Karaite Education in Crimea at the End of the 19\textsuperscript{th} Century: An Unknown Resolution\textsuperscript{1}

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Abstract
The article is a contribution to studies of Karaite education in Eastern Europe. It presents an unknown resolution of the Taurida and Odessa Spiritual Consistory dated to 1898, which approved a new system of education in the Karaite communities of the Taurida and Odessa Spiritual Consistory. It was a formal act that formalized the transformation of Karaite education that was gradually taking place in the second half of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, and its permanent re-alignment in relation to the Russian education system of that time. This resolution is important as it contributed to a decline of the Hebrew language and Hebrew literature in the Karaite community.

Keywords
Karaite Education, Karaites in Cirmea, Karaites in Lithuania, Eliyyahu Bashyatchi, Shelomo ben Aharon

As our knowledge of the traditional Karaite education system is relatively limited, I would like to start by presenting a general outline of traditional Karaite education in previous periods, mainly in the 17\textsuperscript{th} and 18\textsuperscript{th} centuries. For this reason, I will quote two exceptional texts which provide us with a description of Karaite education in the period between the 15\textsuperscript{th} and 18\textsuperscript{th} centuries. They come from \textit{Seper ham-Mi\textsuperscript{v}rot han-Niqra' \textsuperscript{2} Adderet Eliyyahu} by Eliyyahu Bashyatchi (c. 1420–1490)\textsuperscript{2} and \textit{Seper \textsuperscript{3} Appiryon Asa Lo} by Shelomo ben Aharon

\textsuperscript{1} This article is based on the author’s MA thesis \textit{Pages from the History of Karaite Education in Eastern Europe}, written at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań in 2013 under the supervision of prof. Piotr Muchowski.

\textsuperscript{2} Written about 1480, first printed in Constantinople in 1531/2.
These texts do not directly refer to Crimea; however, they certainly present the Karaite education system in the communities in Eastern Europe in that period well.

ʾAdderet Ṣeliyyahu was the widely recognized legal code of the Karaites in Eastern Europe. It is a compendium of religious and social regulations. Undoubtedly, Karaite communities in Eastern Europe fully respected and applied its legal articles, including those regarding education. Eliyyahu Bashyatchi speaks on education in the chapter Ṣasa Ṣaqqarim, in the paragraph Ḥa-ʾiqqar haš-šiši. He formulated ten principles for the education in the Midrash, i.e. at school. These rules take the form of recommendations concerning various aspects of teaching, among others, the age at which boys should start learning (the age of six), the appearance of the school building, the character requirements for a teacher, the need for material support for poor children to enable their effective education, and the teaching methodology, focused on the study of the Torah and the Hebrew language, i.e. the holy language.

The second work, Šeper Ṣappiryon Ṣasa Lo by Shelomo ben Aharon, was created at the turn of the 17th and 18th centuries. It was redrafted several times and several versions of this text have been preserved. However, the earliest version originated at the end of the 17th century, when Shelomo ben Aharon visited Riga University, at the invitation of its rector, Professor Johan Puffendorf. In the 40th column of the first part of Šeper Ṣappiryon, he gives a description of Karaite education in Lithuania. This description supplements the description in the Sixth Principle of Bashyatchi. It is generally in accordance with his recommendations. Shelomo ben Aharon emphasizes that in his day, teaching in the Karaite communities was conducted in the traditional way, as in earlier centuries. He enumerates three stages of education, which he calls Bet Rabban, Midrash, and Yeshiva. He states that learning starts with the alphabet; next, children learn “words and phrases”; and later, prayers and

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3 A shorter version was published in print by Adolf Neubauer in 1866, see Neubauer 1866. A longer version was published by Yosef Algamil in 2000, see Algamil 2000.


