

THE  
KRIMCHAKS

T H E  
K R I M C H A K S

Their Life And Origin In The Crimea

B Y  
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Graduation Thesis For Rabbinical Degree

A T  
HEBREW UNION COLLEGE  
CINCINNATI  
1 9 1 6



*Rec. 9/28*

T O

MY DEAR OLD FATHER

PHINEHAS DOV GOLDENSTEIN

One Of The Noblest Of The Crimean Jews

This Thesis Is Most Affectionately

Dedicated

## P R E F A C E

This little thesis is an attempt to present the life and origin of the Krimchaks in the Crimea. At present there are in the Crimea, three separate and distinct sects, or rather groups of Jews - Karait<sup>E</sup>s, - Polish-Lithuanian Jews and Krimchaks. The Karaites formerly known as Ananites, on account of the founder of their sect, named Anan, are firm believers in pure Mosaism and do not consider the Talmud as authoritative. They claim that they resided in the Crimea for two thousand years, which is however, not in agreement with the fact that this sect was only established at the end of the eighth century. They enjoy all rights in common with all the rest of the "real" Russian subjects of the Czar, and do not suffer the disabilities of the "real" Jews.

The Polish-Lithuanian Jews are of recent date in the Crimea, as the name indicates, they have come here from the North, since the conquest of the Peninsula by the Russian Queen Katherine II, in 1783. They have brought with them their habits, manners and institutions, with which we are well familar, which are not any different from those of the Jews in Poland and Lithuania.

The Krimchaks however, the native Crimean Rabbinites are the ones who concern us the most and to them this little essay is prim~~er~~<sup>arily</sup> devoted. I think it is safe to say that perhaps, no other group of the many isolated Jewish sects in



the world has been more woefully neglected by our writers and historians, than this humble group of Krimchaks in the Crimea. No wonder nobody seems to know anything about them. The average informed Israelite who knows something about the Falash Jews, the Mountain Jews, the Yeminite, Karaite and Subbotnik Jews, knows absolutely nothing about the Krimchaks.

*STILL* The Krimchaks are well worth the knowing. They are the most ancient Rabbintes on the Peninsula. They number upwards of ten thousand souls. They live with us to-day, having flourishing communities, beautiful synagogues and most interesting social institutions. They also possess wonderful historic treasures in their ancient synagogues and cemeteries scattered throughout the Crimean Peninsula. They are a most interesting group of Hebrews, fully deserving of our earnest attention and most careful study and consideration, because in their mode of life, these Jews resemble their Tartar neighbors more so than they do their fellow Jews of the North. For the Krimchaks not only speak Tartar, but eat, drink, dress and live like Tartars in every respect, except in their faith, which is strictly Jewish. They are particularly interesting because in no other Jew do we find the Semitic and Mongolian element so intimately blended, as we do in the Krimchaks. In fact so close is the resemblance between the native

Crimean Tartar and this native Crimean Jew, that you can hardly tell them apart. The only thing that distinguishes the Krimchak from the Tartar is the fact that the Krimchak does not shave his head like the Tartar, also his hair is not as dark as the Tartar's, for strange as it may seem, the Krimchak's hair is of Reddish-Golden color, a <sup>trait</sup> (trait) which is uncommon among the Semitic Tribes. The Krimchak women, however have retained more tenaciously the characteristic Jewish type. They are pretty and have delicate complexions and bright black eyes. It is this latter fact of the peculiar physiognomical and anthropological characteristics of the Krimchaks coupled with the evidences of many other historical facts, that lead me to the conclusion that the origin of the Krimchaks in the Crimea, is undoubtedly to be found in the Chazars, and is to be traced to the period of the rise and fall of the kingdom of the ~~Se~~ Mongolian converts to the Jewish faith, (800-1000). Of course, by that I do not mean to say that there is no Jewish blood in them.

The Krimchaks have always interest me. From my very childhood, I loved to watch them in shop and in the synagogue, because they looked so different from the other Jews I knew. Their picturesque attire attracted my attention, especially the women's wardrobe, which always sparkled with that peculiar Oriental charm and beauty. I

could not believe myself that these Tartar-looking people were really Jews. They have been the object of my curious observation for many years, for I was born, raised and lived among them in the Crimea up to the time I left Russia in 1906. I since read all there was to be had, of interest about them in books, magazine articles and stories and when I entered the Hebrew Union College in 1911-1912, I had my mind already then, made up to make them the theme of my graduation thesis for the Rabbinical Degree. My joy was extremely great, when last May, arriving at my Junior Year at College, and submitting this subject "The Krimchaks" to the faculty, the plan was approved. I at once set down to the task of getting additional material, in order to make this thesis, as good a piece of work as possible. The sources being meager on this side of the ocean, I was obliged to send for information across the seas, but on account of the present world conflict, I flatly failed in my efforts to secure aid from Europe, and as a consequence I was naturally compelled to limit myself to the material available here in America, and to personal observations, which still linger in my memory of days gone by. My present treatise on the subject is therefore by no means complete. Neither complete nor perfect. Furthermore, I claim no great amount of originality on the Subject, nor do I consider it a master-piece in English.

It is just an attempt made and an effort exerted by one who is well aware of the fact that he is altogether too immature to handle successfully an important historic subject of this nature, too young and inexperienced in the tongue of the new world to make it at least pleasant reading matter. I just tried my utmost to present the subject the best I know how, under the circumstances, with the hope of enlarging upon it in the future, and I sincerely trust that the words of mouth and the meditations of my heart will accordingly be acceptable in the sight of my teachers, the great leaders in Israel, who have been my guides and my lights in the righteous paths of the "Torah" for the last five years of my residence at the Hebrew Union College.

Raphael Goldenstein  
of  
Portland, Oregon.

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PART 1  
THE ORIGIN OF THE KRIMCHAKS  
IN THE CRIMEA

## THE ORIGIN OF THE KRIMCHAKS IN THE CRIMEA.

### A. The Earliest Settlement of Jews in the Crimea.

Jews settled in the Crimea at a very early date. According to the testimony of tomb-stones found in the vicinity of Kerch, bearing names and decorated with the seven branched "Menorah", Jews existed on that Peninsula as early as 157 B.C. The Greek inscription on a marble slab unearthed in the Crimea and preserved in the Imperial Hermitage in St. Petersburg, dating back to 80 B.C makes it certain that they flourished there before the destruction of the temple. While from similar inscriptions on grave stones found on the old cemeteries in Chufut-Kale, Mangup-Kale, Kaffa, and Tepe-Kermen and Stara-Krim we learn that organized Jewish communities and synagogues existed in the Crimea at the time the Greeks ruled the peninsula, between 480 -47 B.C. Jerome in his commentary on Obadiah, (Verse 20 ) reports on the authority of his Jewish teacher Hanania, that according to a tradition prevalent among the Jews, the Assyrians and Babylonians conveyed their Jewish captives to the coasts of the Black Sea. These early Crimean Jewish settlers were Greeks in language, customs and social life, & enjoyed equal rights with their fellow citizens, —The Greeks, Up to the conquest of the peninsula by the Romans in 47 B.C.

But the period of the Roman domination was brief, for about the middle of the first century, the Alanes seized the country. In the second century the Alanes were displaced by the Goths, and the Goths were, in turn, displaced by the Huns in the fourth century, the Jews suffering greatly from the successive invasions of the barbarous hordes of antiquity, until the beginning of the seventh century, when the Crimean Peninsula was overrun by the Chazars, a Turkish tribe which occupied the Northern Shores of the Caspian Sea and named the Crimea, Chazaria. The Chazars rule came to an end however, in 1016, when they were displaced by a combined effort of the Russians, and the Byzantines. For the next century and a half, the Peninsula was occupied by the Petcheneyes, who were replaced by the Kipchaks, both of whom were wild tribes of Turkish Stock. The Kipchaks however, were very good masters and behaved generally with tolerance to the subjected peoples, and under them the Jews of the Crimea, enjoyed equal rights with the other inhabitants. A change however took place in 1258, when Berke, their third ruler and his followers embraced the Islam when the relations between the newly converted Mohammedans and the Jews became strained. In 1345 the Genoese tribes established their reign in the Crimea, which lasted until 1475, when Mohammed the 11 came and conquered and enslaved them together with the rest of the Christians on the Peninsula. Many Jews lived under the Genoese regime and in the Taman reigned, at that time, the descendants



of the Genoese Jew, Simeon de Guizolfi. In the constitution of the Genoese colonies on the Black Sea, issued 1449 the Bishops of Kaffa are directed not to oppress the Jews living there. John Schultberger who traveled in Europe in 1394, states in his description of Kaffa that there were two Jewish sects there in existence, i.e. Karaite and Rabbinite, with two separate Jewish synagogues. Another traveler by the name of Martin Bronievski, who visited the Crimea in 1578, says in his "Tartario Descriptio", that the inhabitants of Kaffa, Turks, Egyptians and Jews, cultivated beautiful gardens around the city and that the Khan collected annual tribute from the Jews. The dominician John de Lacie 1625, states likewise that in his time Kaffa was mostly settled by Jews. Inscriptions bearing the dates 909 and 1018 and 1309 have been discovered in the old Krimchak synagogue, which points to the same unmistakable conclusion that Kaffa must have had a large Jewish population and well organized Jewish communities at that early date.

During the rule of the Tartars in the Crimea, the Russian Czar, Ivan III Vassilievitch, has his Jewish representative Kokos at Kaffa. The patriarch Fotias, in a message to the Archbishop Antony of Kerch (858-891) the former thanks the Archbishop for his efforts to convert the Jews of Kerch. Again, the presence of Jews in Kerch during the seventh century is confirmed by inscriptions found in the earliest Christian ~~CE~~ETAROMBS known in that region.

From all the foregoing evidence, it is clear that Jews lived in the Crimea for the last two thousand years. Their numbers might not have been very large in the first century of the common era, but from the old synagogues and mikvahs found in abundance on the peninsula, we may safely judge that their number increased in time. But after all, whether they settled there earlier or later, or whether they were many or few, is not my principle concern here in this thesis. I gave this brief digest of the early settlement of the Jews in the Crimea, merely by way of introduction in order to lead gradually up to the more important phase of this essay, namely, to the discussion of the origin of the Krimchaks in the Crimea.

#### B. Opinions and Theories Regarding the Origin of the Krimchaks in the Crimea.

The opinion of the Krimchak Rabbi David Lachno.

According to the statement of Rabbi David, Son of Eliezar Lachno, in his introduction to the famous Krimchak prayer book called, "Haznia", Karasubazar, (1716) the origin of the Krimchaks in the Crimea is to be traced back to the Babylonian exile. His being the oldest testimony in print, we possess, I shall therefore translate part of it just as it appears in the "Haznia". xxx "The order of prayers in the present "Mahzor" is arranged according to the "Minhag" of our forefathers who formerly resided in the cities of Kaffa and Old-Krim, but who originally came there directly from Babylonia and Persia through the wrath of the enemy,

whose intentions were to destroy and annihilate. The enemy, indeed prospered, and David, son of Zakai, the "Nassi", "Chief of the Exiled", was killed by Hevsein, King of the Ishmaelites, because of his jealousy of the former, who was a direct descendant of the house of David, King of Isreal. Later on, another David posed as the Messiah and gathered many Jews around him and armed like a Turk, he waged war against Persia, but without success. At that time there was much trouble in Isreal, evil decrees, forced conversions, and bitter persecutions until the people of Isreal were exiled and scattered to all the ends of the earth, the majority of them forgetting the "Torah" and forsaking the law. Some of these exiled ones came to the Crimea and settled in Kaffa, (Theoducia) at the time of the reign of Genoeze (Luazim) and built a synagogue, which for beauty was a little temple in miniature. They employed the order of prayer according to their tradition of the "~~Geonim~~", much different from what it is to-day, in both Selichoth, piutun and Mahamodoth. But when the city of Kaffa was captured by the great King of Turkey, Patich Sultan Mohamed, who also captured Constantinople, then many wise men came to the Crimea, ere the Spanish exiles arrived at Constantinople (1461), who prayed according to "Minhag" of Roumania" which is the same as that of the Mahzor of the Haznia."

