

# MAILA TALVIO, A FINNISH AUTHORESS VISITS THE KARAIMS IN LITHUANIA IN 1894

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## I. Maila Talvio and the Charm of Lithuania

by Liisi Huhtala (Transl. by Michael Cox)<sup>1</sup>

In the 1890s Finnish artists and writers began to travel with greater frequency. By 1908 tourism was already so substantial that Eino Leino complained upon leaving for Italy that travel accounts had lost their appeal.

Finns travelled in two different directions: either to see the sights of nature at home in Finland, or abroad, mainly to Italy and France. In Finland they laid claim to the sacred national woodland landscape; from cultured lands they sought stimuli for work. In 1893 Juhani Aho wrote from Florence that the very air there was inspiring. In Florence his novel *The Pastor's Wife* (1893) obtained its pure and refined form, which has been regarded as particularly Finnish.

Traffic between the woodlands of Karelia and the wonders of Italy implied a crisis of the intelligentsia, whose identity was perhaps too exclusively based on national symbols. Now they were faced with the pressures of the modern age and growing individualism. The need to distance oneself, however, bred a sense of guilt, and what became established as the discourse of travel accounts was demonstrating the special natural beauty of Finland by comparison with other lands. In 1889 while at the Eiffel Tower Juhani Aho remembered the tall Finnish spruce and wrote that Finns were heather which clings to its native soil.

The travel accounts by Maila Talvio (1871–1951) compare foreign lands with the Finnish backwoods, which for Talvio were located in her home district of Hartola. The comparison makes it clear that one's duty was to make sacrifices for the sake of the backwoods folk. In her story *On a Foreign River* (1894) a young woman on a spring night in Moscow ponders how far she had had to travel in order to realize what her mission was.

Talvio's journeys diverged from the ordinary routes taken by writers. Because she followed her husband, J. J. Mikkola, a professor of Slavonic philology, on his research and lecture tours, the journeys were directed primarily to eastern and central Europe. The travel letters published in magazines, by which Talvio supplemented her family's income, show, however, that Italy, too, was an experience. The subjects of Talvio's travel letters

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<sup>1</sup> The facts in this article are based on Huhtala 1995. References to Sara Mills' ideas are from Mills 1993. J. J. Mikkola tells of his family's travels in his memoirs (Mikkola 1947).

were, on the one hand, the cultured cities of Europe, in particular Lübeck, Prague and Cracow, and on the other hand the distant villages of small fragmented peoples, for instance the Kashubs and Wends. The arduous nature of the journeys of exploration is frequently mentioned in her letters.

Although travel accounts written by women became more common in Europe in the 19th century, in Finland Talvio was one of the first when she began in 1893. By contrast with her famous male predecessor, Juhani Aho, Talvio did not write about politics or technology but about people and feelings. According to Sara Mills, women travel writers usually aimed at entering into the lives of their subjects, even merging with the local inhabitants. Of the types of travel writers outlined by Mills, Talvio mainly represents the sentimental commentator.

When she began her travel letters Talvio was only just becoming a writer; her first work appeared in 1895. V. A. Koskenniemi, in his biography of Talvio (1946), states his opinion that it was Lithuania that made Talvio a writer.

## A MELANCHOLY COUNTRY

For Talvio Lithuania was above all a Finnish experience. The plight of the country situated between the raven and the eagle – Poland and Russia – was parallel to that of Finland, and in their solemnness the Lithuanians were reminiscent of the Finns. In order to mislead the censor the pamphlet *From the Banks of the River Niemen* (1899) uses Lithuania as an example of what might happen to Finland under Russian sovereignty. The strategy for salvation was a common one: the creation of a national intelligentsia.

On their travels in Lithuania in 1894 and 1895 the Mikkolas were at the heart of the budding national awakening: in Plokščiai, in Kriaučiunas' home. They were present when gendarmes arrested the leading figure of the Lithuanian national awakening, Vincas Kudirka. Talvio wrote a short story about the incident, entitled *A Victim of His Cause* (Seen and Felt, 1896). Its main female character, Eliza, represents the common female figure in Talvio's later works, an upper-class girl who makes sacrifices for her people. In 1895 she wrote enthusiastically about her meeting with the Polish authoress Eliza Orzeszkowa. This 'self-assertive daughter of her people' had left her life of wealth and ease to work for the cause of national awakening. The main character of Talvio's novel *Two Loves* (1898), the Lithuanian scholar Witold Dargis, whose model was perhaps Kudirka, attempts to find his identity in a combination of Lithuanian and cosmopolitan features.

