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IS THERE ONLY ONE HOMELAND?
FORMING THE IMAGE OF TROKI (TRAKAI)
AND THE CRIMEA IN THE SELF-IDENTITY
OF KARAITES IN THE 19TH–20TH CENTURY



INTRODUCTION¹

Is there only one Homeland? Such considerations were inspired by the historiography that discusses Karaite history from their arrival to the Grand Duchy of Lithuania to the recent history of modern times. More often than not, the community is described as the Crimean Karaites, putting an emphasis on the territory as the marker of their cultural and ideological dependence and at the same time drawing a boundary between them and other Karaites all over the world. This term is also used at some point in describing Polish–Lithuanian Karaites, especially when it comes to the early communal history and their first settlements in the territory of the GDL: before becoming the Polish–Lithuanian Karaites, they had been described as the Crimean Karaites. On the other hand, the Polish–Lithuanian Karaite historical myth, which is understood as *a story or account of the community's history that includes important cultural symbols and the perception of common origins and faith*, highlights the importance of Troki (Trakai) and considers this town as the cultural and spiritual centre of Polish–Lithuanian Karaites. Both the Crimea (more precisely Solkhat (now Stary Krym) and Chufut-Kale) and Troki (Trakai) undoubtedly played a crucial role in the history of Karaite communities; however, the article focuses on these places and their importance in the history of Eastern European Karaites, but more on the image of these places in their consciousness and its expression in the first half of the 20th century. As Anthony Smith states, territorialization is one of the most important aspects of collective self-identity², but neither he nor other researchers of the phenomenon of ethnic identity discuss the possibility of existence of two homelands, both equally important to the collective identity of an ethnic community. The assumption that the dual image of homeland might be characteristic of the communities that live in a diaspora, due to the specific form of the nationalism experienced by them, is based on the critics on nationalism by Rogers Brubaker³ who argued to discuss nationalism beyond the statehood, not only as an inseparable element of it.

¹ This article was prepared with the support of the Jewish Memorial Foundation.

² Smith A. Culture, Community and Territory: the Politics of Ethnicity and Nationalism // International Affairs. 1996. Vol. 2, No. 3, p. 445–458.

³ Brubaker R. Myths and Misconceptions in the Study of Nationalism // The State of the Nation. Ed. by J. Hall. Cambridge, 1998.

In this article, I will discuss the development of two images of homeland in the Polish–Lithuanian Karaite community in the end of the 19th to the middle 20th century – that of the Crimean and Troki (Trakai). My research is based on the range of archival sources, mainly communal press, issued in the first half of the 20th century, the correspondence of the Polish Karaite hacham Seraja Shapshal (1873–1961), his articles, and I will try to show the emergence and expression of these two images in the Polish–Lithuanian Karaite community in the 20th century.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF HOMELAND IMAGE: THE CRIMEA

The image of the Crimea as a place of Karaite origin and their homeland began to form in the first half of the 19th century. This process was influenced by the emergence of a new trend in the minority politics of the Imperial Russia to exclude Karaites from anti-Jewish restrictions⁴ and to use this as a tool in solving the “Jewish question”. This led to the growing interest in Karaite history, faith and traditions both in the official institutions and in Russian society. In 1837, the general governor of New Russia Mikhail Vorontsov visited Crimean Karaites and asked for detailed information about their arrival to the Crimean peninsula⁵. After two years, in 1839, the Karaite Spiritual Board received a letter from the Tauria governor M. M. Muromtsev with six questions on Karaite origins, the reasons and circumstances of their arrival to the Crimea, etc.⁶ The answers to these questions were important for securing the social status of the community – the Karaite exemption from the restrictions put on Jews could have been preserved only in the case they would prove their distinctiveness from the latter. What is more important, this interest encouraged the birth of the historical myth in the Karaite community – the community’s experienced religious identity and perception of Torah stories as their own history appeared to be not sufficient in the modernizing atmosphere they lived in. It is not surprising that when the chief *hacham* Simcha Bobowicz entrusted Abraham Frikowicz to find historical evidence in order to formulate the answers to

