

Dan Shapira: Review of Michał Németh,
*Zwięzła gramatyka języka zachodnio-
karaimekiego z ćwiczeniami 'A concise
grammar of western Karaim with exercises',*
Poznań: Katedra Studiów Azjatyckich
[= Prace Karaimoznawcze 1], 2011, 272 pages

This is an excellent primer of both dialects of the Qipchaq-Turkic language of the East-European Karaites, also called the Karaim, as written in Karaim publications in inter-war Poland. The primer contains texts in the Troki / Trakai / Troch dialect of the Karaim language on pp. 153-160, taken from the 1933-1939 publications in *Karay Awazy* (Poland) and *Onarmach* (Lithuania), the Karaim literary and cultural journals, and texts in the Łuck / Lutsk / Łucka dialect on pp. 161-174, taken from the 1930-1932 publications in *Karay Awazy*. On p. 159-160 there appears a pseudo-folkloristic text in the Troki dialect, first published in the well-known *Karaimsko-russko-pol'skij slovar'* of 1974 (the author of the text was, most probably, Seraja Szapszal; in the book under review the author appears as «unknown», *Autor nieznany*). The book contains a valuable Karaim-Polish vocabulary list of words in both dialects on pp. 247-258 (about 900 words) and a Polish-Karaim (of both dialects) vocabulary list on pp. 259-266. The short relevant bibliography (pp. 267-272), organized thematically, is mostly adequate (one would probably add Timur Kocaoğlu, in collaboration with Mykolas Firkovičius (1924-200), *Karay. The Trakai Dialect*, Languages of the World/Materials 458, Lincom Europa, Muenchen 2006, though this book is of limited value). But most importantly, the book contains excellent grammatical and phonetical descriptions of both dialects and it has exercises, and as such, is

of great help to every reader (or speaker) of Polish, who may wish to master a variety of spoken Karaim from the inter-war period.

After all, Polish was, and still is, one of the most important languages for scholars of East-European Karaites; it is in Poland that the majority of the descendants of the Eastern-European Karaites live and it is Polish in which they mostly write nowadays.

This was the Poland / Polish lands where almost all linguistic research on the Karaim language has been conducted: one of the first scholars who worked on the Turkic Karaim language, in Austria and in Poland, was the Pole Jan Grzegorzewski (1849-1922);¹ in the first half of the inter-war period, Poland became the place where academic research of the Turkic-Karaim languages flourished, with such a classic work, by Tadeusz Jan Kowalski (1889-1948), as *Karaimische Texte im Dialekt von Troki*, Kraków 1929, having been published;² and in the last decade or so, Polish scholars, once again, are becoming among the leaders of the field.³ There can be little doubt that in the forthcoming years – and, to a great degree, thanks to Németh's primer under review – we shall benefit from more and more progress in Polish Karaim scholarship.

¹ J.V. Grzegorzewski, Ein türk-tatarischer Dialekt in Galizien – Vokalharmonie in den entlehnten Wörter der Karaimischen Sprache in Halicz, *Sitzungsberichte der Kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Phil-hist. Classe*, Vol. CXLVI, Wien 1903, pp. 1-80; Caraimica. Język Łach-karaitów. Narzecze południowe (Łucko-halickie), *Rocznik Orientalistyczny* I.2 (1916-18), pp. 252-296; Narzecze południowe karaitów polskich t.zw. łach-karaitów, *Sprawozdania z czynności i posiedzeń Akademii Umiejętności w Krakowie*, XXII.3 (1917), pp. 2-6.

² Cf. also T. Kowalski, Język karaimski, *Myśl Karaimska* I.3 (1926), pp. 3-7; Pieśni obrzędowe w narzeczu Karaimów z Trok, *Rocznik Orientalistyczny* (1927), pp. 216-254, 343-344; Zu den türkischen Monatsnamen, *Archiv Orientální*, Vol. 2 (Praha 1930), pp. 3-26; Z pożółkłych kart, *Myśl Karaimska* 2: 3-4 (1930-31), pp. 12-25.

³ Among the post-WWII Polish studies on the Karaim, before the recent "wave" of publications by Henryk Jankowski, Michał Németh and others, the most important was J. Sulimowicz, Materiał leksykalny krymskokaraimskiego zabytku językowego (druk z 1734 r.), I-II, *Rocznik Orientalistyczny* 35.1 (1972), pp. 37-76; *Rocznik Orientalistyczny* 36.1 (1973), pp. 47-107. The language presented and studied in this work was, however, Karaim from Poland-Lithuania, not from the Crimea.

