

Report

Report on an Uppsala workshop on Karaim studies

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The report gives a summary of the talks presented at a workshop on Karaim studies which took place in November 2010 at the Department of Linguistics and Philology, Uppsala University. The report also contains a selective list of the participating institutions' publications on Karaim issues.

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The workshop

A one-day workshop for scholars and postgraduate students engaged in Karaim studies took place on November 13, 2010, at the Department of Linguistics and Philology, Uppsala University. The aim of the workshop, convened by the chair of Turkic languages in Uppsala, was to share information about ongoing research and prepare the ground for closer cooperation between European universities in this field.

Invited participants, representing universities with a tradition in Karaim studies, came from Finland, Lithuania, and Poland. In addition to the Turcologists in Uppsala, Mats Eskhult, assistant professor of Semitic Studies at Uppsala University also participated. Two guests from Germany who have shown great interest in Karaim studies participated in the workshop: Marcel Erdal, Johann Wolfgang Goethe University Frankfurt am Main, and Lars Johanson, Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz.

Tapani Harviainen: Karaim studies in Finland

Tapani Harviainen, professor of Semitic studies at the Institute for Asian and African Studies at the University of Helsinki has been most active in Karaim studies. He gave a detailed report about Karaim studies in Helsinki and Finland in general.

Karaim studies started in the city of Turku (Åbo) some three hundred years ago.¹ On September 9, 1691 Severinus Rijsberg defended his philological magister dissertation *Bihæresium verporum sive De Duabus nostri temporis Judæorum sectis, Rabbanitis scil., & Karræis*. The disputatio took place at the Academia Aboensis. The Latin title of the book refers to ‘The double heresy of the circumcised ones: about two Jewish sects of our time, viz. Rabbanites and Karaites’. Rijsberg’s dissertation appeared in the same year as the well-known report *Epistola de Karaitis Lithuanicæ*, written by the Uppsala Professor Gustaf Peringer (see more below), and it was supervised by professor Simon Paulinus, whose extensive Hebrew grammar (1692) was the first of its kind in Finland. Rijsberg’s thesis offers very little new or interesting information about the Karaites. It simply repeats material presented in earlier sources concerning Pharisees, Sadducees, etc., and some figures regarding the Karaite inhabitants of Constantinople. Unfortunately, Rijsberg did not continue the study of these topics after his disputation. In his dissertation, the author mentions that he was a Scandensis, i.e. originating from the province of Skåne, which had been recently occupied by Sweden. The full text of his thesis can now be read on the Internet.²

After Rijsberg and Paulinus, there was a long break in Karaim studies in Finland. Harviainen’s interest was raised by Ananiasz Zajączkowski’s book *Karaims in Poland* (1961). After reading this book, Harviainen decided to pursue studies on Karaim issues and visited Karaims in Vilnius, first in 1988. A couple of years earlier, he had visited the huge Firkovich Collections in the National Library of Russia in Leningrad. In Vilnius, he was advised by Mykolas Firkovičius, Halina Kobeckaitė and Karina Firkavičiūtė, whose home became for Harviainen a firm basis of contact with the Karaims. The Leningrad archive materials offered him most valuable resources. His publications deal with the Karaites and Karaims from a Semitistic point of view. He has been particularly interested in documents written in Hebrew, Aramaic and Arabic concerning Karaite / Karaim topics with special emphasis on the Karaim traditions of Hebrew pronunciation (see his publications in the references). With the help of Mykolas Firkovičius, the *ullu hazzan* ‘senior hazzan’ of the Lithuanian Karaim community, his colleagues and his daughter, Harviainen has been able to document a pronunciation of (biblical) Hebrew that has been kept alive through oral transmission by the East European Karaims for one thousand years. The pronunciation in question obviously had its origin in the most genuine Palestinian Tiberian Masoretic reading tradition. Corresponding realizations of the so-called shewa vowels have been preserved only among the Jews of Yemen. Among the Karaims, this tradition continued. However, when the last member of the ancient educational chain, hazzan Józef Firkovičius, passed away, this tradition died out. Fortunately,

¹ This part of the report is based mostly on Harviainen’s manuscript presented at the symposium.