5 See Haqdama (Introduction) in Dod Mordekhay by Mordekhay ben Nisan; Mann 1935: 578, note 36.


7 The text of this column was first published by Moshe Güdemann, cf. Güdemann 1886, and next by Jacob Mann, cf. Mann 1935: 1444–1451.
blessings, as well as proper behaviour in the synagogue. At this stage, the most important task is learning to recite the Torah and its translation into the language of daily use, *leshon Ishma'e'l*, i.e. the Karaite (Tartar) language. This was the first stage of education. Shelomo ben Aharon reports that when a boy has made progress in the study of the Torah, then he starts the second stage of education – the study of *Nevi'im* (the Prophets) and *Ketuvim* (Writings). At this stage, students become skilled in the *peshat* method of translation. They do not have a complete knowledge of the Torah and they are obliged to continue their studies. As Shelomo ben Aharon emphasizes, a common method of teaching is repeating the studied material by asking questions.

It is unclear how long this stage of studies lasted and how many hours per day the students had to spend at school. We can assume that the whole process took a few years, depending on the child’s abilities. If a student was talented, he could start the study of grammar, including the parts of speech, verb conjugations, roots and other subjects. Shelomo ben Aharon underlines the importance of grammar, repeating after David Kîmî that a person who knows the holy language (*leshon haq-kodesh*) but does not know its grammar is “like a deaf person who leads oxen and has no stimulus in his hand” and that “in all languages, grammar is the first principle of knowledge”.

During this period, students practiced writing and making exercises in “the lucidity of style”, i.e. the ability to formulate correct and clear statements. It seems that one of the major tasks given to students at this stage was copying literary works and documents. According to a description by Shelomo ben Aharon, the study was mainly based on the texts of *Gan *'Eden* by Aharon ben Eliyahu of Nicomedia and *'Adderet *'Eliyyahu* by Eliyahu Bashyatchi. On Shabbats, students studied Torah commentary from *Sepher Mi'har Yešarim* by Aharon ben Joseph ha-Rofe and *Keter Tora* by Aharon ben Eliyahu of Nicomedia. During holidays, they read Torah passages thematically, i.e. according to holidays. On the days of *Lag ba-'Omer* (i.e. between Pesach and Shavu'ot), study was focused on the articles of faith from *Sepher 'Asara Ma'amaraot* by Caleb Afendopolo. Shelomo ben Aharon also mentions that talented students were then encouraged to study books recommended by Eliyahu Bashyatchi in his *Sixth Principle*, including *'Eş Hayim* and mathematics textbooks by Nicomachus, Even Ezra, and Euclid, as well as books on astronomy and the natural sciences. Bashyatchi suggested the study of these

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books, indicating that “the science of pagans contains the words of our fathers, because during the exile they took our Books and translated them into their languages.” It is noteworthy that Shelomo ben Aharon emphasizes that Karaite recitation teaching, unlike rabbinic teaching, included learning about ten melodies attributed to biblical books. From the description of Shelomo ben Aharon, as well as other data, it can be deduced that the entire educational process lasted several years, and the students finished it around the age of 20.

This traditional system of education functioned in the Polish-Lithuanian communities until approximately the late 19th century, when it was gradually abandoned due to rigorous legislation in the Russian Empire and the compulsory education of Karaite children in Russian schools. The archive of the Troki Spiritual Consistory was partially lost during the First World War, and we are thus not able to trace this process. However, in the light of the general changes in education in Lithuania during the second half of the 19th century, resulting from the Tsarist policy of russification after the Polish Insurrection of 1863, we can presume that these changes started about 1867 and were finally sealed by laws making the use of Russian language in schools mandatory in 1885. The decline in traditional Hebrew Karaite education was undoubtedly an important factor in the acceleration of cultural and social change in Karaite communities during the 19th century.

With regards to the aforementioned resolution of the Taurida and Odessa Spiritual Consistory, which is the main subject of this article, I would like to emphasize that the economic situation of the Karaite population in Crimea at that time was definitely better than in Lithuania. The community was larger and, it seems, worked in a more conscious and reformative manner. Legal decisions taken by the Crimean Karaites regarding education were preceded by deliberations and discussions among the ḥazzans of the Consistory. Their primary objective was to better prepare young Crimean Karaites for professional activity, thus enabling the social and economic advancement of the whole congregation.