In Talvio's travel letters a certain *topos*, a melancholy landscape symbolized Lithuania: a church on a hill, below the River Nemunas, oaks, nightingales and girls' singing on a fragrant summer evening. The same *topos* appears in the Lithuanian folk-songs collected by the Mikkolas. Everything in Lithuania is coloured by a dark *melos*, memory-laden Vilnius as much as the people praying at the gate of Ostra Brama, that is Aušra, and the pilgrim procession of Kalvarija.

The Lithuanian letters testify to the need to differentiate sharply between Lithuania – the West – and Russia – the East. The latter means dirt and chaos. According to Mills, dirt is one way of demonstrating that some areas and races are marginal. In Talvio's accounts of her journeys the burden of Otherness is carried not only by the Russians but also, and in particular, by the Jews. The repeated, to modern minds blatant, anti-Semitism becomes comprehensible in the context of late 19th-century thought, but this does not diminish the repugnant cultural superiority with which Talvio's travel accounts treat all things eastern. She speaks of the 'privations of a cultured person' when she relates her journeys in the Jewish areas of southern Lithuania, and in her writings Judaism is always characterized by smell, dirt and slyness.

It was perhaps the case that Talvio wished her beloved Lithuania to be an impeccable 'land of dainas, green rue and nightingales'.

## II. Two Towns in Western Russia, II: Troki

by Maila Talvio (Transl. by Michael Cox)<sup>2</sup>

From Laudvarova station we travelled in a kind of low, four-wheeled wooden carriage. The driver was a grey-haired old man and the horses were two unkempt, pale grey beasts, which, with ears drooping and nodding, ran in time with the whip. The land by turn rose and fell, the valleys were fields, on the hills there were buildings, in the middle of the grove was a cemetery beside the church and at the crossroads stood a cross and icon at which the traveller would kneel to pray.

Our driver was friendly but taciturn. He answered everything evasively and cautiously. His nationality remained a secret, for although he spoke equally well all the languages which are used in this corner of the world, he could not be mistaken for a Jew, for his behaviour and facial features were entirely different from those of a Jew. When we had travelled nine versts we came to an area which rose and fell as one vast unbounded field, by turns tinged with silver, by turns yellowish, by turns clover-coloured or as black soil. A verst away one could see a large village of grey shacks, behind it was a lake with islands and smiling beaches.

'There is Lake Galve and Troki,' the driver eventually opened his mouth and pointed to the lake and village with his whip. 'If your excellencies wish to go and see the ruins, I can get hold of a rower. And if you do not wish to stay here any longer, I can take you to Laudvarova for the evening train to Vilno.'

Every foreigner who goes to Troki of course goes there to see the ruins and to go rowing on Lake Galve. The business was concluded and we drove ahead.

<sup>2</sup> "Kaksi kaupunkia Länsi-venäjällä, II Troki" published in the Finnish journal *Koti ja yhteiskunta* ('Home and Society') (Talvio 1895b). In her travel accounts Mrs. Talvio used the Polish forms of the names of persons and places (e.g. Laudvarova *pro* Lithuanian Lentvaris, Vilno *pro* Vilnius, Niemen *pro* Nemunas and Keistut instead of Kęstutis); these have been retained unaltered in the translation.

Where the buildings begin there was a crowd of young people decorating the triumphal arch, festoons were twined onto wooden frames, flags were raised, multicoloured, different-sized Russian Imperial and naval and provincial flags. The driver explained that the Governor General of Vilno was coming tomorrow to honour the town by his visit, and that was the reason why everything was being decorated. Streets were swept, the church floor was washed, the newly-founded park road was sanded. The town looked so shabby, so poor, so patched up, but at the same time it gave an impression of cleanliness, as sometimes when one sees an old woman on the way to church, when she has washed and put on her decades' old patched outfit. Everything about her is faded and ugly, but she inspires respect, you could almost love her. And Troki made just this kind of impression. But the triumphal arches with their wreaths and colourful flags were set there as if to mock old age, to sneer at memories which rested in delapidated buildings, ruins and the soil.

