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Coming to the Rescue of the Karaims during the Second World War

The main topic of my remarks concerns some shocking, unrealised plans of extermination of a whole Turkic people, namely the Karaims. The question seems to be of interest not only for the old, but also for a new generation of researchers. In point of fact, in some recent studies touching on this subject we can find observations and opinions which demand elucidation and even rectification. Some details should be cleared up by the Karaims themselves, the others by the Polish-Lithuanian Tatars. As far as these last are concerned, I refer mainly to the following studies: Ali Miśkiewicz, *Tatarzy polscy 1918–1939. Życie społeczno-kulturalne i religijne* (Polish Tatars 1918–1939. Socio-cultural and religious life)¹, Selim Chazbijewicz, *Ideologie Muzułmanów-Tatarów polskich 1918–1939* (Ideologies of the Polish Muslim Tatars in 1918–1939)², the same, *Tatarzy polsko-litewscy w latach II wojny światowej* (Polish-Lithuanian Tatars in the years of the World War II)³, the same, *Tatarzy Krymscy. Walka o naród i wolną ojczyznę* (Crimean Tatars. Struggle for nation and free fatherland)⁴. As far as Karaim problems are concerned, I cite observations made by Emanuela Trevisan-Semi in her book *Les Caraites. Un autre judaïsme*⁵. The correspondence of Professor Ananiasz Zajaczkowski, just being prepared for publication, casts some new light on the problem. Quite interesting are observations made by Aleksandr Nekrich in his wide-known book *The Punished Peoples* or *Nakazannye narody*⁶.

It will be observed that the danger appeared in front of the Jews and the Karaims already in 1920 when Alfred Rosenberg published his mad concepts in the book *Die Spuren der Juden im Wandel der Zeit*, and especially ten years later when his *Mythus des 20. Jahrhunderts* comprising more accurately his doctrine of the “Aryan rase” appeared and he himself became the chief of the APA, the Nazi Party’s Foreign Police Office.

¹ Warszawa 1990.

² In: “Rocznik Tatarów Polskich”, 1993.

³ In: *Meandry cywilizacyjne, kwestie narodowościowe i polonijne*, Ed. A. Chodubski, Toruń 1996.

⁴ Supplement to “Rocznik Tatarów Polskich” 2001.

⁵ Traduit de l’italien par Simone Kauders, [Paris 1992].

⁶ N’ju Jork 1978. Izdatelstvo “Khronika”.

When in September 1939 the German troops attacked Poland, one could be convinced that the menace of annihilation both of Jews and Karaims had become a real one. Most Karaims were, however, unwilling to realise it. In fact, the matter was from the theoretical point of view unequivocal and practically undecided. Emanuela Trevisan-Semi wrote in this connection:

“On peut donc comprendre que les caraïtes, ayant développé des mécanismes ethniques accompagnés d’effets mimétiques, aient posé aux nazis et aux fascistes de Vichy un problème difficile à résoudre”⁷.

The leaders of the Hitler’s party had at their disposal various experts in anatomy, paleontology, law, semitic philology etc., to cite Robert Wetzel, Waldemar Holtz, Karl Kuhn or Baumgaertel, and they required on them among others to solve the problem: who are in fact the Karaims and should they be treated in the same way as Jews. Their answers were, however, contradictory. Some of them were of the opinion that the Karaims are Turks or Tatars converted to a Jewish sect and have no Jewish blood, the others maintained that they belong to an ethnic group difficult to be classified but having a Jewish trace (Einschlag) in their blood, “doubtful” or “impure”, consequently their marriages with Germans should be prohibited, their immigration to the Reich not permitted but their extermination not postulated⁸. As a result the measures applied by German authorities in regard to the Karaims were sometimes inconsequent. Some scholars show a tendency to explain those oscillations as a result of a conflict between A. Rosenberg and the SS chiefs opting for more radical methods of extermination of non-Russian minorities on the occupied territories.

Just after the conquest of the Crimea by the German troops there began to appear in the German press reports on the Peninsula and its population. Thus M. Pusirewsky-Goegginger wrote in “Deutsche Zeitung im Ostland” in November 1941 that in the Crimea which “[...] jetzt von den deutschen Truppen erobert worden ist” there had lived “Ostgoten oder Krimgoten bereits um das Jahr 600, ein germanischer Volksstamm, die Krim in Besitz genommen und sich bis ins 16. Jahrhundert erhalten hatten” and that there still exists “[...] schon vor 50 Jahren im Aussterben begriffene alte Karaimenstadt Tschufutkaleh”⁹.

