

HACHAN MARKAS LAVRINOVIČIUS' COMMITMENT TO THE KARAIM LANGUAGE TRAKAI DIALECT PRESERVATION AND REVITALISATION

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Abstract. The paper introduces Markas Lavrinovičius' most significant jobs in the Karaim cultural heritage preservation and revitalisation. Markas Lavrinovičius (1938–2011) was a Doctor of Science, Lithuanian Karaims' Hachan, and the Chairman of the Lithuanian Karaims' Religious Community. He was an active Karaim community member who made an important contribution to the language research and its revival. He described Karaim customs and traditions, compiled Karaim literary heritage, and prepared it for publication; he also described the Biblical stories in the Karaim language, translated relative Turkic-speaking nations' folk fairy tales into Karaim, and compiled and computerised the Russian-Karaim dictionary. In addition, the article contains a review of the Karaim language coursebook titled *100 karaj tilinių ūriatiuviu. Troch karaj sioziu* ([100 Karaim language lessons. Trakai dialect]) – one of his most significant works, containing a thorough research on the Karaim grammar, conducted by Markas Lavrinovičius and Diana Lavrinovič. Despite being surrounded by non-Turkic languages for 625 years, the Karaim language Trakai dialect has managed to preserve its purity and remain untouched throughout the centuries. Unfortunately, it currently faces the threat of extinction. Therefore, teaching the mother tongue was Markas Lavrinovičius' ultimate goal.

Keywords: Karaims, Karaim language, Karaj, Trakai dialect, Turkic languages, Markas Lavrinovičius, Hachan, Cuman, Kipchak

Markas Lavrinovičius (1938–2011) was one of the distinct personalities in the Karaim community, a fluent indigenous speaker with a profound knowledge of the Karaim language. He made an important contribution to Karaim culture, identity, preservation and revitalisation of the Karaim language. Maintaining the language was his ultimate goal and desire.

Markas Lavrinovičius was born on 26 December 1938 in Trakai (Lithuania) into a Karaim family of Michail and Aliza Lavrinovič. He finished school in his hometown, then he studied at Kaunas Polytechnic Institute, Faculty of Electrical Technologies. After graduation, he worked at the Lith-



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uanian Academy of Sciences and later at the State Research Institute. He was employed as a senior engineer and subsequently became the head of the laboratory. The area of his research and development was microelectronics. In 1968, he was awarded the Candidate of Science degree.

Throughout his entire life, Markas Lavrinovičius was an active Karaim community member. Being enthusiastic and caring about the well-being of the nation, he was willingly engaged in Karaim community life. He sincerely applied his organisational skills while arranging grand national events. In 1989, he was appointed the Chairman of the Karaim Organisation Committee for the International Karaim Congress held in Trakai. About 500 Karaims from all over the world participated in this huge event. Today, in 2022, we are marking the 625th anniversary of the Karaim settlement in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, and 25 years ago, back in 1997, we celebrated its 600th anniversary. Back then, while marking the occasion and organising the festive events, Markas Lavrinovičius was the Chairman of the Karaim Organisation Committee. Both events were thoroughly organised, lasted several days, and made an enduring impact on the participants. In the same year, Lavrinovičius was awarded the 2nd Class Order of the Lithuanian Grand Duke Gediminas for his outstanding performance in civil and public offices. Markas Lavrinovičius was a widely respected personality among commu-

nity members and far beyond it. In 2009, Lithuanian Karaim Community elected Markas Lavrinovičius to the Lithuanian Karaims' Highest Priest – Hachan's – position, and he was also appointed Chairman of the Lithuanian Karaims' Religious Community.

While outlining Markas Lavrinovičius' commitment to the Karaim language Trakai dialect preservation and revitalisation, it is important to start from his last book titled *Avaldan Kieliasigia* ([From the distant past to the future]) published in December 2011. The book describes Karaim customs and traditions, religious festivals, the origin of Karaim ornament, and the base of the Karaim religion.

Back to the 2000s – the period after his retirement was especially productive for Markas Lavrinovičius. In 2002, he published several books, all of them in the Karaim language Trakai dialect. The book *Bir Bar Ėdi* ([Once upon a time]) (379 p.) is a collection of Karaim writers' and poets' literary works: stories, fairy tales, and Karaim folk legends. The stories are retold in everyday language, and the atmosphere puts the reader into Karaim home life in foretime. This set of Karaim literary heritage portrays Karaims' life as well as their national mentality. Markas Lavrinovičius compiled the book from various printed Karaim sources or manuscripts found in the Karaims' home archives. If the texts had been written in Crimean or Halich-Lutsk dialects or other languages, he translated them into the Trakai dialect.

