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“... BUT INCIDENTS OF A PRIVATE NATURE CONTINUED...”: THE FATE OF THE KARAITES OF EUROPE IN MOSHE KOVSHANLY’S REPORT

Yuri Radchenko

Abstract

This text is devoted to analyzing one document, namely the report of the head of the Karaite community in Germany, Moshe Kovshanly, addressed in 1943-1944 to the former Hakham of the Karaites of Poland, Seraj Shapshal. In his report, Kovshanly describes the controversial Nazi policy toward the Karaites from 1933 till the time of the report. The article describes the process of how the Karaite population in Germany fled German repression, analyzes what Kovshanly was silent about in his address to Shapshal and for what reasons, and also discusses the participation of the Russian “white” emigration in the persecution of the Karaite population and the Jews in Germany.

Keywords: Karaites, Jews, Nazis, Germany, Occupation, Persecution, Community, Ukraine, Lithuania.

1. Introduction

The historiography on the fate of the Karaites¹ of Eastern Europe during the Nazi occupation is quite extensive². At the same time, many issues regarding what happened to the Karaite population in many areas of Nazi-occupied Ukraine at the local level have not been reflected in scientific, popular science and in journalistic texts. It is known that in some regions of USSR occupied by Nazis, the Karaites were shot together with the Ashkenazi Jews, as happened in Krasnodar, for instance. In some other locations, like in most places in Crimea, the Germans and their allies did not touch the Karaite population. In addition, even in complex studies devoted to the occupation of certain regions of Ukraine in 1941-1944 not a word is mentioned about the fate of the Karaites.

At the turn of the year 1943, the head of the Karaite community in Germany, Michael (Moshe, Mussa) Kovshanly wrote a letter to the *haham* (hakhan) of the Karaites of Poland, Seraya Shapshal. Kovshanly was the descendant of an emigrant from the former Russian Empire. He was appointed to his post in 1936 and while there, he played a major role in the fate of the Karaites in Europe during the Holocaust. In this letter, Kovshanly described the situation that prevailed among the Karaites during Nazi rule between 1933 and 1943. This document, based on oral testimony from Eastern European Karaites and German officials, sheds light on many aspects and details from 1933-1945 regarding the Karaites. Who were the people who gave testimony to Kovshanly? What, according to this report, were the specifics of German policy toward the Karaites in various regions of Ukraine, Russia, Poland, and Lithuania? Were they persecuted by the Germans and their allies? What was the “legal” basis in the process of implementing “Karaite policy” in Ukraine during the German occupation, according to Kovshanly? One important aspect of the history of the Holocaust and Nazi occupation in Ukraine is the relationship between Jews and Karaites. It is known that in different areas in Europe controlled by the Germans and their allies, relations between rabbis and Karaites were also fundamentally different. What were they like in different regions of Ukraine? How does this report describe the Jewish-Karaite and the Karaite-Tatar (Muslim) relations? An important fact is that Kovshanly and his wife actively collaborated with the Germans during the Nazi rule in order to survive. In 1942-1943, Kovshanly’s name is mentioned in a list of German officials. During the war he worked as Shapshal’s representative in Germany and in the occupied territories, and in his letters to SS officers he referred to himself as “deputy to His Excellency Haham of the Karaites S. Shapshal”. Each of his letters he ended, according to the requirements of the time, “with German greetings, Heil Hitler!” (“mit dem deutschen Gruss, Heil Hitler!”)³. There is information that Kovshanly worked for the unit “Reichsarzt SS und Polizei” (SS and police doctors)⁴ and his wife was “secretary to Rosenberg”⁵. The fact that after the end of the war Kovshanly went to South America and ended any public activity also speaks volumes. What facts of his pre-war and military activities was he hiding? The document describes the persecution of the Karaites by the Russian “white” emigration. Who were these people by origin and in what form did they take part in the persecution of Karaites and Jews? I will give answers to these and other questions in this article.

2. Karaites in Germany in the 1920s and 1930s

Kovshanly's report presents a fairly detailed picture of what the Karaite population was like in the pre-war period. In general, before 1914, the Karaites were unknown in Germany to non-specialists. Only the events of World War I and the revolutions in the former Russian Empire contributed to the fact that a very small number of Karaites – eleven people – appeared in Germany. All of them were native Russians, but they had ended up in Germany in different ways. There was only one woman among them. Kovshanly notes that most of the Karaites from Germany came to the country as prisoners of war of the Imperial Russian Army (IRA) and were engaged before the Nazis came to power mainly in hard physical labor, which was typical for emigrants of that time:

“From the beginning of the National Socialist regime until now, a small colony of permanent Karaites numbering eleven souls lived in Germany. Almost all the Karaites live in the city of Berlin. They are called permanent because they have been living in Germany for more than twenty years. Half of these Karaites are former prisoners of war during the WWI; the rest are divided into three categories: Soviet citizens (who went to Germany with the permission of the Soviet government), Turkish citizens, and stateless persons. All these Karaites are workers, mostly engaged in physical or menial labor, and their occupations are the following: two waiters in a restaurant, one chef in the kitchen of a restaurant, one typesetter in a printing house, a dress-room attendant in a theater, two car drivers, one auto mechanic and blacksmith, one dressmaker, two electricians”⁶.

