kizilov 2015: 274–277. Chwolson's dating of the inscriptions with the 5th century CE based on 'paleographic grounds' is questionable, although these short undated inscriptions, the blessing 'peace upon Israel' and image of the *menorah* are similar to inscriptions from Taman and Kerch and perhaps indeed belong to the first millennium CE.

⁶⁶ Levinskaya 1992, Danshin 1993, Kashovskaja and Kashaev 2001.

⁶⁷ After the Russian revolutions of 1917, the collections of the Asian Museum were transferred to the Leningrad branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Soviet Academy of Science. Unfortunately, the whole collection of stones disappeared without any trace in late 1930s or early 1940s. However, in 1996 we found the above-described stone at the stocks of the Byzantium sector of the Hermitage museum. The monument had no description or documentation, and it was not known when and how it was brought to the Hermitage. So there is still a hope that other Hebrew inscription from the Asian Museum will also be found.



4. DUBNOV VERSUS HARKAVY

While there were egotist overtones in the Chwolson–Harkavy polemics, contrary to the viewpoint frequently expressed by Russian and post-Soviet authors, these polemics totally lacked any ideology and were carried by two scholars sharing similar agendas, of whom one was right and one was wrong. Both shared the view that Jews settled down in the territories of the Russian Empire during the Hellenistic times; that there was an influx of Jews from Khazaria to the Kievan Rus'; that Jews deserved equal rights in the Russian Empire against the background of long-standing Jewish settlements in the Russian Empire, thus making the Jews not newcomers and outsiders, but loyal compatriots.

The real ideological conflict was between Harkavy and his younger contemporary Dubnov. In a sense, Harkavy was an heir to the *Wissenschaft des Judenthums*, many members of which were concerned with 'how to prepare a decent funeral for Judaism'. Dubnov was young and self-asserting; for Dubnov, the (future) father of Jewish Autonomism, creating a Jewish historical narrative was the key part of the national renaissance and the primary task of a national movement. Lacking Harkavy's vast education, Dubnov – socially deprived, young, impatient, being a political activist – criticized Harkavy on numerous occasions for his 'pedantic' approach, for not using his influence and position to create a truly national Jewish historical narrative, and even for 'abandoning historiography as running errands of archaeology and philology'.⁶⁸ Dubnov's attack on Harkavy begun in 1883, with a review of the Russian translation of Volume V of Graetz' *History of the Jews*, which was interspersed with Harkavy's numerous notes; Dubnov criticized Harka-

⁶⁸ 'Таркави... оставил историографию в черном теле, на побегушках у археологии и филологии', see for example Dubnov 1891: 29; Kelner 2008. As Viktor Kelner wrote in his book about Dubnov (2008: 193): 'for the OPE Harkavi was an unquestionable authority, and often the fate of financing of many projects depended on his only word'. The 1880s' crisis led young Jewish activists to protest against values of the old generation of the *maskilim*. Harkavy, who had increased in this period the number of his publications in Russian, became exactly at that time the veritable intellectual *guru* of the St. Petersburg Jewish community. As such, he was attacked by the young Simon Dubnov, who had been illegally residing in the city since 1880. Dubnov wrote an article 'What is the Self-Emancipation that the Jews Need'. Among other things, Dubnov described Harkavy as a personification of dry, soulless learning, the dead-end of Russian Jewish history. Of course, the young critic without any formal education was at that time no match for the venerable scholar, who was a close friend of Horace Günzburg and under whose influence and instruction David Günzburg became a prominent Orientalist. As Zalman Shazar, later to become the third President of Israel, later remembered: 'Those who were eager for modern Jewish scholarship made their way to the West or absorbed the work of Galician or German academicians at second hand from translations that appeared in Russian Jewish monthlies or from Hebrew versions by such distinguished writers as A.E. Harkavy' (Shazar 1967: 171). Dubnov resumed his attacks in 1892 after Horace Günzburg lost much of his fortune due to the intentional failure of the State to pay its obligations, and even had to sell part of his private collections. Dubnov remained hostile toward Harkavy for years to come. Thus he wrote in his diary after visiting Harkavy in 1915 in his house: 'I recall how, an obscure young man, I went to him in the spring of 1881 or 1882 to receive an allowance from the Society for the Promotion of Jewish Enlightenment. Then – how I hurt him in my criticism and how our paths diverged ... How everything is lifeless here! The veritable tomb of history! I tried to stir up the dead man, suggested subjects of small works (on the new Khazar fragment) ... no reply. Everything is dead, as it was thirty years ago, a dead science, mummy of history, buried in the crypt of the apartment, surrounded by books and papers...' (Dubnov 1998: V.2: 346).