⁴ The Jews and Karaites who lived in the territory of so-called New Russia which was incorporated into Russian Empire in 1783, experienced first restrictions already in 1791, which forbade to trade in the internal gubernias. In 1794, the double taxation for Jews was introduced, although after a year Karaites were exempted from it. The conscription of recruits, announced for Jews in 1827, was not applied for Karaites in the same year. The final distinction between Karaites and Jews was made in 1863 when Karaites were granted the same rights as the Orthodox believers living in the Russia Empire. For more, please refer to *Полный хронологический сборник законов и положений, касающихся евреев, от 1649–1873*. Сост. Л. Леванда. Санкт-Петербург, 1874. с. 1000–1005.

⁵ *Фиркович А.* Авней зиккарон // *Караимская жизнь*. Москва, 1911. Кн. 5–6, с. 83.

⁶ *Kizilov M.* Social Adaptation and Manipulation of Self-Identity: Karaites in Eastern Europe in Modern Times // *Eastern European Karaites in the Last Generations*. Ed. by D. Shapira, D. Lasker. Jerusalem, 2011, p. 130–153; *Фиркович А.* Авней зиккарон // *Караимская жизнь*. Москва, 1912. Кн. 10–11, с. 17.

the aforementioned questions, Firkowicz admitted that a popular belief of Eupatoria Karaites about their ancient settlement in the Crimea was based on “no religious or historical books (...) [and that he] found no historical documents from the Karaite past”⁷. The need of information for local governors and its importance in gaining the privileged social status in comparison with other non-Orthodox communities inspired A. Firkowicz for expeditions to investigate Karaite heritage in the Crimean peninsula. Besides other discoveries, he “found” a tomb of Isaak Sangari, dated to the 8th century, in the cemetery of Chufut Kale, which became the strongest evidence of the existence of an ancient Karaite settlement in the Crimea. A. Firkowicz stated that the first confessors of the Karaite faith came to the Crimea before the 8th century, converted the local pagan Khazars to the Karaite faith and adopted their language⁸. This convergence led to the formation of the Karaite community that dwells in the Crimean peninsula. Leaving aside discussions on the controversy of his findings that appeared in the historiography and public sphere already after they had been announced, we can firmly state that they formed an image of the Crimea as a place of an ancient settlement of the Karaite nation, as he called it. This image was strengthened by political initiatives – establishment of the Karaite Religious Board in Tauria (1837) and successful efforts of Crimean Karaites to gain a better social status for the Karaites in the Russian Empire. The image of the Crimea as the official homeland of Russian Karaites was presented in probably the first history of the Crimean Karaites, published most probably in 1862 in Odessa under the title “Pamiat o Chufut-Kale” (Rus. Memoirs about Chufut-Kale) and dedicated to Tsar Alexander⁹. In the preface, Solomon Beim, who was in charge of this publication, stated that this publication was based not on the academic research but “mostly on (...) folk telling and old inscriptions that were found”¹⁰. The author probably meant the ones discovered by A. Firkowicz, and it is not the coincidence that the first chapter of the book is dedicated to re-printing the documents found by him in Russian¹¹, and the second – to Chufut-Kale on which the author claimed that “this small town was the centre of the Karaite population in the Crimea after the destruction of the first temple more than 2200 years ago”¹². This vivid quotation shows the first attempts to create a secular historical narrative of the Imperia’s Karaite community, where the Crimea

⁷ Фиркович А. Авней зиккарон // Караимская жизнь. Москва, 1911. Кн. 5–6, с. 83.

⁸ Miller Ph. Karaite Separatism in 19th Century Russia. Budapest, 1993, p. 8. Now, after many years of research, more and more arguments on the quazi-scientific nature of this theory appears. However, in this article, I do not attempt to prove or to reject the reliability of this or other theory but rather to stress their importance in the formation of Karaite self-perception.