3. Karaites and Russian White Emigrants

After the end of the Revolution and the Civil War in the former Russian Empire, a large number of emigrants who held a variety of political views found themselves in Germany. Prominent among these people was a general of the IRA, a native of Kharkiv province, Vasily Biskupsky. Once in Germany, he took part in the local political life on the side of right-conservative and right-radical groups. In particular, he helped organize the Kapp-Lüttwitz Putsch in 1920. Biskupski later became close to the Nazis and maintained an active correspondence with Arno Schickedanz⁷ and Georg Leibbrandt⁸. According to one version, it was in his apartment that Hitler once hid after the failed putsch from November 1923. After the

Nazis came to power in 1933, Biskupski tried to establish contacts with the Nazi leadership. His initiative was eventually supported by Heinrich Himmler. As a result, in May 1936 Vasily Biskupski became head of the “Russian National Office” (German: Russische Vertrauensstelle, RVSt) in Germany. Sergei Taboritsky and Peter Sabelsky-Bork became the deputy and secretary of the organization, respectively. The task of this institution, which worked under the control of the Gestapo, was to monitor “Russian emigration” in Germany, checking people for their “loyalty”. Later, with the outbreak of the German-Soviet war, the RVSt sent 1.200 “white” emigrants to the Eastern Front as interpreters who served in the Wehrmacht, SS, police and local government, and participated in the Holocaust and other mass crimes. It is difficult to say how far the authority of RVSt extended: for example, whether Biskupski’s structure had the right to check Ukrainians who were supporters of Hetman Pavlo Skoropadskyi⁹, in whose army the head of the RVSt himself had served in 1918. Most likely, the authority of this structure was limited to those emigrants who considered themselves “Russians”¹⁰. This is largely confirmed by Kovshanly in his report:

“Before the National Socialists seized power, the Karaites in Germany lived quietly, working and content with their labor. Along with the already existing secret police of the National Socialist apparatus, a secret police department was created in Germany in 1934 to supervise all Russian natives, regardless of their nationality or citizenship, under the name ‘Russische Vertrauensstelle’ – the Bureau for Russian emigration, which was run by Russian emigrants in the service of the SS Gestapo. Their main task was to look after all citizens of Russian origin, as well as to establish a police force in favor of Germany”¹¹.

Starting with 1938, the task of the RVSt was also to provide the Germans with addresses where Jews from the “Russian emigration” lived. There is still no direct documentary evidence that Biskupski’s men turned Jews over to the Gestapo, but we find indirect confirmation of this in Kovshanly’s report. He reports that with the coming to power of the Nazis and the activation of the RVSt, the Karaites began to be persecuted, arrested and even sent to concentration camps. In these processes the key role was played by supporters of Biskupski’s, who accused the Karaites of being Jews. In this way, Russian white émigrés tried to extend Nazi anti-Jewish “racial laws” to the Karaite population. It is significant that in his report Kovshanly asserts that the main reason why the Russian white emigrants

began to persecute the Karaites was because of their non-participation in the life of the emigration. Obviously, this was an excuse. Before the revolution, the Karaites were very well integrated into the Russian society and took an active part in the life of the emigration. The main reason behind RVSt's actions was the anti-Semitism from the ranks of the White Emigrants, which most likely poured out not only against the Karaites, but also against the "Russian" Jews in Germany:

"The Karaites did not belong in the circle of emigration at all, were not members of any emigrant political party, emigrant association or trade union. The Karaites kept their distance from high politics and led a peaceful life. The political neutrality of the Karaites and their non-alignment with the Russian emigration was a reason for the Gestapo to declare the Karaites an unreliable element and, since 1934, despite the small number of Karaites, persecutions, harassment and even repressions against the Karaites from the side of the German authorities began, with the help of Russian emigrants. There was such a situation that everyone was deprived of work and the right to work, and of the right to receive benefits for the unemployed. There are cases of humiliation, in which the Russian department of the Gestapo or the German Gestapo, the police or the labor exchange summoned Karaites and began to mock their biblical names and oriental physiognomies – calling them "Kikes", "Masons", "Communists", and, without hesitation, submitted them to beatings, threatening to put them in a concentration camp. For example, Avadia Rofe from Berlin, a former prisoner of war in 1914, was beaten ... on the premises of the German Gestapo after being denounced by Russian emigrants for refusing to enroll in the Union of Russian Officers. His own brother Aron Rofe, a former lieutenant in the Tsarist army, a prisoner of war in Germany in 1915, was similarly insulted on the premises of the Russian Vertrauensstelle, *i.e.* the Russian Gestapo. Veniamin Maximadzhi, having lost his job and the right to it and to unemployment benefits, as well as his passport and the right of residence, was imprisoned in a concentration camp, where his hands and feet were chopped off during the reprisal. Then, after being taken to the infirmary, he escaped from there to Vilna, where he died a few years later. Levi, a Turkish citizen, was imprisoned together with his wife for a year and three months from 1934 to 1936 for having traveled to Moscow in 1927 to visit his parents, who lived there. He was accused of espionage in favor of Soviet Russia..."¹².

