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Plague in Lithuania, Desolation in Jerusalem: Two Poems in the Karaim Language from Tadeusz Kowalski's Archival Collection

by *Mikhail Kizilov**

Only few samples of Karaite poetry in the Turkic languages have been published and translated into European languages so far.¹ This article presents two highly interesting and somewhat unusual *piyyutim* (elegies) which I discovered in Kraków in the archival collection of the famous Polish Orientalist, Tadeusz Kowalski (1889-1948).² Furthermore, I shall try to determine the authors of both elegies whose names are not mentioned in the manuscript. The *piyyutim* in question were written in the Karaim language, the Turkic language of the Karaites living in today's Western Ukraine and Lithuania (historical Poland).³ Kowalski most likely received the version of these two

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1 TADEUSZ KOWALSKI, "Pieśni obrzędowe w narzeczu Karaimów z Trok," in: *Rocznik Orientalistyczny* 3 (1926), pp. 216-254; MIKHAIL KIZILOV, "Two Piyyutim and a Rhetorical Essay in the Northern (Troki) Dialect of the Karaim Language by Isaac ben Abraham Troki," in: *Judaica* 63 (2007), pp. 64-75; DAN SHAPIRA, "Miscellanea Judaeo-Turkica: Four Judeo-Turkic Notes (Judaeo-Turkica IV)," in: *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 27 (2002), pp. 475-496; IDEM., "A Karaim Poem in Crimean-Tatar from Mangup: a Source for Jewish-Turkish History (Judaeo-Turkica III)," in: MEHMET TÛTÛNCÛ (ed.), *Jewish-Turkish Encounters. Studies in Jewish-Turkish Relations Throughout the Ages*, Haarlem 2001, pp. 79-100; idem., "Pesn' o Mangupe' 1793 goda," in: *Vestnik Evrejskogo Universiteta v Moskve* 7 (2002), pp. 283-294; BERNHARD MUNKÁCSI, "Karäisch-tatarische Hymnen aus Polen," in: *Keleti Szemle* 10 (1909), pp. 185-210; HENRYK JANKOWSKI, "Reading Loose Sheets of Paper found among the Pages of Karaim Mejumas," in: *Mediterranean Language Review* 16 (2005), pp. 145-166. More than 70 Karaim poems by various authors were translated into Lithuanian by KARINA FIRKAVIČIŪTĖ (ed.), *Čypčyblej učma trochka: Lietuva karajlarnyn jyrlary / Į Trakus paukščiu plasnosiu: Lietuvos karaimų poezija*, Vilnius 1997; this book is based largely on the texts published in MYKOLAS FIRKOVIČIUS (ed.), *Karay Yirlary*, Vilnius 1989.

2 Archiwum Nauki PAN i PAU, Kraków. Spuścizna K III-4. Tadeusz Kowalski. No. 122:1. fols. 52-54a, 55-58; *ibid.*, No. 122:2, fols. 239-242 (*hereafter*: AN PAN).

3 For the introduction, see MIKHAIL KIZILOV, "Faithful Unto Death: Language, Tradition, and the Disappearance of the East European Karaite Communities," in:

elegies written in Hebrew characters ca. 1927 from a leading interwar Halicz Karaites intellectual, Zarach Zarachowicz (1890–1952).⁴ The scholar, apparently, had problems with reading the Karaim text in Hebrew characters. As a consequence, he subsequently asked Nowach Szulimowicz, another Halicz Karaites intellectual, read it for him. On the basis of Szulimowicz’s reading Kowalski made the transliteration of the poems in Latin characters. There is no doubt that Kowalski himself had these elegies ready for publication – but for some reason have not translated them⁵ and never submitted to the press. In my article I largely rely on Kowalski’s Latin transliteration which I have slightly modified because of the absence of some characters used by Kowalski in the modern computer keyboard. Furthermore, I corrected some of Kowalski’s typos by comparing his version with the variant in Hebrew characters provided by Zarach Zarachowicz.

Both elegies are highly interesting and provide us numerous historical details. This feature is somewhat unusual for the Karaim poetry of that period which normally had religious character and seldom provided factual information. The first elegy represents a lamentation (Karaim *kyna*, a loanword from Hebrew קינה) on the devastation of the Lithuanian Karaites community by the “mighty disease,” i. e. by the plague. The epidemic of 1710, known also as the “Great Plague,” began to spread through Poland about 1704 and by 1708 reached Silesia, Lithuania, Prussia, and a great part of Germany and Scandinavia. The epidemic reached its climax in Lithuania in 1710/1711, with smaller outbreaks a bit later. Not only the Karaites, but all other ethnic groups inhabiting the country suffered from the disease. It is estimated that during the plague Lithuania lost about a third of its population. This deplorable event is reflected not only in the Karaim poetry, but also in Lithuanian folklore.⁶ According to Karaites sources, the plague was a mighty blow for the

East European Jewish Affairs 36 (2006), pp. 73-93; DAN SHAPIRA, “The Turkic Languages and Literatures of the East European Karaites,” in: MEIRA POLLIACK (ed.), *Karaites Judaism. A Guide to Its History and Literary Sources*, Leiden 2003, pp. 657-708.