² See <http://books.google.com/>

the tradition did not disappear without vestiges—it has remained described in the publications and recordings kept in the archives (Harviainen 2010 and forthcoming).

Professor Harviainen has analysed several documents written in Hebrew and Arabic found in the Firkovich Collections in St. Petersburg and other archives. He devoted his interest to biblical Hebrew manuscripts written in Arabic characters and marked with Hebrew signs of vocalization. These texts date back to the 10th–13th centuries in the Middle East. The peculiar Arabic method of writing biblical Hebrew was intended to indicate certain details of the correct pronunciation of the holy tongue. Karaites / Karaims have called themselves *bene miqra*’, specialists of the holy scriptures. Thus the strictness of pronunciation has always been very important to them. Other manuscripts found in St. Petersburg have given rise to publications of Karaim *ketubbot* ‘marriage contracts’ and dowry lists of Karaim brides from Lithuania and the Crimea, tombstone inscriptions as well as the history of Abraham Firkovich’s activities and discoveries in the Crimea, Caucasus, Palestine, Syria and Egypt (see the references).

A number of Professor Harviainen’s students have been interested in studying Karaim topics. In 2000, Anna Vuorela completed her MA thesis, which dealt with the liturgical tradition of Lithuanian Karaims. Her material consisted of Harviainen’s recordings of Mykolas Firkovičius and his Karaim friends in Trakai. Vuorela’s approach was musicological. Vuorela’s thesis soon was superseded by Karina Firkavičiūtė’s doctoral dissertation (Firkavičiūtė 2001).

In 1998 an anthology was published under the title *Rannalla päärynäpuu* ‘A Peach Tree at the Lake’ containing Lithuanian-Polish Karaim poetry in Finnish translation (Hopeavuori et al. 1998). The volume also includes a description of the Karaim community, its history, culture, and languages. Keijo Hopeavuori, MA in Turcology, prepared the prose translations. His prose translations were rendered into a poetic form in co-operation with Harviainen and Kai Nieminen, a well-known poet and translator. In the field of Turcology, Hopeavuori has specialized in the Karaim language. He has written several articles on themes dealt with in Karaim literature in the interwar decades; the articles have been published in *Studia Orientalia*.

At the Uppsala workshop, Riikka Tuori, lecturer in Semitic Studies at the Institute for Asian and African Studies, University of Helsinki, presented her ongoing literary research on Polish-Lithuanian Karaite Hebrew religious poems (*zemirot*, sg. *zemer*) of the early seventeenth and mid-eighteenth centuries. The corpus of her study is selected from the Karaite prayer book *Siddur hat-tefillot ke-minhag haqqara'im*, printed in Vilnius in 1890–1892. In Jewish musical tradition, *zemirot* are Hebrew or Aramaic songs, recited before or after the liturgy in the synagogue or during ceremonial meals at home and among friends. The most popular *zemirot* are dedicated to the Sabbath, but also other festivities and familial events such as weddings and circumcisions are accompanied by the singing of religious melodic hymns. Consequently, the *zemirot* are also called table songs or table hymns. The contents of the poems frequently depict the particular festive day. The poets studied by Tuori resided in the Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth, in Trakai and in nearby

towns, and in Halich and Volhynia. The Karaim *zemirot* represent a Sephardic and Ottoman tradition which reached the Polish-Lithuanian Karaim communities through Turkish Karaite influence. This is another example of multiple cultural influences having impact on the tiny Karaite community beyond the surrounding Ashkenazi traditions, most probably via earlier Karaite *Siddurim* and other literary works published in Turkey and the Crimea. Tuori's dissertation aims at a thorough philological analysis of the corpus and will examine the genre, poetic form and prosodic features, the language and the style, and the contents (philosophy, polemics and exegetics) of the poems. Tuori will also evaluate the position of the Karaim *zemirot* in the context of Hebrew medieval poetry.