"In addition to those, there followed a general exodus of Jews from Russia especially from the great beautiful city

of wise and learned Jews called Kiev, about which it is said, "For out of Kiev goes forth the law". From that city a large number of men, women and children came down to the Crimea headed by the great Rabbi Moses Golah, (1515) with whom three other rabbis came down by the name of, Rabbi Asher Hakohen, Rabbi Kalman Ashkenazi, but the third one's name I do not know. All of these sects would assemble in the same synagogue at Kaffa, divided into three separate groups, as they were, each praying according to its own traditional custom handed down to them by the Gaonim. One sect followed the Minhag Ashkenazi, the other Minhag Roumania. Naturally a quarrel soon arose which almost resulted in the erection of separate synagogues for each sect, but fortunately, the spirit of God, moved the great Rabbi Moses of Kiev to step forth and unite the house of Israel. He called a general meeting of all the different groups together and persuaded them to unite and live in harmony with one another. He established eighteen principle "Tekonoth", which he urged them to follow, at the penalty of Herem (Enifuy) most of them being of a nature that were applicable and favorable to all parties concerned. Thus he urged them to decide all questions regarding Shechitah, Bedikah, Kesubah, Kidushin and decisions where Rabbi Moses Iserlis opposes Rabbi Joseph Karo, by saying "some follow the custom thus, or do thus" according to the Ashkenazic tradition. But in the order of prayer, he urged them to follow the Roumanian custom of the

"Haznia" prayer book. While in all other matters he allowed them to rely upon the primitive Babylonian customs and traditions as they still have them. He furthermore made them promise never to change the "nusah" of their prayers as they were newly adopted in the "Haznia" without the consent of all the communities combined.

"Since that time on, we, the Children's children and the offspring of these united sects in the Crimea, have clung to our faith and customs of our forefathers as then laid down by Rabbi Moses, until the new son of the great Rabbi Eliahu of Vilna dawned upon us, who together with his many able disciples established new tekanoth, new prayers for week days and Sabbaths and many other good customs based on Kabbalah - that I have now undertaken the task of embodying them into one Mahzor, so as to make it complete, containing all the new as well as the old Dinim-Minhagim, arranging them in a manner that will be easy for anyone to find just what he wants in its proper place. May it be the will of God to help me finish my task as He helped me to start it. May he bless His people with peace.

The words of the author and writer of the Mahzor.

David, Son of Rabbi Eliezer Lachno.

We must admit Firkovitch's contention that Rabbi David Lachno was not very strong on history. Some of his statements are not exactly correct historically, like for *instance*

the one he makes about David ben Sakai, who really was not killed himself, but his grand-son, Hezekiah, "The chief of the exiled" after Rav Rai Gaon, who was executed by the King together with his entire family.

But whether Lachno is exact in his historical statements in the Hakdamah to the Hazniah or not, one thing is sure, according to his knowledge, the Krimchaks are, first, the descendants of the Babylonian and Persian exiles. Second, of the Spanish refugees, and third, from the Russian fugitives from Kiev, originally being separate communities or sects, but finally united into one solid body known as Krimchaks, by the efforts of Chief Rabbi Moses of Kiev, in the year 1515 and assimilated into the life, dress and tongue of the native Tartars, who were enjoying great freedom in the Crimea, under the beneficent protection of Mohammed the Second of Constantinople.

(Beth Hakneuth Farfell)

The Theory of Abraham Firkovitch.

Abraham Firkovitch, the famous Karaite archivist has an entirely different theory regarding the origin of the Krimchaks in the Crimea. He maintains that the Krimchaks were originally Karaites and are consequently of the same origin. He therefore insists that the origin of the Krimchaks in the Crimea is to be traced not to the Babylonian captivity etc. as our friend Rabbi David Lachno would have, it, but to the lost ten tribes and to the captivity in the days of Shalmanazar.

"The children of Israel in the Crimea" writes Firkovitch in his book called "Devar al Hakraim""are partly the descendants of the ten tribes of the Kingdom of Israel, and partly the offspring of the Kingdom of Judah, who went forth together with their priests, led by Gedaliahu, son of King Hahaz, to protect Samaria from the wicked Shalmanassar, so as to save Jerusalem from destruction. But unfortunately their efforts were made in vain, the people could not withstand the siege and Shalmanassar broke into the city of Samaria and captured them alive, and lead them from Samaria, captive into exile to the cities of Madai (Persia) 720 B.C. But King Kambuz the son of Koresh was good to them, on account of their loyalty to him, and their bravery in his war against Talmora, Queen of Shitim, that he set them free and granted them their request to settle in the Crimea, 474 B.C. Here they came in large numbers, and settled in the cities of Sephrad (Kerch) Sulachat, ( Stara-Krim) and Charzan, (Khersonisus) and in Chufut-Kale, which they fortified with high walls and dwelled there for many years. Proof for the early settlement of our fore-fathers in Chufut-Kale, are the ruins of that city, which are still standing to this day, as witnesses to our ancient history on the Peninsula. Also the many grave stones on its cemeteries called "Emek Jeoshaphat" the inscriptions of which indicated our existence there 33 B.C.



"Since that time they never returned back to their holy land and consequently have not witnessed the destruction of the first temple. They simply heard of its destruction and mourned over it, while the second temple they never even saw, and for a time they knew nothing about what was going on in Palestine. Thus through the grace of God, and the special act of Providence, the Children of Israel have been dwelling in the Crimea now for nearly twenty-four hundred years and while all other nations who periodically swept over the Peninsula, perished and are no more, we, through the merits of our ancestors have survived in spite of invasions of barbaric tribes and persecutions that we endured in the Crimea."

"Up to the middle of the tenth century, the Jews in the Crimea, knew nothing about the existence of the Talmud, but in 957, three messengers, (Shilukim) came down from Jerusalem, named R. Ephraim, Hannukah and Eliahoh, respectively and they for the first time introduced the Talmud into the Crimea, with the result that the Jews of the Crimea were from now on split into two sects, namely, those who accepted the Talmud called Rabbinites, and those who did not accept it called, Karaites, hence the origin of the Krimchaks."

The theory of Firkovitch which is self-explanatory is further supported by him as follows -

First, The old Krimchak synagogues in the Crimea the Ark of the Covenant is placed not in the eastern wall as



is the custom of the Rabbinites, but in the Western wall, which is the custom of the Karaites.

Second,—their pronunciation in reading the Hebrew of the Bible and their prayers, is like that of the Karaites, namely, they use the Sephardic dialect. Third,—their Tartar dialect resembles that of the Karaites, as does their wearing apparel.

Fourth - Physiognomically, the Krimchaks resemble the Karaites more so than they do the Rabbinites.

Fifth - They possess no old documents about their history to disprove my statements.

Sixth - They stand up when they pray at the synagogue just like the Karaites do. They also have carpets on the floors to sit on for the common folks, and long benches around the walls for the reverend old gentlemen as is the custom in the Karaite synagogue.

Seventh - They do not lead the bride and groom to the synagogue to perform the marriage ceremony and do not use the "Hupah" but perform the "Seven Berachoth" at the residence of the bride or groom, just as we Karaites are accustomed to do.

Eighth - They also mention the names of their great leaders of the past and pray for their souls just as we Karaites do on Saturdays and holidays in our synagogues. They likewise mention among other names, the names of the three apostles, (Shilukim) Ephraim, Eliyah

and Hanukkah who brought the news of the Talmud to the Crimea, whom we too mention in our synagogues."

(Massa Krim.)

Firkovitch's theory as here presented created a great storm in its day among the leading writers and historians in the latter part of the last century. Foremost among them are Geiger (Zeitschrift) Zunz (Zur Geschichte) Finn, (Hakov Mell) Pinsker, (Likute) Charni (Hamagid) Levinsohn (Toar Hazopher) Graetz (History) Steinsneider (Hameliz) Chivalron (Corpus) and Harkavy (Altjudische).

They disapproved almost every one of his statements and exposed his unparalleled ignorance of Jewish history. They likewise discovered and exposed to the world all his forgeries and false documents, which he himself had either invented or corrupted in order to prove his mistaken theories. The material is so **vast** that I am unable to fully reproduce it here in this little essay, but I shall contend myself by giving now the opinion of one who lived among the Krimchaks for more than thirty years. Who knows them and has sympathy for them,—in striking contrast to Firkovitch.

The Opinion of Rabbi Hayyim  
Hezekiah Medini.

The Haham of Karasubazar feels very indignant about the terrible charge made by Firkovitch against the Krimchaks in the Crimea, accusing them of being the descendants of the Karaites and in his letter to E. Deinard, he says among other things:-

A - "Firkovitch is harping constantly that the Krimchaks are the offspring of the Karaites. I would like to know who put that "Shtuss" in his head. For if what he said be true, then how is it possible that the Rabbis who heard of that split in the Karaite camps, did not come out at that time with a protest against admitting them into our midst, since according to the Shulchan Aruch Elen Haeser, intermarriage is absolutely forbidden with Karaites, even after they embrace our religion. B - Surely just because the Krimchaks sit on the floor in the synagogue like the Karaites, is not sufficient proof that they belong to the Karaites, for all Sephardic Jews in Palestine do that. The real difference between the Rabbinites and the Karaites, to my MIND lies not in the way they sit in the synagogue, but in the place where the "Bimah" stands. For in the Rabbinite synagogue, there is a platform in the center, which is the case in every Krimchak synagogue, whereas in the Karaite synagogue there is no platform in the center.

C- As to the fact that they speak Tartar and not Yiddish, why we have thousands of co-religionist in Egypt and Damascus who speak nothing but Arabic. Furthermore the Krimchak Tartar dialect is quite different from that of the Karaite.

D - As regards the Sephardic accent the Krimchaks use, why thousands of Palestinian and Arabian Jews employ it, that does not necessarily indicate that they are all Karaites, I am sure.

E - As to remembering the dead in the synagogues on Sabbath and Holidays, that is a very old custom among the Rabbinites, they necessarily did not have to adopt it from the Karaites, quite the contrary, the Karaites adopted it from the Rabbinites.

F.- While as to his accusations regarding the many Karaite books that he found in the Krimchak synagogues, why I can show him similar cases in Palestine in the Sephardic synagogues, yet no one would even dream of accusing the Sephardic Jew of once being Karaites. On the contrary, I found among the Krimchaks in their synagogues, numerous old volumes of the Talmud and parchments, many of them hundreds of years old, upon which are written parts of the Bible, and the Poskim, which was never yet found among the Karaites in their synagogues. For which reasons, I for one, positively deny all such baseless theories advanced by Firkovitch and his school and I implicitly be-

lieve that the Krimchaks are of the same stock as we Rabbinites are. That they are the faithful followers of both the written and the oral laws and that there is no difference nor distinction between them and the rest of the Jews of the world. Absolutely none soever. As to the origin <sup>of</sup> ~~our~~ brothers, the Krimchaks, in the Crimea, I believe Rabbi David Lachno, in his introduction to the "Haznia", approaches the truth as nearly as any man I know of."

#### The Theory of Ephraim Deinard.

Ephraim Deinard, the famous traveler in the Crimea, author of "Massa Krim", believes that the Krimchaks originally lived on the Taurian Peninsula, where they came from Palestine, Greece and in the course of time from Babylonia and Persia passing through Armenia and Caucasia. "Proof for their settlement there, yet before the birth of Christ is found <sup>in the many tomb-stones found</sup> on that Peninsula, which I myself have seen in the Asiatic Museum and Royal Library at St. Petersburg-Testimonies Deinard".

"Thence they moved across the Azof Strait and settled on the opposite Crimean Peninsula in the cities now Known as Kerch, Stara-Krim and Theodosia."

"Some of these ancient tombstones are decorated, in addition to the seven branched menorah, with shopphors, chairs, tables, sandals etc. a custom which prevailed till recently among the Krimchaks in the Crimea, to decorate ~~THE~~ <sup>TOMBSTONE</sup> with the object of his occupation. The inscription on

the tombstones are in Greek, which indicates that they came from Greece and belong to the Hellenistic period of the Jewish history in the Crimea. These Hellenists, settled in the Crimea at least as early as in the days of the Maccabees, (see Harkavy Hajphudin) I do not imagine their numbers were very large at first, but as soon as they established themselves properly on the Peninsula and built synagogues, many more Jews from other lands, were undoubtedly attracted to the Crimea for various reason, some for business, others in quest of homes and as these new-comers kept on their constant stream of emigration into the Crimea, they brought along with them, all the Jewish customs, culture and Talmudic knowledge of the day, thus introducing it into the Crimea to the older pre-Talmudic settlers of the Peninsula. That is how we find so many old parchments and manuscripts of the Bible, the Talmud and the Rambaum, in the Karasubazar "Genizah". Yes indeed, not merely old parchments and dead manuscripts have been spared to us from those remote days, but verily a living token, a remnant of ancient Crimean Israel has been preserved to this very day, represented in the noble band of loyal Jews called Krimchaks.

