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***The Karaite Catechism in Brief* by Moses Firkowicz: Selected issues in light of the Karaite norms and reality**

Abstract. Moses Firkowicz (1846–1918) descended from the famous Karaite family of Abraham Firkowicz. His lineage granted him access to many Karaite manuscripts and a natural disposition towards Karaite literature eventually leading to his appointment as the first director of the first Karaite National Library (Karai Bitikligi). In 1915 he published *The Karaite Catechism in Brief* (Rus. *Караимский катихизис вкратце*), a text written in the form of questions and answers which presumably had been used as a resource guide for Karaite life in the Melitopol community. It presents differences found between Karaites and Rabbanite Jews, discusses issues related to the concepts of prayer, worship, calendar of holidays and provides unique insight on Karaite rites of death. This paper will analyze *The Karaite Catechism in Brief* by Moses Firkowicz in the light of the theoretical laws of 'Adderet 'Eliyyahu by Elijah Bashyatchi and *Royal Attire* by Mordecai ben Nisan, as well as through cases in the journal *The Karaite Life* (Rus. *Караимская жизнь*) and in the archives of the Karaite Spiritual Consistory.

Keywords: Karaite literature, Moses Firkowicz, religious laws.

In 1915 Moses Firkowicz (1846–1918), the grandson of the famous Karaite writer and archaeologist Abraham Firkowicz, published *The Karaite Catechism in Brief* (Rus. *Караимский катихизис вкратце*)¹ in the form of questions followed by answers. Presumably, the author intended to create a resource guide to teach the core beliefs essential to the Karaite faith for the small Karaite community of Melitopol. In his account of separation of Karaites from Jews, Firkowicz considered the Karaite identity as commitment to both national and religious identity without the implication of religious orthodoxy. Using the brief catechism as a fundamental document for further analysis, this paper will examine the text in the context of Karaite law known *halacha* in the Karaite faith and tradition, practices described in the journal *The Karaite Life* (Rus. *Караимская жизнь*) and cases found in the archives of the Karaite Spiritual Consistory. This analysis provides by far the most important evidence available in the literature for reconstructing the religious life of the Karaite community in the Russian Empire at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Firkowicz underlines that Karaites follow the Written Law of Moses and reject the Oral Law, recorded in the Midrash and the Talmud; which means they have never joined the Talmudists, neither were they ever separated from them as the Karaites represent “an independent nation [самостоятельная нация]”. Recognition of the “Karaite nation’s [караимская нация]” independence and distinct identity from the Talmudists arises from the differences in traditions, practices and rituals, including the furnishings of the prayer house, the direction for prayers, the practice of mixing meat and milk together, holidays, fasts and burial customs. For example, Firkowicz emphasizes that Karaites do not celebrate Hanukkah, Lag-Baomer and Hoshana Raba; they always have the feast of Weeks on Sunday – on the next day after Saturday; they celebrate feasts only for one day, on which it falls in the calendar; they do not have *Lo badu Pesach* which means that Pesach cannot fall either on Monday, Wednesday or Friday, and they do not fast on the seventeenth of Tammuz and on the ninth of Av (Firkowicz, 1915, pp. 41–42).

Each new-born boy is commanded to be circumcised on the eighth day after birth

**[Приказано всякого новорожденного младенца мужского пола на
восьмой день от рождения подвергнуть обрезанию]**

(Firkowicz, 1915, p. 7)

The male circumcision on the eighth day of an infant’s life is an important Karaite religious ceremony. The command of the Torah reads to “circumcise the flesh of your foreskin” (Genesis 17.11) which means to cut off the foreskin and no more”. Therefore, unlike Talmudists, Karaites did not institute the “peri’a” (tearing the lining

¹ In the Russian Empire the following catechisms were published: *Туб Та’ам*, by Mordecai Kazaz (1835), *Катихизисъ, основы караимскаго закона* by Jacob Duvan (1890), *Краткій катихизисъ. Руководство къ начальному обученію караимскихъ дѣтей Закону Божию и краткой исторіи караимизма* by Jacob Shamash (1913); *Главныя основы караимскаго законоученія* by Solomn Prik (1917) (Klimova, 2012, pp. 490–504; Klimova, 2017).

of the glans), and their practice was accounted for the distinctiveness of the Karaite society (Mordecai ben Nisan, 2016, pp. 32–33).