Ewa Siemienieć-Gołaś: Karaim studies at the Jagiellonian University in Cracow

Ewa Siemienieć-Gołaś, professor of Turcology, as the head of the Department of Turcology in Cracow presented a short report concerning the past and the contemporary Karaim studies at the Jagiellonian University in Cracow, Poland.

The Jagiellonian University in Cracow has had two outstanding scholars in Karaim studies: Jan Grzegorzewski and Tadeusz Kowalski, who set the foundation for modern linguistic research on the Karaim language.³ Grzegorzewski wrote several works about the language and dialects of the Karaims such as *Caraimica. Język Łach-Karaitów* (1916–1918). His study *Ein türk-tatarischer Dialekt in Galizien. Vokalharmonie in den entlehnten Wörtern der karaitischen Sprache in Halicz* was printed in Vienna (1903).

Professor Tadeusz Kowalski, the prominent Turcologist, established Oriental studies at the Jagiellonian University in Cracow in 1919.⁴ He laid the foundations for Arabic, Turkic and Iranian studies in Cracow. His publications on Turkic varieties, folk poetry, dialectology are well known. Kowalski fully appreciated the significance of Karaim studies and published, in 1929, his essential book *Karaimische Texte im Dialekt von Troki* (1929a). This monograph still constitutes the basis for academic work in this field. His glossary was translated and published in Ankara under the title *Karayım lehçesi sözlüğü*, translated by Kemal Aytaç (Kowalski 1996). Kowalski published a number of articles on Karaim including *Pieśni obrzędowe w narzeczu Karaimów z Troki* 'Ritual songs in the Karaim dialect of Troki' (1926). In 1929 he published another article *Przyczynki do etnografii i dialektologii karaimskiej* 'Contributions to Karaim ethnography and dialectology' (1929b). Kowalski was also the initiator of a Karaim dictionary to be compiled on the basis of handwritten translations of the Old Testament. He had intended to

³ This part of the report is based mostly on Siemienieć-Gołaś's manuscript presented at the symposium.

⁴ Siemienieć-Gołaś (1998).

investigate many other Karaim topics but his sudden death in 1948 prevented the implementation of these plans.

After World War II, Oriental studies developed vividly in Cracow. However, nobody in Cracow followed up Grzegorzewski's and Kowalski's studies on the Karaim language and culture. Ananiasz Zajęczkowski, who was first Kowalski's assistant and was later appointed professor, worked on Karaim. However, he moved to Warsaw and became the head of the Turkic Department at the Institute of Oriental Studies, Warsaw University.

Karaim studies in Cracow are at the present still underrepresented. Two historians at the Jagiellonian University are working on Karaim topics. Stefan Gašiorowski, professor at the Department of History, published in 2008 a monograph *Karaimi w Koronie i na Litwie w XV–XVIII wieku* 'Karaims in the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania in 15th–18th centuries'. Recently, he has published some papers concerning the privileges given to Karaims by the Polish king Stanisław August Poniatowski. Gašiorowski also takes a keen interest in the biography of the *hakhan* of the Polish Karaims, Seraya Szapszał. Stanisław Cinal, who is a historian and a specialist in matters of religion, is also interested in Karaim issues, and has written articles on the work and life of Seraya Szapszał.

Michał Németh, a young scholar who is employed at the Chair of Hungarian Studies of the Jagiellonian University has published two articles on Karaim: *Errors with and without purpose: A. Mardkowicz's transcription of Luck-Karaim letters in Hebrew script* and *North-Western and Eastern Karaim features in a manuscript found in Luck* (2009 and 2010).

