

The origin of the Crimean Karaims and transformations of Karaism in the hermeneutic circle of history interpretation

U.S. Barash

Doctor of Economic Sciences, Professor

T.I. Vlasova

Doctor of Philosophic Sciences, Professor

ORCID: 0000-0001-5040-5733

Researcher ID: D-3841-2016

vasovat2@gmail.com

+380955168658

*Dnipro National University of Railway Transport named after Academician V. Lazaryan
2 Lazaryan st., Dnipro, Ukraine, 49010*

L.V. Martseniuk

Doctor of Economic Sciences, Associate Professor

ORCID: 0000-0003-4121-8826

Researcher ID: N-3917-2019

rwinform1@ukr.net

+380950439025

*Dnipro National University of Railway Transport named after Academician V. Lazaryan
2 Lazaryan st., Dnipro, Ukraine, 49010*

T.U. Charkina

Candidate of Economic Sciences, Associate Professor

ORCID: 0000-0001-6202-0910

Researcher ID: Q-4593-2019

charkina@i.ua

+380679140504

*Dnipro National University of Railway Transport named after Academician V. Lazaryan
2 Lazaryan st., Dnipro, Ukraine, 49010*

Abstract.

The aim of the article. The conceptual reconstruction of the origin of the Crimean Karaims as an ethnic group and determination of the factors which played the main role in the formation of their faith – the Karaism.

The methods. The methodology, used in the article, is stipulated by the specific features of the research object, which call for the complex interdisciplinary analysis including both the approaches the hermeneutic interpretation and the comparative – historical methods.

The main results. The research of the ethnic origin of the Crimean Karaims in the context of the transformations of their faith – Karaism reveals the ambivalent interpretations of their history and worships. The authors' conception confirms the hypothesis of the Karaims' origin and Turks and substantiates the idea of the Bibliism is a source of their faith.

The Concise Conclusion. The Crimean Karaims (Karai) being the Tengrianists before the Ist century A.D. then adopted the pure Bibliism through the Crimean local ethnic groups. Anan's teaching having complemented the Bibliism did not change its main ideas.

The practical meaning is connected with the accentualization of the scientific interest in the historical heritage of the non-numerous ethnic group – the Karaims under the conditions of the «risks» and «treats» of the globalization processes.

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The scientific novelty. The foundation of the Karaims' religion is the Bibliism which had come into existence 500 years before the Judaism appeared as the worship. Thus the Karaism cannot be considered a sect of the Judaism.

Keywords: globalism; religious ambivalence; ethnic identity; the Bibliism; the Judaism.

1. The formulation of the problem

The normalization of the postmodern transformations, which has been widely discussed lately by scientists of different schools, includes several key variables among which the «absolutes» of a person's life take a special place. The latter is not only because of the increased risks of the «postmodern conditions», but mostly because the «old truths» have been abandoned in postmodernity. There appears one word that summarizes the postmodern turn, and this word is hermeneutics in its meaning of the interpretation theory [1]. The researchers mention that each hermeneutic conception creates a wide field for the arbitrary and subjective interpretations, however while speaking about hermeneutic methods at the end of the XXth century, scientists address history and theology more often than other theoretical spheres. This fact can be explained by the practices of hermeneutics which have been dealing with religious texts for centuries. Having different approaches to literature in its broad meaning, hermeneutics has not changed its priorities up to now. It is important that in every conception of interpretation the definite type of the philosophic consciousness is reflected. T. Adorno, following the ideas coming back to Hegel, writes that the social act of the perception of the work of art is stipulated by the peculiarities of the cultural tradition; the expression of the essence of culture on the whole [2]. For us, Adorno's idea is very important because many critics suppose that at the beginning of the XXIst century it is T. Adorno who symbolizes the font of inspiration as a leader of the intellectual thought in the broad postmodernist field [3]. However, while answering the question about what hermeneutics is, scientists accentuate the idea that in the historical view hermeneutics is traditionally considered in the context of the Bible's interpretation which have its roots in «time and space» [4].