- 4 I have established this fact on the basis of the comparison of Kowalski’s manuscript with Zarachowicz’s letters kept in other archival collections (e.g. Manuscript Division of the Lietuvos Mokslų Akademijos Biblioteka, Vilnius [Wilno] F. 143, no. 723, fol.1 [v]: The letter of Zarach Zarachowicz to Seraya Szapszał of 08.07.1948). For more information on Zarachowicz, see MIKHAIL KIZILOV, *The Karaites of Galicia: An Ethnoreligious Minority Among the Ashkenazim, the Turks, and the Slavs, 1772-1945* (Leiden, 2009), pp. 241-244, 247-249.
- 5 His personal archive contains an unfinished Polish translation of the first *piyyut* (AN PAN 122:2, fols.1-2, 37-38).
- 6 GRAŽINA KRIVICKAS, “Relations between the Living and the Dead in Lithuanian Folklore,” in: *Lituanus* 41: 2 (1995).

Lithuanian Karaite community which did not manage to restore its importance ever after. Mordecai Sulcański (1838), for example, informs that the pestilence lasted for five months and killed a “numberless and countless” number of people.⁷ According to Solomon ben Aaron of Troki (today: Trokai) the plague lasted from Tammuz 5470 (June/July 1710) until Tevet 5471 (December 1710/January 1711) with the most difficult days in the month of Av 5470 (July-August 1710).⁸ For the Karaite author this circumstance had a special significance since in the Karaite and Rabbanite tradition the month of Av was largely a month of assiduous fasting and commemoration of the destruction of the Temple, perhaps, the saddest day in Jewish history *par excellence*.⁹ Karaite documents also inform us that as the consequence of the decimation of the Troki community by the plague the newly elected head of the Troki community and other remaining members of the *qebilah* were forced to move to nearby Wilno. They stayed there from 1710 to 1719.¹⁰ The plague became a serious and deplorable event in the history of the Lithuanian Karaites which was remembered by many generations after. After the plague was over, the Troki Karaites developed a special liturgical service dedicated to the memory of the victims of the plague. In addition to the liturgical part, the Karaites visited the local cemetery and touched the grave of the deceased relatives with a handkerchief. The handkerchief was originally supposed to serve as the measure against possible infection. Later it remained as a symbolical part of this ceremony.¹¹

The author of the first elegy was not indicated either by Kowalski or by his Karaite colleagues. Whilst trying to identify its author, I immediately recalled the figure of Solomon ben Aaron of Troki (1670?-1745), Karaite poet, theologian, and spiritual leader of the community.¹² It is known that

7 MORDECAI SULTAŃSKI, *זכר צדיקים או קיצור אגדה*, ed. SAMUEL POZNAŃSKI, Warsaw 1920, p. 116.

8 סדר התפלות כמנהג הקראים, ed. YAKOV SHISHMAN, 4 vols., Wilno 1891/1892, IV, pp. 259-260.

9 The difference is that the Rabbanites observe the 9th of Av as the day of the destruction of the Temple, while the Karaites – the 7th and 10th of Av.

10 JACOB MANN, *Texts and Studies in Jewish History and Literature*, 2 vols., Philadelphia 1935, II: *Karaitica*, pp. 570-571, 580, 911-918, 1262-1267.

11 For more details, see below. A similar rite of kissing the tomb through a handkerchief is still practised by the Polish Karaites in Warsaw (I received an explanation of this ceremony from the members of the community in Warsaw in 1999; cf. MOURAD EL-KODSI, *The Karaite Communities in Poland, Lithuania, Russia and Crimea*, Lyons, NY 1993, pp. 28-29).

12 Concerning him, see more in MIKHAIL KIZILOV, “Jüdische Protestanten? Die Karäer und christliche Gelehrte im Frühneuzeitlichen Europa,” in: ROLF

he was a survivor of the plague from Troki. In the second decade of the eighteenth century he described the devastation of the local community in a letter to the Karaite communities of Constantinople and Damascus.¹³ My hypothesis that it was Solomon ben Aaron who had composed the *piyyut* in question was corroborated when, armed with a reference from Jacob Mann's study, I read a Hebrew elegy by Solomon ben Aaron. This elegy also described the devastation of the Troki community by the plague with a short introduction in prose.¹⁴ Furthermore, after a careful comparison of Hebrew and Karaim versions of the elegy I came to the conclusion that the Karaim variant is in fact a translation of the Hebrew original. There is no doubt that it was the Hebrew version that was composed first and not *vice versa*. The Hebrew version represents an acrostic which starts with 22 letters of Hebrew alphabet and ends with the name of its author, Solomon ben Aaron. The Karaim version does not possess this structure and therefore, was composed after the Hebrew original. The Karaim version represents quite a skilful and literal translation of the Hebrew original with little variations. Thus, for example, the Karaim version has a reference to the "Lithuanian people" (Kar. *el Litvanyn*, here in the sense "the Karaite community of Lithuania") whereas the Hebrew version does not mention this. In general however, both versions are quite similar in terms of their emotionality and content. One may assume that the Karaim version was composed by Solomon ben Aaron himself since he is known as the author of several other important poems in the Karaim language.¹⁵ Kowalski's Latin transliteration of the elegy, somewhat surprisingly, reflects the Galician-Volhynian phonological features of the Karaim language and not its Lithuanian variety.¹⁶ This however may be explained by the fact that the poem was provided and dictated to Kowalski by the Galician Karaites.

DECOT & MATTHIEU ARNOLD (eds.), *Christen und Juden im Reformationszeitalter*, Mainz 2006, pp. 250-251.

