

## THE PRESENT STATE OF KARAIM STUDIES

REPORT ON THE SZEGED WORKSHOP ON KARAIM STUDIES,  
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### **Karaim Studies Today**

The last decades have witnessed growing interest in Karaim Studies. The main impetus for this renewed academic attention comes from the Karaim communities' vigorous commitment to maintaining their cultural, religious, and historical heritage. Since the end of the last century, when changing political circumstances in the post-Soviet era opened up new possibilities and raised new expectations for ethnic and religious minorities in Central Europe, scholars of Karaim Studies have had the opportunity to participate in conferences and meetings organised by outstanding intellectual leaders of the Karaim communities in Vilnius, Warsaw, and Halich. It has proved to be beneficial for all types of Karaim studies to conduct a dialogue with the communities and provide scholarly support for the maintenance of the Karaim heritage.

Central tasks of Karaim studies include conducting linguistic and philological research on written and spoken Karaim, investigating the history of the communities, and studying their religion and religious music, just to mention the most important ones. Moreover, the study of the Karaim language and literary texts inevitably has interdisciplinary aspects. Philological studies of translations from Hebrew, for instance, must be conducted in dialogue with scholars of Biblical and Mediaeval Hebrew. Language contact issues must be handled in co-operation with experts on the Baltic-Slavonic dialects that are in contact with Karaim. Descriptions of the typological features of Karaim must be produced by applying linguistic methods.

Several scholars carrying out research today on the languages and literatures of the Turkic-speaking Karaim communities are affiliated with universities in Poland and Lithuania, countries with small but vibrant Karaim communities. The Polish universities of Poznań, Cracow, and Warsaw were represented at the Szeged workshop by Henryk Jankowski, Mariola Abkowicz, Anna Sulimowicz, and Michał Németh. Jankowski and his students in Poznań have published important works, especially on Cri-

mean Karaim. Mariola Abkowicz has documented the lives and histories of the communities of Wilno, Troki and Poniewiez in the 19th and 20th centuries, and is working on the Karaim anthroponymy of the Karaim Priestly Administrations in Troki and in Poland after the Second World War. Anna Sulimowicz has documented the lives and histories of the communities of Halich and Luck and is working on an inventory of her large collection of Karaim manuscripts. Michał Németh has published valuable studies mainly on Luck Karaim. Karina Firkavičiūtė took her degree in Vilnius at the Music Academy and lectured in Karaim studies at Vilnius University for several years. She has studied and documented the musical traditions of the Lithuanian Karaims and contributed to documenting the spoken Lithuanian Karaim language.

Tapani Harviainen and his student Riikka Tuori, scholars of Semitic Studies at Helsinki University, have dealt with Hebrew traditions in the Lithuanian Karaim community.

Scholars at Uppsala University have investigated Karaim from a Turcological perspective. Éva Á. Csató has focused on the study, documentation and revitalisation of the spoken varieties in Lithuania and in Halich, working in close co-operation with members of these communities, especially with Karina Firkavičiūtė. Zsuzsanna Olach, formerly at Uppsala University and now at Szeged University, has linguistically analysed and published a comprehensive Halich Karaim Bible translation. For more details on recent studies on Karaim before 2010 see a review in Csató (2010), and the bibliographical references in this report.

On the initiative of a group of leading Polish and Israeli scholars such as Piotr Muchowski and Dan Shapira, a new journal, *Karaite Archives*, was launched in 2013 at the Department of Asian Studies, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań. The title *Karaite Archives* was chosen to emphasise the editors' aim to cover issues concerning all Karaite communities, including the non-Turkic-speaking ones. Karaim linguistic issues are as a rule not treated except in connection with translations of Hebrew texts into Karaim. Thus, this new important journal serves primarily as a forum for Karaite studies.

The journal *Turkic Languages* has published several articles on Karaim and is a suitable scholarly medium for further contributions.

