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Review of: Istoriko-kul'turnoe nasledie krymskikh karaimov (The Cultural and Historical Legacy of The Crimean Karaites) / Ed. by A. Yu. Polkanova. Simferopol: Media center of I. Gasprinsky Publ., 2016. 320 pages. ISBN 978-5-9908160-9-1

Cultural legacy of local minorities seems to be a subject matter counterintuitive in its attributes. Within this area typically the whole of minority’s written and verbal artifacts is seemingly poor, but virtually it appears to be a huge mass with obscure spatial, temporal and linguistic contours and genre entity, included by its inner parts into much larger religious, geopolitical, literary, folklore, descriptive and other traditions. And not less common is the following situation: basic and unspectacular historical chronicles of a small and marginal community suddenly flashes with remarkable famous heroes of crucial ages and places striving to discover unexpected viewpoint to reconsider some topical issues.

The foregoing premises completely cover the case of the small (in terms of quantity) people of *Crimean Karaites* (*Qırım Qaraylar*). Being at the same time “classical” religious, ethnic and cultural relic minority of Taurica, for the last five hundred years they settled throughout Western Eurasia. Gaining incredible success in avoiding conflicts with dominating groups, *Karaites* were however acquiescing in assimilation by constant implementing of elements of ascendant cultures. That is why releasing and examining of the authentic sources on *Karaites* history and culture is deemed vital for proper understanding of European and Near East past.

The book reviewed is an anthology of memoir sources and some case studies “on the history and culture of Crimean Karaites-Turks” (p. 2). The volume was composed by scholars, local history experts and representatives of *Qaraylar* community in the Crimean Republic. Structurally it contains a foreword by N. V. Yablonovckaya, memoir excerpts and papers of M. S. Sarach [1], A. Yu. Polkanova, V. S. Kropotov, K. A. Yefetov, An. V. Yena and R. I. Ushataya.

The introductory article defines an ambitious aim set by the authors in making a substantial contribution to the Crimean Karaites studies (p. 4).

It can be no doubt that the highlight of the volume publication is the compilation of memoirs written by three great *Qaraylar* of XX c. – general Yakov Osipovich Kefeli (1876-1962) [2], mayor Sémion Ezrovitch Douvan (1870-1957) [3] and local history expert Boris Yakovlevich Kokenai (1892-1967). Kefeli and Douvan became a part of so-called “first-wave émigré” from revolutionary Russia while the last one stayed in the Soviet country.

The first person was widely known among French Russians as a military memoir writer [4], politician and pamphleteer. Even more so important is introducing of his reminiscences of the voyage to the Paris World's fair in 1900, of performing duties of Trebizond mayor (1916-1917) and of the heroic deed of the lieutenant M. Tapshasar (October 15, 1904).

Even the one who has been informed beforehand about Kefeli’s abilities by the investigation of M. S. Sarach cannot help admiring the general’s pencraft and quick eye. In equally attractive ways he portrays his student time voyage impressions, political maneuverings of WWI period and combat operations of Russian-Japanese conflict. And perhaps the crown jewel for those who investigate evolution of the Russian emigrant values and views is Kefeli’s expatiation on the socialism at large and its USSR mutation (p. 62-69). The latter passage weirdly combines the hatred of egalitarian utopias and the hope for establishing rewarding “trade socialism” in Russia.

The memoirs of S. E. Douvan, the municipal deputy, mayor (1906-1910, 1915-1917) and *Zemskaya uprava* chairman (1911-1915) of Eupatoria, written in early 1950th (Titled “My Social Activity”) are also polemically accentuated and sometimes even biased. But the targets for the Douvan’s criticism are his former political opponents. Among them there are his forbearer in the mayor’s position N. A. Mamuna and chairman P. A. Benderbery, Taurida governors M. P. Lazarev, E. N. Volkov, N. N. Lavrinovsky and N. A. Knyazhevich, other clerks, members of “The Union of Russian People” and other “dishonest governors, vice-governors and clerks”, “the mean company of old fashioned rulers” (p. 144). In memoirist’s opinion, it was this crew who were guilty of the disruption of the empire. Their team-mates in promoting “Douvan’s” Eupatoria development program (Taurida governor V. F. Trepov and deputy B. I. Kazas) are presented just as biased in his paper but, of course, from the negative side.

Therefore the memoirs originally published in this volume highlight an unexpectedly striking realm of the Russian provincial politics of the late XIXth – early XXth cc. A separate text (originally published in the emigrant press [5]) focuses on the cooperation and interpersonal communication between S. E. Douvan and the Empress Alexandra Feodorovna under the framework of creating and managing a health retreat for wounded warriors in Eupatoria (1915-1917).

The last of the memoirs in this anthology is of a totally different nature. The “Diary” of B. Ya. Kokenai doesn’t correspond to its name in the larger half of the text. In fact, it encapsulates an encyclopedia of the Crimean Karaites culture of XIX-XX cc. The “Diary” is written in a clear “local-history” style and describes daily life of *Qaraylar* communities in Chufut-Kale, Feodosia and Crimean countryside during the period. The circumstances of the author’s family private life with few exceptions act as an evidence for highlighting historic, geographic, economic and cultural features of the people described. The data of paramount importance in this work are the detailed records of Karaite households, their settling networks, calendar rituals, cuisine, genealogy and relations with co-religionist communities of Lithuania and Egypt.

The publication of the memoirs of the famous Karaite representatives considerably identifies the volume’s significance. The more's the pity over the bookstaff’s disregard of the standards of introducing sources into the academic use.

