

A DISAPPEARING COMMUNITY: CRIMEAN KARAITES

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ABSTRACT

A DISAPPEARING COMMUNITY: CRIMEAN KARAITES

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The aim of this thesis is to analyze the current situation of the Crimean Karaites. This community is one of the smallest groups with a population of 800 in the Crimean Peninsula and 2,000 in total all around the world. However, they are trying to resist assimilation via launching a cultural revival project. This thesis studies the cultural loss among the Crimean Karaites and analyzes the factors leading to assimilation. It is argued that despite their efforts of cultural revival, Crimean Karaites constitute a disappearing community.

Keywords: Crimean Karaites, Karaite, Karaim, Karaylar, Karaimism, Karaism, Crimea, Jews, Khazars

ÖZ

KAYBOLMAKTA OLAN BİR HALK: KIRIM KARAYLARI

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Bu tezin amacı Kırım Karaylarının son durumunu incelemektir. Kırım Yarımadasında 800, dünyada toplamda 2,000 kişilik nüfusuyla bu halk, en küçük topluluklardan biridir. Ne var ki, kültürel canlanma projeleri başlatarak asimilasyona karşı koyabilmeye çalışmaktadırlar. Bu tez Kırım Karaylarındaki kültürel yozlaşmayı incelemekte ve bu asimilasyona neden olan unsurları analiz etmektedir. Kültürel canlanma gayretlerine rağmen Kırım Karayları'nın yok olmakta olan bir topluluğu meydana getirdiği tartışılmaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Kırım Karayları, Karaite, Karaim, Karaylar, Karaimizm, Karaism, Kırım, Yahudi, Hazarlar

To my mother and father

Anneme ve babama

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PLAGIARISM.....	iii
ABSTRACT.....	iv
ÖZ.....	v
DEDICATION.....	vi
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	vii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	ix
LIST OF TABLES	xi
CHAPTER	
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1. Introducing the Study.....	1
1.2. Methodology.....	4
1.3 Organization of the thesis.....	5
2. THE CRIMEAN KARAITES; ONE OF THE SMALLEST TURKIC COMMUNITIES.....	6
2.1. Who are the Crimean Karaites ?.....	6
2.2. The Naming Issue.....	8
2.3. Demography and Settlement.....	10
2.4. The Turkic Karaites Language.....	16
2.5. Religion- Karaism/ Karaimism.....	22
3. DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO THE ETHNOGENESIS OF CRIMEAN KARAITES.....	30
3.1. The Khazar approach and opposing approach.....	30
3.2. Religion and Conversion to Judaism/ Karaimism in the Khazars.....	34
3.3. The collapse of the Khazar Khanate and the Emergence of Crimean Karaites.....	41

4. THE ASSIMILATION PROCESS OF THE CRIMEAN KARAITES.....	44
5. CRIMEAN KARAITES IN CRIMEAN PENINSULA.....	57
5.1. Crimean Karaites family structure and marriage patterns.....	57
5.2. The Crimean Karaite Language and Education of the Crimean Karaites.....	64
5.3. Settlement of the Crimean Karaites and Their Demographic Structure.....	72
5.4. The Crimean Karaite Religion- Karaimism.....	76
5.5. Symbols of the Crimean Karaite Culture and Sacred places; <i>Chuft- Kale</i> and <i>Balta-Tiymez</i> - the most ancient Turkish cemetery in Europe.....	87
5.6. Crimean Karaites Customs.....	91
5.7. Associations formed by the Crimean Karaites and their role in the community.....	97
5.8. Relations with the other Karaites.....	101
5.9. The perception of the Soviet and Post- Soviet periods by the Crimean Karaites.....	104
5.10. Relations with the Crimean Tatars.....	106
6. CONCLUSION.....	109
REFERENCES.....	113
APPENDICES.....	121
APPENDIX A. THE GUIDELINE FOR THE INTERVIEWS.....	121
APPENDIX B. MAPS.....	127
APPENDIX C. PICTURES.....	130

LIST OF TABLES

TABLES

Table 1. Demography of the Karaites of Crimea.....	11
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Introducing the Study

In this thesis, the current situation of the Crimean Karaites is studied extensively. The Crimean Karaites are one of the smallest ethnic groups in the world. Their number does not exceed 2000 around the world and 800 of them live in the Crimean Peninsula. They constitute a unique ethnic group concerning their ethnic background and religious beliefs. They are said to be the descendants of the Khazars, a Turkic community. Their language belongs to the Kipchak family. They are believers of the Old Testament and therefore, they are mostly mistakenly known as Jews¹. Nevertheless, they only believe in the Torah and not the Talmud unlike the Jews. Their religion is called Karaimism. There are about 25,000 to 30,000 believers of this religion around the world. So, Crimean Karaites constitute only a very small number of the Karaimism believers. The Crimean Karaites can be examined in three dimensions; their geographic situation, their ethnicity and their religious beliefs. These are the things that make these groups so unique and complex. The Crimean Karaites are not known very well and sociological academic research has not been done on this community up to now.

¹ For detailed information about the Jews see; Besalel, Y., 2000, Yahudi Tarihi, Kronolojik Yahudi tarihi, Dünyadaki 104 Yahudi Toplumu, İsrail ve Türkiye-İsrail İlişkileri, Genişletilmiş İkinci Baskı, Gözlem Gazetecilik Basın ve Yayın A.Ş.

In the world, there are many different ethnic groups. As culture is neither stable, nor steady, in time, all these ethnic groups have developed, cultivated, preserved and changed or sometimes even lost their cultures. Throughout history, due to several factors, many ethnic groups have disappeared. Unfortunately, the Crimean Karaites are facing the danger of disappearance as well. Therefore, in their case, it is important to examine the reasons for their continuously decreasing population and the mechanism they developed for the survival of their community.

The Crimean Karaites describe themselves as a Turkic group believing in Karaimism. Their population is decreasing nowadays due to the mix-marriages. Current generations are interacting with Ukrainians, Russians and Crimean Tatars. Most-mixed marriages of the Crimean Karaites take place with Russians and Ukrainians. Crimean Karaites who want to keep their religious ties prefer marriages with Karaimism believers. However, there is apparently limited possibility for this in Crimea; therefore, they get married with the Karaites in Istanbul² and with Jews. Some of them even move to Israel and settle down there. This may result in assimilation. It will not be wrong to argue that in the near future, the number of the

²For further information about the Jews and Karaites in Istanbul see; Gülerüz, N., 1993. *Türk Yahudileri Tarihi-I- (20. yy Başına Kadar)* Gözlem Gazetecilik Basın ve Yayın A.Ş. and Harviainen, T.(year unknown), *The Karaites Community in Istanbul and Their Hebrew*, Jewish Studies in a New Europe, p 349-356. and Weiker, W.F., 1992. *Ottoman Turks and the Jewish Polity- A History of the Jews of Turkey*, The Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, London and Karpat, K., 1994. "Jewish Population Movements in the Ottoman Empire 1862-1914", *The Jews of the Ottoman Empire*, Levy, A. (Ed), The Darwin Press and Şişman, S. 1972, *İstanbul Karayları*, Ayyıldız Matbaası A.Ş. Ankara.

Crimean Karaites will decrease even more. Thus, one can argue that the Crimean Karaites is a disappearing community.

The cultural loss of the Crimean Karaites is studied in this thesis together with the mechanisms that they have developed to preserve their culture and their community. Even though cultural preservation efforts are intensively carried out by the Crimean Karaites, this thesis argues that it is unavoidable for this group to resist assimilation. Briefly, it can be said that the process of assimilation and disappearance has already started for the Crimean Karaites.

However, to revive their culture, the Crimean Karaites are making remarkable efforts. They are collecting materials to construct a museum. They are organizing festivals at the *Chuft-Kale*³. They are publishing their own newspaper. *Fidan*, their folk dance group, has won many competitions in Crimea. Bountiful works of literature are being printed lately. Especially, the work of encyclopedia, consisting of six volumes⁴, is a master source for anyone who would like to obtain information about the Crimean Karaite culture. The encyclopedia is full of valuable information. One of the most important cultural losses that Crimean Karaites have experienced is the language loss. The cultural revival attempt is considered essential for the survival of their community by the Crimean Karaites.

³ *Chuft- Kale* is an ancient walled town in Bakchisaray. The ancient name of the town was Kyrk Yer. For further information on *Chuft-Kale*, see; Крикун Е., Далиненко В., 2005, *Джуфт Кале-воздушный горщд*, Киев Этнос

⁴ Караимская Народная Энциклопедия, Том 1 (1995), 2 (1996), 3 (1997), 4 (1998), 5 (1999), 6 (2000)

1.2. Methodology

In this study, documentary research and qualitative research methods are used. The fieldwork is conducted in the Crimean Peninsula in Ukraine in the cities of Simferopol Evpatoria and Bakhchisaray in August 2007. These cities are chosen because most of the Crimean Karaites live there. In-depth interviews were carried out with the Crimean Karaites people, leaders of the Crimean Associations, religious leaders of the community and academics.

The most important advantage of field research is that it involves the direct observation of social phenomena in their natural settings. The advantage of the interview is that it is based on a set of topics to be discussed in depth rather than on the use of standardized questions (Babbie, 2007:306,314). This led to a better understanding of the situation and it provided useful data for comprehending the actual thoughts of the Crimean Karaites.

In this study, semi-structured interviews were realized. As the same questions were asked in the interviews, comparison between interviews became possible. Besides in-depth interviews, documentary research is another method used in this research. Gasprinsky and Tavrida Libraries in Simferopol were used and through this way, access to valuable sources about Crimean Karaites was provided. Fundamental literature in Turkish, English and Russian has been reviewed. Leaders of the Crimean Karaites also provided important sources about their community.

1.3. Organization of the Thesis

This thesis is composed of six chapters. The first chapter is dedicated to the introduction of the study, statement of the problem and methodology. The second chapter presents a general picture of The Crimean Karaites. This chapter mainly focuses on giving information about the contemporary situation and near past of the Crimean Karaites, their naming issue, their settlement and their demographic status. The third chapter covers the history of the Crimean Karaites. The fourth chapter is about the theoretical framework which focuses on assimilation and group solidarity. The fifth chapter is about the analysis of the fieldwork. Finally, the sixth chapter is the conclusion of this thesis.

CHAPTER 2

THE CRIMEAN KARAITES; ONE OF THE SMALLEST TURKIC COMMUNITIES

2.1. Who are the Crimean Karaites?

The Crimean Karaites are an ethnic group whose origins are a topic of much debate. Nowadays, out of 2,000 Crimean Karaites, 800 of them live in the Crimean peninsula. With their unique Turkic language, mode of life and their assumed ties with Khazars⁵, Crimean Karaites have always attracted scientists' attention. As cited in Polkanov, the prominent orientalist V. Grigoriev was one of the first scientists to pay attention to the Turkic Khazar origin of Karaites in 1846 (Polkanov, 1997:19). Unfortunately, over the past years, works have been published with confusing comments by authors who are not familiar with the Crimean Karaites and their customs. The main confusion is between the ethnical Karaites and the Karaites by religion (Polkanov, 1997:21). Karaites are those who believe in Karaism (A religion which differs from Judaism) but they are not necessarily of Semitic origin. A Karaite may be of any ethnic origin believing in Karaimism such as the Crimean Karaites.

⁵Concerning the name Khazar, there are controversial assumptions. For some scientists the word Khazars comes from word "kaz-er", in Turkish meaning traveling men. As cited in Karatay according to Dunlop Khazars deduce descent from the Uyghur's. However, Golden objects to this notion. (Golden, 2005: 23-64) When most Jewish writers are examined, they trace the descendants of the Jews of Khazars to The Twelve Tribes. These tribes are; *Yahuda*, Benjamin and the 10 Israeli Kingdoms. (Adam, 1999: 33)

There are several approaches to the Khazars ethnogenesis. The most common hypothesis is that the Crimean Karaites are descendants of the Khazars. According to Ilan Halevi, there is no doubt about the Khazar origin of the Crimean Karaites and the fact that they did not disappear after the collapse of the last Khazar state (Halevi, 1988:100). However, there are also approaches that do not support this Khazarist interpretation. An example for the opposing argument would be Gumilev's⁶ approach. According to him, Khazars are not of Turkic origin but they have been assimilated among the Turkic people. According to the Crimean Karaites themselves, they are the native inhabitants of the Crimean Peninsula, and they argue that they are of Turkic descent (Polkanov, 1997:23). According to Ananiasz Zajaczkowski, the most important evidence of the ethnogenesis of the Karaims⁷ is provided by their language (Zajaczkowski, 1961: 37). The language point to their descent from the Khazars and Komans as the Turkic Karaim language belongs to the Kypchak-Koman group of the Turkic languages (Zajaczkowski, 1961:40). Krader also classifies the Crimean Karaites language under Nortwestern or medieval Kypchak group (Krader,1997; 34).

As mentioned previously, there has long been confusion between two separate and unrelated groups, the Karaites and the Crimean Karaites. For example, the Karaite Jews, who

⁶ For details see; Gumilev, L. N., 2003. Hazar Çevresinde Bin Yıl- Etno- Tarih Açısından Türk Halklarının ve Çevre Halkların Şekillenışı Üzerine, çev. Ahsen Batur, Selenge Yayınları, İstanbul

⁷ Zajaczkowski only uses the word "Karaim" because this is the accepted "European" designation for "Karaylar", as he explains: "...in Karaim language *Karay*, in plural *Karaylar*... and in European languages *Karaim* (Russian and Polish)..." (Zajaczkowski, 1961:11)

believe that the Hebrew Scriptures alone are the words of God and who attempt to live by its instructions, are of Semitic origin. On the other hand, Crimean Karaites believe themselves to be a Turkic nation (non-Semitic) and to speak the Crimean Karaites language and to possess the Crimean Karaite culture. The former defines the people who believe in Karaimism while the latter defines a Turkic ethno-cultural group believing in Karaimism. According to the Crimean Karaites themselves, they have descended from Turkic tribes and they readily back this up with linguistic and anthropological evidence. Knowing that they are often confused with Karaite Jews, Crimean Karaites always point out that they are not Jews. Clearly, Karaite Jews and Crimean Karaites are two distinct groups. As already mentioned, the former is only used to distinguish people's religion while the latter is a Turkic ethnic group with its own unique religious heritage.

2.2. The Naming Issue

The Crimean Karaites constitute a good example of how the naming of an ethnic group is an important matter and how it can lead to confusion. In different languages, Crimean Karaites are named differently. For example in English, the group is named as Karaites, in Turkish as Karay, and in Russian as Karaim (*Караим*). As the name Karaite not only defines the ethnicity but also refers to the religious belief of the people, there is confusion about it. The believers of Karaimism (or Karaimizm) are called Karaim. Yet, these people⁸ do not only

⁸ There are about 30,000 Karaim (Karaimism believers around the world. Some examples may be; Egyptian Karaims, Arabian Karaims, Israeli Karaims, and Russian Karaims.

ethnically have Crimean origin. Therefore, not to give way to confusion, I prefer to use the term "Crimean Karaites" in this thesis as this is an English text and my thesis focuses only on the community in Crimea.

According to Gordon, this is quite simply a case of mistaken identity.⁹ The name *Karaite* means Hebrew Scripturalist (from the old Hebrew "Kara" meaning Scripture). Karaite Jews, or as some prefer the more precise term Karaite Israelites, are Jews/Israelites who live by the Hebrew Scriptures without addition or subtraction. Therefore, "Karaite Jew" is not an ethnic designation. On the other hand, the Crimean Karaites use the word Karaites (Karaim) only to define their religious beliefs. Consequently, the word Karaite (Karaim) only refers to a community's religious ties whereas this community can be of any origin.

Originally, as the Crimean Karaites are mostly accepted as the descendants of the Khazars and as they are of Turkic origin, it is important to know the etymology of the word *Karay*. The people call themselves *Karay*. The word *Karay* (singular) and *Karaylar* (plural) are derived from the ancient Turkic and Turkic-Mongolian ethnonyms (in different sounding: *Karaj*, *Karaj*, *Keraite*). The word *Kara*, meaning black / North in Turkish, is a constituent part of many Turkic ethnonyms (Karachaeves, Karakalpaks, Karahazars). In the customary sounding, the most accurate definition is *The Crimean Karaites-Turks*, which allows distinguishing between Karaites by blood and representatives of other nationalities professing Karaism and it helps to avoid terminological confusion. In the Crimea, for example, there is a

⁹ Karaites in the Holocaust? *A case of mistaken Identity*, by Gordon, Online available at <http://www.karaites-korner.org>

small group of Russians of the Karaitic faith (the Russian Karaites). Thus, the most accurate naming is Karais, or the Crimean Karaites-Turks. (Polkavov, 1997: 15)

2.3. Demography and Settlement of Crimean Karaites

The Crimean Karaites are one of the smallest Turkic ethnic groups. They are spread all around the world.¹⁰ Today, the biggest communities of the Crimean Karaites live in Ukraine, Lithuania¹¹ and Poland. Crimean Karaites who live in Ukraine mainly live in the Crimean Peninsula in the cities of Simferopol, Evpatoria, Feodasia, Sivastopol, Bakhchisaray and Yalta. In 1783, there were 2,600 Crimean Karaites in Crimea. Their number increased to 4,198 by the year 1844; and in 1879 to approximately 6,000. Then, this number started to decrease to 5,200 in 1897 and to 5,500 in 1920 and with a more drastic decrease by the year 1979, their number was reported as 2,400; and later in 1989 as 898 (Polkanov, 1997: 27). M. El - Kodsi reported that according to the 1991 Soviet census, the number of the Crimean Karaites living in Crimea was 800. This number is still valid; 250 of them living in Simferepol, 90 in

¹⁰ Because of the Russian Revolution, Crimean Karaites had emigrated to other countries such as; Italy, Holland, Australia, Austria, Latvia, Bulgaria, China, Turkey, Estonia, Romania, Yugoslavia, England, USA, Germany, Poland, Argentina, Brasilia, France, Czechoslovakia Hong Kong and Morocco. The Karaite folk encyclopedia, volume 6, p. 238.

¹¹In June 1997 the Karaites and Tatars celebrated the 600th anniversary of their settlement in Lithuania in 1397. According to the national legend, Vytautas (Witold), the famous king of Lithuania, is said to have brought Tatars and 383 Karaim families from the Crimea 600 years ago to his capital city of Trakai. Here Karaims served as the bodyguards of the Kings and the Grand Dukes of Lithuania. So it is evident that the Karaims have been living in Lithuania since at least the 15th century. (Harviainen, 1997: 104)

Evpatoria, 70 in Feodosia, 60 in Sevastopol, 50 in Bakhchisaray and 30 in Yalta and the rest in other places. ¹²

As it can be clearly seen from the table below, the number of the Karaites has decreased 5,86 times in 100 years. Certain factors influenced the reduction of Crimean Karaites as an ethnic group. These are ecologic-climatic factors, national and religious factors, formation of military caste, invasion of different tribes and peoples, dissolution and formation of new states, epidemic and pandemic, Civil War and Second World War, depriving of property and land-declining of living standards, misbalance between men and women, erroneous deportation, sharp transition into the 19th century from communal and patriarchal mode of life to the modern life of big cities, liquidation of all privileges, closure of national schools, the culture and the religious societies during the Soviet power, inbreeding and seclusion of communal-religious system, change of nationality in documents, and absence of national ethnographic Karaite region and non-fulfillment of legislative acts. ¹³

Table: 1. ¹⁴

Year	1897	1913	1926 ¹⁵	1959	1979	1989	2000
Number of the Karaites in total	12,894	13,600 (8,000 of those lived in (Crimea) ¹⁶	8,300	5,700 ¹⁷	3,341 (1,200 of those lived in Crimea) ¹⁸	2,803 (898 of Those lived in Crimea) ¹⁹	2,200

¹²*Karaims of Crimea* (Ukraine) by Nathan Schur. Online available at <http://www.turkiye.net/sota/karaukr.html>

¹³ The Karaite Folk Encyclopedia volume: 1, p. 157-160.

¹⁴ The Karaite Folk encyclopedia, volume 6, p.27.

According to Polkanov, Crimean Karaites used to live in the mountains and foothills, around the castles of *Kirk-Yer (Cuft-Kale*²⁰) and *Manghup-Kale*, in areas of Bakhchisaray, Solhat (The Old Crimea), Sudak, Kefe (Feodasia), Gezlev (Evpatoria). There are also communities in Kiev, Melitopol, Kharkov, Odessa, Dniepropetrovsk and other cities. Crimea, the West of Ukraine (Lutsk²¹, Galich²²) and Lithuania²³ were among

¹⁵The 1926 Soviet census reports that the Jews population of the Crimea consisted of approximately 60,000 Ashkenazic Jews, 6,400 Krymchaks Jews and approximately 8,300 Crimean Karaites. The exact number of the Ashkenazim, Krymchaks, and Karaites, who remained in the Crimea after the Soviet retreat in 1941 is, unfortunately unknown (Green 1984:171).

¹⁶ Polkanov, 1997:27

¹⁷ In 1959, 5,700 Karaims lived in the U.S.S.R. During World War II the Karaim population had been considerably reduced.