Another representative of the young generation is Magdalena Jodłowska-Ebo, assistant in the Department of Turkish Studies of the Jagiellonian University. She has written two articles on the Karaim names for Sunday and Monday (2005 and 2006).

Cracow has a rich collection of Karaim linguistic material which is, unfortunately, somehow forgotten and neglected, still waiting to be inventoried and investigated. The collection of Kowalski's handwritten notes was donated to the archive of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Cracow. For more than 60 years after Kowalski's death, no one has worked on this material, which was meticulously collected by Kowalski. It includes his notes on the Karaims and also includes some ritual songs from Troki and Karaim proverbs dictated to Kowalski by Karaim speakers. The collection also comprises some fragments of Karaim bible texts dictated to Kowalski by *hazzan* Szymon Firkowicz. There is also a description of the engagement ceremony *k'el'aš'm'ak* in Karaim. Kowalski also left some notes concerning Karaim cuisine, for instance the names of certain dishes. Some poems either in the original version or in translation, with comments by Kowalski are also included. This rich collection is still waiting to be studied.

Mariola Abkowicz and Anna Sulimowicz: Documentation of the history of the Karaim communities

Two other Polish Karaim participants, Mariola Abkowicz and Anna Sulimowicz reported on their ongoing documentation of the history of community life in Łuck, Halich and Trakai (Polish Troki). Abkowicz is a lecturer in Hebrew studies at the Department of Asian Studies of the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. This department was established in 2008 as the successor of the Institute of Oriental Studies. We mention here that Henryk Jankowski, professor of Turcology, has several important publications on Karaim issues, among others on bible translations. Recently, Gülayhan Aqtay, who works at the same department, published *Eliyahu ben Yosef Qilci's anthology of Crimean Karaim and Turkish literature* (Aqtay 2009). Unfortunately, Jankowski could not participate in the workshop in Uppsala; see, however, his publications on Karaim topics in the references section.

In Poznań, Hebrew studies also includes Karaim studies. Abkowicz's dissertation will be an edition and analysis of the Trakai Karaim community's registers, which were handwritten in Hebrew script in the 19th and early 20th centuries. The registers provide an excellent source of information. The dry facts of birth, marriage and death reflect the events in the life of the communities. They serve as a great repository of genealogical information, personal names, and family names, and bear witness to the communities' customs, health, migration, history and their relationships with neighboring communities. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, especially in the interwar period, many unique and interesting social events took place among the Karaims. The communities opened up to the outside world while retaining their tradition, culture and national identity. The name-giving customs reflecting the changes in the communities' life are also analysed in the dissertation.

Anna-Akbike Sulimowicz, lecturer in Turkish at the Section of Inner Asian Studies, Faculty of Oriental Studies, University of Warsaw is an active contributor to the Karaim periodical *Awazymyz* edited by Mariola Abkowicz. She has written numerous articles about Karaim issues (see references) and has also translated many articles from Karaim into Polish, which have also been published in *Awazymyz*.

At the Uppsala workshop, Abkowicz and Sulimowicz presented photos collected for an exhibition at the Ethnographic Museum in Wrocław in October and November 2010. The exhibition titled *Karaj jollary, karaimskie drogi. Karaimi w starej fotografii* 'Karaim roads. Karaims in old photographs' was organized with the help of the Polish Karaim Association. Most of the photos in the exhibition came from private archives of Polish Karaims and were made available to the public for the first time. The two organizers succeeded in reconstructing many details of the lives of Karaim families and their intertwined relations. The photo collection is a great contribution to the history of the communities.