There is growing interest in Karaim in Turkey. Just to mention some examples, Tülay Çulha, who studied with Jankowski, is carrying out a project at Kocaeli University on the maintenance of the languages and cultures of Turkic minorities in Crimea, Hülya Kasapoğlu Çengel has published several studies on Armeno-Kipchak and has also shown interest in Karaim, and Timur Kocaoğlu, together with Mikolas Firkovičius, published a concise book on Karaim in 2006. Several master's students at Turkish universities have expressed their wish to write theses on Karaim topics.

To sum up, three research centres are currently active in Karaim studies: Poznań/Cracow, focusing on Crimean Karaim and Halich/Luck Karaim; Vilnius, in co-operation with Uppsala, focusing on Lithuanian Karaim; and Szeged, focusing on the study of Karaim Bible translations. These centres have a well-functioning network that also includes scholars in Turkey and can be used in the future for carrying out international projects aiming to make excellent contributions to Karaim Studies.

## The Szeged Workshop on Karaim Studies, June 13th, 2014

The aim of the Szeged Workshop on Karaim Studies was to share information concerning the current state of Karaim Studies at European universities and to follow up issues raised at a previous workshop held in 2010 at Uppsala University (Csató 2010). See the short presentations below.

Ongoing and planned projects on Karaim topics were presented by two Polish Karaim participants: Mariola Abkowicz from Adam Mickiewicz University of Poznań, and Anna Sulimowicz from the University of Warsaw. Karina Firkavičiūtė from the Karaim Cultural Society (Vilnius, Lithuania) gave information about a fascinating research plan aiming to study the relation between the so-called Masoretic accents and the system of Karaim religious music.

A further goal was to discuss the possibility of establishing a network to build a virtual library of annotated Karaim religious texts drawing on the resources of already existing Karaim corpora.

The conveners of the Szeged workshop were Zsuzsanna Olach at the Turcological Research Group of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and Department of Altaistic Studies at the University of Szeged, and Éva Á. Csató from the Department of Linguistics and Philology at Uppsala University. We would like to express our gratitude to the Turcological Group of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, and Professors András Róna-Tas and Mária Ivanics personally, as well as to the University of Szeged, and Vice-Rector Professor József Pál personally, for making it possible to hold this second workshop on Karaim Studies.

## Past and Present Karaim Linguistics and Philology

Karaim linguistics covers the study of the three Karaim varieties, those of Crimea, Halich and Trakai, and texts written in these varieties. The linguistic study of Karaim varieties is a specialisation within linguistic Turcology. The genealogical status of Karaim is undisputed; it is clearly a member of the Turkic language family.

Karaim is a relatively well-described Turkic language. Turcologists working on Karaim today can draw upon the work of famous scholars such as Wilhelm Radloff, Tadeusz Kowalski, Ananjasz and Włodzimierz Zajączkowski, Alexander Dubiński, Nikolaj Aleksandrovič Baskakov, Kenesbaj M. Musaev, Omeljan Pritsak, Seraja Markovicz Szapszal, and Jan Grzegorzewski, who laid the foundations for the description of Karaim linguistics. These scholars were Turcologists trained in comparative Turkic studies. Their aim was to understand the place of Karaim varieties in the larger context of the Turkic language family, and to describe their historical development and their contacts with non-Turkic languages. The seminal studies of these Turcologists constitute the basis for later research. I shall mention here only a few of the fundamental linguistic works, namely the description of the Karaim varieties in *Philologiae turcae fundamenta* by O. Pritsak, published in 1959; the two volumes of Karaim grammar, *Phonetics and Morphology* published in 1964, and *Syntax* published

in 2004, by K. M. Musaev; the comprehensive Karaim–Russian–Polish dictionary edited by N. A. Baskakov, S. M. Szapszał and A. Zajączkowski, and published in 1974; Kowalski’s monograph on the Trakai variety published in 1929; Grzegorzewski’s study on the Halich–Luck variety published in 1916–1918; and Radloff’s material on the Crimean varieties published in 1896. See a list of the classic works in Alexander Dubiński’s bibliography published in the Karaim–Russian–Polish dictionary.

