

KARAITE SELF-PERCEPTION: A STUDY OF TWO VILNIUS PERIODICALS *KARAIMSKOYE SLOVO* AND *MYŚL KARAIMSKA*

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Abstract: This study aims to reconstruct the self-perception of the Karaite community in Vilnius during 1913–1939. The research is based on a review of two Karaite periodicals, *Караимское слово* (*Karaite Word*), published in Russian from 1913–1914, and *Myśl Karaimska* (*Karaite Thought*), published in Polish from 1924–1939. Both periodicals served to develop national self-awareness and a spiritual revival of the whole Karaite nation by covering history, politics and literature. In *Karaimskoye Slovo*, Karaites identified themselves as Israelites; in *Myśl Karaimska*, some high-level representatives openly emphasized their Turkic origins. State and institutional discrimination against the Jewish population had become a major issue over the years, creating a volatile platform for change while breaking with the eternal sense of Karaite identity as people of Israel. This paper contributes to the literature on the history of the Karaite community in Vilnius in the early decades of the twentieth century.

Karaimskoye Slovo (*Караимское слово*) was one of the most important Russian-language periodicals of early twentieth-century Imperial Russia. The first such publication in the Lithuanian community, it was printed from June 1913 to June 1914. The periodical was published by A.I. Shpakovskiy (А.И. Шпаковский) and edited by Ovadiya Pliyich Pilecki (Овадія Ільичь Пилецкій). Its editorial office was located in a building of the Karaite community in Gorodskaya Street, “Zverinets,” Vilnius (г. Вильна, “Звѣринецъ,” Городская ул., домъ Караимской Общины). It was printed by the brothers D. and Kh. Yalovtser (Типографія братьевъ Д. и Х. Яловцерь). According to the preface of the inaugural issue, the periodical served to develop national self-awareness and a spiritual revival of the entire Karaite nation:

While starting the publication of the periodical, which is the first such publication among Karaites living in the northwest region, we are filled with deep awareness of the necessity and importance of this printable instrument for our small nation, and we believe that it will benefit the cultural interests and the development of national consciousness. Our periodical – independent of political partisanship – aims to acquaint like-minded people with bygone times,

educating them in historical facts relating to the history of the Karaite people and with the works of our ancestors, with their mistakes and achievements, with their joys and sorrows.¹

Issued monthly, *Karaimskoye Slovo* covered history, politics, and literature. It published poems by M. Sinani (М. Синани) and Pravdin (Правдинъ), Turkic Karaite-language poems by M. Akhbash (М. Ахбашъ), and literary works by A. Katyk (А. Катыкъ) and M. Sinani. Among its writers contributing for at least one year were Tobiasz Lewi-Babowicz (Товия Леви-Бабовичъ), Aron Katyk (Аронъ Катыкъ), Kseniу Abkowicz (Ксенія Абковичъ), Moses Pilecki (Моисей Пилецкій), Borys Kokenaj (Борисъ Кокенай), Abraham Szyszman (Авраамъ Шишманъ), Moses Firkowicz (Моисей Фиркович), and Mid-dor-Èl'-Dur (Миддор-Эль-Дуръ). The journal chronicled the everyday life and general activities of the Karaite communities in issues, and it ranged from 17 to 27 pages in length. It also ran an informal matchmaking service, publishing the letters of spouse-seekers. It printed thanksgiving letters, appeals for financial aid, marriage announcements, and obituaries and death notices of notable Karaite people. The journal was widely distributed, including throughout Vilnius, Yevpatoria, Simferopol, Yalta, Pskov, Bakhchysarai, Odesa, Feodosiya, St. Petersburg, Sevastopol, Trakai, Berdyansk, Melitopol, Kyiv, Kharkiv, Mykolaiv, Kherson, Sumy, Lutsk, Armyansk, Panevėžys, Kremenchug and Moscow.

After Poland gained independence in 1918 following the end of the First World War, Lithuania became part of the Second Polish Republic. The Polish-language journal *Mysł Karaimska* (*Karaite Thought*) was established in 1924 on the initiative of the Vilnius Community of Karaites (Wileńskie Stowarzyszenie Karaimów). In 1934, publication was transferred to the Society of Karaite Lovers of History and Literature (Towarzystwo Miłośników Historii i Literatury Karaimskiej), producing ten issues from 1924–1939.² The paper, printed in A5 format, averaged 30–40 pages in the 1920s, growing to 140–160 pages in the 1930s. Ananiasz Rojecki served as the first editor for five years, then the post was transferred to Ananiasz Zajączkowski, an academician, and under his direction the journal took on a scholarly dimension. *Mysł Karaimska* dealt with such interdisciplinary topics as Karaite history, ethnography, anthropology, and philology. Karaite and Polish authors alike, including Seraja Szapszał, Szemaja Firkowicz, Tadeusz Kowalski, Józef Wierzyński, Marian Morelowski and Tobiasz Lewi-Babowicz contributed extensively to the journal, authoring a number of articles.³ The scientific, literary and sociological journal sought to unite all Polish Karaites to serve the entire nation, while simultaneously preparing for a better future:

The Karaites who have found themselves within Poland's borders have quickly adapted to the new conditions. For regaining the Borderlands was nothing more than the reclaiming of those

¹ “Начиная издание нашего журнала, который является первым опытом среди караимовъ, живущихъ въ Сѣверо-Западномъ краѣ, мы полны глубокаго сознанія необходимости и значенія этого печатнаго органа для нашего маленькаго народа и вѣримъ, что онъ послужитъ на пользу культурнымъ интересамъ и развитію національнаго самосознанія. Журналъ нашъ внѣ всякихъ политическихъ партій, онъ ставитъ главной своей идеей знакомство нашихъ единомышленниковъ съ давно минувшимъ временемъ, знакомство съ старинными фактами, относящимися къ исторіи караймскаго народа, знакомство съ дѣлами нашихъ предковъ, съ ихъ ошибками и заслугами, съ ихъ радостью и горемъ.” *Karaimskoye slovo* 1913, no. 1: 1.