Although it has been facing a slow decline, one should understand that respect for the commandment of circumcision has remained quite strong in spite of the erosion of principles and values of the Karaite faith in “the modern times”. At the first National Karaite Congress in 1910, the Moscow hazzan M. Beym (М. Бейм) reported that some Karaites have ceased to circumcise their children and obtained their metrical certificates through the police or the District Court. In fact, the police were not authorised to issue the metric certificates, however the District Court – as the congress delegates emphasised – could make a record in the Metric Book and issue metric certificates only in cases where the registration had not been done due to an error by the local registrar. This should only be done subject to the condition that the parents have completed all the necessary formalities. Moreover, B. Sarach (Б. Сарач) reported a similar case in Mykolaiv (Nikolayev) which prompted an explanation by the Senate that circumcision should be necessary among Karaites, and without this practice the boy could not be registered in any metric book (Еще о первом национальном караимском съезде, 1911, p. 62).

It is worth mentioning that in a letter to the Mykolaiv synagogue hazzan Irtlach (Иртлач), dated the 15th November 1909 (No. 837), the Spiritual Consistory reported the findings of an investigation which found that the sons, born to Iosif Avraamovich Aga (Иосиф Авраамович Ага) in Mykolaiv, remained uncircumcised. Furthermore, Iosif Avraamovich himself too avoided performing this necessary spiritual rite. Such matters were deemed to be unacceptable in the Karaite society, therefore – in order to prevent another case – the Consistory delegated the hazzan Irtlach to convince Aga to fulfil the commandment by circumcising his sons in the presence of the hazzan and attaching his children to the faith of his ancestors.

Performing newborn circumcision among Karaites is a rite of the religious law according to the Karaite faith, based on a dogmatic truth which was clearly and precisely stated in the Holy Scriptures: in the book of Genesis 17.9–15 and in the book of Leviticus 12 [...] everyone who denies the sacrament of circumcision becomes one who avoids observing the basic dogmas of the Karaite faith, and, consequently, he cannot be considered Karaite, as it is expressed in the Holy Scripture [...] and that soul shall be cut off from among his people (Leviticus 19.8). From this it is clear that Karaite newborns who were not circumcised, are, of course, not Karaites; they cannot be considered members of the Karaite society, they cannot receive education in the spirit of the Karaite religion, and therefore they cannot be children of the holy temple; they cannot be buried in the Karaite cemetery according to the Karaite funeral rites².

² In original: “Совершение обрезания младенцам у караимов является обрядом религиозного закона караимского вероисповедания, основанного на догматической истине точно и ясно изложенной в Св. Писании: книга Бытия гл. 17, ст. 9–15 и в книге Левит гл. 12 [...] всякий отрицающий таинство обрезания становится уклоняющимся от соблюдения основных догматов караимского вероучения, а, следовательно, не может считаться караимом, ибо, как выражено в Св. Писании [...] истребится душа та из народа твоего. Из сего явствует, что младенцы-дети караимов, над которыми не совершено обряда обрезания, само собою, что не есть караимы; они не могут считаться членами караимских обществ, не могут получать воспитания в духе караимского вероучения и потому не могут быть чадами святого храма; они не могут быть погребенными на караимском кладбище по караимским погребальным обрядам”.