¹⁸ Polkanov, 1997:27

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ One of the most well known places of the Crimean Karaites is *Cuft-kale* (a fortress) and the highest number of the Karaites were located there (*In the middle of the 17th century the Karaites numbered over 300 families-(the Karaite Encyclopedia by Nathan Schur- Frankfurt, 1995)* and the main migration proceeded from this fortress. Below is a list of the reasons of the migration: Peace in the Crimea after its junction with Russia; The loss by Bakhchi- sarai the position of the Capital of The Crimea; The domination of economic and social privileges of the Big town in the comparison with the Chufut-Kale, located in the mountains; Active spiritual and intellectual life of the Karaites in Evpatoria; Political prospects of Evpatoria, as a new spiritual Center. These migration processes led to a social change. As a result, Evpatoria became the Center of Crimean Karaites in the beginning of the 19th century. (Tiryaki, 2005:11) After all, the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, Civil war, Bolshevik terror, hunger in 1921, inaccurate national policy of Soviets led to the irreversible changes in the number of the Karaite population. (Demographic collapse, cultural and social crisis) (Tiryaki, 2005:12)

²¹ In Lutsk in 1552 Schur mentions about 25 households; in 1648 20 households; in 1778, there was about 80 Crimean Karaites; in 1784, 105 Crimean Karaites; in 1787 there were 33 households consisting of 137; in 1789, 25 households and in 1920's only 70-80 Crimean Karaites were left. "Karaims of Crimea (Ukraine)" by Nathan Schur. Online available at <http://www.turkiye.net/sota/karaukr.html>

²² In Galich, in 1783 there were approximately 300 Crimean Karaites, this number has not changed in 1844 and decreased to 250 in the year 1879.

the areas of compact settling of Crimean Karaites. Crimean Karaites came to Galich from Crimea by the invitation of the *Knyaz* Danila Galitcki. In the 19th century, the Crimean Karaites came to Lithuania, which became their second Motherland (Polkanov, 1997:25). As Tiryaki mentions, currently only several hundreds of the Crimean Karaites live in their homeland Crimea and there are about 1,100 Crimean Karaites in the whole of Ukraine (Tiryaki, 2005:3).

However, the demographic data about the Crimean Karaites may not be accurate for several reasons. Firstly, during the Tsarist Russia and later in the Soviet Union, not all Crimean Karaites may have reported their ethnicity. Secondly, in 1939 during the Nazis rule, the Karaites were not considered as Jews under the German program of genocide (Blech, 2004:115). Therefore, many "Jews" (Semitic) declared themselves as Crimean Karaites to survive. Another reason is that in many works when given the numbers of the Karaites, it is not clear whether they are the Crimean Karaites or whether it is the other groups, which is ethnically not Turkic (Khazar) but only named "Karaite/Karaim" because of their religion.

As it can clearly be seen from the figures, there has been a dramatic decrease in the population of the Crimean Karaites. Besides the reasons mentioned above, the other reason that affected the decrease of the population is their military career. Crimean Karaites were known as professional soldiers since the Khazaria (The Karaite Folk Encyclopedia, 1995: volume 1:161). Traditionally, the military career seemed to be attractive for the Karaite. They took part in wars such as the Crimean War,

²³ In Lithuania in 1783 lived around 700; in 1844, 761; in 1879, 944; in 1897, 800 Crimean Karaites.

Russian-Turkish War, Russian-Japanese War and World War I, all of which accelerated the disappearance of the Karaite community as many of them did not return from the battlefield. Furthermore, Stalin deported the Karaites with the Crimean Tatars from Crimea at the end of the World War II. Many of the Crimean Karaites migrated to Turkey after the annexation of Crimean Peninsula by Russia. (The Karaites Folk Encyclopedia, 1995: volume 1:162). These can be also enumerated among the factors causing the decrease of the population of Crimean Karaites. According to the data in the year 1955, there were 350 members in the Karaite community in Istanbul and this number has decreased to 150 by the year 1979. This Karaite community consists of both Greek and Crimean Karaites. The mother tongue of Greek Karaites was Greek but it has been replaced by Turkish. There was an active interaction between Greek Karaites of Istanbul and Crimean Karaites and migrations have taken place in both directions (Harviainen, year unknown: 349-350).

On the other hand, the position of the Crimean Karaites in the tsarist Russia is also an interesting issue to be studied. From the rule of Catherine²⁴ the Great until Nicholas the Second, all Russian tsars were favorably disposed toward the Karaites and provided them with various privileges (The Karaite Folk Encyclopedia, 1995; volume 1:162). Under the rule of Paul and Alexander I. (1796-1825), the Crimean Karaites were exempt from the double tax. In general, they were treated like the

²⁴ "After the Russian annexation of Crimea at the end of the 18th century Catherine II took a respectful interest in Karaim. Catherine moved some of the Crimean Karaim to reinforce their old settlements in Lithuania; and in the huge new frontier province of Novorossiya in the south she granted them full Russian citizenship, which was denied to the main Jewish population" (Ascherson, 1995; 23)

Christians in terms of tax issues (Margolis and Marx, 1972:627).
Dubnow also points to the same argument about the tax issue.

It is interesting to observe that (...) in the 18th century (...) Karaites were released from the double tax. They were also granted permission to own estates, and were in general given equal rights with the Christian population (...) Here the national-religious motive of the anti-Jewish legislation crops out unmistakably. The handful of Karaites, who had for centuries lived apart from the Jewish nation and its spiritual possessions, were declared to be more desirable citizens of the monarchy than the genuine Jews, who were on the contrary to be cowed by repressive measures (Dubnow, 2000:154).

Green states that the Crimean Karaites were not considered as Jews by the Nazis (Green, 1978a: 37-38). He continues mentioning that a preliminary survey of the history of the Russian Karaites in the modern period is necessary in order to examine the reason for exemptions of execution and how they affected the lives of an estimated 74,000 Jews living in the Crimean Peninsula during the German Occupation (Green, 1984:169). According to Green;

During the course of the 19th century, the tsarist government continued to recognize the Karaites as a unique ethnic-religious group and granted them rights and privileges which were denied to the Russian Jewish community. In 1827 and 1828, the Karaites were exempt from military service whereas the Russian Jews were burdened with the responsibility of supplying troops for the tsar's army. In 1863, the Russian Karaites were granted full Russian citizenship, a privilege which the Russian Jews did not receive until the Russian Revolution of 1917 (Green, 1984:170).

It is interesting that Karaites are often criticized for asking protection from the Nazis. Thousands of them managed to be

excluded from the Nazi extermination. Being aware of the treatment of Crimean Karaites, many Jews presented themselves as Karaites. In other words, many Jews took on the identity of Karaites. This was very widespread and was even used by the Jewish leaders.²⁵

2.4. The Turkic Karaite Language

Exactly the data of the Karaitic language are one of the most striking monuments of the history of the Turkic peoples languages- N. Baskakov²⁶

Language is one of the most important elements when analyzing ethnicity. Language may change under the conditions of the surrounding nations. However, it preserves its chains of primordial form that reflects morphology, etymology and semantics (Polkanov, unknown: 63). The language of the Crimean Karaites is named as *Karaim*, but because this word is used for naming the group itself and the believers of Karaism as well, I prefer to describe it as *the Turkic Karaite language in this thesis to avoid confusion*.

As Crimean Karaites and Crimean Tatars have lived side by side for centuries, interaction between the two Turkic languages was inevitable. Today, when we examine the two language dictionaries, it is easy to see similarities. Perhaps if the Crimean Tatars had not been exiled, Crimean Karaite may have preserved their language much better. The Karaites language has not only taken words²⁷ from the Crimean Tatar

²⁵ Karaites in the Holocaust? *A case of mistaken Identity*, by Gordon, Online available at <http://www.kataites-korner.org>

²⁶ Cited in Polkanov, 1997:29

²⁷ For example; *adet-* tradition, *ece/-* faith/death (Arabic); *eger-* perhaps, *sheker-* sugar (Persian)

but from the Arabic, Persian, Armenian, Hebrew, Greek as well (Karaites Folk Encyclopedia, volume 3:16). In addition to some words that Karaites language borrowed, Karaites language has also given away words to other languages.²⁸

According to the genealogical classification of the languages, the Turkic Karaim language belongs to the Western Kipchak group of the Turkic family of languages. It is most closely related to Karachai-Balkar, Kumyk and the Crimean Tatar, all of which belong to the same linguistic group (Firkovicius, 1996:31). Furthermore, this language belongs to a Turkic subfamily, which is considered as part of a larger Altaic family by many researchers (Firkovicius, 1996:14). As it is generally accepted, the Turkic languages are classified under three sections; Black Sea-Khazars region (Karaites, Crimean Tatar, Karachai-Balkar and Kumyk), Idil-Ural region (Tatar, Bashkirt) and Aral-Khazar regions (Khazak, Karakalpak, Nogay, Kyrgyz) (Öner, 1998: XXIII).

The Turkic Karaites language is typically agglutinative; its grammatical structure differs very much from that of the Indo-European languages. In agglutinative languages, words and their forms are built up by the addition of standard mono-semantic derivational and grammatical affixes, which never merge with the stem or with one other. The most typical feature of the Karaites language word formation is the addition of

²⁸ During the Turkish language revolution, one of the aims was to purify the Turkish language from foreign words and some Persian and Arabic words were eliminated. The founder and the first President of the Republic of Turkey, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk has taken 330 words from the Karaites language. Unfortunately, it is not certain which words were inserted into the vocabulary but it is known that these were mainly agricultural and military terms. (Tiryaki, 2005:4)

derivational affixes to the end of the stem word. For example, *balych* meaning fish and *balychcy* fisherman; *ish*-work and *ishchi*-worker; *sioz*- word and *siozcu*- speaker (Firkovicus, 1996:16).

It is believed that the Karaite language has developed around the 9th-10th century B.C. The Karaite language has historically established three different dialects; Trakai, Halich-Lutsk and Crimean. As Venckute mentions in his book entitled *Mien Karajce Ürianiam*²⁹, the Crimean dialect has assimilated many features. It has also experienced a considerable influence of other languages spoken in the peninsula; such as Turkish, belonging to the Oghuz group of the Turkic family. He also mentions the differences existing among the three dialects. In terms of phonology, grammar and lexis, the Crimean dialect differs considerably from the dialects of Trakai and Halich-Lutsk³⁰, which are very similar in terms of their grammar and lexis, exhibiting only some phonological differences (Firkovicus, 1996:14).

Regarding the alphabet, the Karaites have borrowed the Aramaic alphabet. The Aramaic alphabet has developed out of the Phoenician alphabet and became distinctive from it by the 8th century BC. The Aramaic alphabet was used for writing the Hebrew language. Today, Biblical-Aramaic, Jewish Neo-Aramaic dialects and the Aramaic language of the Talmud are written in the Hebrew alphabet. Karaites have used the Aramaic alphabet mainly in their religious texts. For example, *Torah*³¹ the holy

²⁹ Meaning-I am Learning the Karaite Language.

³⁰ This dialect is spoken among the Karaites of Poland and Lithuania.

³¹ See picture 1.

book of the Karaites is written with the Aramaic alphabet. However, nowadays the Crimean Karaites use Russian as their daily language. Nowadays, when Karaites go to the *kenasas*, they pray in Russian and only read the Cyrillic.

Crimean Karaites mostly do not know the Karaite language. The ones who know few words are mostly over the age of 50. The oldest Crimean Karaite, Mrs. Tamara Ormeli is 92 years old and she lives in Simferopol. She is the person who knows the language best, and yet she does not remember much. Although she has now limited knowledge of the language, all the community members respect her as oldest of the Crimean Karaites and want to believe that she is fluent in the mother tongue. This also reflects the symbolic dimension of the language issue.

The Karaites and in particular their language and religion have become an attractive subject to scientists and researchers. Amongst the most eminent Turkologists who have studied on the language are Aleksander Dubinski, Ananiasz Zajakowski, Wlodzimierz Zajakowski, and Karaite scientist Seraja Szapszal. On the other hand, as Polkanov argues, the works done on the dialects of the Karaite languages mainly focused on the *Trakai* and *Halich-Lutsk* dialects. Accordingly, the Karaites of Lithuania and Poland have preserved their language better than the Crimean Karaites because Crimean Karaites had not got many written materials on their language and grammar until recently.³²

³²For those who want to learn the Karaites language, here are several sources; Ялпачик, Г.С. (Yalpachik, G. S.) 1993. *Русско Караимский Разговорник*, Симферополь «ТАВРИЯ» and Леви, Б. З., Ed. Лебедев, Э.И., (Lebedev) 2005, *Urus-Karay Sözlük/ Русско-караимский словарь*,

Ananiasz Zajakowski, Włodzimierz Zajakowski, N.A. Baskakov³³ and Seraja Szapszal edited the Karaim-Russian-Polish dictionary, published in Moscow in 1974 (Yalpachik, 2004: 96). Russian Turkologist V. V Radlov acted as a pioneer in this field and made the vocabulary and literature accessible. Furthermore, he gathered words and presented examples of literature. Some other academicians who have contributed to the Karaite language are V.A. Gordlevski, A. Samoilovich, V. Filononenko and K. Musayev. Karl Foy, B. Munkasci, Jan Gregorzewski, Tedeusz Kowolski (Dubinski, 1994: 11, 12). Some authors of Karaite literature who have been influenced by Sureyya Shapshal³⁴ are Sima Agha Firkovich (1897-1982), Aleksander Mardkovich (1875-1944) and Yusuf Lobanos (1878-1947) (Dubinski, 1994: 14).

Most of the ancient written works of the Crimean Karaites are anonymous folk literature. The written works were lengthways written and this collection was called *mecmua*³⁵ (meaning periodical or journal- manuscript). The *Mecmua* achieve is in Bakhchisaray- *Han-Saray* Museum. The *Mecmua* has only been once published once by Turkologist V.V Radlov

Симфереполь and Ялпачик, Г.С., (Yalpachik, G. S.) 2004, 21 Урок Караимский Языка, Симфереполь Доля and Firkovicus, M., 1996, Mien Karajce Ürianiam, Vilnius

³³ See also Baskakov, N.A., 1975. Türk dillerinin tarihi sınıflandırılmalı karakteristik yapısı, Moskova

³⁴ Süreyya Shapshal 1873-1961, one of the the leading Crimean Karaites(Han Şapşal is buried in the Balta-Tiymez cemetery. (See Picture 2) He has many publications. Several of them are; Шапшал, С., 1895, Караимы в Крыму- Краткий Очерк and Шапшал., С.М. 2004, Караимы СССР в отношении этническом Караимы на службе у Крымских Ханов and Караимы в Крыму and Şapşaloğlu, S.,1928. *Kırım Karai Türkleri*, İstanbul

³⁵ For details: Read article by Natalia Budnik, *Mecmua- Crimean Karaites manuscript collections*. (Article is originally in Russian and Turkish).

and it is 410 pages. Radlov's work was written in the Aramaic alphabet³⁶. Only 167 pages of its transcription were done and the remaining 243 pages were left as the original. In this anthology, we come across characters such as Köroğlan, Karacaoğlan, Aşık Ömer and many others. These characters are among the most known heroes of the Turkish folk tales. Legends and folk tales have been told from generation to generation. Topics are mostly about the events that took place in the old times in Crimea (Dubinski, 1994: 231).

There are also songs, riddles, proverbs and idioms. Some of them are poetical. An article about folk songs of the Crimean Karaites was published by Ananiasz Zajakowski. Again, Süleyman Kırım in Paris published folk legends in 1925. After V. V. Radlov, idioms and proverbs have been published by R.S.Kefeli in 1910 and by V. Filonenko in 1929. Besides these, A. Samoylovich published Radlov's anthology in 1916 (Dubinski,

³⁶ The Aramaic alphabet has been called (by Peter T. Daniels) an abjad--that is, a consonantal alphabet-- used for writing Aramaic. It is adapted from the Phoenician alphabet, and became distinctive from it by the eighth century BCE. As with other abjads, the letters all represent consonants, some of which are matres lectionis, which also indicate long vowels. The distinction made between abjad alphabets and later alphabets like Greek that incorporate vowels more systematically, however, tends to confuse alphabets with "transcription systems," and there is no reason to relegate the Aramaic or Phoenician alphabets to second class status as an "incomplete alphabet" (see the critique by F. Coulmas, *Writing Systems* [Cambridge University Press, 2004], page 113).The Aramaic alphabet is historically significant since virtually all modern Indian and Middle Eastern writing systems use a script that can be traced back to it, as well as numerous Altaic languages of Central and East Asia. This is primarily due to the widespread usage of the Aramaic language as both a lingua franca and the official language of the Neo-Assyrian, Babylonian, and Persian Empire. The holy texts of Judaism and Islam, as well as certain Christian and Buddhist texts are written in scripts which are known as descendants of Aramaic.(Online available at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aramaic_alphabet)

1994: 233). There are many sources about legends, folk tales and songs as well.

When the Crimean Karaites began to experience a cultural loss and adapted to the ways of Russian culture and language in the 20th century, their language got endangered. Yet the intellectual potential is still strong and many Crimean Karaites release books, publish their own newspaper and even issued their own folk encyclopedia (Borsari, 2003:13). However, these publications are mostly in Russian. Therefore, they rather support the idea of preserving their language and they work significantly on the matter. Grammar books such as *Mien Karajce Ürianiam* and *In 21 lessons- The Karaim language* (Crimean dialect) and other books like *Crimean Karaite Idioms and Proverbs*, *Karaite song* and dictionaries are being published. They want their language to be taught in schools as mother tongue. Some Karaites choose to study Crimean Tatar language at the university because of the great similarities between the two languages. They believe that through this way they can more easily learn their mother tongue and pass it on to their children. There are also Karaite language courses arranged by the Crimean Karaites Association.

2.5. Religion- Karaism/ Karaimism

*The custom is half of the belief.*³⁷

Karaimism (Karaism) is a monotheistic religion that was formed in Baghdad. From Baghdad, it spread to Syria, Egypt³⁸,

³⁷ Crimean Karaite proverb (Tiryaki, 2005:7)

Crimea (Khazaria), Byzantium, Spain and Iran. Today, there are about 30,000 Karaim³⁹ (Karaites) in the entire world, most of them living in Israel. Crimean Karaites who still speak Turkic languages live in Ukraine, Russia and Poland. The Karaites in Istanbul are mostly the Greek Karaites. Some ethnic Jews (of Semitic origin) and Russians are also believers of Karaism (Tiryaki, 2005:5).

Religion has played an important role in the Karaites history. The Karaites have believed in Karaimism since the 8th century. Karaimism traces its origin back to Anan Ben David⁴⁰ (Halevi, 1988:57). He was from Basra and he played an important part in the formation of the religious teaching and consolidation of believers in the past (Polkanov, 1997:43). From the 8th -10th centuries, the Karaites were subjected to the rule of Khazar *Kagan*. In the 8th century, this teaching spread among Khazars (Polkanov, 1997:43).

Karaimism is an independent doctrine and its followers do not celebrate any holidays or feasts that are not expressly confirmed by the Holy Torah. An important element of the religious education of Karaites is reading the Torah in the original language (Old Hebrew) (Tiryaki, 2005:6). The Karaite feasts are as old as the First Temple in Jerusalem. As prescribed

³⁸ For further information about the Jews and Karaites in Egypt see; Beinun, J., 1998 *The Dispersion of Egyptian Jewry- Culture, politics, and the Formation of a Modern Diaspora*, The American University in Cairo Press Cairo, New York

³⁹ The person who believes in Karaimism.

⁴⁰ The doctrine of Anan ben David is a synthesis of religions and it accepts Mohammed, Jesus and Moses as prophets. It is based on tolerance and freedom. His doctrine is based on two main ideas; who ever accepts the prophets can live their lives as they wish to and people can compose ones own belief. What is important is to believe in monotheism, eternity and the three prophets. (The Karaite Folk Encyclopedia, 1996: volume 2, p 15)

by the Hoy Torah, the religious house of the Karaites is a temple with following roles; ritual purity, taking off shoes, washing, and separation of men and women during prayer. Most of the Karaite prayers are psalms. The texts of the Torah, however, are used as supplements to the Psalms; but they do not have the main role and are only invoked on certain weekdays and holy days (Tiryaki, 2005:6). According to Prof. Valentine I. Kefeli, the religious journey (process of Hadj) to Holy Land-Palestine, Israel, Jerusalem was very popular among the Crimean Karaites in the 19-20th centuries (Kefeli, 2004:3). Moreover, Tatjana Teryaki mentions that a Crimean Karaite who did the *Hadj* was called *Hadji*. This was an honored name which brought the whole Karaite family to the Patrician level in the society (Kefeli, 2004:3).⁴¹

In Crimea now, there is only one⁴² *kenasa*⁴³ operating in Evpatoria. This *kenasa* complex consists of a grape yard, marble yard, lapidarium, the yard for the attendance to pray, a small *kenasa*, a big *kenasa*, memorial, museum of ethnography, library and the cafeteria *Karaman*⁴⁴(Tiryaki, 2005: 12-27). The *kenasas* are orientated with their altars to the south. There is a balcony in the northern part of the building with a separate

⁴¹ For further information about the Hadj; Internetal Institute of Crimean Karaites, Issue:3, Karaite Hadj (Pilgrimage) to Holy Land, Abraham Kefeli, Slippery Rock, USA, 2004)

⁴²Before the Russian revolution, the number of the *kenasas* were 20, and 11 of them were in Crimea. The last acting temple was closed in Evpatoria 1959. (Polkanov, 1997:47) Today the *kenasa* in Evpatoria is acting. The one in Simfeopol is used as the radio house. The ones in Kiev, Kharkov, Bakhchisaray and Sevastopol are preserved but are not used to their proper purpose.