More information on the Karaims was offered by a war correspondent Herbert Caspers. In “Mitteldeutsche National-Zeitung” of April 25th 1942 he tried to explain the complicated problem of the Khazars that he named, nobody knows why “Chesaren”:

“Neben den Tataren waren auch die Chesaren hier ansässig, und aus ihnen entwickelte sich der Stamm der Karaimen, dessen Überbleibsel zuletzt die Felsenfestung bevölkerten und die heute ein besonders interessantes, absterbendes Zwergvolk im Südosten Europas darstellen. Die Chesaren stammten aus Asien, ihre karaimischen Abstammlinge tragen

⁷ Trevisan-Semi, op. cit., p. 84.

⁸ Trevisan-Semi, op. cit., p. 85.

⁹ M. Pusirewsky-Goegginger, *Auf der Krim. Erinnerungen an bekannte Stätten und Städte*, “Deutsche Zeitung im Ostland”, November 30th, 1941.

heute alle Kennzeichen turkotatarischer Abkunft, sind schwarzhaarig, haben breite Gesichtsknochen, die türkische Form der Hakennase und zeigen das ruhige Temperament der Türken. Im Gegensatz aber zu dem anderen Zwergvolk auf der Krim – von beiden leben heute nur noch einige tausend Familien – den Krimschaken, die dem Judentum entstammen, sind die Karaimen betonte Judenfeinde”¹⁰.

A report by Werner Klau in “Wilnauer Zeitung” of June 26th 1948 was written in a relatively objective tone:

“Die sogenannten litauischen Karaimen stammen von der Krim. Sie gehören zu der Gruppe der Turkvölker und nahmen im 9. Jahrhundert unserer Zeitrechnung ihre jetzige Religion an, die eine Mischung christlicher und mohammedanischer Elemente darstellt. Vytautas der Grosse brachte viele von ihnen von seinem Kriegszuge nach Südrussland in seine Heimat, wo er sie als Hilfstruppen in einer Reihe von Dörfern ansiedelte. Ein Teil der Karaimen diente als Leibgarde in Traken, wo sie eine Reihe von Ländereien erhielten und durch Privilegien ausgezeichnet wurden. Die Karaimen waren seit jeher bekannt und beliebt wegen ihrer Treue und Zuverlässigkeit [...]”. W. Klau mentioned also his visit paid to the Museum in Troki and his encounter with the Hakhan:

“Heute befindet sich der Sitz dieses Oberhauptes in Wilna. Es ist der bekannte Orientalist Hachan Hadzy, Seraja Chan Szapszal. Zurzeit ist die Schar der von ihm Betreuten zwar nur gering – er hofft aber nächstens wieder Verbindung zu seinem nun befreiten Volksgenossen auf der Krim aufnehmen zu können”¹¹.

The same author published a similar report in “Die Woche” of November 11th 1942. In two illustrations you could see some Karaim national costumes kept in the Museum in Troki and the great hazzan Shemaja Firkowich (without indicating his name) teaching a group of Karaim children. He reported:

“Vor dem Weltkrieg gab es im Gebiet des Zarenreiches etwa 10= bis 20 000 Karaimen, von denen manche hohe staatliche und militärische Würdenstellungen erlangten. Der Weltkrieg und die Bolschewistenzeit zerrissen die Bande zwischen den Karaimen in Litauen und Polen und denen auf der Krim, die unter einer über zwanzigjährigen roten Herrschaft zu leiden hatten. Heute berichten deutsche Soldaten in ihren Feldpostbriefen von der Begegnung mit Resten des Karaimenvölkchens auf der südrussischen Halbinsel. Mit der zähen Widerstandskraft ihrer Rasse haben sie sich hier wie dort – in Litauen und auf der Krim – in allen Stürmen der Geschichte zu behaupten gewußt”¹².

Only four days later a certain “Dr. Steiniger” (the Christian name not marked, maybe a pseudonym?) presented his opinions in “Deutsche Zeitung in Ostland”, a German paper published in Riga. As far as the religion of the Karaims is concerned, Dr. Steiniger did not show a deeper knowledge of the problem while writing:

¹⁰ Herbert Caspers, *Auf den Spuren der Goten vor Sewastopol. Romantische Liebestragödie auf der Krim. Aus 1500 Jahren Geschichte*, “Mitteldeutsche National-Zeitung”, April 25th, 1942.

¹¹ Werner Klau, *Lebensschicksal eines kleinen Volkes. Von der Krim nach Wilna*, “Wilnauer Zeitung”, No. 148, June 26th, 1942.

¹² Werner Klau, *Strandgut der Geschichte*, “Die Woche”, Heft 45, November 11th, 1942.