Familiarity with these classic works should constitute an essential precondition for linguistic studies of Karaim. The field of study can only develop if there is a shared stock of knowledge to serve as a touchstone for evaluating quality. Unfortunately, few young linguists can read Russian, Polish, and German, so the preparation of a new dictionary and a new comprehensive grammar in English is desirable.

Instruction in Karaim has also been established at universities. For the last four years, regular courses have been held in Karaim at Uppsala University. These are conducted in co-operation with Vilnius University, represented by Karina Firkavičiūtė. The courses in Uppsala have also been offered several times on the internet, attracting several highly qualified participants. A course in Karaim has also been offered at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań.

### **Challenges Facing Karaim Linguistics**

A prominent challenge facing Karaim linguistics is to establish the genealogical status of the Karaim varieties. Karaim is a Kipchak Turkic language in the ethnolinguistic sense, but the varieties spoken in Lithuania and Halich/Luck have significantly different Kipchak features. More comparative research on these features is needed in order to define the distances between Karaim and other Kipchak varieties. Our knowledge of the language spoken in the Karaim community in Crimea – despite the valuable contributions of Professor Jankowski – is still limited because of the nature of the available material. More research on the Turkic varieties of Crimea is sorely needed.

Karaim is a European Turkic language characterised by many copied non-Turkic features. An important task is to map the typological features of European Turkic languages, in order to compare their similarities and differences and account for contact-induced changes. Karaim shares many typological features with, for instance, Gagauz and Balkan Turkish. A comprehensive study is needed to compare the contact-induced changes in several European Turkic varieties, including the more recent varieties such as Deutschlandtürkisch.

The linguistic analysis and description of the spoken varieties of Halich/Luck and Lithuania constitute an area in urgent need of work. The available source material for describing the spoken varieties comprises recordings of speakers. Opportunities to make new recordings are very limited, but still exist. Non-religious literary texts, correspondence, and other materials also offer good possibilities to study the grammar of Karaim. Michał Németh has, for instance, published Karaim letters written in Luck. Syntactic and morphological features of the Karaim varieties can be investigated on the basis of such materials. The phonology in its true sense can be studied

from written sources only to a limited extent. Writing systems do not encode the pronunciation in a fully retrievable way.

Studying the philological and linguistic features of the translations from Hebrew is another challenge. The translated texts have very specific properties and are not directly suitable for reconstructing the grammar of Karaim. As already mentioned, Henryk Jankowski has contributed several articles to this field of Karaim studies. Zsuzsanna Olach has recently published her book on this topic. Both scholars work in co-operation with experts in Biblical Hebrew. The majority of the translated texts are still awaiting publication. The religious texts written in Karaim are very much influenced by the translated texts.

This specialisation of Karaim linguistics into different fields is fruitful and should be continued in the future.

### Linguistic and Philological Studies of Karaim Texts

At the workshop, Henryk Jankowski, from Adam Mickiewicz University of Poznań, discussed the complicated status of the Karaim varieties of the Crimea. He presented various factors that have had an impact on the development of Crimean Karaim, such as the language of the spiritual leaders, the linguistic influence of the Karaims living in Wolhyna and Galicia, the other languages of the Crimea, Turkish influence, etc. He distinguished between Kipchak and Oghuz features in Crimean Karaim texts and studied certain special phonological and morphological characteristics. He gave two examples of features that can be found only in Crimean Karaim and not in any other Karaim variety: (i) the lexeme *oturaş* ‘residence; dwelling (place)’, corresponding to the Halich Karaim word *olturus*, and the Trakai Karaim word *olturuş*; and (ii) the phonetic form *hüşte* ‘well’, corresponding to Turkish *işte*. He mentioned the four known extant works in archaic Crimean Karaim: (i) *Targum seliḥot* (1734) edited by Sulimowicz (1972, 1973); (ii) fragments of a *Tanakh* translation in a manuscript from Manchester dated to the end of the 18th century (Jankowski 1997); (iii) a translation of the complete *Tanakh* in a manuscript from Cambridge (Jankowski 2012, p. 59); and (iv) a printed translation of the complete *Tanakh* which came out in Gözleve/Eupatoria in 1841.