4. Establishment of the Karaite community in Germany

An important route to salvation for the Karaites in Germany, and in the countries that later fell within its sphere of influence, was the organization of a community that could prove that Karaites were not part of the Jewish people. It was for this purpose that Kovshanly organized a meeting in Berlin at the beginning of 1935, in which a “community” of Karaites (in fact, a meeting of 11 secular people) was organized, with Kovshanly elected as its head. The question remains whether the Karaites in Germany would have established such a community had it not been for the danger of German repression. He reports that the German authorities did not follow the path of Poland and of other countries that adopted Imperial Russia’s experience in “Karaite policy”, which meant recognizing them as a separate denomination from Judaism. Kovshanly (consciously or not) fails to notice the changed realities –Nazis looked not at the intricacies of religion, but at “race” (in the understanding of the pseudo-science and -anthropology of the second half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century):

“...the German authorities did not try to clarify the issue of the Karaites as Poland and Turkey did, but the Karaites living in Germany had to resort to self-defense, namely: at the beginning of 1935 in the city of Berlin in the apartment of Musa Kovshanly took place the first meeting of the Karaites, devoted to the issue of self-defense”¹³.

Kovshanly notes in his report that the Germans accused him of espionage “in favor of foreign intelligence” and that his apartment was searched. Most likely this is true and Biskupski’s men were involved.

5. Relations with Crimean Tatars and Nazi Officials

Kovshanly describes the restrictions to which the Karaites were subjected in Germany by the Nazi authorities in the second half of the 1930s, when they were suspected of being Jewish. He emphasizes that this happened at the instigation of Russian white emigrants. He also reports that at this time it became popular among the Karaites who lived in the Reich to mimic Tatars-Muslims and Orthodox Russians. This tendency can be seen in the way Kovshanly himself was called – Michael-Mussa, not Moshe.

In some places, such as Crimea, the good relationships between Crimean Tatars and Karaite nationalists contributed to the fact that the Germans did not touch the local Karaites. Later, after May 1944, when the Red Army entered Crimea, the same relationship was maintained. Thus, by the end of spring 1944, about a thousand Crimean Karaites who might have been involved in collaboration and feared possible persecutions from the Soviet authorities, retreated with the German army to the West. They found refuge there and established the “Verein der Tataren und Karaimen zu Wien” (“Association of Tatars and Karaites in Vienna”). Later, however, the word “Karaites” from the name of the organization was dropped because the Karaites began to leave the association. The reason for this was the conflict between Kovshanly and the Crimean Tatar leader Mustafa Edige Kirimal¹⁴. In a letter dated February 12, 1945, Kovshanly accused his former friend and colleague Kirimal of not being of pure Tatar origin and of working for the NKVD¹⁵. Kovshanly does not mention this conflict in his report, apparently because he wrote the report to Shapshal earlier. But it is interesting that, in his memoirs, Kirimal completely bypasses the topic of his relations with Kovshanly and with the Karaite Turkic nationalists in general¹⁶. Kovshanly reported, among other things, that “the Karaite subject” began to be of interest to the organs of Nazi Germany involved in solving the so-called “racial questions”, but he mentions it in passing:

“Three years later, *i.e.* in 1937, all the Karaites and, in particular, Kovshanly himself had to get a job in their professions and, despite the fact that they had to work with their acquaintances illegally, they had to work for a pittance and for more than 12 hours a day. All Karaites living in Germany during this difficult time had to hide their origin and were forced to pretend to be Muslim-Tatars or Orthodox Russians, in order to avoid any more accusations. Having found no more accusations against Karaites, the Russian Gestapo continued to persecute the Karaites for their non-political nature and declared them ‘Jews’, *i.e.* it informed the German Gestapo and the Ministry for Racial Affairs – Rassen Forschungen¹⁷, that the Karaites were Jews who enjoyed rights in the former Russian Empire. Of course, the word ‘Jew’ was enough for the Germans, as they were not interested in the Karaite’s former legal status”¹⁸.

In the context of the events of the Holocaust, Kovshanly mentions the fate of Germany’s Jews during the Nazi period only once. He emphasizes that those Jews who “pretended to be Karaites” suffered, without saying who exactly told the German authorities who was a real Karaite and

who was not. It is significant that, in 1941, representatives of the Karaite community from Kyiv provided for the Germans and their collaborators the service of identifying “pseudo-Karaites”. The question remains as to what role the structure led by Kovshanly played in these processes:

“In general, in this latest account, the real Karaites did not suffer, because it had been said already that they hid their origins, only the Jews who hid their origins and pretended to be Karaites suffered”¹⁹.