² It is worth mentioning that after the Second World War many Karaites moved to Poland. Two continuing issues were published in 1946–1947 in Wrocław.

³ Sulimowicz 1999: 13–14.

neighborhoods which once belonged to the Polish Republic [...]. *Karaites Thought* will be a herald of all Karaites issues and current affairs. In its columns we will consider all aspects of our social and religious life, while giving space to various trends of Karaites thought – starting from the assumption that beneficial compromise emerges from opposition.⁴

The periodical actively promoted Karaites culture, including the transition of Karaites into a truly modern language. It published not only original Karaites texts, but also translations into Karaites (for example *Oda do młodości* (*Ode to Youth*) by Adam Mickiewicz), which sparked the development of the standard Karaites language. As a result, the elevated status of the Karaites language made it the choice for twentieth-century writing. (In interwar Poland, Lutsk became a center of cultural activities. Aleksander Mardkovicz initiated the Karaites-language periodical *Karaj Awazy* (1931–1938) and also published *Elijahunun ucuru* (*jomak*) (1932), *Birtihi keklernin* (1931), *Szelomit* (*jiry ulu siwerliknin*) (1938), *Tozdurhan birtik* (*bary icin – dert surada*) (1939), *Aj jaryhynda* (1933), *Halic* (1932), *Janhy jirlar* (1932), *Aziz Tas* (1934), *Karaj sez-bitigi. Słownik karaimski. Karaimisches Wörterbuch* (1935), and *Luwachlar dert jilha* (5693–5696) (1932)).⁵

The Vilnius periodicals *Karaimskoye Slovo* and *Myśl Karaimska* were both created by the same Lithuanian Karaites community, but by different generations. Only a short amount of time – eleven years – separated the Polish Karaites existence from the Russian Karaites past, but at the same time these formed one Karaites history. While *Karaimskoye Slovo* dealt with the most heated polemics in the election of a new hakham, protecting candidates and even defending Seraja Szapszał against allegations of his opponents,⁶ *Myśl Karaimska* had already published articles by Szapszał as the hakham – making this title more Turkic and constantly praising his achievements.⁷

⁴ “Karaimowie, znalazłszy się w granicach Polski, przystosowali się rychło do nowych warunków. Bo odzyskanie przez Polskę ziem kresowych było niczem innym jak rewindykacją tych dzielnic ongiś wchodzących w skład Rzeczypospolitej [...]. Rzecznikiem wszystkich zagadnień i aktualnych spraw karaimskich będzie „Myśl Karaimska”. Na jej szpaltach rozpatrywać będziemy wszystkie zagadnienia naszego życia społecznego i religijnego, dając jednocześnie miejsce różnym kierunkom myśli karaimskiej, wychodząc z założenia, iż z przeciwieństwa wyłania się zbawienny kompromis.” *Myśl Karaimska* 1924, no. 1 (vol. 1): 1–2.

⁵ Kizilov 2015: 139. Underlying the status of Karaites language, Halich scholar, Zarach Zarachowicz, wrote in *Myśl Karaimska*: “In addition to the Karaites religion, the second treasure that our ancestors left us and that we should preserve is our mother tongue. Our mother tongue, the language spoken by our fathers, which we use in our lives and that our mothers used to lull us to sleep, we should protect and improve more and more. Beside the biblical language that every Karaites should know – because this sacred language is used to pray to God and praise His name, the works of our scientists, knowledge of which is also the duty of every Karaites, are written in this language – each Karaites should know his language, use it at home and in social life, for what will uplift Karaim if our language and religion are forgotten?! [Oprócz religii karaimskiej, drugim skarbem, który pozostawili nam nasi przodkowie i którego strzedz powinniśmy, jest nasz język macierzysty. Język macierzysty, ten język, którym mówili nasi ojcowie, którym posługujemy się w naszym życiu i którym matki nasze do snu nas kołysały, powinniśmy pielęgnować i czem razem więcej go doskonalić. Obok języka biblijnego, który każdy Karaim znać powinien – bo w tym świętym języku modli się do Boga i chwali Imię Jego, w tym języku pisane są dzieła naszych uczonych, poznanie których jest także obowiązkiem każdego Karaima – każdy Karaim powinien znać swój język, używać go w życiu domowym i towarzyskim, bo cóż będzie akcentować Karaimizm, jeśli język i religia nasza będą zapomniane?!]” *Myśl Karaimska* 1924, no. 1 (vol. 1): 6.

⁶ *Karaimskoye slovo* 1913, no. 2: 1–2; *Karaimskoye slovo* 1913, no. 5: 1–2.