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9 Bashyatchi 1531: (ʿAsara ha-ʿiqqarim) 27 recto.
10 Cf. Kutrzeba 1920: pp. 158–161. Ḥazzan Izaak Charczenko’s memories are important evidence on this issue. He was born in 1841 and attended the Karaite school in Troki until the late 1840s. They clearly show that the school was run in a traditional manner in the mid-19th century. General subjects, like geography and history, were not taught. Charczenko was severely punished for attempting to study the Russian language on his own. Cf. Charczenko 1925.
The discussed resolution is preserved in the Archive of the Taurida and Odessa Spiritual Consistory in the State Archive of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, in collection 241, opus 1, number 1592. This is a copy of the original document. Its text was written in Hebrew on two sides of folio number 19. It belongs to a larger collection of resolutions adopted by the assembly of the *ḥazzans* of the Taurida and Odessa Spiritual Consistory in 1898. This resolution bears testimony to the changes in that period, evidencing a crucial moment in the transformation of the Karaite education.

The text on fol. 19 verso includes the curricula for study of the Hebrew language and religion. It reads as follows:

**סדר הלמוד לשפתנו הקדושה**

1. הלמדה שלמיים בשפתנו הקדושה על כל השמות הבנאים וברובם חכמים.
2. את התורות אלされました מצבס לילדי יחדconc ראלה קואו.
3. בבראשית ובראשית מבראשית: אמם.
4. בבראשית ובראשית מבראשית: אמם.
5. בבראשית ובראשית מבראשית: אמם.
6. בבראשית ובראשית מבראשית: אמם.
7. בבראשית ובראשית מבראשית: אמם.
8. בבראשית ובראשית מבראשית: אמם.
10. בבראשית ובראשית מבראשית: אמם.
11. בבראשית ובראשית מבראשית: אמם.
12. בבראשית ובראשית מבראשית: אמם.
13. בבראשית ובראשית מבראשית: אמם.
15. בבראשית ובראשית מבראשית: אמם.
16. בבראשית ובראשית מבראשית: אמם.
17. בבראשית ובראשית מבראשית: אמם.
18. בבראשית ובראשית מבראשית: אמם.
19. בבראשית ובראשית מבראשית: אמם.
20. בבראשית ובראשית מבראשית: אמם.
22. בבראשית ובראשית מבראשית: אמם.
23. בבראשית ובראשית מבראשית: אמם.
Translation:
“The order of teaching of our holy tongue”

1. To teach it to boys, the members of our people, who are educated in secondary schools and external schools.

2. As a rule, we decided to introduce it to all classes in this way.

3. First stage.

4. Reading and writing. The first five Chapters of the book Le-Regel ha-Yeladim by the scholar ribbi Eliyyahu Kazaz,\(^\text{11}\)

5. together with the rules of grammar, including a good knowledge of words by heart and their translation from one language to another.

6. Second stage.

7. From the book Le-Regel ha-Yeladim Chapters 6–12, including the recitation of the Torah and the translation of the Book of Genesis, Chapters 1, 2, 3, 4, 5.

8. Chapter 6 from verse 5 to the end. Chapters 7, 8. Chapter 9 to verse 17. Chapters 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 17, 18. Chapter 19 to verse 30.

9. Third stage.

12. 36, 37, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50. From the Book of Psalms, psalms 100, 113, 135, 150.
13. Fourth stage.
15. Chapters: 11, 12, 16, 17, 19, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27. From the Book of Psalms, psalms 3, 13, 15, 67, 95.
16. Fifth stage.
17. *Le-Regel ha-Yeladim* Chapters 31–44. The Book of Numbers, from Chapter 6, verses 22–27, Chapters 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 28, 29, 30, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36. The Book of Deuteronomy should be read in whole. Only in some places the verses inappropriate.
18. Verses 13–29 should be recited; in Chapter 27, only verses 20–24. After them, from the Book of Joshua Chapters 1, 10, 22, 23, 24. The Book of Judges should be read in whole. From the Book of Psalms, psalms 19, 24, 25, 29, 96, 97, 98.
19. Sixth stage.
20. The Book of Samuel, the First and the Second one. The Book of Kings, the First and the Second one. The Scroll of Esther. From the Book of Psalms, psalms 6, 20, 21, 22, 32, 33, 84, 86, 90, 91, 92, 103, 115, 118, 137, 148. And boys should be taught sayings taken from the Proverbs of Solomon, as it is noted in the book *Le-Regel ha-Yeladim*, in part 2, pages 1[10], 111, 112 by heart.