⁴³ Religious house of the Karaites. (The most ancient *kenasas* of the Crimean Karaites are the two *kenasas* at the *Chuft-Kale*. See picture 3 and 4)

⁴⁴ See Picture 5.

entrance for women. Women did not visit *kenasa* before marriage, but this is not being experienced currently. Carpets were used to decorate the *kenasas*. Karaites enter the temple barefoot. They pray⁴⁵ twice a day; in the morning and evening. The priests are called *Gazzan*⁴⁶ whereas, social and spiritual head is called the *Gakhan*. He was the leader of the Karaitic Cleric Government (Polkanov, 1997: 45). There are several forms of the words *Gazzan* and *Gakhan*; *Hazzan* and *Haham/Gaham* (Borsari, 2003:9). The communities are closely knitted by the main priest- the Haham upon whom the Karaites relied to solve all their disputes (Borsari, 2003:22). They were called to save genetic and spiritual values of their communities and nation as a whole. *Hahams* were not only attendants of worship, but they were also spiritual teachers of the community (Borsari, 2003:25).

The *Gazzan* of the *kenasa* of Evpatoria, Mr. D. Tiryaki explains that the principles of Karaimism are derived from the books of the Torah (the Old Testament). He summarizes the aim of Karaism as to serve God, love everybody, and preserve the laws of the Torah. The Karaites are distinct from Rabbinical Jews, Muslims, and Christians; however, it is possible to find some similarities in their customs and rules. Karaimism is a religion that does not permit the making of changes or additions to the Old Testament. They deeply accept the idea of

⁴⁵ The Karaims pray at home but they attend the prayers held in the *kenasas* on Saturdays. The *gazzan* reads from the Torah and collections of prayers. (The collection printed in both Russian and The Turkic Karaite Language, for the Crimean Karaites for their prayer in the *Kenasa* in Evpatoria was financed by TİKA- The Turkish International Cooperation and Development Agency) The Old Testament has been translated into the Crimean Dialect. For details see; Jakowski, H., The Finnish Oriental Society Volume 82 Ed. Helsinki 1997.

⁴⁶ For the outfit of the *gazan* see Picture 6.

unchanging law from the time of Moses: as stated in Deuteronomy 4:2, "Do not add or subtract from the law, but keep the commandments of Lord your God that I have given you." (Tiryaki, 2005:5). The Ten Commandments are scrupulously observed by the Karaites (Polkanov, 1997:43). The Karaite religious movement has regarded the Old Testament as the complete and sole source of divine law and guidance. Therefore, Karaites repudiated the Talmud as merely human doctrine and opposed much of Orthodox Judaism. Historically, that was a strict and often ascetic sect, living in small communities throughout the Middle East.⁴⁷

One characteristic of the Karaites is that they profess belief in Jesus and Mohammed as prophets. Warren Paul Green, a noted holocaust researcher explains:

One aspect of Russian Karaites was recognition of the divinity of Jesus and Mohammed. In a pamphlet published by the Polish Karaylar- Karaite community in 1938, the topic of the relationship of Karaylar-Karaism to Islam and Christianity was discussed: "Karaites view Christ and Mohammed as prophets."⁴⁸

On the surface, there is nothing to differentiate Karaites from other Jews says Meyers in her article.⁴⁹ She continues by listing the differences⁵⁰ as such; Karaites remove their shoes when entering the *kenasa*. Inside the *kenasa*, Karaites kneel on

⁴⁷*Only the Bible Counts* by Nechemia Meyers. Online available at http://www.jewishsf.com/content/2-0-/module/displaystory/story_id/12658/format/html/displaystory.html

⁴⁸ As cited in Green 1978b:286

⁴⁹*Only the Bible Counts* by Nechemia Meyers. Online available at http://www.jewishsf.com/content/2-0-/module/displaystory/story_id/12658/format/html/displaystory.html

⁵⁰ For a comparison between the Karaites religious festivals and customs and the festivals and customs of the Jews see; Еврейские праздники и обряды, Симферополь «Ремоне» 2001

rugs rather than on chairs or benches. (Although in the *kenasa* in Evpatoria, there are benches Karaites kneel on the floor in some part of the praying.) Karaites pray twice a day whereas Rabbinates pray three times a day. Karaites do not celebrate Rosh Hashanah (new year), Yom Kippur (atonement), or other Jewish holidays on the same day as Rabbinates. This is due to the fact that Karaites have calendar. Margolis and Marx also mention about this; "The holidays were actually celebrated on different days and the confusion created thereby was noticed even by non-Jews." (Margolis and Marx; 1972:268). Karaites accept that the New Year begins on any day of the week. Karaites eat beef with milk products, if the milk and the meat are from different sources. Rabbinates go to a special bath called a *Mikvah* to be purified, however Karaites simply take shower. Karaite men never recite the humiliating blessing traditionally said by their Orthodox counterparts, who thank God for not having created them as bondsmen or women. Karaite women are not allowed inside the synagogue during their menstrual period.⁵¹ As mentioned in the book entitled *As it is written- a brief case for Karaism*, Karaites do not light Shabbat Candles. This practice is forbidden in accordance with Exodus 35:3 as nowhere in the Torah is there a commandment to light Shabbat Candles. Karaites have adopted only the Torah and it is forbidden to add or diminish the commandments of the Torah (Lichaa, Gordon & Rehhavi, 2006: 33). Last example necessary to mention here is; Karaites do not traditionally place a mezuzah (a small parchment scroll inscribed with the passages from Deuteronomy 6:4-9 and 11: 13-21) on their

⁵¹ *Only the Bible Counts* by Nechemia Meyers. Online available at http://www.jewishsf.com/content/2-0- /module/displaystory/story_id/12658/format/html/displaystory.html

doorsteps as most Jews do. Instead, they put up a little plaque with the Ten Commandments.⁵²

It is important to note that all Karaites are recognized as Jews by the State of Israel. Furthermore, every Israeli has an identity card and on this identity card is registered the holder's religious/ethnic affiliation. The identity card belonging to Karaites has "Jewish" in the space for religious/ethnic affiliation. Karaites (including the Crimean Karaites) are also covered under the Israeli *Law of Return*- the right of all Jews anywhere to return to Israel and seek immediate citizenship. Recently the government of Israel published a stamp in honor of the Karaite Jews (Lichaa, Gordon & Rekhavi, 2006:30). During the interviews, some Crimean Karaites have mentioned about such Crimean Karaites who have moved to Israel but this is not an accepted attempt among all the Crimean Karaites.

When mentioning about the religious beliefs of the Karaites, it is also necessary to mention about the relics of the former beliefs. Karaites use the Old Turkic word *Tengri* for God. "The cult of sacred oak-trees⁵³ reached the present" (Polkanov, 1997:51). Karaites pray at the sacred-oak tress. The name of the cemetery in Bakhchisaray is *Balta Tiymez*⁵⁴. *Balta Tiymez*, losophate valley is an old necropolis of the Crimean Karaites and is just like *Chuft-Kale*⁵⁵ a time-honored sacred place of the Crimean Karaites (Borsari, 2003:16-17). The head stones of the graves face south just as in the Islamic tradition. The Karaites

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ See Picture 7.

⁵⁴ Meaning "May axe not touch."

⁵⁵ See Picture 8.

use the Aramaic alphabet on the gravestones.⁵⁶ Almost all of the old gravestones in the *Balta Tiymez* are written with the Aramaic alphabet; however, the language is the Karaites language, in other words to the North-Western group of the Turkic languages (Zajaczkowski, 1938; 40).

⁵⁶ See Picture 9.

CHAPTER 3

DIFFERENT APPROACHES

TO THE ETHNOGENESIS OF CRIMEAN KARAITES

3.1. The Khazar approach and opposing approach

The ethnic origin of the Crimean Karaites is a controversial issue. This interesting community of the Crimean Peninsula has caused a lot of debate in the academic literature. There are two approaches to the matter. According to one approach, the Karaites are Jews both in religious and in ethnic respect. On the other hand, the opposite approach claims that the Karaites are ethnically non- Semitic and that they are the descendants of the Khazars as mentioned in the previous chapters. So, who are the Khazars? At this point it is necessary to take a brief look at the Khazars history from various aspects.

Khazars ruled for 300 years between the 7th and 10th century in the region called Khazaria⁵⁷ (northern parts of the Caucasus). They were one of the most important Turkic tribes who are mainly accepted as the descendants of the *Gokturks*. The word Khazar comes from the Turkic word *gezer* meaning traveling/ wondering. The original Turkic word of the tribe is Hazar (Kuzgun, 1985:14).⁵⁸ What have made the Khazars so popular are their beliefs. Lately, Khazars are being studied by

⁵⁷ King mentions from the region as *Gazaria*. He also agrees that the Khazars ruled from 7-19th centuries and mentions that the Khazar state was located on the plains north of the Caucasus mountains, touching both the Black and Caspian Seas. (King, 1968; 73-75)

⁵⁸ For further reading on the Khazars and Karaites see; *Türklerde Yahudilik ve Doğu Avrupa Yahudilerinin Menşei Meselesi- Hazar ve Karay Türkleri*, Şaban Kuzgun, 1985

many scientists and many books have been published about them. The reason for this is that they have played a very unique role in the history of the world. This is generally accepted by most scientists without any hesitation. Karatay mentions about the Khazars and he says that by not adopting Islam like other Turkic tribes, Khazars have prevented in a way the spread of Islam in the East Europe and also in Russia. Many historians do not hesitate to make the prediction that if Khazars had converted to Islam, Russians would have been within the orbit of Islam (Karatay, 2005:1). Zuckerman dates the conversion to Judaism back to the year 861. According to him, in the 860s, there ruled 4 kings; *Hezekia*, *Ishak*, *Menase* and another *Menase*. At the 10th century three kings ruled the Khazar Khanate. *Bünyamin* (until 920), *Aaron* (until 930) and *Yusuf* (until 955) (Zuckerman, 2005: 120).

According to the view that supports the Khazar approach, which is the most accepted one in the academic circles, The Khazars are of Turkic tribes. The supporters of this approach are Arabian historians such as Ibn-i Miskavayh, Taberi, Mesudi, Ibn-i Haldun, Karamani, Kazvini and Jewish writers such as H. Rosenthal, H.H.Millman, Dunlop, and Russian writers such as Barthold⁵⁹ and Minorsky and other historians like Philip L.Gell, Kutscjera and M. Grignaschi, claim that Khazars are ethnically and historically Turkic. Turkish historians agree upon the fact that the Khazars are Turkic but they do not share the same opinion considering to which Turkic tribe they belong to. Z.V Togan connects the Khazars to the *Gokturks*, Afet Inan shares this opinion whereas H.N.Orken, I. Kafesoğlu and H. Koşay

⁵⁹ Barthold claims that Judaism was not only the religion of the Khazar khanate but the Khazar state as well. (Karaşemsi, 1934; 20)

connect the Khazars to the *Sabirs*⁶⁰ (Kuzgun, 1985: 17-19) On the other hand, A.N. Kurat defines the Khazars as a separate tribe (Kurat, 1976: 743-745).⁶¹

The historians who deny this theory stress on the documents by Ibnu'l Esir. According to Ibnu'l-Esir, *Georgians are Khazars*. At this point, Kuzgun stresses that it is important to note that Ibnu'l Esir does not say that the *Khazars are Georgians*. M. Khorene, Miçeforos, Anastasyos and Teophanes make connection with the *Barsils*.⁶² On the other hand, an Armenian historian argues that the *Barsils* are not Turkic but a

⁶⁰The Sabir people inhabited the Caspian Depression prior to the arrival of the Avars. They appear to have been a Turkic people, possibly of Hunnic origin. Online available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sabirs>

⁶¹ See also; Kurat, A.N., 1972. *IV-XVIII yy. Karadeniz Kuzeyindeki Türk Kavimleri ve Devletleri*, Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, Ankara

⁶²The Baysi / Barsils were a semi-nomadic Eurasian tribe, probably of Turkic linguistic affiliation, and possibly identical with the Bagrasik. They are included in the list of steppe people living north of Derbend in the Syrian compilation of Zachariah Rhetor, and are also mentioned in documents from the second half of the 6th century AD in connection with the westward migration of the Eurasian Avars. When the Avars arrived, according to Theophylact Simocatta, "the Barsilt (Barsilians), Onogurs, and Sabirs were struck with horror (...) and honoured the new-comers with brilliant gifts." In an Armenian geography of the 7th century, the Barsirs are described as living on an island, distinct from the Bulgars and Khazars and at odds with both nations. In addition, it describes them as possessing large flocks of sheep, supporting the notion that they were at least partly nomadic. Mikhail Artamonov theorized that "Barsilia" was located in northern Daghestan, but subsequent scholars have disputed this theory, as the population of the relevant period and region appears to have been, for the most part, settled in permanent fortress-towns. Some archeologists believe that the Barsils lived near the Volga delta, which would explain the Armenian reference to them as island-dwellers. This is supported by Theophanes' statement that the "populous people of the Khazars came out from the innermost parts of Bersilia in Sarmatia Prima." If indeed they lived on the lower Volga, they were almost certainly conquered by the Khazars, whose capital Atil was in the same region from the mid-700s on. Eventually at least part of the Barsil nation is believed to have settled in Volga Bulgaria. In the tenth century, ibn Rustah reported that the three nations of Volga Bulgaria were "Bersula", "Esegel", and "Bulgar". Thereafter the Barsils were likely to be assimilated by the Volga Bulgar. Online available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barsils>

Turkified group. V.F Miller and Artamonov make a connection between the Khazars and the *Alans*⁶³ (Kuzgun, 1985: 19-21). Kuzgun adds that the argument which claims that the Khazars are not Turks contradicts with one another and it is scattered and that it does not focus on one point. Most important of all, these views do not have clear evidence. (Kuzgun, 1985: 21) Other leading researchers who have written about the Khazars are L.N.Gumilev, P. Golden, M.I. Artamonov and D.M Dunlop. For example, according to Artamonov, Dunlop could not understand what kind of a role Judaism played among the Khazars history (Artamonov, 2004: 588).

Artamonov is among the scientists who have hesitations to say that the Karaites are the descendants of the Judaic-Khazars. However, when he mentions their language, he stresses that this is the only evidence providing that they are from the Khazars. Artamonov argues that the language is not a sufficient proof to determine the ethnic origin of the Crimean Karaites. Thus, according to Artamonov, the issue of the ethnic origin is still a matter of unsolved question (Artamonov, 2004:575) Artamonov dates the dual rule of the Khazar khanate to the 9th century and he sees this as a result of conversion to Judaism (Golden, 2005:49).

On the other hand, Zajaczkowski claims that the Karaites are the heirs of the Khazars (Zajaczkowski, 2005:133). Zajaczkowski mentions the Karaites as the modern representatives of the Khazars (Dunlop, 2008: 239). In his

⁶³ The Alans or Alani (occasionally but more rarely termed Alauni or Halani) were an Iranian nomadic group among the Sarmatian people, warlike nomadic pastoralists of varied backgrounds, who spoke Iranian language and to a large extent shared a common culture. Online available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alans>

article the “Khazarian culture and its inheritors”, Zajaczkowski mentions that the Khazars are a nomadic community and adds that they were half-nomadic just like many other Turkic groups. He supports this by giving examples from various documents. One is from Ibn Rusta’s work. Here, Ibn Rusta mentions that the Khazars are a community living in the cities in the winter and that they move to the plains in the spring and stay there until winter. Another example is from a Hebrew document, in this Khazars are described as a community which stay in the cities all winter and in April, they all go to their lands and come back to the cities in Kislev (November- December) (Zajaczkowski, 2005: 123). The Khazars cities were full of vineyards and orchards. The city population consisted also of Muslims⁶⁴, Christians and others. There existed mosques, churches and *kenasas*. The east side of the city was preserved for the palace members whereas the west side was the real city where the Muslim, Christian, Jew or pagan and tradesman of other religions lived (Zajaczkowski, 2005: 124).

3.2. Religion and conversion to Judaism/Karaimism in the Khazars

When Khazars are examined, it is seen that these people did not have one main religion. There was religious freedom in Khazaria and as a result, many missionaries come to the region (Kuzgun, 1985: 83). The oldest of the beliefs was the Old Turkic belief (*Gök Tanrı* - this was a monotheist religion) (Kuzgun, 1985: 84). As a result of the freedom, the conversion to another monotheistic religion was easy for the Khazars. Christianity

⁶⁴ For further information about the spread of Islam among the Khazars see Yıldız, H.D., 1981. *Hazarlar Arasında Müslümanlığın Yayılması*, Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi- Ankara

spread among the Khazars around 860s as they interacted with the Byzantines (Kuzgun, 1985: 90-92). Islam spread among the Khazars as they established relations with Arabs (Kuzgun, 1985: 93). Most interesting of all was the conversion to Judaism. With this point, another argument is faced and that is whether this was a Rabbinic Judaism or Karaimism. Rabbinic Judaists supported the opinion that these people accepted Talmud. On the other hand, Karaims claim that the Khazars only believed in the Torah and that they did not accept the Talmud. According to this argument, the Khazars were not Talmudist.

When and how Judaism was spread among the Khazars is another debate. According to Artamonov, Khazars converted to Judaism in the year 737 (Artamonov, 2004: 342). Whereas, Karaşemsi claims that the conversion was earlier in the 670's when Ishak Şangari come to Khazar land (Karaşemsi, 1935: 18). On the other hand, Harkavy goes even further back to the date 620's and states that the Khazars converted to Judaism when they became independent (Kuzgun,1985; 98). There are many other claims but at this point it is more important to mention that this conversion happened between the 7th and 8th centuries. Another important issue is the reason for their conversion to Judaism. According to Zajaczkowski, the conversion to Judaism was easy as the Khazars were already believers of a monotheist religion. This was the *Tengri Han* belief (Zajakowski, 1961:18). Khazars traditional monotheist beliefs - that is called Tengri- made it easier for them to convert to another monotheist religion.

The conversion to Judaism goes back to the 8th century according to the Hebrew documents and according to the

Muslim documents; it is during the rule of the Caliphate Harun Reşit (786-809) (Zajaczkowski, 2005:127). Zajaczkowski goes further mentioning about the Karaites and according to him, the Karaite missionaries came from Byzantine. He says that the aim was to spread the Karaite religion among many Turkic communities as well as the Khazars and Kumans on the Black Sea shore and Khazaria. He adds that today the Karaites inhabitants of the region are the remains of these peoples (Zajaczkowski, 2005: 127).

Controversial to the point of view that relates the conversion to Judaism as a result of missionaries activities, Pritsak stresses that the spread of Judaism happened via tradesman and not professional missionaries sent from the religious centers. He argues that tradesman promoted their religion in a popularized way (Pritsak, 2007: 34). According to Shapira, who supports another approach opposing the Khazar approach, it was not possible that the conversion was the aim of the missionary Jewish groups. He says that the Khazar-Karaite speculation should be abandoned for ever. He mentions about the Sogdians spreading Christianity and Manicheism among pagans (Shapira, 2007: 48). Related to this, Shapira makes a connection between the conversion and a coin. This coin from the Viking *Spillings Hoard* of Gotland, Sweden is identified as having been minted by Jewish Khazars. Numismatists are concluding that the coin was actually minted in 837-838 in Khazaria (Shapira, 2007: 44). From the point of view of Shapira, the theory connecting Khazars and the Karaites used the following arguments; the two stages of the conversion (Karaite or Karaite-like Judaism), *Chufut-Kale* an unbreakable linkage between the Khazars and the Karaite, *The Majlis*

document (a document testifying for a Karaite-Khazar connection), The Turkic dialect spoken by the Karaites, early contacts with near borders, no Sabbath candles were lit nor was the Talmud heard in this land (Shapira, 2007: 47).

Zajaczkowski continues mentioning that in the Soviet Encyclopedia's last edition, it is written that at the end of the 8th century, the Khazar ruling class has converted to Karaimism (Zajaczkowski, 2005:128). According to Zajaczkowski, the Khazars have not adopted Judaism but the Karaimism. The Karaim belief includes Turkic, Islamic, Christian and Jewish traditions. Khazars spoke Turkic-Khazar language and wrote with the Aramaic alphabet. Karaites are the grand-grand children of the Khazars (Zajaczkowski, 2005: 133).

