

UDC 141

DOI <https://doi.org/10.36059/978-966-397-414-9-67>

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**“OUR RABBINIC BROTHERS”?  
FROM THE DE-JUDAIZATION OF KARAIMISM  
IN THE RUSSIAN EMPIRE AND TURKEY  
BY AVRAHAM FIRKOVICH TO THE DE-HEBRAIZATION  
OF THE KARAIM OF EASTERN EUROPE  
BY SERAYA SHAPSHAL (1837–1961)**

**Key words:** Judaism, Karaimism (Karaism), Jewish-Karaite relationship, Karaite separatism and emancipation, Secularization, Dejudatization, Dehebraization, Abraham Firkovich, Seraya (Sergey) Shapshal, Toviy Bobovich, Eastern Europe, Middle East, Turkey.

At the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century in the Austrian parts of the Holy Roman Empire (later Austrian Empire, Austria-Hungary) and at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the Ottoman Empire, the Karaim were granted the status of a separate community from that of the Jews and the accompanying recognition of equal rights with Christians and Muslims respectively. In these two empires the emancipation of the Karaim proceeded relatively easily, since they had been subjects of these empires for quite a long time and the authorities had a good knowledge of them.

After the partition of Poland and the annexation of Crimea to the Russian Empire (end of the 18<sup>th</sup> c.), the Karaim were among the new subjects of the empire, but the ecclesiastical and secular authorities knew nothing about them and at first they were subject to the anti-Semitic legislation of Russia, as were the Jews.

Thanks to the efforts of Karaim’s communal leaders – and above all the collector of manuscripts and antiquities – Abraham Firkovich, by 1837 the Karaim were recognized as the separate community from the Jews and in 1863 the Karaim received from the Russian authorities equal rights with the local Christian population.

The already complicated relationship between the Karaim and Jews during more than a thousand years of their coexistence in the Near

and Middle East, Austrian and Ottoman empires, became even more complicated in Russian conditions.

If the deeply religious theologian Abraham Firkovich (who postulated the origin of the Karaim from Biblical Samaria and Ten Lost tribes), sought the de-Judaize Karaim because of their different origin and religious beliefs and practices, the next spiritual and communal leader of the Karaim – secularist and professor of Turkology Seraya Shapshal – put forward the thesis of the Khazar origin of the Karaim and began to de-Hebraize the Karaim of Eastern Europe by claiming the syncretic character of Karaim religion and their Turkic descent, paving the way to their own (pan-)Turkic identity.

The spiritual leader of the Karaim of Cairo, Tuviv Bobovich, took a middle position: emphasizing the Turkic element in Karaimism, he at the same time stressed the exclusively Mosaic character of the Karaite faith, denied by S. Shapshal.

In my paper I will demonstrate the complexity of the theme of the attitude of the Karaim of Eastern Europe of 19–20<sup>th</sup> cc. to their “rabbinic brothers”, which varied from communal leader to communal leader.

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