

Michael Tarelko: Review of Michał Németh,
*Unknown Lutsk Karaim letters in Hebrew script
(19th–20th centuries). A critical edition,*
Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu
Jagiellońskiego [= *Studia Turcologica
Cracoviensia* 12], 2011, 416 pages

The main purpose of this publication is to serve as a critical edition of the sixteen handwritten letters (eleven private and five public) written by the Lutsk Karaims in the period from 1841 till 1923 years.

Firstly these documents were part of the collection of the Karaim temple (kenesa) in Lutsk. The building was damaged and robbed during the First World War. However at least a small part of the collection survived thanks to Aleksander Mardkowicz – a Karaim writer, poet and promoter of the Karaim language and culture (1875-1944). Later the manuscripts were included in the collection of the Karaim-born orientalist Józef Sulimowicz where they were catalogued and briefly described.

It is not the first work of Németh dedicated to Karaim issues. Before the publication of this book he had already published a number of the articles on the subjects of the Karaim etymology, textual studies and dialectology. Therefore this book is a natural continuation of the author's previous works.

The language of the manuscripts is Lutsk Karaim (a sub-dialect of the southwestern dialect) with Hebrew interpolations, except some short inscriptions in Russian and the manuscript catalogue number 54 consisting of the letter in Russian and the answer in Karaim. Six manuscripts are completely vowelled,

six are not vowelised and the other four letters are partially vowelised. Almost all the manuscripts are written in Hebrew script although the inscriptions and the letter in Russian of course are written in the Cyrillic alphabet.

It is the first critical edition of the texts written in the south-western Karaim dialect. The work, which required a knowledge of the Turkic, Semitic and Slavic languages, has been carefully carried out and at a high professional level.

The results of the work may be used in comparative studies. For example, there are numerous parallels between the writing of the published letters and the writing of the texts written by the Tatars of the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania with the Arabic letters in the Slavic (Belarusian and Polish) languages:

- So the letter *aleph* or *aleph* combined with vowel points is used for indicating word-initial vowels in the published Karaim letters: אבײלי [abajly] ‘honourable’ (p. 101, 106, 264); אײס [is] ‘work’ (p. 286). The same function of this letter is characteristic also of Slavic (Belarusian and Polish) texts in the Tatar manuscripts: البو [al’bo] ‘or’ (P97¹, fol. 14a:1; 33b:13); ابي [aby] ‘that’ (P97, fol. 11a:2; 41b:8); ام [im’e] ‘name’ (P97, fol. 30b:2) etc.
- In the published Karaim texts there is a tendency to distinguish velar [k] and palatal [kʲ] by using *koph* (ק) and *kaph* (כ), respectively, when rendering them (p. 103, 110, 122). The analogous tendency is in the Slavic (Belarusian and Polish) texts written with the Arabic letters by the Tatars of the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania. The velar consonant [k] is regularly rendered with ق (q): فاراڤس [karacʰ] ‘караць’ (P97, fol. 35a:6) ‘to punish’; قروڤ [krolʰ] ‘кароль’ (P97, fol. 5a:10; 5b:8 etc.) ‘king’, and the palatalised [kʲ] with the letter ك (k): منك [menkʲi] ‘пакуты’ (P97, fol. 11b:7) ‘torments’; ك [kʲedy] ‘калі’ (5a:11; 29b:12 etc.) ‘when’. The exceptions to this rule are very rare in both the Karaim

¹ Most of the examples were taken from the Tatar manuscript of the 18th century that is in the Central Scientific Library of the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus (catalogue number P97). Some texts of the manuscript were published in: ТАРЭЛКА, М., СЫНКОВА, І. 2009.

and the Tatar texts: כולדום [koldum] 'I begged' (p. 110); קין [kin] 'day' (p. 110); قلفادثونط [k'ilkadz'es'ont] 'some dozens' (P97, fol. 14b:2); قلفا قروص [k'il'kakroc'] 'some (times)' (P97, fol. 32a:6); غورالق [goralk'i] 'vodka' (P97, fol. 34a:3)².

- Furthermore, the palatal [ś] tends to be noted with *shin* (ש), as apposed to [s] rendered mainly by *samech* (ס) (p. 112, 123). Such distribution of the functions between the letters ש and ס in the Karaim writing can be compared with the functions of the letters س and ص in the Tatar manuscript: صين [syn] 'son' (P97, fol. 9b:6 etc.); سلا [s'ila] 'force' (P97, fol. 37a:8).
- Some parallelism can be seen also in the use of the letters of the emphatic and non-emphatic sounds [t̤] and [t] (p. 113). The letter ט in the published Karaim letters notes both [t̤] and [t], whereas ת is used in the words of Hebrew origin. In the Tatar manuscripts ط consistently is used for [t̤], while ت is used in the words of Arabic origin such as تفسير [tefsir] 'comment, translation', نيت [nijet] 'intention' etc.
- The letter *yodh* is occasionally used in the Karaim texts after *tzadhe* (צ) and *nun* (נ) to indicate palatals [č] and [ń] (p. 122, 124, 140, 211-210). The same way of marking the palatals is characteristic also of the texts in the Slavic (Belarusian and Polish) languages written with the Arabic letters by the Tatars of the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Compare, ژصيا [žyc'a] 'of life' (P97, fol. 34a:8)³; لصيونص [l'ec'onc] 'flying' (the manuscript of 1885, fol. 323b⁴); نيوياصط [n'ev'asta] (the manuscript of 1885, fol. 405a) 'woman'; فانيو [kan'u] 'to the horse' (the manuscript of the 20th century, fol. 232b:1⁵).

The list of the parallels between the orthographic systems of Tatar texts written in the Belarusian or Polish language with the Arabic letters and of the

² Antonowich was aware only of five such cases (Антонович 1968, с. 237).

³ The consonant [c] is rendered in the Tatar manuscripts with the special letter – ص with three dots below it. But we used ص in this and the following examples for the technical reasons.

⁴ The manuscript is in a private collection.

⁵ The manuscript is in a private collection.

Karaim texts especially in the words of Slavic origin can be continued. Both ethnic groups, being in the same state and inhabiting a common Slavic environment, could resolve the problem of the adaptation of Hebrew and Arabic script respectively to the non-Semitic texts in the same way and perhaps with possible mutual influence.

There is no doubt that this work is an important step in the study on both of the Karaim language in general and the Karaim dialect of Lutsk in particular. It is especially important since the Karaim language of the West of the Ukraine, which is now on the brink of extinction, served as the object of investigation. The work of Michał Németh is a significant contribution not only to Karaim studies proper but also to comparative historical linguistic research.

Bibliography

- АНТОНОВИЧ, А.К. 1968. *Белорусские тексты, писанные арабским письмом, и их графико-орфографическая система.* – Вильнюс: Вильнюсский гос. ун-т им. В. Капсукаса.
- ТАРЭЛКА, М., СЫНКОВА, І. 2009. *Адкуль пайшлі ідалы. Помнік рэлігійна-палемічнай літаратуры з рукапіснай спадчыны татарай Вялікага Княства Літоўскага.* Мінск: Тэхналогія.