Nowadays, interpretation structures our *modus vivendi* in the representation of our «Self» both in the consciousness and practices under conditions of our everyday life, but the point is that hermeneutical analysis is still in the focus of the research of the church texts.

As far as the conditions of our changing world, no doubt, they are determined by globalization. But if only 15-20 years ago the sum of the social changes covered the meaning of the transformations in the centrifugal direction, today these processes more and more often reflect the centripetal movement of the operative capabilities of the actors' control over the historical situation. Recently the «pendulum» of globalization has oscillated in the opposite direction – towards integration, to the traditional values and cultural wealth of both large and small ethnic groups. The peoples' reactions, as for the intervention of more powerful, or opposite, cultures, have become more painful, and the failure of the multiculturalism doctrine can serve as a vivid example. On the other hand, a statement about the great «overloads» of the small ethnic groups and their cultures sounds as an axiom today, and it appears valid because they lead to their complete disappearance. No doubt, in those processes the loss of the ethnic identity plays a key role. The latter mainly concerns minor ethnic groups because it is directly connected with the ambivalent tendencies of the replacement of the socio-cultural identities, the formation of the new identities and the restoration of the ruined ones. It is significant that desymbolization of the cultural integrity of the society along with the weakness of personal integrity means a loss of the collective objectives and values. The processes of the destruction of values and radicalization of the collective identity represent the crisis of rendering socio-cultural and existential experience, which in its turn gives birth to individuals who have lost «life absolutes», behavior standards, in fact, basic moral systems.

Thus, the issues of history in the problematic field of the religious life of such small ethnic group as the Karaims acquire special importance: a number of the discreet identity components are disappearing, and the identification according to the definite ethnic group its history and religion is

becoming a determining factor. In the crucial socio-cultural transformations at the beginning of the XXIst century.

2. The historiography and discussion

As at the close of the XXth century the discussions about the globalization problems were becoming rather acute, and the critical attitude to the concepts of the neoliberal globalization were accentuated. In the XXIst century scientists focus their attention on the comparison of the globalization processes with the possibilities of the sustained development of the contemporary world. The researchers claim that globalization and integration have a positive impact on the world's development, on the one hand, while on the other, they have given birth to the serious problems, and struggling them proves to some states a difficult task to cope with [5].

However, we live in the epoch when individualism as an organizing principle of culture «has survived» God, that is why so many people put the personal interests in the center of their life's position (both in a person and in a state, both in a private and a public life). And all these is directly connected with specific morals and general morality, i.e. religion. In this context it is worth recollecting the famous citation from F. Nietzsche's «Twilight of the Idols»: when one gives up the Christian faith, one pulls the right to Christian morality out from under one's feet. This morality is by no means self-evident... Christianity is a system... By breaking one main concept out of the faith in God, one breaks the whole [6]. It is important that F. Nietzsche mentions in the «Antichrist» that in primitive Christianity one finds only concepts of a Judaic-Semitic character, ideas which have been badly mauled by the Church [7].

In the problematic and conflict situations the connection between morality and religion manifests itself distinctly, the «God's eye» is closed for many individuals and the «golden rule» is forgotten. In this connection it is significant to stress that on the whole the ethic life is conservative, we resist the changes in the ethic norms; fundamental ethic norms are close to our hearts. Here we should recollect Kant's supreme categorical imperative and its link with the old «golden rule». It is precisely in this context scientists see their hopes for the future, otherwise the «passion for the perfect life» will become pure ideology, and moral values will disappear in the world of consumerism and hedonism.