13 MANN, *Texts and Studies*, II: *Karaitica*, pp. 570, 580, 1262-1267.

14 סדר התפלות כמנהג הקראים, ed. Shishman, IV, pp. 259-261.

15 Especially famous is his poem "Hej, hej kyzhyna...", published in: *Mysł Karaimska* 2:3-4 (1930), p. 21; *Karaj Awazy* 3 (5) (1932), pp. 25-26; MYKOLAS FIRKOVIČIUS (ed.), *Karay Yirlary*, Vilnius 1989, p. 188. For his poem "Da ty pienkna [sic] damulenka" ("You are truly a pretty maid"; Polish in Hebrew characters), see TADEUSZ KOWALSKI, "Z pozołkłych kart," in: *Mysł Karaimska* 2:3-4 (1930-1931), pp. 12-25.

16 On Northern (Troki) Karaim, see (with caution) TIMUR KOCAOĞLU & MYKOLAS FIRKOVIČIUS, *Karay. The Trakai Dialect*, Munich 2006; MYKOLAS FIRKOVIČIUS, *Mieñ karajče ūrianiam*, Vilnius 1996.

In the prose introduction to the Hebrew version of his elegy Solomon ben Aaron mentions that this *qinah* (קִינָה) should be sung by the Karaites in all communities after reading of *parashah* (פִּרְשָׁה) and *haftarah* (הַפְּטָרָה) starting from the 9th of Tammuz and until the 7th of Av. Furthermore, it should be sung on the 7th of Av after the *qinot* dedicated to the destruction of the Temple. The melody of singing was supposed to follow the pattern of one of the songs from a Sephardic *Siddur*.¹⁷ One lacks information about the liturgical use of the poem in the Crimea, Volhynia and Galicia (even though the presence of this translation in Halicz can be the evidence to this effect), but in Lithuania this poem was indeed in use at least until the 1920s. Young Ananjasz Zajączkowski (1903-1970), future famous Karaite Orientalist in Poland, described in his first publication the ceremony of commemoration of the victims of the plague in the 1920s. On 9th of Tammuz 1923/4 after a special liturgy in the synagogue-kenesa, the whole Karaite community of Troki went to the local Karaite cemetery where a special *k'yina*, i.e. apparently Solomon ben Aharon's elegy, was sung.¹⁸

Let us however analyse the text of the Karaim version of the elegy. The elegy informs that all members of the community suffered from the plague irrespective of their age and social status. It mentions the neglected state of "the street", i.e. undoubtedly, the Karaite Street (Kar. *Karaj oramy*) in Troki and the death of the "head of the community, the law-giver" (Kar. *dżymatnyn ayasy, oł Tora jes'is'ŷ*). The "law-giver" mentioned here was apparently a head of the community, known in Hebrew as *av-beit-din* (אב-בית-דין) or *shofet* (שׁוֹפֵט) and as *wójt* in Polish. This could have been Abraham Moskiewicz of Poswol (today: Pasvalys), who according to some data was the *shofet* of the Troki community until 1709/1710.¹⁹ According to the Karaite documents analysed by Jacob Mann, the office of the Troki *shofet* remained vacant until 1713.²⁰ Then the elegy describes the physical symptoms of the disease ("signs in the bodies, exceptional torments"), expansion of the cemeteries and spread of the plague even into fortified settlements (perhaps, the Troki castle and other Lithuanian fortresses where the Karaites lived). These data are partly corroborated by epigraphic evidence. It seems that there was a special section in the Karaite cemetery of Troki, located next to the side entrance to the old part of the burial ground, where victims of the pestilence were buried. At the

17 סדר התפלות כמנהג הקראים, ed. Shishman, IV, p. 260.

18 ANANJASZ ZAJĄCZKOWSKI, "Promień miłości," in: *Mysł Karaimska* 1 (1924), p. 20, ft. 3.

19 Concerning him, see JERZY WIERZYŃSKI, "Dokument z r. 1706 z Archiwum Karaimskiego w Trokach," in: *Mysł Karaimska*, 10 (1934), pp. 11-18.

20 MANN, *Texts and Studies*, II, pp. 570-571, 580, 911-918, 1262-1267.

moment only two tombs from the period of the plague have survived.²¹ Especially interesting is a tombstone inscription on one of them which mentions that five persons (!) buried there were victims of the plague (Heb. מגפה).²² Finally, the lamentation ends with the expectation of the coming of the messiah and restoration of the Temple in Jerusalem.

The second elegy is dedicated to the destruction and devastation of Jerusalem and the land of Israel. Its phonology also reflects the Galician-Volhynian features of the Karaim language and may have been composed by a local Karaite who could have visited the Holy Land (or have been thinking about it), most likely in the seventeenth century. On fol. 239r of the document, on the page with the Latin transliteration of the lamentation on the Lithuanian plague, Kowalski for some reason left a note in pencil: “Josef Mašbir”.²³ Joseph ha-Mashbir is a name of Joseph ben Samuel *ha-Mashbir* (d. in Halicz in 1700), a seventeenth-century leader of the Karaite community of Halicz, who also composed poetry in Karaim.²⁴ Nevertheless, one more Galician-Volhynian poet of that period, Joseph ben Yeshuah from Derażne (d. in Łuck in 1678), had the nickname “Mashbir”.²⁵ Joseph ben Yeshuah is known as the author of several most interesting *piyyutim* (פיוטים) in Karaim, including one entitled “Bijler Biji, nek cydajsen...” (“O King of the Kings, until when thou endurest...”).²⁶ This poem is quite similar in its content to the elegy published here. It also describes the desolation of Jerusalem and expresses the hope for the forthcoming unification of Israel and reestablishment of its rule in the Holy Land. Thus, it seems to be very likely that it could have been Joseph ben Yeshuah who composed this most interesting elegy.