"From the Historic material gathered in the Crimea, from the careful analysis of oldletters, manuscripts and inscriptions on parchment books, Torah, cases and grave stones, I reached the conclusion that the Krimchaks settled in the city of Karasubazar just four hundred years ago, after

Sulachat, (Stara-Krim) ceased to be the capital of the Tartar Khans. Thus it is clear that they moved from Stara-Krim, Kaffa, Kerch and Mangup, to Karasubazar, where they were granted special privileges by the Tartar Kings, to barter freely and live in peace under their personal protection, and when the Jews in other Crimean cities, heard of that, they flocked over to that city to benefit by the great privileges, together with their other more fortunate Karasubazar brethern."

Because of the great historic importance of the "Schutz-Briefe" of the Crimean Khan's, I am going to translate ~~some~~ of them.

"Granted by King Selim Gerei, son of Kaplan Gerei Khan -

"This charter is granted to the Jews of Karasubazar, Moses and Solomom sons of Jacob and Aya son of Eilijah, because from days immemorial, their forefathers have been granted same privileges from our ancestors, the Kings Memet Gerei Khan, etc. for which reason, I too grant them the same charter of rights, freedom from taxation and immunity from all duties to the King, Furthermore, no one is allowed to take away from them, their horses, houses, fields and crops, nor do them any injury whatsoever."

Signed, Bakhtschissarai, 1156, according to the Tartar era.

## Dr. Harkavy's Opinion.

Dr. Abraham Harkavy, the great archiologist and authority on Jewish History in Russia, believes that the Krimchaks first settled in the Crimea in the year 1238. "For up to the thirteenth century, the Krimchaks dwelt primarily in the regions of Astrakhan, Stavropol, Orenburg, Upha and further South, partly also towards the East of Asia. At that time, diverse nomad tribes, were roaming over the plains of Southern Russia including the Crimea, and not until the year 1238, when the Peninsula was finally conquered and occupied by the Tartars of the "Golden Horde" did the Krimchaks as well as the Karaites form settlements there, in the cities of Sulachat, Kaffa, and Karasubazar. In fact, all the Crimean discoveries of Firkovitch, that were not forged by that Karaite, bearing data concerning the history of our Krimchak brethren, and the Karaites on the Peninsula, do not point to any date prior to the beginning of the fourteenth century."

Professor Graetz supports this view of Dr. Harkavy, by saying (H. of J. VI ) that a considerably large number of the Jews now dwelling in Southern Russia, originally lived in Caucasia, and he further adds, that they are likewise the descendants of the Chazars, who dwelt along the Volga River and in the Crimean Peninsula, which Harkavy does not admit. For Harkavy believes that after the down fall of the Chazar Kingdom (1000) the Chazars emerged once more



into the Tartar tribes whence they sprang, thus dispensing from the arena of history as a separate people forever.

#### Dubnow's View on The Subject.

The famous Jewish historian, Dr. Solomon Dubnow, in his latest survey on the subject, in a recent publication of the "Yevreyskaya" Starina" 1914, conveneiently divides the history of the Crimean Jews into eight respective periods -

1. - The Old Greek Period (Up to 100 B.C.)
2. - Pontus Period (100-1B.C.)
3. - Roman Period ( 1 - 11 A.D)
4. - Byzantine Period (1V - VI1 A.D.)
5. - Khazar Period (VI1 - X A.D)
6. - Barbarian Period (XI - XI11 A.D.)
7. - Tartar and Genoese Period (XI11 - XV A.D.)
8. - Tartar-Turkish Period (1475-1785)

Next, the present Russian period follows.

He proves with the aid of reliable historic evidence, that Jews had been living in the Crimea during each one of those periods and he dwells with especial emphasis upon the period that interest us mostly in this thesis, namely, that in which the Krimchak life assumed its peculiar shape and form, namely, the Tartar period.

Like Harkavy, he believes them to have settled

there in the thirteenth century, but unlike the latter, he contends that the Krimchaks came there passing through the Dardanelles from Italy, Spain and Portugal, not from Caucasia. These strangers from the Latin countries, soon adopted themselves to their new surroundings, at first, combining the Italian with the Tartar ~~CULTURE~~ and later on, abandoning the former altogether, and assimilating the latter. Thus in the fifteenth century, we find the Crimean Jews, universally speaking the Tartar language, instead of the Spanish and Italian, and we also notice them adopting the dress, manners and habits of the Tartars on the Peninsula. It is at that period in the history of the Crimean Jewry, that the full-fledged Krimchak type originated and assumed its particular stamp and form under the beneficent rule of the Khans and the Protection of the Sultan's at Constantinople. Very important discoveries regarding this period (XIV - XVIII) have recently been made by Mr. A.R. Gidalievitch, of Sevastopol, who excavated the Jewish cemetery of Mangup-Kale and unearthed many old grave stones bearing names and dates that establish the truth of the existence of a large Krimchak Community there, as early as 1387. No authentic earlier inscriptions have been found there, but this is quite a step forward in the right direction and is of great importance to us, when we came to remove the veil of mystery from the face of the history of our people on the Peninsula. Since the data furnished us by Firkovitch,

cannot be relied upon, for his dates do not correspond with the inscriptions on the tomb stones now unearthed, and conflict radically from beginning to end, his being in most cases, four or five hundred years older, than ours. He tried to fill the gap of nearly a thousand years, from the Byzantine period to the Tartar period, with monuments and inscriptions that he himself invented, while to us, that period as far as monuments are concerned, is a perfect blank. Fortunately we have epigraphic and literary sources that cover that vast period, which we hope in time, to work out, so as to shed additional light on the History of Isreal in the Taurida.

#### Dr. Karpeles Statement.

Dr. Gustave Karpeles in his excellent book, "Geschichte der Judischen Literature" makes the following statement bearing upon the history of the Krimchaks in the Crimea.

"From Rome, Jews spread to the Apenine Peninsula but on account of the untold persecution and suffering they endured there, under the Byzantine rule during the reign of Leo III, the Isaurian (718), who persecuted them relentlessly, <sup>THEY</sup> emigrated eastward to Caucasia and the Crimea. At that time there lived in the Crimea, a strong and fierce Tartar tribe, who spread their dominion along the Volga,

between the Black and the Azof Seas - The Chazars. This Chazar ~~Co~~people which which struck with terror all the surrounding nations of Persia and Byzantine, was very kindly disposed towards the Jews. They not only allowed the Jews to live in perfect freedom and enjoy all the privileges of citizenship, but they would ~~never~~ appoint them as judges, interpereters and doctors in the Royal household, as well as councilors in the King's court. During the reign of Bulan, one of the greatest of the Hagans, the condition of the Jews in Chazaria was especially favorable, for he was the first to embrace Judaism. In his days, Judaism flourished on the Peninsula and many schools were established for Jewish study and learning. Perfect religious toleration prevailed in the land zealously guarded by the Senate, represented by three denominations including the Jewish. Furthermore, the Hagans, or the Chazar Kings, would likewise assist their brethern, the Jews in other lands, protecting them wherever and whenever possible."

This mild and tolerant disposition of the Chazars attracted Jews from all lands and turned Chazaria, practically into a Jewish state. Thus the Crimean Jews passed upwards of two hundred years under the beneficent rule of the Chazars, enjoying every liberty, until 1016, when the Chazars were over run by the combined efforts of the Byzantines and the Russians."

Similar statements are made by all historians who studied the question carefully, especially in recent times. Dr. Kutcho~~ra~~, who just published a book on the Chazars, throws additional light on that interesting period in Jewish history, but of course, had he been a Jew instead of a German, and known the subject a little better, he would have arrived, perhaps, <sup>at</sup> to different conclusions. I shall return to them later on in the course of my essay. Presently I shall conclude by saying that I heard the late Dr. Schechter was very anxious for some one, a Jew, to undertake the difficult but worthy task of studying carefully and writing up the complete history of the Chazars, which (a) work properly done, would I am sure, throw much light on the history of the Crimean Jews and help us to a better understanding of the past of the Krimchaks in the Crimea. Let us hope that the wish of that great Prince in Israel, who has recently been taken out of our midst, will be realized in the near future and that the clouds that hang over the ancient history of our brethren on that Peninsula, will be dispelled and a new sun shall dawn on the new heavens of rejuvenated <sup>CRIMEAN</sup> Israel.

The Most Probable Theory of the Origin  
Of the Krimchaks in the Crimea.

From the preceding survey on the subject before us, from statements, views and theories of various historians quoted, it is clearly seen that they do not agree with one another, as to the origin of the Krimchaks in the Crimea. They all however, agree in, first, that Jews have been living in the Crimea, at least, for the last two thousand years. Second, that these Jews were exiles of many lands, mostly Eastern countries. Third, that the "Golden Age, " of the Crimean Jewry, <sup>occurred</sup> during the Chazar period (VII - X ) and fourth, that the Crimean Jews, as Krimchaks, did not exist before the Tartar period (XIII - XVI). These general universal <sup>ADMISSION</sup> by themselves, throw considerable light upon the origin of our Krimchak brethren in the Crimea, but they likewise point to a more still probable solution of the problem, which I believe is the correct one, namely, that the immediate origin of the Krimchaks is to be found in the Chazars.

My proof for this contention is, first, Historical, Second, Anthropological. Historically we know that during the eighth century, a strong Tartar-Chazar tribe adopted Judaism and that, that tribe which ruled the country, now called Southern Russia, including the Crimean Peninsula, was especially favorable to the Jews. That on account of their

mild disposition and favorable inclination toward the Israelites, Jews flocked from every land, particularly from the cruel Byzantine Empire, to Chazaria for protection and peace. Thus, ~~for more~~ <sup>more</sup> than, two hundred years, the land of the Chazars was a place of refuge and a haven of security against oppression and persecution of barbarous antiquity. Furthermore, we learn that these Chazars were good Jews, true adherents to the written and oral law. Some of them even knew Hebrew quite well, (Hajehudim). They loved their new religion and were willing to make great sacrifices for it, as "Geim" usually do. So well were they pleased with Judaism and so thankful were they to the Jews who granted them this noble faith, that they not only protected them at home in Karasubazar, but they also stretched forth their helping hand to every land, where they possibly could, to aid their fellow-Jews, and deliver them from thier oppressions. It is only natural to suppose, therefore, that mutual aid at such a time was correspondingly met with mutual love on the part of the Jews, and as a result, inter-marriage between the two races must have been very common those days on the Peninsula.

History likewise tells us that the Chazars were not only a strong tribe, but a numerous tribe as well. So large and fierce that they succeeded to subdue all the surrounding nations and tribes. They exacted tribute from

Kiev and presents were sent to them from the Byzantine ruler. Persia terrorized by their power and might, built a gigantic wall in the Caucasian Mountains for protection against invasion from the Chazars. Bulgaria was subjected, so was whole of Tartaria, Caucasia and the Volga Region. But the iron ~~RULE~~ of the Chazars, after a period covering almost three long centuries, (VII-X) came to an end in the beginning of the eleventh century by the combined forces of Russia and Byzantine.

Now, the question naturally arises, what became of the Chazars after their downfall? Where are they? Numerous and fierce as they had been, where have they disappeared? They were good Jews, where shall we find them? They existed for nearly three hundred years, as Jews for two hundred years, harbored and gave protection to thousands of Jews among them, with whom they came in closest union. Where did they suddenly vanish without leaving the least trace of their foot-steps on the sands of time..

I agree with Harkavy that some of them fell back into the Tartar tribe, whence they sprang, while others, undoubtedly returned to Bulgaria whence they came. I believe also, that many of them were killed in the wars, in taking the last stand for their country, while others were made slaves by the Russian and Byzantine conquerers. I



furthermore imagine that a great many of these conquered heroes were converted to Christianity on the one hand and Mohamedism on the other. But I do not, in the least, doubt, that a goodly number of the Chazars, at the downfall of their Kingdom, emerged into the Jewish race, while still others formed separate distinct Chazaro-Jewish sects, or groups, known to us today by the names of Subbzniki and Krimchaki, perhaps also the Karaimi.