For memories, for the people of Lithuania both bitter and sweet, are linked with the history of the city of Troki. Troki was the first capital of the country. Before Vilno existed, and before Gedimin existed, there was Troki. Nothing would remain from the time of its greatness if there was not preserved in the church the miracle-working icon of the Mother of God which at great festivals is still crowned with a golden crown, as before, and if on the island in Lake Galve there did not stand the ruins of the castle which was built some time before 1400 by Keistut, the son of King Gedimin. Then the castle was one of the most imposing of its day.

Our escort was a handsome young man, who at first spoke broken Russian but then, noticing that we were foreigners, forgot and spoke Polish. He was much more frank and unreserved than our driver had been, and while rowing he told us about conditions in Troki. The supreme governor of the Russians there nowadays was a good man, strict but honest. Not many Jews lived in Troki, but there were Karaims living there. – What were they? – Relations of the Jews but much more honest and cleaner folk than the Jews. They reject the Talmud and accept nothing else but the pure unadulterated law of Moses. They heartily despise the Jews.

The lake was calm, the water was a strange green colour, like in the sea. The beaches were a beautiful green and on the island ruins rose on a high mound – what fine, grey ruins! – and a boat approached the shore of the island bringing decorative materials for the Governor General's reception.

The castle wall was built in a rectangular shape, the longest wall was 40, the shortest 25 fathoms long. From three walls projected from each of them a round tower, the tower of the fourth wall was in the middle and higher than the others. A year or so ago it was still possible to climb up the stairs, which have now decayed. On one storey of the castle were probably the dwelling rooms and on the other military weaponry. The outside was faced with red bricks, inside the walls were plastered. In 1822 one could still clearly notice twelve frescoes, of which one portrayed a man in princely costume on a throne, below which stood a woman, both engaged in lively conversation. In the second picture could be seen the prince receiving the greetings of the people and so forth. Now it took effort to see that there had been these pictures. Depressions in the ground inside the castle

walls had evidently been underground rooms for prisoners. Now a lawn grows in them, and on the walls and window arches there sprout flowers and grass. The moat, which used to be deep enough to prevent enemies from entering the castle, is now almost choked. Spring streams gather there to water roots, from which arise climbing plants to weave into a splendid curtain up to the castle mound and along the walls. And more and more the castle - - - and it was from its tower a young princess once waved a scarf to her departing husband when trumpets sounded and weapons glinted - - - decays. From that tower a high-born maiden dreamily watched the lake as the sun set behind it; in the castle there was a big party with drinking and singing. And the land was free, all around there echoed one's own language. – The land now lies in ruins, the language is a foreign one, an alien people are lords and the grey towers project towards the heights on a desert island in Lake Galve, until they decay entirely, down to the ground, so that no stone upon stone remains.

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Talking could be heard from the beach. Flags were hoisted on their staffs and green was twisted into festoons.

When we came back to the town, our escort took us to the driver's lodgings. There sat by the window two young men writing, an old man was mending his clogs, but immediately went to harness the horses when he saw us coming; his wife was clearing up the room. It was not in the least untidy. Even the samovar which stood on the table was so bright that one could see one's reflection in it. When we had said a few words about the castle and the weather, the old woman sat down nearer to us and proceeded:

'Think not that we are Jews. Many people think that that is what we are. We are Karaims, we live according to the pure law of Moses, we do not make ourselves guilty of the same gross iniquities as – the Jews.'

She spoke in a gentle voice, but the word 'Jew' she uttered with a hint of disgust. They spoke Polish at home. We perused the exercise books in front of the seated young people. They contained Russian writing.

'We can write Polish too, although that is what we have to learn at school,' said one of them.

The old woman offered to make us some tea, but the clock reminded us of the arrival of the train and so we left Troki.

### III. Karaims

by Tapani Harviainen

Who were the secretive, cleanly and decent Karaims whom Mrs. Talvio met in Trakai and who aroused her positive attention? Two answers are embedded in her own narrative: 'Relations of the Jews but much more honest and cleaner folk than the Jews. They reject the Talmud and accept nothing else but the pure unadulterated law of Moses.' And: 'Think not that we are Jews. Many people think that that is what we are. We are Karaims...'