21 One should keep in mind that many of the tombs from the cemetery have not survived. Furthermore, it is known that only comparatively rich people could afford stone tombs while less well-to-do people were often buried without tombstones or with wooden *matsevo* (מצבות).

22 Yeshayah ben Isaac, his sons Isaac and Joseph, and daughters Sulamith and Dina, d. in 1710, 1713, and 1716. Their collective tombstone was erected apparently only after 1718 when the community returned to Troki from Wilno (GOLDA AKHIEZER & ILYA DVORKIN, “כתובות המצבות מבתי העלמין בליטא,” in: *Pe’amim* 98-99 (2004), pp. 225-260, p. 245.

23 AN PAN, No. 122:2, fol.239.

24 On him and his Karaim poems, see KIZILOV, *Karaites of Galicia*, pp. 48-50.

25 MIKHAIL NOSONOVSKIY & VIKTOR SHABAROVSKIY, “Karaimskaya obshchina XVI-XVII vv. v Derazhnom na Volyni,” in: *Vestnik Evreyskogo Universiteta v Moskve* 9 (27) (2004), pp. 29-50; MIKHAIL NOSONOVSKIY, “The Karaite Community in Derazhnia and its Destruction,” in: *Shvut* 6 (22) (1997), pp. 206-211.

26 JÓZEF BEN JESZUA, “Bijler Biji, nek cydajsen...,” in: *Karaj Awazy* 2 (4) (1932), pp. 19-20.

Nevertheless, it is known that Joseph ben Yeshuah's trip to Jerusalem ended in Bahçesaray in the Crimea in 1666 where he was arrested and imprisoned by the Tatar khan (most likely, Mohammed Giray IV) under the suspicion of espionage for Poland.²⁷ He was released some time later, very likely due to the fact that Mohammed Giray IV was dismissed by the Porte and a new khan, Adil Çoban Giray, came to power. The former had to run away from the Crimea, having taken with him the most important of his prisoners, including Russian boyar Vasilii Sheremetev (Turk. *Şeremet ban*). In the course of his escape Mohammed Giray was attacked by a group of local nobles, Şirin beys, who took these prisoners from the khan by force and subsequently donated them to the new khan, Adil Çoban Giray.²⁸ It is very likely that Joseph ben Yeshuah could have been among these prisoners. After his release Joseph ben Yeshuah spent three years in the Karaite community of Çufut Qaleh and subsequently returned to Volhynia. His desire to travel to the Holy Land remained apparently unsatisfied.

The second elegy, dedicated to the desolation of Jerusalem, also conveys numerous historical details.²⁹ Some of these details could have been known only to somebody who personally visited Jerusalem and read descriptions (or heard accounts) of other pilgrims to the Holy Land. The author describes the destroyed beauty of Jerusalem which “has heavily fallen down and fallen into decay”. Indeed, other documents also inform us about the emigration of Rabbanite and Karaite inhabitants from Jerusalem in the second half of the seventeenth century as a consequence of the wars between Poland and Ottoman Empire. Furthermore, it is known that by the beginning of the eighteenth century majority of the Karaite houses of the city were purchased and taken over by the Rabbanites.³⁰ The author of the elegy mentions roofs of Jerusalem which were “arched like brows”³¹ and “surrounded by cedar trees.”

27 JÓZEF BEN JESZUA, “Karanhy bułut,” in: Alexander Mardkowicz (ed.), *Zemierter*, Łuck 1931, pp. 20-21; cf. slightly different version in JAN GRZEGORZEWSKI, “Caraimica. Język Łach-Karaitów. Narzecze południowe (łucko-halickie),” in: *Rocznik Orientalistyczny* 1:2 (1916-1918), pp. 268-270.

28 These events are described in detail by the Ottoman traveller EVLIYA ÇELEBI (*Księga podróży Ewliji Czelebiego*, transl. Z. ABRACHAMOWICZ ET ALII, Warsaw 1969, pp. 335-336; IDEM, *Kniga putešestvii*, transl. M. KIZILOV, Simferopol’ 1996, pp. 153-157; *Kniga putešestvii*, transl. E. BAKHREVSKIY, Simferopol’ 2008, pp. 202-207, 226.

29 For the general attitude of the Karaites towards Jerusalem, see DANIEL J. LASKER, *From Judah Hadassi to Elijah Bashyatchi. Studies in Late Medieval Karaite Philosophy*, Leiden / Boston 2008, pp. 229-247.

30 MANN, *Texts and Studies*, II, pp. 125-126, 321-322. Cf. JÓZEF BEN JESZUA, “Bijler Biji, nek cydajsen,” pp. 19-20.

31 Apparently the cupola of the Dome of the Rock.

Even more interesting is his reference to *shetiyah tasy* (שתייה טסי)³² which the author calls “the centre of the world.” Here the author refers to the so-called Foundation Stone (Heb. אבן שתייה, sometimes referred to as *selah*, the Pierced Stone, Omphalos or navel of the earth), the stone which is at the moment located in the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem. According to medieval Jewish tradition this stone was at the beginning of the creation of the universe.³³ Later the Ark of the Covenant stood upon this stone; it was also the stone on which Abraham was tested by God to see whether he would sacrifice his son, Isaac. According to medieval Muslim tradition, it was from this stone that Muhammad ascended to heaven.