Let me now quote an authority on the subject. Mr. Fishberg in his scientific study on race and environment, "The Jew", makes the following important statement with regard to the period under discussion :-

"The most important infusion of non-Jewish racial elements into the veins of Eastern European Jews, took place in the eighth century, when the Chazars embraced Judaism. There is considerable historical evidence that after the destruction of their kingdom, many of them mingled with the Jews in that region, in the Crimea, and in other countries. It is stated by authority, that the Jews in Southern Russia, Hungary and Roumania, and part of Poland are mainly descendants of the Chazars, who freely inter-married with the Jews."

Traces of blood mixture of this alien element in the Jewish physiological organism have been recognized and carefully analyzed by both Jewish and non-Jewish scientists

and anthropologists, who in common discovered Tatar-  
 anian as well as Mongolian types and traits among  
 the Jews. In fact, Hugo Kutchera, in his recent large  
 valuable volume on the Chazars, called "Die Chazaren",  
 established the truth of this observation by numerous  
 painstaking proofs and analysis, anthropological and  
 Historical, which are quite convincing. He maintains  
 that the Russo-Polish Jews, who have later on emigrated  
 to Germany and Austro-Hungary, are no Semites at all,  
 but are the descendants of the Chazars, who, he believes  
 were of Finnic origin, not Mongolian as Harkavy and the  
 others maintain. Of course, that I believe is stretching  
 the point too much. It is going a little too far to make  
 Finns out of practically all of the Jews of Europe. But  
 what I do however, believe, is that the Krimchaks of whom  
 we never hear before the downfall of the Chazar Empire,  
 but whom we meet right after this downfall, the Krimchaks  
 who speak Tartar, dress like Tartars and possess Tartar  
 manners, moreover look like Tartars, that they undoubtedly  
 are the direct descendants of the Jewish-Chazars-who orig-  
 inally were Tartars. For knowing them as I do, I do not  
 think there is a more non-Jewish-looking Jew in the world  
 like the Krimchak. If the Krimchak is not a full-blooded  
 Mongolian, he is at least a half breed. He surely has  
 plenty of Chazar blood running in his veins.

It has been similarly ascertained anthropologically, that likewise the second group of the native Crimean Jews namely, the modern Karaites, are a quite distinct ethnic group, and are more akin to the Tartar tribes of Southeastern Russia than to their Jewish Rabbinic neighbors. Weissenberg who made a careful study of the Karaites, (Die Karaer der Krim) in the Crimea, maintains that they are a very mixed race and have a large quantity of Mongolian blood in their veins, doesn't that too show one of the two things, either that the Karaites are another remnant of the Crimean Chazars, or else carry in their veins the Chazar blood, who after the destruction of their Kingdom, may have joined the Karaites.

Moreover, Firkovitch, the famous leader of the Karaites, who contends that the Krimchaks are the descendants of the Karaites, advances <sup>as</sup> proof for his contention, the fact that the Krimchaks resemble the Karaites more so than they do their Rabbinite brethren, which Deinard represents and in turn proves in a lengthy essay that the Karaites are not Jews at all, i.e. that they are not even of Jewish origin, but of the Mongolian stock. If so, I again insist that the Krimchaks are the descendants of the Chazars, because I lived among the Karaites <sup>and the Krimchaks,</sup> for a good many years, and I know them both, and from what I know about them and their

physiognomic expression, I admit Firkovitch's evidence, this time, the Krimchak does look like a Karaite more so than a Russo-Polish Jew. For both Krimchak and Karatie are apparently of the same Chazaric origin, hence their common language, their common dress, customs and traditions, particularly their common facial resemblance. It also explains the strange fact, why the Karaties who did not accept the Talmud from the three Jerusalem Shil-uchem, nevertheless, pray for the souls of the latter, and mention their names in their "Hazkorath Neshomoth" on all important holidays in their synagogues, just like the Krimchaks do.

It is true I am no anthropologist, I have not taken any measurements nor have I studied the skull formation of the Crimean sects, but that much even a blind person could see, while in religion there is much in common between the Krimchak and the Russo-Polish Jew, in actual life and in bodily appearance there is almost nothing in common between them. The Krimchak is backward, awkward and sleepy, while the Russo-Polish Jew is active, plastic and wide awake. The former sticks to his Tartar with the tenacity of a Tartar, a backward number in civilization, and like the Tartar, does not admit the ways of modern culture into his life, while the latter adopts the language of the country, (Russia) and accommodates himself to the social environment in which he lives, as soon as the laws of the state are not in his way, and oftentimes, even

in spite of them. The Russian Jew is a thrifty worker, a hustler, a man with ambition, trying to amass wealth, power and to become a factor in the social and political life in the country in which he lives, while the Crimean Jew, i.e. the Krimchaks,—as I shall show later in the second part of my thesis, devoted to their life,—like the Tartar, of which stock they undoubtedly sprang, or at least has a goodly portion of his tardy blood running in his veins, the Krimchak, I say, is lazy, unskilled, except in the working out of dyed skins, which is their principle occupation, ambitionless, indifferent to their environment~~s~~, indifferent to wealth and power or higher social position. The most of them are dull, uninteresting and simple minded people, for which reason they are nick-named "sheep heads" by the Northern Jews, and inspite of the fact that their women are exceptionally beautiful, nevertheless on account of their inferior intellectual qualities, the Northern Jew seldom comes to inter-marry with them. Although the Krimchaks realizing the inferiority of their kind, and recognize the superiority of the Northern Jews, are only too anxious to give their daughters in marriage to the Jew from the North. All of which goes to prove that the Krimchaks if not altogether <sup>KHAZAR</sup> have at least a large portion of Chazar blood in their veins, for surely environment alone could not work such a tremendous difference in the life

and nature of a purely Jewish organism, for the Jew has been known in history of the world, as the great merchant people, the quick mind, bright and alert business man who always stood at the top of the money ladder, while these Jews, in spite of their long residence in the Crimea and apparently under beneficent rule and protection of the kind Khans - are way down in the scale of business and the newly arrived Russo-Polish and not the Krimchak Jew controls the business interest of to-day in the large cities on the Crimean Peninsula. Furthermore, Jews are known for their skill in mathematics and their talents in music, these Krimchaks however are a unique exception, in that respect, for these Jews contrary to the universally accepted rule, are poor mathematicians, and still poorer musicians. The music I heard in their synagogues, is void of harmony, sweetness and Judean beauty. It is simply a sort of monotonous sing-song, the same melody, from beginning to end, just like the Karaiteschant in their synagogues. They have not ~~got~~ the least appreciation for true Jewish music. They do not care to "Go to hear a Khazan" and listen to a juicy piece of "Tikanto", which penetrates all the "Avorim" as ~~the~~ Polish "Hassid" would express it. All the Krimchak cares for is a cup of Khaveh (Black coffee) and a fresh Yantoch (meat pie) and he is satisfied. On twenty cents a day he lives happily with his

entire family and grand opera does not bother him.  
He does not miss it in the least...

Taking into consideration, then, all the facts and observations I enumerated above in the course of my essay, the most probable theory regarding the origin of the Krimchaks in the Crimea, I should say, is the latter, namely that they are the descendants of the Chazars. Every bit of authentic knowledge we have about the history of this peculiar sect, seems to point in that direction. Moreover, great historians like Professor Graetz for instance, are supporting this view. Let us then accept it until somebody else, more capable and better equipped, comes along and throws new light upon the subject.

Presently let us part with part one, and with God's help, commence part two, which is going to deal with the life of the Krimchaks in the Crimea.

PART 11  
THE LIFE OF THE KRIMCHAKS  
IN THE CRIMEA



SOCIAL ASPECT  
OF  
KRIMCHAK LIFE

## SOCIAL ASPECT OF KRIMCHAK LIFE

Unlike the most of the Jews of the world, who speak Yiddish, the Krimchaks speak Tartar. The Tartars claim that it is not a pure Tartar that the Krimchaks are using, but it is a sort of Tartar jargon called Tschagadai. In this Tartar jargon, many Greek and Hebrew words are found, in fact many of the more educated Krimchaks speak Hebrew fluently as they do the pure Tartar. But the languages of Western Europe are still unknown to them. In their Hebrew speech, they employ the Sephardic pronunciation as the Karaites do. In script however, they often use the Arabic characters, but as a rule all their books are written in Hebrew, even the vernacular is written in Hebrew characters.

Some examples of the Krimchak Language:-

Good -- Yakshi	Coat -- Urbah
Mother -- Anna	Key -- Anaktar
Dog -- Kupek	Give -- Berdi
None -- Aat	Cat -- Kedi
Father -- Baba	Head -- Ekmek
Candle -- Tcherakh	Water -- Soo
Block -- Khara	

The Krimchaks are a very mannerly class of polite and simple people. They are as simple in their manners as they are in dress and diet. In other words they are not yet civilised in the modern sense of the term... They act very plain, natural, unconventional. They are quiet, peaceful, naive individuals of very hospitable nature. One seldom sees them quarrel or tattle tale or gossip. One never sees a Krimchak drunk or broke or gamble. If he is not in his shop you will find him at home with his family or in the coffee houses with his friends.

The coffee house is the social center of the Krimchak community. There in the shade of old walnut trees and to the murmur of the rippling fountain. On the bare floor or on soft carpet, friends gather and discuss politics, transact business and form matches. Here in the coffee house, Krimchak, Karaites and Tartar meet on common ground, sit and sip the black coffee bit by bit, using the smallest amount of sugar imaginable, keeping it on tip of the tongue. With the tiniest bit of sugar on the tongue, the Krimchak can drink from one to ten cups of coffee and then having some still left in his mouth to throw away.

Here in the coffee house, the poor as well as the rich Krimchak sits on the floor with folded legs, like his Tartar neighbor and listens with the greatest eagerness to the world news told by one of the more educated Muslims, who can read the newspaper. Here too, the atmosphere is filled with the fragrance of roasted coffee, blended with the odors of the Shashlik fat, frying just outside of the coffee house. All sorts of melodious voices of the street peddlers selling Turkish candy

cooked corn and buzzah, tear in through the open windows of the coffee house, making the place a perfect delight to the simple mannered Krimchak.

One of the interesting facts of the Krimchak social life, is the manner in which they go calling on one another. When a Krimchak goes calling on a friend, the whole family goes along with him, and the call or visit is not of such short duration as ours, not even as the longest of our visits, but lasts from two to five days if not more. Surely this grand quality of hospitality marks them more distinctly than any other of their virtues, as the true descendants of Abraham and to the grand children of ancient Israel.

The most favorite of Krimchak dishes are the famous Tartar Shashliks, Yantochs and Tchebereks. Shashliks are fat square bits of fresh mutton pierced through and arranged on a five inch wooden stick which is thrown into a greasy pan of boiling fat and cooked until the meat is turned crisp. Shashliks to the Krimchaks are like pork or lamb chops to the American, readily made and thoroughly enjoyed with green vegetables, onions, lettuce and parsley.

Yantochs resemble our modern American meat pies, with some variations. An original Krimchak Yantoch is a large pie filled with chopped potatoes, onions, lamb or mutton, fried in grease until the extraordinary heavy dough walls of Mr. Yantoch get nice and brown. As a rule the Yantoch is not an everyday affair, it is only on Fridays that the good wives of the Krimchaks make them and carry them to their husbands' shops every Friday morning, when all business is laid aside and with legs folded under them and with both hands clinched to the warm juicy oozing pie, the poor Yantoch is eagerly devoured.

Tchebereks are large half-moon shaped meat pies filled with raw meat finely ground together with green onions and lots of parsley and pepper, fried in boiling dish of fat and eaten while still hot, right from the frying pan.

Very little white bread is eaten by the Krimchak. They prefer the fresh "Pete" a sort of soft cake, made of plain rye dough mixed with brand and sprinkled with brand on both sides and baked on a bare oven. Pete can easily be split while still hot, and inserted with a shashlik or two forming a sort of hot meat sandwich, which the Krimchak, as the Tartar, enjoys immensely.

Soup never appears on the table of a Krimchak, in fact none of the elegant dishes of the Polish and Lithuanian Jew, are to be found in the dining room of the Crimean Jews. Not even the traditional Sabbath delicacies like "Kugel" and Zimes, Pucha or Gefillte Fish." As a rule their food is very plain and simple as is their dress. To be sure, it is almost too plain, for everything is fried in fat and boiled in grease, but they eat lots of vegetables and are very fond of fruits and nuts, and while they do not know how to make fancy cakes and tasty salads, their fruit preserves are the finest, best and most delicious imaginable.

Coffee and buzzah are the most favorite drinks of the Krimchaks.