Karina Firkavičiūtė: Studies on Karaim musical heritage

Karina Firkavičiūtė has studied the musical heritage of the Lithuanian Karaims. Three different types of music traditions can be distinguished: (i) liturgical music sung during the prayer in the *kenesa*, (ii) paraliturgical music sung on religious occasions in the community, and (iii) secular music without religious content. Firkavičiūtė has described these traditions and made a unique documentation of them. She has written an MA and later a PhD thesis (1995 and 2001) and has published several important articles on the subject. The main questions addressed in her investigations are: How original are the melodies in the Karaim liturgy? What is the relationship between Karaim liturgical music and other liturgical traditions? What is the origin of the melodies? Which musical and non-musical rules are manifested in this musical tradition? The music of the Lithuanian Karaims, which has been handed down orally in the community, can be characterized as vocal and monodic. Firkavičiūtė has made recordings with the last Karaims who still had full musical competence. She has also compared the Lithuanian tradition with that of the Karaite community that emigrated from Egypt to Israel. This has led her to the assumption that, in spite of the seemingly great differences, both traditions might have originated from a common source. A special role is played by the 150 Psalms, which are sung in two different ways: liturgically and non-liturgically, i.e. on occasions such as mourning, fasting, or in serious cases of misfortune in the family or community. On non-liturgical occasions, all psalms are sung to the same melody, whereas in the liturgy, each psalm is sung to its own individual melody. The paraliturgical chants are sung in the community on various feasts and family rituals. The melodies are borrowed from the music of the region, i.e. from the territory of present-day Lithuania.

Firkavičiūtė's recordings and her own competence are of crucial importance for the revitalization of this tradition. The oral transmission of the liturgical music has broken down because of the lack of competent members in the community. Her written documentation can be employed in teaching within the community.

Firkavičiūtė's dissertation had inspired Marcin Krupa, who wrote a BA thesis on a Karaim musical topic at the Vocal Faculty of the Karol Lipiński Academy of Music in Wrocław (2010). At the workshop, he performed the Karaim lament *Syjt firjatba tujulat* 'The lament sounds as a cry', which is sung when a coffin is removed from a house.

Studies on the Karaim language: the Uppsala tradition

At the end of the seventeenth century, when many academic circles in Europe were engaged in discussions concerning Karaism, Gustaf Peringer Lillieblad (1651–1710), professor of Oriental languages at Uppsala University, visited the Lithuanian Karaims (Csató & Gren-Eklund & Sandgren 2007, Csató 2007 and Johanson 2007). Peringer reported about this journey in a letter written in Latin to professor Hiob Ludolf. This letter, known as *Epistola de Karaitis Lithuanice*, is famous because it

contains the beginning of the Genesis in Karaim. This is the first documentation of the Karaim language in Western scholarly circles. The letter was published in 1691 in the German journal *Monatliche Unterredungen* edited by Wilhelm Ernst Tentzel (1659–1707) (Şişman 1952). The list of lectures by the professors of Oriental Languages at Uppsala University, *Prelectiones Linguarum Orientalium Professorum Upsalensium*, contains items attesting that Peringer held lectures on Karaim topics after his return from Lithuania. He had also collected Karaim manuscripts but, regrettably, the books were lost in a fire at the Royal Library of Stockholm in 1697.

Other Swedish scholars also made early efforts to establish contacts with the Karaims. Two important Karaim works were authored in response to Swedish inquiries about Karaism. In 1696 and 1697, the rector Johann Uppendorff (1654–1698), invited the Karaim scholar Solomon ben Aaron to Riga to lecture on Karaism. Uppendorff asked questions about the differences between Rabbinism and Karaism, and Solomon ben Aaron answered in a treaty that was published later in 1866 (see references in Csató 2007). The memory of Solomon's visit is still alive in the Karaim community. However, the Karaims confused Riga and Uppsala, believing that Solomon had visited Uppsala. The memory of this alleged visit to Uppsala was written down in a short story by Alexander Mardkowicz. The story describing Solomon's adventures in Uppsala has been translated into Swedish (Csató & Johanson 1998).