“Viel beachtet wird auch die Religion der Karaimen: sozusagen eine Verbindung der wichtigen morgenländischen Religionen [...] Die Karaimen [...] halten sich von den Juden streng getrennt”¹³.

On the other hand, the “racial affiliation” of the Karaims appears according to Dr. Steiniger in a complicated manner:

“Der Rassenzugehörigkeit nach sind die in Lettland, Litauen und in Generalgouvernement lebenden Karaimen den in dem gleichen Gebiet lebenden Mohammedanern recht nahe verwandt”. Here the author makes use of a badly reputed term of “Turanian race” and states that the Karaims have anyhow an southwestasian-oriental “admixture” in common with the Jews:

“Entsprechend ihrer Herkunft von der Krim und ihrer Abkunft von turko-tatarischen Völkern gehört die Mehrzahl der Karaimen der turaniden Rasse an, allerdings sind bei ihnen auch vorderasiatisch-orientalische Einschlüge festzustellen, in denen sie mit den Juden übereinstimmen”¹⁴.

This statement sounded like an augury of extermination, Dr. Steiniger, however, decided to throw in a positive opinion, a hope for survival:

“Doch sind diese Einschlüge nicht stärker als bei den heutigen Türken im allgemeinen. Aus ihnen den Beweis einer etwaigen jüdischen Abstammung der Karaimen abzuleiten, ist daher abwegig”¹⁵.

At the same time Dr. Steiniger mentioned that the Ministry of Inner Affairs already four years earlier, namely on December 22nd 1938, had issued the following interpretation:

“Die Sekte der ‘Karaimen’ ist nicht als jüdische Religionsgemeinschaft im Sinne des § 2 Abs[atz] 2 der ersten Verordnung zum RGB [= Reichsbürgergesetz] anzusehen. Die Feststellung, daß die ‘Karaimen’ in ihrer Gesamtheit artverwandten Blutes sind, kann jedoch nicht erfolgen, denn die rassische Einordnung einer Person läßt sich nicht ohne weiteres nach ihrer Zugehörigkeit zu einem bestimmten Volke, sondern immer nach ihren persönlichen Abstammungsverhältnissen und rassebiologischen Merkmalen vornehmen”¹⁶.

In 1943 there appeared a special off-print of a paper on the Karaims printed in “Petersmanns Geographischen Mitteilungen”. Its author was Dr. Herbert Kirrinnis, temporarily living in Vilno, who stated that:

“Die Karaimen sind türkischer Herkunft [...] sie den Tschuwaschen nahestehen, mit den Juden also, wie häufig behauptet wird, nichts zu tun haben”. On the same occasion, the author cited opinions of unidentified “Jewish writers” who should have abetted the people to kill the Karaims:

¹³ Dr. Steiniger, “Die Karaimen”, “Deutsche Zeitung im Ostland”, No. 314, November 15th, 1942, Riga.

¹⁴ Loc cit.

¹⁵ Loc cit.

¹⁶ Loc cit. We can find the same fragment cited in a written answer given to S. von Douvan by der Leiter der Reichsstelle für Sippenforschung in Berlin am Januar 5th 1939. The word “Karaimen” has been written there without quotation-marks.

“In Werken dagegen, die nur für Juden bestimmt sind, behaupten die jüdischen Verfasser selbst bis in die jüngste Zeit, daß der Karaismus mit der jüdischen Lehre nichts gemeinsames habe, mit dem Islam und dem Christentum aber vielen Auffassungen sich berühre. Allgemein wird in diesem Zusammenhang die radikale Ausrottung der Karaimen verlangt, weil sie als Abtrünnige anzusehen seien. ‘Il est permis, de les tuer’ ” – concluded the author in French.

In this place H. Kirrinnis cites also S. Shapshal’s opinion who should have stated that:

“Die zwischen diesen beiden Religionen vorhandene Kluft kann niemals und nirgends zugeschüttet werden”¹⁷.

Could the Karaims, having known this and similar declarations and racial considerations, be sure of their survival? Certainly not. They had in front of them so many ghasty results of racial theories: overcrowded prisons, concentration camps, rounds-up in the streets etc. They could also suppose that some instructions elaborated in Berlin might be not acknowledged as valid by the functionaries of a lower rang, by front troops, by the Police and the SS. All sorts of mistakes were possible, all the more so as – as Dr. Steiniger reminded of – “[...] Aus Russland stammende und in Deutschland lebende Juden behaupten nämlich oft, keine Juden, sondern Karaimen zu sein”¹⁸.