Buzzah is a sort of soft drink made of brand cooked with sugar. It is sold on the streets of Karasubazar and Baktschissarai, for a penny a glassful. But the Krimchaks are very fond of wine as well, which they usually make themselves in their homes, of those world famous Sudack grapes of the splendid Crimean vineyards.

Coffee is served black without milk in it. Each cup of coffee is cooked separately in a clean bright little copper coffee pot made for that special purpose. When left standing for a moment after the coffee is poured from the pot into the cup to cool off a little, a thick one inch layer of coffee sediment is usually found on the bottom of the cup. That is how the Krimchaks like to prepare their most favorite social drink at the coffee house and at home.

The Krimchaks dress just like the Tartars on the Peninsula, (and had it not been for the fact that they look like Jews, one could never tell them apart.) Both men and women wear the national garbs of the Tartar people. The men wear Turkish caps either made of red cloth like those worn by our Shriners, or of black fur karacul, which they wear all year round, summer as well as winter. Their trousers look like bloomers, extremely large and loose girdled about with a wide oriental girdle. Their coats are very long, made of thin cloth of a dull black color, hanging loose over the shoulders. Boots are never worn by the Krimchaks, but they wear sandals and sheep skin slippers of bright colors. Heavy woolen socks are worn summer and winter and the oriental white knit cotton cap never comes off their heads. It takes the place of the black satin Yarmolka of the Polish Chasid.

The womens' wardrobe is still more elaborate, more picturesque than that of the men. Their dresses are made of very bright colors of floral designs, oriental in every respect. They wear no stockings, but the white linen bloomers come way down to the ankles and cover every inch of the leg, reaching down to the slipper. The slipper is made of either red or yellow Sophian leather, with gold and silver trimmings. The skirts are rather short, but the wide bloomers are extremely long, a foot or so longer than the skirt. Strangely enough, a shawl is worn, not on the head or about the shoulders, as one would naturally suppose, but about the waist in the back over the hips.

The Krimchak women are very fond of jewelry, especially of small gold chains, with which they decorate their flat, hard red plush caps. They wear these and other chains around their necks, make bracelets out of them and often attach them to their braids, just like the Gypsies. For the Krimchak women like the Tartar women, are always wearing their hair made up in numerous thin little braids, intertwined with silk threads and gold silver and copper coins. Some especially, those who are blessed with abundant hair growth, make as many as fifty to sixty such braids, hanging down all over the back and shoulders. The girls often dye their hair in reddish paint called "Kene" which has a very un-



pleasant odor and makes the scalp very red and greasy, but it lends an extraordinary polish and luster to the beautiful long hair of the Krimchak maiden.

It is customary likewise among the women folks to paint their finger nails with the same dye, and it is really remarkable how well they succeed in this queer manicuring stunt. Old and young paint their long nails and revel in jewelery. Their belts are as a rule, are made of silk ~~(cloth)~~ inlaid with precious stones, and so are their bracelets. Finger rings they seldom wear, but red beads are the delight of all women in Krimchakdom.

The women as a rule do their own spinning, weaving and sewing as well as all the rest of their domestic work, and while working, and for that matter, even when they do not work, they constantly keep on chewing sakiz, a sort of chewing gum, only it has not sweet taste to it. Thus the naive Krimchak women, like the cows of Bashan, chew the cud the whole blessed day to keep their teeth white and clean.

The Krimchak women possess the most luxuriant hair that can be found in any place among any race of people. The secret of the beauty, softness, length and duration and preservation of their hair, lies in the use of the so called KILL. Kill is a sort of natural soap of muddy color found in great abundance in the mountains in the vicinity of Baktschissarai, (my birthplace) and near Inkerman. It is a very soft stone which contains a certain amount of natural oil. It is used by all the Crimeans instead of soap. It melts like wax when it comes in contact with water, especially with sea water.

Strange enough the Krimchak women are very fond of smoking, and when all the housework is done, mother and daughters, sit down in a circle upon the floor and puff the "chubuck," a sort of Turkish smoking pipe with extremely long mouth-piece. The chewing of sakiz, the smoking of the chubuck and the drinking of black coffee are among the principle characterisitic luxuries of the typical oriental life of the Krimchak women. By their habits, manners, looks and dress, one could never believe himself that these are daughters of Judah, for while the men folks are getting Europeanized a little, the women are still as oriental as ever. They seem to be very slow in giving up old traditions, customs, dress, habits, manners and ideas. But for that matter, women have always been more ~~xxxxxx~~ conservative than men. A similar spectacle we witness in America, where the men immigrants get Americanized sooner than the women, but I donot doubt that the same ~~slowness~~ given in the American case, may easily be applied to the Krimchak case, namely, that because the men folks get out into the world, meet the street life, come in contact with external influences outside of home, while the women folks mostly stay at home, doing housework, taking care of the children, etc., and consequently are slow in getting, in the one case, Europeanized, and in the other Americanized.

Many of the Krimchak women, like the Karait and Tartar women, go around open-breasted, i.e. they do not button their waists or kimonas in the front. This holds good especially with old women, who wear all sorts of talisman, charms and red beads about their necks, displayed on their bare chests.

Chains and talismans, to keep away the evil one, are worn very extensively not only by the women but by the men folks as well, for the Krimchaks in the Southern part of Russia are almost as superstitious as the Hassidim in Northern Russia. When somebody gets sick, they never consult a physician, but use herbs, talisman and ablutions. They often lead the poor unfortunate patient down to the river, where they wash his face and then escort him, not to his own home, but to the home of one of his friends, where he spends the first night. In addition to that, each one takes home a pitcher of river water for a Segulah:

In case one takes sick as a result of sudden fright, he is taken a mile or two outside of the city limits, is laid upon the ground and a circle is formed around him with a cane or dry branch. Then seven woolen threads of different color are tied to the nearest tree in the vicinity, also an earthen pot and a copper coin is buried on the place where the patient rested.

In his book "Abne Zikaron", Abaham Firkovich, the famous Karaite leader, relates another instance which will help to illustrate the superstitious nature of our Krimchak brethern. He tells that when he entered their synagogue in Karasubasar, with the permission of the Russian Government, to excavate the walls of the same to look after old manuscripts, they were all frightened to death when he declared his mission, no one of them dared to come near the "Genizah," because they were afraid of the Herem, that was put in former days upon the "Genizah." So great was their fear and consternation lest they bring down the wrath of heaven upon them, that they even scared the wits out of the Russian policemen who were secured by Firkovich to open the "Genizah," who refused to obey orders from their superiors to break the walls, lest they die instantly, as warned by the Krimchaks.

The Krimchak women are royally treated by their husbands. Perfect devotion marks the married life of the Krimchak. A Krimchak seldom if ever, applies for a divorce. A Krimchak never forsakes his wife and family. A Krimchak is never brought to court, charged with abusing his wife, or for that matter, any one else. Loyalty, affection and love, are the great home virtues of the Krimchak. Especially are they particular with regards to courtesy to old parents and grand-parents, whom they treat with the greatest tenderness, highest consideration and deepest sympathy. A Krimchak will always rise in the presence of an old person, offer his seat or assistance, always ready to serve the aged and venerable fellow brother.

A strange thing about the Krimchak women is the fact that they are as a rule, much taller than the men folks, and by far prettier than the men, just the reverse of what we find among their Karaite neighbors. Among the Karaites, the women are smaller and uglier than the men. In fact many of the Karaite men are really handsome, while the women are so ugly, that you could tell

a Karaite woman if she were the only one among a thousand other women of other nationalities. The Krimchak women are not so loud in talk as are the Karaite women, who usually walk the streets in pairs of five or seven and talk so loud that one can hear them all over town. There are not as many spinsters among the Krimchaks, neither. The Krimchaks are very glad to inter-marry with the Polish and Lithuanian Jews, but the latter for some reason or other, are not so anxious as they are, to marry their daughters (to their men.) They rather look down upon the Krimchaks, and never care to associate with them, for they consider them "socila inferiors", as do the German Jews ~~(of)~~ the Russian Jews in America.

I am glad to say that among these simple, God-fearing people there are no fallen women, which is I am sorry to say, the case in the North. Purity and chastity reign supreme in Krimchakdom.

ECONOMICAL ASPECT  
OF  
KRIMCHAK LIFE



## ECONOMIC PHASE OF KRIMCHAK LIFE

## NUMBERS.

It was impossible for me to secure accurate statistics regarding the exact number of the Krimchaks in the Crimean Peninsula, on account of the present European conflict, but approximately, I should say, all in all they number in the neighborhood of about ten thousand souls. For the sake of clearness I shall state the approximate number of the Krimchaks according to cities and localities in which they live.

Karasubazar -----	5000	Souls
Feudocia -----	2000	"
Simferupol -----	1000	"
Yevpatoria -----	600	"
Sevestupol -----	500	"
Kertch -----	300	"
Melitupol -----	150	"
Stara-Krim -----	130	"
Yalta -----	100	"
Berdiansk -----	100	"
Alushta -----	25	"
Baktschissarai	25	"
Elsewhere about	300	"
	10230	"

In places where their number is too small to form a congregation of their own, they generally affiliate themselves with the Russo-Polish communities, but in cities where their number is sufficiently large, they form communities of their own and build synagogues, according to their own taste, where they use their peculiar Sephardic Nusah, and worship according to their own manner. Thus in Baktschissarai, where I was born and raised, where their number is limited, not exceeding twenty-five souls, they belong to our Ashkenazic community, made up of Lithuanian and Polish Jews, worship in the same synagogue and are buried in same cemetery. Although I have noticed many times, in our synagogue, the Krimchak worshippers, especially the old men among them, using in addition to the Ashkenazic prayer book, used in our synagogue, a Sephardic prayer book with Tartar translation. I also noticed them chanting their prayers quietly as they do in their own synagogues. But in Feudocia and the like where their number is considerable, they have separate organized communities, separate synagogues and separate cemeteries.

## Occupation.

The Krimchaks of Karasubazar as well as all the rest of them in the Crimea, are mostly poor working men who live from the toil of their hand and the sweat of their brow. Many of them are wine makers, some farmers, but the majority are plain cobblers, tanners, tailors, cap makers and small merchants. There are no big capitalists among them, but there are likewise no destitute

poor among them. They all manage to make a living and are satisfied with very little. They are extremely honest in their business dealings and never take advantage of anybody. High industrial skill they never attained, because of their lack of modern education and proper industrial training. The Krimchak has none of that ambitious desire of making money that characterizes the Occidental Jews, and strange enough he is often so indifferent to business chances that the shrewd Polish and Lithuanian Jewish business man looks down with contempt upon the "ignorant sheep-headed" Krimchak.

#### Habits.

The reason for this strange indifference to wealth and material prosperity, is undoubtedly to be found in the simple habits of the Krimchak life, which is a copy of the life of the Tartar people among whom the Krimchaks, having been living, in peace, for many generations and centuries. It is a well established fact, in Jewish history, that the Jew easily adapts himself to his environment, and that is especially true with regard to the Krimchak who lives, acts, and thinks almost alike with the Tartar.

Simplicity, plainness and economy, the great outstanding virtue of the Tartars, are true characteristics of the Krimchak as well. No costly furniture, no rich decorations, no Parisian styles, no latest fads. In the home of the Krimchak, all the furniture one sees, is one low round table standing in the center of the dining room, no chairs nor beds are used. All eating and sleeping is done on the floor, covered with Turkish carpet. Long benches are attached to the walls around the rooms on which many bright colored soft pillows are scattered about.

#### Organizations.

As we have already seen above, the largest Krimchak community is to be found in Karassubazar, and because of its importance, I am going to give you a complete description of the place and its inhabitants.

Karassubazar is a very ancient city in the heart of the Crimean Peninsula, on the river Karasu (Black Water). This city is situated in a valley, like my own birthplace, Baktschissarai, surrounded by high mountains on every side. Karassubazar in the Crimea, is something like Fresno in California, when it comes to climate. It is the hottest place in the Crimea in the summer, because the high mountains that surround it protect it from the cooling sea breezes, and for that reason it is an excellent place for vineyards, as is the Imperial Valley in California.