As Professor Huhtala has demonstrated above, Mrs. Talvio considered the Jews to be a real danger to the national renaissance of the Baltic and other Eastern European peoples at the end of the 19th century. From the viewpoint of today we may say that several statements of hers in this story and, in particular, the entire first part of her travel account dealing with the Jewish *shtetl* of Schaki (Šakiai in modern-day Lithuania)<sup>3</sup> could have been used as typical anti-Semitic propaganda material.

Irrespective of these features, we may pay attention to the fact that visitors from abroad did not frequent Trakai and Karaims at the end of the 19th century. Thus her report presents us with exceptional evidence of the opinions of her time, of her own impressions as an outsider and, probably, of the views held in the circle of her acquaintances too.

A short description of the history of the Karaims, of their culture and of some observations by other visitors might serve to complement the picture given by Mrs. Talvio.

In June 1997 the Karaims and Tatars celebrated the 600th anniversary of their settlement in Lithuania in 1397.<sup>4</sup> Although no document indicating the date has been preserved, according to the national legend, Vytautas (Witold), the famous king of Lithuania, is said to have brought Tatars and 383 Karaim families from the Crimea 600 years ago to his capital city of Trakai (in Polish Troki, in Karaim Troch), where the famous Island Castle was built by the Grand Duke Kęstutis (Keistut, Kynstute) in the 14th century. In Trakai Karaims served as the bodyguard of the Kings and Grand Dukes of Lithuania.<sup>5</sup>

It would be an interesting task to investigate the development of this tradition. Nevertheless, it is evident that both the Karaims and the Tatars have been living in present-day Lithuania since at least the 15th century.<sup>6</sup> In Trakai and elsewhere in the country the Karaims have been well known for their special abilities as growers of cucumbers and other vegetables and as horse dealers; these were still their main occupations at the end of the 19th century, at the time of Mrs. Talvio's visit, although their good education and assimilation into the surrounding society were beginning to lead to their being offered a growing number of positions in the administration (cf. Kowalski 1929: xi).

<sup>3</sup> Published in the same journal *Koti ja yhteiskunta* (Talvio 1895a).

<sup>4</sup> My report on the celebrations is to be published in *Festschrift Professor E. Saag* (Harviainen, forthcoming).

<sup>5</sup> Related e.g. in Czacki 1860: 143–144; in different accounts slightly varying years are offered, and 483 too occurs as the number of the immigrant families. For the town of Trakai, see Baliulis, Mikulionis & Miškinis 1991.

<sup>6</sup> See e.g. Heller & Nemoy 1971: cc. 771–772; Raudeliūnas & Firkovičius 1975: 49–51.

The Karaim religion derives its origin from the Karaite reformation movement within Judaism which was set in motion in Iraq by ‘Anan ben David in the middle of the 8th century.<sup>7</sup> Hebrew was taught as the traditional language of religion and literature until the end of the 1930s in the Karaim school in Trakai.<sup>8</sup> The mother tongue of the Karaims in Eastern Europe (inclusive of the Crimea) is the Kipchak Turkic Karaim language. In addition, as mentioned by Mrs. Talvio, they have been multilingual for centuries, speaking Polish, Byelorussian, Russian and Lithuanian.<sup>9</sup>

In Eastern Europe the number of Karaims has probably never exceeded a few thousand; the plague of 1710 is considered by the Karaims to have been a decisive catastrophe which decimated their number for ever.<sup>10</sup> According to the Russian census of 1897, the number of Karaims in the western part of the Empire was 1,383.<sup>11</sup> In 1925–28 Tadeusz Kowalski (1929: ix) counted their number as 300 in Trakai, 250 in Vilnius, 70 in Łuck, 130 in Halicz (Luck and Galich in the present-day Ukraine) and 100 in Poniewież (Panevėžys in Lithuania).