⁷ *Myśl Karaimska* 1928, no. 4–5 (vol. 1): 1–4; *Myśl Karaimska* 1929, no. 1 (vol. 2): 3–4, 5–22; *Myśl Karaimska* 1932–1934, no. 10 (vol. 10): 1–10.

Importantly, the well-known author Tobiasz Lewi-Babowicz authored texts in both periodicals (in *Karaimskoye Slovo* under the pen name of Lewi).⁸ In 1911, he was ordained as the elder hazzan in a Sevastopol Karaite kenesa, where he worked until 1931. In 1936 he left Sevastopol for Cairo to head the Karaite Egyptian community.⁹ During that time, Russian, Turkish, Egyptian and Austrian-Galician Karaites constituted one indivisible community subject to their Religious Consistory in Yevpatoria and the hakham – the supreme head of the clergy.¹⁰

Reading the Vilnius periodicals referring to the origin and formation of the Karaite community, one can find some changes in self-perception of this – as they always emphasize – small nation. This seems rather unrealistic, as the Vilnius Karaites represented the same academic circles and institutions of their ancestors and studied their historical writings. However, it should probably be interpreted as insight into the exact historical time of the existence of the Karaite community, as it provides evidence for two distinct possibilities.

It is clear that most of the historical facts remain constant and unchanged, especially those regarding religious matters. They concern the keeping of the written Mosaic Torah pure in the Karaite community, which naturally caused long-term conflicts with the Rabbanites. Karaites rely solely on the Holy Scriptures in the form in which they were approved prior to the Talmud. They reject any oral traditions and interpretations that have no biblical basis. In the words of the two publications considered here:

<i>Karaimskoye Slovo</i>	<i>Myśl Karaimska</i>
They [Karaites] constitute a sect which differs from the rest of the mass of Jews by an intense devotion to one of the sacred books of the Old Testament and the absolute negation of all the interpretations and elements added to the Talmud later on as oral traditions passed down by their forefathers, and which are revered by Rabbanites as on par with the Holy Scripture. ¹¹	Indeed, Karaites consider themselves – and not unjustifiably – to be the only followers of the elevated teachings of the prophet Moses in their completely flawless form, relying only on the books of the Old Testament without the later additions of the Talmud, Kabbalah or any other interpretations. ¹²

Taking into consideration the ways Karaites differed from the Rabbanites, one should understand the meaning of the name ‘Karaites,’ as it clearly refers to the reading process. *Karaimskoye Slovo* took notice of the word *Mikra*, which is derived from the Hebrew verb for *to read*, and used it to designate the Karaites, who were strict followers of the Bible. *Myśl Karaimska* focused on the grammatical question of why the only correct

⁸ *Karaimskoye slovo* 1913, no. 5: 3–4; *Karaimskoye slovo* 1913, no. 6: 8–10; *Karaimskoye slovo* 1914, no. 11–12: 9–16; *Myśl Karaimska* 1928, no. 4–5 (vol. 1): 25–29; *Myśl Karaimska* 1929, no. 2 (vol. 2): 25–32.

⁹ Ельяшевич 1993: 120–122.

¹⁰ *Karaimskoye slovo* 1913, no. 6: 5–6.

¹¹ “Они составляют секту, отличающуюся от всей остальной массы евреевъ буквальною привязанностью къ однимъ священнымъ книгамъ Ветхаго Завета и безусловнымъ отрицаниемъ всѣхъ толкованій и прибавленій, которыя въ качествѣ устныхъ преданій, завѣщанныхъ праотцами, вошли впоследствии въ составъ талмуда, чтимаго раввинистами наравнѣ съ Священнымъ Писаниемъ.” *Karaimskoye slovo* 1913, no. 6: 8

¹² “Rzeczywiście, Karaimowie uważają się i nie bezpodstawnie za jedynych wyznawców wyniosłej nauki proroka Mojżesza w postaci zupełnie nieskażonej, opierającej się jedynie na księgach Starego Testamentu bez późniejszych dodatków Talmuda, Kabały i t. p. tłumaczeń.” *Myśl Karaimska* 1924, no. 1 (vol. 1): 3.

form should be *Karaims*, and not *Karaites*. Zajęczkowski wrote several reviews to prove his point to that effect.¹³ Moreover, his later writings do not even mention *Mikra*, instead referring to the *Kur 'ān*.¹⁴

<i>Karaimskoye Slovo</i>	<i>Myśl Karaimska</i>
<p>In modern literature they [Karaites] are called <i>Karai</i> or <i>bene-Mikra</i>, which means “sons – textants.” They have obtained this name, firstly, because they profess the doctrine of Pentateuch (Torah) in its full text, and, secondly, in order to distinguish them from the whole mass of Jews, known in the literature under the name of <i>bene-Yehuda</i> (i.e. sons of Jude), who accepted the teachings of the Talmud with its many oral traditions and interpretations by the rabbis.¹⁵</p>	<p>Now the word <i>Karaim</i> is the plural form of the Hebrew <i>kara</i> [...] in both Polish and Western European literature: “Muslim,” which also comes from the plural form of the Persian <i>muslim-an</i> (in the singular form of Ar. <i>muslim</i>). So we have a complete analogy with the name “<i>Karaim</i>,” which therefore does not represent anything extraordinary [...]. Bałaban’s artificial coining of the name “<i>Karaites</i>” with the ending <i>-ita</i>, from the root <i>kara</i> does not have the slightest historical justification.¹⁶</p>