In families, where there had been Karaite-Rabbanite intermarriage, the situation was more complicated. According to the letter from the Department for Spiritual Affairs of the Ministry of Internal Affairs to the Taurida Governor, dated 26th February 1915 (No. 1433), the governing Senate by decree of March 13, 1914 No. 3819, delegated the Minister of Internal Affairs to consider the complaint of the Karaite, Avraam Emeldesh (Авраам Эмельдеш). He wrote to complain about the refusal of the Taurida Karaite Consistory to register the birth of his son in the Karaite metric books. His son was born from his marriage to a Jew Tsivel Shik (Цивель Шик) whom he married according to Rabbanite Jewish rituals. In fact, Emeldesh had previously wrote a request about this matter to the Department for Spiritual Affairs. However, his request was denied and the department based its denial on the conclusion made by the Karaite Spiritual Consistory which stated that:

According to the teachings of the Karaite faith, one of the indispensable conditions for the legitimacy of marriage is a commonality of confession of the persons marrying, and therefore Karaism does not admit any kind of mixed marriages. Consequently, only marriages held between a Karaite man and woman and blessed by the Karaite spirit leader will be considered valid. Any other marriage, concluded contrary to these rules, is recognized as invalid from the point of view of the Karaite religion, since the marriage, committed outside the rules of their faith, could not be held by any Karaite priest (sic!) [...] the complainant's son cannot be recognized as born in a legitimate marriage [...] therefore, as an illegitimate child, he must follow the faith and state of his mother, and thus the event of his birth is to be written in the Jewish metric books³.

The response of the Consistory to this case may seem harsh, even callous, but it demonstrates a commitment to the Karaite faith and an eagerness to preserve and protect the uniqueness of the Karaite people.

The Karaites and the Talmudists as separate nationalities do not enter into marriages and relationships

***[Караимы с талмудистами в брачные союзы и в родство
не вступают как отдельные народности]*** (Firkowicz, 1915, p. 42)

As stated in the Karaite law, a Karaite man or woman can only marry a person of the same Karaite religion⁴. They have to be mature according to the Civil Law of the

³ In original: "По учению караимской веры — одно из неперемных условий законности брака есть общность вероисповедания вступающих в брак лиц, а потому караимство каких бы то ни было смешанных браков не допускает и следовательно действительным считается лишь тот брак, который совершён между караимом и караимкой и благословен караимским духовным лицом; всякий же другой брак, заключенный вопреки сих правил, признается не действительным с точки зрения караимской религии, как совершенный вне правил их веры и ни один караимский священник не совершит подобного брака [...] сын жалобщика не может быть признан рожденным в законном браке [...] а потому, как внебрачный, он должен следовать вере и состоянию своей матери, и, следовательно, событие о его рождении подлежит записыванию в еврейские метрические книги".

⁴ It should be stressed that the Karaites denied acceptance of anyone outside their community into the Karaite religion. It was also reported in the published statistics that – in the period from 17th April 1905 (since the decree on the freedom of religion) to 1st January 1909 – 409 people converted from Orthodoxy to Judaism, and 2 people

state where they live, and they need to express their mutual consent to enter into marriage (Kazas, 1911a, p. 52).

Ba'aley haq-qabbala said that a woman was acquired⁵ in three ways: through money, a document⁶, and sexual intercourse. All these conditions are satisfactory for an act of acquiring, called *qinyan*, only in the presence of witnesses. About money they concluded after examining "taking a wife", as it is written: "if a man takes a woman", and after examining "taking through money", as it is written: "I will give money for the field". They said that if taking in a possession was for money, then the taking a wife should be for money. About the document they concluded from a divorce, and they said that if a divorce was through a document, so acquiring should be through a document. About sexual intercourse they concluded after examining "if a man takes a woman and marries her" which means that he acquired her through sexual intercourse. Some of our first sages said that the woman was acquired in five ways, for example ribbi Benyamin, who said that the woman was acquired through a betrothal, taking⁷, a purchase price, called *mohar*, covenant, and witnesses [...]. In conclusion, consecrating the daughter is in the following four circumstances: if she is a minor, and she has a father; or if she is a minor, and she has no father; or if she is mature, and she has a father; or if she is mature, and she has no father. However, if she is a minor, and she has a father, the father has a right to consent to the marriage of his daughter, and he gets her divorce. (Bashyatchi, 1966, p. 298)

Marriages between Karaite and Talmudist partners were forbidden⁸, and the Karaite Consistory did not only refuse to marry them, but also did not acknowledge their unions, even if the couple was married by the Rabbanite rabbi. The majority of rabbis – like Karaites – also showed the same 'negative' attitude towards such mixed marriages. Nevertheless, some rabbis could apply to the Ministry for permission to register such marriages or divorces in the Jewish Metric books, usually receiving a posi-

converted to Karaism, the Karaites officially declared then that they did not welcome neophytes into their community (Хроника текущей жизни. Переход в караимство, 1911, pp. 109–110).