The end of philosophy, proclaimed by J. Derrida, explicitly means the end of universal truths. The conceptual multiplicity expands the problematic field of risks and threats in postmodernity. The ambivalence of the definitions against the background of the indefinite conceptual borders puts an accent on the significance of the critical reflection of the ultimate concepts, which construct «the moral law inside man». On the other hand, the position of the subjective interpreting suggests not only subjective ideas but mankind itself in its historical relativism. It is known, the specific features of the phenomenon of the «new world order» occupy the top «troubles» of postmodernity, and it is mainly because the absolutes of the moral life are subjected to the ideological attacks both in science and culture. However, scientists intend to discover and determine some «supreme» human features, the supreme values, adherent to man, and it is obvious that thinking about them is impossible outside studying the basic philosophical notions, absolutes and religious grounds of the moral life of man or woman.

Discussing the background of the Karaims' representation in history and theology it is appropriate to mention here that Karaims' origin has been in the focus of historians' debates for two centuries at least.

The Karaites (Karaims) who are defined as an «ethnoreligious minority among the Ashkenazim, the Turks, and the Slavs» in one of the latest books [8], have been mentioned by scientists and more often non-professionals in different spheres: history, cultural studies, theology in general, and Judaism, in particular. The interest to the origin and formation of the religion of the Crimean Karaims was increasing during the whole 20th century. At the beginning of the third millennium scientists, as a rule, put an accent on the Karaims' faith as the monotheistic religion with its dogmas, traditions, spiritual hierarchy, which is the religion of Iranians, Arabs, Jews,

Greeks, Ethiopians, and Karaims. On the territory of Ukraine it is the religion of the ethnic Karaims and it is noted that the Crimean Karaims is one of the most scanty world's peoples, in fact, they are an ethnic and cultural relic. In Ukraine there are about 1300 Karaims and most of them live in their historical homeland, in the Crimea. As for the Crimean Karaims, the names of their ethnos and religion are identical, but sometimes there occurs an error, when the ethnic Karaims who are only the Crimean Karaims (Turks), and the Karaims in their faith are considered identical.

Because of the contradictory views as for the origin of the Karaim's faith (Karaizm), it is important to touch briefly upon the history of the Crimean Karaims. Though there are different approaches to the origin and history of the Crimean Karaims, there is a general tendency to relate the Crimean Karaims to the Turkish group of the Altai family of the peoples. Their descendants, who first had joined the Huns tribes and then the Khazar tribes, mixed in the Crimea with the Sarmats, the Alans and the Goths [9]. M. Kizilov writes that approximately in the end of the XIIIth century the Karaims moved to the Crimea together with the Tartars [10]. But in the «Britannica» it is said that the Karaims is a Jewish sect which came in existence in the early Middle Ages [11]. Those views demonstrate that the problem of the Karaims' origin should be accentuated too, as scientists represent different ideas about the origin of both the people and its religion. Moreover, there exist some ideas that represent quite new views on the problem. For example, V. Rogozha in his recent book claims that the Karaims are descendants of the semits tribes, involved in the civilization process that gave the name to the people that had come. Those people called themselves Karaims which meant «black-headed». V. Rogozha maintains that the people of Karaims came from the land of the «noble lords». The author of the book stresses that in his writings he answers the questions that have been unclear because scientists have not been able to determine the locale of the original land of the Karaims [12].

V. Kotlyar in his preface to Rogozha's book comments that there exist several versions of the Karaims' origin in his text: the first one states that the Karaims are the descendants of the Khazars who preached the Judaism. The second one is the Cumans-Kipchaks version, according to which the Karaims' ancestors came from the land captured by Mongols. The next one claims that the Karaims are the Crimean Tartars who came into the Judaism. Then some researchers say that the Karaims are the Jews who did not keep the «blood purity» because they had stayed in the mids of the Polovostu and the Crimean Tartars but who kept their religious groundings. The next one declares that the Karaims were pure-blood Jews who did not accept the Talmud version of the Judaism. According to the sixth version the Jews came to the Crimea in the VI century B.C. together with the army of the Persian tsar Cambyses. They took the languages and the customs of the Turk people which lived in the Crimea but kept the pure «before-Talmud» Judaism; the Karaims did not adopt the Judaism from the Khazars, but the Khazars did it from the Karaims. As for the seventh version, the Karaims were children of the mixed marriages of the Khazars and the Jews in which the mother was the Khazar and the father was the Jew. The eighth version declares that in the VI century B.C. not the Jews came to the Crimea with the tsar Cambyses but the Indo-Iranian ancestors of the Karaims – the Hittites. The Hittites were assimilated with the Alans, and after the Crimea had been won by the Khazars, a part of the Alans mixed with their conquerors and adopted their official religion – the Judaism, later, – the Karaizm [13].