At the end of the 19th century Trakai was a pronouncedly multiethnic town with a total population of 3,240, according to the Russian census of 1897; the Rabbanite Jewish community with its 1,112 members constituted 34.3% of the total, while the Karaims numbered 377 persons (11.6%). The number of speakers of both Polish and Russian were on an equal level, viz. 27%, while Byelorussian was the native vernacular of 8% and Lithuanian of only 0.9% of the residents of the town; the Jews spoke Yiddish and the majority of the Karaims their own vernacular. The role of the Catholics seems to have been a permanent one, although the number of members of the Russian Orthodox Church was growing; in 1914 approximately 60 % of the total population of 4,915 were Catholics, 20% Russian Orthodox, 20% Jews, 12% Karaims, 1% Muslims, i.e. Tatars,<sup>12</sup> and 0.7% Old Believers. This multiethnicity was also distinctly reflected in the town school

<sup>7</sup> For details, see Heller and Nemoy 1971: cc. 763–781; Zajączkowski 1961: 24–32; Kobeckaitė 1997: 16–31.

<sup>8</sup> The Karaim pronunciation of Hebrew has retained a number of very interesting ancient features shared elsewhere only by the Yemenite Jews; for details, see my articles: Harviainen 1991; 1992. Hebrew was also employed as the literary language in private letters and e.g. in the protocols of the Karaim community in Trakai still in the latter part of the 19th century. Kowalski (1929: xiii–xiv) writes that despite the strict discipline imposed in the *midraš* schools, the knowledge of Hebrew was in decline in the 1920s.

<sup>9</sup> In the Hebrew texts of the Karaims their vernacular is called *lešon Qedar* ‘the language of Kedar’ (cf. e.g. Isaiah 42:11; 60:7; Ezekiel 27:21; Song of Songs 1:5). In a peculiar way Mrs. Talvio, who was interested in linguistic phenomena, does not seem to be aware of either their Hebrew or the Karaim vernacular – a Turkic language found in Lithuania would surely have aroused her curiosity, since in that period the Fenno-Ugrian and Turkic languages were considered to be related.

<sup>10</sup> Every year the victims of the plague are commemorated on the 9th day of the month Jaz-aj (Tammuz) in the form of a fast called *Burunhu oruč* (‘First Fast’) or *Avuz jabar* (‘Beginning of the Fast’), the visit to the graveyard in Trakai and the recitation of the memorial poem by Shelomo ben Aharon of Trakai (Kobeckaitė 1997: 30).

<sup>11</sup> The number of Karaims in the Russian Empire totalled 12,894, the majority of them living in the Crimea.

<sup>12</sup> The Tatars have been living in these areas of Eastern Europe for 600 years; however, by the 18th century their native Tatar vernacular was replaced by the local languages; for details, see Lederer 1995.

with its three grades: in 1902 there were 90 pupils of whom 51 were Catholics, 18 Orthodox, ten Jews, eight Karaims, two Old Believers and one Muslim. In 1897, 27 boys attended the re-established school of the Karaims.<sup>13</sup>

The distinction between the Karaims and the Jews appears clearly in Mrs. Talvio's short story. Although the relations between these two minorities were usually fairly correct,<sup>14</sup> the demarcation line became more marked from the beginning of the 19th century on. The Russian Empire had annexed the Crimea in 1783; there the Karaims had been economically far better off than the Rabbanite Jews and had enjoyed privileges under the Muslim regime. By the time of the partitions of the Polish Empire in the 1790s extensive new provinces became part of Russia. In this area approximately 500,000 Jews came under Russian rule – which did not conceal the anti-Semitic stance of the new rulers.

In this new situation the wealthy Crimean Karaims commenced in 1795 a struggle to obtain separate legal status in the Russian Empire, and the former Polish Karaims joined this successful process in the middle of the 19th century. Full legal separation between the Karaims and the Rabbanite Jews took place in the Russian Empire in 1863.<sup>15</sup> A remarkable proponent of independence for the Karaims was the famous Karaim scholar Abraham Firkovich (1787–1874) who collected the huge collections of Hebrew, Arabic and Samaritan manuscripts, codices and other antiquities which are now kept in the National Library of Russia in St. Petersburg.<sup>16</sup>