<sup>REST</sup> The houses of Karassubazar are built of clay, like the (sort) of the Tartar habitants on the Peninsula, lacking all tastes of architectural beauty. Like all Oriental (houses) DWELLING

the walls of the houses are very thick, although the most of them are but two story (houses) and not only the outer, but even the inner partitions of the house are made of walls three feet deep. Every house is enclosed within high walls, like a fortified city, and no one can get into the house unless he is given permission to enter the arched gate of the court yard first. The windows are very small and are usually barred with iron or wooden grating. Extensive balconies surround the house and flowers of all kinds fill the court. Usually a well of spring water is found in every back yard, which is used for drinking and watering purposes. The gardens and flower beds surrounding the home of a Krimchak or a Tartar are often very beautiful, for the Krimchak, like the Tartar is very fond of flowers. \*OFTEN

Our Krimchak co-religionists in Karrassubazar are well organized into four religious communities, with four handsome synagogues. These synagogues are very old and the Karait Firkovitch made good use of them when he excavated some of their walls and discovered most valuable historic documents, which he sold to the Royal Museum or Ermitazsh in St. Petersburg.

Similar organized Krimchak communities are to be found in Stara-Krim in Kerch, Simferupol and Feudocia. In Feudocia the Krimchaks have two synagogues, one of which is at least a thousand years old, undoubtedly built by the Khazars. Each community has as a rule in addition to the synagogue, a Mikvah, usually adjoining the synagogue in the same court yard, as is the case in Bachtschissara, Karrassubazar and Feudocia. The Krimchaks have likewise their own Shochets, Rabbis as well as their own Chevrah Kadishah.

Names.

It may be of interest to note some of the unusual names of the Krimchaks. These names are seldom, if ever, met with among the Northern Jews of (the Crimea). Many of these names are found on the grave stones of "Emek Jeoshaphat" at Chafut-Kale and on the tomb stones of the old cemeteries at Mangup-Kale, Sulachat and Karasubazar. But the most of them are still employed by the men and women of our Krimchak co-religionists of to-day.

Women's Names.

Beyzah - Daughter of Bracha  
 Giorah - Daughter of Sinan  
 Surgalin - (Meaning beloved)  
 Gulph - (Meaning Rose )  
 Eituli - (Meaning Full Moon)  
 Guhor - (Meaning Precious Stone)  
 Tichter - (Meaning Gift)

## Women's Names.

Biklev - (Meaning Mistress)

Akbichah - (Meaning White Beauty)

Kisigul - (Red Blossom)

Parlok - Arzi - Beina - Khira -

Pursoni - Sharcha - Saltan - Arza - Manushab -

Mshallah - Kaliah - Murrat - Eltunkiz - Mushak -  
Kirzah - Duveleth - Rukhamah - Shunuch - Baltachin -

Saaduth - Archurufra - Pumia - Abigail - Beichnah -

Pneirah - Pumula - Mudath.

## Men's Names.

Babi - Son of Azariah

Bniyahn - Son of Issachar

Daniel - Son of Mikdashi

Zsubabel - Son of Jacob

Khukyah - Son of Chanuckah

Hannaniah - Son of Abdiel

Yokbai - Son of Joseph

Joseph - Son of Gibadi

Jacob - Son of Barniah

Kudeth - Son of Joseph

Simon Tov - Son of Nathan

Azjiz - Son of Ashriel

Nissim - Son of Sharvit

Allench - Son of Monodh

Kalba - Son of Eliahn

Mira - Son of Zurki

## Men's Names.

Mural - Son of Jeohyda  
 Sava - Son of Euriel  
 Schen - Son of Kheyi  
 Schaltiel - Son of Eldael  
 Busra - Son of Chaschiel  
 Tukmish - Son of Bakshi  
 Bukiran - Son of Isaac  
 Shakuh - Son of Basuch  
 Eimi - Son of Elisoph  
 Khannuckah - Son of Mordechi  
 Makhmoo - Son of Judah  
 Hillel - Son of Ephendi  
 Aaron - Son of Hinthah

Nachmoo - Anat - Achiah - Alani - Danielli - Acka -  
 Ravin - Adam - Barzih - Mishel - Rachmani - Sharbat -  
 Adoniah - Amrazsi - Alphasi - Kachula - Emmuel - Rikmah  
 Zadkiel - Zephaniah - Toshlon - Ziruk - Tavath - Eldad -  
 Shadna - Abyah - Adoniah - Or - Jehn - Achituv - Shevniah-  
 Lashgari - Nakshon - Amnon - Salunan.

Similar names are employed by the Jews of Derhant, Tashkent, and Turkestan in the Caucasian region of the Russian Empire, which points to the relationship of all Jews round about the shores of the Black Sea coast.

More modern names limited to the Krimchaks of to-day only, are as follows -

Jacob Kalpaktschi - Nissim Mangupalu - Samuel  
 Sasan - Moses Bentovim - Nissim Kokos - Bechar Patikh -

Asher Churbaza - Joseph Akhmatshet - Asher Aschirov -  
Eliezer Shick - Hyvin Peiastaro - Eliah Zakhzir -  
Raphael Labak - Ephraim Shor - Joseph Halevi - Aaron  
Hokohen - Akibba Mizrakhi - Abraham Ashkenazi - Joseph  
Hannukkah - Mordechi Purim - David Pessah

As it can easily be seen, many of these names derive their origin from localities, like Mangupalu, counties like Ashkenazi, history, like Pessah, and objects, like Duveleth, which throw considerable light upon the history of the Crimean Jew.

POLITICAL ASPECT  
OF  
KRIMCHAK LIFE



## POLITICAL ASPECT OF KRIMCHAK LIFE

Politically the Krimchaks are just as bad off as the rest of the Russian Jewish subjects. Although history conclusively proves them to be the earliest settlers on the Peninsula, yet on account of their adherence to the Jewish faith, they are deboured from the rights of all the other Russian non-Jewish subjects. The Krimchaks bear the yoke of Russian oppression with great courage and fortitude of spirit. They do not even complain <sup>normal</sup> against their bitter lot in that land of darkness. That is the characteristic of the Krimchak, never to complain, but bear the yoke, since their Lord has decreed it upon Israel. The Krimchaks, like the Yemenite Jews, have a great love for Zion, and look forward to the restoration of the Jewish Kingdom at Jerusalem. They are all Zionists, not political Zionists, but old type Zionists who believe in the miraculous deliverance of Israel through the Messiah.

Originally they were supposed to have possessed equal rights with all the other natives of the Crimea, but through the vicious scheme of the native Karaites, they were cheated out of their birthright. The old Krimchaks relate, that when the Crimea was conquered by the famous Queen Katherine, she granted the Krimchaks a "Schutz Brief", just as she did to the other nationalities on the Peninsula, but in 1836 when Nicholas I, was expected to visit the Crimea, the Karaites who lost their "Schutz Brief" came to the Krimchaks and asked them to let them have their "Schutz Brief" so that they, that is the Karaites might request the Czar some special privileges for the Krimchaks, whose friends they suddenly pretended to be. The foolish Krimchaks, not having suspected the Karaites evil designs, gave them their "Schutz Brief", which the Karaites falsified by inserting instead of Krimchakim Yvreyon, which means to the Krimchak Hebrews - Karoimskim Yevreyam, which means to the Karaite Jews and they never returned the note back to the Krimchaks.

When Emperor Nicholas II finally visited the Crimea, the Governor-General of Southern Russia, Prinz Michail Woronzav, undertook to restore and furnish in truly Oriental style, the old palace of the Khan's at Bachtschissarai, he entrusted the necessary purchases to the Karaite merchant, Sinah Bobovitch, a man of affairs, who had business relations in Constantinople. Bobovitch went to Constantinople and received during an audience with the Sultan, permission to select what he needed from the Sultan's castles and warehouses. On his return to Bachtschissarai, Bobovitch also had charge of furnishing the palace there,



remaining even after the Czar had arrived. At that time a deputation of the Crimean Rabbinites, i.e. the Krimchaks, were also presented to the Czar, and like the other natives of the Crimea, they submitted their petition to be released from military service. The Czar asked the delegates: "You believe in the Talmud?" "Yes, your Majesty, we believe in it", the Krimchaks replied. "Then you must furnish soldiers," curtly replied the Czar. "You see, Bobovitch, that you Karaites have done a very sensible thing by cutting loose from the Talmud, when did this happen?" Thereupon, Bobovitch replied that the Karaites never had anything to do with the Talmud, that their religion was much older than the Jewish religion, that the Karaites had taken no part in persecuting and executing Jesus on the cross." "Can you prove it?" asked the prince. "Certainly I can" replied Bobovitch.

When subsequently in 1874 a society for history and antiquities was formed at Odessa, Woronzov remembered Bobovitch's promise. Bobovitch had in the meantime been elected Chief Rabbi of the Crimean Karaites, and commissioned his tutor, Firkovitch, who was known as an inveterate foe of Rabbinites to furnish the necessary documents proving the great age of Karaism, giving him in addition to traveling expenses, a definite salary while occupied in this research work. He furthermore procured for Firkovitch, an authorization from the Russian Government to collect all the necessary records and historical documents among the Karaites and the Krimchaks. Armed with the authority, Firkovitch, traveled through the Crimea and took away from the Krimchaks whatever documents he deemed necessary. After plundering the Krimchaks, he fabricated manuscripts and various epitaphs, tampered with the dates of documents and interpolated the names of Crimean localities and Karaite personages in many of them. All this was done in order to represent the Karaites in the Crimea as a highly developed people, dwelling there since the time of the Assyrian King Shalmanesser in the seventh century B.C. and to prove that the Rabbinites, i.e. the Krimchaks owed all their culture to the Karaites. Extravagant and surprising as these alleged facts seem nowadays, they nevertheless found credence at that time in Russia, especially in Government circles. They paved the way for the total emancipation of the Karaites in Russia. Thus the Krimchaks who are the real native Crimean Jews, were swindled out of their rights by that famous, or rather infamous forger, Abraham Firkovitch, with the result that today they are subject to all the restrictions and disabilities of the Russian Jew in general. They cannot deal with certain articles, they cannot be admitted to the schools above the normal, they cannot occupy any position in the Government. They cannot be officers in the army and navy. They must pay extra taxes and must not live outside of

the pall of Jewish settlement, not even in Yalta nor Sevastopol, except by special permission. The traveler who comes to the city of Sevastopol is usually lead by the guide to the "Brotskaye Kladbeshtsche", i.e. the brother's cemetery, where thousands of men who fell in the Crimean War (1854-56) have found their eternal rest. On that famous historical cemetery, there is a separate field set aside for the heroes of Israel who died in that battle, many of them Krimchaks. Still the same people who shed their blood and died for their native land as heroes on the field of battle are denied even the right of residence on the very spot they consecrated with the atonement of their sacred martyr blood. Such injustice can only be perpetrated by a government like that of Russia. Fortunately, the Krimchaks, on account of their backwardness, and stagnation in civilization, they do not feel the injustice and persecution as keenly as the Northern Jews do. They are comparatively satisfied with conditions, to an extent, that the Governor of the Taurida, in his report to St. Petersburg, states that the Krimchaks are a peaceful, satisfied, industrious, honest and straightforward people. Here is an actual case where ignorance is bliss.

RELIGIOUS ASPECT  
OF  
KRIMCHAK LIFE

## RELIGIOUS ASPECT OF KRIMCHAK LIFE

## In The Synagogue,

The most interesting phase of Krimchak life is undoubtedly that which deals with their religious customs and ceremonies, traditions and superstitious, oriental practices. For notwithstanding the fact that they are true Rabbinites in every respect and loyal sons of Israel and his Torah, nevertheless, in many of their customs they differ greatly from the rest of the Jews of the world. For instance when the Krimchaks gather to attend services at the synagogue, they do not enter the house of worship until all the worshippers arrive, when they enter in a body, and as soon as they enter, they start the services at once. This is done in order to prevent people from "idle talk" in the "Holy Place", which is looked upon with the greatest respect by the Krimchak. As soon as the Cantor commences reading, no one dares to whisper or even to turn around in his seat. The Cantor stands in the center of the synagogue on a high platform called Bimah. So does the Rabbi of the congregation occupy a seat on the Bimah, not in Mizrah, as is the custom among the Polish and Lithuanian Jews. All the prayers are read alternately, sentence after sentence by the Cantor and congregation, in a chanting sing-song manner. Perfect harmony exists in the synagogue between the Cantor and congregation. The greatest respect is shown to the Rabbi and a spirit of holiness fills the entire house of worship. And as they enter in a body, so do they also leave the synagogue in a body. No one is allowed to remain there to speak or gossip with his neighbor, so as not to desecrate the holy sanctum.