The Karaite community repeatedly appealed to the German authorities with a request not to extend the Nuremberg legislation²⁰ onto them, invoking their former status in the Russian Empire. The head of the Karaite community in Paris, Semyon (Serge) Duvan, took an active part in these processes²¹. As a result, in 1939 by the decision of the Genealogical Office, the petition was granted. Later this decision was extended to 200 Karaites in occupied France, who in 1940 found themselves in the zone of Nazi control. Kovshanly describes the situation in which he succeeded in convincing the SS representatives that the Karaites were not Jews. Among the arguments that Kovshanly presents are the testimonies of Jewish historians who, out of a desire to save the Karaites, denied their Jewish roots. It is significant that Kovshanly confuses names, willingly or not. For example, instead of “Weisenberg” he writes “Weinberg”, and he also mistakenly calls the German Willy Bang-Kaup a “Jewish scholar”. As evidence, he also cites some articles apparently from Soviet encyclopedias of the 1930s, which claimed that the Karaites were a separate Turkic nationality. In his opinion, all this convinced the SS “scholars” that the Crimean Karaites were “pure Turks”:

“...In connection to this, in 1940, the headquarters of the German Gestapo in Berlin summoned Musa Kovshanly for an explanation. Scientific officials of the Gestapo who tried in every possible way to prove that the Karaites are Jews were present, but M. Kovshanly pointed out to them researches on the Karaites done by Jewish professors lik Weinberg, Feiker, Bang-Kaup and others, as well as the novelties from Soviet research according to which the Karaites are pure Turks. Of course, such proofs provided by the Jews themselves and by Soviet science put the Gestapo scholars in an awkward position. As a result, M. Kovshanly was released, the position of the Karaites in Germany and in France apparently changed and there was no more persecution in principle”²².

6. Karaites on the territory of the occupied USSR

The German attack on the USSR on June 22, 1941 marked a new phase of the Holocaust in Europe. In connection with these events, the "Karaites question" began to be discussed more actively in various Nazi structures. In the Lithuanian city of Trakai, in August 1941, the German authorities attracted Shapshal, who was one of the most active adherents to Karaite nationalism from the interwar period, to "consultations". As a result, on September 25, 1941, an instruction was issued on the territory of the Reichskommissariat Ostland, according to which it was impossible to "equate the Karaites with Jews"²³. This instruction was approved on October 1, 1941 by the political department of the Ministries of the Eastern Occupied Territories. It was decided that "harsh measures" should not be performed against the Karaites. At the same time, practice shows that although there was a ban on persecutions against them, many units, especially the *Einsatzgruppen*, upon meeting the Karaite population, independently applied the "final solution". Thus, for example, in Kharkiv several dozens of Karaite Jews were shot together with 10,000 Jewish rabbis in the winter of 1941-1942. The rest of the city's Karaite population survived the occupation. Moreover, starting probably from the end of January 1942, Karaite documents (real or fake) could save a person's life and even enable him to obtain a trade license²⁴.

As in Lithuania, the Germans and their collaborators used local Karaite and non-Karaite "experts" and "activists" to determine the status of the Karaites in each particular area. Thus, in Melitopol, on October 10-13, 1941, local Karaite Gelii (Hilel) Yalpachik, at the request of the staff of Sonderkommando 10a, together with his friends and a former *hazan*, sketched a "Brief historical and ethnographic information about the Karaites"²⁵, the original of which has not survived. Yalpachik later said that the head of the town council, Perepletchikov, helped them escape:

"The Germans thought that the Karaites were a special kind of Jews...They gathered together over a hundred of us and asked: 'Who are you, what kind of nation are you?'. I told them that we were like Old Believers, that we had an independent language of the Turkic group, our own religion, our own traditions... And Perepletchikov... came to the Gestapo to defend us. He said that he knew for sure that in tsarist times the Karaites enjoyed the same rights as the Russians and served in the army..."²⁶.

In Crimea, the Germans also turned to consulting local “experts” about the past of the local Karaites. In the spring of 1942, one Nazi officer, SS-Obersturmführer Alfred Karasek, communicated on this issue with the director of the Crimean Museum of Local Lore, Alexander Polkanov. By German order Polkanov wrote a brochure in which he “proved” the Turkic, pagan and partly Muslim origin of the Crimean Karaites. He probably used some of his notes and the narrative of Karaite Turkic nationalists of the interwar period in preparing this text. According to another version, Polkanov prepared this brochure on his own initiative and hid most of the books in the museum that proved the Jewish origin of the Karaites from German eyes. Polkanov was personally interested in saving the Karaites as he himself was married to a Karaite woman²⁷. Partly such actions, as well as instructions for the *Einsatzgruppe D* from Berlin contributed to the fact that the Crimean Karaites suffered little during the occupation. We find a rather peculiar reflection of some of these events in Kovshanly’s report. In his report he relies mainly on the testimonies of Karaites who found themselves in Germany and had previously stayed in various regions of the occupied USSR. Thus, he had several witnesses from Crimea and at least one Karaite from Kharkov – Mikhail Avakh. The latter left (or was taken away by force) to work as an Ostarbeiter in 1942. We managed to find his letter from Germany to Seraya Shapshal with a request to confirm his Karaite origin:

“Your Eminence, Deeply Respected Haji Gahan,

I, Mikhail Borisovich Avakh, was mobilized in Kharkiv and am now in the camp of Eastern workers, working in a factory. I was tracked down by the respected Kovshanly, who has helped me morally and as much as possible. I am 28 years old. I heard a lot about you in Russia from my grandmother Bekenesh Arabadzhi from Evpatoria. My heart is filled with joy that you are alive and healthy to the joy of all of us Karaites. I learned that our small nation exists and is united by you. I lost my mother, my father, my homeland. The only thing I have left is my dear Karaite community and its people. I know that I am not alone and my Karaite brothers will always help me. I have a request to you. I do not have any documents. My Karaite birth certificate was lost. I ask you to issue me a new certificate or a certificate replacing the old one. I wish you strength and health for many years.