According to the Jewish sources, the conversion was due to the fact that Judaism was perceived as a superior religion (Kuzgun, 1985: 104). During the times of the conversion, in Khazaria, there were intensive missionary activities (Kuzgun, 1985:105). The conversion to this religion is explained from another aspect by Karaşemsi. According to him, Khan and the ruling class converted to Judaism as this was an older and honorable religion and also because Judaism was the least related religion with politics among the other religions (Karaşemsi, 1934: 19-20).

From Dunlop's point of view, Khazars were Shamanist nomads and half-nomads of Central Asia. However, later on, they have converted to Judaism. He argues that if it had not been to the Khazars, the history of Christianity and Islam would have been much different from that of today. Dunlop handles

the conversion of the Khazars to Judaism in two aspects. One is from the point of view of the Arabic written sources and the other is from the Hebrew sources. Dunlop points out that, unlike other Arabic literature, the work of Ibn-i Fadlan has not mentioned the conversion to Judaism (Dunlop, 2008:130). Dunlop adds that although it can not be defined as Rabbinic, there is no hesitation that the Khazars have converted to Judaism as it is in details mentioned in the documents (Dunlop, 2008:131).

According to the Arabian literature, in the *Muruc ez-Zeheb* (947), it is mentioned that in the city of Atil (the capital of the Khazar Khanate) there lived Muslims, Christians, Jews and pagans (Dunlop, 2008; 107). In the Khazar Khanate, there were two rulers. The *Khagan* acted as the president and the *Melik* was the prime minister. The *Khagan* was of the Khazars and the *Melik* was chosen among the Jews. Politics and the administration were in the hands of the *Khagan* but the *Khagan* was chosen by the *Melik* (Dunlop, 2008:113). Here is what Ibn-I Fadlan says about the Khazars ruler; The Khazar rulers are called *Hakan* and his deputy the *Hakan Beh* (Dunlop, 2008:127). There is different information given by various sources about the rulers of the Khazars. V.Minosky therefore has drawn a table to clarify these differences (Kuzgun, 1985:77).

Here are examples from the Hebrew documents about how the Khazars have converted to Judaism. There is a document originally written in Arabic by Yehuda ha Levi in 1140. According to this document, the conversion took place in 740 AD. This famous work of ha Levi is accepted as the defender of

the Middle Age Judaism. It is argued that the Karaites were those people who had left Palestine before Jesus was born and had settled to Crimea long before the Khazars. This is also the argument of Firkovich according to Dunlop. Dunlop says that Firkovich does not only support his argument by documents but also gives his Karaite teacher as another reference (Dunlop, 2008:139). Dunlop also mentions about how Firkovich's efforts were examined with suspicion as he tried to show one of the manuscripts he collected⁶⁵ as Ishak Sangari's (Dunlop, 2008:140). A Karaite from Basra, Yafet Ibni Ali wrote the word *mamzer* and this is explained as the Jews. Another Karaite writer Jacob ben-Reuben mentions about the Khazars as a nation that was not deported from their homes and as the only nation which did not pay any tax to non-Jews (Dunlop, 2008:237).

Golden continues by giving a list of people and their point of view on the Khazar approach; Ibn Rusta (920) mentions that the Khazars big chief was a Jew. And the other ruling peoples consisted of Jews too but the rest of the Khazar community were believers of the Old Turkic belief. Ibn Fazlan (922) says that the Khazars and their kings were Jews. Ibn al-Faqih (930) states that all Khazars adopted Judaism to some extend. Mesudi (943) describes the Khazar city; Here live Muslims, Christian, Jews and others. Istakhi (951) says that Jews consisted only the minority and that the majority of the Khazar population consisted of Muslims and Christians. Only the

⁶⁵ For information about the Firkovich collections also see Harviainen, T., 1995, *The Cairo Genizot and Other Sources of the Second Firkovich Collection in the St.Petersburg*, ed.E.J. Revel, *Proceedings of the Twelfth International Congress of the International Organization for Masoretic Studies*, Society of Biblical Literature, Cambridge University and

ruling class was Jews. Mukaddesi (985) describes Khazaria as a land full of sheep, honey and Jews. According to Nedim (987), Khazars wrote with the Aramaic alphabet. Ishak Ibn el- Huseyn says that the main ruler of the Khazars believes in Judaism. (cited in Golden, 2005: 42-45). Bekri (1094) mentions about the general population of the Khazars as Muslims and Christians. The smallest community is the Jews he says. Yakut (1229) mentions about 10,000 Muslims. According to him, Khazars are Muslims and Christians.

Conversion to Judaism of the Khazars have for generations been the concern of scientists. What was so interesting is how come the Khazars ruling class chose Judaism rather than Christianity or Islam despite being in such a close relation. According to Zajaczkowski, the answer lies in "tolerance" (Zajaczkowski, 2005: 125). He mentions about an Arabian geographer supporting this argument. According to Ibn Rustah, in the Khazars Khanate, all three days were considered holy (Friday, Saturday and Sunday) There used to be seven judges; two Muslim, two Christian, two Jewish and one for pagans (Şaman) (Zajaczkowski, 2005:126).

As Golden states, this conversion did not take place over night. The relations with the Christian Byzantines and Muslim Arabs were putting pressure on the Khazars. They rejected to accept both of these religions but to be among the "great powers" a monotheistic religion was necessary (Golden, 2005: 37). There are many arguments upon, whether the Khazars were Rabbinic Jews or Karaims. No matter how incomplete Zvi Ankori's works are, they have certainly shown that the Khazars

were Rabbinic but of course among the Khazars, there were Karaims says Golden (Golden, 2005: 39).

3.3. The collapse of the Khazar Khanate and the emergence of Crimean Karaites

As surrounding tribes had accepted the Old Testament, the Khazars under the rule of Bulan Khan accepted this religion in the year 740. In those days, Talmudism was not known in the region. Torah came to the region with Karaimism. In the 9th century, Khazars were Muslims and Christians. As the Russian *Knyaz* Svyatoslav conquered the region in the 10th century, the Khazars were wiped of the scene of history by the 11th century. However, of course the peoples of the Khazar Khanate did not disappear. These people were assimilated among the Russians. As the Khazars were warriors, they worked as soldiers for the *knyaz*. In the Russian manuscripts, the name Khazar was last mentioned in the 11th century (Polkanov, unknown: 73).

After the collapse of Khazars in the 11th century, Karaites continued to live in Crimea, *Kirk-Yer*. As independent Karaite Khanate was formed in the following years and as they came from the same race, they joined with the Golden horde in peace. The guards of the Castle (Chuft-Kale) were always chosen among Karaites. As there were always wars in the region, Hans always stayed in the castle. This is also why the grave of Canike Sultan⁶⁶ (1473) is in the *Chuft-Kale*; showing the trust towards the Castle and the Karaites. Another reason for Crimean Khans good behavior towards Crimean Karaites was

⁶⁶ See picture 10.

because Crimean Karaites saved the life of Hacı Giray's father (Ormeli, 2005: 13).

In 1246, some Crimean Karaites immigrated to Danill Galitski, where they were given land, following the invitation of the *knyaz*. Later, in the 14th century, they moved to Lithuania with Vitovits. Karaites held on to their political identity during the Crimean Khanate. Their lives were not at risk and they were exempt from the taxes. They joined the Cossack's and moved to the Colonel rank in the army (Kolodniy and Filipovich, 2005: 47). In the 14th and 15th centuries, it is noted that the Christian Khazars mixed with the Russians. The other Khazars lived in the Khazar Mountains and the Caucasus, and they preserved their freedom for a while and then united with the neighboring ethnic groups. Their names have many similarities. One example is; *Kara-im, Kara-çay*. This similarity can perhaps be explained with a close relationship. The Khazar theory has been put forward by V.V.Grigoriev, V.D. Smirnov and A. Samaylov (Polkanov, unknown: 73). Grigoriev's and Smirnov's researches have put forward that the Karaites have indeed no ethnic relations with Semitic-Jews but that they were from the Turkic race. In his book entitled *Russia and Asia*, Grigoriev clearly states his view that the Karaites are Turkic (Karaşemsi, 1934: 45).

After Crimea was annexated by Russia, Karaites left the peninsula and moved to Odessa, Kiev and Berdyansk. A spiritual Karaite administration was formed in Crimea in 1837. Their centre was the Kenasa complex in Yevpatoria. (Kolodniy and Filipovich, 2005: 43) Their centre was first in Kırk-Yer (Çift Kale) and it was later moved to Evpatoriya in the 19th century.

Gahan, was the leader of the Spritual Karaite Adminstration (Kolodniy and Filipovich, et al., 2005: 47).

Polkanov stresses that the anthropological studies have proven that the Crimean Karaites belong to the Turkic groups. It is found out that the Crimean Karaite language belongs to the *Kuman* codex. These bring up the question of which Turkic tribe the Crimean Karaites come from. According to Polkanov, the answer to this must be found in an assimilated group which once existed in Crimea and spoke a Turkic language and has lost its freedom and even its name (Polkanov, unknown; 72). He shares the opinion that the Crimean Karaites comes from the Khazars. He says that this tribe existed in the Northern Caucasus and Black Sea steps in the 2nd century and that they formed a strong state in the 6th century, and finally in the 7th century concurred all of Crimean peninsula. He adds that the Khazar influence was so strong that even in the 15th century; the region was called the *Gazzan tsardom*. Even tough it was long ago, the Arabian writers mention the Black Sea as Khazar Sea (Polkanov, unknown: 73).

CHAPTER 4

THE ASSIMILATION PROCESS OF THE CRIMEAN KARAITES

Representing an interesting ethnic group, the Crimean Karaites, even though gradually assimilated in Crimea, are still trying to resist assimilation. This chapter deals with how assimilation proceeds among the Crimean Karaites. Aspects of power-conflict, assimilation and ethno genesis theories are used to highlight the three components of ethnic solidarity. These are economic interdependence, in-group/out-group boundaries and ethnic identity (Petrisans, 1991: 61). My argument will be mainly based on the analysis of Petrisans article because his approach is helpful for better understanding the case of the Crimean Karaites.

The central concern in the case of the Crimean Karaites is the process of assimilation. It is of high importance to analyze the factors that have contributed to the process of assimilation such as the Soviet era, mixed marriages and cultural loss. The assimilation process needs to be analyzed considering the historical development of this process. Hence, it is pertinent how and to what extent the Crimean Karaites have sustained their identity. For the analysis of this question, it is necessary to assess the relevance of the existing theories of assimilation.

The assimilation theories are very fragmented. There is not one theory that can fully explain the process of assimilation. According to Petrisans, the power-conflict theories demonstrate how certain ethnic groups became

perpetual minorities, whereas they neglect to specify under what conditions other ethnic groups can overcome economic impediments and assimilate over time. Aspects of each of these theories are considered as central processes in developing a comprise model. Internal-colonialism, split markets, middlemen and minority theories recognize the cohesive force of economic interdependence. The power-conflict theories highlight the effects of economic interdependence on ethnic solidarity. In other words, ethnic solidarity is the strongest when economic interdependence is high (Bonacich, 1980).

Another theory is the assimilation theory which explains the cultural adaptation of the ethnic group to the host society; however, this does not seem to organize the solidarity-producing forces of economic independence. In other words, the assimilation theory explains how ethnic solidarity is maintained through in-group/ out-group boundaries. Gordon stresses on seven key sub-processes and also mentions that one way to retard assimilation is through the maintenance of strong in-group/out- group boundaries (Gordon, 1964 and 1978).

The third theory is the ethnogenesis theory which explains the retention of ethnic identity despite the disappearance of those economic and cultural forces promoting solidarity. The theory elucidates the efforts ethnic identity has on the ethnic solidarity. There are certain ethnic groups which can share some traits with the host society and still retain their ethnic identity (Shibutani, 1964 and 1965).

The above three aspects or three stages of ethnic solidarity can be conceptualized as; high, moderate and low. According to the high ethnic solidarity, it is necessary to have a conscious effort to keep the family plot intact and to preserve the customs. In the high ethnic solidarity, power-conflict, assimilation and ethnogenesis theories are united and they compose a model that represents ethnic solidarity. The moderate stage of ethnic solidarity reveals in-group/ out-group boundaries and a strong sense of ethnic identity. However, economic interdependence no longer plays a key part in their unification. The moderate stage is analyzed under enclavement, ethnic play, socialization of children and cultural history. One of the factors that help retard assimilation is the formation of enclaves, or small communities that provide institutional structures that replace those of the larger society. In this stage the entire economic interdependence variables drop out, leaving in-group/out-group boundary and ethnic identity variables as the impetus behind solidarity. Group members rarely mix with non-ethnics and therefore, in-group/out-group boundaries are strengthened. Finally, the last stage of the ethnic solidarity is the low stage. In low stage in-group/out-group boundaries are no longer a major force maintaining the solidarity of the group but rather ethnic identity is maintained through symbols, rituals and a quest for group membership. As first transition from the high to moderate stage and then from the moderate to low ethnic solidarity occur, the symbols become more important. So, it can be said that the final stage of ethnic solidarity is made up solely of symbols (Petrisans, 1991).

Ecological isolation is a key factor for an ethnic solidarity. Petrissans examines the case of the Basques and he mentions that the long periods of isolation experienced by Basque shepherders in the United States enabled them to maintain their language much longer than other ethnic groups. Therefore, language has become a symbol of Basque ethnic solidarity as well as a means for maintaining in-group ties in the face of interaction with various out-groups. Inter-marriage does occur among the Basques but it is usually the Basque male that marries a non-Basque. As a result, even though assimilation occurs, it is not likely that the Basques will quickly lose their identifying names. Additionally, many clubs and festivals serve as potential meeting places for future marriages. So, Basques are encouraged to intra-marry while non-Basques are excluded from membership. The Basques claim their national identity due to their origins and biological and cultural traits. Although they are being labeled as French or Spanish, they adamantly claim that they are Basque. They proudly maintain their ethnicity even though their origin and strange language remain a mystery (Petrissans, 1991).

In the case of the Crimean Karaites, it is not possible to mention a high ethnic solidarity mainly because of their population. The number of the Crimean Karaites decreased from almost 13,000 to 2,000 (as given in table 1; in the year 1897 there were 12,894 registered Crimean Karaites whereas, in the year 2000 their number was 2000) in years and today this is their primary problem. Another important issue is the mother tongue. During the Soviet era, Crimean Karaites did not teach their mother tongue to the children. If previous generations of the Crimean Karaites of the Soviet era had

taught their children the Crimean Karaite language, today's elderly would have been fluent in their mother tongue.

During the times when the Crimean Karaites lived in the *Chuft-Kale*, they were soldiers and warriors⁶⁷, they owned orchards and vineyards and worked in their farmlands, living together in a community. In time, new generations received a better education and their occupation fields changed. Well educated Crimean Karaites started working in big cities away from their families. As Crimean Karaites started living in a non-isolated community, they were not successful in preserving their culture. Consequently, they set-up families with Russians, Ukrainians and with people of other communities like Jews⁶⁸. This led to a cultural loss. As it can be clearly understood from the example, currently, occupational assimilation occurs, especially among the last generations. Therefore, in the Crimean Karaites case, economic interdependence is no longer contributing to an ethnic solidarity while the old-world work values have not been preserved as it is one of the main functions of the high ethnic solidarity. For all the above mentioned functions and the lack

⁶⁷ For details about the war traditions of the Crimean Karaites see; Кропотов, В.С., 2004, Военные Традиции Крымских Караимов

⁶⁸ At this point it is necessary to give an example from a newspaper article that mentions how marriages with the Jews are perceived among the Crimean Karaites. In the article, it is briefly mentioned that the Crimean Karaites are not Jews. The article continues to argue that special laws have been prepared for Crimean Karaites during the Tsarist rule and that this is an indication of their Turkish identity. Crimean Karaites look more like Tatars, which makes them look more like Muslims than Jews. According to the article, what distinguished Crimean Karaites from Jews are their physical appearance, culture and outfits. The article is arguing that the Crimean Karaites did not take Jews among their community. Finally, it is mentioned that a marriage with a Jew leads to the externalization of a Crimean Karaite. (From the newspaper *Kyrym Karaylar*; 7 June 2006 no; 48 Translated from Russian to English by Duygu Varol.)

of them in the case of the Crimean Karaites, it is impossible to mention about a high solidarity among the Crimean Karaites.

Crimean Karaites at present do not live in enclaves. They live in communities in which the majority of their interactions are Russians, Ukrainians, Crimean Tatars and other small communities. Nowadays, Crimean Karaites live scattered in the cities, mostly. As previously mentioned about their settlements and their population, it is indeed clear that in this sense it is difficult to mention of group solidarity. As communities live isolated, it is easier for them to preserve ethnic solidarity; however, this is not the situation for the Crimean Karaites. The Crimean Karaites do not live in an isolated community and as a result intermarriages are seen rarely, resulting in low population. Even though Crimean Karaites claim that Crimean Karaites should in-marry nowadays, the remaining Crimean Karaites are very low, as given by numbers in the previous chapters. As mentioned by the interviewees, the effort of maintaining ones surname is seen among the Crimean Karaites women. It was also mentioned by the interviewees that it was not allowed for Crimean Karaite women to marry a non-Crimean Karaite, whereas men could. When intermarriage started to occur, this started the loosening of the solidarity. Nowadays, even though Crimean Karaites are encouraged to intra-marry and to preserve their identifying surnames, this is practically impossible due to the number of the remaining Crimean Karaites.

The interviewed community members are mostly aware of how important it is to be conscious of ones own identity, know

about the history of its origin and attend the camps organized at the *Chuft-Kale* and to know ones mother tongue. They are mostly members of the associations in their own cities and try to gather as much as possible but their main concern is their decreasing population and their economical situation. Their common view is that they do not have enough financial support to support the revival. Crimean Karaites try to support the associations by paying the membership fee but these are deficient.

Today, language has become a symbol of ethnic solidarity among the Crimean Karaites. Propinquity encourages the retention of the maternal language. However, currently, the Crimean Karaites can speak only a few words of their maternal language. Therefore, it cannot be said that language is a means of maintaining in-group ties. Although language is an important element of persistence of in-group awareness and ethnic solidarity, it is only a symbolic solidarity in the case of the Crimean Karaites.

Lately, many books are being published by the community members. With the help of these books, the middle-aged and youngsters learn the Crimean Karaite culture. Another importance of these books is to transfer printed material to the next generations so that they can pass on culture to latter generations at least through these books.⁶⁹ A further attempt

⁶⁹ Some examples of these books are: Кефели Н.А., Максимук А.Д., Полканов Ю.А., 2006, Мозаика Культуры Крымских Караимов, Симфереполь (In this book it is possible to see pictures of children from the festival in Turkey on p.55); Полканов, Ю.А. 1994. *Обряды и Обычаи Крымских Караимов-Тюрков Женитьва, Рождение Ребенка*, г.Бахчисарай; Шапшал, С., 1895, Караимы в Крыму- Краткий Очерк; Полканов, Ю. А., Полканова, А. Ю., Алиев, Ф.М., 2005, *Фольклор Крымских Караимов, Симфереполь*; Полканов, Ю.А., Полканова, А. Ю.,

of the Crimean Karaites is printing newspapers. In the inner pages of the Crimean newspaper, every month, the Crimean Karaite section which consists of two pages is published. This section has the heading *Kyrym Karaylar* (Къырым Карайлар).⁷⁰ Other than this newspaper, they had another one called the *Karaimskaya gazeta* (Караимская газета).⁷¹

There is a folk dance group called *Fidan* and the group members play the Crimean Karaites dances. They participate in competitions and festivals. Other than this effort, the Crimean Karaites gather at the *Chuft-Kale*. Every year, they organize camps and not only Crimean Karaites from different cities but also the Karaites from Poland, Lithuania, Russia and from other parts of the world get together. It was mentioned that a Karaite from Japan even came to the camp once. By courtesy of these camps, elderly, middle-aged Crimean Karaites and their children get acquainted with each other. At the camps, traditional food is cooked, dances are played, elderly tell the youngsters about the Crimean Karaites traditions, they visit the *Balta-Tymez* and pray at the oak tree, children are encouraged to clean the cemetery and the Crimean Karaite folk tales and legends⁷², proverbs and idioms⁷³, and songs⁷⁴ are being taught to the children and they are promoted to learn the Crimean Karaite language.

Алиев, Ф.М., 2005, Фольклор Крымских Караимов-песни, пословицы и поговорки, народный календарь, Симферополь

⁷⁰ See picture 11 and 12.

⁷¹ See picture 13.

⁷² For details see; Полканов, Ю.А., 1995, Легенды и предания Караев (Крымских Караимов Тюрков) Симферополь and Тиряки, В.З., 2002, Легенды и Предания Крымских Караимов, Евпатория, there is also a booklet about the legends of *Chuft-Kale*; Джухт Кале в легендах и преданиях крымских караимов 2002

Socialization of children is another important aspect to the retention of in-group/ out-group boundaries. This serves to increase loyalty to the group and to decrease deviance. Among the Crimean Karaites, the general practice is to encourage children to learn about their culture as much as possible. Even though today Crimean Karaites children learn most about their culture at the camps, they do not learn much in terms of language as elderly do not know much. Crimean Karaites try to socialize their children because the family socialization is reinforced by the associations within the community. The Crimean Karaites know the importance of supporting the associations as they act as the "core" of the community. The Crimean Karaites families and enclave communities need to interact on a primary group level to indoctrinate children in to the Crimean Karaite values of ethnic pride. As Petrissans put it, ethnic play generates the kind of ritual intensity that produces ethnic solidarity only when there is a closed community (Petrissans, 1991: 70-71).