According to N. Filipovich who writes about her Crimean compatriots:

“Many Karaims were killed in the rear of the enemy notwithstanding a known fact that they were not submitted by the Germans to persecutions on account of their racial features. Still before the war the Germans made a scrupulous examination of the Karaims of Troki and decided that the question is of a people of the Turkic origin¹⁹. Anyhow, during their occupation of the Crimea territory and the Lithuania they made control on the spot once again of the Karaims. So, in Symferopol in mid-January 1942 the German authorities addressed A.I. Polkanov, a distinguish local sightseer, urging on him to explain the tribal origin of the Crimean Karaims. The reason was that there came a denunciation in which the menager of the labor exchange delivering the man power to Germany claimed that the Karaims are Jews. And, notwithstanding the fact that this denunciation was at variance with Berlin racial elaborations, the Germans, with all pedantry, so much typical to them, started to control the denunciation on the ground of the local material. A.I. Polkovanov’s results agreed of course with those of German scholars and they satisfied the Nazis”²⁰.

The moral leaders of the Karaims both those living in General Government and those from Vilno, Troki, Luck, Halich – localities which in the course of military operations changed several times their invaders – were looking out to all possible means to be

¹⁷ *Die Karaimen*. Von Stud.-Rat Dr. Herbert Kirrinnis, z[ur] Z[eit] Wilna. Sonderdruck aus “Petermanns Geographischen Mitteilungen” 1943, Heft 3–4, pp. 100–101.

¹⁸ Steiniger, op. cit.

¹⁹ N. Firkovič, *Karaimy v Krymu. XX vek* (diplomnaja rabota), Simferopol’ 1995, p. 2.

²⁰ Loc. cit. A.I. Polkanov’s opinions about the Karaims of the Crimea can be found in a volume of his selected papers: *Krymskie karaimy (Karai – korennoj maločislennyj tjurkskij narod Kryma)*, Pariž 1995.

rescued. Even rather phantastic ideas of Alexander Markowich to immigrate to Turkey or to the Crimea seemed at that time to be acceptable²¹. In Warsaw during the German occupation Ananiasz Zajączkowski, making attempts at rescuing his compatriots from eventual Nazi persecutions, produced for them certificates attesting their Turkic origin²². A general opinion among the Karaims was that in all rescuing actions collaboration with the Tatars was advisable and useful.

It is not a proper place here to discuss mutual relations between the Karaims and the Tatars, their similarities and divergencies²³. So we shall only remind of the fact that both ethnic groups have had a common history, a common place of origin or cohabitation, an ages-long attachment to the Polish nation, a common juridical position and the everyday neighbourhood as well. Among the differences one should list different religions, a conservation of their mother tongue by the Karaims, a greater numerical force of the Tatars and their attachment to military tradition. Different were their national goals. The Polish-Lithuanian Tatars were, already at the beginning of the 20th century, influenced by a nationwide anticzarist Muslim mouvement aiming at the cultural and political liberation for all Muslims living in Russia. Their compatriots in the Crimea (the Tatar intelligentsia assembled around of Ismail Bey Gasprinski, "Young Tatars" and "Vatan") started their fight for autonomous or independent state still earlier, i.e. in the second half of the 19th century. In realization of this capital plan they were in search of the help from their compatriotes or from outside allies. A well-known fact is that the Germans were on several occasions ready to help them.

As soon as the German troops invaded Poland in September 1939 and during the following occupation period there fired up among the Tatars a distressing dissent. There exists a remarkable evidence of the attachment of the Polish Tatars for the Commonwealth of Poland, treated by them as their own motherland. It has been known that they have forgotten their mother language and used the Polish²⁴, that they organized special troops and in their fights against Russians and Germans lost their life. A sudden disappearance of Poland from the geographical cards, a vivid desire to acquire their own independence, or at least the autonomy, along with a clever policy of the Germans caused that some Tatar leaders decided of a political and military collaboration with the Nazi authorities. The religious head of the Polish Tatars, Mufti Dr. Jakub Szynkiewicz (Schinkewitsch) was by the Germans nominated the Mufti of the "Ostland" and, at the same time, subordinated to the Great Mufti of Jerusalem. Equally subordinated to the Germans became in Warsaw the newly-founded Tatar Association headed by Abdullah Churamowicz. The latter had a special motivation to collaborate since he was married

²¹ This problem has been touched upon in Ananiasz Zajączkowski's correspondence.

²² No copy of such a document has been revealed so far.

²³ A lecture entitled "Relations between the Tatars and the Karaims" was delivered by Józef Sulimowicz (vel Szulimowicz) on March 6th 1936 in Oriental Institute in Warsaw.