With respect, Avakh Mikhail Boris”²⁸.

It is clear from the letter that Avakh, like many Karaites in Germany, faced the accusation of being a Jew. The same thing happened, for example, to Tatiana Gibbor, who was taken from Simferopol, and who had been working in a mine on a conveyor belt in Passenberg since the summer of 1942. One day a fellow worker denounced her to her boss, informing him that Tatiana was Jewish:

“She said that I was not Russian, but a Yuda. To the chief. He called me: ‘Tatiana, are you a Juda?’ And I said, ‘No.’ ‘But Samarskaya... said ‘you’re Yuda.’ And I said, ‘No.’ He could have done something if he said I was Jewish..... And he didn’t even touch me... And then we went to the barracks and started beating her [the informer Samarskaya - Y.R.]. ‘Are you not ashamed, shameless? How could you say that?’”²⁹.

Interestingly, together with Tatiana in the group of Ostarbeiters arrived a Krymchakian girl (Krymchaks – Crimean Oriental Jewish Talmudists), who hid her identity, apparently pretending to be a Karaite:

“There was a woman who was Jewish, or Krymchachka, a resident of Crimea. And we were friends with her all the time?”³⁰.

In his text, Kovshanly reports about the shooting of Karaites by the Germans in a number of places (Kyiv, Kharkiv), often exaggerating the number of victims. Thus, in Kharkiv he records about a hundred dead. An important element of the language of the document is the demonstrative absence of suspicion that the Karaites might be of Jewish origin. Every case of execution of Karaites by the Germans on the territory of the USSR is “justified” by the fact that the Germans accused them of loyalty to the Soviet system, and not by the fact that their ancestors read the Torah in the *kenassa*. Perhaps Kovshanly wrote in this way fearing that the letter might fall into the hands of the Germans. In his account of the events in Kyiv, he also relies on the testimony of a German official, Heinrich Guse (Huse?), who served in the Ministry of the Occupied Eastern Territories [German: Reichsministerium für die besetzten Ostgebiete]. It is difficult to say who this might have been. Perhaps it was the Reichskommissar for Ostland, Heinrich Lohse:

“...but incidents of a private nature continued. Thus, for example, are the words of the Karaites living in Crimea, like Kara-Kumysh-Karaman and

Mark Seriado. After the occupation of Crimea by the Germans in 1941, many Karaites were accused of supporting secret Soviet agents and were shot by the Germans. In 1942, after the landing of Soviet military units in Evpatoria and Feodosia, 110 Karaite souls were shot by the Germans in Evpatoria and 80 Karaite souls in Feodosia, accused of supporting the Soviet occupation. According to the words of the Karaite Michael Avakh in Kharkov, after the second capture by the Germans and during the first stay of the Germans in Kharkiv, 100 Karaite souls were shot by the German Gestapo, *i.e.* the whole colony accused of supporting the Soviet power. According to the words of a German official, Heinrich Guse, who served in the Ministry of the Occupied Eastern Territories [Reichsministerium für die besetzten Ostgebiete], in 1943 the entire colony of Karaites in Kyiv, numbering 70 souls, was shot, standing accused of serving the Soviet authorities³¹.

In his report, Kovshanly does not mention a number of regions in Central-Eastern Europe where Karaites lived during World War II, *e.g.*, Galicia, Volhynia, Odesa, Trokai, etc. The report also lacks information about the policy of the Nazis, their allies and their collaborators towards the Karaite Slavs who lived in Crimea and southern Russia. Thus, on the territory of the already mentioned Galicia, the small Karaite population did not suffer from the Germans. The Mortkovich family lived in Galich and Zalukva. According to the memories of Shimon Motkovich, there was even a German field commander's office in the Karaite hut:

"Dad's family lived in Galich, and Mom's family lived in Zalukva The Germans did not touch the Karaites ... 5-6 families were there [in Zalukva before the attack of the Germans - Y.R.] ... The Germans, when they settled, they looked where there was a better economy, where there were clean people. The Germans did not touch the Karaites. They destroyed the Jews, but they did not destroy the Karaites. There were some German headquarters in Zalukva, where my aunt's house was. And my aunt spoke German. And they cooked food there and so on. My father constructed roads ... We hid Jews ..."³².

