

Dan Shapira: Review of Nesrin Güllüdağ,  
*Kırımçak Türkçesi Grameri* ‘A Grammar  
of Krymchak Turkic’, Ankara: Gece Kitaplığı.  
2014, 496 pages. ISBN 9786054942619.

The Qrimchaqs (Qırımçaqs / Qırımçaqs / Krimchaks / Krymchaks / Krymčaks etc.) were a Rabbanite-Jewish territorial-cultural-linguistic community. They were characterized by their residence in the Crimea, by their Turkic speech, and by the Rabbanite version of their Judaism that made them distinctive of the Crimean Karaites. Until the mid-1850s they had submitted to the leadership of the Karaites, and their entire history was marked by a long and sometimes problematic dialogue with their Karaite brethren and rivals.

Their Turkic speech was not too different from that of their Muslim neighbours in Qarasubazar in the Crimea, blending Qıpçaq and Oğuz features. Until the First World War their (very few) literary texts in Turkic were modelled on those of the Crimean Karaites. After the Sovietization of the Crimea, a short-lived attempt was made to create a “proletarian Krymchak literary language”, as reflected in I.S. Kaja, *Qrımcaq mektebleriniñ ekinçi sınıfına mahsus oquv kitabı*, Qrım devlet neşriyatı, Simferopol’ 1930. (In the book under review this work is quoted as *Qırımcaq Mekteblerinin İkinci Sınıfına Mahsus Oquv Kitabı*, Qırım Devlet Neşriyatı, 1930; indeed a substantial part of the Latinized texts on pp. 283–380 in the book under review come from this textbook).

It was an interesting experiment in Soviet language-building for it had two unique dimensions. One was the politics of the “proletarianization” of a Jewish language in the USSR. In the case of the Krymchak, this was the same as in the case of other Jewish languages of the USSR: Yiddish, Tati and Judeo-Bukharan. Secondly, the Crimean context of the Krymchak was unique because the Soviet language engineering of the Crimean-Tatar aimed at promoting a new

language based on dialects, mostly very close to the speech of the Krymchaks, at the expense of the already existing literary language of the *Tercümân*.

In the end, the Soviets abruptly stopped their attempts to educate the Krymchaks in their mother tongue, and eleven years after their Sovietized literary language had been created and subsequently abandoned, almost all of them were dead, killed by the Nazis, while the Crimean Tatars were expelled from their country by the Soviets in May 1944.

Although the Krymchak language or, “ethnolect”, as others call it, is practically dead, it is still very interesting from the point of view of a linguist or social historian to study the small Turkic literary corpus of the Krymchak. While doing so, the scholar should take into consideration the variety of synchronic, diachronic and stylistic levels and genres. These include the translations of the Biblical texts, always modelled on older texts, and, in the case of the Krymchaks, on those of the Karaites; folklore materials of non-Jewish provenance, which were mostly transmitted in their non-Jewish linguistic forms, a phenomenon known well from other Jewish linguistic communities, too. A very fruitful course would be a comparison of the linguistic facts of the Krymchak of the Soviet period with those of the Crimean-Tatar of the same period, for which there is an excellent 1992 grammar by H. Jankowski.

It is very interesting – and to the best of my knowledge not previously noted – that no attempt to create a literary language for the Crimean Karaites was made in the 1920s–1930s. This is especially enigmatic in the light of the very prolific process of linguistic engineering in inter-war Poland (and Lithuania), where the local Karaites reinvented themselves as a linguistic Turkic minority.

The author of the book under review, Dr. Nesrin Güllüdağ, is a highly trained linguist who is well-suited for these tasks. The result, however, is less than what one might have hoped.

On the cover of the book (designed by Ferhat Çakır) there appears a medieval image of some crusader-style knights. It is unclear what they represent, but this out-of-character design unfortunately suits well a book whose table of contents ends with the words “Hata! Yer işareti tanımlanmamış” (“Error! The index is not defined”) (p. XVIII).

The book has evidently not been proofread. It is not possible to note all the typographical problems, but this sample should be illustrative: “Budca-Tats” (p. 40) who appear in a row with “Sabataylar” and “Buharan Musevîleri”, apparently, copy-pasted from a source in English and not edited since. The same

applies to “Talit” (ayinlerde üzerinde adamların oturduğu şey) “**Jews**” ... (p. 47), and to “İsraillerin “**Pharaonian** Mısır’dan” ayrılışları” (p. 66) [the emphasis is mine, DSh]; “Kerpotoriye” (for \**Jevpatoriya*) and “bu ra-kamı” (p. 35).

