

Dan Shapira: Review of Володимир
Шабаровський, *Караїми на Волині:
Штрихи до портрета загадкового народу*
[Volodymyr Šabarovs'kyj, *Karajimy na Volyni:
Štryxy do portreta zahadkovoho narodu*] ‘Karaims
in Wolhynia: Strokes to the portrait of an
enigmatic people’, Луцьк: ПВД «Твердиня»,
2013, 250 pages

A recent Ukrainian book by Volodymyr Šabarovs'kyj is a welcome addition to a steady stream of important publications in Ukrainian published in recent years in Ukraine – in Western Ukraine, one should note, but not in the Crimea where the majority of Ukrainian Karaites now live – dealing with different aspects of history, culture and the heritage of the Karaites and Karaims who once played their part in the ‘concert of the peoples’ of Ukraine.¹

One of a few recent Ukrainian books on the Karaites was the very learned catalogue of Karaite tombstone inscriptions from Halicz (Halych/Galich/Halič/חַלִּיץ/Галич) published by I. Jurčenko, O. Kefeli, N. Jurčenko, and O. Berehivs'kyj, *Karajims'ke kladovišče bilja Halyča. Kataloh nadmohyl'nych*

¹ According to the 2001 Ukrainian census, as mentioned in the book under review, p. 174, there are 1,196 Karaites (“*karaimy*”) in the Ukraine, 671 of them in the Crimea; 72 of the total and 52 from the Crimea claimed their mother tongue as Karaim, whatever that might mean.

pam'jatnykiv, L'viv, Halyč 2000.² What is interesting is that in both cases we are met with the fruit of the labour of scholars who either were self-funding or were supported financially by their relatives and friends. In these two cases, we find the continuation of the Eastern-European *Heimatskunde* tradition, where all the elements of the history and culture of a particular *kleine Heimat* should be studied and documented. Šabarovs'kyj is an inhabitant of Deražne/Derazhnia near Łuck/Lutsk in Wolhynia; Derazhnia and its destroyed Karaite community appear largely in the book; as for Łuck, it was once, together with Troki/Trakai (Kar. Troch), the former joint capital of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania where Karaites had settled by the mid-15th century. Being an independent scholar, Šabarovs'kyj is the author of several articles on aspects of Karaite history in Wolhynia,³ and his book is a welcome addition to our "Karaite shelf".

The book seeks to provide for the Ukrainian reader the Karaite past of the Ukrainian homeland, which is a laudable aim. In doing so, the author has made an impressive effort to collect under one cover nearly all the information about the Karaites of Wolhynia available in Polish (translated into Ukrainian), Western-Ruthenian, Russian, and Karaim (translated into Ukrainian). It is a pity, though, that the bibliography includes just one Hebrew title (Samuel Poznański's edition of *Zekher Šaddiqim* by Mordechai Sultanski. Poznański's name, in fact, is not even mentioned as the editor in the bibliography but is mentioned on p. 175 as the one who *printed* Sultanski's work⁴).

² Cf. my review in the Hebrew journal *Pe'amim* 103 (2005), pp. 147-150.

³ Cf., e.g., M. Nosonovskij, V. Šabarovskij *Karaimy v Deražno: stixotvornyj rasskaz o razrušenii obščiny* [<http://www.coe.neu.edu/~mnosonov/kar/>]; М. Носоновский и В. Шабаровский, Караимская община XVII века в Деражном на Волыни, *Вестник Еврейского Университета в Москве* 9, 27 (2004), pp. 29-50; compare now Michael Nosonovsky, The Karaite Community in Deražne and its Leader Ḥazzan Joseph ben Yeshu'ah, *Eastern European Karaites in the Last Generations*, ed. by Dan D.Y. Shapira and Daniel J. Lasker, Ben-Zvi Institute and the Center for the Study of Polish Jewry and its Culture, Jerusalem 2011, pp. 17-35. There are more articles by Šabarovs'kyj to appear soon.