²⁴ S. Szapszał, *O zatraceniu języka ojczystego przez Tatarów polskich* [The loss of the mother tongue by the Polish Tatars], in: "Rocznik Tatarski" I, 1932.

with a Jewish women and wanted at any price to save her life²⁵. On the other hand, at the end of 1939, Leon Mirza Kryczyński, vice-president of the District Court of Justice in Gdynia, a generally respected Tatar, was arrested and executed by the Germans as a result of his refusal to collaborate. Also a Polish officer of the Tatar origin, the captain of horse Aleksander Jeliaszewicz refused to collaborate. He was proposed to command a cavalry troop composed of Turkic soldiers from the Soviet Union²⁶. Also many other Tatars refused to collaborate with the Nazis. In 1941, as soon as the German troops occupied the Vilno region, Dr. Szyrkiewicz found himself in a quite uneasy position. He was an Orientalist educated in Berlin who attended the renown Willy-Bang's seminary. Much appreciated has been his study *Rabyūzis Syntax* (1927). Annemarie von Gabain after some four years elapsed had a pleasant memory of him:

“Als ich selber im Jahre 1923 in Berlin bei Willy Bang zu studieren begann – schrieb sie – traf ich Rahmeti bey bereits dort an, während Rabia hanım Medizin studierte. Zu unseren Kommilitonen gehörte u.a. ein Tatare aus Weißrußland, Jakub Schinkewitsch, der später Mufti in Polen wurde [...]”²⁷.

Not long ago, Selim Chazbijewicz explained that Jakub Szyrkiewicz had been from the time of his sejour in Berlin acquainted not only with Orientalists but also with Dr. Joseph Goebbels. Just in 1941 Goebbels should have recalled in mind his old colleague and proposed to him a collaboration. J. Szyrkiewicz accepted his proposal. From that time on the collaboration should have had a propagandist and political character, but it lead not to anti-Polish or anti-Jewish demonstrations. According to Selim Chazbijewicz this kind of collaboration of Jakub Szyrkiewicz was similar to the activity of Knut Hamsun in Norway and, practically speaking, was confined to a few interviews given to the German press and to a showy support given to the organisation of the so-called “Legion Ost”, composed of the representatives of the Turkic Muslim peoples, of the Waffen-SS, recruited from among the prisoners of war and volunteers from the territories occupied by the German troops²⁸. It has been also known that Edige Szyrkiewicz, Jakub Szyrkiewicz's nephew, returned to Vilno in 1942 as a representative of the Red Crescent for the affairs of the Soviet Crimean Tatars at the German headquarters of the land forces. After the Germans had taken the Crimea, he co-organised the Mohammedan Committee, a political organisation being an attempt to create a limited self-government of the Tatars under the German control. He was active and used a pseudoname of “Kyrymal”²⁹. In this connection the representatives of the Polish Tatars of the same orientation sejournd during a year or two in Berlin. In 1943 Ananiasz Zajaczkowski in a letter drown up in Polish and addressed to Tadeusz Kowalski wrote what follows:

²⁵ S. Chazbijewicz, *Tatarzy Krymscy. Walka o naród i wolną ojczyznę* [Crimean Tatars. Struggle for nation and free fatherland], Poznań-Wrzesnia 2001, p. 77, note 295.

²⁶ On Aleksander Jeliaszewicz see A. Miśkiewicz, op. cit., pp. 71, 156, 166.

²⁷ A. von Gabain, *Rahmeti Arat (15.4.1900–29.11.1964)*, “Ural-Altaische Jahrbücher” 38, 1966, p. 133.

²⁸ Chazbijewicz, *Tatarzy Krymscy*, ut supra, pp. 76–78.

²⁹ Chazbijewicz, *Tatarzy Krymscy*, ut supra, p. 76, note 291.

“Abdullah Zihni since probably two years spends nearly all his time in Berlin. In collaboration with Edige Szynekiewicz they set up a Crimean representation towards the authorities. As a representative, he is getting on well. He never writes to me, he is, I know, mortally offended since, in a proper time he had not become an instructor here”³⁰.

The quisling activity among the Tatars was observed by the Polish Karaims with much attention but also with disapproval. The Karaims themselves were loyal to the alliance, lasting for many centuries, with Poland, not defeated but occupied. They remained in contact with clandestine Polish authorities, some of them became partisans or soldiers of the underground army. In spite of all profits that collaboration could bring them they were in their majority against it. But, at a certain moment, it was rumoured that their highest moral superior, the hachan Seraja Shapshal, was making efforts to contact the German authorities. In a letter written on March 1942 Ananiasz Zajączkowski informed Tadeusz Kowalski that:

“[Shapshal] has been said to have procured an official acknowledgment (by the Office of Minister Rosenberg) for the Karaims to be ‘arisch’. As less praiseworthy can be considered the fact that he is presumably going to visit the capital [i.e. Berlin – E.T.]; on his return he is supposed to visit us. In fact, all this would be going too fast. Well, let us wait, this situation will probably become clear”³¹.