Having described the desolation and devastation of Jerusalem the author of the elegy asks the city regarding its fate and reasons for its abandonment. In the answer the city describes its devastation and sufferings of the Jewish people exiled from the Holy Land. It is highly symptomatic that while portraying the settlement of the exiled ones in various countries of the world, the elegy refers only to the countries which housed then the Karaite communities (Poland, Byzantium, Ottoman Empire and the Near East).³⁴ At the same time the elegy does not include into this picture Ashkenaz and Sefarad where at that moment there were no Karaite communities. While describing the wanderings of the exiled ones the author refers to the problems which were frequently encountered by the pilgrims to the Holy Land in the seventeenth-eighteenth centuries: cold seas, pirates, uncomfortable ships, long journey, slavery and battles.³⁵ At the end of the elegy the author expresses the hope for the future reestablishment of the kingdom of Israel in the Holy Land. As has been mentioned above, this elegy is similar in its contents to “Bijler Bijl, nek cydajsen...” by Joseph ben Yeshuah of Derażne. Highly interesting is also the structure of the elegy which represents a dialogue between the author and the city of Jerusalem. It does not seem that such a metaphorical technique has ever been used by any other Karaite author writing in Karaim in early modern times.

32 *Tas* is a Karaim for “stone.”

33 See bYoma 54b (in: ARTHUR COHEN, *Everyman's Talmud*, London n. d., p. 34).

34 This is how one should interpret his geographic terms “In Rus, in Poland, in Rome and in Turkey / Amongst the Midianites and Moabites.”

35 For the accounts of the early modern Karaite pilgrims to the Holy Land, see MOSES BEN ELIJAH HALEVI, “מסעות,” in: JONAS HAYYIM GURLAND, גנוזי ישראל, בס”ט פטורבורג, 4 vols., Lyck: 1865-1867, I, pp. 31-43; SAMUEL BEN DAVID, “מסעות,” in: GURLAND, גנוזי ישראל, I, pp. 1-30. For the accounts of Rabbanite pilgrims, see ABRAHAM YA‘ARI (ed.), מסעות ארץ ישראל, Tel Aviv 1946.

There is a number of Hebrew and some Slavic loanwords in both elegies, which is normal for the Karaim literature of early modern period.³⁶ Some of these loanwords are absent from the only standard dictionary of the Karaim language published to date.³⁷ Most of the Hebrew loanwords had religious character: *k'yna* (קינה lamentation), *ḡaxamtar* (חכמלר sages), *micva* (מצוה commandment, duty), *Israetler* (ישראלר Israelites), *kobenter*, (כוהןר³⁸ priests) *leviter* (לויילר Levites), *kayattar* (קהללר congregations), *galut* (גלות exile), *bet yammigdaš* (בית המקדש the Temple), *medrashlar* (מדרשלר religious schools) *Tora* (תורה the Torah), *naviter* (נביאלר prophets), *nasiler* (נשיאלר leaders), *mas'ijaxymiz* (משיחמיז our messiah), *malax* (מלאך angel), *ganneden* (גן עדן Garden of Eden), etc. Some loanwords were geographic names: *Levanon* (לבנון Lebanon), *S'irjon* (שריון Sirion, the name of Mt. Hermon), *Esaw* (עשו / Poland), *Jisrael* (ישראל Israel), *Mic'raim* (מצרים Egypt). Two ethnonyms were used as geographic names to denote the countries of the Near East: [the countries of] *Midjanlytar* (מדיןלילר Midianites) and *Moawlytar* (מואבילילר Moabites). Especially interesting is the usage of two medieval Rabbinic terms, *shekbinah* (שכינה God's presence) and *even shetiyah* (אבן שתייה Foundation stone) which are mentioned in the second elegy. The presence of these two terms shows that the author of the poem (Joseph ben Yeshuah?) was acquainted with medieval Rabbinic terms, and perhaps, Rabbinic literature. Loanwords of Slavic origin were usually technical terms: *pokojtar* (פוקויילר chambers), *mašters'iz* (משטרשיז without a mast). Two other words had more abstract meaning: *pusta* (פוסטא devastation, void) and *karanja* (קרנייא punishment, retribution). Two Slavic loanwords were used as geographic terms: *Litva* (Lithuania)³⁹ and *Rym* (here, apparently, Greece or Byzantium).

36 The number of Slavic loanwords in Karaim literature grew considerably in the nineteenth century. Between the two world wars the Karaim language was somewhat artificially Turkicized and purified from Hebrew and Slavic loanwords in frames of dejudaization reforms carried out by the leaders of the Polish-Lithuanian Karaite community of that time. For more information, see MIKHAIL KIZILOV, "The Press and the Ethnic Identity: Turkicisation of Karaite Printing in Interwar Poland and Lithuania," in: *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 60 (2007), pp. 399-425; IDEM, *Karaites of Galicia*, pp. 268-277.