Myśl Karaimska was careful to draw a clear distinction between Karaites and Jews, denying any mutual contacts. A. Rojecki and A. Zajęczkowski wrote extremely critical reviews of Majer Bałaban’s book *Karaites in Poland* to put an end to this inaccurate co-identification. They openly rejected any association with the Jewish people, and – as A. Zajęczkowski strongly emphasized – their Old Testament religion did not make Karaites Jewish. The matter of language and anthropological differences should be taken into consideration when forming an opinion. Karaites should not be considered only as a religious group, but as one having the right to national self-determination.¹⁷ In the same way, *Karaimskoye Slovo* pointed out the differences between Karaites and Rabbanites,

¹³ *Myśl Karaimska* 1928, no. 4–5 (vol. 1): 68–69, 74; *Myśl Karaimska* 1935–1936, no. 11 (vol. 11): 86–87.

¹⁴ In 1946 A. Zajęczkowski concluded: “It seems to be not subject of doubt today that the term *Karaj* in the traditional sense ‘followers of Scriptures’ was based on the meaning of Semitic *kara* in the Islamic-Quranic use: *kara’a* ‘read, recite scripture, text,’ where the term *Kur ‘ān* ‘Text or the Holy Scriptures of Muslims, the Quran’ came from. [Wydaje się bowiem nie ulegać dziś wątpliwości, że termin *Karaj* w znaczeniu tradycyjnym ‘wyznawców Pisma’ powstał w oparciu o znaczenie semickiego *kara* w użyciu muzułmańsko-koranicznym: *kara’a* ‘czytać, recytować Pismo, Lekturę’, skąd sam termin *Kur ‘ān* ‘Lektura czy Pismo Św. Muzułmanów, Koran’.]” *Myśl Karaimska* 1946–1947, no. 24 (vol. 2): 31.

¹⁵ “Въ современной же литературѣ ихъ именуютъ Караи или бене-Микра, т. е. сыны-текстанты. Имя это они приобрѣли, во-первыхъ, потому что исповѣдуютъ учение «пятикинжія Моисея» (Тора) въ олномя его текстѣ, и, во-вторыхъ, для различія отъ общей массы евреевъ, извѣстной въ литературѣ подъ именемъ бене-Югуда (т.е. сыны іудеи), принявшіе учение талмуда со множествомъ его устныхъ преданій и толкованій раввиновъ.” *Karaimskoe slovo* 1913, no. 6: 4.

¹⁶ “Otóż to, że wyraz *Karaim* jest już liczbą mnogą od hebrajskiego *kara* [...] w literaturze zarówno polskiej, jak i zachodnio-europejskiej: „Muzułmanin”, która również pochodzi od liczby mnogiej perskiej *muslim-an* (w liczbie pojed. ar. *muslim*). A więc mamy tu zupełną analogię do nazwy „*Karaim*”, która zatem nie przedstawia nic nadzwyczajnego [...] sztuczne urabianie przez Bałabana nazwy *karaita* za pomocą końcówki *-ita* od tematu *kara* nie ma najmniejszego usprawiedliwienia historycznego.” *Myśl Karaimska* 1928, no. 4–5 (vol. 1): 68–69.

¹⁷ *Myśl Karaimska* 1924, no. 1 (vol. 1): 3–4; *Myśl Karaimska* 1928, no. 4–5 (vol. 1): 35–69.

mphasizing that the two groups refused to intermarry or to bury their dead in the same cemeteries. They even avoided eating together.¹⁸

<i>Karaimskoye Slovo</i>	<i>Myśl Karaimska</i>
<p>Karaites stand in marked contrast to Jews-Talmudists when compared for appearance, households, dialects and religious practices [...]. All the Karaites' rites, holidays, time calculation, calendars, religious items, as well as all their prayer books and literature, although written in the ancient biblical language the Jews use, have nothing in common with this nation.¹⁹</p>	<p>Karaites never considered themselves Jews. They differ from those [people] not only in religious practice, but also in using the [different] language – the essential condition for being a nation. There are also major anthropological differences between Jews and Karaites.²⁰</p>

This was, in fact, a traditional way in the Karaitic literature to indicate the distinctions between Karaites and Rabbanites living in the same region ('*Adderet 'Eliyyahu* by Eliyahu Bashyatchi, *Dod Mordekay* and *Lebuš malḳut* by Mordechai ben Nisan, *Me'irat 'Enayim* by Simḥah Isaac ben Moses Lutski). When it came to religious passion, it provoked such a torrent of discussions that the gap between the two groups grew progressively wider. Although it may have contributed to a process of change in self-perception, *Karaimskoye Slovo* revealed an affirmative attitude toward Israeliness and to the matter of seeing a Karaite uniqueness inside the whole of Israel. On the other hand, *Myśl Karaimska* reflected the tendency toward Turkic self-awareness and referred to Israel as only the spiritual motherland that attracted believers of three religions – Mosaicism, Christianity and Islam. Therefore, Karaites did feel a longing to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

¹⁸ *Караймское слово* 1913, no. 6: 8.