It will be useful to cite here the observations made by Emanuela Trevisan-Semi:

“En fait, les nazis tergiversèrent et temporisèrent, peut-être en raison de leurs difficultés sur le front oriental. Ils savaient bien en effet que les Tartares considéraient les caraïtes comme un groupe turco-tartare, appartenant au leur, et comme ils avaient besoin de l’appui des Tartares en tant qu’antislaves, ils préférèrent laisser de côté la question raciale pour maintenir de bons rapports avec ceux-ci, par crainte de représailles s’ils éliminaient les caraïtes. Alors même qu’ils disposaient d’une documentation fournie, les nazis laissèrent la question »caraïte« ouverte jusqu’à la fin de la guerre”³².

And just here we come up to the heart of our considerations: if, and who in reality tried to prevent the menace of holocaust from the Karaims? Whose intervention, and in which way made, has appeared most efficacious?

A few situations can be debated. In the first stress is put on the self-defence of the Karaims and a special personal courage shown by Seraja Shapshal, the second emphasizes the merit of Jakub Szynekiewicz, the third brings out into relief Tadeusz Kowalski, while the fourth one introduces an anonymous “German anthropologist”, an expert in Karaim matters.

The first situation has been described by A. Nekrich as follows:

“[...] the extermination [of the Karaims in the Crimea] was stopped as a result of a brave intervention of the Karaim Hachan Khadji Serai Shapshal (Sergey Markovich

³⁰ In Ananiasz Zajączkowski’s letter to Tadeusz Kowalski of October 25th, 1943.

³¹ In Ananiasz Zajączkowski’s letter to Tadeusz Kowalski of March 30th, 1942.

³² Trevisan-Semi, op. cit., pp. 86–87.

Shapshal) the residence of whom was at that time in Lithuania". "The story is not devoided of interest. Following the advice of a certain colonel of SS from the Staff 'Ostland', an expert in Oriental culture, Shapshal, warned in due time about the extermination of the Karaims being in preparation, addressed a memorandum to Rosenberg in which he exposed the history of his nation. After clearing up the ethnical origin and religious relations between the Jews and the Karaims, Shapshal found in himself enough courage to write in the conclusion the following: 'The Moses' commandments have remained up to our time the base of the world civilisation. It is not allowed to forget or to blur this merit of the Jewish nation'. Shapshal succeeded in convincing Rosenberg of the fact that the community of the Karaims and the Jews has a religious, and not ethnic character"³³.

The above story is like an anecdote about which one would like to say: "Se non è vero, è bene trovato". As to its authenticity, only a recovery of the written original text in German archives or its copy in S. Shapshal's collection in Vilno could deliver a convincing proof. It seems that the addressee was from a long time sufficiently informed of all nuances of the problem and that no arguments could induce him to change his mind. It is evident that the anonymous adviser and expert in Oriental culture was nobody else but Jakub Szynkiewicz in person. However no earlier researcher informed that he was the SS colonel. Did Shapshal really send such a memo to German authorities (to which?), by himself or through the good offices of Jakub Szynkiewicz? Has he got an answer?

The hero of the second story is Jakub Szynkiewicz himself. Here the name of A. Rosenberg has not been mentioned, we learn instead about J. Szynkiewicz's connections during his student days and J. Goebbels is mentioned by name. The episode is dated 1943. Selim Chazbijewicz, who is the author of the printed version of the story, puts the episode on "the positive account of Dr. Szynkiewicz's activity" and is persuaded that it "has not been known earlier to a larger circle of interested readers". We are unable to check the authenticity of this account, we can suppose, however, that the intention of its author was to alleviate the odium of collaboration with which J. Szynkiewicz might have been charged. The whole fragment reads in translation as follows:

"Dr. Jakub Szynkiewicz while following in the twenties his Oriental studies in Berlin made friends with another student of the same school, Dr. Joseph Goebbels, the future Minister of Propaganda of the Reich. In 1941 Goebbels recalled to mind his former comradeship. In front of the menacing extermination from the Germans and repressions, executions and deportations from the Soviets Dr. Szynkiewicz accepted his proposal of collaboration. It had a political character, but there were no anti-Polish or anti-Jewish Tatar demonstrations"³⁴.

³³ A. Nekrich, *Nakazannye narody*, N'ju Jork 1978, p. 25.

³⁴ S. Chazbijewicz, *Tatarzy-polsko-litewscy w latach II wojny światowej* [Polish-Lithuanian Tatars in the years of the world war II], in: *Meandry cywilizacyjne, kwestie narodowościowe i polonijne*, ed. A. Chodubski, Toruń 1996, p. 95.