⁴ Cf. also the photo on p. 130, a page from Poznański's edition with his notes. It is unfortunate that the author did not arrange a comparison between some traditions

One of the strongest sides, if not the strongest side of the book, is the author's extensive use of local archival material. The author has shown, for instance, that Avraham Firkowicz moved in 1810 from a village in the vicinity of Łuck to this city not because he lost his money in the miller business, but because the Russian authorities expelled the Jews living in the villages, as often occurred, in fact, during the 19th century. Šabarovs'kyj identified the village where Firkowicz had lived as Zalavie, a place that no longer exists, in the Równe/Rovno/Rivne province (pp. 8-9). It is possible that Firkowicz was even born in Zalavie, and not in Łuck, as had previously been believed. It appears that the family business was the production and retailing of spirits. In the awkward language of the Russian official document, the family "was exercising/practising the sale of brandied wine" (упражнялась продажею горячего вина, p. 92). According to the document, there lived in Zalavie, in 1809, Samoil, the son of Shlioma Firkowicz who was 45 years old; his wife, Sura, the daughter of Moszko, 40 years of age; their sons Abram, 22 years old (=Avraham son of Shemuel Firkowicz); Moszko, 14 years old; the daughters Malka, 16 years old; Ester, 6 years old; Khania, 3 years old; and Abramko's wife, Khania who was 18 years old.⁵ The *pater familias* had a house of his own in Łuck. In the village he had two horses, three heads of oxen, and all of his property was worth 1,000 *zloty* in value.

According to the same Russian archival document, published in the book under review, in another village in the vicinity, Pianie (also no longer existing), there lived Jos' (Yos'), the son of Moszko Czuczorowicz, and his family. He was 40 years old, his wife Sura, the daughter of Samoilo was 36 years old. Their son was Moszko and the daughters Rukhlia, 17 years old, Szonia, 13 years old, and Mencza, one year old. The *pater familias* also had a house of

found in Sultanski's book (written in 1838/9) and the parallel material found in Tadeusz Czacki, *Rozprawa o żydach i karaitach*, Wilno 1807, for in many cases, Sultanski was dependant on Czacki. This omission is especially regrettable in light of the author's apparent awareness of such dependence.

⁵ I transcribe the Hebrew names from Cyrillic into Latin while using a mixed English-Polish orthography, which is self-evident in each case, hopefully. Note, however, the Yiddish-sounding forms of the proper names. To some extent, this is also a characteristic of some Karaite family names from Łuck and Halicz (like Sulimowicz).

his own in Łuck, whereas in the village he had two horses, six heads of oxen, and all of his property was worth 2,000 *zloty* in value.

A couple of years ago the well-known collector of Judaica and Karaitica, Mr. Alfred Eidlisz of New York, showed me a copy of Abravanel's Commentary on the Pentateuch printed in Venice in 1579. According to a handwritten inscription on this printed copy, in 1816/7 Avraham Firkowicz regarded himself as a student of "R. Yoseph ben Moshe, ḥazzān of the village of Pyy'n". At the time I was unable to tell Mr. Eidlisz who this Yoseph ben Moshe was, and where to look for the village of Pyy'n, but now, thanks to the Russian archival document found and published by Šabarovs'kyj, we learn that Jos'/Yos' son of Moszko Czuczorowicz of the village Pianie and R. Yoseph ben Moshe, the ḥazzān of the village Pyy'n are one and the same person, a Karaite villager with six oxen working in the vodka-business, and quite a Hebrew scholar, incidentally, a situation reminiscent to that described in one of H.N. Bialik's poems.