⁹ *Author not indicated*. Память о Чуфут-Кале. Одесса, 1862, title page.

¹⁰ Ibid., preface, c. 1.

¹¹ Ibid., c. 7–35.

¹² Ibid., c. 36.

acted as the departing place and point of this story. The replacement of Jerusalem with the Crimea benefitted in shaping the relationship between Karaites and the imperial government – firstly, the secular historical narrative and its focus on the Crimea helped the Karaites to dissociate themselves from Jews with whom they shared the common religious tradition and had been deeply related during the past centuries¹³. Secondly, emphasizing the Crimea as the place, where Russian Karaites started their history could work in strengthening the community's position in the Russian society and shaping a good image of the Karaites by presenting them as autochthons, sedentary people, in contrast with Jews who were traditionally perceived as having no strong link to any territory and for this reason lacking loyalty to the country they lived in¹⁴. The image of the long Karaite history in the Crimea and their sedentary lifestyle was supported by the fact that a considerable part of the community was earning their living from gardening. On the other hand, it must be noted here that this historical narrative was formed on the basis of pre-modern Jewish legends. Bernard Weinryb¹⁵, who had examined the plots of different Jewish migration legends, noticed that in the Polish and Crimean Jewish environments the stories of Jewish arrival to a particular place have common features like the early arrival and settlement in the territory before it was inhabited by members of the dominating society, coming to a particular place after invitation of the ruling elites, experiencing equal rights with locals, using special privileges set up by the rulers, etc.¹⁶ These aspects are visible in the Karaite historical narrative as well, which allows to state that the common perception the past existed both in Jewish and in Karaite culture and were used, consciously or not, in the development of their secular historical narratives.

The further fate of the Crimean Karaite historical myth depended very much on the appearance of the new means of communication inside the community and the growing literacy of its members. As Benedict Anderson noted, press and printing were

¹³ In the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth, Karaites and Jews were deeply related – both groups shared religious, cultural life, were administrated by the Vaad institution, shared common privileges granted by the Grand Dukes and Polish kings. For more, please refer to *Mann J. Texts and Studies in Jewish History and Literature // Karaitica. Philadelphia, 1935. Vol. 2.*

¹⁴ Aleksander Mardkowicz in his letter to Seraja Szapszał gave an important argument why Karaites should associate their Homeland with the Crimea rather than with the Holly Land. He stated that Jews, who report their attachment to the Holy Land, are always treated as foreigners, strangers by the rest of society in all places they dwell. Karaites should avoid being treated like the Jews. Alexander Mardkowicz to Seraja Szapszał, 1928 // Lietuvos mokslų akademijos Vrublevskių biblioteka (Vrublevski Library of Lithuanian Academy of Science, further – LMAVB), f. 143, b. 467, l. 1–9.

¹⁵ *Weinryb B. D. The beginnings of East-European Jewry in legend and historiography // Studies and Essays in Honour of Abraham A. Neuman. Ed. by M. Ben-Horin, B. D. Wienryb, S. Zeitlin. Leiden, 1962, p. 445–502.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 452–453.