¹⁹ “Караймы рѣзко отличаются отъ евреевъ-талмудистовъ по внѣшнему виду, домашнему быту, нарѣчю и религіознымъ обрядамъ [...]. Всѣ обряды богослуженія караймовъ, ихъ праздники, лѣтоисчисленіе, мѣсяцесловы, религіозные обиходы, а равно и молитвенные книги и вся литература, хотя и написаны на древне-библейскомъ языкѣ, какъ и у евреевъ, ничего общаго не имѣютъ съ послѣдними.” *Ibid.*: 5–6.

²⁰ “Karaimi nigdy siebie za Żydów nie uważali. Od tych bowiem dzielą ich nie tylko różnice w kulcie religijnym, lecz i język – ten zasadniczy warunek bytu narodowego. Również i pod względem antropologicznym zachodzą tak istotne różnice między Żydami i Karaimami.” *Myśl Karaimska* 1928, no. 4–5 (vol. 1): 36.

<i>Karaimskoye Slovo</i>	<i>Myśl Karaimska</i>
[...] Karaites, practicing the Law of Moses, and Jews, who accepted the Talmud – the doctrine of the rabbis – have been called the one common name of Israelites. Therefore, the majority of historians and almost all the nations, being hardly acquainted with the pastimes of Karaites, relegate them to being Jews, Talmudists. ²¹	This love of the Holy Land along with the Karaite confession was accepted by newly-converted Turkic peoples, today’s Crimean and Polish Karaites. ²²

It is not surprising that the locals misidentified Karaites and Rabbanite Jews, as they were closely linked and related historically. The general term *Jews* (*judaie*, *żydzi*) was commonly used in official documents of both groups, and Karaites authored many papers to prove they did enjoy the highest and most ennobling form of their sovereigns’ benevolence. It was Karaites – not Rabbanite Jews – who gained the favour of local, regional, and national rulers to cement their own rights and safeguard their continued existence. It is worth noting here the Privilege of Grand Duke Casimir Jagiellon on 27 March 1441, which conferred Magdeburg rights on *judaei Trocenses*; the Privilege of Grand Duke Alexander Jagiellon on 17 December 1492 which confirmed the Privilege of 1441 at the request of *judaei, cives Nostri de Troki*; the Privilege of Grand Duke and King Sigismund I the Old on 23 November 1507, which was also bestowed upon *judaei Trocenses* and confirmed the Privilege of 1441; the Decree of King Władysław IV Vasa on 3 December 1646, which forbade the Rabbanite Jews, ‘*żydom rabinom*’ (as opposed to the Trakai Karaite Jews ‘*żydzi Troccy Karaimowie*’), to settle in Trakai; the Privilege of King Władysław IV Vasa on 3 December 1646, which confirmed the Privileges of 1441, 1492 and 1507 for *judaeorum Trocensium, rithus Karaimici*; and the Privilege of Grand Duke and King Stanisław Augustus on 12 November 1776, which confirmed various previous privileges for *żydom Karaimom Trockim* (or simply *Karaimom*).²³ In *Myśl Karaimska* Szpapszał also referred to the edicts decreed by the Crimean khans, such as the Edict of Khan Selâmet I Giray of September 1608 (Jumada al-awwal 1017 according to Hidzhra), the Edict of Khan Canibek Giray on 24 December 1610 (8 Shawwâl 1019 according to Hidzhra), the Edict of Khan İnyet Giray of July 1635 (Muharram 1045 according to Hidzhra), the Edict of Khan Mehmed IV Giray of April 1642 (Muharram 1052 according to Hidzhra), the Edict of Khan Murad Giray of April/May 1679 (Rabi’ al-awwal 1090 according to Hidzhra), the Edict of Khan Devlet II Giray of January 1699 (Rajab 1111 according to Hidzhra), and the Edict of Khan Qırım Giray of October 1768 (Jumada al-awwal 1182 according to Hidzhra). The edicts

²¹ “[...] караймы, исповѣдующіе Законъ Моисеевъ, и евреи, принявшіе талмудъ, т.е. учение раввиновъ именуется однимъ общимъ именемъ израильяне. Поэтому большая часть историковъ и почти всѣ народы, не зная вполнѣ исторіи караймовъ, считаютъ ихъ заодно съ евреями-талмудистами.” *Karaimskoye slovo* 1913, no. 6: 3–4.

²² “To umiłowanie Ziemi Świętej wraz z wyznaniem karaimskim przejęły nowonawrócone ludy tureckie, dzisiejsi Karaimi krymscy i polscy.” *Myśl Karaimska* 1930–1931, no. 3–4 (vol. 2): 26.

²³ Фирковичъ 1890: 1–53; *Myśl Karaimska* 1924, no. 1 (vol. 1): 22; *Myśl Karaimska* 1928, no. 4–5 (vol. 1): 38–39.

were addressed to the Jewish nation, Jews of Kyrk Yer,²⁴ although in everyday life the Karaites were not considered Jews, for example, as Szapszał claims: “local people of Trakai and surrounding areas referred to Karaites as the Kyrgyz.”²⁵ The author emphasizes Jews as ‘unrighteous people’ who seemed to assume the Karaite interests. *Karaimskoye Slovo*, on the contrary, focused on explaining the superiority of Karaites to Jews-Talmudists, referring to their blameless lifestyle and conscientious discharge of duties as a reflection of Karaite morals and teachings.