In too many cases, the author, while bringing small gems from unknown or overlooked sources, fails to interpret the valuable evidence properly. Thus, on p. 61 the author tells us that in 1924 there was at the school in Łuck a nine-year-old pupil, a "Russian of the Karaite faith", and one gymnasium student who was a "Pole of the Karaite faith". The author is at pains to explain this seemingly unsolvable situation; however the solution is very simple being an exercise in categorization. In 1859, Avraham Firkowicz petitioned the Russian government to grant the Karaites various privileges (see *O proisxoždenii sekty Karaimov*"; *o darovannyx" im" v" raznyja vremena i raznymi pravitel'stvami preimuščestvax"*, *i o l'gotax" nyne imi isprašivaemyx"*, Sankt-Peterburg 1859, p. 13). *Inter alia*, he wrote that the Karaites are an indigenous (a very opaque word in Russian, which can be understood also as 'independent') sect of the Jewish Law/Torah (*samobytnaja sekta Iudejskago zakona*), who lack only the happiness of having been enlightened by the light of Christianity (*im ne dostajet tol'ko sčastija byt' ozarionnymi svetom Xristianstva*). The Karaites were therefore requesting no longer to be referred to as "Karaite Jews", but rather as "Russian Karaims of the confession of the Old Testament" (*Roskijskije Karaimy ispovedanija Vetxago Zaveta*). These *Roskijskije* [of Russia] *Karaimy* were soon shortened to *Ruskije Karaimy*.

Now, it is to be observed that in the Russian language all the ethnonyms are substantives except one, “Russian” (*rususkij*, fem. *rususkaja*), which is an adjective.

The historical reason for this, which is no longer felt, was the fact that the land and the people on it were in the possession of the Rus’/the Scandinavian (and other) Vikings. Thus, in Russian, *Rususkije Karaimy* ‘Russian Karaites (lit. Karaims)’ could mean both “the ethnic Russians who happened to be, regretfully,⁶ Karaites (Karaims) with regard to their religious confession of the Old Testament alone”, or “the Karaites (Karaims) who happened to be subjects of the Russian Empire”; you choose!

This is how the gradual and long process of what Roman Freund has called “the Karaite Dejudaization”⁷ began after the Karaites were granted equality in 1863 and the successive generations of the Karaites in the Russian Empire became accustomed to imagining or, presenting themselves as “Russians”, with its double meaning. When Łuck became Polish, after the collapse of the Russian Empire, the parents of at least one Łuck Karaite translated their former loyalty to the Russian Empire to the new loyalty to the Polish Republic, and this is how we got one “Russian of the Karaite faith” and one “Pole of the Karaite faith”: the parents of the “Pole” mechanically translated the adjective into a substantive.

The book is accompanied by many appendices and very interesting black-and-white photos and maps. As mentioned above, there are many small gems interspersed throughout this book. An example is the incidental mention of the fact that the *‘ezrath-našim*, the women’s gallery in the synagogue, was called by the Łuck Karaites *babinec* (p. 100), ‘the place for women’. Later, this *babinec* was used as a *genizah*. The author quotes a Polish tourist guidebook from 1929, according to which, in 1915 the Karaite synagogue (and its *babinec*?) was plundered by Hungarians and Talmudic Jews. This would seem to

⁶ See above, “*im ne dostajet tol’ko sčastija byt’ ozarionnymi svetom Xristianstva*”.

⁷ R. Freund. 1991. Karaites and Dejudaization. A Historical Review of an Endogenous and Exogenous Paradigm, *Acta Universitatis Stockholmiensis. Stockholm Studies in Comparative Religion*, No. 30, Stockholm.