“Az biždiañ, Lietuvanyn karajlardan – bar baryndan niečia juž,” – Hachan Markas Lavrinovičius used to say – “tiek öñgiariak sanej, bar tiurk uluslarynyn sany – hiepsi tiumiañliar. Barlarymyz – bir kanly karyndašlarymyz” ‘There are a few of us, Lithuanian Karaims – all together making a few hundred,’ – Hachan Markas Lavrinovičius used to say – ‘however, otherwise, there is a great multitude of Turkic peoples. We are all one blood brothers’. With this in mind, he selected and translated into the Karaim language 94 Turkic folk fairy tales of the relative 25 Turkic-speaking nations' including: Altai, Azerbaijani, Balkar, Bashkir, Khakas, Chuvash, Dolgan, Gagauz, Yakut, Kalmyk, Karachay, Karakalpak, Kazakh, Ket, Kyrgyz, Krymtatar, Kumyk, Nogay, Tofalar, Tatar, Turk, Turkmen, Tuvan, Uyghur, and Uzbek. The title of the book is *Karyndašlarymyznyn Chaznasy* ([Our brothers' treasures]), (268 p.). In the foreword, Markas Lavrinovičius writes that the nation's folklore always transits its entity, adding that the Turkic relative nations' life perception is relative and understandable for Karaims' mentality. All the fairy tales are retold the way Karaim grandmas would tell the stories to their grandchildren in the old days.

In the same year, Markas Lavrinovičius published *Aziž Jazyšnyn Jomachlary* ([The Holy scripture stories]), (117 p.), where he describes the Biblical stories from the Old Testament, narrating them in the Karaim language Trakai dialect.

Since the 1970s, Markas Lavrinovičius eagerly studied and analysed the Karaim lexicographic sources, and thoroughly investigated the well-known Karaim-Russian-Polish dictionary edited by N.A. Baskakov, A. Zajączkowski, S.M. Shapshal¹. Based on the Karaim literary monuments, he created the Karaim language primary card catalogue, and later on, he also compiled a computer dictionary. The result of this work was *Urus-karaj siožliugiu* ([Russian-Karaim dictionary]). The Crimean and Halich-Lutsk dialects' words complemented the list only in case they could not be found in the Trakai dialect. The dictionary contains as many as 36,597 Russian lexical items and 13,165 Karaim words and collocations. It was the first Russian-Karaim Trakai dialect dictionary ever. In the foreword the author marks that: 'this dictionary does not claim for an academic level,' and emphasises that, 'it is a practical manual for those wishing to enrich their Karaim language Trakai dialect vocabulary'². Before its first official edition in 2012, this dictionary was widely spread and used not only by native speakers, but also by turcologists outside the community who were interested in the language. The electronic version provides both Russian-Karaim and Karaim-Russian translations.

The decades of working on the dictionary considerably enriched Lavrinovičius' lexicon. Maintaining the language, passing it on to future generations and teaching young people was always his heart's desire. For years Markas Lavrinovičius was arranging lessons and relentlessly teaching the community members the heritage language. He never missed a chance to explain some grammar to the people he was talking to, and was always willing to share his knowledge.

In 2010, the Hachan started teaching the Karaim language remotely. The community members, wishing to study their mother tongue, would receive a weekly e-mail from him with one lesson. The project *Karaim language*

1 Баскаков Н., Зайончковский А., Шапшал С. *Караимско-русско-польский словарь*. Москва, 1974.

2 “<...> предлагаемый «Русско-караимский словарь» не претендует на академичность, а является практическим пособием для желающих пополнить свой словарный запас караимского языка тракайского диалекта.” Lavrinovičius M. *Русско-караимский словарь // Русско-караимский словарь = Urus-karaj siožliugiu*. Тракай, 2012, с. 12.

internet lessons was a chance for everyone to learn the native language or improve their skills.

Later on, Markas Lavrinovičius transferred all the Karaim language grammar and teaching material compiled by him into a coursebook. When he passed away in 2011, his daughter Diana Lavrinovič, a language teacher by profession, took over the work on the coursebook. She was working on this project, researching the language for 10 years, and finally, in 2021, she published the Karaim language coursebook *100 karaj tiliniñ üriatiuviu. Troch karaj sioziu (100 уроков караймского языка. Тракайский диалект)* ([100 Karaim language lessons. Trakai dialect], (635p.). Thus, consequently, the authors of the book are Markas Lavrinovičius and Diana Lavrinovič.

The book entirely covers the Karaim language morphology and phonetics aspects and is both a practice book and a grammar reference. The coursebook consists of 100 lessons, each of them introducing a grammatical category or a word-building rule. A wide range of vocabulary is also provided there. Karaim proverbs and words of wisdom are frequent usage examples to complement the rules, which make language acquisition more efficient. Numerous examples from literature allow a much more contextualised way for the exploration of both grammar and lexicon. This is the way learners are encouraged to explore the Karaim culture and the nation's way of thinking. A good number of lessons are supported by topic-based vocabulary, including topics like: family, house, atmospheric phenomena, parts of the body, feelings, names of plants, names of animals, days of the week, months, etc. The book provides over 500 practical exercises, which is a phenomenon never seen before. A variety of stimulating exercises created for language acquisition are intended for different language proficiency levels and cover a variety of topics, such as: declination, conjugation, matching synonyms and antonyms, collocation, word formation, arranging sentences, proverbs matching, translation, *izafet* constructions, etc. The book has the 'key' section, and, therefore, it can be used as a self-study manual. Moreover, it includes a detailed Grammar reference as a supplement that gives a wider and more precise insight into the Karaim language morphology and phonetics.