On the other hand, the Crimean Karaites do not force their children into the Crimean Karaites community as they know that the more they push, the less they will be involved with their culture. Unlike the former generation, the coming generation needs to keep closer ties with their community and preserve the culture which has been transferred to them even if they leave to pursue educational goals.

⁷³For books on proverbs and idioms see; Firkovicius, M.,2000, Selomonun Masallary (Süleyman'ın Meselleri) Patarliu Knyga, Ankara and Полканов, Ю.А., 1995 г. Кърымкъарайларынь аталар-созы пословицы и поговорки крымских Караимов,Симфереполь

⁷⁴ Фиркович, М.И., 1989, Карай Йырлары, Вильнюс (This book is printed in Vilnius by the Lithuanian Karaites.

At this point, it is also necessary to point out the importance of religion. In Crimea, there is only one functioning *kenasa*. Today, the Crimean Karaites who wish to go to the *kenasa* need to go to Evpatoria in order to maintain their accustomed patterns of worship. Crimean Karaites do not have a *kenasa* and a *gazzan* of their own in every district, village or even city. Perhaps this is due to their dispersed settlements and due to their low demographic number. Normally, it is the *gazzan's* duty to solemnize a marriage, to give the name of a newborn by a ceremony, to organize funerals etc. However, as there is only one *gazzan* in the whole of Crimea (and Ukraine), it is practically impossible to serve the whole community. As most of the *kenasas* were closed down by the Soviet regime, Crimean Karaites could not practice their religious beliefs at the *kenasas*. As a result, a loosening in the religious beliefs occurred as this was one of the aims of the regime. For most of the ethnic groups, religion is the main tie to an ethnic solidarity. Hence, if a group loses the opportunity to practice its religion and becomes less aware of its religious duties as in the case of the Crimean Karaites, this means that the group has lost one of the main elements of ethnic solidarity.

The Crimean Karaites claim their own national identity because of their origins, religion and cultural traits. When asked about their nationality, they will adamantly claim that they are of Turkic origin and that they are the descendants of the Khazars. Although they are labeled as Jews, they firstly deny this and proudly maintain their ethnicity even though there is still a debate about their origins and religion. During the Soviet regime, they were unable to practice their religious

practices freely and the dominant language was Russian, causing the loss of the mother tongue.

In brief, Crimean Karaites have formal socializing agents such as the annual camp which teaches dancing, singing, language, cooking and culture and the associations which work to acquire more social rights. Unfortunately, these efforts are not enough to mention a moderate stage of ethnic solidarity among the Crimean Karaites community. Even in time if the Crimean Karaites ethnicity disappears, an ethnic identity remains. This can be visibly recognized through Crimean Karaites flag, two-headed spear and shield, *Chuf-Kale*, and dancing costumes. Other than these, Crimean Karaites Association *Krymkaraylar* have printed calendars⁷⁵ which state their religious festivals and the calendar is printed both in Russian and the Crimean Karaite language. It is also possible to read brief information about the Crimean Karaite festivals, famous Crimean Karaite people etc. During the festivals, at the *Chuft-Kale*, badges are distributed to the attendants.⁷⁶ As Petrissans says, in this sense then, people's cultural possessions become charged with significance as a marker of ethnic membership. He adds that these marginal ethnics can be recognized through bits and pieces of symbols that represent their ethnic group. Therefore, it is possible to maintain an identity indefinitely through symbols (Petrissans, 1991: 73).

Even though Crimean Karaites no longer live in enclaves, go to the *kenasa* and socialize their children into the Crimean

⁷⁵ See pictures 14 and 15.

⁷⁶ See pictures 16 and 17.

Karaite culture, these individuals may still return to the community for annual festivals or major religious holidays. These times of rituals rejuvenate and reinforce their ethnic identity. Furthermore, Crimean Karaites seem to return to their heritage at times of important transitions in life such as marriage or funeral. For example, the Crimean Karaites prepare halva, which is served after the funeral prayer. Nowadays, there is a definite breakdown in marriage pattern, religious practices and language retention. However, the ethnic identity is still retained and this is due to a desire to find meaning and a sense of belonging in a society. For the Crimean Karaites, a search for roots seems to give a sense of continuity and reassurance. The Crimean Karaite identity serves a valuable and distinctive characteristic in Crimean Peninsula. These findings imply that assimilation is not irreversible.

When Crimean Karaites are studied, it is seen that in terms of ethnic identity none of the three types of theories can explain the assimilation of the Crimean Karaites by its own. The Crimean Karaites are an example of an ethnic group whose resistance to assimilation can not be fully explained by either power-conflict or assimilation theories. Ethno genesis theories explain how Crimean Karaites have maintained their ethnic identity through rituals, symbols and a quest for meaning, even after many of the variables have dissipated (Petrisans, 1991: 76-77). However, the uniqueness of the Crimean Karaites is their low population which is a factor that renders difficult even the practice of some symbolic rituals, and it can be argued that with further decrease of the population it will be difficult to preserve the symbolic identity.

As a result when low, moderate and high stages of ethnic solidarity are examined, for the case of the Crimean Karaites, the following statements can be made. Even though Crimean Karaites are motivated to maintain their ethnic and cultural identity against the threat of assimilation, this attempt is not sufficient. For the Crimean Karaites, the rituals are the meaningful times of group awareness that increase ethnic identity. For the Crimean Karaites, the symbols are group markers that signify the ethnicity and increase the ethnic identity and these are used during the rituals. The Crimean Karaites identity is all that remains in the low stage of ethnic solidarity and ethnic identity is perpetuated through symbols and rituals.

CHAPTER 5

CRIMEAN KARAITES IN CRIMEAN PENINSULA

This chapter is based on the fieldwork carried out in Crimea in August 2007. During the fieldwork, in-depth interviews were realized by the Crimean Karaites community members as explained in detail in the introduction. During the one month fieldwork in Crimea, it was possible to meet with the Crimean Karaites mostly at the *Chuft-Kale* in Bakhchisaray and at the *kenasa* in Evpatoria and in some cases, in their houses in Simferopol. Interviews with the notable people of the community and with many other Crimean Karaites from various age groups were carried out. In this chapter, I tried to support my hypothesis with my observations and accommodate facts to theory.

5.1. Crimean Karaites family structure and marriage patterns

In the old times when Crimean Karaites were getting married, they used to prepare a marriage agreement. This agreement was called the *Kalim*⁷⁷ (Kalym). The *kalim* was written with the Aramaic alphabet. According to this agreement, the bride and the groom had to write all their belongings on this agreement, which they brought as trousseau. When a divorce took place, this agreement was torn into two and the trousseau was returned mutually. Furthermore, the groom had to give some amount of gold

⁷⁷ See picture 18.

agreed upon to the bride as alimony. The *kalim* was prepared by the *gazzans*.

During the interview in Simferopol, the oldest living Crimean Karaite showed a *kalim* dating back to the year 1895. Back then, all couples had to have a *kalim*. Today this custom is not carried out anymore as the marriages take place in front of the current laws. A synonym for *kalim* is *şetar*. The *gazzan* of the *kenasa* said about the *şetar*:

In the past, there was the practice of *şetar* (marital agreement). In this agreement, both the bride and the groom's belongings were written. In case of the divorce, the amount that groom should pay was also written there. Nowadays, *gazzan* is still making the weddings but there is no more *şetar*.

Today, monogamy is essential in the Crimean Karaite families but in the past polygamy was common. During an interview, a Crimean Karaite academician mentioned:

Polygamy was common up until the 1930s. A Karaite man could marry up to 4 women. In Bakhchisaray, there was a Karaite man in the 1930's who had two wives. One of the wives had no child and the children of the other wife used to call both wives mother (Male, 63).

These days, Crimean Karaites mostly set up families with Ukrainians or Russians. Although a number of them stressed that they prefer to get married within the community, this is almost impossible in practice due to the

small population. There were some rare examples who did marry Crimean Karaites. Most of the interviewees stressed that they were married either with a Russian or an Ukrain.

My husband is Russian, he is a police officer. I could not find a Crimean Karaite (Female, 26).

Another interviewee said that:

I'm married with a Russian but my children are married with Crimean Karaites, for me that is the best way but nowadays, people marry whoever they want to marry (Male, 65).

During the interviews at the *kenasa* in Evpatoria, a lady working at the *kenasa* stressed:

I am a widow and my late husband was from Ukraine and was a technician. I have a 35 years old son who is married with an Ukrain, and he is working in a factory producing computer parts (Female, 60).

On the other hand, when asked during the interviews, most of the interviewees said that they are married with the person they love. However, they mentioned that in the past, it was more common for men to marry a non-Crimean Karaite and that this was not advised for women.

During the interview, a woman said:

In the old days, women couldn't marry a non-Karaite, Crimean Karaite men enjoyed more rights than Crimean Karaites women (Female, 60).

Another interviewee at the *kenasa* mentioned:

I am retired and I am a widow. My late husband was Ukrainian. He was a vessel technician. I have two daughters. Most of the Crimean Karaites prefer to marry people from different nationalities (Female, 62).

As most of the Crimean Karaites are well educated, it is common for them to meet with their husbands/wives at school or at work. An example to this was given by the Chairman of the Simferopol Karaites Association, Mrs. Galina Gladilova Prokopveyna. During the interview in *Chuft-Kale*, she said:

My mother, who was a student at Mendeyelev Institute, met my father, who was a Circassian and the dean of the institute. After the war, they got married and I was born. My husband who is Russian was living only two houses away from us. We were friends since our childhood and went to the same school (Female, 60).

Young Crimean Karaites do not know much of their culture other than few things that they hear from their parents. As they themselves set up families and have their own children, young couples who are conscious about cultural loss are encouraging their children to feel interest in their culture and language. Another interviewee mentioned:

I'm a Crimean Karaite and I'm Ukrainian. I'm married with a Russian and have two children. In the past, Crimean Karaite families used to have up to 8 to 10 children, but nowadays due

to the economic reasons, they have one or two children. Another reason for the decrease is that there was no abortion in the past (Male, 65).

Today, the number of the children in the Crimean Karaite families is two in average. The family size is getting smaller and smaller.

I'm half Crimean Karaite and half Circassian. I have two children and they both have one child. They don't want to have more because they can't afford it. As my husband is Russian, one of my children feels Russian and the other one feels Crimean Karaite (Female, 60).

Like in Turkic culture, some Crimean Karaites live in the form of extended families. This is because of both economic conditions and the respect to the elderly. They say that they are very respectful towards their ancestors and believe that what they can learn from the elderly will be transferred to the next generations. Therefore, today it is of extra importance to take good care of the cultural heritage.

The preservation of the family name is an example to the attachment to cultural heritage. Some Crimean Karaite women married to non-Karaite men prefer to keep their surname. For those Crimean Karaite women keeping their own family name is a way of resisting assimilation. However, this is not very common. A Crimean Karaite woman said:

Our family name is *Bakkal*. I did not change my surname. I still use my surname Bakkal. My husband and his family understand the fact that I insist on using my father's surname and I wish my son feels himself Karaite too. My four year-old son is a Karaite. Now, he is too young, but in the future I will tell him that he is a Crimean Karaite and I, myself, want to teach him the Crimean Karaite language, because our mother tongue is not taught at school. However, I will not put pressure on him, he will be free in his choices (Female, 26).

The Crimean Karaites could not live as a closed-community. They have been in relation with Ukrainians, Russian and Crimean Tatars as well as with other small communities such as the Krymchaks.⁷⁸ They lived side by side with the other nationalities of Crimea. Even though Crimean Karaite culture is very similar to the Crimean Tatar culture, when it comes to marriage, intermarriages are very rare. Among the Crimean Karaites interviewed, it was not possible to come

⁷⁸ The Krymchaks (Krymchak: sg. къримчах - *qymchakh*, pl. къримчахлар - *qymchakhlar*) are a community of Turkic-speaking adherents of Rabbinic Judaism living in Crimea. They have historically lived in close proximity to the Crimean Karaites. At first, *krymchak* was a Russian descriptive used to differentiate them from their Ashkenazi coreligionists, as well as other Jewish communities in the former Russian Empire such as the Georgian Jews, but in the second half of the 19th century, this name was adopted by the Krymchaks themselves. Before this, their self-designation was "Срель балалары" (*Srel balalary*) - literally "Children of Israel". The Crimean Tatars referred to them as *zulufly çufutlar* ("Jews with pe'ot") to distinguish them from the Karaims, who were called *zulufsiz çufutlar* ("Jews without pe'ot"). (Online available at; <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Krymchaks>). For further reading on the Krymchaks see; Altınkaynak, E., 2006. *Kırımçaklar*, SOTA/Türkistan ve Azerbaycan Araştırma Merkezi, Harleem; Крымчахлар, Алманах, No:1 Симферопол; Издателство "ДОЛЯ", 2005

across to any Crimean Karaite who is married to a Crimean Tatar or a Krymchak. Marriages with the Karaites in Istanbul were mostly preferred. During the interview with the *gazzan* of the *kenasa* in Evpatoria, the *gazzan* said:

As our religion does not restrict marriages with other Karaites, mixed-marriages are usual among us. For instance, my grandmother is a Greek Karaite. Religion is essential; not ethnicity. Whether Greek or Jew, it is not important as long as the person believes in Karaimism.

As Crimean Karaites believe in Karaimism, they also prefer to set up families with people from the same religion. As a result, we see marriages with the Karaites in different countries. During an interview, *gazzan* mentioned;

As our religion does not restrict marriages with other Karaites, mixed-marriages are usual among us. For instance, my grandmother is a Greek Karaite, religion is essential, not the ethnicity. Whether Greek or Jew it is not important as long as the person believes in Karaimism.

As it can be seen from the above examples, nowadays marriage patterns have changed. In the past, the marriage ceremonies were done at the *kenasa* and the *gazzan* was the person in charge of the event and an agreement was set, whereas, today this is not the case. Therefore, it was not possible to see a marriage ceremony. Today, the marriages are official marriages and most of the Crimean Karaites get

married with Ukrainians, Russians and people from other ethnic groups. Therefore, the customs are only fresh in memories for now.⁷⁹

5.2. The Crimean Karaite Language and Education of the Crimean Karaites

The mother tongue of the Crimean Karaites is the Karaite language which belongs to the Turkic language group. It is very similar to the Tatar dialect. Currently, their mother language is not being taught at schools and neither was it taught back in the Soviet Union era. In the Soviet Union, Russian was the dominant language. The Crimean Karaites also learned Russian and this language became the language of their daily lives. Especially during the Soviet era parents avoided teaching Crimean Karaite language to their children. This was done on purpose. This has in return become one of the causes of the assimilation of the Crimean Karaites. Most important, currently, even the elderly do not speak their mother tongue. The Crimean Karaite language is now a dying language and this is very well realized by the community members. Although it was not expressed openly by them, community members feel that this language loss will be followed by the disappearance of the community.

These days the Crimean Karaites are trying to recover the language loss and rewrite their language. As their language is still not taught at schools, and as only a few Crimean Karaites know the language, it is almost impossible for a sufficient revival. They are very eager to learn their

⁷⁹ For further information about the Crimean Karaite families see; Karaites Folk Encyclopedia Volume 6, *Karaites house*.

original mother tongue. They are trying various ways to learn the Karaite language. However, they know that this revival is not very possible without a strong support.

During my fieldwork, I was informed by the Crimean Karaites about the efforts of a Turkish academician who was trying to contribute to the revival of the Crimean Karaites language. With his support at the university in Simferopol, Turkish courses were held as Turkish and the Crimean Karaite languages are very similar and the Crimean Karaites want to learn Turkish and by this way they are hoping to learn their own language. Another Swedish teacher who learned the Karaite language from a Karaite family living in Galich came from the Uppsala University to teach, but not many could attend the courses due to the financial conditions. Lately, in the camps organized at the *Chuft-Kale*, children are being encouraged to learn the language. There are dictionaries, grammar books for those who are interested to learn.

What is common among the Crimean Karaites is that most of them feel the need to learn one's own mother tongue. Even though they do not remember or know much, it can clearly be seen that they are proud to know some Karaite words. One 85 years old lady at the *kenasa* on Saturday prayer sang a song immediately after she learned that I was from Turkey. She said that they used to speak the Karaite language among the community during her adolescence. Today this shows the symbolic meaning of the Crimean Karaite language for them.

About the possibilities of the revival of the Crimean Karaite language one interviewee said:

Turkish languages are being taught at the universities but not the Crimean Karaite language. They thought of opening a faculty for our mother tongue but there was not enough application. There are four people in Simferopol who could teach the Crimean Karaite language. To learn the Crimean Karaite language, we tried to learn Tatar as they are familiar but as the Turkish teacher's Russian was not enough, we couldn't succeed. There is only one person who knows the language and she is 91 years old. There is also someone who has graduated from university in Simferepol. She speaks Tatar and is now learning the Crimean Karaite language. She is an assistant at the university. Maybe she can teach. Apart from them, a lady came from Sweden, from the Uppsala University. She is not a Crimean Karaite but learned the language from elders. She prepared a CD both in English and the Crimean Karaite language. She lived with a Karaite family in Galich. She was here to teach but not many people could come due to financial reasons (Female, 26).

Here are the comments of two young girls, one at the *Chuft-Kale* and another one the at the *kenasa*. The first said:

I definitely want to learn the Crimean Karaite language. I'm studying it. In the future, I want to learn Turkish (Tatar) at the university because they

are similar. My mother tells me, if I can learn Turkish, it will be easy. I have the grammar book "21 lessons" and I am studying from there (Female, 12).

She also reads a poem in the Karaite language and the second one said:

I do not remember any word and maybe I will learn in the future (Female, 13).

So as it is clear, some are very enthusiastic about learning, for some it's a probability in the future and they are not very sure whether they want to learn it. It is also interesting to note that those children attending the camps at the *Chuft-Kale* are those who show interest. So, as a result, it can be said that the camps are effective in this sense. However, whether it will be enough to lead to a language revival or not is an important topic of debate.

An academician argued about the Soviet era and the issue of language: Polkanov mentioned that;

During the Soviet era, it was forbidden to speak the Karaite language. This obstacle has caused our language loss that today we are trying to revive. The only way in doing so is to learn Turkish and Crimean Tatar language and adopt this to the Karaite language. Thank God there are dictionaries. There is the academic dictionary; edited by Baskakov, Zajakowski and Shapsal. There is no problem with Vocabulary but grammar books are very few. During the Language Reform, Ataturk has adopted 330

Karaite words. It is not known which words these were but it is certain that these words were about military. Crimean Karaites have chosen animal names as surnames and these are among the most ancient surnames taken by them. An example would be; *Börü* (meaning wolf in Uzbek).

When asked which languages they speak in their daily lives interviewees said:

I can speak Russian and understand Ukrainian. I have graduated from college. My parents and grandfather could speak our mother tongue but I know only few words. They used to speak the Karaite language, when they did not want us to understand what they were talking about. My mother is still alive but she is very sick. We use Aramaic alphabet for the written scripts but the language is Turkic. As the Aramaic alphabet is used, this has lead to confusion and we have been interpreted as Jews. The Old Testament was translated into Russian (Cyrillic) in the 1800s. Previously, it was in the Crimean Karaite language (Female, 60).

Below are examples from the responses of the interviewees showing the importance Crimean Karaites give to the Karaite language and the languages they know and use in their daily lives.

My children can speak Russian, Lithuanian, Ukrainian, the Crimean Karaite language,

German and English. Here, our children mostly know and speak Russian but in Lithuania, grandparents teach the Karaite language. They also teach French, English and German but with games, if they try to teach in a serious manner, the kids maybe confused (Male, 65).

We do not't know the Karaite language. Here, our two girls are studying Turkish (Tatar) at the university. As it resembles Karaite language, they also try to learn Karaim, but currently there is no one to teach Karaites language. When we gather, we speak Russian. When Karaites came from abroad, they bring translators with them (Male, 32).

Even tough the Crimean Karaites are working hard to help the survival of their language, it seems that The Crimean Karaite is a dying language. Small population, economic conditions and insufficient support offered to cultural revival are among the factors causing the death of the Crimean Karaite language.

Almost all the Crimean Karaites interviewed were well educated. Most of them have graduated from technical schools. They mostly live in cities where they constitute a very small minority. They were interacting with other groups, which is the most important reason for cultural loss causing assimilation. Neither during the Soviet era nor during the post-soviet Ukraine is the Crimean Karaite language taught at schools since they were interpreted as Jews and very few knew about the Crimean Karaite culture. As Russian was the

language of both daily life and education, Crimean Karaites got their education in Russian. As to discrimination, different views appeared during the interviews. Although some of the interviewees explained that there was discrimination at school, others did not share this opinion and said that they got along well with all of their schoolmates and that there was no discrimination. Some interviewees said that at school, children used to make fun of them by teasing them with their names.

