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Historical Outline of the Short Activity of the Karaite Public Primary School in Troki, 1918–1923

Rys historyczny z krótkiej działalności powszechnej szkoły karaimskiej w Trokach (1918–1923)

ABSTRACT

The aim of the scientific article on the general Karaite school in Trakai in 1918–1923 is to discuss five years of the only Karaite school that operated in the first years after Poland regained independence.

Karaims are currently the smallest ethnic minority in Poland, which has retained its cultural identity, partly due to the importance of knowledge and science as superior religious values. The word *karaim* itself means the reader, which is why the schools in which

PUBLICATION INFO			
			e-ISSN: 2449-8467 ISSN: 2082-6060
			
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SOURCE OF FUNDING: Project of the National Science Centre in Poland, Opus 3, funds allocated pursuant to the decision no. DEC-2011/03/B/HS6/03480, titled: <i>Cultural and Educational Activity of Karaims in the Second Polish Republic</i>			
SUBMITTED: 2020.12.20	ACCEPTED: 2021.07.01	PUBLISHED ONLINE: 2022.06.30	
WEBSITE OF THE JOURNAL: https://journals.umcs.pl/rh		EDITORIAL COMMITTEE E-mail: reshistorica@umcs.pl	
			

the skills of reading the scriptures were so important. The first official information about the Karaite school in Trakai comes from 1576. The activities of the school were interrupted by the outbreak of the First World War and the hostilities forced the Karaims to leave Trakai. The history of the Karaite school in Trakai appears again in archival documents from the interwar period.

The article was prepared on the basis of archival documents kept in the Lithuanian Central State Archives, in the Wroblewski Library of the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences in Vilnius in the document collection of the Archives of the Karaim Clerical Administration in Trakai and in the Lithuanian Central State Archive in Vilnius in the fond of the Vilnius School District Board in the files of the school inspectorate of the Trakai district.

This text discusses the activity of the Karaim general school in Trakai (1918–1923), taking into account school conditions, organizational and structural changes, the curriculum, methods and forms, and the composition of teachers and students, and shows the importance of the Karaite school for Karaims and the Trakai community.

The short years of operation of the Karaite school in Trakai testify to its phenomenon, because it was the only school of a religious minority in the period in question, which constituted the basis for the development and preservation of their cultural identity for the Karaims.

Key words: Karaims, primary school, Second Polish Republic

STRESZCZENIE

Celem artykułu naukowego dotyczącego powszechnej szkoły karaimejskiej w Trokach w latach 1918–1923 jest omówienie pięciu lat działalności jedynej szkoły karaimejskiej, która funkcjonowała w pierwszych latach po odzyskaniu przez Polskę niepodległości.

Karaimi są obecnie najmniejszą mniejszością etniczną w Polsce, która zachowała swoją odrębność kulturową, po części za sprawą znaczenia wiedzy i nauki, jako nadrzędnych wartości religijnych. Samo słowo *karaim* oznacza bowiem czytającego, dlatego tak istotne były szkoły, w których zdobywano umiejętności czytania pisma świętego. Pierwsze oficjalne informacje o szkole karaimejskiej w Trokach pochodzą z 1576 r. Działalność szkoły przerwał wybuch pierwszej wojny światowej a działania wojenne zmusiły Karaimów do opuszczenia Trok. Na nowo historia szkoły karaimejskiej w Trokach pojawia się w dokumentach archiwalnych z okresu międzywojennego.

Artykuł został opracowany na podstawie dokumentów archiwalnych znajdujących się w Litewskim Centralnym Archiwum Państwowym, w Bibliotece Litewskiej Akademii Nauki w Wilnie im. Wróblewskich w kolekcji dokumentów Archiwum Karaimejskiego Zarządu Duchownego w Trokach oraz w Litewskim Centralnym Archiwum Państwowym w Wilnie w zespole Kuratorium Okręgu Szkolnego Wileńskiego w teczках inspektoratu szkolnego powiatu trockiego.

W niniejszym tekście omówiono działalność powszechnej szkoły karaimejskiej w Trokach (1918–1923), uwzględniając warunki szkolne, zmiany organizacyjne i strukturalne, program nauczania, metody i formy, skład osobowy nauczycieli i uczniów oraz ukazano znaczenie szkoły karaimejskiej dla Karaimów jak i dla społeczności trockiej.

Krótkie lata działalności szkoły karaimejskiej w Trokach świadczą o jej fenomenie, bo była to jedyna szkoła mniejszości religijnej w omawianym okresie, która stanowiła dla Karaimów podstawę rozwoju i zachowania ich tożsamości kulturowej.