vy's contempt for the Karaites. Harkavy threatened Dubnov with a *herem*, a religious ostracism (Horowitz 2010: 58–59). Later, Dubnov wrote:⁶⁹

'After all, the heated and still unresolved debate about "the origins of Rus" between Pogodin and Kostamarov⁷⁰ does not prevent either one of these scholars from studying later periods of Russian history, which they have enriched with their wonderful works. However interesting the "question of the Khazars" is and however much the question of ancient Jewish settlements is connected with it, we should not make the living and huge task of Jewish historiography dependant on its resolution, which really entails a single point...'⁷¹

Dubnov's theory of the 'wandering centers in search of autonomism' was born out of his somewhat Oedipal revolt against Harkavy; he was obsessed with the idea of becoming a leader of Russian Jewish historical scholarship; as Horowitz writes,

'Dubnov inevitably clashed with Harkavy politically, since, impatient with the failure of Jewish intercessors, Dubnov demanded that the Jews struggle for their rights using modern pressure politics. On the historical plane, Dubnov mocked Harkavy's archaeological inclinations, ridiculing his fixation on the Khazars.⁷² Harkavy, a Russian Jew, wanted to give the Jews roots in Russia, while Dubnov, after the events of 1881–82, pushed to emigration and autonomism.'

Dubnov's work on the Crimean material and his *dilettante* treatment of the Mangup inscriptions – which produced an article named 'Historical *Enigmas* of the Crimea' (the italicization is ours) can be viewed in the same troubled context.⁷³

Though Dubnov had no intention of burgeoning on what would be wrongly considered the Chwolson–Harkavy controversy, *post factum* his work on the Crimean material and his article, *combined with his future posture as the patriarch of Russian-Jewish historiography*, were held by the students of Jewish studies, in the Soviet period, as evidence of his taking Chwolson's side.

5. ROMANTIC VIEWS OF THE HISTORY AND FORGING THE DATES OF HISTORICAL MONUMENTS

What are the chances that Chwolson was wrong, despite the fact that Chwolson's opinion was accepted by various schools of Russian and Soviet historians and Semitists, and Harkavy was right?

⁶⁹ Dubnov 1891: 30–31, as quoted in English translation in Horowitz 2009: 111.

⁷⁰ Dubnov meant here the famous dispute 'about the origins of Russia' held on 19.03.1860 between the historians M.P. Pogodin (1800–1875) and N.I. Kostomarov (1817–1885).

⁷¹ Dubnov 1891: 30–31.

⁷² Horowitz 2010: 50.

⁷³ Still, the aforementioned article by Dubnov is not without its merits: Dubnov was the first who noted the existence of 'doubles' – tomb inscriptions with practically identical texts, and dates one of which was given by Firkowicz in his publication correctly, while the other date – that of the fake – was printed changed. In Mangup and Çufut-Qaleh there is quite a dozen of such 'doubles'.



The facts strongly support this seemingly paradoxical conclusion. First of all, the recent field studies at Çufut-Qal'eh indicate unambiguously that there are no inscriptions older than the fourteenth century. Practically all Çufut-Qal'eh inscriptions of the eighth-twelfth century published by Chwolson can now be identified as forgeries. While Harkavy's arguments were mostly historical, Chwolson's arguments were mostly paleographic.⁷⁴ They might seem reasonable in 1882, today, however, most of them are out-of-date. For example, no new monuments with blessing formulas were discovered since the 1880s, while the inscription with the blessing formula from Tortosa upon which Chwolson based his arguments, seems to be younger than it was suggested by Ascoli in his publication of 1880. No new evidence was found that could support the view that a Jewish community could exist in Kaffa in the tenth century. Previous reports of the first millennium monuments in Çufut-Qal'eh turned out to be groundless while ancient colophons of the manuscripts turned out to be forged.