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12 The word לקריאה added above the line.
31. Note: individual cases, which are not specified in this list, the teacher will be able to
32. supplement with oral explanations, especially if the boys need help in understanding the sayings
33. which were read. Besides, as far as possible, efforts should be made to teach them to write clearly and nicely.
34. To avoid making this order of teaching too burdensome for the school-boys, the scholar ribbi Eliyyahu Kazaz promised to arrange presently
35. a way of teaching from his book *Le-Regel ha-Yeladim* in a different manner, most easy and correct.

Folio 19 recto includes recommendations for the curriculum for girls. We read there:

**סדר הלמוד לבנות הקראים**

1. קריאת לשוננו הקדושה, מקרן, ואסמן האפשר גוֹתְם, תפלה קרה, אוזה
2. ברכה: כנני, ברכה קדמ אוֹר הלומד, ברכה "המותא", ברכה תמה, ברכה השנה.
3. הבשכטם, עס תרגומיו, בָּן בָּלַשׁוֹן טַעְוָא, לֹפְדָר סַפְּרִי חֵבֵר הַקְּדוּשָׁה
4. (בָּמִיעל פֶּה הַמְּלַלָּד בֵּי מַעָּל פֶּרֶס בֵּי בֵּלַשׁוֹן אָבָּדָא) מַתִּיעַ עֶס בָּואֶר עֶקְר
5. האמונת מתני תמרענות ומילה תחליל, מילה החרות תחוור תומורת.
6. וביקייה נגשורים ותרשים לָא מְטוּאֶלֶב תפלה ד לְנַבֵּה דֵּל לְפַלְוָה דֵּל
7. אֶלְוַנְמַנְלַיִד.
8. חֵבֵר שְמַאְלָא פָּמְפְּלָד
9. וַהוֹצֵק סְלַתנֶסָר
10. וַהוֹצֵק פָּלָטָסְק
11. וַהוֹצֵק פּוֹסָס בֵּבָאָן בְּבָאָן
12. וַהוֹצֵק פּוֹלְטָהא יִפָּאָו שְמַעַה דַּבָּנֶסָא
13. וַהוֹצֵק פּוֹלְטָהא שְמַאְלָא לִגְמָנָא
14. אָלָיָה בֵּי אָלָיָה וְלֵי קָאָה.

14. נָגָה עַלְתַי אַלְוַדְיָה.
Translation:
“The order of teaching for Karaite girls”
1. Reading of our holy language, the Bible, and as far as possible, also writing, short prayer, some
2. blessings, for instance, the blessing before and after study, the blessing of *ham-Mōsi* (who bringest forth), the blessing of food, bedtime blessing, a blessing
3. after getting up – along with their translations, into the Russian or Tatar language, learning stories from the Holy Scriptures
4. (from the teacher’s mouth or from a book in Russian or another language), together with an explanation of the articles
5. of faith and issues related to the holidays and those commandments of the Torah which are the most weighty.
6. Appropriate prayers and blessings, as well as [some] order are required for the arrangements
7. presented above.
8. Ḥakham Shemuel Panpulov.\(^{15}\)
9. Ḥazzan Iṣḥaq Sultanski.\(^{16}\)
10. Ḥazzan Yufuda Sauskan.\(^{17}\)
11. Ḥazzan of the holy community Kaffa Babağan Babay.
12. Ḥazzan of the holy community Poltava, may God protect it, Simḥa Dubinski.\(^{18}\)
13. Ḥazzan of the holy community Gözleve Shemuel Neʾeman.\(^{19}\)
14. Eliyyahu ben Eliyyahu, of blessed memory, Kazaz.\(^{20}\)