The author hardly mentions the Hebrew alphabet which has been employed by the Krymchaks throughout their history, with the exception of the last 80 years. There are no references to pre-Soviet Krymchak texts, with the sole exception of a long folkloric text common to all the Oğuz peoples and even to their non-Turkic and non-Muslim neighbours. Almost all the texts, in fact, are from early Soviet publications. Keeping in mind that the author of most of the texts republished in the book under review was Isaac Qaya, himself, the author of *Qrımcaq mektevleriniñ ekinçi sññfña maxsus oquv kitabı* and *Qrımcaq valalarñ icyn ana tilinde alefbet ve oqu kitabı*, Qrım hukimet neşriyatı (Simferopol’, 1928), and that the same Qaya was the author of the Crimean-Tatar textbook, И.С. Кая, *Руководство для обучения крымскотатарскому языку по новому алфавиту*, Симферополь, 1928,<sup>1</sup> it would have been highly beneficial to compare the texts in these school textbooks. This has not, however, been done.

The bibliography lacks basic items. It does not, for example, include two of the three items just mentioned, and the third, which is provided, is misspelled, and lacks the author’s name. Kenesbay Musayev, the great scholar of the Karaim, is cited several times in the book, but not in the bibliography, and so many other prominent scholars, among them M. Polinskaya.

My own article summarizing the studies on the Qirimchaq Jews from a historical and social perspective is not mentioned in the bibliography.<sup>2</sup> Two other important articles by Velvl Chernin and by Zeev Tchernin (who is the same

<sup>1</sup> Cf. also А. Одабаш и И.С. Кая, *Руководство для обучения крымско-татарскому языку*, Симферополь, 1924 (in Arabic script).

<sup>2</sup> Dan Shapira, Some Notes on the History of the Crimean Jewry from the Ancient Times Until the End of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, With Emphasis on the Qrımcaq Jews in the First Half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, *Jews and Slavs* 19 (2007), ed. by W. MOSKOVICH and L. FINBERG, Jerusalem–Kyiv: Hebrew University; [Ukrainian] Institute of Jewish Studies, 2007, pp. 65–92). This article was recently elaborated by the distinguished Ukrainian scholar from the Russian-occupied Crimea, Mykhailo Kyzyllov (The Krymchaks: Survey of the History of the Community, *Studies in Caucasian, Georgian, and Bukharan Jewry. Historical, Sociological and Cultural Aspects*, ed. by Golda Akhiezer, Reuven Enoch, Sergei Weinstein, Ariel University, Institute for Research of Jewish Communities of the Caucasus and Central Asia, Ariel 2014, pp. 218–237, in Russian).

person) lack reference.<sup>3</sup> But there is a Turkish translation of Milorad Pavić's *Khazar Dictionary* in the bibliography, and on p. 39, Hikmet Tanyu is quoted as an authority on the Khazars, the same Hikmet Tanyu whose *opus magnum*, *Tarih boyunca Yahudiler ve Türkler* ("Jews and Turks Throughout History"), was called by Rifat Bali "[a] ... massive (+1300 pages) anti-Semitic piece ... by now considered (in rightist circles) both a fundamental work and a classic in the field".<sup>4</sup>

Typographical mishaps are found on almost every page. In some cases they seem to be the result of 'copy-paste' (Korkmaz, Zeynep [no coma; DSh], pp. 454–455); in others, such as p. 453 (Jankowski, Henryk [no coma; DSh] **Grammatuka Jezuka Krymskotatarskiego**) they are the result of confusion between the Latin and Cyrillic characters. Occasionally the reason appears obscure. Thus "raqı : raki, voa, içki" (p. 424), where "voa" stands for "votka"; "poçta : ptane" (p. 418), where "ptane" stands for "posthane". I could not figure out the meaning of "pt: Rus. karakol, gözetleme yeri" (p. 418). There is frequent duplication of entries in the dictionary. For example, "barışña : Rus. genç kız, küçük hanım" (p. 386); "papiy : ördek" (p. 417); "saba : sabah, gündüzün, günün başlangıcı / saba : sabah" (p. 424); "şoloma : şahıs adı" (p. 430); "sofra : sofrta" (p. 428); "soqta : medrese öğrencesi; soqta : softa, medrese eğitimi almış kişi" (p. 428). In the last case, it is obvious that the author, in addition to creating two different entries with the same meaning, has also confused two different characters. There should be one entry, not two, and it should be read *softa*, as in Turkish. We find strange typographical signs, as in "goz nurı dokıL" (p. 402); "şlapa : Rus. şapka" (p. 430); enigmatic entries, like "obal : bir yere topl" (p. 414). A single word "of" is made into three entries with the same meaning, and the following word "og" has only two entries (p.