The background of Kovshanly's report was that the status of the Karaites was periodically subject to revision. Around the time of writing the report for Shapshal, a new instruction was issued from the "final" documents regulating the status of the Karaites on the territory of the Reichskommissariat Ukraine. On September 13, 1943, Commissar General Zhitomir from the Ministry of Occupied Eastern Territories issued the

instruction “On the situation and attitude to the Karaites”, which was elaborated and released in Berlin on July 31, 1943. The document repeated the already known theses about the non-Jewish origin of the Karaites:

“The Karaites are religiously and nationally different from the Jews. They do not originate from Jews, but are a Turkic-Tatar people, closer to the Crimean Tatars. They are of an ante-Asiatic and Oriental race with a Mongolian admixture and are foreign [*artfremd*] in relation to the German people. The mixing of Germans and Karaites is forbidden for racial reasons”³³.

At the same time, when the document mentions the prohibition of mixed marriages of Karaites and Germans, it refers to the “First Ordinance on the Implementation of the Law on the Protection of German Blood and German Honor” [Erste Verordnung zur Ausführung des Gesetzes zum Schutze des deutschen Blutes und der deutschen Ehre], which regulated exclusively the situation of Jews in Germany³⁴. That is, this instruction shows that the “suspicion of Jewishness” was never completely removed from the Karaites throughout the occupation of Ukraine. It should not be forgotten that among the Nazis there were people who called for the Karaites to be treated as Jews. For example, the Nazi publicist and writer Dagmar Brandt (pseudonym Mara Krüger) shared this position. She viewed the Karaites very negatively, calling them “fanatical Jews” and calling for their extermination. In 1943, she wrote a huge novel in 12 volumes, “Gardariki,”, more than 900 pages. Brandt “analyzed” the history of Western and Eastern Europe, demonstrating the “demoralizing role” of Jews in different eras, according to the Nazi worldview. Brandt portrays the Karaites as a Jewish group of “descendants of Japheth”, the “lost tribe of Israel”, who have always ruled “Kanaan” – Russia. One of the main characters in the third volume of the novel is Rahmani Ben Eliyahu, a Khazar merchant who lived in Kyiv in 720-725. Brandt’s seventh volume focuses on the history of the adoption of Christianity in Kyivan Rus’ territory. Prince Vladimir the Great is portrayed there as a man surrounded by Jews who have a strong influence on him. The prince himself is also described as the son of a Jewish servant girl, Malusha. Even Anastasius, the man who helped Vladimir during the siege of Chersonesus, is, in Brandt’s view, a baptized Jew from Babylon. The novel describes how the Karaite-Khazar missionary Yehu Fravitta ben Hanina proposes to Prince Vladimir that he convert to Judaism. The Khazar-Karaites are portrayed in the novel as an element hostile to the “Aryan race”, constantly organizing Jewish

conspiracies and corrupting the Russian statehood³⁵. In this atmosphere, in which the position towards the Karaites could have been reconsidered, Kovshanly wrote his report and chose his words very carefully.

7. Conclusions

Moshe (Mikhail-Mussa) Kovshanly is a very interesting and little-studied historical character of the period 1930-1940s. His biography and his activities from 1933-1945 require additional research. His report written to Shapshal in late 1943-early 1944 sheds light on many aspects of the life of the Karaites in Europe under Nazi rule. The letter-report is an example of an internal source of documentation about the Karaite community, but it is likely that Kovshanly was afraid of the German secret services and exercised some degree of self-censorship. For example, not once in his letter does he show doubt about the theory of the Turkic origin of the Karaites. Kovshanly's report gives us an idea of what the Karaite population in Germany was like by the time the Nazis came to power. He also described in some detail the attitude of the Reich towards the Karaites through different stages of Hitler's regime. Kovshanly reported that the main initiators of the persecution of the Karaites in Germany in the 1930s were Russian white emigrants from Biskupski's organization. The latter were searching for Jews among the Russian emigration and insisted on extending Nazi anti-Jewish legislation to the Karaites. There is nothing in Kovshanly's report about the German persecutors of the Karaites. Perhaps, he kept silent about it because of censorship. The document does not contain information about the attitude of the Ukrainian diaspora and emigration towards the "Karaite question" – for example, the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalist under leadership of Stepan Bandera or the supporters of Hetman Pavel Skoropadsky. There is no information in the document about the collaboration from the part of the Karaite population and Kovshanly himself with various structures of the Nazi state. At the same time, based on oral testimonies of Karaite and German officials, Kovshanly gives an idea of the Nazi policy in the "Karaite question" in the occupied USSR, for example, in Crimea, Kharkiv and Kyiv. Information about a number of regions (for example, Galicia, Lithuania, Odessa) is missing. Most likely, Kovshanly did not have information about events in those areas at the time of writing the report. The document showcases the

contradictory and constantly changing policy of Nazi Germany towards the Karaites in 1933-1945.

When continuing the study of questions posed in this article, researchers should consider a number of archival sources. For example, it would be promising to examine the private archives of Kovshanly's and a number of other Karaites who were active during World War II. It would also be important to study and analyze German documents from the Federal Archives in Freiburg, Berlin and Ludwigsburg, archival trial files from the former KGB archives, documents from the Russian emigration (e.g., the Bakhmeteff Archive) and the Ukrainian emigration (e.g., Oseredok in Winnipeg).