⁵ It means „to be a wife”.

⁶ In 1912 the journal *Karaimskaia zhizn'* published the Russian version of the marriage contract which was drawn up to specify the rights and responsibilities of the groom in relation to the bride "according to the Law of Moses, the man of God and according to the holy and pure regulations of Israel (по закону Моисея, человека Божьего, и святым и чистым постановлениям Израиля)". It includes the obligation of the groom to be "what the sons of Israel should be – the ones who feed, honour, respect, dress up their worthy spouses and provide them with all necessary as far as possible and due to truth" («чем должны быть сыны Израиля, кормящие, почитающие, уважающие и наряжающие своих достойных супруг и доставляющие им все должное по мере и правде») and the obligation of the bride to do "all what all daughters of Karaites do in the houses of their spouses and to stay under their supervision, focusing all their affection [of wives] upon them [husbands]" («всем тем, чем все дочери караимов занимаются в домах своих супругов, и находиться под его наблюдением, сосредоточивая на нем одном все свои влечения»). Lastly, "the couple agreed to keep faithfully the Sinai Covenant and the principles of Horeb, to observe the holy God's feasts and to celebrate them, when seeing the moon and the beginning of spring in the holy land of Israel, if their means allow them to do so («чета условились чистосердечно хранить Завет Синайский и уставы Хорива, соблюдая святыя праздники Божии и праздновать их по видимости луны и открытию весны в святой земле Израиля, если их состояние им это позволит»)". The marriage contract was signed by the bride and bridegroom, ten witnesses – including groomsmen (*shoshpins*) – and finally by the hazzan (Брачный акт караимов (пер. с древне-библейского), 1912, pp. 84–85).

⁷ It means "marrying, buying".

⁸ Bohdan Janusz confirmed that in Galicia the marriages with Talmudists were not acceptable, as Karaites separated themselves from Jews, considering them as gone-astray and turned away from the truthful Israeli faith. Nevertheless, Janusz also added that Karaites also believed that after the coming of the Messiah all religious contradictions will end, and all Jews would be united as one great Israeli nation "въ единый великий израильскій народъ" (Janusz, 1912, p. 71).

tive outcome, as the Civil Law did not put forth any objections under the condition that the rabbis would do everything according to the principles and practice of the Jewish faith (Günzburg, Katsnelson, 1913, p. 283).

In the summer of 1910, an agenda about the issue of the Jewish-Karaite marriage procedure proposed by the Ministry of Internal Affairs was put to the Congress of Jewish rabbis which took place in Petersburg. The official response from the Congress was that there could be no procedure as such marriages were forbidden by the Jewish law. Despite the fact that the representative from the Ministry of Internal Affairs, I. Platonnikov insisted on getting an answer to questions such as: if the marriages were legal, if the children in those families needed to be considered legal-born or bastard-born and so on, the Congress principally decided not to resolve them. The Congress responded only to one request, a request made by the rabbi of Akkerman asking if a rabbi could marry Jews and Karaites without a permission of the Karaite Spiritual leadership, and the answer was negative (Хроника текущей жизни. К вопросу о караимско-еврейских браках, 1911, p. 109).

The mixing of blood is prohibited, i.e. marriages between relatives

***[Запрещено смешение крови, т. е. вступить в брак
с ближайшими в родстве]*** (Firkowicz, 1915, p. 23)

For moral reasoning, the Karaite scholars forbade a man to marry his deceased wife's sister after his wife's death, basing their reasoning on their interpretation of Leviticus 18.18 to "not take a wife to her sister, to vex her, to uncover her nakedness, beside the other in her lifetime". It was also forbidden for two brothers to marry two sisters: since it is written that "you should not uncover the nakedness of your father's wife's daughter, born to your father, and who is your sister", therefore two brothers cannot marry two sisters; two brothers cannot marry a mother and a daughter; and two sisters cannot marry a man and his son" (Bashyatchi, 1966, p. 287). If the couple was unlawfully married in spite of a prohibited degree of kinship, the marriage could be annulled against the will of the spouses (Kazas, 1911a, pp. 52–53).