37 E.g. Hebrew *shekbinah* (שכינה [God's] presence), *shetiyah* (שתייה foundation [stone]), *erezler* (ארזלר cedar), *koyenlik* (כוהןליק priesthood); Slav. *pokojtar* (poln. *pokoje*, chambers) (cf. N. A. BASKAKOV / A. DUBIŃSKI / CH. F. ISKHAKOVA / CH. F. IZHBULATOVA / K. MUSAEV / A. ZAJACZKOWSKI / W. ZAJACZKOWSKI & S. M SZAPSZAL (eds.), *Karaimsko-russko-pol'skij slovar'*, Moscow 1974).

38 In Hebrew loanwords the Karaites kept *nun-sufit* (ן) and *mem-sufit* (ם) even in the middle of the word, at the end of the Hebrew root.

39 Standard Hebrew for Lithuania is *Lita* (ליטא).

The publication of these two elegies is an important contribution to our knowledge of early modern Karaite history and literature in the Karaim language.

I. Elegy on the destruction of the Lithuanian community by the plague of 1710.

Ojangyn jireg'im *k'yna* oxumakka,
Kotarma acuvun kaħyryn Tenr'in'in!
Ucrady ułusta jadawłu *karanja*,
Tig'endi aňnyndan kic'li ħastałyknyn.
Ułular, kic'iler, atałar, ułanlar
Astry k'yjnałdyłar ałnyndan tarłyknyn.
Bir k'yška zamanda kurdu karsymyzda
Tesce k'epk'enete okłaryn ełetnin.
Syzłatma eks'itme abajly elimni
Ystyrdy k'y'jasa avyna kułarnyn.
A kajda *ħaxamlar*, tig'eł ak'yłlylar,
Tiz iwretiw'iler jołuna *Toranyn*,
Ereňler, katyňlar, jig'itler da kartlar,
Kułuk etiw'iler, kułuyun Tenrinin,
Sukłancy ułanlar, abajly tuwmuslar,
Ceber k'ylyklylar uksasy *sappirin*,
Aruw jirekliler, *micva* k'yłuwcułar,⁴⁰
Tiz inc'k'ełew'iler syrłaryn *Toranyn*
Kołlary bajłandy k'yłmaktan *micvany*.
Endiler zerek'e, ic'ine topraknyn,
Tig'eł y'ermetliler, sukłancy dzewyerler.
S'iplik'k'e tasłandy basynda oramnyn.
Łevanon da *S'irjon* syjyt etiniz bek.
Bu ħastałygyna tavirusımayymnyn
Dzymatnyn aħasy, oł *Tora* jes'is'i
Xorłandy jaryusu była oł kaħyrynyn.
Juvaslar, tig'ełler birg'e cajpałdylar.
Murdar kijiklerden g'ewdes'i tizlernin

40 Kowalski for some reason has *k'yłuwcułar*.

Wake up, my heart, to read the elegy
 And to announce the fury of God's wrath!
 The people was punished with painful retribution
 Which was finished with a mighty disease.
 Great ones, little ones, fathers and sons
 Greatly suffered from the disaster.
 He [God] in a short time prepared against us
 Fast and sudden arrows of plague.
 To torment and diminish our venerable people
 He gathered [us] as birds in the net
 Where the wise ones, righteous sages
 Virtuous teachers of the ways of the Law,
 Men, women, young and old ones,
 Servants in God's service,
 Beautiful children, honourable relatives
 With mild character, similar to sapphires,
 With pure heart, keepers of the commandments
 Righteous readers of the secrets of the Law,
 Whose hands [He] bound with fulfilment of the commandments?
 They are put into the cemetery, in the earth,
 Righteous venerable ones, beautiful precious stones.
 The beginning of the street was left in dust.
Lebanon and *Sirion*,⁴¹ lament greatly.
 This disease is our destruction.
 The head of the community, the Law-giver,
 Suffered from the sentence of this [i.e. God's] wrath.
 Modest and righteous ones were together destroyed.
 Bodies of virtuous ones [devoured] by unclean animals.⁴²

41 *Sirion* (שריין) in Dtn 3:9 and *Shirion* (שריין) in Ps 29:6 (Heb. "breastplate" or "body armour"). In Ps 29:6, as well as in this poem, *Shirion* is mentioned together with *Lebanon*. *Sirion/Shirion* is apparently the name of the Mount Hermon used by the Phoenicians and Sidonians.