S. Chazbijewicz presents the Karaim episode as follows:

“On the positive account of Dr. Szyrkiewicz’s activity one should put the episode of 1943, namely the rescue of the Karaims from extermination, planned by German authorities, by the Tatar Mufti Office. On the proposal of the Mufti Office “racial examination” proving the Turkish origin of the Karaims was made[...]. In this case Szyrkiewicz availed himself of his connections dating from his student’s time. This episode is a pretty unknown fragment of the history of Vilno under occupation and of the history of Tatar-Karaim relations, also relations existing among particular minorities on the borderland of the Polish Commonwealth”³⁵.

The mention of the “Tatar Mufti Office” seems to have here a merely formal meaning since opinions of J. Szyrkiewicz were surely authoritarian ones. Interesting is the mention of “extermination” planned notwithstanding all previous statements and declarations. Quite doubtful is the information of the “racial examination” of the Karaims made on the proposal of the Mufti Office. The question demands a detailed presentation.

In his subsequent work (*Tatarzy Krymscy...*, op. cit.) S. Chazbijewicz delivers some other details. He denies A. Nekrich’s information and thinks that he was lacking more precise data:

“In fact, the intervention of the Mufti Dr. Jakub Szyrkiewicz at Goebbels in 1942 saved from extermination the Karaims, both Crimean and Polish-Lithuanian in Vilno and Troki. The intervention, undertaken at Shapshal’s request, was ended with a racial examination of the Tatars and Karaims in order to find out among the last-mentioned racial Turkic features”³⁶.

It is general knowledge that already before the World War II scientific investigations were made among both the Karaims and the Tatars. They embraced anthropological and, in 1932, also serological observations. The latter were made by Michel Reichert, professor of the Stefan Batory University in Vilno. Jan Czekanowski referred to their results³⁷. In 1936, the results obtained by Jan Czekanowski and by Corrado Gini were published in Italy. The gathering of a new material, as if for a new round of research has been testified by A. Zajaczkowski. In one of his letters dated July 2nd 1933 we can read:

“Naturally, I will with pleasure give all information to Mr. Poznański, or to Mr. Gini”. In another letter of 1934 we read also:

“How was the research work of Professor Gini in Luck and what do you think about it?”³⁸. Otherwise it has been known that the Italian expedition worked in Troki from 4th

³⁵ Op. cit., p. 97.

³⁶ *Tatarzy Krymscy*, ut supra, p. 84, note 308.

³⁷ M. Reichert, *Sur les groupes sanguins des Caraimes de Troki et de Wilno*, “Anthropologie” X, 1932, pp. 256–267; Jan Czekanowski, *Z zagadnień antropologii Karaimów* [Some problems of the anthropology of the Karaims], “Myśl Karaimska”, new series II (1946–1947), p. 3 ff. The pioneer of this research was J. Talko-Hryniewicz: *Karaimi v. Karaici Litewscy* [Karaims or Lithuanian Karaites], “Materiały Antropologiczne i Etnologiczne”, VII, 1904, pp. 44–100. Corrado Gini, *I Caraimi di Polonia e Lithuania*, “Genus” II, No. 1–2, 1936, pp. 1–56.

³⁸ Ananiasz Zajaczkowski’s letter to Aleksander Mardkiewicz of September 28th, 1934.

till 16th September 1934. At the same time S. Chazbijewicz writes about the “racial examination” in 1943, organized by the Gestapo that was comparing characteristic features of the Karaims and the Tatars. The author does not precise the circumstances of that research, but the fact has been confirmed:

“From Riga there came to Vilno an ‘anthropological commision’ which started to examine the Tatars in Vilno and Sorok-Tatary and the Karaims in Vilno and Troki. Hence various conjectures, gossip and supposedly misgivings” – noted Ananiasz Zajaczkowski (informed by Konstanty Chalecki) in a letter of December 23rd, 1942³⁹.

It can be supposed that either the work of the commission was the result of the chain of interventions: Shapshal-Szynkiewicz-Goebbels or the Gestapo men made additional investigations on their own, partially questioning the earlier examinations and trying to find out a new argument in favour of their secretly done actions.