NOTES

- ¹ Karaites Judaism or Karaism is a Jewish religious movement characterized by the recognition of the Tanakh alone as its supreme authority in Halakha (Jewish religious law) and theology. It is distinct from mainstream Rabbinic Judaism, which considers the Oral Torah, as codified in the Talmud and subsequent works, to be authoritative interpretations of the Torah. Karaites maintain that all of the divine commandments handed down to Moses by God were recorded in the written Torah without additional Oral Law or explanation. As a result, Karaite Jews do not accept as binding the written collections of the oral tradition in the Midrash or Talmud. During the 9th century C.E., a number of religious groups arose that denied the existence of Oral Torah. These groups came to be known as Karaites, and they were distinguished from the Rabbanites or Rabbinical Judaism. The Karaites believed in strict interpretation of the literal text of the scripture, without rabbinical interpretation. They believed that rabbinical law was not part of an oral tradition that had been handed down from God, nor was it inspired by God, but was an original work of the sages (*Karaites*, <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/karaites>).
- ² Algamil, Y., *Ha-yehudim ha-karaim be-mizrach Europa be-avar u-be-hove*, "Tif'eret Iosef" Institute for the Study of the Karaite Jewry, Ramle, 2000; Arad, Y., *Toldot ha-shoa. Brit ha-moetsot ve-ha-shtachim ha-mesupachim*, Yad Vashem, Jerusalem, 2004; Atchildi, A., "Rescue of Jews of Bukharan, Iranian and Afghan Origin in Occupied France (1940–1944)", in *Yad Vashem Studies* 6 (1967): 257–81; Backer, A., *Die Karaimer. Historischer Iberblick*, H. Leivik, Tel Aviv, 1990; Dodenhoeft, B., "Vasilij von Biskupskij. Eine Emigrantenkarriere in Deutschland", in Karl Schlögel (Hrsg.): *Russische Emigration in Deutschland 1918 bis 1941. Leben im europäischen Bürgerkrieg*, Oldenbourg Akademie, München 1995: 219-228; Feferman, K., "Nazi Germany and the Karaites in 1938-1944: between racial theory and Realpolitik", in *Nationalities Papers* 39, 2, 2011: 277-294; Feferman, K., *The Holocaust in the Crimea and the North Caucasus*, Yad Vashem, Jerusalem, 2016; Freund, R., *Karaites and Dejudiaization: A Historical Review of an Endogenous and Exogenous Paradigm. Stockholm Studies in Comparative Religion* 30, Almqvist & Wiksell International, Stockholm, 1991; Friedman, P., "The Karaites under Nazi Rule." in *On the Track of Tyranny. Essays Published by the Wiener Library to Leonard G. Montefiore, on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday*. Ed. Max Beloff, The Wiener Library, London, 1960.
- ³ Kizilov, M., *The Sons of Scripture. The Karaites in Poland and Lithuania in the Twentieth Century*, De Gruyter, Warsaw, 2015, 346.

- ⁴ Freund, R., *Karaites and Dejudaization: A Historical Review of an Endogenous and Exogenous Paradigm. Stockholm Studies in Comparative Religion* 30, Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1991, 92.
- ⁵ Kizilov, M., *The Sons of Scripture. The Karaites in Poland and Lithuania in the Twentieth Century*, De Gruyter, Warsaw, 2015, 348.
- ⁶ Хахану караимському, Хаджи Сюрае-Бею Шапшалу. Доклад о положении состоянии караимов в период существование национал-социалистического режима в Германии и во время войны в период с 1939 года до настоящего времени в занятых Германией странах на Западе и на Востоке, *Lietuvos Mokslų Akademijos Biblioteka (Library of the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences) [MS LMAB]*, F.143, No1053, 1.
- ⁷ Arno Schickedanz (1892[1] –1945) was a diplomat of the German Reich who held paramount positions in both the NSDAP Office of Foreign Affairs (APA) and the Reich Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories (RMfdbO). Both ministries he held positions in were under the command of Alfred Rosenberg, a friend since childhood and a leading Nazi theorist and ideologue. Schickedanz was a vehement antisemite, and his positions within Rosenberg's ministries often involved antisemitic programming. In particular, Schickedanz was a central figure in the expansion of the Foreign Policy Office. He was the proposed ruler of the Reichskommissariat Kaukasien, however this territorial entity never came into existence. Schickedanz died of suicide on the 12th of April 1945 (Biedermann und Schreibtischtäter. Materialien zur deutschen Täter-Biographie, Institut für Sozialforschung in Hamburg: Beiträge zur nationalsozialistischen Gesundheits- und Sozialpolitik 4, Berlin 1987, S. 173.).
- ⁸ Georg Leibbrandt (1899 – 1982) was a Nazi German bureaucrat and diplomat. He occupied leading foreign policy positions in the Nazi Party Foreign Policy Office (APA) and the Reich Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories (RMfdbO) as an expert on issues relating to Russia. Both agencies were headed by Nazi ideologist Alfred Rosenberg. Leibbrandt was a participant of the January 1942 Wannsee Conference, at which the genocidal Final Solution to the Jewish Question was planned. In the postwar period, criminal proceedings against Leibbrandt were initiated, but the case against him was ultimately dismissed (Eric J. Schmaltz, Samuel D. Sinner, *The Nazi Ethnographic Research of Georg Leibbrandt and Karl Stumpp in Ukraine, and Its North American Legacy* Get access Arrow, *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, Volume 14, Issue 1, Spring 2000, P. 28–64.).
- ⁹ Pavlo Skoropadskyi (1873 – 1945) was a Ukrainian aristocrat, military and state leader, decorated Imperial Russian Army and Ukrainian Army general of Cossack heritage. Skoropadskyi became Hetman of all Ukraine following a coup on 29 April 1918 (Скоропадський Павло, Українська мала енциклопедія : 16 кн. : у 8 т. / проф. С. Онацький. — Накладом Адміністрації УАПЦ в Аргентині. — Буенос-Айрес, 1965, С. 1762-1764).