Słowa kluczowe: Karaimi, szkoła powszechna, II RP

INTRODUCTION

The Karaites form the least numerous ethnic minority group in Poland (several hundred people), having preserved their own language, religion and culturally distinctive features. The origin of this ethnic group goes back to the Khazars and the Polovtsian, their religious practices are related to Karaimism. The Karaites have been present in Poland for over six hundred years; as early as in the 16th century, the first Karaite settlers arrived in the Great Duchy of Lithuania from the Crimean Peninsula. In order to prevent the country from Teutonic invasion, Vytautas the Great settled the Karaite community in the towns bordering with Teutonic land. The Karaite communities resided in Salatay, Birże, Karaimiszki, Poswól, Pompiany, Poniewież, Nowe Miasto, Troki, Vilnius, Krakinov, and later also in Ruthenian castles in Lutsk, Olynka, Karaimovka, Lviv, Halitsh, Zalukev and Kokizov¹. These towns thrived economically, also thanks to Karaite settlers, who apart from prospering as mercenaries developed agriculture, trade and craftsmanship. As they had a good command of Hebrew and Karaite languages, they often served in the army and in the diplomacy. There were also eminent scholars and writers in this ethnic group. As an example, Izaak ben Abraham, a philosopher and a polemical writer from Troki, was famous in the 16th century. In the next century, two doctors: Zarach Natanovitch and Abraham ben Josijahu gained considerable fame in the royal court of John III Sobieski. Ezra Nisanovitch from Troki was another distinguished doctor, working for the Radziwiłł family. Mordechai Nisanovitch made his name famous as the author of a treatise on the Karaite religion. Hazzan from Lutsk, Abraham Firkovitch², is considered to be the first to have done the serious research on the origin of the Karaite community. Thus, the intellectual potential within such a small community was really impressive. It was the result of intellectual traditions that were passed within the community over generations, the foundation of which was religion. Even the origin of the word „Karaim” – *reading* – reflects Karaites' need to recognize the importance of books and theological studies. Karaite religious identity is based on the need to study, to gain knowledge. That is the reason why the Karaite community regarded the place where they were taught Karaite and Hebrew languages, where they read the Pentateuch and studied religion as an institution of great impor-

¹ Tradition of civic freedom goes back to the middle of the 15th century, when in 1441 Polish king Kazimierz Jagiellonian granted Magdeburg Law to them, being confirmed by subsequent monarchs.

² Hazzan – in Karaimism: a person who is a spiritual leader of a Karaite commune.

tance. Karaite religious school in Troki might have operated since the 15th century – it was when the first kenesa was built there. First official records mentioning the Karaite school in Troki go back to 1576, when Braclav governor Janusz (?) Zbaraski confirmed the legitimacy of madrash (school for children) being built there in the area owned by the Karaite commune. Other sources mention the fact of John Kazimierz having granted the privilege to Karaims in 1665 permitting them to reconstruct the kenesa and the school destroyed during the wars. Money necessary to rebuild the school was borrowed from the community residing in Nowe Miasto, located nearby. However, in 1794 it was again destroyed by the fire in Troki. In 1869, the Karaite Spiritual Board in Troki supported the school, using the fees from the lease of the commune house. In 1894, Feliks Malecki, the hazzan and a teacher, reconstructed the building of a madrash to enable the students to learn in Karaite elementary school. During the partitions, the school was co-financed by the czar and the Karaim commune in Troki, it was equipped with the library; the school was free of charge and covered four years of study. The school certainly developed Karaims' intellectual potential and their cultural competences; it was also an integrating factor for the whole community. Numerous Karaite scholars, famous all over Europe, were educated in the school³. The outbreak of the First World War interrupted the school activities; the Karaims were forced to leave Troki.

During the inter-war period, the Karaite school in Troki appears in the archival documents again. This period was a very intensive time, considering cultural, educational and religious development within Karaim community⁴.

The aim of the publication is to analyze the further events related to the only Karaite school working from 1918 till 1923, during the first years of Polish regained independence. The access to the archival documents was possible thanks to the following institutions: Lithuanian Central State Archives [hereinafter: LCVA], the Wróblewski Library at the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences in Vilnius [hereinafter: LMAVB] as well as the collection of archival documents in the Karaite Archive in Troki, No. 219. Such documents as the correspondence between school director and the Board of Education in Vilnius [hereinafter: BEV], school registers and the cur-

³ See: Lietuvos mokslų akademijos Vrublevskių bibliotekos [dalej: LMAVB], fondas [dalej: f.] 301–124, k. 124; S. Gąsiorowski, *Karaimi w Koronie i na Litwie w XV–XVIII w.*, Kraków–Budapeszt 2008, s. 391; W. Syrokomla, *Wycieczki po Litwie w promieniach od Wilna. (Troki, Stokliszki, Jezno, Funie, Niemież, Miedniki etc.)*, t. 1, Wilno 1857, s. 74, 82; M. Bałaban, *Studja Historyczne*, Warszawa 1927, s. 59.

⁴ See: U. Wróblewska, *Działalność kulturalno-oświatowa Karaimów w Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej*, Białystok 2015, *passim*.

ricula, students' attendance lists and parents' petition to continue school's activities are to be found there.

The documents in LCVA, regarding the BEV are a valuable source of information while analyzing the operation of the Karaite school in Troki⁵. The documents of 1919–1920 reflect the structure of the education system under the jurisdiction of Civil Board of Eastern Territories and the ordinance of Commissary General of Eastern territories⁶. In 1919, when the Civil Board of Eastern Territories was established, the Public Enlightenment Section was formed – it was administered by Lucjan Zarzecki, the author of national school concept. Territories being the subject to the Commissary General were divided into four districts: Vilnius district, Minsk district, Polesie district and Volyn district. District School Inspectors were appointed for each district, all types of schools were obliged to report to them, they administered the educational procedures and the district inspectors. When eastern borders were defined, the education structure within Vilnius district was administered by the Education Department of Middle Lithuania until the Vilnius Board of Education was formed in May 1922. Concurrently, the district inspectors were obliged to prepare the reports until Vilnius education district was established by the Minister of Religious Affairs and Public Education of Vilnius district in 1922⁷. In LCVA, there are such archival materials as protocols of Troki Municipal Council, reports and post-inspection reports from the Karaite Elementary School in Troki. These are important documents, reporting the beginnings of Karaite education in the Second Polish Republic. Since the nature of the archival documents in this publication is unique, one of the first reports from the Elementary School in Troki has been attached at the end of this article. The content of the article contributes to depicting the only Karaite school in the Second Republic of Poland⁸.