Despite all these, the scholarly communities of historians, Hebraists and Semitists in Russia and the USSR had demonstrated in the twentieth century the lack of critical attitude towards Chwolson's claims that have been widely accepted at their face value and without serious personal investigation. The reason for that is that these Romantic claims that declared a deep antiquity of the monuments resonated well with the aspirations of the national movements – the Jewish, Georgian and Karaite ones – that considered a romanticized history a basis for their national identification.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The nineteenth century was the time of Romantic Nationalism; numerous forgeries of historical monuments, documents and 'ancient literary works' emerged at that time, with the aim to prove the antiquity of an ethnic group in a particular land, the rights of a group to equality, or the authenticity of national traditions. Chwolson, who at first, out of neglect or out of a chase to fame and career, adopted Firkowicz's forgeries, quickly realized his mistake; however, he could not back up. It was problematic for him to acknowledge the criticism by both Harkavy and German Hebraists, since this criticism questioned, reasonably, Chwolson's scholarly qualifications and integrity. We should remember that, albeit being a bright scholar, Chwolson owed his brilliant career solely to his earlier decision to convert and to accept administrative support of the Russian authorities. In other words, the interference of political pressure into the academic argument resulted in the prevailing of the scholarly flawed opinion. Thus, Karaite attempts to make the inscriptions to look older got administrative support from the Russian authorities. Remarkably, this claimed older age of the inscriptions was readily accepted by the emerging Jewish 'national school' of historians, and partially by Karaite and by Georgian historians, who had idealistic and romantic views of their own history (Shapira 2014). During the Soviet period, Jewish Studies in the USSR were in neglect and barely dwindled on the remains of the pre-Revolutionary – *i.e.*, mostly nineteenth century's – knowledge; nobody seriously studied the whole complex of the inscriptions from the South of the Russian / Soviet Empire. The remnants of the scholarly community were hypnotized by

⁷⁴ We could add that the 20th century saw the emergence of Hebrew paleography, which is now an established discipline. The modern research of Hebrew paleography makes Chwolson's attempts obsolete (see for example the fundamental work Engel and Beit-Arié 1987–2017).



Chwolson's authority, who was the teacher of their teachers' teachers. At the same time, Western scholars did not have access to the monuments in question and did not study them either. Only after the collapse of the Soviet Union can we see the energetic resurrection of the studies of Jewish history in the South of the Former USSR.

While Firkowicz's forgeries certainly caused significant damage to the artifacts of Jewish history and total disappearance of entire layers of Jewish history in the Crimea, it would be wrong to blame only this semi-medieval *dilettante* scholar for the fact that uncritical attitude towards the forgeries was rooted so deeply. Two other factors played a role: the rough interference of the political pressure into the academic field (first, in the form of the governmental support of Chwolson against Harkavy and, second, the Soviet oppression of Jewish Studies) and romanticization of ancient history by national movements (Jewish, Karaim and Georgian), which sometimes made scholars associated with these movements virtually blind towards the facts. Today it is obvious that the complex of problems related to erroneous dating of the Hebrew epigraphic material from the South of the former Russian / Soviet Empire is much more complicated than just Firkowicz's forgeries.



APPENDIX

Here we publish two tombstone inscriptions from Çufut-Qal'eh; both were found by Chwolson and published in his 1882 book, as a proof that Harkavy was wrong in his polemics against Firkowicz and Chwolson. Chwolson's logic went as follows: Firkowicz did not publish these two inscriptions in his 1872 book *Abnei Zikkaron*, ergo, did not find them; ergo, they were not forged by Firkowicz and are genuine. In fact, both of them do appear in Firkowicz's drafts of his book. According to Chwolson, they date from 992 CE (but he remarks: 'ist verdächtig und die Form der Schrift gehört dem 16. Jahrhundert an') and 996 CE. Nevertheless, the dates of both inscriptions were doctored, apparently, by Firkowicz. The real dates are, however, from the late 16th century. The images are taken from Fedorchuk, Shapira, Vasyutinsky-Shapira 2020–21.

Chwolson 1882:254–255, N. 17; the real date is 1592 CE, forged:



Figure 7.



... monument
of ...
... of the respected R. Moses
[she] passed away on Monday...
of Shevat, year 752
from the Creation, her* soul* shall be
bound* in the bundle* of life.

... ציון
של ...
... כ'ר' מ[ש]ה[ה]
[נ]פטר[ה] יום ב'
בש[בט] שנת ת'ש'נ[ב']
ליצירה ת'נ'צ'ב'ה'

Chwolson 1882:255 N. 19; the real date is 1596CE, forged:



Figure 8.

[wife of Isaac of blessed memory] Cohen. .. אשת⁵⁷ יצחק ז'ל' ..
She passed away on Monday 3rd ...
... year 756 from the Creation, her* soul* שנת ת'ש'נ' ליצירה ת'נ'צ'ב'ה' ...
shall be bound* in the bundle* of life*.

⁷⁵ Chwolson read 'daughter'; Firkowicz, in his drafts, read 'wife'.



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