In November 1910, the First Karaite National Congress in Eupatoria reviewed some religious practices and changed them to move forward with the times, ensuring that the religious practices remain relevant. At the plenary session on the 8th of November, the committee submitted a report on the question of marriage with the wife's sister after the wife's death, and permission was given by a verbal vote (20 votes in favour, 11 votes against). At the next plenary session on the 9th of November the committee discussed the question of the marriage of a pair of siblings to another pair of siblings, and even though the majority thought that the Scripture did not forbid such marriages, they were still not able to come to an agreement. In order to reach a consensus, the Karaite hakham Samuel Pampulov referred the matter to the

⁹ The English translation of all biblical verses follows as closely as possible to the Hebrew original and is based on the King James Bible.

opinion of the non-Crimean leaders. The Troki hakham in a letter from 1909 wrote about a case which took place in 1907, and wholly supported the Karaite Spiritual Consistory in its decision not to give permission for such marriages. In a letter dated the ninth September 1909, the Constantinople hakham strongly advocated for following the old traditions. The Cairo elders in a letter dated the 20th September 1909 also considered such marriages forbidden by the Karaite scholars, but they did ask for a list of reasons for making changes and moving beyond the old rules. After a long debate, the Consistory finally ruled to allow the marriage of a pair of siblings to another pair of siblings with 24 members voting in favour and 7 members voting against. It should be stressed that some Karaites continued to express considerable anxiety and insisted on the necessity to prohibit the following marriages – at least initially – between children born in marriages between siblings of one family with siblings of another family. However, the vast majority protested against passing a new prohibition while referring to the fact that the Bible did permit two first-cousins to marry (Первый национальный караимский съезд в Евпатории: Итоги съезда. Труды съезда, 1911, pp. 82–85).

**Both men and women are not allowed
to marry people of other faiths**
***[Нельзя как мужскому так и женскому полу вступать
в браки с иноверцами]*** (Firkowicz, 1915, p. 23)

The Karaite law prohibits inter-religious marriages, and it is obvious that the clash of religious rituals and traditions will prevent the couple from sharing their religious life entirely as a part of their identity. However, Karaites “found another way” to keep this rule, as some Karaite men looked for pleasure and amusement outside the community, and when the time came to marry, they looked for a Karaite wife. The journal *Karaimskaia zhizn'* published several letters written by Tatly-Dzhan (Татлы-Джан) from Odessa, in which the author protested about the indifference of the Karaite Congress in Eupatoria to the future of the Karaite nation and “its degeneration [вырождение]” (Tatly-Dzhan, 1911, p. 105). The author described the reality where many Karaite men left for big cities in the Russian Empire to increase their chances of finding a job with a higher salary, and decided to come back to their Karaite community after they achieved the best possible position: “...they live with girls of other nationalities in a civil marriage, beget families and, after reaching forty or more years of age, begin to talk about marrying a Karaite girl, covering their previous life with a mantel of innocence, calling themselves bachelors. It is so easy to deceive the girls in the Crimea! Besides, they [girls], being afraid to find themselves in the camp of the “old maidens”, often buy such bridegrooms, who are of no value, and whom, despite this, they [girls] still pay a huge sum of money, not mentioning the dowry (Tatly-Dzhan, 1911, p. 106)”. The status of a Karaite girl who wanted to get married was clearly quite miserable. Her education was not taken into consideration, as her family background was the only important factor. An educated