The famous anthropologist Alekseev V.P. writes that the Karaims represent a historical paradox in their combination of the Turk language and the Judaism religion. As the Karaims' tradition is obviously tendentious, the scientist assumes that only facts should be taken into account though they are not numerous. The first and the most important fact is the Turk language of the Khazars: Khazar names, separate words from Khazars' language, etc. The next significant fact is that the state religion in the Khazar land was the Judaism. It is known that after the fall of the Khazar realm a part of the Khazars moved into the Crimea. In the Crimea lived people whose ethnos and language are unknown to us, but their culture is known and manifested in splendid cave towns – Mangyp-Kale, Eski-Kermen, and others. Their physics type is also known, and the anthropologists maintain that if they are set is one row with the Khazars and the Karaims, they will take the extreme position. Thus, V.P. Alekseev claims that the inference is evident: the Karaims are

connected with the Khazars through the direct and immediate genetic succession, they are offsprings of the Khazars, not ancient Jews with whom they have no links [14].

Many researchers claim that Karaism is an independent religion [15]; some assume it the sect of the Judaism or put it among the ancient teachings [16]. The encyclopedia «Britannica» gives such a note: «The Karaites are a Jewish sect that emerged in the early middle ages. Like other religious minorities they (Karaites) have their own religious courts and communal organizations. Considered part of Jewish society they have maintained their separate identity by resisting intermarriage and preserving their religious lives based on the Torah as the sole source of religious law» [17]. In Wikipedia the article «Karaite Judaism» has the following statements: «Karaism is a Jewish religious movement characterized by the recognition of the Torah alone as its supreme authority in Halakha... and theology. It is distinct from mainstream Rabbinic Judaism which considers the oral Torah. Karaites maintain that all of the divine commandments handed down to Moses were recorded in the written Torah without additional oral law or explanation. As a result, Karaites Jews do not accept... the oral tradition in the Midrash or Talmud» [18].

The problem, which appears not simple, is further complicated by a large amount of papers and books written by non-professionals, by enthusiastic lovers of history and culture. That is why this article is focused on the sources of the origin and transformation of the religion of the Crimean Karaims with the accent on the scientific analyses and use of the methodology of the complex analysis. Involving the methods of the complex analyses in the historical and philosophical field is so important because the main question in the line of «risks, threats and crises» has become the anthropological question: «What is man?» Recently philosophic hermeneutics has made an extensive invasion into the sphere of ontological and gnoseological studies, and the latter allows to use the methods and approaches of those sciences in the attempt to analyze the domain of the «proper humane». While understanding that the problem of the correlation of the interdisciplinary approach and the particular science methods is still open in the Ukrainian science, we accentuate the necessity of the interdisciplinary approach in this very research. In our comparison of the methods and ideas we try to focus the analysis on the corresponding cultural and historical contexts, thus we address the historical-comparative methodology.

We assume that this article permits to speak about a systematic analysis because man is a system-creating factor in the spheres of both philosophy and theology, on the whole, – all humanitarian sciences.