<i>Karaimskoye Slovo</i>	<i>Myśl Karaimska</i>
<p>[...] they [Karaites] have not only avoided the distortion of their faith from the Talmud, but have escaped from that moral and civil humiliation which became the heritage of the Rabbanites. Generally, Karaites are not viewed with the same disgust and contempt as the Rabbanites by the Christians and Muslims. They deserve this exception because they carry themselves and behave in a more humane, tolerant, sincere and amicable way of living.²⁶</p>	<p>[...] Jewish scholars and writers [...] literally do not look favorably on any issue or fact towards Karaites to discredit them artificially, to cast a shadow of suspicion, and ultimately to impede or complicate [perception]. Jews claim all good (generally recognized as Karaite) and throw all the evil on Karaites.²⁷</p>

As far as the above goes, it should also be stressed that *Karaimskoye Slovo* contains a report of B. Stern (Б. Штернь), director of the Odessa Jewish School, to the Governor-General of Novorossiya and Viceroy of Bessarabia Region, Count M.S. Vorontsov (М.С. Воронцовъ), published in the magazine of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, 1843, vol. 2. It states: “Among the Jewish people (Western nations call all Israelites Jews or Judeans) [...] there is a noteworthy specialty denoting a very sharp contrast to the general mass of the Jews. This is a handful of descendants of Abraham and guardians of the Law of Moses, known as ‘Karaites’ [...]. They make up a sect which is different from the rest of the mass of Jews [...].”²⁸ For many years, Karaites were no longer petitioning to be

²⁴ Фирковичъ 1890: 57–105; *Myśl Karaimska* 1929, no. 1 (vol. 2): 18.

²⁵ “Ludność miejscowa z Trok i okolic nazywa Karaimów kirgizami.” *Myśl Karaimska* 1929, no. 1 (vol. 2): 20.

²⁶ “[...] они не только спаслись отъ искаженія своей вѣры талмудомъ, но и избѣгли того нравственнаго и гражданскаго униженія, которое досталось въ удѣль раввинистамъ. Вообще караимы не возбуждаютъ къ себѣ ни въ христианахъ ни въ мусульманахъ такого отвращенія и презрѣнія, какъ раввинисты. Они и заслуживаютъ вполнѣ это исключеніе, ибо сами держатъ и ведутъ себя гораздо чловѣчнѣе, общежителнѣе, искреннѣе и дружелюбнѣе.” *Karaimskoye Slovo* 1914, no. 7–8: 6.

²⁷ “[...] uczeni i pisarze żydowski [...] nie pozostawiają literalnie żadnej kwestii lub faktu, korzystnego dla Karaimów, aby sztucznie nie dyskredytować go, rzucić cień podejrzenia, lub w ostateczności zahamować czy też powikłać. Wszystko dobre (powszechnie uznane za karaimskie) przywłaszczają sobie Żydzi, wszystko złe rzucają na Karaimów.” *Myśl Karaimska* 1929, no. 1 (vol. 2): 17.

²⁸ “Въ народѣ еврейскомъ (западныя народы евреями или іудеями называютъ всѣхъ израильтянъ) [...] есть своя достопримѣчательная особенность, составляющая весьма рѣзкое исключеніе въ общей массѣ евреевъ. Это горсть потомковъ Авраама и блюстителей Закона Моисеева, извѣстная подъ именемъ «караимовъ» [...]. Они составляютъ секту, отличающуюся отъ всей остальной массы евреевъ [...]” *Karaimskoye slovo* 1913, no. 6: 7–8.

regarded as Karaite Jews, but rather Karaites, as it seemed to be the only way to avoid misidentification with Rabbanite Jews, who were not in the favour of the local authorities. This strongly indicates the economic and social reasons behind the denial of being a Jew, and that being a Karaite does not exclude being a direct descendant of Abraham and thus automatically an Israelite. When *Karaimskoye Slovo* claimed Israeli origin as an undeniable, self-evident truth, in the sense of being immediately obvious to every Karaite, *Myśl Karaimska*, to the contrary, referred to Turkic origins, purposefully presenting this theory as a statement of absolute unchanging truth, and that there was no reason to doubt this truth that can be proved.

<i>Karaimskoye Slovo</i>	<i>Myśl Karaimska</i>
<p>Whatever it once was, today the undeniable historical truth is that the current Crimean Karaites, and therefore the Lithuanian, Volhynian and Galician Karaites who sprouted from them, are in fact the direct descendants of a special branch of Israelites who separated from their brethren in the ancient days, before the age of the Babylonian captivity, and penetrated into the territory of current Russia from the depths of Central Asia.²⁹</p>	<p>The relationship between Karaites and Cumans,³⁰ the heirs of the Khazar land, is not in doubt. Despite the linguistic ties [...] there is also a commonality of culture [...]. Among the Crimean Karaites the Polovtsy people exist to this day, and they still bear in their official surname of <i>Komän</i> direct proof of their origins from the Cumans.³¹</p>

Not surprisingly, the same views are expressed in other articles. As *Karaimskoye Slovo* refers to the Holy Scripture (2 Kings 10, Ezra 1 and 4, Neh 13),³² *Myśl Karaimska* refers to studies by Smirnow, Chwolson, Czacki, Nowosielski, and Syrokomla.³³