<sup>3</sup> V.JU. ČERNIN, O pojavlenii étnonima 'krymčak' i ponjatija 'krymčakskij jazyk', *Geografija i kul'tura étnografičeskix grupp tatar v SSSR. MFGO*, 1 (Moscow 1983), pp. 93–104, and זאב (וועלול) טשערניץ, "המבטא העברי של היהודים הקרימצי'קים", *בלשנות עברית מח (תשמ"א)*, עמ' 31–38. Although his work is mentioned on p. 36 (wrongly dated to 1974 and with [www.family.askinazy.com](http://www.family.askinazy.com) quoted as the authority) and on p. 55 (together with "M. Polinkaja", who is, obviously, M. Polinskaya, the author of two of the classical articles in the field (M.S. POLINSKY, *The Krymchaks: History and Texts, Ural-Altische Jahrbücher* 63 (1991), pp. 123–154; M.S. POLINSKY, *Crimean Tatar and Krymchak, classification and description, The Non-Slavic Languages of the USSR* (Chicago 1992), pp. 157–188), not in the bibliography in the book under review at all, as mentioned above.

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.rifatbali.com/images/stories/dokumanlar/another\\_enemy.pdf](http://www.rifatbali.com/images/stories/dokumanlar/another_enemy.pdf).

414). “Gimnaziya : jimnastik, kültüfızık” (p. 402) is wrong – the word means gymnasium. “Qarındaş : kalem açacak” is also wrong. (p. 420). The word does not mean “a pencil sharpener”, but simply “a pencil” and is a loan word from Russian < Turkic; Russian > French). “Genihom” (cehennem)” on p. 269 (not in the dictionary) is, of course, “gehinnom”.

On p. 99, the author scrutinizes two phonetic shifts: “1.2.2.4.3. ğ>g” and “1.2.2.4.4. h>g” (for the latter she quotes one example, *gektar*, *hectare* [to be mentioned again below, DSh]. The shift (or both), in fact, is not a shift at all, but a graphic convenience, for in the Crimea of the 1920s-1930s, the local Turkic variants were influenced heavily by Ukrainian and South-Russian pronunciation, where *g* is a rare consonant found in non-assimilated loan words only, and the character for *g* is realized as *h/ğ/γ*.

It is not possible to work adequately with a Jewish language, such as Krymchak, without having at least *some* background in Jewish Studies and without some knowledge of Hebrew. In such a case, however, one should at least consult with those who have such skills. This would have avoided many strange dictionary entries. We find, for example: “bet-em-deraş : çalı çırpıdan yapılan klube” (p. 388) whereas the Hebrew *bet hamedraş* actually means “a house of study”, and not “a ritual booth built of twigs and branches for the Feast of Tabernacles”; “siddur : KI yahudilerin kutsal kitabı, Tevrat” (p. 428) whereas *siddūr* is a prayer book and not the Torah; “ze iş: Ibr. gayr-i israililer” (p. 446) while Hebrew *zeh* יֵשׁ means “this man” and not “a non-Jew”; “uzdeş : Ibr. ay” (pp. 437, 269) which is a result of misreading Hebrew חוד, “month”, as if it were שדוא.

The author, as mentioned, confuses Latin, Cyrillic and the “Soviet-Latinized” letters of the late 1920s–1940, too: “vadéu: böylece, böylelikte” and “vadeu: sonuçta, bir zaman” on p. 437 (cf., *e.g.*, p. 307, twice) are obviously the same word, Turkish < Arabic *badehu*. The word “kavod : ayrıcalık, imtiyaz” appears without a reference to its Hebrew origin (p. 405). Hypercorrections deriving from the confusion of characters of different alphabets and languages result in “Hagama” (p. 64) (\**haskamah?* \**haggahah?*), the monstrous hybrid as *Saül* [sic!] *Tchernichowsky* [sic!] (p. 64) and *Moses Ha Hole* (p. 65). On p. 269 and p. 401, the word “galaxa” (*i.e.*, *Halakhah*), translated, imprecisely, as “Jewish written laws”, is given in the Russian form (but the loan word from Russian, “gektar” (hectare), on p. 99, is provided with the learned explanation “< *hectare* Ft. “*hektar*”). The word “gupıl”, “yemek çatalı”, p. 269 (cf. p. 402) given

as of Hebrew origin,<sup>5</sup> is not Hebrew at all, but rather a loan word from the Southern (“Ukrainian”) dialect of Yiddish, *gubl* (German *Gabel*, “fork”). The list could go on for pages.

The first 67 pages of the book under review are long and self-contradictory. They provide limited discussion and often quote surprising sources about “Mosaic Turks” and Khazars and other favourites of the Google search.

In conclusion, it is good to have this book on one’s shelf, for it has so many Soviet-era texts about the October Revolution and the Red Pioneers and a relatively reliable dictionary. As an Introduction to Krymchak Studies, however, it is a total failure.

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<sup>5</sup> As the authority is quoted, in n. 1102, Musauli Kenesbay (the great scholar of the Karaim language, Kenesbay Musayev). In the bibliography there is no Musauli or Musayev.