First of all, there are no detailed specifications for the texts published. Consequently, the narratee is unaware of the place of any given writing in the oeuvre of any given author. The provenance of the memoirs also stays obscure. As far as the fragments on Kefelis’ office of Trebizond mayor, Tapshsars’ heroic deed and Douvans’ reminiscence of the empress are concerned, the dates of their writing are not specified [6]. The publishers don’t comment on the order of Kefelis’ memoirs (obviously they are arranged ignoring the chronology: 1) reminiscence of 1900; 2) of 1916; 3) of 1904). No explanation is given as to why the delineation of events in “My Social Activity” was reduced to 1910 [7]. Foregoing premises refer to the “Diary” of B. Ya. Kokenay to a smaller extent because there is a relevant preface by A. Yu. Polkanova.

Secondly, no text modifications which were made during prepress are specified. Thus, only thanks to the picture on page 17 we can suggest that the literary work by Ya. O. Kefely was made in handwriting using pre-revolutionary orthography. Surprisingly the memoirs of S. E. Douvan were typed by the volume editors with the use of the “old” alphabet.

Third problem is the lack of commentaries to the texts. Moreover, in the provided footnotes there are no references to the sources of the given information at all.

The circumstances listed above lay us under a necessity of stating the need of more extended source study of memoirs published and creating a relevant scholarly commentary.

Apart from the documents of a personal nature the anthology reviewed contains the papers on the topical issues of the Crimean Karaite’s history.

The largest (p. 249-301) investigation by V. S. Kropotov focuses on the *Qaraylar*s fate on the territory occupied by Nazi Germany. The scholar uses vast data to discover the causes which gave rise to the “academic” interest to this community from the creators of the Race theory in 1930th. The author examines the incentives to exclude Crimean Karaites from the cohort of those who were subject to killing and the features of the implementation of this policy in different countries.

The study highlights the specific attitude to the Karaites question of some European Jewish communities of that time (preeminently, of the “L’Union générale des israélites de France”), which generally criticized emancipation efforts by *Qaraylar.* V. S. Kropotov also characterizes the campaign in defense of the Karaites held by the Russian emigrants.

One could only regret that the scholar was unlikely to have had a possibility to look through the recently reported study of N. V. Turygina introducing the memorandum “The Russian Colony in France” to the police prefect of Paris by the interim hetman of the Don Cossack Host M. N. Grabbe (January 24, 1941). This document also claims that *Qaraylar* “are Aryans and not Jews… descend from the Khazar people who have already disappeared.”[8] Perhaps, the controversial Karaite-Jewish relations during the Second World War might be clarified by publishing of the records of the Paris *Qaraylar* committee. Following the data of the German Federal Archive, one must conclude that the latter committee was involved (of course by the order of the Third Reich administration) into the expert evaluation of ethnic origin of some East European Jews who were sentenced to go to the Drancy internment camp [9].

Generally, we can accept the conclusion of V. S. Kropotov that the recurrent investigations of Crimean Karaite’s ethnic identity by different Nazi institutions were triggered by “the ideological attitude” rather than by the practical need (p. 298).

Among other essays included in the anthology, the interdisciplinary research by the biologists K. A. Yefetov and An. V. Yena stands apart. Based on their previous studies, it examines the sacred grove Balta Tyimez near Bakhchysarai. From our point of view, this paper contains complete spatial and temporal specification of the object which is sometimes considered as the only preserved Turk sacred grove in Europe. The scientists located about fifty oaks inside the area of the man-caused impact. The trees are dated at not more than 460 years old.

The volume reviewed is enlarged by the small literary study of “Karaites topic” in the oeuvre of V. V. Nabokov (by K. A. Yefetov) and the essay about the short life of the Simferopol *Qaraylar* Library (by R. I. Ushataya).

While familiarizing oneself with the anthology, a reader must take into account some fundamental elements of the paradigm that seems to be accepted by the publishers. First priority here is the “Turk” version of Karaites ethnogenesis. Being far from accepting or rejecting it, we can’t avoid the fact that the Khazar mode of this theory (unconditionally adopted by the author of the preface (p. 4)) is seen as totally controversial to the current state and content of the relevant sources [10]. And the main counter-argument is that all the writings represent Khazars as worshipers of Orthodox Judaism. Moreover, there is no evidence of succession between Khazars and Medieval *Qaraylar.*

Nevertheless, the release of “The Cultural and Historical Legacy of The Crimean Karaites” is an event of certain importance for studies of this unique people as well as for support of the readers’ interest to this area. Fascinating and finely written memoirs of the famous figures are combined with the special investigations on the topical issues. The mix above turns this book into a stint reading for the one who’s interested in the past and the present of Crimea.

***Notes***

1. Mihail Semenovich Sarach (1909?-2000) was a famous representative of Russian émigré community, freemason, participant of the French Resistance and benefactor (*Russkoe masonstvo* (2001): 731; *Rossijskoe zarubezh'e vo Francii* (2010): 46; *Nezabytye mogily* (2005): 432).

2. *Rossijskoe zarubezh'e vo Francii* (2008): 681.

3. *Rossijskoe zarubezh'e vo Francii* (2008): 514-515.

4. Kefeli, 1954; *Port-Artur: Vospominanija uchastnikov*, 1955: 37-41, 57-60, 65-71, 83-88, 89-90, 159-164, 191-196, 271-290; Kefeli, 1959-1965; Kefeli 1969; Kefeli, 1970; Kefeli 1971.

5. Duvan, 1952: 9-11.

6. The contradiction between the time of writing of “My Social Activity” given in the openings clause (1954 – p. 114) and in the very text (15.09.1951 – p. 169) seems to be an unfortunate slip.

7. The second tour of mayor’s duty wasn’t highlighted either in the Douvan’s memories that had been published before (Duvan, 1954: 11-13).

8. Turygina, 2016a: 53, 66.

9. Sparsely introduced in: Turygina, 2016b: 177-182.

10. See: Miheev V. K., Tortika A. A., 2005.

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