Michał Németh, Jagiellonian University, Cracow, discussed how the evidence provided in Halich/Luck Karaim manuscripts can be used to study the diachronic phonology of these Karaim varieties.

Zsuzsanna Olach, in her presentation *Karaim Hebrew script: Reconsidering some points of Karaim orthography*, analysed the allographic alternations in religious texts written in different Karaim varieties.

### Karaite Studies

Tapani Harviainen, Helsinki University, presented a number of themes and goals in Karaite Studies that are in need of further attention in the future. He emphasised the

importance of compiling a Hebrew-Karaim dictionary of Bible translations and of conducting further studies of the traditional, literal Karaite Bible-translation techniques. He also mentioned the importance of taking good care of material collections and manuscripts written in Hebrew and Karaim.

Riikka Tuori, Helsinki/Frankfurt, presented the main findings of her study of Karaim poetry and poetics in Eastern Europe. She pointed out that Karaim poetry was influenced by Sephardic traditions.

### Shared Resources

The efficient networking of scholars participating in Karaim studies makes it possible to seek fruitful co-operation for data-sharing in order to enhance the quality of research. The scholars presently engaged in studying the different Karaim varieties would all profit from having access to a comprehensive, searchable corpus of Karaim data. This would make comparative research more efficient and enable the use of modern methods for creating dictionaries.

Sharing data presupposes some consensus on transliteration, transcription and morphological annotation, i.e. the establishment of standards for the representation of data. This would add much value to studies on the topics mentioned above.

The final round-table discussion was introduced by László Károly who is working on a Middle Turkic digital dictionary. He proposed to include Karaim varieties in this project. The tool for building this dictionary is provided by the publishing house Brill which has had long experience of publishing comprehensive reference books and dictionaries. The framework of the project would ensure great flexibility for the participants who could feed in their data and perform the editing tasks. The database built by sharing resources would allow the contributors to publish dictionaries in different languages and with different thematics.

The participants exchanged their views concerning co-ordinated applications for project funding, with the aim of building a corpus of Karaim linguistic data.

### Recent Publications on Karaim (2010–2015)

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- Abkowicz, Mariola (2012): *Ijisi baraskiniń* to po karaïmsku znaczy zapach piątku [*Ijisi baraskiniń* means ‘the smell of Friday’ in Karaim]. In: Berendt, Elzbiety (ed.): *Mom ja skarb. Smaki tradycji dolnośląskich* [Traditional tastes of Lower Silesia]. Wrocław, Muzeum Narodowe we Wrocławiu, pp. 132–134.

- Abkowitz, Mariola (2013): Listy, listy [Letters, letters]. In: Berendt, Elżbieta (ed.): *Mom ja skarb. Dolnośląskie świętowanie – miejsca, rzeczy, rytuały* [Lower Silesian feasts – places, things, rituals]. Wrocław, Muzeum Narodowe we Wrocławiu, pp. 164–167.
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- Csató, Éva Á. (2012): Språkdokumentation: En utmaning för humanistisk forskning [A challenge for humanities]. In: Jeffner, Anders (ed.): *Språk och ordkonst i Österled* [Language and literature in the Orient]. Stockholm, Kungl. Vitterhets Historie och Antikvitets Akademien (Konferenser 79), pp. 9–21.
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- Kobeckaitė, Halina (2012): Karaimai tarp garsiausių Lenkijos tiurkologų [Karaims among the famous Polish Turcologists]. *Trakų žemė* No. 44.
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