man from a poor family could take a non-suitable wife and receive money for his act. As for an educated girl living in poverty, she did not have any option except to marry a countryman, and even in such a case, the fiancée demanded a dowry (Èst, 1912, p. 89; Tatly-Dzhan, 1911, pp. 105–107; Tatly-Dzhan, 1912, pp. 61–64; Член общества. К вопросу о судьбе караимских девиц: письмо из Николаева: хроника, 1912, pp. 110–113). The above-mentioned author of the article even dared to write some provoking thoughts: “I loudly declare that a Karaite girl is not a nurse [literally: “a sister of mercy”], which is obliged to take care of an old and sometimes sick husband at the best of her heyday of strength and health [...] First of all, she is a human being and [...] I am always an ardent defender of a Karaite girl who married a person of other faith [Я громко заявляю, что караимская девушка — не сестра милосердия, которая обязана в лучшую пору своего расцвета сил и здоровья ухаживать за старым и подчас больным мужем! Она прежде всего – человек и [...] являюсь всегда ярким защитником караимской девушки, вышедшей замуж за инородца] (Tatly-Dzhan, 1911, p. 106)”. Undoubtedly, such radically feminist thoughts were not acceptable in the Karaite society, though the publication of the article in *Karaimskaia zhizn'* without any commentaries showed that awareness of the issue was important and thus deserved much more consideration.

Divorce between spouses is permitted 1) through their mutual agreement, 2) for any lawful reason, 3) if a peaceful coexistence between spouses is impossible

[Развод между супругами допускается: 1) по их обоюдному согласию; 2) по какой-либо законной причине; 3) ежели между супругами впредь мирного житья быть не может]

(Firkowicz, 1915, p. 31)

The Karaite divorce laws required the sanction of a court in a legal process. Even though Deuteronomy 24.1 implies that only the husband had the right to file for divorce, which often presents a woman in a disgraceful light, Karaites allowed both husband and wife to apply for the termination of a marriage union. The reasons for divorce could be that the bride was not a virgin as revealed during consummation on the wedding night, infidelity towards the husband or wife, inability to have sexual intercourse, an illness or disability that makes married life unbearable, constant quarrels between spouses, cruelty to a wife and all that bring shame to the family's name. After a divorce, the husband or the court – in case of husband's refusal – gives the wife a divorce document *get*, dated not from the creation of the world, but from the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple as a symbol of the destruction of the family (Kazas, 1911a, pp. 52–53).

The issue of divorce found its place in the literature when I. Èrak wrote a tragic drama *Dina* based on a real-life event connected to divorce. It tells a story of a Karaite woman who was blamed by her newly married husband for losing her virginity

before marriage. False accusations could have been used as a way for getting compensation from his father-in-law. As the husband did not report his wife's non-virginity immediately after the first night, even though two best men '*shoshpinim*' were appointed, and he approached her again for a relationship, the Karaite community court acquitted the woman and her reputation was restored. She was freed from the marriage contract and received an acquittal document (*кавьюль намэ*) (Èrak, 1911, pp. 18–19, 30).

...mitpalel wears a tallit during prayer
[на время молитвы Митпаллель надевает таллет]
 (Firkowicz, 1915, p. 28)

During the liturgical service a religious leader – who is someone with good knowledge of the Hebrew language, experience in the ritual of prayer and worship, and could even be someone not appointed to the position of hazzan – adorned himself with a special long and wide garment made of silk or linen with long blue tassels on the four corner, called *tallit*. Verses of scripture or the name of the donor of the *tallit* was often embroidered in gold thread (Kazas, 1911b, p. 79; Firkowicz, 1915, p. 28).

Other worshipers themselves wear a *şıit*, also known as *tchitchit* '*чичим*'. It is a garment similar to the *tallit*, folded several times with corners hanging down to the knees and fringes wrapped around the little fingers of both hands. Traditionally, *şıit* had been “the ordinary daily garment of Israel (ежедневномъ одѣяніи сыновъ Израиля)” (Kazas, 1911b, p. 79) serving as a reminder of the commandments of the Lord, even as the thoughts of a person were engaged in earthly affairs. (In Rabbinic Judaism, *şıit* is known as the knotted or twined fringes attached to the four corners of *tallit*, and *tallit qatan* could be worn over or under clothing.) It is necessary however, to say that the vast majority of Karaites did not wear a *şıit* even during prayer time (Mordecai ben Nisan, 2016, p. 189).