⁵ T. Serafin, *Władze szkolne w latach 1917/18–1937/38*, Warszawa 1938.

⁶ The ordinance defined the duties of school inspectors. They were obliged to present monthly reports to the Head of Public Enlightenment Section in the Board of Eastern Territories on Elementary Schools, Primary Schools and other forms of education, regardless the language of instruction. Rozporządzenie tymczasowe (15931/259) Komisarza Generalnego Ziem Wschodnich, dotyczące szkolnictwa i oświaty, „Dziennik Urzędowy Ministerstwa Wyznań Religijnych i Oświecenia Publicznego Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej” [dalej: „DUMWRiOP”] 1919, nr 12–13, poz. 2, s. 401–403.

⁷ „DUMWRiOP” 1922, nr 19, poz. 195, s. 343.

⁸ The Karaite Elementary School and its role in history of education was fully elaborated in: U. Wróblewska, *Działalność*.

ELEMENTARY KARAITE SCHOOL IN TROKI (1918–1923)

In 1918 Karaims were gradually returning to their family town, Troki; Rafał Abkowicz, son of Abraham Szemoel Abkovitch and Estera nee Aranowicz, grandson of Ananias Abraham Abkovitch, hazzan from Troki, was one of the first people to return home⁹. Before the outbreak of the war, Abkovitch gained considerable religious education, being taught by hazzans Bogusław Firkovitch and Zachariasz Mickiewicz. They instilled the idea of midrash „being the moral foundation of Karaite spiritual existence into his mind”¹⁰, this rule determined all his social work in Karaite commune in Troki. Abkovitch, aware of the great importance of studying in maintaining Karaite distinctiveness and identity, immediately began organizing the school and the temple. Being enthusiastic and eager, he began teaching religion and Karaite language. He was the first Karaim to maintain school documentation and to correspond with school inspectorate; he wrote the petitions to education authorities to prepare formal grounds to Karaite schooling. This was how he recalled rebuilding the school:

I managed to collect all the school desks and arrange them in the same manner as they were arranged before the Karaims left Troki, I even managed to find teacher’s desk and put it in the right place. The midrash had to be heated, though, so I persuaded Józef Nowicki to travel to the forest with me; there we managed to buy some wooden splints from a forest ranger and bring them to Troki. So, we had the fuel, then we had to chop the wood and there were no volunteers to do the job. I had to learn this skill. I managed to do everything. Osip Ananiewicz (Milukas), a gabbai, employed a woman who tidied the room and fired the stove. The midrash was finally heated. There were only few people. We managed to gather in the kenesa once a week, on Saturday, as the interior was scruffy and cold. I was teaching my sister Sophia on weekdays, then some other children joined us, finally I managed to restore our beloved place¹¹.

⁹ Rafał Abkovitch was born in Troki on 16 III 1896, he died on 12 IX 1992 in Wrocław. His father, Abraham Szemoel Abkovitch, came from an eminent family of Karaite hazzans. In 1911, before the outbreak of the World War I, he completed the 4-grade Karaite school, with Russian as the language of instruction, then he attended theological courses at the Spiritual Karaite Board. After completing his education, Abkovitch worked in the District Tax Office and studied for the sixth-grade exam of the middle school. In July 1915, he conscribed to the Russian army as a volunteer. In March 1919, he fought in the WWI as an infantry regiment commander. R. Abkowicz, *Wspomnienia, „Awazymyz”* 1999, 1 (2), 1999, s. 4–5.

¹⁰ „że podstawą moralną istnienia karańskiego dżymatu jest midrasz”. *Ibidem*, s. 4.

¹¹ „Udało mi się zebrać wszystkie ławki i rozstawić tak, jak one stały przed wyjazdem Karaimów z Trok, nawet biurko, przy którym urzędowali nasi nauczyciele odnalazłem i ustawiłem na właściwym miejscu. Tak odrestaurowany midrasz w zimie potrzebował opału. Musiałem starać się o ten opał. Namówiłem b. p. Józefa Nowickiego, aby pojechał ze mną do lasu i jakoś udało się nam zakupić u leśniczego szczyapy i z wielkim trudem przywieźć je do Trok. Mieliliśmy już opał, trzeba było narząbać, niestety nie było wśród

Karaite school in Troki began operating formally in April 1919 when the School Inspectorate in Troki district¹² approved establishing the elementary school for Karaite children with Karaim language of instruction¹³. The school operated within Troki County, Vilnius district, where during a schoolyear 1919/1920 there were 68 elementary schools operating, teaching 392 pupils and employing 94 teachers¹⁴. Officially, Marie Roubianke¹⁵ was employed as a headmaster as well as a general education teacher whereas Rafał Abkowitch was responsible for religious education and Karaim language classes. Formal decision to open the Karaite school meant the salaries for the teachers were paid by state budget. During the first year of its activity, there were 32 pupils enrolled to the institution, including 14 boys and 18 girls, which accounted for nearly 20% all school children residing in Troki¹⁶. Another 26 pupils began school the next month¹⁷. Varying numbers of students were the result of migration. Altogether, there were around 58 students attending the Karaite school during the schoolyear 1919/1920. The pupils studied every day; they received education in Karaim for 4 hours, while 1 lesson was taught in Polish¹⁸.