The third story of rescuing the Karaims has been lately presented by Tadeusz Ulewicz, a Polish professor who during the German occupation was working in the German Institut für Deutsche Ostarbeit, and should be well informed. In a Polish paper “Nasz Dziennik” he states that:

“The Karaims were rescued from annihilation by an Orientalist from Cracow, Tadeusz Kowalski. The Hitlerites wanted to exterminate them because they were of the Moses’ faith. Therefore they called Kowalski to the Gestapo to hear his opinion as a specialist on the Karaims. He answered that in respect to race they are not Semites, but a Turkic tribe which turned Mosaiste. Thanks to this they have survived. Therefore it was he who had saved them”⁴⁰. Tadeusz Kowalski’s biographers do not mention this episode. Nobody knows when and where such an interrogation should have taken place.

Equally fascinating is the fourth story related by Professor Anna Kowalska-Lewicka, T. Kowalski’s daughter. Published in Polish in 1999, it reads as follows:

“During the war, when Poland was under the [German] occupation, in Cracow, long after curfew, somebody rang at our door. At the first moment we were in shock. Only Germans were allowed to move in the streets so late, and the ring at the door could announce nothing else but a visit of the Gestapo. Meanwhile there was standing on the door-step an attractive middle-aged civilian. It has appeared that he was a German anthropologist (by the way, breathing hatred to Hitler so impetuously that at first we feared that it might be a provocation). He was ordered to produce an anthropological opinion whether the Karaims are Semites – in such a case the gas chambers were awaiting them – or a Turkic people confessing Moses’ faith. His expert’s report appeared, in accordance with the truth, favourable for the Karaims, and in this way he saved their life. On the occasion of his research work he made friends with many families in Halich. Later, by order of Mr. Nowachowicz, a lawyer, he brought furs, silver objects, books to our house in hope that they might be kept out from being plundered if the Soviet army

³⁹ Addressed to Tadeusz Kowalski.

⁴⁰ *Ukryte cele manipulacji* [Hidden goals of a manipulation], “Nasz Dziennik”, April 10th, 2003, p. 9.

arrives, what was expected already at that time. Our anthropologist visited us on several occasions each time drugging up the Karaim goods”⁴¹.

In this story the name of the “German anthropologist” has not been indicated by the author of the relation, and, practically speaking, nobody is able to know it. Thus another life-saver of the Karaims remains anonymous.

At last let us adduce quite individual opinion of Emanuela Tr a v i s a n - S e m i, rather difficult to be accepted in all details:

“Ce n’est pas la politique nazie qui a permis de sauver les caraïtes, mais plutôt, paradoxalement, le mécanisme culturel classiquement utilisé par les caraïtes envers le groupe d’accueil, en l’occurrence les Tartares et les Litvaniens. Ils se présentaient comme »partie des Tartares«, »partie des Litvaniens«, assimilables à ceux-ci”⁴².

So the problem has not been finally resolved. Bringing to light and scrupulous examination of new documents seems still to be the most important task of the interested historians.

⁴¹ Anna Kowalska-Lewicka, *Tadeusz Kowalski w oczach córki* [Tadeusz Kowalski in his daughter’s eyes], in: *Tadeusz Kowalski (1889–1948), Materiały z Posiedzenia Naukowego PAU w dniu 19 czerwca 1998 r.*, Kraków 1999, Polska Akademia Umiejętności. “W służbie nauki”, nr 4, 1999, pp. 74–75.

⁴² Trevisan-Semi, op. cit., p. 87. The information given by the same author (following W. Green and Sh. Spector) and on the same page saying about the hundreds of Karaims serving in the Wehrmacht, the Waffen SS and in the Tatar legion seems *prima vista* to be exaggerated and unreliable. At the same time, there is no doubt that certain Karaims, few in number, perceived their rescue and help in close contacts with those Tatars who became allies of the Germans. A plain example of such attitude was the activity, consisting mainly in works of charity, observed at the end of the second world war, and soon after it, of Michał (Michel) Dubinski (born in 1903), a Karaim from Troki, engineer by profession and a solid civil servant in the Polish Ministry of Labour. In August 1944 he travelled (partially?) afoot from Troki to Vienna, then to Berlin and Paris, and started helping Tatars and Karaims kept in concentration camps, prisons, or sent to forced labours. In collaboration with Barz Urman Emirza he founded in Vienna a “Tatar-Karaim Association”, confirmed by German central authorities in Berlin. The following Karaims were members of that Association authorities: Michel Dubinski, representative of Karaim affaires and Secretary General, Ibrahim Jakovlevich Penbek, Treasurer, Michail Kouvsanli, member and Delegate of the Association in Berlin and Mr. Szpakowski, President of the Board of Control. Soon appeared that the Muslim funds were exclusively assigned for helping the Tatars, so M. Dubinski, being nominated a delegate of the Association to France, organised in Paris a Commission for Helping the Needy Karaims. Its members were: Sulijmov Ilič Gelelovič, Michail Jahovlevič Arslan and Boris Markovič Sararz.