The oldest member of the Crimean Karaite community mentioned about her education and how difficult it was in Soviet times for a Crimean Karaite to get university education. She stressed:

I studied chemistry at one of the best universities of Moscow. After I wrote my thesis and became an assistant, the Second World War started. Before I went to Moscow, I was studying medicine in Simferopol but was dismissed from the faculty by the director when he found out that my father was a *gazzan*. To enter that faculty I had to keep this matter as a secret. In front of all the students the director told me "Your father is a *gazzan* and you are studying with our money." As a result, I had to go to Moscow to study (Female, 91).

During the interview in *Chuft-Kale*, the Chairman of the Simferopol Karaites Association mentioned about her education:

I am a university graduate, so are my children.
I used to work as a chief-engineer in a wine

factory. My retirement salary is 430 Hryvnia per month (Female, 60).

The fieldwork has indicated that most of the Crimean Karaites were well educated and had good jobs. An interviewee mentions about his daughter's education:

My daughter has graduated from university in Evpatoria and now she lives in Trakai and she is working in a bank (Male, 65).

During the interview at the *kenasa* in Evpatoria, a visitor explained his views about education in the following way:

I have graduated from a technical college, I can speak only Russian. My children, who were born here in Evpatoria, are university graduates. Back in the school, we were all together, there was no discrimination. Governments promise many things but none keep their promises. (I only want to make business with my own people, because according to me, only they keep their promises (Male, 65).

The issue of mother tongue is also pointed by many interviewees. An interviewee mentioned the Crimean Karaite language:

I speak Russian and Ukrainian. There was no mother-language education at schools, and yet it is still unavailable, but we demand it. There are only few people who speak the Crimean

Karaite language, and they only speak few words. We want our children to learn the Crimean Karaite language, at least from the grammar books. We have no problems with the state institutions (Female, 62).

During the Soviet period, many nationalities experienced discrimination at school. These were mostly the deported people of small nationalities which were generally perceived as untrustworthy people by the Soviet government. Although these people had access to education, which was compulsory during the Soviet regime, for at least 10 years they experienced important difficulties in entering the universities.

On the other hand, the fieldwork and the documentary research indicated that many Crimean Karaites managed to have access to higher education using various methods. In many books and the Folk Encyclopedia of the Crimean Karaites it is mentioned about the famous Crimean Karaites. Although they were forming a small community, there were many doctors, engineers, chemists, architects, soldiers, diplomats among the Crimean Karaites.

5.3. Settlement of the Crimean Karaites and Their Demographic Structure

During the fieldwork it was found out that most Crimean Karaites were living in Simferopol, Evpatoria and Bakhchisaray (*Chuft-Kale*). However, few of them were living in other places but they were coming together for the camp at the *Chuft-Kale*.

Some came to pray at the only active *kenasa* in Evpatoria. As mentioned above, Crimean Karaites do not live as a closed-community. One can come across a Crimean Karaite in various cities of Crimean Peninsula and all around Ukraine. The fieldwork has indicated that all the interviewees have knowledge about the settlements and demographic structure of the Crimean Karaites. What is clear is that all the Crimean Karaites are conscious about the very low population. They all say that this is their main concern. Today, the total number of the Crimean Karaites in Crimean peninsula is 800, whereas, the *gazzan* of the *kenasa* in Evpatoria mentioned about 800 households only in Evpatoria in the 18th century. Below is a suggestion expressed by a Crimean Karaite to prevent the decline of the population:

I was born in Simferepol; so are my children. If we don't get any aid from the government, there will be no more Crimean Karaite in the coming 50 years. Instead of taking our young people to military service, government should try to encourage our youngster to set up families and give birth to children (Female, 60).

The fieldwork has shown that all the Crimean Karaites see Crimea as their homeland, and stress that they do not prefer to live anywhere else. Below are some examples from the interviewee comments about Crimea and their future:

Normally, Crimea is the homeland of the Crimean Karaites. I live in Militepol and I am very happy about it. There is a huge difference between the official figures and the reality about the number of the Crimean Karaites. The

population is cosmopolite in Militepol, there are Russians, Ukrainians etc. In the past century, the shops belonged to Crimean Karaites, but after the wars, everything changed. According to official figures, there are 120 Crimean Karaites in Militepol today (Male, 30).

The following quotation gives clues about the perception of the declining population by the Crimean Karaites.

I see Crimea as homeland and want to live here. Our main problem is our small population. All of our *kenasas* were taken by the state. If you want to meet a Crimean Karaite, you should meet them at their home, you can not meet them outside (Female, 26).

Another quotation that gives clues about the perception of the declining population by the Crimean Karaites is as follows;

I and my children were born in Nikolayev. I am still living in Nikolayev. There are 56 – 57 Crimean Karaites there. There are 12 –13 people whose both parents are Crimean Karaites. There are 25–28 people whose only one parent is Crimean Karaite. The rest are children. This is our main problem; we have a decreasing population and Crimean Karaites are not forming families with one other. There are 2,000 Crimean Karaites all around the world (Female, 62).

Even though during the Nazi invasion, the Crimean Karaites were not interpreted as Jews by the Germans and thus were not subjected to genocide; still their number could not manage to keep its stability as there were many other alerting factors of the decline. The oldest Crimean Karaites also adds some words about the reason why the Germans had not seen the Crimean Karaites as Jews:

In the year 1943 in Germany in a newspaper, an article has been published about the Crimean Karaites.⁸⁰ In this article it was explained in detail that the Crimean Karaites were not Jews but that they have an ethnic origin going back to the Khazars. This article was reprinted in the Crimean Newspaper on June 7th 2006 (Female, 91).

Today, the Crimean Karaites are aware of the importance of the declining population and they are most concerned about their future in this means. The Crimean Karaites and their associations are working on this issue and they try to encourage a revival. Even though they live apart from each other, they try to keep in touch. As mentioned above, one main reason for the decrease is the change in the family patterns. As Crimean Karaites married non-Crimean Karaites, the Crimean Karaite population declined drastically. Briefly, as expressed by an interviewee, in 50 years of time Crimean Karaites will disappear.

⁸⁰ This article has been re- published in the *Kırım Karaylar* section of the *Qırım* newspaper. 7 June 2006 No: 48 (1008)

5.4. The Crimean Karaite Religion- Karaimism

The Crimean Karaites are believers of Karaimism. All around the world, there are about 25,000 Karaites. These Karaites are of various nations. There are Crimean, Egyptian, Greek, Jew, and Russian Karaites. Their religious houses are called the *kenasa* and the only active *kenasa* in Crimean peninsula is the one in Evpatoria as already mentioned. The *kenasa* building in Simferopol on the Karaim Street⁸¹ dates back to 1891⁸², but it is used as the radio house. Today, there is one active *kenasa* in Evpatoria, one in Vilnius and one in Trakai. According to the information given by the *gazzan* of the Evpatoria *kenasa*, before the revolution there were 11 *kenasas* in the Crimean peninsula and 20 *kenasas* in Russia.

A *kenasa* is very similar to a synagogue in appearance. *Kenasas* are constructed of two main floors.⁸³ In the first floor, men do the praying whereas women sit in the second floor. Even though today practices have changed, originally unmarried girls could not go to the *kenasa*. Both men and women have to wash up before going to the *kenasa*. They take off their shoes and enter the prayer house barefoot. These are also the practices done by a Muslim before entering a mosque or before praying. Women have to cover up before entering the *kenasa*.⁸⁴ When a comparison is made, in some of its

⁸¹ See picture 19.

⁸² See Picture 20.

⁸³ See pictures 21 and 22.

⁸⁴ The *Gazzan* of the *Kenasa* in Evpatoria warned me to cover my arms and my head. At the entrance, there is a hanger where there were yellow *kippas* and head scarves for those who came unprepared. (see picture 23).

practices Karaism was closer to Islam than Rabbinate Judaism (cited in Cohen, 1994; 157)

In some parts of the prayer, men kneel down. The prayers are done in Russian, Crimean Karaites language and in Old Hebrew. The prayer book⁸⁵ is printed both in Russian and Crimean Karaites language. On one page there is the Russian translation⁸⁶ and the other is their mother tongue.⁸⁷ In the parts of the prayer book, where it is underlined, all men read together with the *gazzan*. The *gazzan* said that it is especially important to let the people contribute so that they can follow easier.

Just like the Jews, Karaites also accept Saturday as the holy day, and this is the day when they get together at *kenasas*. According to Karaimism, a Karaite should pray twice a day, once before sun rises and the other after the sun set. Crimean Karaites only celebrate the feasts written in the Torah. These are common with the Jews but Jews additionally celebrate the feasts mentioned in the Talmud. As Karaimism only accepts the Torah, they stress that they are misinterpreted as Jews but express that they are not Jews.

⁸⁵ For examples of the other prayer books see; Firkovicius, M. 1998. The Prayer Book of Karay Religion (Vol: 1-Book for reading in the Kenasa at the beginning and End of Every Prayer Service-In Karaylar Language) Lithuania and Cyhardy D.J., and Firkovicius, M., 1993, Karaj Koltchalary (Karaimu Maldos), Vilnius

⁸⁶ In the year 1910, the Karaite community came together and as a result of the decision taken, the *gazzan* translated the prayers from the Crimean Karaite language to Russian (language). Before 1910, the prayers used to be read in the Crimean Karaite language. During the revolution, the Russian translation was read and afterwards there was almost no Crimean Karaite who knew its own mother tongue. Onwards as a result they kept on reading it from the Russian translation. Today this situation continues.

⁸⁷ See pictures 24 and 25.

The Crimean Karaites say that they believe in The Old Testament (Torah) and they accept all three prophets. They say that their religion is the core of all three big religions. According to them, if New Testament (Bible) is added to the Old Testament, Christianity is formed. If Koran is added, Islam is formed and if Talmud is added, Judaism is formed.

During the research in Crimea, several Saturday prayers were observed at the *kenasa*, and the attendants were mostly elderly people. About twenty people come to the *kenasa* on Saturdays. These are always the same Crimean Karaites attending the *kenasa*. The *gazzan* mentions that this number doubles at the feasts. A young Crimean Karaite was seen once and that was her first visit to the *kenasa*. She was from Nikolayev and she came with her grandmother. According to her this was an interesting experience. But neither she nor her grandparent knew much about Karaimism.

About the religious customs and prayers, the *gazzan* of the *kenasa* in Evpatoria explained how a Crimean Karaite does his/her prayer. He also mentioned about the religious feasts; and the duties of a *gazzan* with the following words:

We pray at the *kenasa* on Saturdays, on the other days of the week we pray two times a day; once in the morning and in the evening. But we pray together on Saturdays. In the past, there was much more attendance because the region was a Karaite district. Today the number of the Karaites decreased and people do not practice their religion much. On Saturdays about 25-30 Karaite attend the prayers. We practice only

what is written in the Torah. For example we wash up, cover our heads and take off our shoes before the prayers. We have many feasts; *Shabat*, *Yom Kipur*, *Yom Terua*, *Sukhot*, *Semhat Tora*, *Purim*, *Pesah* and *Shavuot*. *Shabat* is celebrated every week. *Yom Terua* (*Rish Gošana* in Judaism) is the New Year in September. We calculate the years by adding 3760 years. According to Karaism, we are in the year 5768 (5768-3760= 2008). *Yom Kipur* or *Boşatlık* is forgiving feast. *Sukhot* or the *Alaçık Hıçı* or *Orak Toyu* is celebrated 5 days after the *Yom Kipur*. This is the blessings day. On this day, we eat fruits at the *kenasa* after the prayer. The *Semhat Tora* is 8 days after the *Sukhot*. On this day, we start reading the Torah. *Purim* is celebrated on March. This is the spring feast. We eat "Purim *ayaklachik*, a sweet paste with raisins, prune, garbanzo beans or walnuts and its name come from its shape. It is like a foot and ayak means foot in Turkish. On this day, we eat braised meat and drink wine. Presents are given to children. *Pesah* is celebrated on the 14th of April. During one week, it is forbidden to eat yeasty bread; therefore, we only eat *Timbil / Bayram Otmegi* (feast bread)⁸⁸. This bread is called the *Matsa* in Hebrew. And finally the *Şavuot* or *Aftalar Hıçı* is the 50th day after the *Pesah*. On this feast, egg is eaten. After this feast, it is possible to eat fresh harvest flour.

⁸⁸ See picture 26.

The *gazzan* continues by giving information about the duties of a *gazzan*;

Briefly, the *gazzan* is the head of the community. He is the leader. Our duties are to arrange marriage agreements, to keep a register of the born children, to arrange funerals etc. We do not collect donations. *Gazzans* never deal with financial matters. This is always someone else's duty to organize the finance. When a child is born if the child is a girl, the mother brings the child to the *kenasa* on the first Saturday after she is born. She is being given a name by the *gazzan* and registered to the community. If the child is a boy, than he is brought to the *kenasa* on the 8th day. Here his name is given and circumcision takes place. Circumcision is called the *Birit Milla* in the Torah. A *Birit Milla toy* (a feast) is organized. My sons have been circumcised too. These days, circumcision is done by Muslim Tatar doctors.

Besides what the *gazzan* has explained about Karaimism, it is more important to understand what the Crimean Karaites know about their religion and how they practice their religion. Here are some examples from the interviewees comments related to religious matters. From these comments, it can clearly be seen that very detailed explanations are given to the questions concerning religion. Here is what the Chairman of the Simferepol Karaites Association said:

I see myself as a Karaim. We are Karaims only in terms of religion. We only believe in the Old Testament. Christianity was formed by the combination of the New Testament to the Old Testament. If Koran is added, Islam is formed and if Talmud is added Judaism is formed. But as we believe only in Torah, we can not be considered as Jews. In other words, our religion goes back in history. All the religions were formed according to the Old Testament. The Old Testament is the backbone. I call this religion "Karaimism" while others call it "Karaism", but actually in the end, both are the same. In the ladies section of the *kenasa*, on the sealing, there is a golden drawing of the Solomon temple. This temple was several times rebuilt. About 5000 years ago, it was first burnt down and that is accepted as a tragic day by the Karaites. We only accept the first temple built and for commemorate of that day, we fast for three days every year. The last day is called the day of sacrifices. The days of fasting are called *Nedava*. This year *Nedava* was between 22 – 24 July. On the sacrifice day, you should sacrifice a white sheep and this meat is distributed to everyone. On September, we celebrate Biblical New Year. After this, there is another holiday, but I can not remember its name. Then, it is *Orak Toyu*. On that day, we bring wheat, fruit, bread and wine to *kenasa*. After these are blessed, children eat the fruit

and then pray. Anan Ben David is the man who constructed our religion. He took out the unnecessary parts of the religion. After this, Karaites accepted this as their own religion (Female, 60).

As it can be seen from the below response, the Crimean Karaites feel deep respect to the *kenasa*. During the interview, a Crimean Karaite man expressed his feelings about this as such:

When entering the *kenasa*, we do a prayer and when exiting, we do not leave the *kenasa* turning our back to it (Male, 65).

Some of the Crimean Karaites visit the *kenasa* not for a religious duty but to be together with the community members as they do not have any other place of their own for meetings. Here is a quotation supporting this argument:

I enjoy coming to *kenasa*, I come to the *kenasa* to meet with our people, *kenasa* is a meeting place for me. The visits to the *kenasa* are interesting but I do not want to learn anything new about religion. I have a book, we normally have to read it but I do not read it. Today, at the prayer the *gazzan* advised us to read this book, but I will not. I have to come to Evpatoria because the *kenasa* in Nikolayeva are used for other purposes. Nikolayev is 700 km away from here. This time I came for work and I brought my grand daughter with me, this is her first time coming to *kenasa*. I myself

normally come at feasts. For us all feasts are very important. I do not remember when this *kenasa* was restored or since when it is active, but I come here to visit every now and then (Female, 62).

On the other hand, there are also religious Crimean Karaites for whom the *kenasa* and their religious duties are extremely important. One of them said:

For me the *kenasa* is the most important place. I have come to the *kenasa* for 50 years, therefore I know all about it. Sergey Boriseviç Sinani has taken pictures and recorded all this time. The restoration of the small *kenasa* was financed by Sarach.⁸⁹ For the big *kenasa*, we get 1 million Grivna as a government aid. There is a cafe in the *kenasa* complex and that is another source of income. For the opening ceremony, many Karaites came (Female, 60).

Another Crimean Karaite mentioned about their feast and compared Judaism and Islam with Karaimism;

We gather together at the *kenasa* in the feasts. The dates differ each year. We calculate the dates according to the lunar calendar.⁹⁰ The dates of our feasts and the ones of the Jews do not match. They have another calendar. Ours match with the Karaites in Poland and Lithuania. We do not have *Hannukah*. Our

⁸⁹ Saraç was a tradesman who lived in France. He was among the most famous financiers.

⁹⁰ See picture 27.

prayer books are in Turkic language. *Kenasas* face south as do the mosques. At the *Balta-Tiymez* cemetery, graves are in the north-south direction, likewise the graves of the Muslims. We also worship the oak tree. Everybody is free to pray as they wish (Female, 26)

According to the information given by the Crimean Karaites, it is possible to convert to Karaimism for anyone who has the will. Currently, in the Crimean Karaite community, there are such examples. Another interesting point is the reason given by those people who have decided to convert to Karaimism; they say that Karaims are more united and good people:

Some people who covert to Karaimism call themselves Karaim. It is not necessary to be a born Karaim, one can adopt Karaimism by his/her own wish. It is important to note that Karaim and Karaite/Karay are two different things. Karaim implies only the religion of a person and the word Karay/Karaite show people's ethnicity. My mother is a Crimean Karaite and my father is Russian. I chose to believe in Karaimism, because Karaite people are better people (Female, 28).

I am Ukrain and my wife is half Ukrain and half Tatar. We both chose to believe in Karaimism because among the Karaite there is a unity (Male, 32).

As it can be clearly understood from the below example, for the Crimean Karaites it is extremely important not to be categorized as Jews or Crimean Tatars. The Chairman of the Simferopol Karaites Association, Mrs. Galina Gladilova Prokopveyna, during the interview in *Chuft-Kale*, expressed:

After one of my speeches, a Jew came to me and said that I was a Jew. Then a Tatar, who was also there, said that I was Crimean Tatar. I said, I was neither Jew, nor Tatar and tried to explain that we were a different nation. We have good relations with everyone but we do not like to be seen as Jews. It's very sad! (Female, 60).

When asked to the interviewees about their relations with the Krymchaks and Crimean Tatars, they have a common view. They mention that the Krymchaks believe both in the Torah and the Talmud. Express that the Crimean Karaites and the Krymchaks are both Turkic, but Krymchaks have converted to Judaism and not to Karaimism. The Crimean Karaites especially insist that they are called Karaims because of their religion. They say that ethnically they are Karai (Karay), but the word Karaim could only be right to identify their religion. As it was asked to the interviewees what they know about the Krymchaks, their common response was that the Krymchaks were believers of Judaism. Here is an example from an interviewee:

Krymchaks are good people but accept the religion of the Jews, Judaism, as their religion. This belief affected them negatively during the war. Since they were registered as "Jew" in

their passports, they have been subjected to genocide by Germans. On the other hand, as we were registered as "Karaim" in our passports, Germans didn't kill the Crimean Karaites. The Crimean Tatars are also nice people; we are both of Turkic descent. We all lived together in the region, like with the Krymchaks (Female, 91).

As the Crimean Karaites used to be Shamanist before converting to Karaimism, even today, it is possible to see the Shamanist elements in their culture. Polkanov mentions about these elements with the following words:

According to the ancient beliefs, there are two genies; one good and one evil. The good genie is the *Ulu ata* and the evil one is *Karga*. Even today the Crimean Karaites call the God, *Tengri*. The Tengri is believed to be the God of the skies. In the *Balta-Tiymez*, there are holy oak trees and the Crimean Karaites are worshipping them. We go to the trees to pray and make a wish. When making a wish, it is necessary to hug the tree and lean with ones cheek. We choose a holy tree for our family. The roots of the oak tree are believed to reach to the dead. We make connection with the dead by these roots. The leaves of the oak tree represent the souls of the dead. Today there are about 20 main oak trees. We put stones around these trees. Women who hope to get married or to have children come to make a

wish and it is believed that if a person makes his/her wish from heart, it ought to come true. In the Karaimism religion, it is forbidden to work on Saturdays. On the other hand, it is not forbidden to visit the *Balta-Tiymez* as this is a holy place.

In brief, it can be argued that currently the religious beliefs of the Crimean Karaites are not very strong when compared with the past. Today, as there is only one active *kenasa* in the whole Crimean Peninsula, it is practically not possible to expect for the Crimean Karaites to go to the *kenasa* regularly for prayer or for other occasions. They themselves mentioned that they go to *kenasa* only for special occasions. Since their religion is what makes them so special, it is necessary for them to preserve it. The religious customs of this unique community constitute one of the basic elements of their culture and identity.