Unfortunately, the newly formed school operated only for 11 months. Despite the efforts made by Rafał Abkowitch, its activity ranged from Sep-

Karaimów ochotników. Musiałem nauczyć się rąbania drzewa. Przygotowałem go o własnych siłach. Wreszcie ówczesny gabbaj Osip Ananiewicz (Milukas) wynajął kobietę, która sprzątnęła salę i napaliła w piecach. Midrasz był ogrzany. Uczniów było mało. Więc mogliśmy zbierać się na nabożeństwo, na razie w soboty, bo kienesa była zaniedbana, a do tego nie ogrzewana. W dni powszednie zacząłem stopniowo uczyć swoją siostrę Zofię i znalazło się jeszcze kilka zaniedbanych dzieci i w ten sposób został odrestaurowany przeze mnie nasz kochany midrasz". *Ibidem*.

¹² J. Gierowska-Kałaaur, *Zarząd Cywilny Ziem Wschodnich (19 luty 1919 – 9 września 1920)*, Warszawa 2003; S. Walasek, *Szkolnictwo powszechne na ziemiach północno-wschodnich II Rzeczypospolitej (1915–1939)*, Kraków 2006.

¹³ There were 7 elementary schools established in Troki: one Karaite school, four Polish schools and two Jewish schools. Lietuvos centrinis valstybės archyvas [dalej: LCVA], f. 172, apyrašas [dalej: ap.] 1, bylos [dalej: b.] 24, k. 1.

¹⁴ J. Gierowska-Kałaaur, *op. cit.*, s. 242.

¹⁵ The data of employment is found in Rafał Abkiewicz memoirs in: „Awazymyz” 1999, 1 (2), s. 4; LCVA, f. 172, ap.1, b. 24, k. 14; b. 507, k. 1.

¹⁶ LCVA, f. 172, ap. 1, b. 506, k. 7–8, 11.

¹⁷ The first students to begin school in 1919 were: Michał Firkowicz, Zarach Firkowicz, Marcin Firkowicz, Marcin Kapłanowski, Mariusz(?) Kapłanowski, Władysław Poziemski, Kazimierz Pilecki, Józef Józefowicz, Izaak Jutkiewicz, Anani Żarnowski, Władysław Zajączkowski, Zofia Abkowiczówna, Julia Firkowiczówna, Anna Firkowiczówna, Zinaida Firkowiczówna, Emila Firkowiczówna, Walentyna Łobanosówna, Galina Łobanosówna, Ludmiła Poziemska, Natalia Jutkiewiczówna, Liza Jutkiewiczówna, Zofia Jutkiewiczówna, Emilia Jutkiewiczówna, Justyna Jutkiewiczówna, Kamila Jutkiewiczówna, Adela Jutkiewiczówna. LCVA, f. 172, ap. 1, b. 24, k. 14a.

¹⁸ LCVA, f. 172, ap. 1, b. 118, k. 19.

tember 1919 until July 1920. Due to unfavorable political situation in Vilnius district, it was suspended during summer break. The situation was far from being stable due to military actions, conflict with Lithuania and constant migrations of Karaim families.

No sooner than in December 1920, when political circumstances indicated certain stabilization, the Karaim Commune in Troki wrote the petition to the School Inspector of Troki district asking to re-establish the school and to appoint a teacher of Polish language¹⁹. The result of the petition marked another stage of Karaite school. At the beginning of 1921, hazzan Szymon Firkowitch was appointed the headmaster and a teacher of religion and Karaite language; he had graduated from the realschule in Perm and the Alexandrovskoe Spiritual Karaite College in Eupatoria. Maria Szymańska was employed as a teacher; apart from the governmental salary, she could live in a teacher's flat at school. Eliazs Dubinski was a school janitor whose salary was paid by the Municipal Council in Troki²⁰. The Municipality in Troki supplied the school with the fuel in order to heat the school building²¹, while Karaite commune was responsible for paying electricity bills and maintained the teachers' room and the canteen²². In order to settle the legal status of the Karaite school, in June 1922, the school equipment, including furniture, library and teaching aids, was taken over by the Karaite Spiritual Board²³.

Whole Karaite community was engaged in the problems related to the Karaite school. The school was partly administrated and organized by the Board of School Protection appointed by the parents; Lidia Poziemka was the secretary of the Board. In 1922, the building destroyed during the war was renovated. The Spiritual Karaite Board covered the cost of necessary building materials using the funds received from the district council, so the roof and the floors were renovated, and the windows were changed²⁴.

In 1921, when the school was re-opened, there were 47 pupils in the age from 6 to 15 years old, enrolled to the school, including 23 boys and 24 girls. Next schoolyear, this number was reduced to 40 pupils. The big-

¹⁹ The Department of Education reactivated the school, following the previous terms and conditions: all subjects taught in Polish, religion and Karaite language covered during no more than 5 hours. LMAVB, f. 301–219, k. 90.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, k. 10.

