

REMARKS ON THE PHONOLOGY OF A SOUTH-WESTERN KARAIM TRANSLATION OF THE LATTER PROPHETS

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Abstract. The present paper focuses on the only available South-Western Karaim translation of the Latter Prophets, registered under the accession number ADub.III.83. Alongside a concise overview of the manuscript and its copyist, Jeshua Josef Mordkowicz, the paper offers a brief analysis of the Modern South-Western Karaim traits displayed in the language of the manuscript.

Keywords: South-Western Karaim, Latter Prophets, Jeshua Josef Mordkowicz, Modern South-Western Karaim phonology

1. Introduction

Recent research led to the discovery of a South-Western Karaim translation of the Latter Prophets¹ in the private archive of the late Polish Turkologist Aleksander Dubiński (1924–2002). The translation was copied by Jeshua Josef Mordkowicz (1802–1884) most likely in the second half of the 19th century in Halych, in present-day Ukraine. The manuscript was given the accession number ADub.III.83. The main text is handwritten and is completely vocalized. It comprises 245 folios. Translations of the Latter Prophets are also available in North-Western Karaim² and Eastern (Crimean) Karaim.³

- 1 The books of the Latter Prophets (as part of the Old Testament) include Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Twelve Minor Prophets, namely Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi.
- 2 The North-Western Karaim translation of the Latter Prophets from the second half of the 19th century is catalogued under accession number F305-90. It is included in the Karaim collection of the Wroblewski Library of the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences in Vilnius, Lithuania.
- 3 The Eastern (Crimean) Karaim translation of the Latter Prophets is preserved as part of a manuscript from the 18th century kept in the Cambridge University Library, and as part of the printed edition of the so-called Eupatorian (Gözleve) Bible from 1841 (Jankowski 2018: 50–51).

2. The copyist

Jeshua Josef Mordkowicz was born in Halych in 1802. He was only 19 years old when he assumed the position of hazzan in Kukizów. After returning to Halych, Mordkowicz worked as a copyist while also teaching religion at the local Karaim school. In 1866, he became the hazzan of the Karaim community in Halych and served in the position until his death in 1884 (Zarachowicz 1925: 21–23). Mordkowicz is known to be one of the most significant contributors to South-Western Karaim Bible translations that resulted in manuscripts of both individual biblical books and copies of the entire Old Testament (Németh 2021b: 15). Some of his translations from the first half of the 19th century still include archaism, while those of the second half of the century exhibit Modern South-Western Karaim features (Németh 2020: 47).

3. Modern South-Western Karaim features of ADub.III.83

The language of ADub.III.83 displays features of Modern South-Western Karaim, suggesting that it was most likely copied in the second half of the 19th century. The following section provides a brief analysis of these Modern South-Western Karaim characteristics of the manuscript.

3.1. Delabialization of *ö* and *ü*

The Hebrew letters used for *ö*, *ü* and *e*, *i* are clearly distinguished in Karaim manuscripts. The letter *waw* (ו) with the respective diacritic marks consistently stands for the front rounded *ö* and *ü*, while the front unrounded *e* and *i* are primarily indicated with the letter *aleph* (א) with its own diacritic marks. The orthography of ADub.III.83 reveals that the manuscript contains no trace of *ö* and *ü*.

According to Németh (2020: 72, 74–75), due to the Slavonic linguistic environment, *ö* and *ü* underwent complete delabialization, as in *kekler* ‘heavens’ rather than **kökler*, *kin* ‘day’ rather than **kün*, *ezine* ‘for yourself’ rather than **özüne*, etc. The front rounded vowels are not part of the phonemic inventories of the surrounding Slavonic languages, therefore, they might have easily affected the South-Western Karaim vowel system. The Slavonic influence had an impact on the North-Western Karaim vowel sys-

tem as well, however, it resulted in a different outcome (for more details, see, Németh 2020: 74).