3. The main material and results

As early as the middle of the XIXth century there was made an attempt to determine a font of Karaims' religion. The author of an article «Jews – Karaims» drew an interesting conclusion: «They are some descendants of Abraham and observers of Moses' law known under the name of Karaites» [19]. Then he writes, that the foundation of Karaism, which is pure Bibliism without any admixtures, by all means goes back to the most ancient times [20]. The author proceeds that the Crimean Karaims are descendants of the Israeli kingdom, who were taken as captives by Persians; they kept the Bibliism in the form that had nothing common with the Judaism because it did not admit any comments and interpretations of the Holy Writ. The conclusion made by the author testifies to the fact that Karaims' religion is more ancient than Judaism, consequently it cannot be its sect.

The question arises why Israeli and Judaics have different religions as they are one and the same ethnic group – the Jews. Contemporary scientists agree with ancient writs concerning the idea that «Israeli» and «Judaics» were different tribe formations [21]. They assert, that Joseph and Judas belong to different hereditary lines, and add that Judea, as it seems, was not the Israeli tribe [22].

In the «Britannica» it is said that the Judaism was formed much later, after Israeli mixed with other ethnic groups, and the conclusion could be expressed in the idea that Israeli were not Jews. The history of Israel was very short and then it left the world's scene. Judea existed longer and gave birth to Judaism, which in its turn gave birth to Zionism. And if Judaism came into

existence in 458 B.C., Bibliizm sprang 500 years earlier. Israel rejected the Judaic doctrine of the chosen people and went its own way [23].

After scientists established that in their ethnos the Karaims are descendants of the Turks, namely, the tribe of Karaites, the scientific theory, reported above, came to fiasco. S. Kushul, the Karaim researcher, proposed a new hypothesis, which allowed to remove contradictions that had appeared. She asserts that Karaims took Bibliizm from the local inhabitants of the Crimea who, in their turn, accepted it from Jews – Israelites. It happened approximately in the first century A. D.: grave stones at the cemetery of Balta – Timez prove that supposition [24].

Murad-Adji in his research of the initial religion of the Turks – the Tengrism paid special attention to the religion of the Crimean Karaims. The scientist stresses that Karaims–Turks are of paramount interest for theologians and historians of religion. He proceeds that Karaims who live in the Crimea and Lithuania are followers of the Old Testament. But can we call them Jews, – asks the researcher, – or they represent more ancient teaching that had come into existence before Christianity and even before Judaism? Murad-Adji agrees with the latter supposition. In the Altai and other Siberian regions where the Turks lived (in no way connected with Palestine), the ancient folk legends still exist, which put scientists at the deadlock, – in fact, they are passages of the Old Testament, its “narrative outline”. How could it happen? The first to find them was a Russian missionary, a priest Stefan Landushev who published them in the XIXth century. They represent amazing resemblance with the Bible in the narratives about the world creation, creation of man, the fall of man, the true faith and others [16].

Even if we take into account that the Tengrism is very close in its essence to the Christianity of the IIIrd-Vth centuries, we shall have a question, whether the religion of Israel is a transformed Tengrism, which had come into existence in the Tibet and became monotheistic in the first millennium B.C. History provides similar examples: the Turks’ religion in 301 and 312 A.D. correspondingly was rendered in the transformed way first to the Armenians and then to the Byzantine people [25].

One more question arises concerning the date when the religion of the Karaims–Turks was first called Karaizm. Professor A. Dubisky writes that in the end of the VIIIth century opponents of the Talmudism found their defender in the person of Anan Ben David, born in Basra in the South of Iraq. By all means he can be considered a reformer and organizer of the anti-Talmud movement, and in the outcome that gave an original Karaims’ religion [24].