²¹ *Ibidem*, k. 20.

²² *Ibidem*, k. 2–2v.

²³ *Ibidem*, k. 64.

²⁴ The district council in Vilnius covered the costs of building materials necessary to complete the renovation, such as roof tiles, flooring and other wooden elements, on the request of Szymon Firkovitch. The total renovation cost accounted for 693,000. *Ibidem*, k. 12, 13.

gest number of pupils attended the Section One – there were 15 pupils learning in this form. In the Second Section there were 10 pupils learning, in the Third and Fourth Section there were 9 and 5 pupils respectively²⁵.

In the four-grade Karaite school, the pupils were taught until the noon, from Monday to Saturday. Maria Szymańska taught such general subjects as Polish, History, Arithmetic and Geography, she was also responsible for teaching Gymnastics and Music while the Director, hazzan Szymon Firkovitch, taught Religion and Karaite Language. The pupils were evaluated after each term; such qualities as attention, diligence and good behavior were assessed as well. In a schoolyear 1922/1923, Natalia Poziemski, Roman Ławrynowicz and Włodzimierz Poziemski were awarded due to their school achievements²⁶. Pupils wanted to achieve the best results at school, as it guaranteed starting the following schoolyear in the upper form. However, when their school marks were not satisfactory, they were obliged to repeat the course. Karaim pupils rarely failed the course and repeated the class, it usually happened in case of Karaite language lessons. The teacher, Szymon Firkovitch must have been rather demanding and students' competence in Karaite language was probably rather low. Parents did not always use their mother tongue while communicating with their children, so it could affect the difficulties the pupils had during the lessons of Karaite language. It was Russian that was an official language before 1918, being commonly used by Karaims, so in June 1921 most of school documents and statements were completed in Russian²⁷. This is the reason why in the inter-war period students could not expect any considerable help from their parents, as they had been raised in the Russian sector of Poland, they had been educated in Moscow, Saint Petersburg or Crimea, they had worked in tsarist offices being more competent in Russian rather than Polish or Karaite.

Moreover, the events children experienced during the war certainly affected their sense of security, so the difficulties they faced at school might have resulted from certain traumatic situations they experienced, such as forced migration and the constant necessity to run away. Students' psychophysical condition affected their learning abilities and the results they achieved during learning process. The children who begun their education in the Karaite school had been born before the inter-war period. Anna Bezerowicz (born 28 June 1907)²⁸, Helena Dubińska (born 15 April 1909)²⁹,

²⁵ *Ibidem*, k. 70–73.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, k. 68–69.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, k. 34–39, 41–42, 45, 47–50, 56, 58, 63, 65.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, k. 57.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, k. 61.

Justyna Józefowicz (born 22 February 1909)³⁰, Eugenia Dubińska (born 23 December 1911)³¹, Zinaida Firkowicz (born 8 September 1912)³² were all born before 1918. Their experience related to World War I certainly affected their sense of security. Several children attended elementary schools in Moscow – Halina Łobanos (born 7 July 1912)³³ or Włodzimierz Poziemski (born 22 March 1909). The fact of several Karaite children attending Russian schools earlier certainly affected their problems while learning in Polish.

Another significant problem during the initial period of elementary education was certainly pupils' poor attendance, considering the need to increase the level of education within Polish society. It was an urgent issue in the areas where illiteracy was a major problem; there the pupils' attendance directly affected the enrolment rates. That is why, both in Karaite school and other elementary schools in eastern borderlands of Poland, the education authorities were concerned about the low attendance rates. In 1921, due to poor attendance rates, more than two thirds Karaim pupils had to repeat the schoolyear. Only 17 pupils out of 47 could have completed the school year with satisfactory or good results. The most common reason why the pupils' attendance was so poor was the necessity to fulfil various household chores. In 1919/1922, Karaims were still in the process of restoring the houses they had left earlier and the children were often engaged in household duties – school was the secondary duty. Karaims from Troki made their living from gardening and farming, that is why school attendance was reduced in spring and summer, when their duty was to help in these jobs. Moreover, political situation in the Eastern Territories of Poland made pupils' parents feel skeptical about the education, affecting their school attendance. When the political situation and daily life became more stable, pupils' attendance in Karaite school visibly increased. In the schoolyear 1922/1923, there were only 5 students out of 33 who did not manage to complete the schoolyear successfully; as they had joined the class during the schoolyear, they probably did not manage to catch up with the material.

Educational procedures of Karaite school in Troki resulted from the obligatory curricula for elementary schools following the ideas of state education. In order to maintain the status of the school, both the pupils and the whole Karaite community were obliged to accept the regulations

³⁰ *Ibidem*, k. 62.

³¹ *Ibidem*, k 59.

³² *Ibidem*, k. 46.

³³ *Ibidem*, k. 44.

and directives issued by The Ministry of Religious Affairs and Public Education. According to the directives of the ministry, a schoolyear had to be commenced and completed with religious celebrations. All ethnic groups were obliged to respect this ordinance, so they organized the appropriate celebration in their church or another temple. Similarly, Karaims celebrated the beginning and the end of every schoolyear in the *kenesa*. Pupils participated in the celebration together with their parents. Additionally, school authorities released Karaim pupils from their lessons on the days of religious festivals. The headmaster, Szymon Firkowicz, was responsible for the curricula, which also had to respect state celebrations. He sent the reports to the Education Inspector, which is the reason why we are able to read the report of celebrating the anniversary of 3rd May Constitution in 1923.