5.5. Symbols of the Crimean Karaite Culture and Sacred places; *Chuft- Kale* and *Balta-Tiymez*- the most ancient Turkish cemetery in Europe.

The symbols are important elements in the Crimean Karaite culture. The most common symbols are the flag, spear and shield, *Chuft-Kale* and the *Balta Tiymez* cemetery. The symbols are placed almost everywhere; on the covers of the books printed on t-shirts, in the caves, etc. All the Crimean Karaites are aware of their symbols. On the *Biyik Kapu* (Big Entrance) and at the Firkovich House in the *Chuft-Kale*, it is possible to see the flag and the main symbols.

The flag⁹¹ is formed of three colors; each of these colors represents different elements. Blue represents the sky/sea, yellow represents the soil/sun and white represents the pure soul. Here is how a Crimean Karaite describes their flag;

We have a flag, forming of blue (represents the sky), white (represents the pure soul) and yellow (represents the sun) (Female, 26).

Besides the flag, the most common symbols of the Crimean Karaites are the symbol of spear and shield⁹². This symbol is also used by the Crimean Karaites to define their culture. As Crimean Karaites were soldiers and warriors nowadays, this symbol represents their past. All the Crimean Karaites mention about this symbol and they are proud of their past.

The other symbol of the Crimean Karaites is *Chuft-Kale* (castle).⁹³ *Chuft-Kale*⁹⁴ is the sacred castle of the Crimean Karaites. This castle is the most ancient place of settlement of the Crimean Karaites. When the Crimean Karaites come to Crimea, they first settled in Bakhchisaray, in *Chuft-Kale*. *Chuft-Kale* was first constructed as a small castle. With the increase in the population, the castle expanded. Today it consists of two parts.

Crimean Karaites say that the name *chuft* comes from the Turkish word *çift* meaning double. The Crimean Karaites

⁹¹ See picture 28.

⁹² See Picture 29.

⁹³ See Picture 30.

⁹⁴ For further information about the *Chuft-Kale* see; Крикун Е., Далиненко В., 2005, Джүфт Кале-воздушный горщд, Киев Этнос

especially emphasize on the naming matter of the castle because *chufut* means Jew in Turkish. As they do not want to be interpreted as Jews, they make a comment on this matter. Nevertheless, as can be seen from the picture today at the castle on the sign⁹⁵ the word *chufut* is used. The castle is a touristic place and according to the Chairman of the Simferopol Karaites, the explanation of guides is incorrect. Here is what the Chairman of the Simferopol Karaite Association, Mrs. Galina Gladilova Prokopveyna, said about Chuft-Kale during the interview:

First of all, it is not *Çufut-Kale*, it is *Chuft Kale*. It means *Çift Kale* (double castle). In the beginning, there was only one settlement, but when the population increased, they formed another settlement. Eventually, in two cities, two castles were formed (*Chuft Kale*). Potemkin army came here when Russia took over Crimea in 1783. They saw dark hair, big noses and circumcised Karaites. Potemkins thought Karaites were Jews as they were reading the Old Testament in the ancient language. In Tatar and Turkish *Çufut* is Jews. Since 1783, this castle is known as *Cufut Kale*, before that the word *Çufut Kale* was not used.

According to Polkanov who is an expert on the *Chuft-Kale*, there are an old and a new castle. The valley to the *Chuft-Kale* is called the *Ashlama dere*. The main road to the castle is called the *Karay yol* (meaning the Karaite road). There is also monastery in the valley and the road to it is

⁹⁵ See Picture 31

called the *manastırlı yol* (Monastery road). There are two other roads within the valley; these are the *at yol* (horse road) and the *araba yol* (tumbrel road). Finally, the road way back is called the *Şirin yol* (cute road).

Next to the castle, there is the cemetery; *Balta-Tiymez*. This is a very unique cemetery. When looked down from the castle, one sees a huge forest. But actually it is not just a forest seen, in fact there is a cemetery beneath it. TİKA-The Turkish International Cooperation and Development Agency is making up an inventory fieldwork. TİKA supplies material for us such as cameras, computers etc. TİKA and the Crimean Karaites work together in *Balta-Tiymez* to gather all the information.

According to Polkanov, at the cemetery, there are two kinds of gravestones. The word for gravestone is *yolcu taş*⁹⁶ meaning travelers stone in the Crimean Karaite language. The one kind is the *eğer taş* and the other *evçik taş*. On some of the stones there is no writing. This is because one should return from the world as one comes. Meaning; when we were born, we had no names; we shall return back without it. The children's gravestones are called *bala taş*. These are small stones and yet constantly they are being stolen. Some graves consist of two stones and these are dolmens. According to a legend says Polkanov; the *evcik taş* are the graves of the settled people and graves of the nomads are the *eğer taş*.⁹⁷ On these graves four sticks were put. There are about 10,000

⁹⁶ See Picture 32.

⁹⁷ For information about the legends of Chuft-Kale see; Ассоциация «Крымкарайлар», 2002 г., Джуфт Кале в легендах и преданиях крымских караимов, Симфереполь

gravestones in the *Balta-Tiymez*. 7,000 of them are above the ground. Even though in many religions, the graves are positioned in the East-West direction, the graves of the Karaites are like the Turkic ones positioned in the North-South direction.

There are also religious symbols in the Crimean culture. For example, the six pointed stars can be seen at the *kenasas*. One can come across this symbol on the grave stones. Besides this star, on the grave stones in *Balta-Tiymez*, many Old Turkic symbols carved on the grave stones can be seen. Some of them are like a flower and some represent the sun.⁹⁸

Consequently, symbols are important elements of the Crimean Karaite culture. For Crimean Karaites, the most important places are the Castle and the *kenasa*. For cultural revival, camps are being organized in the *Chuft-Kale* for eleven years. People gather here and the youth meet one another. Children can learn more about their culture when they come together. The camps are seen as an opportunity for increasing ethnic solidarity.

5.6. Crimean Karaites Customs⁹⁹

Today the Crimean Karaites are paying a special attention to their customs. As they have lost many of their

⁹⁸ See pictures 33, 34 and 35.

⁹⁹ For further information about the Karaites customs see; Полканов, Ю.А. 1994. *Обряды и Обычаи Крымских Караимов-Тюрков Женитьва, Рождение Ребенка*, г.Бахчисарай and Бабаджан, А., Богославская Т., Катук Г., Кропотов В., & Полканова А., (Babacan, A., Bogoslavskaya, T., Katuk, G., Kropotov, V. & Polkanova, A.) 2000 *Караи Крымские Караимы-история культура святыи*, Симферополь Акъмэджид and Altinkaynak, E., 2006. *Tozlu Zaman Perdesinde Kırım Karayları*, SOTA/Türkistan ve Azerbaycan Araştırma Merkezi, Harleem

customs for years, they are now very careful about their customs and want to preserve them. Lately, many books have been published about the Crimean Karaite culture and customs. The basic elements of the Crimean Karaite customs are trying to be taught to the youngster by the elderly as part of cultural revival efforts. The efforts of the associations and the camps organized at the *Chuft-Kale* aim to strengthen ethnic solidarity. At the feast and other gatherings, the elderly tell about their customs to young people. According to most Crimean Karaites, small communities should have closer ties to survive.

The main characteristics of Crimean Karaites are honesty, good manners, and benevolence. Therefore, Crimean Karaites want their children to be good mannered and they see this as the core of the culture. When disciplining their children, they also know that they need to teach about the Crimean Karaite customs. However they, themselves, do not necessarily know much. Young parents are trying to learn as much as they can from their elderly. Concerning this issue, a Crimean Karaite mother stressed:

We will teach our kids good manner. We know little about Karaite customs. Our kids will know even less, but we will teach them what we know (Female, 29).

Another significant element of the Crimean Karaites culture is solidarity. Within the community, the Crimean Karaites try to help each other as much as possible. An interviewee mentions about the solidarity among the community.

If there is a Crimean Karaite family that is poor, his/her neighbors would help the family. They would help them in every means, like; they would find them a job or help them wed. There is a Karaite proverb; Your neighbor's poor condition is your disgrace (Male, 32).

Nowadays, the communication between the Crimean Karaites is strong. Even though they can not gather very often, they keep in touch through phone calls. Because they know that if they do not keep the solidarity, the community may not survive. One interviewee said:

We communicate with other Karaites, for example, we gather, or we talk on the phone. We have no internet because there is limited number of computers in Militepol so we use the phone as it's more convenient for us (Female, 28).

Crimean Karaites have very old customs. There are also traces of their ancient religion, Shamanism. At the cemetery, as mentioned before, there are oak trees which are accepted as sacred. The visits to the cemetery are therefore of major importance. When children are brought to the camps they are also visiting the cemetery. This visit includes the prayer at the oak tree and when going to graveyard, one must choose different routes, it is forbidden to return home using the path used to reach the cemetery. Here is what Mrs. Galina mentioned about their visits to the *Chuft-Kale*, *Balta-Tiymez* and about the oak trees;

We place a stone there, because according to the Old Testament, one should put a stone on the graveyard. Previously, Khazars were also placing a stone on their graves. According to Khazars, you take a small stone and throw it. Khazars had *kurganlar*¹⁰⁰ (piles of stones). The size of the *kurgan*, showed how many people have visited there. Today as there are gravestones, there is no more need for *kurgan*. Today, putting stones on the gravestones is a symbolic tradition. We have more than 20 trees in the graveyard, but most of them have rotten and got damaged. We try to keep our ancient religion alive by trees. We believe that God is in these trees. God helps us and makes our wishes come true. Usually people make common wishes, for instance we wished rain during the draught or if a woman cannot have a child wishes for a child or if the enemy comes, they wish them to go. So, all Karaites at least once a year try to visit *Balta-Timyez* graveyard. If they have no graveyards of their family, they visit their ancestor's graveyard. All of our roots are coming from here. These graveyards are holly for us (Female, 60).

Here is another Crimean Karaites woman's thoughts and impressions about the camps and the *Balta-Tiymez*;

A lot of people gather during the holidays, and they chat with one another. They collected our

¹⁰⁰ See picture 2.

legends in a book; Karaite folklore.¹⁰¹ We put stones on the graves, it is a custom. There was a similar custom during the times when the Crimean Karaites were nomad; they were placing stones to the graves on the road and those stones eventually formed the gravestones (Female, 26).

The most popular dishes of the Crimean Karaite cuisine is the *kibin*¹⁰², *pirojki*¹⁰³, *shorba*, *kubete*¹⁰⁴, *babka*¹⁰⁵, *machcha*¹⁰⁶, *chir-chir*, *hamurdolma*.¹⁰⁷ During an interview, a Crimean Karaite mentions about the soup she cooked;

We cook soup with sheep meat, potatoes, onion, carrots, tomatoes and pepper. We have very strong vodka named *chopraksi*. Another of our custom concerning food is that just like the Turkish custom, the Karaites also kiss the bread as an indication of respect. Before giving the bread, she is supposed to kiss and salute the bread (Female, 60).

¹⁰¹ Полканов, Ю.А., Полканова, А. Ю., Алиев, Ф.М., 2005, Фольклор Крымских Караимов, Симфереполь

¹⁰² See Picture 36.

¹⁰³ See Picture 37.

¹⁰⁴ See Picture 38.

¹⁰⁵ See Picture 39.

¹⁰⁶ See Picture 40.

¹⁰⁷ For details see; Штойко, А. Д., 2001, Страницы Памяти, Симфереполь: Крымкарайлар and Хафуз М.Э., 1991, *Караимская кухня*, вестник куранты приложение по:3

When examining a culture, the way they dress is also giving information about their way of life. Even though today the customs of costumes do not continue, it is still known and mentioned by an interviewee;

Little girls wear pink and light blue clothes. Engaged women wear yellow. Even though they are five years old and engaged, they wear yellow. Married women wear bright red clothes. After marriage, women wear dark blue and dark green at home and purple for outside. By the color of her clothes, you could tell her marital status, but not any more. If she is wearing white head scarf, it means there is a funeral. Karaim women do head knits around 40 types, but no head scarf. Men used to wear wide pants and boots¹⁰⁸ (Female, 60).

One last example of the Crimean Karaite custom that is still alive is the preparation of *halva* after the funeral. During the interviews, this custom was mentioned by a Crimean Karaite.

When a Crimean Karaite passes away, the Crimean Karaites prepare halva¹⁰⁹ (it's a kind of dessert). There are several kinds of halva. *Akhalva*, *Karahalva* and *Olum halvası*. *Halva* is eaten after the prayer. If the person who has passed away is old, then the halva is prepared soft because his/her friends who would attend the funeral would be expected to be old. But as

¹⁰⁸ For examples of costumes see picture 41, 42 and 43.

¹⁰⁹ See Picture 44.

he/she is young then the halva is cooked hard because young peoples' teeth are healthy.

5.7. Associations formed by the Crimean Karaites and their role in the community

The Crimean Karaite community is willing to support the associations and they believe in the improvements done by their efforts. The fieldwork in Simferopol showed that there are several associations. However, it was only possible to get in touch with one of them. That was the All-Ukrainian and Crimean Association of the Crimean Karaites *Krymkarailar*. The Chairman of this association, Mr. Vladimir Ormeli is also the member of the *Ullu Biylik* of the Crimean Karaites of Ukraine and honored worker of the Culture of Ukraine. Academician Yuri Aleksandrovich Polkanov is also a member of this association *Krymkarailar*.

As there are several approaches to the subject, almost to the end of my stay I heard that there were several other associations formed by the Crimean Karaites, but I could not have the chance to have contact with them. These were the *Federation* whose chairman is Chorunova and the *Religious Federation* formed by Lebedev. Lebedev was the advisor to the prime minister during 1990-1991. One other association is the *Fidan*, this association is centered in Simferopol and its chairman is Bakkal Yevgeni Grigorevich.

Mrs. Galina Gladilova Prokopveya is the chairman of the Simferopol Karaites of the same association. The All-Ukrainian and Crimean Association of the Crimean Karaites

Krymkarailar are presented in different cities. Below is detailed information given by Mrs. Galina during the interview;

I am the chairman of the association in Simferopol. We try to gather the Karaites in order to prevent them from assimilation;. Karaites, half-Karaites, all of them. It's a cultural event. I collect many cultural goods in my home. My dream is to open a museum in Simferepol. There is one in Evpatoria but I want to open one in Simferepol. We have good relations with the Crimean Tatar Association. Mostly elder people gather in our association, but I want young people to come. I try to teach them our customs and values so that they can pass it to their own children. We have young children but they don't show interest. We have associations in a few cities, like Kiev (Arabacı; Chairman of the Association), Odessa (Iral; Chairman of the Association), in Duepropetrovski (Baraj; Chariman of the Association), in Kharkov (Kapo; Chariman of the Association) and also in Nikolayev, Ivamo – Frankovsk and in Galich (Female, 60).

Crimean Karaites are aware of the associations in their cities and they are pleased with the efforts of the associations. Here is a response from an interviewee;

Association works very well. This helps us gather together. There are offices of the association in Miletopol, Nikolayeva, Sivastapol,

Simferepol, Evpatoria, Odessa, Feodasia, Kharkov, Petrovsk. We have more than 10 offices (Female, 62).

Crimean Karaites try to contribute to the efforts of the associations as much as possible as we can understand from the words of an interviewee:

We attend the meetings of the association regularly. We refresh our memories. 15 years ago, we were only gathering in funerals, but now we gather constantly in good and bad days (Female, 26).

As generally their economic conditions are poor, the fee of membership is quite low. An interviewee mentioned:

We used to pay 6 Hryvnia per person to the association, but now it is 12 Hryvnia It's not enough. We have to rent the places we gather. We do not have places of our own. In the future, we are planning to gather and develop here in the *Chuft-Kale* (Female, 29).

Another interviewee said:

I believe we are in a positive trend and things are getting better, but I want more positive developments. For example; language courses or computer courses and even dancing courses for the young. There are people who want to learn Karaite language. In the winter, when people have spared time, we arrange a time for them to learn the language. In Evpatoria, there

are reading courses given by *Gazzan Tiryaki* (Male, 65).

Another interviewee mentions that the association is also presented in Militepol. He continues explaining;

We are about 60 people in the association in Militepol, Simferepol has better records. We gather together, when there is a problem in order to solve it. We gather four times a year and organize two conferences. We have problems regarding life. If there is a problem which we can solve together, we solve it. For example, Jews want to take the *Chuft-Kale*, we gather about this issue (Male, 32).

Another effort of the association is supporting the folk dances. On the wall, there are pictures of *Fidan*¹¹⁰, a junior folklore team. They have won many competitions. *Fidan* folklore group won the runners-up place in a competition. One of the interviewees stressed that *Fidan* started with six people and that now they are 30 people (Female, 60).

Consequently, the associations and their efforts are supported by the Crimean Karaites and the associations are seen as the fundamental preservers of the Crimean Karaite customs and traditions. However, the cultural revival attempts of the associations are not sufficient.

¹¹⁰ See pictures 45 and 46.

5.8. Relations with the other Karaites

There are about 25,000 to 30,000 Karaites in the world as mentioned before. These are from various nationalities in various places. The Karaites in Istanbul, Poland and Lithuania are the ones who have the closest relations with the Crimean Karaites. They also have relations with the Karaites in Israel. Some Crimean Karaites mentioned that they have lost contact with their relatives in Istanbul and some still have communication and even visit one another. For example an interviewee said;

There are many Karaites in Turkey, but we have no communication with them as they live overseas. I heard there are touristic places (Male, 32).

One example for the Crimean Karaites who have not lost contact and still visit their relatives in Istanbul is Mr. Ormeli, He motioned about his visits:

My cousin is living in Istanbul. His surname is Öorme. When I went to Istanbul to see him for the first time, the moment I saw him at the airport, I knew it was him.

Another interviewee from the same family mentions about her relatives in Istanbul;

Our relatives in Istanbul are Öorme. They were two brothers but one of them passed away. They both visited us in Simferopol. One of them has a daughter who is married with three

children, but they are Turks. They are assimilated (Female, 60)

According to the *gazzan* of the *kenasa*, the Karaites in Istanbul are of Greek origin. Here is what he mentioned about these Karaites;

We can not say for sure that Crimea Karaites are from the Khazars. Crimean Karaites definition is not wrong, we are Turks. However, the Karaites living in Turkey are of Greek origin, they use Greek language. So, Crimean Karaites are ethnically Turk but the Istanbul Karaites are Greek, Cairo Karaites are Arab, Bagdad Karaites are Persian. Russian Karaites are Slav. Jerusalem Karaites are ethnically Jew. There are also Slav Karaites coming to the *kenasa*.. Slav Karaites come from Russia.

Crimean Karaites give importance to the relation with Turkic culture and customs. This can be supported with the below example.

In Crimea on TV, we watched the TV series *Feride*¹¹¹. The elders were very happy to watch it. As we do not have Internet in our homes, we do not have e- mail addresses or yahoo groups to keep the communication with other Karaites. Polish and Lithuanian Karaites have their own web-sites (Female, 26).

¹¹¹ Originally the name of the serial is not *Feride*. *Feride* is the name of the main character. The original name of the serial is *Çalığışu*.

During the camps in *Chuft-Kale*, Karaites from different countries gather and enjoy the feasts. As ethnically the Karaites in Crimea, Poland and Lithuania come from the same origin, they are in a closer relation. Although they have different dialects, they have the sense of unity and they organize language courses together. The Karaites in Poland and in Lithuania have lived in a close-community and as a result they were able to preserve their culture better than that of Crimean Karaites. All the Crimean Karaites interviewed share the opinion that their financial conditions are much better when a comparison is made. Below are quotations from the interviews;

Karaites living in Crimea and Lithuania were financially in good condition during the Soviet period. Nowadays, Karaites in Lithuania and Poland are financially in better condition therefore they do not want to come to Crimean to live. They preserved their language better. They live as a commune (in Rayon's). Six centuries ago *Knyaz* Viktor took some Karaites to Lithuania but they kept their customs and traditions. Some, very few, later moved to Poland. There are about 150 people in Poland and 300 in Lithuania. I visited the Karaites living in Australia. There are two Karaites in Japan, and they visited the *Chuft-Kale* during the camp in 2005. They spoke English and a Karaite living in Warsaw, who helped them in translation. There are also Karaites in France, in USA and in Cairo. Rich Karaites went to USA (Female, 60).

My daughter is living in Lithuania. I visit her and meet with the Karaites. Polish Karaites also visit them. Lithuanian Karaites' common values are good manner but every one has his/her own characteristic. I know that some Karaites moved to Turkey. Ottomans ruled in Crimea. Karaites in Lithuania live together there and do not mix with other nations. As a result, they have not assimilated. They continue their customs and see Crimea as their homeland (Male, 65).