Another contact took place between some Swedes and Karaims in Galicia. A relative of Solomon, Mordecai ben Nissan of Kukizow (a place near Lemberg), wrote a small book, *Levush Malkhut*, about Karaism. This book contains responses to questions allegedly asked by Charles XII when the king visited Poland in 1702. According to Mordecai, the king asked: "From which nation are you? What is your confession? What are the differences between the Karaims and the Talmudists?" Another traveller in Charles XII's time was Michael Eneman, who visited the Karaims of Constantinople and Cairo at the beginning of the 18th century in order to collect information about their traditions (see references in Csató 2007).

Uppsala University has been engaged in Karaim studies also in more recent times. The famous Karaim scholar Simon Şişman (Szyszman) published an article about Peringer's visit to the Karaims (Şişman 1952). His monograph on the Eastern European Karaims was published in the *Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis* (Szyszman 1989). Harney, a visiting scholar at the Centre for Multiethnic Research at Uppsala University, wrote an article about the fate of the Karaims (Harney 1991). Several theologians have shown interest in Karaim issues. Håkan Ögren, who participated in the workshop, has arranged several seminars on Karaim topics. He is also working on a detailed bibliography of Karaim studies.

The Turcologists at Uppsala University have been engaged in the documentation and description of the Karaim language. Éva Á. Csató, professor of Turkic languages, has carried out a documentation of the spoken language both in Lithuania and in Halich in Ukraine. Her recordings of the last full-fledged speakers are archived at the Leipzig Endangered Languages Archive (LELA). Sven Grawunder,

from the Department of Linguistics at the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology in Leipzig, reported at the workshop on the endangered languages archive, its aims and present situation.

Csató has published numerous articles about the typological features of the Karaim language, contact phenomena in Karaim due to long-lasting contact with non-Turkic languages, on language attitudes and other issues (see references). Together with David Nathan she has published some multimedia resources and written articles about the use of information technology for endangered languages (Csató & Nathan 2002, 2003, 2007 and Nathan & Csató 2006).

Zsuzsanna Olach, Csató's PhD student, is writing her dissertation about the linguistic analysis of a Halich Karaim bible translation. At the workshop, Olach reported on her work and presented examples of Hebrew influence on the Karaim bible text. Olach has transliterated the Halich Karaim text, which is written in Hebrew script. The Karaim bible text will also be rendered in a transcription, which is easier to read. In the transcription Olach tries to avoid over-interpretations. Thus, for instance, as front and back *i* are not distinguished in the Hebrew script, these are rendered as *i* also in the transcription. The dissertation defense is planned to take place in 2011.

With the financial help of the Swedish Institute, the Turcologists in Uppsala have been engaged in supporting the East-Central European Karaims in their efforts to revitalize community life and especially the community language. There are still about thirty full-fledged speakers in Lithuania, most of whom are over seventy years old. In the summer of 2010, the 8th Karaim Language Summer School was organized in Trakai. Karaims from all communities participated and took language classes. It is hoped that this positive movement for language maintenance will continue and that the language documented by Peringer will not die out.

Recently, a project financed by the Swedish Institute is being carried out in cooperation among Uppsala University, Vilnius University and Taras Shevchenko National University in Kyiv. The aim of the project is to develop Karaim studies as an academic subject at the university level and to support the Karaim communities in Lithuania, Poland, Russia and Ukraine in building an educational network. Competence will be established at both the academic and the community levels so that members of the Karaim communities in the future will be motivated to conduct their own research activities and preserve the community heritage.

Karaim studies in Vilnius

Eugenija Spakovska, a young representative of the Lithuanian Karaim community, is studying library sciences at Vilnius University. At the workshop, she reported on her plans to write a thesis about the Karaim manuscript collection in Vilnius libraries. She intends to focus on Szymon Firkowicz's collection deposited at the Wroblewski Library of the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences.

Conclusions

This report gives a short account of the presentations at the Uppsala workshop. There are further ongoing Karaim studies, which are not included here. The Uppsala meeting was a first step toward creating an international forum for scholars engaged in research in this field.

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