„In response to your letter of May 18th, 1923, I have an honor to announce that on Thursday 3 May the religious service was held in order to commemorate the Constitution of 3 May at Karaite *Kenesa* in Troki, attended by local authorities, all parishioners and all the pupils attending the Karaite school.

I held the service, as the *hazzan* of Troki, the service was observed by F. Malecki, representing the leader of the Karaite Spiritual Board, who arrived in Troki from Vilnius to participate in the event. After the service, Mr Malecki held the speech presenting the unquestionable significance of the Constitution to the Polish State. After the speech, he addressed the Karaim community, emphasizing the great role of Karaite traditions being highly appreciated in the communities with whom they co-existed. Mr Malecki asked the Karaim community to maintain these traditions.

After the religious service, the parishioners of the *kenesa* in Troki, and the pupils and the teachers of the Karaite school took part in the procession; unfortunately, as the procession had not been announced before, the Karaite school did not manage to perform as a separate organization”³⁴.

³⁴ „W odpowiedzi na pismo Pana z dn. 18 maja r.b. [1923] mam zaszczyt komunikować że w czwartek dn. 3-V w Trockiej Kienesie Karaimskiej odprawione zostało uroczyste nabożeństwo z powodu rocznicy Konstytucji 3-go Maja, na którym obecni byli przedstawiciele władz i wszyscy parafianie teje kienesy jak również i wszyscy uczniowie szkoły karaimskiej.

Nabożeństwo było odprawiane przeze mnie, jako *Hazzana* Trockiego w obecności p.o. *Hachana* i Prezesa Zarządu Duchownego Karaimskiego p. F. Maleckiego, który w tym celu przybył z Wilna. Po odprawieniu nabożeństwa, p. Malecki wygłosił mowę, w której szczegółowo przedstawił doniosłe znaczenie Konstytucji 3-go Maja dla Państwa Polskiego. Przemówienie owe zakończył zwrotem do ludności karaimskiej z prośbą o podtrzymanie dawnych tradycji narodowości karaimskiej, która przez swe zachowanie się zawsze zdo-

All the pupils and the whole Karaite community participated in the celebration of the Constitution Anniversary. Karaim pupils who learnt at school, had to be educated according to the regulations of state education of the Second Republic of Poland. While participating in school activities and celebrations, they learnt the content defined as „Poland and Its Culture”³⁵. Schools, propagating the ideas of Polonization, followed the state national policy agenda, particularly directed at national minorities, being regarded as posing the centrifugal threat. However, Karaims as a small, assimilated and mainly religious group accorded with ethnic policy of the Polish state, so education authorities tended to treat them favorably³⁶.

Apart from its educational goals, the school in Troki served an integrational role for Karaim community. In a restored and warm building, Karaim community held commune meetings, various courses, meetings related to education. The school building was also rented by municipal authorities. For example, in March 1923, school authorities organized the session of elementary school teachers from Troki and other communes, working on such subjects as organization of local schools and the responsibilities of district teachers³⁷.

School library in Karaite school in Troki was well equipped and it was still increasing its supplies. The teacher Maria Szymańska was responsible

bywała stanowisko pełnego uznania w tych narodowościach i w tych państwach, gdzie zamieszkiwała.

Po nabożeństwie parafianie Trockiej Kienesy jak i uczniowie szkoły karaimejskiej z nauczycielami na czele przyjmowali udział w pochodzie, lecz z powodu tego, że urządzenie pochodu było niespodzianką szkoła karaimejska nie zdołała zorganizować się w osobną organizację i przygotować się do przyjęcia udziału w pochodzie, jako osobna organizacja”. *Ibidem*, k. 22–23.

³⁵ The authors of the curricula insisted that they did not interfere with the educational development of ethnic minorities. According to Sergiusz Hassen and Bogdan Nawroczyński, their aim was to make the students familiar with Polish culture, form their respect to the state of Poland, increase the sense of belonging to the state and the civic responsibility according to the program of state assimilation. See: S. Mauersberg, *Szkolnictwo powszechne dla mniejszości narodowych w Polsce w latach 1918–1939*, Wrocław 1968, s. 206–210; E. Magiera, *Wychowanie państwowe w szkolnictwie powszechnym Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej*, Szczecin 2003, s. 53; idem, *Problem mniejszości narodowych w jędrzejewiczowskiej reformie programu historii dla szkół powszechnych w okresie międzywojennym*, w: *Rola mniejszości w kulturze i oświacie polskiej w latach 1700–1939*, red. A. Bilewicz, S. Walasek, Wrocław 1998, s. 229–235.

³⁶ Educational policy towards ethnic minorities See: U. Wróblewska, *Polityka oświatowa wobec mniejszości narodowych, grup etnicznych i wyznaniowych zamieszkujących Kresy Wschodnie w II RP*, „Nauka” 2011, 2, s. 109–124; S. Mauersberg, *Szkolnictwo*; idem, *Komu służyła szkoła w Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej?: społeczne uwarunkowania dostępu do oświaty*, Wrocław–Warszawa–Kraków–Gdańsk–Łódź 1988.