crucially important in shaping new forms of dependence – virtual communities¹⁷. In the very beginning of the 20th century, the first issues of the Karaite communal press appeared, promoting the notion of the common history and fate among scattered communities all over the Empire¹⁸. It worked as a tool in spreading and strengthening the Karaite historical myth among the readers of communal press who, probably, were disseminating it among other community members. For example, in the first periodical of Russian Karaites, the journal *Караимская жизнь* (Karaite life)¹⁹, six articles on the Crimea appeared, although the total number of issues published during two years of its existence was limited to 12. Among these, four excerpts of the famous book of A. Firkowicz “Avnei Zikkaron” was published, focusing on his aforementioned findings²⁰. Besides, two more articles were devoted to discuss A. Firkowicz’s activities and the importance of his findings²¹. This is a clear sign that even after more than half a century after the activities of A. Firkowicz, his findings and the formulated concept of the Crimean Karaite history were deeply rooted in the community’s self-identity and, what is also important, did not face any competing narrative of such kind. In another communal journal, which followed after the *Караимская жизнь* was closed, *Караимское слово* (Karaite word), published by I. Shpakowski in Vilna (Vilnius) in 1913–1914, also focused on the Crimea as the center of the Karaite past and present; probably in each of its issues at least one article was devoted to Karaite history in the Crimea²². The absence of such historical sketches of other Karaite settlements clearly shows that the Crimea was commonly reflected as the kernel of the Karaite past, in other words, the features attributed to Crimean Karaites were also thought to

¹⁷ Anderson B. Įsivaizduojamos bendruomenės. Apmaštymai apie nacionalizmo kilmę ir plitimą. Vilnius, 1999, p. 87.

¹⁸ For example, the issue of *Караимское слово*, which was printed in Vilna, could be obtained in Vilna itself, Berdiansk, Bachisaraj, Eupatoria, Ekaterinoslav, Kiev, Kremenchug, Melitopol, Moscow, Odessa, Pskov, St. Petersburg, Panevėžys, Sevastopol, Simferopol, Sumach, Trakai, Charkow, Cherson, Feodosia, and even New York. The last cover of the journal *Караимское слово*. Вильна, 1914. № 6.

¹⁹ The first secular communal journal of the Karaites in the Russian Empire, published in Moscow from 1911 to 1912 in Russian. The editor of the magazine was V. I. Sinani; 12 issues of this journal appeared during two years of publishing.

²⁰ *Караимская жизнь*. Москва, 1912. Кн. 12, с. 10–20; *Караимская жизнь*. Москва, 1911. Кн. 5–6, с. 82–87; *Караимская жизнь*. Москва, 1911. Кн. 3–4, с. 72–77; *Караимская жизнь*. Москва, 1912. Кн. 10–11, с. 16–20.

²¹ *Кокизов Д.* Новые доказательства против старых обвинений // *Караимская жизнь*. Москва, 1911. Кн. 1, с. 40–53; *Author not indicated.* Деятельность А. С. Фирковича по архивным данным // *Караимская жизнь*. Москва, 1912. Кн. 12, с. 54–56.

²² Only three issues of the total number of 12 are available for this research. In all of these, many articles are published on the topic. *Троцкий Е.* Караимы. Исторический очерк // *Караимское слово*. Вильна, 1914. № 7–8, с. 2–8; *Поездка в Мангуп* // *Караимское слово*. Вильна, 1914. № 7–8, с. 8–10; *Троцкий Е.* Мангуп-Кале // *Караимское слово*. Вильна, 1914. № 9–10, с. 10–12; *Троцкий Е.* Караимы. Исторический очерк // *Караимское слово*. Вильна, 1914. № 6, с. 3–8.

be characteristic of all Karaites, and the past of the Crimean Karaites was perceived as that of all Karaites.

By the first decade of the 20th century, the image of the Crimea was already formed and had a central role in the Karaite perception of their own historical past. This perception is clearly reflected in the first text of Seraja Shapshal who later became the Tauria's (1913–1915) and Poland's (1927–1940) chief *hacham*. It was published under the title *Караимы и Чуфут-Кале в Крыму. Краткий очерк* (Karaites and Chufut-Kale in Crimea. A Short Review) that appeared in St. Petersburg in 1896 when S. Shapshal was a university student on the request of Tauria *hacham* Samuil Pampulov who noticed S. Shapshal's interest in Karaite history. The title (Karaites and Chufut Kale in Crimea. A Short Review) of his short work already shows the author's attitude towards the relation between Karaites and the Crimea in general or Chufut-Kale in particular. He started his review by stating that "the ancient fortress Kyrk-er (later Chufut-Kale) served as a shelter for Karaites for centuries"²³. Later he claims that "archeological excavations that were carried out there (meaning the cemetery of Chufut Kale) had proved that Karaites lived in the Crimea before the birth of Christ"²⁴. By mentioning archeological research he definitely meant A. Firkowicz's expeditions, and, as later occurred, those of Daniel Chwolson who was a professor at the St. Petersburg University. S. Shapshal continued his review by concluding that "from all nations living in the Tauria peninsula, the most ancient inhabitants undoubtedly are the Karaites"²⁵. "From immemorial times, Karaites respect Joseph's valley as a national sacred place, and all of them would like to be buried there, were their ancestors lie"²⁶ (meaning the Chufut-Kale cemetery).