²⁹ “Какъ бы то ни было, неоспоримою историческою истиною оказывается теперь, что нынѣшніе крымскіе караимы, а потому и происходящіе отъ нихъ караимы литовскіе, волынскіе и галиційскіе суть прямые потомки особенной вѣтви израильтянъ, отдѣлившейся отъ своихъ собратьевъ во времена стародревня, еще до эпохи вавилонскаго плена, и проникшіе въ предѣлы нынѣшней Россіи изъ глубины Средней Азій.” *Karaimskoye slovo* 1914, no. 7–8: 6. Moreover, I would like to present another citation from the article by Troitskiy referring to the lost Israeli tribes: “Belonging undoubtedly to the descendants of the ten tribes of the kingdom of Israel, led away into captivity earlier than the other two tribes of the kingdom of Judah, Karaites could have quite naturally preserved the oldest text of the Holy Scriptures completely free from the influence of Rabbinism. [Безъ сомнѣнія принадлежа къ потомкамъ десяти колѣнъ царства израильскаго, уведеннымъ въ плѣнъ прежде остальныхъ двухъ колѣнъ царства собственно іудейскаго, караимы весьма естественно могли сохранить у себя древнѣйшій текстъ св. писанія, совершенно свободный отъ вліянія раввинизма.]” *Karaimskoye slovo* 1914, no. 7–8: 4.

³⁰ The Cumans, or Polovtsians, were a Turkic people; Jabłonowski 1878: VI.

³¹ “Związek między Karaimami i Kumanami, tymi spadkobiercami ziemi chazarskiej, nie ulega wątpliwości. Pomimo związków językowych [...] istnieje także wspólność kultury [...] wśród Karaimów krymskich do dziś dnia egzystuje cały ród połowiecki, w urzędowym swem nazwisku noszący bezpośredni dowód swego pochodzenia od Kumanów, mianowicie *Komän*.” *Myśl Karaimska* 1930–1931, no. 3–4 (vol. 2): 7.

³² *Karaimskoye slovo* 1914, no. 9–10: 12.

³³ *Myśl Karaimska* 1928, no. 4–5 (vol. 1): 37, 42.

<i>Karaimskoye Slovo</i>	<i>Myśl Karaimska</i>
[...] The Karaites are indisputably the direct descendants of one of the ten tribes of Israel, captured after the defeat of their kingdom in Samaria. ³⁴	These Turkic tribes were to be peoples belonging to the giant Khazar state, partly also strains of Cumans or Polovtsy. As is known, the Turkic origin of Karaites today is generally accepted in European studies. ³⁵

In light of the discoveries made in *'Abne Zikkaron* by the famous Karaite Abraham Firkowicz, both periodicals paid special attention to the Khazars and a so-called “notable person in Karaite history,” Isaac Sangari, who was originally considered – up until the modern Israeli research on the Eastern European Karaites³⁶ – to have converted the Khazars to Karaism. Bearing in mind the important fact that both periodicals were marred by many short-sighted mistakes arising from forgeries of Firkowicz’s manuscripts and tombstones, which could not be properly studied in those days, one should take notice of the two different conclusions drawn from accepted truths and based on their own understanding.

Karaimskoye Slovo suggested that its readers should have enough information to critically evaluate the work described in the Karaite-Rabbanite literature and conclude that only Karaites – pure Biblists, *bene Israel*, the children of Israel – converted the Khazars to their religion, not the Rabbanites. But claims that the Karaite settlements were already so strong in the eighth century that they were able to subdue – as it was emphasized – the “wild hordes,” created a complex problem in the historical development of research into origins. The process of conversion caused some people to form an opinion that Karaites originated “from the Tatar people (отъ татаръ).” However, *Karaimskoye Slovo* did not share this view, referring to Karaites solely as descendants of Israel.

On the other hand, *Myśl Karaimska* presented Khazars not only as people who had converted to the Karaite faith, but it also described them as the ancestors of modern Karaites. Szapszał and Zajączkowski claimed that Firkowicz’s discoveries did reinforce the probability of the Khazar origin of Karaites, and the authors repeatedly referred to the Khazar heritage through the prism of the Karaite language, lifestyle and culture. Furthermore, after the Second World War, *Myśl Karaimska* – now published in Wrocław – paid more attention to Khazars and their heritage from a Karaite perspective. For example, Zajączkowski wrote “About the Khazars culture and its heirs,”³⁷ and Czekanowski authored “On the issues of Karaite anthropology.”³⁸

³⁴ “Караимы безспорно прямые потомки одного изъ десяти колѣнь сыновъ израилевыхъ, взятыхъ въ плѣнь послѣ разгрома ихъ царства въ Самаріи.” *Караймское слово* 1914, no. 9–10: 12.

³⁵ “Temi plemionami tureckimi miały być ludy, wchodzące w skład olbrzymiego państwa chazarskiego, częściowo także szczepy Kumanów czyli Polowców. Jak wiadomo, tureckie pochodzenie Karaimów jest dziś w nauce europejskiej powszechnie przyjęte.” *Myśl Karaimska* 1935–1936, no. 11 (vol. 11): 85.

³⁶ Shapira 1998–1999: 231–240; Shapira 2002–2003: 223–260; Шапира 2003: 535–555; Shapira 2008: 233–245.

³⁷ *Myśl Karaimska* 1945–1946, no. 1 (vol. 23): 5–34.

³⁸ *Myśl Karaimska* 1946–1947, no. 2 (vol. 24): 3–23.