- ¹⁰ Dodenhoeft, B., Vasilij von Biskupskij. Eine Emigrantenkarriere in Deutschland, in Karl Schlögel (Hrsg.): *Russische Emigration in Deutschland 1918 bis 1941. Leben im europäischen Bürgerkrieg*. Oldenbourg Akademie, München 1995, S. 219-223, 226-227.
- ¹¹ Хахану караимскому, Хаджи Сюрае-Бею Шапшалу. Доклад о положении состоянии караимов в период существование национал-социалистического режима в Германии и во время войны в период с 1939 года д о настоящего времени в занятых Германией странах на Западе и на Востоке, *Lietuvos Mokslų Akademijos Biblioteka (Library of the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences) [MS LMAB]*, F.143, No1053, 2.
- ¹² Хахану караимскому, Хаджи Сюрае-Бею Шапшалу. Доклад о положении состоянии караимов в период существование национал-социалистического режима в Германии и во время войны в период с 1939 года д о настоящего времени в занятых Германией странах на Западе и на Востоке, *Lietuvos Mokslų Akademijos Biblioteka (Library of the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences) [MS LMAB]*, F.143, No1053, 5-7.
- ¹³ Хахану караимскому, Хаджи Сюрае-Бею Шапшалу. Доклад о положении состоянии караимов в период существование национал-социалистического режима в Германии и во время войны в период с 1939 года д о настоящего времени в занятых Германией странах на Западе и на Востоке, *Lietuvos Mokslų Akademijos Biblioteka (Library of the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences) [MS LMAB]*, F.143, No1053, 7.
- ¹⁴ Kizilov, M., *The Sons of Scripture. The Karaites in Poland and Lithuania in the Twentieth Century*, De Gruyter, Warsaw, 2015, 310-311.
- ¹⁵ Kizilov, M., *The Sons of Scripture. The Karaites in Poland and Lithuania in the Twentieth Century*, De Gruyter, Warsaw, 2015, 348-349.
- ¹⁶ Kirimal, E.M., *Der nationale Kampf der Krimturken*. Emsdetten/Westfalen, 1952.
- ¹⁷ There was no Ministry for Racial Affairs. It was a „Rassenhygienische und bevölkerungsbiologische Forschungsstelle“ within the Reichsgesundheitsamt / Reich Health Ministry.
- ¹⁸ Хахану караимскому, Хаджи Сюрае-Бею Шапшалу. Доклад о положении состоянии караимов в период существование национал-социалистического режима в Германии и во время войны в период с 1939 года д о настоящего времени в занятых Германией странах на Западе и на Востоке, *Lietuvos Mokslų Akademijos Biblioteka (Library of the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences) [MS LMAB]*, F.143, No1053, 6-7.
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- 21 Kizilov, M., *The Sons of Scripture. The Karaites in Poland and Lithuania in the Twentieth Century*, De Gruyter, Warsaw, 2015, 297-299.
- 22 Хахану караимскому, Хаджи Сюрае-Бею Шапшалу. Доклад о положении состоянии караимов в период существование национал-социалистического режима в Германии и во время войны в период с 1939 года до настоящего времени в занятых Германией странах на Западе и на Востоке, Lietuvos Mokslų Akademijos Biblioteka (Library of the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences) [MS LMAB], F.143, No1053, 7.
- 23 *Холокост на территории СССР: Энциклопедия* / Гл. ред. И. А. Альтман, Москва, 2011, 386.
- 24 Радченко, Ю., Оккупация, категоризация населения и избирательность геноцида: случай караимов Харькова (1941–1943 гг.), *Ab Imperio*, 3/2022, 131-160.
- 25 *Ялпачик Гелий Семёнович (1912-1993)*, <https://karai.crimea.ru/183-jalpachik-gelij-semjonovich-1912-1993.html>
- 26 Гелий Ялпачик. Нас спасали добрые люди (записано со слов в 1992 году), в *Караимы Мелитополя, Мелитополь*, 2004, 35.
- 27 Kizilov, M., *The Sons of Scripture. The Karaites in Poland and Lithuania in the Twentieth Century*, De Gruyter, Warsaw, 2015, 329-330.
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- ³⁵ Кизилев, М., Михайлова, Д., «Хазары и Хазарский каганат в европейских в европейских националистических идеологиях и политически ориентированной научно-исследовательской литературе», в Хазарский альманах, том 3 (2004), 50-51.

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