be a reference to the Magyar soldiers in the Austro-Hungarian army and the local Rabbanite Jews, while practically all the Karaites of the Western Russian *gubernijas* had been evacuated deep into Russia or to the Crimea during the Great German Offensive of 1915. Now, an *'ezrath-našim* is not something one expects to find in a Karaite synagogue and apparently, it was an import from the Rabbanite synagogues. When, by the end of the 19th century, the Łuck Karaites discovered that they were not supposed to have one, they converted it to a *genizah*, in an effort to re-Karaitise their ways. The reason given in the book for the conversion of the *babinec* into a *genizah* is different, namely, the decrease in the number of the active members. Another highly interesting fact about this *babinec* is its Slavic name. As far as I know, no such term for the *'ezrath-našim* exists in Yiddish, and it is quite telling that the Karaites borrowed an element of the Rabbanite synagogues while they did not borrow its Hebrew name, having, instead, adopted a Slavic name; Professor Henryk Jankowski has kindly observed that the Lithuanian Tatars also use this Slavic term for a part of their mosque, so we probably have here an interesting example of a Karaite-Muslim interaction.

The author has apparently been fortunate enough to have traced the earliest source for the Eastern-European Karaite custom of burying their dead in a coffin (p. 75). This is the well-known 1790 petition of the Łuck Karaites to the last Polish *Sejm*. The author, however, has not recognized the value of his discovery; cf. p. 83, on the burial in shrouds in the past, “as the Jews do”. Indeed, the book overflows with such revealing penetration into a way of life that is no more.

One cannot avoid some criticism. The author frequently uses outdated or flawed sources for his presentation of what Karaism is and he continues the fruitless discourse about “the Karaites in the religious sense” versus “the Karaites in the ethnic sense” (pp. 6 ff., 11-13, 17ff., 159).⁸ The historical truth, in

⁸ Compare Mikhail Kizilov “Social Adaptation and Manipulation of Self-Identity: Karaites in Eastern Europe in Modern Times”, *Eastern European Karaites in the Last Generations*, ed. by Dan D.Y. Shapira and Daniel J. Lasker, Ben-Zvi Institute and the Center for the Study of Polish Jewry and its Culture, Jerusalem 2011, 130-153.

fact, is very simple. In Eastern Europe there used to live Yiddish-speaking Rabbanite Jews and Turkic-speaking Karaite Jews. In the era of secularisation, modernisation and nationalism, the Yiddish-speaking Rabbanite Jews chose to transform themselves into Hebrew-speaking Zionists (or, Marxists, Yiddishists, etc., etc.), while the Turkic-speaking Karaite Jews chose to transform themselves into a small secularised [post-]Turkic nation. All this belongs to the history of Eastern European nationalism. Similar projects and processes were under way in other parts of Eastern and Central Europe, too: as Adolf Ivar Arwidsson (1791-1858), one of the spokesmen of the Fennoman Movement and a speaker of Swedish, put it in plain Swedish, “We are no longer Swedes, we cannot become Russians, therefore we must be/become Finns” (Svenskar äro vi icke mera, ryssar kunna vi icke bli, därför måste vi vara finnar). The 19th and 20th centuries in Eastern and Central Europe were times of massive voluntary ethnic changes. It is not advisable to project 19th century ideological developments onto earlier periods. Ignorance of the shared Jewish history of the 19th and 20th centuries in Eastern Europe can only be detrimental to a scholar of Karaite history and culture.

Furthermore, the book is unfortunately marred by many mistakes arising from the author’s unawareness of modern Israeli research on the Eastern European Karaites.⁹ Thus the author speaks, in a vague manner, about the Khazar king Bulan and the made-up “Khazar missionary” Yishaq Sangari¹⁰ (pp. 27-28). He repeats the story about Sinan Ćelebi who was said to have

⁹ For example, *Eastern European Karaites in the Last Generations*, ed. by Dan D.Y. Shapira and Daniel J. Lasker, Ben-Zvi Institute and the Center for the Study of Polish Jewry and its Culture, Jerusalem 2011, and especially, for that matter, the article by D.J. Lasker, The Life and Works of Simḥah Isaac Lutski – A Preliminary Intellectual Profile of an Eighteenth-Century Volhynian Karaite, 36-56.