The *ö, ü > e, i* process began in the first half of the 18th century and is considered to have been complete by the early decades of the 19th century. It first occurred in the word-final syllables, particularly in suffixes, and gradually extended to the word-initial syllables (Németh 2020: 72–75). The process is entirely complete in ADub.III.83.

3.2. The completion of the *š > s* change

In Karaim manuscripts, the Hebrew letters *shin* (ש)⁴ and *samekh* (ס) are typically used to denote *š* and *s*, respectively. In ADub.III.83, however, the words that historically contained *š* occur with <ס> to represent *s*, e.g. South-Western Karaim איסליר *isler* ‘deeds’, Arabic סרבת *serbet* ‘sherbet’, Persian דוסמן *dosman* ‘enemy’, Slavonic (Polish) פלסקא *fleska* ‘bottle’. Despite the fact that <ש> was no longer used to indicate *š*, it was retained in the orthography of Modern South-Western Karaim manuscripts by assuming a new function. The letter <ש> occurs in front of *i* to render [š], e.g. South-Western Karaim שיגז *szige* ‘for you’, Arabic רישים *resim* ‘commandment’, and also in front of palatal(ized) consonants, e.g. South-Western Karaim קילטיריר *eske* *keltirir* ‘X will remember’,⁵ Arabic מישכין *misikin* ‘poor’.

On the other hand, the use of <ש> and <ס> in Slavonic loanwords appears to be more ambiguous. However, it is clear that the number and frequency of Slavonic loanwords are lower than those of Arabic and Persian origin. We must also bear in mind that Mordkowicz (and Karaims in general) had a good command of the surrounding Slavonic languages, and, therefore, certain Slavonic loanwords may have retained their original spelling for longer. An example of Slavonic origin *piščjalka* ~ *piscjalka* ‘pipe, a kind of musical instrument’ (cf. Polish *piszczalka* ‘id.’) occurs twice in ADub.III.83, once with <ש>, i.e. פישצילקא, and once with <ס>, i.e. פיסצילקא.

The words that etymologically contained *š* rarely occur with *shin* (ש) and they always alternate with forms written with *samekh* (ס), therefore, the *š > s* change can also be considered complete in the language of ADub.III.83.

4 The diacritic dots distinguishing the two phonemes of *shin* (ש) in Hebrew are not marked in ADub.III.83.

5 Lit. mind-DAT bring-FUT.

3.3. The question of $\check{c}, \check{z}, \check{z} > c, z, z$

In Karaim manuscripts, the Hebrew letter *tzade* (צ) and its final form *tzade sofit* (ץ) generally denote both \check{c} and \check{z} , and then later on even c and z , while the letter *zayin* (ז) is used for both z and \check{z} . According to Németh (2020: 57), the dealveolarization of $\check{c}, \check{z}, \check{z}$ in South-Western Karaim must have occurred around the same time as the $\check{s} > s$ change. Even though the exact phonetic value of these Hebrew letters cannot be detected from the orthography, it is highly likely that the $\check{c}, \check{z}, \check{z} > c, z, z$ shifts are also present in ADub.III.83.

The dealveolarization process in South-Western Karaim should not be confused with similar processes found in other Turkic (e.g. Kazakh, Noghay, Azeri dialects spoken in Iran, etc.) and Slavonic languages (e.g. Polish mazuration) as it was a more systematic and historically distinct process in South-Western Karaim. Although the issue needs further investigation, Németh (2021a: 319) suggests that it might have been triggered by the South-Eastern borderland dialects of Polish spoken in the area.

4. Conclusion

The delabialization of the front rounded vowels (\ddot{o} and \ddot{u}) and the dealveolarization of the alveolar fricatives (\check{s} and \check{z}) and affricates (\check{c} and \check{z}) are considered complete in the language of ADub.III.83, thus clearly reflecting those of the Modern South-Western Karaim phonological peculiarities. Therefore, the manuscript apparently belongs to Mordkowicz's later translations from the second half of the 19th century.

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