Mrs. Talvio's visit took place during a period of cultural and national awakening among the Eastern European Karaims; in fact it can be considered as being a parallel phenomenon to the Lithuanian national revival during the period of Russification and the forty-year-long prohibition of Latin characters in (the few permitted) Lithuanian publications in 1864–1904.<sup>17</sup>

One of the first Karaims to acquire a European higher education was Romuald Kobecki (1823–1911), who was born in Trakai. After attending the local Karaim school he continued his studies in the Richelieu Lyceum in Odessa. In the Polish High School in Nowogródek he lectured on Polish literature and French. Kobecki has been characterised as tolerant in regard to other religions, a sincere patriot and a scholar who did not confine himself merely to Karaim matters. Although Kobecki had no special religious education, he was elected *hachan*, the religious leader of the Karaims in Trakai, in 1902. His son

<sup>13</sup> Baliulis, Mikulionis & Miškinis 1991: 148–149 (detailed statistics of other periods are also to be found in this book); Nadav 1971: c. 1403.

<sup>14</sup> Without mentioning their sources Nancy and Stuart Schoenburg (1991: 316) state that in Trakai 'the Karaites, who enjoyed full civic rights, were as a rule friendly to their rabbinic neighbours, but lived separately'; according to them, in 1897, there were 818 Rabbanite Jews and 424 Karaims in Troki, out of a total population of 2,390 (*ibid.*).

<sup>15</sup> In 1837 the Karaim Religious Consistory was established in the Crimea and the parallel Consistory for the Western Provinces in Trakai in 1850. For details, see Miller: 3–67.

<sup>16</sup> For the collections, see Harviainen 1994 and the sources referred to in it. *Karaim Avraam Firkovich* by V.L. Vihnovich (1997) is the most recent general account of the collector and his activities.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Hellmann 1976: 102–133; Samalavičius 1995: 123–132. For the literary activities of the Karaims of the Crimea and the Ukraine up to this period, see Schur 1992: 116–118.



Josef (1861 Trakai – 1917 Kiev) served as professor of geology in Kiev from 1908 onwards.<sup>18</sup>

In 1890 Pinachas<sup>19</sup> (Feliks) ben Aharon Malecki (1854–1928), an exegete, a prolific author of liturgical poetry, later the *hachan* of Trakai and the translator of the Karaim Passover *haggada*, published an introduction to the Karaim prayer book *Ronne pallet* in which cultural and ethnic aspects, as well as the importance of the use of the Karaim language as a vehicle of literature, found their first expressions.<sup>20</sup> In 1889 a Karaim translation of Genesis, edited by Z. Mickewicz and E. Rojecki, was published in Vilnius.

The beginning of secular poetry in Trakai is connected with the same period by the name of Szymon (Semjon, Sima, Simonas) Kobecki (1865–1933), whose first collection *Irlar* ('Songs') was printed in Cyrillic characters Kiev in 1904. Kobecki, an officer in the Russian army, was also active as an author of comedies in Karaim. Numerous poets followed his example during the first decades of the 20th century in Halicz and Łuck.<sup>21</sup>

12 issues of the journal *Karaimskoje slovo* appeared in Russian in Vilnius in 1913–14; in addition to scholarly contributions it contained publications of contemporary Karaim poetry and prose with the pronounced intention of developing national self-consciousness.

In an interesting way Kowalski repeats a very similar picture of the characteristic traits of the Karaims as was offered by Mrs. Talvio some thirty years earlier. Kowalski relates that the Karaims of Eastern Europe were considered by their Slav neighbours to be peaceful, hard-working and honest people. In appearance the Karaims as a rule are of average height, short-headed, broad-faced and black-haired. They are small-scale farmers, earlier on famous horse-dealers, who, lacking the spirit of enterprise, lose to the Jews in

<sup>18</sup> Zajączkowski 1961: 89–90; El'jashevich 1993: 101–103.

<sup>19</sup> The typical Karaim pronunciation instead of Pinehas/Pinechas or Pinhas.

<sup>20</sup> Malecki 1890: v–viii. Kowalski (1928: 143–147) reprints the text in Latin transcription under the heading 'Ein Muster der gelehrten Prosa' with a number of explanatory notes (*ibid.*: 302). For Malecki, see El'jashevich 1993: 138–139. Poetry and translations from Hebrew, from Polish and from other European languages were composed by Karaim scholars from the 18th century on, and the first book, a prayer-book in Crimean Karaim, was printed in Venice in 1528/9; for details, see Zajączkowski 1964.