DEVELOPMENT OF THE TROKI (TRAKAI) IMAGE: VARIATION IN HOMELAND PERCEPTION

Surprisingly, the image of Troki as the cultural and religious centre of Polish–Lithuanian Karaites appeared earlier than that of the Crimea. We can find some messages about Witold (Vytautas) who brought Karaites to Troki (Trakai, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania) already in the 17th century, for example, in the text of Ezra ben Nisan, a Radziwill doctor who wrote that in 1216 the Grand Duke Witold (Vytautas) brought Karaites from the Crimea to the Grand Duchy of Lithuania²⁷. There were some more similar stories of that kind in Karaite writings, but the majority of these tellings have characteristic features

²³ *Шанишал С.* Караимы и Чуфут Кале в Крыму. Краткий очерк. Санкт-Петербург, 1896, с. 1.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, с. 7.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*, с. 26.

²⁷ *Kizilov M.* Karaite Joseph Ezra Dubinskii and King John III Sobieski: on Jewish physicians, Christianity, and fifteenth-century illuminated manuscript from Windsor Castle // *East European Jewish Affairs*. April 2008. Vol. 38, No. 1, p. 45–64.

of a legend – a non-historical fabula and no correct geographical or other details of this arrival. Later, the story of Karaite arrival was mentioned in non-Karaite writing as well, like that of Tadeusz Czacki “Paper on Jews and Karaites” (pol. “Rozprawa o Żydach i Karaimach”) published in 1830. The appearance of a more elaborated version of this legend in the Polish–Lithuanian Karaite community is evident from the fragments of an interview with the above-mentioned Abraham Firkowicz, which were published by Władysław Syrokomla in his famous book “Travelings around Lithuania in the rays from Vilna” (pol. “Wycieczki po Litwie w promieniach od Wilna”) in 1857. The author states that “Mr. Firkowicz explained us the tradition, which is still evident among Karaites, that armed Karaite knights every day after morning services in the synagogue marched on the backs of their horses (...) to the isle castle where they served to the ruler. (...) We were speaking about the Karaite guard who safeguarded the castle”.

Despite the popularity of the W. Syrokomla’s text, it is not until the 20th century than the story of Karaite arrival to the GDL and settlement in Troki (Trakai) became part of the Polish–Lithuanian Karaite identity. The mentioning of Troki (Trakai) as an important centre in the Karaite understanding of their history until the 3rd decade of the 20th century was very limited. S. Beim, the author of the *Память о Чуфут Кале* (Memory of Chufut-Kale) mentioned the “Polish” Karaites who were “moved there in about 1200 by the grand duke of Lithuania”²⁸, but what is important here is that Troki (Trakai) is missing in this story. It can be assumed that this lack of territorialization was not determined by the general historical obscurity characteristic of this telling marked by chronological inaccuracy, but rather an evidence of the unimportance of Troki (Trakai) to the self-identity of Eastern European Karaites. This is well proved by the content of the Karaite communal press as well: in the first periodical of Russian Karaites, the journal *Караимская жизнь*, only one text was printed on Troki (Trakai). One could argue that the journal that was published in Moscow by the Crimean Karaites did not reflect the interests of the Polish–Lithuanian community, but the content of the Vilna-based Karaite journal *Караимское слово*²⁹, which was published from 1913 to 1914, did not put much emphasis on Troki (Trakai), either, – it was only one of many peripheral communities, much less important than the Crimea; no article on Troki (Trakai) appeared in the journal, not to mention the messages from different communities about the events there. It should be stressed that the town of Troki was not mentioned in the afore-mentioned text of S. Beim, showing that it played no important role in the self-identity of the Karaites at that time, as it did not in the beginning of the 20th century, either.