The principle dogma of Anan’ and his followers lay in the invariability of the laws given in the Old Testament, the laws that do not need to be commented or added. In this connection the need for constant and deep studies of the Bible was stressed, and this precisely was reflected in the word “Karaim”. The stem of this word is derived from the Old Jew and the Arabic verb “Kara”, which means “to read” (The Holy Writ). Anan is represented as a founder of Karaims’ laws, and his teaching is collected in the book “Code of laws”. Karaims believe the Bible to be the Old Testament, i.e. Torah, as well as the books of the Prophets and hagiographies. Of paramount importance is Decalogue, ten Commandments. This is the main ethic law of the followers of Karaizm. Along with Decalogue there are so-called “Ten dogmas of faith teaching”. Anan believed in the immortality of the soul and its transmigration, denied all the rights of the clergy and admitted interpretation of the religious foundations. Anan’s teaching is similar to the teaching of the Arabic philosopher Basil ibn Ata – the founder of the Muslim sect of Mutazilites. But the most important fact in Anan’s teaching is his belief in the single indivisible God and the Revelations of the three prophets – Jesus, Mohammed and Moses [26]. Anan has its followers: Benjamin Nahavendi and Daniil al Kumucu, who lived in the IXth century in Iran. Abu Jusuf Jakub is considered one of the most important authors of the law-creating manuscripts of the Middle Ages. He lived in the first half of the Xth century in Egypt, and his main work is “The book of the luminaries and watching towers”, in which he rendered the Karaims’s laws.

Taking into consideration all mentioned above we can reconstruct the consequence of the transformation of the Crimean Karaims’ religion. The part of the Karaevs, which was not numerous, took the fortress Kurk-Yer near Bahchisarai in the Crimea in the first century A.D. They founded

their principality which existed till the XIXth century. Through the local proselytes of the religion they either adopted the Bibliizm, or they took it from the Altai, from their Turk tribesmen. However, the presence of the Aramaic print on the gravestones in Balta-Timez cemetery proves the supposition of the Karaims' adoption of the Bibliizm from the local people.

The main part of the Karaeys who were in the Khazar Khaganate adopted the Old Testament as the state religion in 730 A.D. under the reign of the Khagan Bulan who kept the former faith in the God of Heaven-Tengri. Then in 799-809 A.D. under the Khagan Obady the Turks strengthened their faith by the adoption of the Karaims's religious teaching which was very close in its essence not only to the Bibliizm but also to Islam and Christianity. It is worth while mentioning that in that period there existed several religions in the Khazars' land: Islam, Christianity of the Nestorian type, shamanism and animistic beliefs.

It is precisely about those facts that the King Josef informed the Jewish high official Khasdai ibn Shafut in his letter, telling him that the king Obady was a law-abiding and a just man who strengthened the Kingdom and the faith according to the law and the rule [21].

The court of the Caliph al-Mansur (VIII A.D.) declared Anan's teaching (Karaizm) a new faith. The opinions of both the Orthodox Church and the Catholical Church were identical: both Churches considered that faith close to the Mohammedan faith, and several documentary sources testify to that fact. At the same time the Karai continued to believe in the God of the Heaven Tengri and the sacred oaths, they remained the Tengrians and shamanists despite the official adoption of the Karaims' religion [15].

4. The conclusions

On the grounds of the research given above it is possible to come to the following conclusions.

1. Though the last decades have testified a turn into the recognition of the ethnic authenticity of the Karaims and their religion, scientists still accentuate the ambiguity of both the ethnic origin of the Karaims and the roots of their religious beliefs. The valid understanding that might delete ideas and conceptions, which lead to the distortions and tendentious visions, lies in the field of hermeneutic analysis of the historical texts.
2. The Crimean Karaims (Karai) were Tengrians up to the first century A.D. together with the rest of the Turks. Then they adopted the pure Bibliizm through the local peoples of the Crimea. After Anan's teaching had come into existence in VIII A.D. they adopted Karaizm together with the rest of the Karai who were a part of the Khazar Khaganate. Anan's teaching supplemented the Bibliizm without changing its essence.
3. The foundation of the Karaims' religion is the Bibliizm. As the teaching of the Bibliizm had come into existence 500 years before the appearance of the Judaism, the Karaims' religion cannot be considered a sect of the Judaism.

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