We still do not have a comprehensive *History of Karaim and Karaite Studies in Poland*, which would be of great value in enabling us to re-consider what seems to be obvious (and what is not); nor do we have a *History of the Karaim Language*. It is obvious that both topics are interwoven and, to a great extent, the history of the Karaim Studies in Poland is a part of the history of the Karaim language. We do not know why, after 1931, Kowalski refrained, unfortunately, from further investigation of Karaim literature, with only one 1936 article, the purpose of which was to mark the future tasks of Karaite / Karaim Studies, published.⁴ One might venture to suggest that this voluntarily withdrawal of this highly gifted Polish Orientalist from the field which, he, himself, actually had created, had something to do with the fact that a great part of the Karaite community in Poland has been virtually hijacked by leaders who were mixing up literature, scholarship and politics. Seraja Szapszal was elected / appointed as the head of the Polish Karaites in 1927-28, under the *Sanacja* regime of Józef Piłsudski (1867-1935), exactly when the Prometheism entered into its last and the most organized stage and lasted till 1932; in Poland, one of the biggest lobbyists of Szapszal – a prominent scholar of Azeri – was Memmed Emin Rasulzade (1884-1955), an eminent Azeri politician, scholar and author.⁵ Though Szapszal, himself, never was a member of any of the Promethean clubs or organizations, nevertheless, the history of the Karaim language in the inter-war Poland, especially between 1928-1939, should be viewed in the broader Promethean context. And this is, possibly, why Kowalski's book was published in 1929 – and after this date he rarely touched on Karaim issues; what is so fascinating about Németh's primer is the fact that his book deals exactly with the Karaim language at the stage of its development where Kowalski had stopped – the years of Szapszalian language-engineering.

⁴ T. Kowalski, Najpilniejsze zadania karaimoznawstwa, *Myśl Karaimska* IX (1936), pp. 12-23.

⁵ He had invited Szapszal to participate in the 1928 Ottoman-Turkish publication, *Türk Yılı*. He became related a bit later to Piłsudski by marriage; he settled finally in Poland after having been banned from Turkey, under Soviet pressure, in 1931.

Of course, all written languages are results of language-planning and language-ideology; what we, sometimes, tend to overlook is the fact that the Karaim language of the twentieth century is a very young language, a product of recent developments, and as such, it is no different from other modern languages, such as Lithuanian, Estonian, Modern Hebrew, YIVO Yiddish or Soviet Yiddish, Modern Kazakh or Modern Qazan Tatar, Modern Turkish of Turkey, and so on. And this is at odds with older literary languages – no less engineered – such as Literary Italian, Spanish, French, post-Luther German, Polish or English. In the case of the first group of the languages, we are sometimes better advised to follow the interaction between the language-creators and the scholars of this or that language. The twentieth century Karaim, especially that of the inter-war publications in Poland and Lithuania, is unique because we can see, almost in real-time, this interaction of creativity, scholarship and politics.

What is lacking in Németh's book is material from Halicz; the reason for this seems to be the fact that we have almost no written material in Karaim from this ancient and conservative community from the 1930s. This is strange and the research on this question is a *desideratum*. Mikhail Kizilov (*The Karaites of Galicia: An Ethnoreligious Minority Among the Ashkenazim, the Turks, and the Slavs, 1772-1945*, Studia Judaeoslavica, Leiden: Brill, 2008), though having mentioned the copying of Hebrew and Karaim texts at very late dates in Halicz, did not refer to the scarcity of Karaim material from twentieth century Halicz. Previously, Németh had published *Unknown Lutsk Karaim Letters in Hebrew Script (19th-20th Centuries). A Critical Edition* (= Studia Turcologica Cracoviensia 12), Kraków 2011, 416 pp., the book in which a language register different from that of the journal publications in *Karaj Awazy* was studied; Németh had also published, in 2011, an article on the phonetic differences between the Lutsk and Halicz sub-dialects; this would be understandable, in view of the demographic history of the Karaites in Łuck and Halicz, for the Karaite community of Łuck was repopulated from Troki in the late 17th - early 18th centuries and the closeness of the Łuck and Halicz sub-dialects is a secondary development.

In short, this new book by Michał Németh is a welcome addition to our Karaim shelf; it is inspirational in thought and contemplation.