For many centuries the commandment of *şıit* (tassels) and the *tekelet* string on *şıit*, from Numbers 15, was “obligatory for adult men, especially for the Torah scholars, who were concerned about the reward for fulfilling commandments” (Bashyatchi, 1966, p. 198; Mordecai ben Nisan, 2016, p. 189), and *tekelet* – as Mordecai ben Nisan explained in his book *Royal Attire* – was “similar to the eye of heaven, whose colour was between black and white” (Mordecai ben Nisan, 2016, p. 88–89).

Death and mourning

The most detailed description of the Karaite rituals offered by Firkowicz – surprising yet unsurprising as it is a significant life event – was on the topic of death and funeral. The author wrote a practical guide to preparations for burial and mourning to make this painful time less confusing, while still remaining faithful and grounded in the religious principles.

Some of the important things to do after a death occurs in the family were to destroy food supplies in the room the deceased was in, and to wash the bed the deceased laid on (in case of death from an infectious disease it was necessary to destroy the bed) (Firkowicz, 1915, p. 24).

Our scholars, of blessed memory, instruct us to purify ourselves after seven days through bathing and laundry, and also to purify all vessels and clothes that have touched a corpse or been under a tent with it, [by washing them] in water after seven days. (Mordecai ben Nisan, 2016, p. 88–89)

The specially appointed people – so called *kabarlar* (who in the evening had to purify themselves by washing) – prepared the deceased for burial: the body would be washed, wrapped in a shroud, and put in the coffin. Then the deceased was escorted to the cemetery by the hazzan and other members of the community with prayers. Firkowicz emphasised that the Karaites buried their dead with faces to the south in coffins boarded up with nails contrary to Talmudists¹⁰ who laid the corpse on its back in a ground and the corpse was covered with boards over sides and top, so the back of the deceased directly touched the ground (Firkowicz, 1915, pp. 24, 34).

Firkowicz defined several stages for the process of mourning and gave recommendations for the gradual return to normal life. Deep mourning for seven days from the burial was kept for the father, mother, brother, sister, son, daughter, husband or wife of the deceased. After the funeral in the evening before sunset, the hazzan would come to the house of mourners and give them *aiak* (аяк), the cup of consolation. They were to attend morning and evening worship at the kenasa for a week, while sitting and praying in the last row. Men wore black belts and women wore black scarves. When greeting a Karaite in mourning, the tradition was to say: *Baruk hag-gozer* (Blessed is the Maker of this decree). On the seventh day from the funeral after sunset, the hazzan would come again to the house of the mourners, take back the *aiak*, and all the grievors would go to the kenasa where other relatives and friends joined them for a prayer. Afterwards, everyone would be invited to the house of the mourners for a prepared meal *et ashy* (эт аши), which contained meat. It would be the first time after the seven days of deep mourning, where the mourners were allowed to eat meat. On the first Shabbat after deep mourning, a special offering was to be given in memory of the deceased. After the prayers, the members of the

¹⁰ One should remember that the relations between Jews and Karaites were complicated due to the activity of the funerary brotherhood. Karaites would not be present during the death of their relative, and even it was their closest relative, and hired Talmudist Jews instead to conduct the rituals (Janusz, 1912, p. 67). When Samuel Leonowicz, the brother of *hakham* (рахам) Abram Leonowicz, died in 1839, the members of the Jewish *Chevra kadisha* demanded a large sum of money in return for a funeral ceremony. It prompted Karaites to ask their leader to allow them to bury their dead on their own. Abram Leonowicz gave his permission, and since then, the Karaites buried their own dead, appointing no more than two members of the community. Additionally, Janusz reported that Karaites used to light many candles at the head and feet of the dead man (Janusz, 1912, p. 73).