<i>Karaimskoye Slovo</i>	<i>Myśl Karaimska</i>
<p>[...] the Khazar temples were established in Crimea before the prevalence of Rabbinism. Indeed, Khazars, being a wild and semi-nomadic nation, accustomed to unbridled freedom, could not, of course, be submitted to the heavy yoke of the Talmud, bound by rabbis, a yoke, the Divine Founder of Christianity called “the grievous burden.” Karaism could conquer them only in the primitive purity of Biblism that prevailed in the Crimean kenasa before the invasion of Rabbinism. The era when the Talmud, having penetrated into Crimea, ignited the pushback by taking the name and the character of Karaism, undoubtedly initiated the falling away of Khazars from Karaism, shocked by the internal split and their separation into Muslims and Christians. Only a few of them could, with their extraordinary passion, still remain faithful to kenasa, and they probably settled in Solkhat among the Karaite community, which was then the most important on the whole peninsula. Distanced from the strife, they peacefully spent their patriarchal life there. (This afforded grounds for some historians to believe that Karaites have descended from the Tatars).³⁹</p>	<p>The fact that on Karaite tombstones we find names of Turkic roots long before the appearance of the Tatars in the Crimea, that the language of Crimean Karaites has such Turkic archaisms, which are not known in the Tatar language, that until this day the Polish-Lithuanian Karaites speak a Turkic dialect – according to lexical resource, especially archaism, and while standing closest to the ancient language of Polovtsy, or Cumans (XIII, XIV) – all this confirms the theory of Firkowicz regarding the connection of Karaites with Khazars. For, after all, the latter ones – living in areas of the Taurida Peninsula long before the appearance of Tatars and even of Polovtsy, who were converted by Karaites to Mosaicism, – made their language their own, which – as it can be determined – belonged to the group of Turkic languages.⁴⁰</p>

³⁹ “[...] храмы хазарские установились в Крыму еще до водворения раввинизма. И действительно, хазары, народ дикий, полукочевой, привыкший к необузданной свободе, конечно, не мог бы подчиниться тяжкому игу талмуда, скованного раввинами, игу, которое сам Божественный Основатель христианства называл «бременем неудобноносимым». Караимизм мог покорить их только в первобытной чистоте библизма, господствовавшего в кенаса крымских до вторжения туда раввинизма. Эпоха, в которую талмуд, проникнув в Крым, возбудил здесь оппозицию, принявшую имя и характер караимизма, без сомнения положила начало отпадению хазар от караимизма, потрясенного внутренним расколом, и разделению их между мусульманами и христианами. Только немногие из них по особому увлечению могли остаться еще верными кенасе и они то, вероятно, поселились среди общины караимской в Солхат, тогда важнейшей во всем полуострове. Здесь они, удаленные от распри, мирно проводили свою патриархальную жизнь. (Это дало некоторым историкам повод полагать, что караимы происходят от татар).” *Karaimskoye slovo* 1914, no. 7–8: 5–6.

⁴⁰ “Fakt, że na nagrobkach karaimskich spotykamy imiona o tematach tureckich na długo przed zjawieniem się Tatarów na Krymie, że mowa Karaimów krymskich posiada takie archaizmy tureckie, jakich nie zna język tatarski, że Karaimi polsko-litewscy do dziś dnia mówią narzeczem tureckim, co do zasobu leksykalnego, nadzwyczaj archaizmem a najbliższym stojącym języka dawnych Połowców, czyli Kumanów (w. XIII, XIV), – wszystko to potwierdza teorię Firkowicza o połączeniu się Karaimów z Chazarami. Boć przecie ci ostatni, żyjący na obszarach półwyspu Taurydzkiego na długo przed zjawieniem się tam Tatarów, a nawet i Połowców, będąc nawróceni przez Karaimów na mozaizm, uczynili tymże swego języka, który, jak da się stwierdzić, należał do grupy języków tureckich.” *Myśl Karaimska* 1928, no. 4–5 (vol. 1): 42.

The historical reason behind such an interpretation of the Khazar conversion, which is no longer recognized, is the fact that Karaites, living in a Christian society, wanted to prove they were not involved in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. *Karaimskoye Slovo* inclined its readers to believe that Karaites arrived in Crimea before the building of the Second Temple: “and after their captivity, they did not go back to Jerusalem because Karaites do not observe the holiday of Hanukkah, celebrated by Jews-Talmudists in memory of the consecration of the Second Jerusalem Temple.”⁴¹ *Myśl Karaimska* totally neglected the question of when Karaites came to Crimea, deciding instead to focus on the transformation of Karaites into indigenous Turkic-speaking residents of the peninsula. Highly placed Karaites promoted the new view of the Karaite peoples as having Turkic origins, moving away from any Israeli connection, thus contributing to the post-war Karaite history.

To sum up, *Karaimskoye Slovo* and *Myśl Karaimska* remain highly significant sources regarding Karaite history. Despite the misinterpretations of the above historical sources, and others, it is undeniable that most of the printed periodicals can serve as reliable material for Karaite studies, as they were written by Karaites themselves. In publishing a number of articles, they promoted the religious and cultural understanding of being a Karaite, language learning on a deeper level, and the study of literature and history. Most notably, they presented numerous facts and a range of views, allowing readers to capture the process of change in the perception of the Karaite identity, which was a result of the rising interest in Turkic studies, starting in the interwar periods and surviving almost an entire century.

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