³⁷ LMAVB, f. 301–219, k. 98.

for the library, so apart from being a teacher she was also a librarian. The library was open every afternoon, from 4pm to 6pm. Not only the students could use the library but it was also available to all the community in Troki. There were 298 items in the library, 214 books in the collection were the property of the Karaite Spiritual Board. The library was mainly attended by the pupils of 7–15 years of age and the young people between in the age of 15–20. People aged 20–40 years old infrequently used the library supplies, whereas Karaims over 50 hardly ever borrowed any books. The data collected in 1922 shows that there were 35 pupils using the library while there were as many as 74 adults using the place, including 20 women and 15 men. It demonstrates the fact of not only pupils but also adults being interested in knowledge. Karaite farmers, craftsmen, office workers and people of other professions used the library supplies. The readers borrowed fiction, historical books, books on sociology and economics and the books related to particular professions. In the supplies of the Karaite library, readers could also choose poetry and drama. Readers demonstrated varied reading profiles, depending on their personal interests. Juvenile literature was the most popular category, though fiction, historical books, socio-economic books and poetry were also in demand. They hardly ever borrowed books on theatre and these concentrating on certain vocational areas³⁸.

The development of Karaite school was stopped just before the beginning of a new schoolyear. At the end of August 1923, resulting from the reorganization of school structures, Karaite school was connected with another 7-grade elementary school in Troki, following the decision of the Board of Education in Vilnius³⁹. The teachers, hazzan Szymon Firkowicz and Maria Szymbańska, were employed on new terms and conditions in the new elementary school⁴⁰.

Karaite community took certain steps in order to rescue their school. The Karaite Religious Commune in Troki sent a request letter to the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Public Education asking to reactivate the 7-grade Karaite Elementary School in Troki⁴¹. In the petitions addressed to education authorities and to the Polish government, Szymon Firkowicz emphasized the significance and the huge role the Karaite school played while educating and raising the new Karaite generation. „Being the representative of Karaite clergy and considering parents' feelings, we feel our

³⁸ LCVA, f. 171, ap. 1, b. 411, k. 121.

³⁹ LMAVB, f. 301–219, k. 85–86.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, k. 78; „Myśl Karaimska” 1926, 3, s. 27.

⁴¹ LMAVB, f. 301–219, k. 85–86.

responsibility for our children's education, as our future as a nation depends on this school"⁴².

As the Karaite community wrote such a considerable number of request letters, the standpoint of the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Public Education was unequivocal – the Board of Education in Vilnius did not see any major obstacles to re-open Karaite school in Troki⁴³. Like in case of other minorities, it could be re-established as a private school, so Karaims would be obliged to support it financially. Although the Karaims were engaged and determined to support the school, they were not capable of supporting it in financial terms. Thus, all the efforts made to re-activate the school failed, so the school building was used only as a community center. Eventually, in 1923 the school lost its status of a state institution, and since then it was used to host various cultural and social events, such as meetings, lectures and performances. Karaite Ladies' Association „Katyn odżahy”, the Association of Karaim Youth „Bir-baw”, Karaite Athletic Association „Karaj idman birlihi” organized their meetings in the building.

CONCLUSIONS

The inter-war period in Poland was also intensive time for Karaite culture. Independent Polish state offered suitable conditions to Karaim community allowing them to initiate new socio-cultural activities, promoting science, education and Karaite heritage. The school in Troki offered education before the First World War and continued its work after 1918. Five years after the independence was regained, the school in Troki was the only elementary Karaite school in Poland restored by the Karaims who returned to Troki after the First World War. Cultural distinctiveness of Karaims was based on religious formation and learning Karaite language; it was their hard work to rebuild the school and revive its traditions going back to the 15th century. Karaite elementary school worked from 1919 until 1923 – these four years were marked with numerous changes and stages. Rafał Abkovitch was the one who managed to rebuild the school after the war to start teaching religion and Karaite language there. In 1919, the school was formally approved, hazzan Rafał Abkovitch was appointed the school director and Maria Roubianke was employed as a teacher. The

⁴² „Ja zaś, jako duchowny a tem bardziej rodzice dzieci czujemy swoją odpowiedzialność za nauczanie dzieci naszych ponieważ od istnienia lub nieistnienia szkoły zależy w dużej mierze przyszłość nasza jako osobnej narodowości”. *Ibidem*, k. 88.

⁴³ *Ibidem*, k. 85–86.

Karaite school in Troki was under the jurisdiction of the Civil Board of Eastern Lands, working until July 1920. Then, as a result of the unfavorable political situation in Vilnius district, the school was suspended until December 1920. At the end of December, the Education Inspectorate in Troki district opened the school again, responding to the petition signed by members of the Karaite commune in Troki. Hazzan Szymon Firkovotch was delegated to perform the function of the school headmaster, whereas Maria Szymańska was employed as a teacher. In 1922, the Board of Education in Vilnius district was organized, being responsible for reshaping school structures, according to the guidelines formulated by the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Public Education. In August 1923, the Board of Education in Vilnius District merged the Karaite school with the 7-grade elementary school in Troki. The only Karaite school in the Second Polish Republic, where the general curriculum was accompanied with Karaite religious and language education, prevented Karaims from complete assimilation, propagated by educational public policies. It was finally closed in 1923. The stages of re-activating the Karaite school reflect the situation of many elementary schools in Vilnius district determined by the political situation. Constant changes affecting school structures may have not contributed positively to the education process. Karaims, apart from financial and formal obstacles, had to cope with differences in levels of education among the pupils as well as their emotional problems, being the consequence of war experience. It is worth remembering that the school in Troki not only performed educational functions but it was also a community center where the Karaite community could meet and integrate. That is the reason why Karaims wanted to avoid closing the school, preparing and submitting the petitions to the Ministry and the Board of Education. These actions occurred to be ineffective. In 1923, the school was closed – its history can be investigated in Vilnius Archives.