In 1903 the correspondent of the Jewish newspaper “Der Fraind” wrote about the attitude of the Galician Jews to Karaites: “To our big sorrow we had to admit that Jews took advantage of this opportunity for their financial benefits: they charged big prices for funerals and bargained as if buying goods during fairs [К великому нашему прискорбию, мы должны признаться, что евреи пользуются этим обстоятельством для своих денежных выгод: дерут большие цены за похороны и при этом торгуются, как при покупке товаров на ярмарке]” (D. F., 1911, pp. 74–75).

community would visit the house of the mourners, express their condolences with deepest sympathy, and eat dark halva as a symbol of grief (Firkowicz, 1915, p. 25; Sulimowicz, 2012, p. 17).

40 (sic!) days after the death, a special gathering would be organised¹¹, and after ten months or one year from the funeral the so called *ak-kiimiak* (ак-киймяк) would be held, where the grievors changed from black mourning clothes into bright clothes. During *ak-kiimiak*, on Saturday, the members of the community with the hazzan would visit the house of the mourners after prayer in memory of the deceased, comfort them and eat white halva, thereby marking the end of the mourning period. If the deceased died outside of town, the deep mourning would begin from the day the family was notified about his death and funeral (Firkowicz, 1915, p. 25).

In 1911, the journal mentioned earlier *Karaimskaia zhizn'* reported on the very ceremonial funeral of the hakham Samuel Pampulov. It took place on the fourth of January 1911 in Eupatoria and was attended by many people from the local authorities, Russian, Greek, Jewish, Armenian and Krymchak communities, all who came to pay their last respects. The description of the entire funeral process was exactly according to the instructions written in Firkowicz's guide, including the commemoration service in the memory of Pampulov which was held on the seventh day in the Eupatoria kenesa. Afterwards, those who attended the funeral were invited to the memorial dinner *et-ashy* (эт-аши) in the premises of the female professional school (Похороны Таврического и одесского гахама С. М. Панпулова: хроника, 1911, pp. 95–99).

It should be added that Firkowicz also wrote about a tradition of visiting cemeteries – including the cemetery in the Josaphat valley outside the “cave-town” of Chufut-Kale – in the period from the seventh to the tenth day of the month of Av to pay respect to the memory of the dead. Karaites would sing special memorial songs like *sharduwan* (шардуван, literally meaning iron railings around the grave) and *sherbiet* (шербиет, when literally means couplet, verse) filled with sorrow, anguish and suffering, in the Karaite-Crimean Tatar language (Ėgiz, 1912, pp. 13–15).

Conclusions

The *Karaite Catechism in Brief* by Firkowicz had great didactical importance and was considered to be the condensed reference to the Karaite laws. Its purpose was to develop a particular interest in faith among co-believers, bolster their faith, and encourage them to remain faithful. It was ideal not only for young children learning the basics but also for adults to get answers to questions that arise in their minds regarding the true and legitimate teaching. It also served as a handy resource for daily prayers.

Upon closer examination of the archives and periodicals, it appears that Karaites on one hand, continued to practice the customs and traditions of their forefathers,

¹¹ According to Józef Sulimowicz, in Crimea and Halicz the commemoration day was called *kyrk* which meant literally 40. In Lithuania and Troki there was a tradition of *otuz* which meant literally 30, when on the deceased's 30th day the Karaites read *zichron* (Sulimowicz, 2012, p. 17).

living their daily lives as they always have, yet on the other hand they also chose their own paths that were sometimes completely opposite to Biblical customs and Karaite scripturalism. The dawn of the twentieth century also marked the start of the battle for the preservation of the Karaite faith and identity from secularization and the influence of the Russian Empire. The difficult questions – of how to integrate properly into society and to achieve financial stability and growth – became a pressing issue that forced particularly Karaite men to leave their close, tightly-knit religious community in favour of the larger secular world. While living in Christian society, it would be a real miracle if Karaites remained theologically aware believers, ardent opponents of Rabbanism and strict observers of the Karaite rituals described by Firkowicz.

It is thus an important task to collect and study cases of the Karaite Religious Consistory in order to illustrate, in greater depth, the experiences of individual families. Such a study would help develop a more holistic understanding of the factors which encouraged de-judaization and facilitated secularization among Karaites in the Russian Empire.

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