²⁸ *Author not indicated.* *Память о Чуфут-Кале.* Одесса, 1862, с. 36–37.

²⁹ The journal at some point replaced the afore-mentioned *Караимская жизнь*. It was published by A. I. Szpakowski, with much of the input by O. Pilecki. 12 issues in Russian appeared during that time.

It was the merit of the Karaite hacham Seraja Shapshal who elaborated the historical myth of the Polish-Lithuanian Karaites by connecting images of the Crimea and Troki (Trakai) to the dual concept of homeland. Worth mentioning is one of the first texts of S. Shapshal after his election to the position of the Polish Karaite hacham, dedicated to the Polish Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs. Here he states: “In the end of the 14th century, the grand duke Vytautas (Witold) brought Karaites and Tatars from the Golden Horde (...) he brought 500 Karaite families (...) Like Tatars on horsebacks, Karaites on foot served as warriors for the grand dukes of Lithuania and Polish kings and were granted land ownership. Today’s Karaites are the descendants of those brought by Vytautas (Witold). Being of the same origin as Tatars, they benefit from the received land”³⁰. This quotation clearly shows the development of this story of Karaite arrival from the legendary story into an elaborated narration of a Karaite historical myth.

In one of his last texts “On the question of Lithuania’s historical connections with Turkic countries and nations”, the concept of the dual image of homeland was supported by incorporating well-known historical figures of the GDL and the Golden Horde to the context of the Karaite arrival story. In this article, S. Shapshal stated that the first attempts of the grand dukes to cooperate with the peoples of the Crimean peninsula dates back to the middle of the 13th century (1252), to the conflict between the duke Tautvydas and the later king Mindaugas (Mindowg)³¹. It is interesting to note that the cooperation between the rulers of two geographical places, both important for the Karaite identity, was held in a military context. As the plot of a Karaite historical myth shows it, military service was a) the reason for the Grand Duke Witold (Vytautas) to bring them from the Crimea, b) one of the key occupations of the Troki (Trakai) Karaite community. The Grand Duke Vytautas is, of course, the main figure connecting Troki (Trakai) and the Crimea in the above-mentioned text of Seraja Shapshal.

After drawing a connection between Lithuania and the Crimea (Golden Horde) on the political (state) level, later in the same text S. Shapshal tries to prove personal relations between Witold (Vytautas) and the khan of the Crimea Tokhtamysh. Giving reference to *Rocznik Tatarski*³², he states that Vytautas (Witold) gave a shelter to Tokhtamysh after his unsuccessful battle with khan Tymur, or Tamerlang, in 1395. He settled in Lida, in a luxurious apartment, and was very well-off thanks to the Lithuanian Grand Duke. As Shapshal stresses, these two leaders became allies on the political arena as well as close friends in everyday life. Moreover, the son of Tokhtamysh Dzhelal-ed-

³⁰ Archiwum Akt Nowych (further – AAN), f. Ministerstwo Wyznania Religijnego i Oświecenia Publicznego (further – MWRiOP), syg. 1462, l. 3.

³¹ *Шапшал С.* К вопросу об исторических связях Литвы с тюркскими странами и народами (typewriting), 1955 // Lietuvos istorijos instituto biblioteka (The Library of Lithuanian Institute of History, further – LIIB), f. 4, b. 208, l. 1.