Another interesting synagogue custom, is the manner in which they sell the portions of the Torah. Ere the Torah is read on Saturdays and holidays, the Shamesh, (Sexton) runs around the Bimah in great haste calling out in very loud voice, "Twenty Cents Maphter, Fifteen Cents, Shishi etc." The auction often continues from fifteen to thirty minutes. A Krimchak when called up to the Torah, often makes such an offer, "Birtauch Eki Immurta", i.e. one chicken and two eggs. Strange enough, this they do not consider idle talk in their synagogue, and they recite the procedure with great enthusiasm.

Their Rabbi never preaches in the synagogue, but in week days, after Maariv, i.e. evening services, (then) they go to the home of the Rabbi and listen to a learned discourse on the Talmud or Bible.

In the synagogue the women do not occupy the same pews with the men folks, but are seated in a balcony separated by a wall and lace curtain. Although according to an old manuscript found in Royal Library in St. Petersburg, in the past the men and women used to sit together in the Krimchak synagogue, even attend funerals together, which is strictly forbidden today.

On the Holy-Days of New Year and Atonement Day, the Krimchaks read in addition to the usual prayers of the day, many (psalms) **POEMS** which they chant in their peculiar Oriental Tartar sing-song. Even the most serious prayer and supplications of the day which are as a rule recited with tears and loud noises and even wailing by our Orthodox brethren in Northern Russia, are read with perfect composure, joy and harmony, as are the poems of the prayer books. All read or rather sing the verses and sentences in perfect unison, following the Khazan or Cantor carefully, no one raising his voice above the neighbors or ~~making~~ wild shouts of Khasidic religious enthusiasm as one encounters in the synagogue of Northern Russia.

On Sabbath Eve.

It is likewise the custom of the Krimchak to go to the Mikveh, i.e. (that is) bath house every Friday afternoon and upon returning, taste of every dish prepared for the Sabbath meal. "Toameyu Kayim Zochoo" i.e. all who taste of it enjoy life," cries out the Krimchak, when arriving home from the Mikveh, and the good wife comes forth and meets him with the delicacies for the Sabbath, which he tastes, blesses and is satisfied.

Yes, the Turkish bathhouse in general occupies a very important place in the life of the Krimchak. Men like them as do the women. It is their greatest pleasure to spend a day in the bath house. They enjoy it as we do grand opera. The men folks while cooling off, in the fountain hall of the bath house, eagerly **ENJOY** drink cups of Khaveh, (a) black coffee, and eating fruits. The pleasure with which they do it can not be described. ~~well~~. With the women folks, a bath day is a holiday. When they go to the bath house, they take along with them the best things to eat, cakes and preserves, wine and honey. They also dress in the finest costumes and put on all their jewelery, as though they were going to a ball. The rich among them, have even music played there for the enhancement of their great pleasure.

**UPON** (When entering the synagogue on Friday eveing, "The Sor. of Songs" is recited by the entire congregation, read alternately by the Cantor and congregation in the usual fashion of the Oriental Sephardic congregation, singing the verses in a sort of uniform sing-song. On Fridays the Krimchaks give alms to the poor and provide for their needs, with food (and) coal and coin. The Krimchaks are a very charitable and good-hearted people. They are always ready to help the poor brother who lost his way in life. Perfect harmony and brotherly sympathy exists between them, in joy and in sorrow, they are all one.

The interior of a Krimchak synagogue is the same as that of a polish or Lithuanian synagogue. It is very plain, no pictures no images or decorations of any kind. The platform is in the center. the ark in the Mizrah and all the long benches are facing it. The Krimchak synagogue like the Krimchak home, is very clean and orderly, not a speck of dirt is to be found in the synagogue, and everything is always in its proper place. A spirit of reverence and worship fills the Krimchak synagogue.

WORSHIPFUL NETS

As I remarked above, the Krimchaks are very devoted to their religion. A Krimchak will never be converted to any other religion. He will never give up his religion or marry outside of his faith. Still the Krimchak is no zealot like the Polish and Lithuanian Jew, he does not care whether his brother keeps or transgresses the law of Moses. He will never come up and rebuke the offender of the law and will never laugh or ridicule him, or persecute him, he just looks on calmly with perfect composure on the transgressions of his neighbor and pities the poor fellow who does not know any better.



## THE MARRIAGE CEREMONY

Among the most interesting customs of all isolated ancient Jewish sects are undoubtedly their engagement and marriage ceremonies. The Krimchaks like the Phalash Jews, have very ancient matrimonial rites, which may interest the modern Jew, for which reason I am going to describe some of them in detail.

The engagement ceremony is considered by the Krimchak a strong and valid contract which is not to be easily broken. It is a serious tie which is not to be lightly annulled. After the engagement ceremony, which is the same as that of the Orthodox Jew. The Bridegroom is supposed to call upon the bride as often as possible. He is also obliged to send her at least twenty cents every Friday, of which she is to dispose of in the following manner - Ten cents for the bath house expense, six cents for Kenah, a paint with which to dye her hair and paint her nails, which is usually done at a bath house. She is also to buy Sakiz, a sort of chewing gum for that same amount and finally for the rest of the four cents, she is to buy soap and tip the servant in the bath house. In exchange for this high and expensive courtesy, the bride is to present the bridegroom with a Yantoch every Sabbath eve, that is a sort of meat pie for which the bridegroom must pay a few cents to the messenger boy who brings it to him, even though the boy be rich or Korah.

Some of the Krimchaks marry very young, often at the early age of thirteen or fourteen. The majority of them however, marry only when they feel that they are able to support a family. Unlike the Polish Jew, the Krimchak never forces his daughter to marry against her will or without her consent. They leave it to their children to marry whom ever they wish, provided the party is in a position to support a wife and furnish her comforts.

The marriage ceremony always takes place early in the morning, while it is still dark, (before the breaking of dawn) the people, (guests) march on the street with music and dancing to the bridegrooms' home, whom they take out and escort to the brides' home in grand procession. But ere they enter the house of the bride, they leave the bridegroom standing in the center of the yard, and they dance and jump wildly around him in a circle. Next they enter the bride's home, where they tarry an hour or two until the bride completes her toilette. Part of the bride's toilette consists of painting her forehead with white paint and decorating it with black painted drawings of blossoms and flowers, also of painting her cheeks with gold paper of different designs. Then they lead the bride to the bridegroom's home where the rejoicing is continued till daybreak, when they are both, i.e. the bride and groom, led to the synagogue, but instead of a canopy as is the custom among us, they use a talith, instead, which they spread over the heads of the couple and bring a chicken ~~and~~ and a rooster which are held by the best men, and swung around the heads of the marrying couple (for) seven times. Then these chickens are killed and the bridegroom is betrothed to his bride according to the ancient custom of Moses and Israel and the crowd returns to the bride's home.

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The Bride is not allowed to leave her house all through the seven days of rejoicing, and no male is allowed to approach her room. The bridegroom is the only one who is allowed to enter her room and that for the first night only. All through the seven days of rejoicing, the bride spends in a soft and comfortable bed, which is sheltered by curtains and sheets so that no man might peep into it. This bridal bed is known as the "Hupah", a term altogether differently applied by us today.

Another interesting custom among the Krimchaks is the way in which the bridegroom is led to the bath house on the wedding day. It is the duty of the bridegroom to invite all his bachelor friends to his home, treat them with wine and cake and then be led by them to the Mikveh or bath house in triumphant procession. Upon their arrival at the bath house, a sort of auction commences at once, on the honor of undressing the bridegroom. "I offer alti kupek", i.e. six cents for the privilege of removing the bridegroom's coat!" - explains one bidder - "I offer oon kupek, i.e. ten cents that the coat should not be removed," cries another. This peculiar auction continues for about two or three hours straight, until the poor fellow is finally undressed in peace. But that is not all, the poor Hathan is not through yet, for as soon as he is undressed, a new offer is made by one of his young friends who gets up and calls out on top of his voice, "I promise a dollar for the privilege of washing the bridegroom's head with soap." "And I offer two dollars that the bridegroom's head be not washed by you," follows another friend, amid shrieks of joy. The same comical procedure takes place when the Hathan is ready to dress again. The bridegroom is often kept for hours in the bath house.

It is likewise customary among the Krimchaks for the bride to bring all her dresses and jewelry to the bridegroom's home, where they are hung on all the walls for display, so that everybody might see their wealth and beauty. This is done a day before, or on the day of marriage. All gold and silver jewelry, particularly the Turkish coins, without which no marriage gifts are complete, are put into a large silver tray and a jewelry expert is called to announce their worth. After the expert's opinion is given, the tray is carried around and the honest opinion of every one in the house is solicited, to make an estimation on same. Every one is entitled to estimate them according to his individual judgement. Then the marriage contract is written, and in this Kethubah are mentioned and carefully enumerated all the articles of goods and property, clothing and jewelry, which the bride had at the time of her marriage, as well as their price. This contract is signed by all the people in the house. Often times there are as many as twenty or twenty five signatures on a single Kethubah.



EDUCATIONAL ASPECT  
OF  
KRIMCHAK LIFE

## EDUCATIONAL ASPECT OF KRIMCHAK LIFE

Liberal education among the Krimchaks is scarce. The most of them do not know more than to speak the Tartar and read the Hebrew. Western culture has not taken hold, as yet, of the Krimchaks. The Krimchak knows nothing about the great movements that transpire in our times. He lives in a world of his own, circumscribed and limited to his daily needs and wants. There are no professional men among them, not a one. They are all plain, common satisfied working men, who trust in God, and manage to get along without our so-called modern culture.

## Schools.

Their schools are of very ancient type, modeled after the Tartar MEDRASH. The teacher, who has no knowledge of pedagogy, sits in the center of the school room, which is usually in his own home, and the pupils sit in a half circle around him on the bare floor, reading, reciting and chanting in one voice, the prayer book or the bible. So loud is the noise they make, that it reminds one of the "Gemorah" melodies of a Lithuanian Yeshibah on a (genial) summer night.\* All the children learn at school, is to read Hebrew ~~SOMETIMES~~ also to translate the Bible, but nothing else is taught at a Krimchak school.

The same general curriculum is followed, the same disorder and lack of system is prevailing in the Krimchak school, as we find in the average Polish "Heder". No grammar, nor writing, neither Russian nor Tartar are taught. Usually the children quit school at the age of thirteen and then they are taught a trade. There are no "silken young men" among them, as you find among the "Hasidim" in Poland. Every Krimchak boy knows a trade.

The Krimchak school exists only for the (partial) education of the boys, but not for the girls. The girls never go to school at all. They have no trades, but stay home and learn domestic science... Thus the women are much lower in the scale of education than the men. They are absolutely ignorant of what is going on in the world. They are in the full sense of the term, illiterate. They cannot even read the Hebrew prayer book. But unlike the Karaites and Tartar women, they are not kept like prisoners, locked up in their homes, but are allowed to appear on the streets, whenever they feel like it, and that without veils (or) white sheets or covers. The Krimchak women are very devoted to their husbands and are excellent house keepers. They do fine beaded (work) and knitted work and are cranks when it comes to neatness and cleanliness. It is true, they love to gossip, but they cannot help that, why, they are only women after all.

Of late some of the young men of the wealthier Krimchaks, commenced to show interest in modern knowledge, but their modern training does not go any further than that of reading modern Hebrew literature and Russian newspapers. Many of the Krimchak youths have of late also made some important changes in their outward

appearance for they are getting to be Europeanized. They are slowly abandoning the national and native Tartar style of dress and costume and are putting on white collars and tailored suits after the latest Parisian style. But not<sup>5</sup> with the young women, they do not seem to have the least desire to change and get civilized.

### Great Men.

From numerous inscriptions found on old "Torah" cases in Karasubasar, from countless epitaphs on ancient monuments found in the old cemetery at Chufut-Kale and from the many learned books and parchments found in the Krimchak "Genizah" by Firkovich, we may securely conclude that, in the past, there must have been a good many great men among the Krimchaks. True it is, the names of these great scholars that are known to us, are not always typ-  
 THE ■ theory, that the Krimchaks are made up of Jewish exiles from many lands. Thus we find the name of a great Rabbi Shabthai Dani-  
 alo, which is Italian, on the cemetery of Chufut-Kale dated 900 A.D. and the name of another great Rabbi called Moses Ashkenazi, mentioned in the "Haznio" dated 1560, which betrays his German origin. While in the same "Haznio"—an ancient Krimchak prayer book, the name of a Rabbi Chandli is given, which points to its Turkish origin.