The authors of the book have conducted significant innovative research. The book contains a unique morphological analysis of the Karaim language corpus. Its components are: the range model of a wordform (including a set of ranges with a series of morphophonological forms of inflectional affixes for each range) and the set of compatibility rules for affixes that constrain

the choice of components of a wordform. It has a model for nouns and verbal nouns, adjectives, numerals, verbs, verb impersonal, and for location names. The mentioned research for the Karaim language wordform has never been done before.

Like all other Turkic languages, Karaim is an agglutinative language, and its distinctive characteristic is vowel and consonant harmony. In the PHONETICS section the authors describe all harmony laws, characteristics of vowel and consonant phonemes, vowel and consonant affix choice and rules of matching them to the stem, and various other phonetics nuances. All parts of speech are precisely described in the MORPHOLOGY section. The supplement IT IS INTERESTING demonstrates the lexis, which gives the reader a glimpse into the national mentality. The nation's particular way of thinking is hidden in its language. For instance: *bit'niñ bierniasi* stands for 'insignificant/minor gift', which literally means 'gift of a louse'; *džan bušurmahy* stands for 'stress', which literally means 'confusion of a soul'. Nothing expresses the nation's character better than its language.

The purpose of the coursebook is undoubtedly for the community members to learn their heritage language or improve their language skills and become more self-aware about the language. In addition, the book must be of high linguistic value for the turcologists' scholarly research, for the comparative-historical analysis of the Karaim vs. the closest relative Kipchak-Polovcian sub-group languages, and the Turkic languages in general.

It goes without saying that one of our most valuable assets is our language. Dr. Markas Lavrinovičius believed the nation would live as long as the language remained conversed. Therefore, he continuously made his best effort that the Karaim language would be used in day-to-day conversations in his own family. Dr. Markas Lavrinovičius was one of the eminent personalities of his time in the Karaim community, highly enthusiastic about Karaim cultural heritage and identity preservation. He spread the knowledge of the Karaim language and history. Always passionate about the idea of revitalising the language, he never gave up his dream.

Even though the Karaim language Trakai dialect has been isolated from other Turkic languages for centuries, it has maintained its purity and survived untouched in its ancient condition. It is interesting to mention that in the 1930s, at the initiative of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, President of Turkey, while implementing his reform, the Turkish Language Commission arrived in Trakai to the Karaims intending to clear the Turkish language of loan-

words. As a result, the Turkish language dictionary was enriched with 330 Karaim words.³ The Karaims of Trakai are *like a fly embedded in amber* – this is how Polish turcologist Prof. Tadeusz Jan Kowalski (1889–1948) once described the Karaims in Trakai⁴, meaning that they, being isolated from other Turkic peoples for centuries, had preserved their culture, identity and language. Lithuanian Karaims managed to maintain their identity and heritage language up until now and we hope they will continue to cherish it for the forthcoming generations.

List of Markas Lavrinovičius' works on the Karaim heritage preservation:

- *Karaj Tili Otuz Siegiž Sahat Ašyra*. 1991. 294 p. (manuscript)
- *Avaldan Kieliasigia (Из далёкого прошлого в будущее)*. Тракай, 2011. 80 p.
- *Русско-караимский словарь / Urus-karaj siožliugiu*. Тракай, 2012. 460 p. Electronic and paper versions.
- *100 karaj tiliniñ üriatiuviu*. Electronic version.
- *100 karaj tiliniñ üriatiuviu. Troch karaj sioziu. I bitik. (100 уроков караимского языка. Тракайский диалект. I книга)*. (with Diana Lavrinovič) Trakai, 2021. 380 p.
- *100 karaj tiliniñ üriatiuviu. Troch karaj sioziu (100 уроков караимского языка. Тракайский диалект)*. (with Diana Lavrinovič) Trakai, 2021. 635 p.

Markas Lavrinovičius' books that are still in manuscripts, not yet published:

- *Aziž Jazyšnyn Jomachlary*.
- *Bir Bar Ėdi*.
- *Karyndašlarymyznyn Chaznasy*.
- *Karaj-urus siožliugiu*.

3 Szapszal S. Sprawozdania i bibliografja // *Myśl Karaimska*. Wilno, 1936. Zesz. II, s. 105–107.

4 Kowalski T. *Język karaimski* // *Myśl Karaimska*. Wilno, 1926. T. I, zesz. III, s. 3–7.

Conclusion

It is obvious that maintaining the Karaim language, the nation's identity, culture and values was Markas Lavrinovičius' overwhelming desire throughout his life. He always made a sincere effort to preserve the cultural heritage and revitalise the Karaim language Trakai dialect. He may not be with us now any longer, but his legacy: collecting Karaim literary works, compiling a dictionary, and creating a coursebook with 100 lessons for the Karaim language studies, will live on for a long time.

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- Лавриновичюс Маркас. 2012. *Русско-караимский словарь / Urus-karaj siožliugiu*. Тракай.