³² Ibid.

Din, who later became a khan, was fighting together with Witold (Vytautas) in the great battle of Grunwald (Žalgiris). It is important to note that in both of the mentioned texts of Shapshal we can see clear efforts to unite two geographically distant, differently state-dependent places both important to Polish–Lithuanian Karaites into one unified and logically connected narrative and make them mutually dependent.

As we can see, although the images of the Crimea and Troki became known in the Karaite community before the 20th century, it is not earlier when these images became part of the Karaite historical myth and of their collective identity. The letter of Alexandr Mardkowicz to Seraja Shapshal, send in 1928, gives a vivid picture of how important the image of Homeland was for Polish–Lithuanian Karaites. The author of the letter expresses the need for Karaites to orientate themselves to the historical homeland which he describes as that of the Crimea. He states: “We, Polish Karaites, are separated from our native socket – the Crimea”³³ and “we should search for our true Homeland in the steppes between the Dnieper and the Crimean peninsula”³⁴. It is worth noting that before the 20th century, as it is evident from the already mentioned initiatives of Avraham Firkowicz, the image of the Crimea was as that of the place where Karaites had lived for a long time, whereas during the first half of the 20th century this image gained the status of the Karaite birthplace or historical homeland.

The fact that the legend on Karaite arrival to Troki (Trakai) appeared earlier than that of the Crimea, but despite that did not manage to gain the status of the *grand historical narrative*, shows that this local story remained important only to a very limited number of Karaites and could not compete with that of the Crimea mainly because the concentration of Karaites in the peninsula was much greater and their influence on the rest of the brethren was overwhelming. However, in the 20th century, the importance of the Troki (Trakai) image for Polish Karaites began to grow. This was influenced by both political circumstances and the need of the Karaite historical myth to fit the local realities. When in the 3rd decade of the 20th century Polish Karaites, mainly in Wilno (Vilnius) and Troki (Trakai), began to reflect their history in the country, using it as an argument to justify their existence in it and strong relations to its territory and legal authority, the Crimean peninsula was incorporated into the USSR, and any association with it could be evaluated as a lack of loyalty in the Karaite community to the re-born Polish state and society. On the other hand, living in Poland, like in the 19th century Russian Empire, it was important to find their place in the history of the dominating society, and the story of Witold (Vytautas) bringing Karaites to Troki (Trakai) could be attractive. Finally, the dual image of the Homeland, connecting two geographically distant places of the Crimea and Troki, developed from the initiatives of the Crimean

³³ Alexander Mardkowicz to Seraja Szapszał, 1928 // LMAVB, f. 143, b. 467, l. 5.

³⁴ Ibid., l. 8v–9.

Karaites Abraham Firkowicz who reflected the Crimea as an ancient Karaite settlement, and Seraja Szapszal who formed the dual picture of the Karaite homeland where the Crimea was not only the place of the long-lasting Karaite dwelling, but also the place of their origin. The dual picture of Homeland was at some point a compromise between the two historical narratives present in the Karaite community, even though, as mentioned before, they were not of equal importance. Besides, S. Shapshal, who himself put an effort to strengthening the image of the Crimea as the birthplace of Eastern European Karaites, could not easily refuse it when he became the chief leader of Polish Karaites.

CONCLUSION

After analyzing periodicals, other published texts and personal writings of the Karaite leaders in the 19th – first half of the 20th century on the topics of Karaite history, the development of their Homeland image was reconstructed. Due to the fact that Karaites lived in the Diaspora having no territory which they could refer to as an ethnic group, the dual image of their Homeland was formed. The Crimean peninsula was understood as the place of the origin of Eastern European Karaites, while the Troki place served as a local version of the Homeland, which was used as an argument for the dominating Polish society to prove the ancient history of local Karaites. Both the Crimea and Troki served as a tool in the formation of the *grand Karaite historical myth* which was used to define the modern collective Karaite self-identity.