42 The Hebrew version mentions the dogs (כלבים).

S'iplikni kuctular kic'inden syzlawyn.
Acuvu Tenrinin da ul'lu kaxry
Ot kibik kabundu elinde *Litvanyn*.
Boj k'yzlar ceberler, nayys kijitiler
Jas es'iklerinde, syjt kabaklarda.
Teredzede belgis'i ul'lu verenliknin.
G'ewdeler iklendi ul'lu kuppalarda
Sayarda salada ornunda zeretnin.
Zeretler arttylar bar orunlarynda
Iwlerde, tizlerde ceginde beklknin.
Belgiler *gustlarda*, tamasa awruwlar.
Belgis'i awruwnun kaxyrnyn tarlyktan.
Az awlak ka'yanlar tirlikk'e jazylan
Sayync bitiklerde kle'ibe Tenrinin
Belgis'i tirliknin man'ajda kojulan
Ki bol'aj kotarma maytawnun Tenrinin.
Xajifs'in bijimiz kajy'ly bu elni,
K'etirgin dewletin tez *Israetlerin*,
Cajpawcu *malaxny* toxtat cajpamaktan,
Endirgin uluska cyklaryn alyysyn.
Bu acuw vaxtynda elg'enler bolsunlar
Asaislyklarda, k'erkinde tyncl'ynyn,
Syjly ortaklykta, *naviterbe* birg'e,
Ic s'iverleribe korkuncu Tenrinin.
Bal'kuwlu ornunda, satyr *ganedende*
Jarysyn izleri jary'yn k'eklernin.
Emirlik atamyz, uvul jaslylarny,
Ystyryyn kal'dy'yn tozul'any'ynyn
G'ermetin askartkyn, kondaryyn iwinni,
K'ergizgin izlerin *mas'ijaxymiznin*,
Tadzyn *koyenliknin* da syjly bijliknin.
Kajтары'yn bijens'in dzany jaslylarnyn,
Uvuncu sezlerin cy'ary'yn jarykka.
Tel'eme basyna ec dusmanlary'ynyn
Tur'uzyun topraktan elilerimizni
Bas urma a'nynda bayatyr Tenrinin.

God's fury and his mighty wrath broke out
 As fire in the Lithuanian people.
 Unmarried beautiful maids in embroidered dresses
 Embraced dust because of the mighty disease.
 Tear is at the door, grief is at the gates.
 The sign of the great devastation is in the window.
 The bodies bore the burden of large worms.
 The cemetery was instead of the town and village.
 The cemeteries became larger everywhere,
 In houses, in fields, within a castle border.
 Signs in the bodies, exceptional torments.
 Signs of suffering from the pain of [God's] wrath.
 Those few who remained, with God's will
 Are registered for life in [God's] memorial books.
 The sign of life that remains on the brow
 Shall reveal praise to God.
 Our Lord, have mercy on this miserable people,
 Raise swiftly the might of the Israelites
 So that the angel of extermination stops extermination.
 Send to the people the dew of your blessing
 So that in this time of wrath the dead ones
 Shall be in heavenly bliss, in grace of peace,
 In honourable brotherhood, together with prophets,
 With three beloved ones of wrathful God.⁴³
 Rays of the half of the light of heavens
 Are in the radiant place, in the merry garden of Eden.
 Our eternal father who comforts the tear-stained ones,
 Gather the rest of your dispersed ones,
 Make known your respect, erect the House,⁴⁴
 Show the traces of the messiah,
 The crown of priesthood and honourable kingdom.
 Restore the joy of [these] tear-stained souls.
 Reveal your words of consolation
 To take revenge on the head of your enemies.
 Raise from the dust our people
 To bow head before mighty God.

43 Apparently, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are meant. The Talmud (bMeg 14a) provides a list of 48 male and 7 female Jewish Prophets.

44 I.e. the Temple.

II. Elegy on the desolation of Jerusalem

Es'ime ałajim *Jisraeł* bijliŷ'in,
Jerušałajimnin syjin ceberliŷ'in.
Ki astry jyyŷdy da ne jarŷylandy,
Da ceber orunda verenlik jajyŷdy.
Korasy enkejdi da farsty tajyŷdy,
Karanyy da tuman da *pusta* etiŷdi,
Karanyyn avazy za kuzŷun ɣujasy,
Verenliklerinde da ank'yt baŷasy.
Kiikler da kuslar, jaman jyrtuwcuŷar
Da syjt da firjat ic'inde boŷduŷar.
Sordum oŷ orundan ne boŷdu ortandan.
Ceber nerselerin ki edi awaŷdan
Ne boŷdu cardaklar, baŷaly kaŷtyŷar
Da c'iwrelerinde ornatkan *erezler*,
Šetijja tasy oŷ ortasy dunjanyn,
Ne boŷdu ɣ'ermetin da syjy syrynnyn?
Ne boŷdu sarajlar, baŷaly *pokojlar*?
Da ortalarynda akyŷly *xaŷamlar*?
Ne boŷdu *kayattar*, ceber jergeliler?
Asajys aŷalar syjly k'ylyklyŷar?
Asajys orunlar syjly dewletliler?
Tora uŷumaklar da aziz *medraŷlar*
Az'iz 'nerselerim *migdaŷtar*⁴⁵ ne boŷdlar?
Körbanlar, maŷtawlar da az'iz orunlar?
Ne boŷdu *koyenter*, az'izler aruwlar?
Ojuncu, maŷtawcu da az'iz *leviter*?
Tuŷyanŷaj jaryŷy kujasnyn da ajnyn
Tundu jaryklyŷy abajly dinimnin,
Endiler tibine tebeny'i g'erlernin.
Karardy da tundu k'erk'i izlerimnin,
Teg'enek k'ec'itk'en is'tinde es'tiler,
Kijikler da tuvar barysyn baŷtyŷar
Galutka bardyŷar suwukta kuryakta.