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17 The *ḥazzan* in the community of Odessa.
This programme was most definitely prepared for the Alexandrian Karaite Theological School in Eupatoria, which was established in 1895. However, it was also adopted as an obligatory programme in all the schools of the Taurida and Odessa Spiritual Consistory where Karaite children were taught. The programme was to be implemented on the basis of the handbook of Eliyyahu Kazaz *Le-Regel ha-Yeladim*. Its author was one of the signatories of the resolution under discussion, and probably its initiator. As the headmaster of the Alexandrian Karaite School, he was undoubtedly a very influential person, and in fact, was the author of the new programme. It also is noteworthy that in 1896, a new, second and revised, edition of his book was published. It was evidently prepared by Kazaz for the needs of the new education programme. In comparison to the first edition of this textbook from 1869, many changes were introduced regarding the contents and arrangement of the material. In addition to this, the language of the explanations was changed. Instead of Crimean Tatar text written with Hebrew letters, Russian text written in the Cyrillic script was used in the second edition. This change seems symptomatic of the new educational policy of the Taurida and Odessa Spiritual Consistory, which opened the Karaite community to assimilation and integration into Russian society. Indubitably, the new programme resulted to a great extent from the educational policy and legal acts of the Russian authorities; however, the limited scope of the teaching of Hebrew and the Karaite religion (to only two or three years and three hours per week) was a deliberate decision, favouring a good general education over a knowledge of the holy language and literature in that language. Certainly, the resolutions of the Taurida and Odessa Spiritual Consistory were only a part of the new extensive policy that confronted the Karaites' emancipation, and the general social and economic changes in Russia during that period.

It should be emphasized that this new policy was considered controversial and was criticized by many members of the Karaite community. A different approach is well illustrated by two preserved statements of Karaite activists from that period, Avraham Kokkey and Shemuel Pigit. They were formulated

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a few years after the new programme was implemented, when its implications had already become noticeable.

In the introduction to his Ohel Avraham,23 a primer of the Hebrew language published in 1903, Avraham Kokkey highlights the rapid decline of the teaching of Hebrew and the loss of the knowledge of Hebrew in the younger generation. He writes that school-age children spend little time learning the language of the “holy Torah”, because they are overburdened with other duties. Consequently, young Karaites have only a limited knowledge of the principles and practices of their religion. Referring to their dim knowledge of Hebrew, he states “they do not know how to read even one syllable properly”, “they cannot even distinguish between alef, he, het and ayin”, “they are not used to distinguishing šere from hireq and also qames ḥatuf from qames ḥayav”, and “their writing is poor”. He notes that they cannot even recite the prayers.24

As a reason for this situation, he points to the decline of Karaite education, a lack of appropriate textbooks, and an inadequate school curriculum, in which learning Hebrew has been reduced to a minimum and replaced with learning Russian and secular subjects.

Similarly, Pigit writes in his book Davar Davur, which was published in 1904:25 “The new generation which takes the place of our fathers now knows neither Hebrew nor the jargon. They only learn Russian”. “Doubtless, in this generation, in its heart, there will be no spirit of Judaism. It is a large step

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24 Cf. Kokkey 1903: 6:

to assimilate into peoples. Within two or three more generations which will come after them, they will not know their roots, that they are from the sons of Israel, and they will mix with gentiles, will enter among them and they will not know that they have entered among them”. And next: “[…] and by the end of the 20th century, according to the Christian calendar, undoubtedly, there will be no one among us, among the citizens of the Kingdom of Russia, let its glory be great, who will know and understand the Tatar and Turkish language at all.”; “We are not afraid that the Turkish language and the mentioned literature will be forgotten by us and our offspring. The object of our grief is that along with them, the ability of learning our sacred language will be taken away from us. And that the study of the sacred books will become alien to us as well, in these days and in the days which will come. No one knows what our fate will be. The time will show us.”