ANNEX

Źródło archiwalne (oryginał w języku polskim)

Sprawozdanie szkoły karaimskiej powszechnej w Trokach

Zajęcie w szkole karaimskiej rozpoczęło się od 1 października. Dzieci zapisało się 25 z tej liczby 10 chłopców, dziewczynek 15. Uczono dzieci codziennie pięć godzin, a mianowicie: 4 godziny przedmioty w języku polskim i jedną godzinę język karaimski.

Dzieci są zgrupowane na dwie grupy, pierwszą grupę analfabetów i drugą grupę, które posiadają język rosyjski.

Z pierwszą grupą przeprowadzono: pogadanki o rzeczach i pisano elementy liter.

W drugiej grupie poznano polskie abecadło, czytano, pisano z tablicy i opowiadano powiastki przeczytane.

Z arytmetyki przeprowadzono zadania i przykłady w zakresie 100.

Kierowniczką szkoły

Marja Roubianka

8/XI/19

Spis uczni:

- 1. Firkowicz Michał*
- 2. Firkowicz Zarach*
- 3. Firkowicz Marcin*
- 4. Kapłanowski Marjan*
- 5. Poziemski Władysław*
- 6. Pilecki Kazimierz*
- 7. Józefowicz Józef*
- 8. Jutkiewicz Izaak*
- 9. Żarnowski Anani*
- 10. Zajączkowski Władysław*

Spis uczennic

Abkowiczówna Zofia
Firkowiczówna Julja
Firkowiczówna Anna
Firkowiczówna Zinaida
Firkowiczówna Emilja
Łobanosówna Walentyna
Łobanosówna Galima
Poziemska Ludmiła
Jutkiewiczówna Natalja
Jutkiewiczówna Liza
Jutkiewiczówna Zofja
Józefowiczówna Emilia
Józefowiczówna Justyna
Jutkiewiczówna Kamilja
Jutkiewiczówna Adela

Poniedziałek	Polski	Arytmet.	Polski	Pogadanki		
Wtorek	Arytmet.	Polski	Pogadanki	Polski		
Środa	Polski	Pogadanki	Arytmet.	Polski		

Czwartek	Pogadanki	Polski	Śpiew	Pogadanki		
	Arytmetyka	Polski	Pogadanki	Polski		

Źródło: Sprawozdanie z 1918–1919 rok, Akta szkół powszechnych miasta Trok 21 maj – 21 grudnia 1919, LCVA, f. 172, ap. 1, b. 24, k. 14–14 a.; dokument w formie rękopisu.

Document of archive (translated to English):

Report of the Elementary School in Troki

Classes at the school started on the 1st of October. There are 25 children who were enrolled in the school, including 10 boys and 15 girls. The children had 5 classes every day: 4 hours of subjects taught in Polish, 1 hour in Karaite.

The children are divided into two groups, the first group consisting of illiterate children, the other group of children speaking Russian.

The first group: talking about everyday objects and writing letters.

The other group: Polish alphabet, reading, writing on the blackboard, telling stories.

Arithmetic: arithmetic operations in the range of 100.

Marja Roubianka

8/XI/19

Schoolboys:

1. *Firkowicz Michał*
2. *Firkowicz Zarach*
3. *Firkowicz Marcin*
4. *Kapłanowski Marjan*
5. *Poziemski Władysław*
6. *Pilecki Kazimierz*
7. *Józefowicz Józef*
8. *Jutkiewicz Izaak*
9. *Żarnowski Anani*
10. *Zajączkowski Władysław*

Schoolgirls:

Abkowiczówna Zofia
Firkowiczówna Julja
Firkowiczówna Anna
Firkowiczówna Zinaida
Firkowiczówna Emilja
Łobanosówna Walentyna
Łobanosówna Galima

Poziemska Ludmiła
 Jutkiewiczówna Natalja
 Jutkiewiczówna Liza
 Jutkiewiczówna Zofja
 Józefowiczówna Emilia
 Józefowiczówna Justyna
 Jutkiewiczówna Kamilja
 Jutkiewiczówna Adela

Monday	Polish	Arithmetic	Polish	Conversation		
Tuesday	Arithmetic	Polish	Conversation	Polish		
Wednesday	Polish	Conversation	Arithmetic	Polish		
Thursday	Conversation	Polish	Singing	Conversation		
	Arithmetic	Polish	Conversation	Polish		

Source: *Sprawozdanie z 1918–1919 rok, Akta szkół powszechnych miasta Trok 21 maj – 21 grudnia 1919*, LCVA, f. 172, ap. 1, b. 24, k. 14–14a.; document available as a manuscript

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NOTA O AUTORZE

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