As mentioned above, there are also Karaites living in Israel. The Crimean Karaites also visit Israel and have communications with them. For some Crimean Karaites, religion is of higher importance than ethnicity and for some, religion is a symbolic element of the culture. A lady at the *kenasa* said:

My mother is ill, and as in Israel health conditions are better and as we are welcomed there, we moved to Israel. I come to Evpatoria to visit friends and today I come to pray at the *kenasa* (Female, 58)

5.9. The perception of the Soviet and Post- Soviet periods by the Crimean Karaites

At the interviews, questions regarding the life conditions of the Crimean Karaites during and after the Soviet period were asked. When the two periods were compared, most of the interviewees argued that the Soviet era had its advantages

and disadvantages. According to the Crimean Karaites, they had better life conditions in the Soviet period. They could get education, health care and many other facilities free of charge and they all had a fine salary and the rentals were suitable. An interviewee mentions about the Soviet era;

During the Soviet Union I was young, and I think those times were better than today. Education, health care, summer camps were all free of charge. Rents were low and salaries were high (Female, 60).

Another interviewee makes a comparison of the two periods;

When I compare the Soviet era and the current situation, it is difficult to say much. These days, there is a chaos. A comparison can be made only after something's are stable. At Soviet times, Karaites could gather, but not like today (Female, 62).

For some communication and traveling was much easier during the Soviet era and an interviewee mentions about this situation;

We could travel without passports and visas during the Soviet period. Now traveling is a great problem (Female, 26).

As to their current situation, they do not want to come to a conclusion at once. As they are experiencing a new process of adaptation after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Crimean Karaites as the citizens of Ukraine are demanding more rights from the government. The Autonomous Republic

of Crimea and the Crimean Parliament have given many rights to the minorities. They prepare special aid programs. The camps organized at the *Chuft-Kale* are supported by the government. Today, what the Crimean Karaites mostly demand from the government is to get back their buildings.

Previously, during the Soviet times, we could not organize camps, and I cannot say much more. On the other hand, today we make agreements with the government and each year, a program is made. This is the Crimean Nations Committee. If they find it necessary, they give financial support. For this camp in *Chuft-Kale* for instance we got an aid (Male, 32).

There are laws for us but the improvement is very slow. We wish to get back the buildings which were formerly ours (Female, 26).

Consequently, when comparing the Soviet era and the Post-Soviet era according to Crimean Karaites, it had its advantages and disadvantages. For this community what is indispensable and most necessary is to have their cultural rights. Crimean Karaites are in a process of assimilation and this is the reason why they demand the support of the government.

5.10. Relations with the Crimean Tatars

When describing the Soviet era, the Crimean Karaites also mention about Crimean Tatars and how the lives of the

Crimean Karaites changed when the Crimean Tatars were exiled. After the exile, the vineyards were cut down, and they remember these days with grief. As I have mentioned above, the relations of the Crimean Tatars and the Crimean Karaites are close. They have lived along in peace for centuries. They have not had problems. The *Chuft-Kale* and the *Han Saray* are in the same region of Bakhchisaray. During the Giray Khan period, the Crimean Karaites had a mint at the *Chuft-Kale* where they made coins for the Giray Khanate. One of the respondents at the *Chuft-Kale* camp in Bakhchisaray said:

Soviet times were interesting years. I can say that it was weird. There were interesting practices which I think were absurd. They deported the Tatars and they cut down the vineyards. This was also very absurd. However, there was no discrimination at schools. We used to tell that we were different. This was a matter of curiosity. As they showed interest, we used to tell about our community and culture (Male, 32).

Another interesting and important observation was how the Crimean Tatars perceived the Crimean Karaites. What was common was that The Crimean Karaites were accepted *Chufut*; therefore, it can be said that from the Crimean Tatars point of view, the Crimean Karaites are perceived as Jews. As I have mentioned above; the word *Çufut* in Turkish is the word used for the Jews. And perhaps this is the reason why it so rare for a Crimean Tatar and a Crimean Karaites to set up a family, even though they both accept themselves as Turkic.

Perhaps this shows that for the Tatars, religion is one step ahead than nationality.

On the other hand, the two cultures include many similarities; the language, the traditional dances, costumes and their kitchen. For an outlandish it is not possible to distinguish a Crimean Karaite folk dance from a Crimean Tatar folk dance. When a video of a Crimean Karaite folk dance was shown to a Tatar, his response was;

This is our dance our music (Male, 29).

Therefore, probably if the Crimean Karaites were not exiled, the Crimean Karaites may have preserved their culture much better as they have such similarities and as they were living side by side. This would not have been a reason for the assimilation of the Crimean Karaites as they did not set-up families with one other but it would have supported the common language and customs.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

A Turkic community of the Crimean Peninsula, the Crimean Karaites, whose descendants are Khazars as mostly accepted by the academicians and scientists, are living a process of assimilation. From the sociological point of view, in accordance with the community's own interpretation, the Crimean Karaites are facing extinction. This thesis attempted to examine the reasons and results of the cultural loss and assimilation process of the Crimean Karaites. The main argument of this thesis is focused on the cultural loss of the Crimean Karaites. In order to analyze the Crimean Karaite assimilation process, it was necessary to define some terminology and approaches in the field of the Crimean Karaite. Hence, definitions and frameworks for analysis of the group were provided as a fieldwork research.

Even though the Russian tsars treated the Crimean Karaites favorably by providing them with various privileges, exempting them from the double tax and treating them like the Christians during the Soviet power, Crimean Karaites national and religious schools along with the *kenasas* were closed down, causing the loss of mother tongue and religious practices. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Crimean Karaites started to establish a cultural revival project. This required the development of social solidarity. The fieldwork has shown that despite the efforts of cultural revival, the population of the Crimean Karaites is not sufficient to resist the process of assimilation.

The first cause of the assimilation is related with the low population of the Crimean Karaites. As their number decreased and as they were not living in an isolated community, the Crimean Karaites have not been very successful in preserving their ethnic solidarity as necessary. The fieldwork has indicated that Crimean Karaites are mostly well educated and that they live in cities. This is an important factor limiting residential segregation, limiting the possibility to live as a closed community and thus, a factor which increases interaction with other communities such as Russians and Ukrainians. This was followed by the mix- marriages. Along with these reasons, it is necessary to mention that the Crimean Karaite language failed to survive. Currently mother tongue education is still not available for the Crimean Karaite children. During the Soviet era, it was forbidden and the Crimean Karaites could not teach their children their mother tongue and today the elderly generation therefore lacks the sufficient knowledge to pass their mother tongue on the new generations. Russian language is still the dominant language among the Crimean Karaites. Most of the elderly mentioned that they understand the Ukrainian language. Briefly, linguistic assimilation occurred along with the cultural assimilation. As a result, this led to an acculturation.

All above-mentioned factors are contributing to the assimilation process of the Crimean Karaites and have contributed to the cultural loss and led to loosening the ethnic solidarity. It was seen that Crimean Karaite culture lost out to Russian and Ukrainian influence. It was seen that in the case of Crimean Karaites the assimilation process became a part of their faith. In order to understand how the assimilation

process occurred, we first need to find out how assimilation occurs, the reasons behind it and how it can be resisted if it can. For this purpose, historical background was provided and it was compared with the current situation of the Crimean Karaites.

The fieldwork has shown that nowadays, the goal of the Crimean Karaite community is to achieve a cultural revival in order to resist complete assimilation. For this purpose, Crimean Karaites have established associations. Furthermore, they are printing books, newspapers and encyclopedias of their own, organizing camps at the *Chuft-Kale*, and they have established a folk dance group to present their culture and they introduce themselves to other communities, nations and countries. Additionally, they have opened a cafe and a small museum in the Kenasa complex. Socializing agents used by the Crimean Karaites are the annual camps which teach dancing, singing, language, cooking and culture and the associations which work to acquire more cultural rights. Despite all these efforts, based on the fieldwork, it is possible to argue that there is a low social or ethnic solidarity among the Crimean Karaites community members. Low solidarity can be interpreted as an important factor leading to the assimilation of a community and this is what is being experienced by the Crimean Karaites. One can argue that in the light of all the findings, it is inevitable for this small Turkic community to disappear.

The field research has indicated that it is unrealistic to expect a successful cultural revival among the Crimean Karaites who do not have the necessary tools and possibilities

to realize a revival. Their population is the main obstacle of the cultural revival. Low population is the main factor necessitating mixed marriages which cause further decrease of the population and thus, contribute to further assimilation.

The Crimean Karaite community is not insensitive to the assimilation process, yet they have no other choice than mix-marriages. They have a complex structure, combining Shamanist elements along with their religion and have an interesting ethnic origin. This situation of the Crimean Karaites, in a way can be defined as hybridization, compelling the ethnic theories. Currently, the Crimean Karaites are experiencing the revival of a disappearing process.

Consequently, due to the fact that ethnicity and religion intersects in the case of the Crimean Karaites, it is a confusing case. This is at the same time a very important case for the ethnicity literature. There is insufficient networking and though they define themselves as a Turkic community, they are integrated to other groups and mix-marriages are inevitable. Nowadays, among the Crimean Karaites, a low ethnic solidarity is experienced as they are in a process of assimilation, which is eventually expected to lead to extinction.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

THE GUIDELINE FOR THE INTERVIEWS

1. How old are you?
2. What is your marital status?
3. What is your nationality that is mentioned in your ID?
4. What is your spouse's nationality as mentioned in his/her ID?
5. Do you have children?
6. What is your children's nationality as mentioned in their ID?
7. Are they married?
8. Do Crimean Karaites marry Russians, Ukrainians and Crimean Tatars?
9. What is your education?
10. What is your profession?
11. What is your occupation?
12. What is your spouse's education?
13. What is your spouse's profession?
14. How many languages can you speak?

15. What is your children's education, profession and occupation?
16. What is your place of birth?
17. What is your children's place of birth?
18. What is your family's occupation?
19. Can you briefly mention about your family?
20. What is the religious belief of the Crimean Karaites?
21. Can we identify you as a Jew?
22. How would you define yourself?
23. When would Crimean Karaites help one another?
24. Do you have a symbol or a flag to represent you? What is the significance of *Batla Tiymez* and *Chuft-Kale*?
25. Who is your best ally? How are your relations with Crimean Tatars?
26. Do you have ties with Krymchaks? Do you have any similarities religion wise?
27. What do you think about the Khazar theory?
28. What is your most important problem?
29. What are your plans about the future?
30. Which language do you use at home?
31. What is the first thing you teach your children?

32. What is the characteristic feature of a Crimean Karaite?
How is their family structure?
33. Do you have a special story or a memory about Crimean Karaites Turks, told by your parents or grandparents?
34. What is the difference between Crimean Karaites and Karaites?
35. Does the Crimean Karaites have relations with the Karaites living in Poland, Lithuania and elsewhere?
36. As a Crimean Karaite, what do you think about USSR?
37. What do you know-think about Turkey? We know that there are about 50 Karaites in Istanbul – Karaköy, do you have any contact with them?
38. What do you think about Crimean Karaite associations?
39. Do you participate in the activities of those associations?
40. Can you learn your mother language in schools at Crimea?
41. Do you feel Ukraine and Crimea as your home land?
Where would you like to live?
42. What are your cultural rights in Ukraine?
43. Which ethnic group would you prefer as your business partner?
44. Do you have problems with the state institutions? What are your social, legal and political rights?
45. Did you face any discrimination at work or school?

46. What are the characteristic features of different groups you live together?
47. Can you mention about your temples?
48. Do you feel that, you are facing discrimination because of your religious beliefs?
49. Would you compare your status in USSR and post USSR era?
50. How important is religion, when defining you?
53. What is the approximate population of the Crimean Karaites?
55. How often does Crimean Karaites visit one another?
56. Would you like to add anything else?

APPENDIX B MAPS

MAP 1.



Location of Crimea (red) with respect to [Ukraine](#) (light blue).

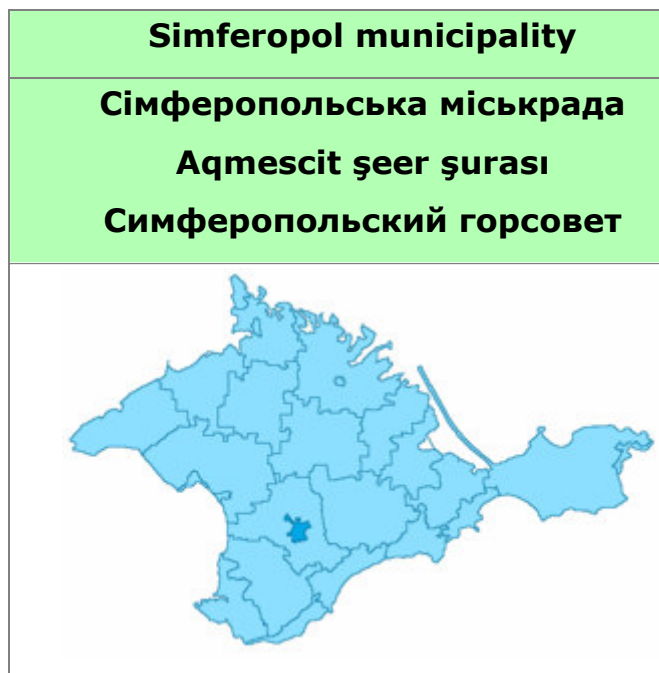
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crimea>

MAP 2.



http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Simferopol_raion

MAP 3.



http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Simferopol_municipality

MAP 5.



http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bakhchisaray_raion

MAP 6.



http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eupatoria_municipality

APPENDIX C
PICTURES

Picture 1



Picture 2



Picture 3



Picture 4



Picture 5



Picture 6



Picture 7



Picture 8



Picture 9



Picture 10



Picture 11



Picture 12



Picture 13



Picture 14



Picture 15



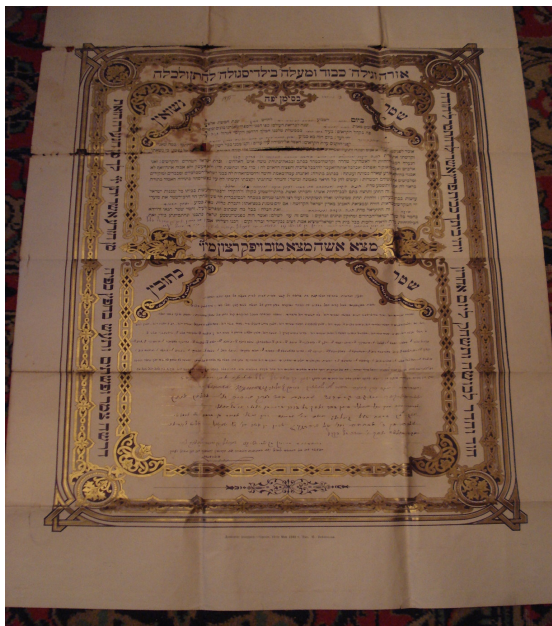
Picture 16



Picture 17



Picture 18



Picture 19



Picture 20



Picture 21



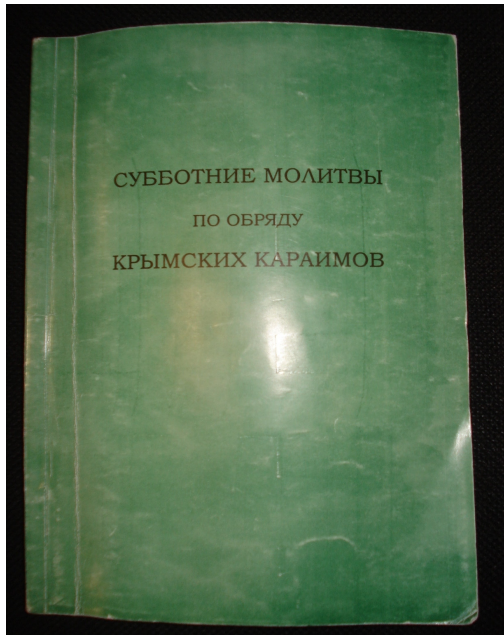
Picture 22



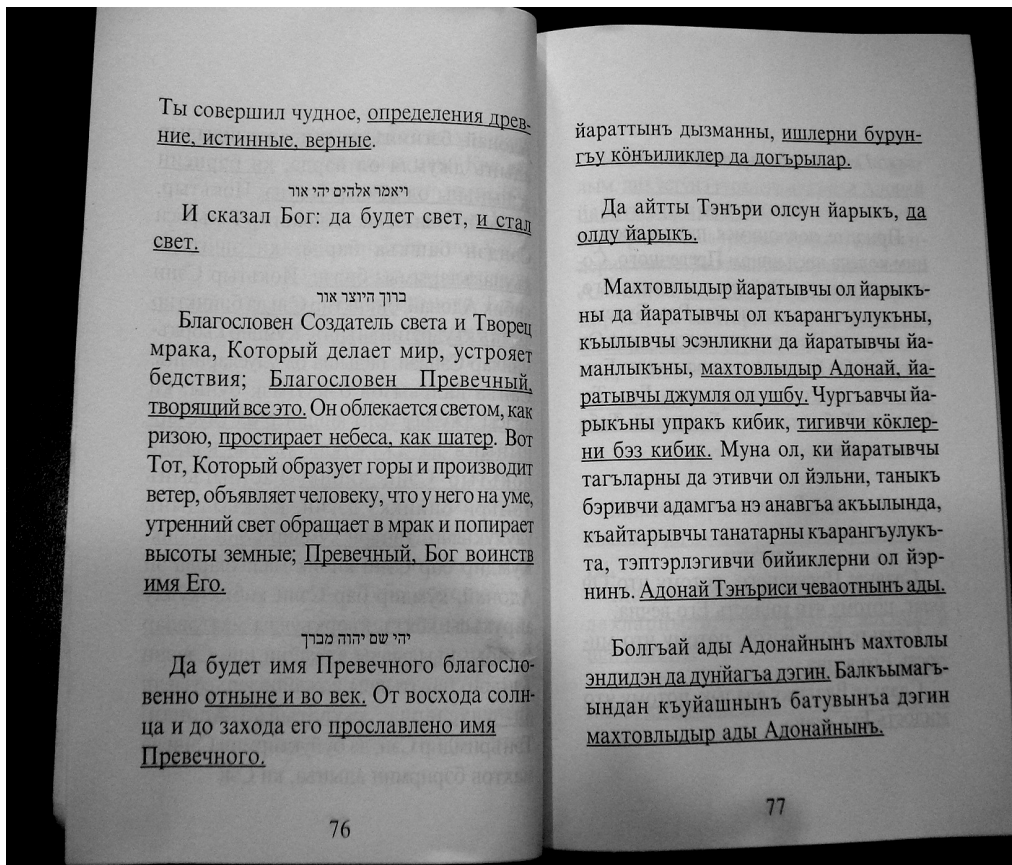
Picture 23



Picture 24



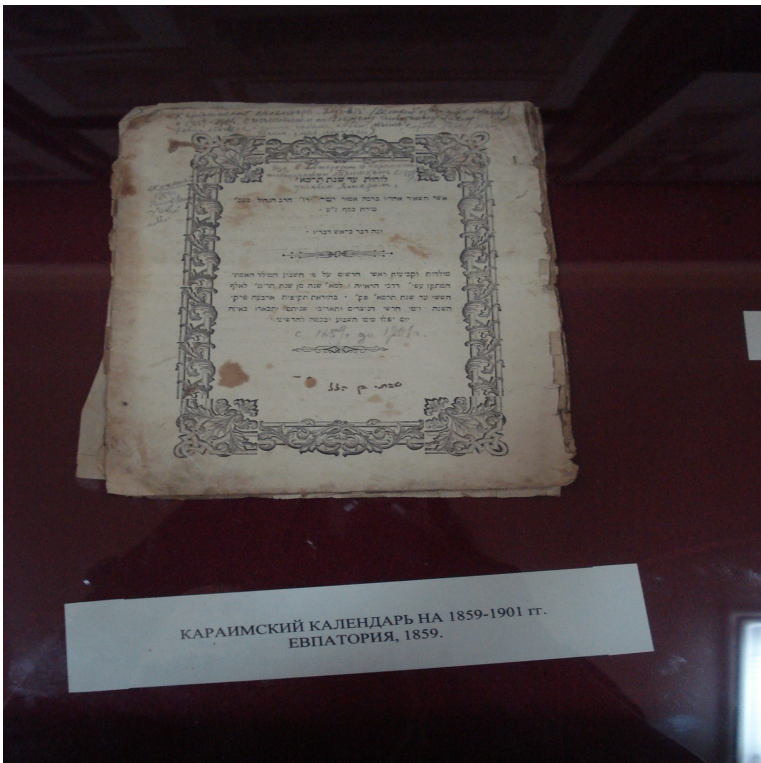
Picture 25



Picture 26



Picture 27



КАРАИМСКИЙ КАЛЕНДАРЬ НА 1859-1901 гг.
ЕВПАТОРИЯ, 1859.

Picture 28



Picture 29



Picture 30



Picture 31



Picture 32



Picture 33



Picture 34



Picture 35



Picture 36



Picture 37



Picture 38



Picture 39



<http://karaim-institute.narod.ru/room/food.htm>

Picture 40



<http://karaim-institute.narod.ru/images/machcha2.jpg>

Picture 41



Picture 42



Picture 43



<http://karaim-institute.narod.ru/room/art-head-dresses.htm>

Picture 44



Picture 45



Picture 46