There is a likelihood that the curriculum for the schools which was introduced in the Taurida and Odessa Spiritual Consistory and officially enacted in 1898 also had an impact on the curricula in the schools in the Polish-Lithuanian communities. The data here are incomplete, as the Archive of the Troki Spiritual Consistory was lost. Nevertheless, this impact can be noticed in the correspondence between representatives of the two consistories preserved in the Archive of the Taurida and Odessa Spiritual Consistory. In a letter of 20 June 1897, representatives of the Troki Spiritual Consistory asked the authority of the Taurida and Odessa Spiritual Consistory (in the Russian language) for the official Hebrew language and religion curricula in the Alexandria Karaite Theological School in Eupatoria, as a Karaite (primary) school was to be opened in Troki in September 1897, and in order to present them to the education authority official (the headmaster of school) of the Vilna Governorate. In reply, a letter was sent (on 4 August 1897; in the Russian language, as well) to the above-mentioned education authority official with a description of the curricula. It informed that the Alexandrian Karaite Theological School in Eupatoria functioned as a religious school supervised by the hakham of the Taurida and Odessa Spiritual Consistory and a public primary school under

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27 The State Archive of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, Fond 241, opus 1, number 728, fol. 14 recto.
28 The State Archive of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, Fond 241, opus 1, number 728, fol. 15 recto–16 recto.
the supervision of the education authority (school officials) of the Taurida Governorate. The faculty consisted of two teachers of “the language of the Torah” and one teacher of the Russian language and arithmetic; the first two were paid by the Spiritual Consistory and the third by the Ministry (i.e. the Ministry of People’s Enlightenment). The public primary school was a two-grade school whose curriculum was divided into five terms (three in the first grade and two in the second one). The Hebrew language (the holy language) was taught during five terms, whereas the Russian language and arithmetic were taught from the second to the fifth term. The Russian language was the language of instruction; however, it was explained that earlier (i.e. until the school year 1896–1897) teaching was conducted in “the language used in poor houses of Karaite families, in the dialect of Tatar”. This change resulted from the order of the Taurida and Odessa ḥakham. The attached curriculum for primary school students includes the following description (cf. fol. 15 verso – 16 recto): “During the first term, teaching reading and writing. During the second term, teaching the pupils fluent, mechanical reading, from the grammar §§ 1–7, from a practical textbook {of the ancient Hebrew language} of Kazas, including oral and written translation, from the ancient {Hebrew} Biblical into Russian and from Russian into ancient {Hebrew} Biblical, of the words included in given paragraphs, and including learning the vocabulary which refers to them. During the third term, from the Holy Scripture, translating the Book of Genesis. From the grammar §§ 8–24, from the quoted textbook, including oral and written exercises and vocabulary learning. During the fourth term, from the Holy Scripture, translating {the Books of Exodus} the b. of Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers. From the grammar §§ 25–34, from this textbook with exercises. During the fifth term, from the Holy Scripture, translating the Book of Deuteronomy. From the grammar §§ 35–44, from the textbook by Kazas. At the end, learning the nine fables in prose, featured in these paragraphs, by heart. During the recent stage, lectures for pupils are given (in the form of) oral conversations in Russian on primary dogmas of the Karaite faith.” At the end of the letter, it was explained that the Russian language and arithmetic were taught in accordance with the primary education curriculum of the Ministry of People’s Enlightenment.  

29 Cancellation marks.

30 I would like to give my acknowledgments to Veronika Klimova for translating this letter.
It can be concluded from this correspondence that the programme adopted in 1898, which changed the traditional model of education, served as a model for the curriculum of the Karaite public school in Troki, as well. Unfortunately, we are not able to explain if the textbook of Kazaz was also used as a basic manual in the schools of the Troki Spiritual Consistory. In the archives, I managed to find only one mention of the textbook of Kazaz dated 1937. It is quoted in a report on the teaching programme in the Karaite community of Luck, signed by the ḥazzan Rafał Abkowicz.31

Bibliography


31 It is quoted as Podręcznik języka hebrajskiego – J.Kazasa (The textbook of Hebrew language by J. Kazas). Cf. The Wróblewski Library of the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences, F 143–1023, fol. 147r. It seems however that it was only one of the textbooks used by ḥazzan Abkowicz in his teaching work. According to an oral account of his great-granddaughter Mariola Abkowicz, he also used the textbook Rešit Hokhma by Magnus Kryński (edited many times, among others in Warsaw, 1923). On Magnus Kryński see: http://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Magnus_Kryński. I would like to give my acknowledgment to Mariola Abkowicz for this information.