45 The Karaites apparently pronounced the Hebrew מקדש as *migdash*.

Let me recall the kingdom of Israel,
 Honourable beauty of Jerusalem,
 Which has heavily fallen down and fallen into decay
 And destruction spread instead of grace.
 The fences have fallen down and walls became rickety.
 There appeared darkness, and fog, and desolation.
 Crows' voices, owls' nests,
 And young snakes amidst the destruction.
 Wild animals and birds, evil predators,
 And sorrow and anxiety were there.
 I asked that place: "What happened to the centre [of the city],
 What happened to graceful things which were here [from the days] of old?
 What happened to the roofs, expensive [and arched like] brows,⁴⁶
 Surrounded by cedar trees planted there,
 To the Foundation Stone, the centre of the world,
 What happened to the honour and respectful secret?
 What happened to palaces, expensive chambers,
 And wise sages in their midst?
 What happened to congregations [which were like] beautiful rays?
 To graceful leaders and honoured traditions?
 To graceful places and honoured powers?
 To studies of the Torah and holy schools?
 What happened to my holy things from the Temple?
 To sacrifices, graces and holy places?
 To holy priests, [those] who entertain,
 Waken, and glorify? To holy Levites?"
 [The city answers:] "The light of the sun and the moon went dark,⁴⁷
 The light of my honoured faith went dark,
 Went down to the lowest part of graves.
 The beauty of my features⁴⁸ went dim and dark.
 Blackthorn and nettle grew above them,
 Wild animals and cattle trampled them all down.
 They all went to the exile, to the cold and famine,

46 Apparently, the cupola of the Dome of Rock is meant.

47 From here apparently starts the answer of the city. This is why you have here mostly first person singular: "my [i.e. Jerusalem's] congregation", "my honoured faith," etc.

48 Or "beauty of my face / surface."

Jamgurlu da buzlu syjytly vaçtlarda
 Ez'g'es'i tengizler is't'ine tink'e'di,
 Ez'g'es'i kuruda tig'endi eks'i'di.
 Dusmanlar g'erebde alarny bekledler,
 Da teren tengizde *maştlers* i'z ijdiler.
 Da korkuw da kobuw kałtravuk jettiler.
 Oltura g'erebde da syjyt ettiiler
 Da ucsuz *galutka* k'erejsyz tist'iler
 Da murdar jerlerde bary tinkyldiler,
 Da syjly dzymatym da ceber *nas'iler*,
 Kułlukka satyldlar k'ylyctan tis't'iler;
 Dayy ulanlary tozułdu k'es'i'di,
 Tynk'e'di vatyldy da astry basyldy
 Tenrimiz bijimiz da kajjam atamyz,
 Biz'di ulusundan da tis't'i tadzymyz.
 Da jat bijliklernin erkine beri'dim.
 Da tis'li kollarda s'irtildim bire'dim.
 Orusta, *Esawda* da *Rymda* da Tirkte,
 Da *Midjanlylarda* da *Moawlylarda*.
 Raymetli atamyz, ojanayaj da bakkaj,
 Da eks'izlerinin talasyn talaskaj,
 Jomdarayaj kal'dyyyn tozułyan elinin
 Toxtatkaj is'tinde ol az'iz jerinin.
 Joyaryy da syjly, ki tiwdin da vattyn,
 Jubatk'yn onyalk'yn ki nec'ik ant ettin,
 Da kajtk'yn kondaryyn az'iz sayarynny
 Turyuzyun k'erk'ejtkin *bet yammigdaşynny*⁴⁹
 Da k'ets'in *şey'inan* toxtama ic'inde.
 Da bijliy'imizni turyuzyun ornunda
 Nec'ik yar janyajny janyyrtas jaryyyyn,
 Alaj sen janyyrtk'in *Jisrael* bijliy'in.
 Da uspu janyajny janyyrtk'in jaksyya,
 Tynçlykka, bijenc'k'e da jaksy çabarya
 Juluyun *galuttan kayallarymyzny*,
 Ki nec'ik *Mic'riden* atałarymyzny.

49 I.e. *beit ha-miqdash* (בית המקדש), “the Holy House” or “the Temple” in Hebrew.

During the rainy, icy and sorrowful times,
 Wandered other seas,
 In other lands decreased and diminished.
 Enemies closed them in the ship,
 And chased them away to the deep sea without a mast,
 And fear, dread and trepidation followed.
 While sitting in the ship they wept
 And got into the endless and boundless exile,
 And wandered through unclean lands.
 And my honoured congregation and graceful leaders
 Were sold to slavery or fell down from the sword.
 Moreover, children were cut off and scattered,
 They wandered, were slain and strongly oppressed.
 Our God, our Lord and our indissoluble father
 Despised his people and threw down our crown,
 And gave me to the power of other kingdoms,
 And in different hands I was erased and wandered
 In Rus, in Poland, in Rome and in Turkey,
 Amongst the Midianites and Moabites.”⁵⁰
 Our merciful father, wake up and have a look,
 And settle the dispute amongst your orphans.
 Gather the remnants of your dispersed people
 And place them [to rule] over this holy land.
 The high and honourable, who ignites and strikes,
 Comfort and heal [us] as according to the covenant,
 Come back and erect the holy city,⁵¹
 Erect and decorate the Temple
 And send your *shekbinah*⁵² to be established there,
 And establish there our kingdom.
 As you renew light during the new moon,
 Renew Israel kingdom in the same way.
 During this new moon renew it for the prosperity,
 Serenity, joy and good tidings.
 Deliver our congregations from the exile
 As you did with our fathers in Egypt.

50 I. e. apparently in the territories of modern Iran, Syria, and Iraq where there were Karaite communities in medieval and early modern times. Here most likely ends the answer of the city and starts the final part of the elegy.

51 I. e. Jerusalem.

52 Lit. “Presence [of God]”, a Rabbinic term.