<sup>21</sup> According to El'jashevich (1993: 103), Kobecki advanced to the rank of lieutenant-colonel before the Revolution. Zachariasz Abrahamowicz (1878–1903) from Halicz, another pioneer of secular Karaim poetry, was the author of the slogan which is well known among the Karaims: *qart din yangi usba ot menim belgimdi* 'the old faith with a new understanding – this is my sign'. The famous Karaim writer Aleksander Mardkowicz (1875–1944, under the *noms de plume* Kokizow and Al-Mar), who was born in Łuck, commenced his literary career not earlier than in the 1920s (Zajączkowski 1964: 798). — A large part of the early Polish/Lithuanian Karaim poetry has been re-edited in the anthologies *Karaj jyrlary* ('Karaim Songs', collected and edited by M. I. Firkovič; published by the Lithuanian Fund of Culture and the Cultural Association of the Lithuanian Karaims, Viln'jus 1989. 215 pp.) and *Čypčychlej učma Trochka. Lietuva karajlarnyn jyrlary – Į Trakus paukščių plasnosiu. Lietuvos karaimų poezija* ('I Shall Fly to Trakai like a Bird – Poetry of the Lithuanian Karaims'), an anthology of Karaim poetry from Trakai in the original language with Lithuanian translations by several well-known Lithuanian poets; compiled and edited by Karina Firkavičiūtė (Danielius, Vilnius 1997. 239 pp.). In a similar way, a great number of the prayers in Karaim have been included in the new prayer-books, see the bibliography at the end of Harviainen 1995. A new liturgy and prayer-book compiled by Mykolas Firkovičius in Karaim on the basis of ancient *siddurim* and *maḥzorim* in manuscripts and print will appear next winter 1997/8.

competition. Furthermore, the Karaims are modest and a little ponderous. In their religious views they are as a rule pious and conservative, but without an inclination to fanaticism; thus they are on better terms with their Christian and Muslim neighbours than the Jews used to be. According to Kowalski (1929: ix–xii), the peculiar habits of the Karaims had disappeared before the 1920s with the exception of a number of national foodstuffs. As a consequence Kowalski felt that it was his duty to collect as much material as possible before the total assimilation of the Karaim community.

Although Kowalski could not foresee the catastrophic effects which the Second World War and the communist regime were to impose on all of the Eastern European religious and national minorities, the Karaim community is still alive in Lithuania. Despite the fact that their number is not more than 270, in ten years they have been able to revive their religious, cultural and literary activities to an admirable extent.<sup>22</sup>

Finally, what was the magnet that drew Mrs. Talvio to Trakai, where she was to make the acquaintance of the Karaims, unknown to her so far? As the ancient capital, Trakai had to a large extent retained its reputation as a national symbol among both the Poles and Lithuanians who suffered from the determined policy of Russification. The town was – and is – renowned for the beauty of its location between the limpid lakes. The Island Castle was in ruins, but these ruins offered genuine romance for the increasing number of visitors. The postcard below, from the beginning of this century, is not exceptional – a great number of similar romantic drawings and gravures are known from the beginning of the 19th century on.<sup>23</sup> Side by side with the national memories of Lithuania, Mrs. Talvio met in the town a landscape resembling the beautiful scenes of her home district and there she had the unexpected opportunity to discover once again a small nationality which had been able to retain its individual, silent and clean nature.



<sup>22</sup> For details, see Harviainen 1997 & forthcoming; Kobeckaitė 1997, and *Karaimai Lietuvoje – Karaims in Lithuania* (Statistikos departamentas prie Lietuvos Respublikos Vyriausybės, Vilnius 1997. In Lithuanian and English. 61 pp.).

<sup>23</sup> Baliulis, Mikulionis & Miškinis 1991 contains an attractive exhibition of maps and old pictures of Trakai inclusive of Karaim topics, the Castle (esp. tables 41, 74–89), its frescoes mentioned by Mrs. Talvio (table 74, p. 192) and its restoration (tables 175–206, pp. 250–264).

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