¹⁰ See Dan Shapira, Two Names of the First Khazar Jewish Beg, *Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi* 10 (1998-1999), 231-240; idem, Yitshaq Sangari, Sangarit, Bezalel Stern, and Avraham Firkowicz: Notes on Two Forged Inscriptions, *Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi* 12 (2002-2003), pp. 223-260; Dan Šapira, Jicxak Sangari, Sangarit, Becalel’ Štern i Avraam Firkovič: istorija dvux poddel’nyx nadpisej, *Materialy po Arxeologii, Istorii i Etnografii Tavrii* 10 (Simferopol’ 2003), 535-555.

come from Persia to the Crimea in 1500 CE (p. 29), which in my opinion was invented by Avraham Firkowicz,¹¹ quotes abundantly from modern Crimean pseudo-Karaite “scholars” (pp. 13, 35, 36, 39), ascribes to Avraham Firkowicz the theory about the provenance of the Eastern European Karaites from the Lost Tribes (p. 18) which Firkowicz never did;¹² and repeats the well-known mistake that Karaites were among the murdered in the Babi Yar in Kiev (p. 19; those whom the Russian writer, Kuznecov, called “Karaims” were no doubt some Christian Judaizers). He repeats the groundless assertion that the Soviet Marshal Rodion Malinovskij was a Karaite (p. 46; the family name existed among the Karaites of Troki in the Period of Reformation, but it is also found among Poles and Ukrainians); dedicates more than ten pages to the Karaite religion (pp. 30-42), while he quotes as his authorities Polkanov, Zajączkowski and Syrokomla – among whom only one was Karaite, ignoring authorities in this question.

The most important flaw with this book, in my view, is the fact that the author and his audience have not yet fully come to terms with the horrible heritage of living in the *bloodlands*, to use Timothy Snyder’s catchword (Timothy D. Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin*, Basic Books, Random House, 2010). It was in Wolhynia, the region whose long-since dead Karaite population is under scrutiny in the book, that the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA-b) organized the genocidal *Rzeź Wołyńska* between March 1943 – December 1944 (not to mention the ubiquitous Holocaust). Yet the author attempts to prove that the Karaite community of his own town Derazhnie was wiped out in 1648/9 not by the Ukrainian Cossacks of Chmielnicki, but by other factors, “maybe by the Poles or the Tatars” (the Sub-chapter on p. 142 is titled “Who Killed Whom?”), and considers (p. 8) the account of Yehudah ben Yeshu’ah, a survivor of the 1648/9 Derazhnie massacre, who had named the leaders of the Cossack murderers by their names, “not-objective

¹¹ *The Tombstones of the Cemetery of the Karaite Jews in Çufut-Qal’eh (the Crimea). Report of the Ben-Zvi Institute Expedition. A Collection of Studies*, edited by Dan D.Y. Shapira, Ben-Zvi Institute, Jerusalem 2008 [Hebrew; 563 pages], 233-245.

¹² *Ibid*, 8-54.

and tendentious”. He states that “the sudden outburst of Anti-Semitism can be explained not by the cruelty inlaid in the genes of the Ukrainians, but by another reasons” (p. 147), and “it is possible that the legend about wiping out the Karaites of Derazhnie by the Chmielnicki’s insurgents, and not by the Tatars, Poles or a regular band, could be a typical invention, of the sort of inventions about the Anti-Semitism of S. Petliura, S. Bendera, the UPA fighters or the Ukrainian Popular Republic’s Army” (p. 149; cf. p. 170). The author sympathetically mentions a Łuck Karaite young woman in the service of the UPA-b terrorists (pp. 46-47). In no place in the book does the author tell us what happened to the Karaites of Wolhynia in World War II, how they survived – which is an unstudied topic with too many unaccounted gaps. In many senses, World Word II is still there.

The book, however, is a good read. I would urge every Eastern European scholar of the Eastern European Karaites (and for this purpose, Israel is obviously an extension of Eastern Europe) to have the book on their desk, and every large university library in Eastern Europe, Israel and the USA, should have its copy.