Among the foremost great men of the Crimean Jews of the past, the following may be mentioned as they are found in documents, books and on monuments in the cemetery of Bachtschuasai, Karasubasar and Mangup.

Abraham, the Crimean who wrote the book  
 "Sephath Emeth" 1357.

Moses the Exiled, who wrote the book called  
 "Ozar Nekmod" of Kiev, 1448

Isaac Pamyuto.

Jeremiah Banin.

Moses Mevorach, author of many poems used  
 by the Krimchaks to this very day. 1598

Moses Kokos<sup>1</sup>, 1548 upon whom is was said -  
 "From Moses to Moses, there never arose a man  
 like unto Moses."

David Lachan<sup>1</sup> 1716, who wrote the "Haznio"  
 He is likewise the author of the book  
 "Mishkan David".

Abraham Shachi, author of a book called  
 "Sechel Tov."

Moses Bachshi - 1724

The biographical material on the lives of these great (Krimchak) leaders that covers a period of almost nine centuries, is very scant. Their books have either been lost or destroyed, all we know about them is their names as we find them inscribed on monuments that have been unearthed and still are being discovered on the Crimean Peninsula.

The Krimchaks themselves are unfortunately, a people who have little use for antiquities and have no conception of the historical value of data or important ancient manuscripts. Firkovich for that reason had no difficulty in getting all the historical material they possessed, but according to modern historians, he so falsified the material he obtained from the Krimchaks, in order to prove his own false theories, that it is a very **risky** thing for us to depend upon or draw conclusions from the material he has to offer on this matter. For that reason we must limit our research in this field, to the great men among the Krimchaks who are nearer to our own times, about whom we know with certainty of their works, deeds and lives, which helped to shape, mold and influence the Krimchak life of to-day. Foremost among these men, stands out the great personality of the Gaon Hayyin Hezekiah Medini, better known as "The **Hanqm**", Chief Rabbi At Karasubazar."

## THE HAHAM

## His Life And Works

The Gaon Hayyin Hezekiah Medini, was born at Jerusalem in the year 1833 to very pious and noble parents of good old Frankish family, (who were) exiled from Spain, *that was* four hundred years ago. His father Rabbi Raphael Medini, who was a great talmudic scholar, taught the boy Hebrew, Bible and talmud, and at a very early age the great genius of the boy was discovered by his father and teachers. He showed wonderful power of memory and deep insight into the teachings of the ancient Rabbis. So profound was his knowledge of the law, that he was granted "Semicha" i.e. ordination, at the age of thirteen.

Although young Medini had ~~now~~ permission to assume charge of a congregation as full fledged Rabbi, nevertheless, he preferred to stay in the "Beth Hamidrash" and study, so as to add knowledge and to gain more wisdom in the "Law of God". Unfortunately in 1853, his father died, leaving a large family without any means of support and this young prodigy was obliged to listen to the persuasions of his friends, the great Palestinian Rabbis, who urged him to leave the "halls of the Torah" and enter the actual practical ministry. In the same year, at the age of twenty, Hayyin Hezekiah Medini, accepted a call and became Rabbi of the Frankish Congregation at Constantinople.

Here in Constantinople he made a great many friends, for everybody admired his beautiful character. He also secured many students who remained his life long friends, who looked up to him and honored him as a "Man of God". For from his very youth, the Haham was not only brilliant in letters, but in character as well. He was true to the ~~core~~, unselfish, unassuming, plain and meek; good and kind to all. The nobility of his soul attracted all people to him, like a magnet, and his kingly appearance made Jew as well as Gentile respect him.

So rapid did his fame grow and so fragrant his good name that after serving Constantinople Community for a term of thirteen years in the capacity of a "Dayon", i.e. as member of a Rabbinical Court Of Justice, he received and accepted a call from the largest Krimchak Community in the Crimean, Russia, namely that of Karasubazar.

Karasubazar, as I already stated in a previous chapter, contains the largest number of Krimchaks in the world. There are fully eight hundred Krimchak families in it, but almost all of them are uneducated, almost ignorant, tartar-like Jewish people. When Rabbi Medini arrived to take charge of his new community, he was greatly alarmed at the terrible conditions prevailing among them. He never saw such a congregation before; Jews who know no Judaism, Jews who grow up without the least knowledge of the Bible and especially the Talmud. Jews who do not study the law. He took pity on them, for they were willing to learn, and he settled down to the task of educating and elevating these poor simple hearted good people,



feeling that this was a chance, an opportunity to save a whole community in Israel from religious degeneracy and perhaps from an ultimate religious (destruction.) Like a true Pastor, he, at once, commenced the work of "feeding the hungry sheep", by establishing a "Yeshibah" or Hebrew Academy, under his personal supervision and direction, where hundreds of Krimchak young men received instructions in Biblical and Talmudical ~~thesis~~. He himself delivered the lectures and conducted classes for more than thirt-three years, with the result that to-day the Krimchaks, and not the Polish and Lithuanian Jews in the Crimea, are the most learned in the law, and ~~not~~ most proficient in Judaism. He practically transformed the ~~life~~ of the Krimchak Community, raising it to a level that it has never reached before. To-day one finds great Talmudic scholars among them, men of profound learning and piety and all of them without exception, are the students that he raised in less than half a century. His influence on the Krimchaks has undoubtedly been the greatest in their history, for he not only taught them the law and educated them in Hebrew, but he also organized them into a solid body and ~~community~~ cemented them into a concrete unit, as they have never been before. He did away with a great many of their superstitions and pointed out a new way for them to walk, in, the way of the Torah.

He, too more than any other man, was instrumental in bringing, before the public eye, and was the first to present them to the great Jewish world, through his numerous books, in a new light, in the true light as "good, dear and holy people." The Krimchaks were little known ere the Haham came to dwell in their midst and even to those few to whom they were known, they were known as an ignorant, wild and degraded sect or tribe with whom no one cared to associate. The Haham was the first to discover the nobility of their souls and the beauty of their naive faith in God. He loved them and looked upon them as his children, and with a father's care he trained, fostered and sheltered them from all evil. He never missed an opportunity from dispelling the myth of obscurity that hung over them all those centuries up to the time of his arrival as leader among them. He certainly was a leader, a true spiritual guide who reclaimed a whole isolated family to the house of Israel.

The respect and love that existed between the Haham and his flock can only be described by the love and devotion existing between the "wonder Rabbi", (The Zadik) and his followers, (The Hassidim). The Krimchaks looked upon him as a God. They actually worshipped the ground he walked upon. On every important matter the Haham was consulted and his advise was invariably taken. A Krimchak never brought suit against his fellow Jew in any but the court of justice of his Haham. The Haham's decision was always final and always obeyed. No Krimchak would dare to violate or even contradict the Haham's commands.

The Haham's influence extended not only over the Krimchaks at Karassubazar, but all over the Crimean Peninsula, and not only over Krimchaks alone, but over all Polish and Lithuanian

Jewish communities in the Crimea. All Rabbis and Shochtim referred to him for advise, instruction and guidance in things too difficult to be decided by themselves. All over the Crimea, even the little children knew who the Haham was. He was called Haham because the first initials of his name which equal "Haham", namely, Háyvin Hézekiah Médini. He reminded one of the days of the Judges in Israel, for he actually judged Crimean Israel for thirt-y-three years, and his days Israel lived in peace in the Crimea. So great was the trust and confidence of the people in him, that they would always abide by his decision. He settled many quarrels in different communities and restored peace and harmony in many a house in Israel. In fact, his counsel was sought even by leading Rabbis from all parts of the new and the old world. For the thirty-three years he spent in Karassubazar, he never wasted a single minute, but he worked day and night, for the sake of his people; and it is really remarkable what a great man of his type can do, for inspite of the fact that he is the most prolific writer of "Teshuboth" of our day, he found time, in addition, to writing numerous books, also to attend to a thousand and one things, which no ordinary man could possibly do. For instance, to care for the widow the orphan, the poor, the shnorrrers, to reply to thousands of "Shaaloth", i.e. Rabbinical inquiries, not only those of his immediate community, but from all over the world. He was often asked by people to pray for their sick or entrusted with sums of money to distribute among the poor. Especially was he constantly occupied with giving out certificates of "Semichah" and "Kabalah" to Rabbis and Schochtim from all over creation. Every author of some new book was sure to come to him to ask him for his "Haskamah" and the good hearted man, who could not refuse anybody, thus worked ceaselessly and untiringly to the very day he left Russia.

The loveableness of the Gaon's character is hard to describe. Such types as he represents are very scarce, indeed, in our days. He was a real "Zadik", a man who lived a life of sacrifice, a life of (science) a life of usefulness. All his interest in the Torah and in his people, Israel, was of the disinterested kind, — "Lishmoh". He hated money. He hated honor. He despised evil. His monthly salary amounted only to Forty Rubels, (\$20.00) and out of that amount he gave about half to the poor. He never would accept a gift or present, not even at his daughter's wedding. He refused to retain a (promised) gain from the publication of his own books. On the contrary he made weekly contributions out of his own pocket to the publication fund of his books. He would prefer sending his books to poor but learned people, almost free of charge, rather than to rich, who could pay the price, but who could not make use of them. He used to say, "I want my books to be read, not merely sold." He had the greatest respect for the humble laboring man and all his three daughters married laboring men. One married a cobbler, the other a tanner and the third a cap-maker. The former two are still living in Karassubazar and the last one is residing in Pheodicia. But the Haham's sons-in-law in addition to being bread earners, are likewise great scholars his own pupils, whom he reared and **BRED** his Yeshibah at Kara-subazar.

The Haham left no sons. His only son, who was a very promising, brilliant boy, died at a very early age, which made the Haham very sad, but he accepted it submissively from the hand of God, since that was His will. But in order to perpetuate his name, which a great Mitzvah, he undertook the publication of that gigantic work known as the "Seder Hemed". He likewise donated many books to Yeshiboths, bearing his name and gave every cent he had to "Zedakah," for the same reason, in order to redeem his soul from that great punishment of dying without leaving a son to perpetuate his name, which he naively believed was on account of his sins.

The Haham hated honor. He never cared for publicity. He refused, again and again, to accept calls from many large communities who offered him a larger salary. He felt he could serve the Krimchaks best. He knew they needed him most. He cared for the service he could render, not for the pay and honor which he despised. He understood that by his education, his sympathies, his Oriental ways and manners by his Sephardic and Palestinian origin, that by these unique and peculiar characteristics, he was especially fitted for the Krimchak community, whom he actually did resurrect to life again, after centuries of obscurity, ignorance and illiteracy. He always avoided notoriety and when he published his famous book on Talmudic studies, called "Or-Li", he failed to affix his name to it. In vain was he assailed by the Rabbis of Poland and Lithuania for ~~not~~ having published the "Seder Hemed" without their "Haskomoth", for it was not out of arrogance and independence on his side, but quite the contrary, he wanted to avoid publishing on his books the titles and honorary names which the Haskomoth granters usually ascribe to an author of his rank.

The Haham was the most highly ethical man I know of. He was ethics personified. He ran away from honor. He loved the good, the right, the true and had a supreme passion for justice. He loved peace and pursued it. Especially was he considerate about the feelings of others. He never commanded, but persuaded in the most pleasant terms of the true peace maker and as a rule, people were moved by his words of wisdom and followed his advice and instructions. So great was the power of his angelic personality, that (some) people would not dare to deviate from the course, and advise he urged them to follow, lest the wrath of heaven descend upon them. He was obeyed through love and fear as the ancient "Man of God" in Israel. He was a many-sided man, his piety did not interfere with his deep sympathies, for everything Jewish. He gladly joined all movements that tended toward the uplift and independence of his beloved people. He was truly proud of his race. He was one of the first "Hovave Zion" and even favored the modern Zionistic movement. He bought Shekalim and donated much money toward the national fund. In short, everything Jewish was of the greatest concern to him, be it of whatever character, it may, he was always ready to support and encourage movements that tended towards the betterment and upliftment of his holy people. For that reason the Haham is one of the few men in Israel to-day who is honored and loved by all Jews the world over.



The Haham commended the respect not only of his co-religionist, but strangely enough, of people outside of his faith as well. The Turks in Palestine, the Tartars in the Crimea considered him a "Holy Man" whom they greatly respected. For not only his inner character, the beauty of his soul, but his outer appearance as well, greatly impressed people of all nationalities, commanding the respect and admiration of this saintly man. His wonderful calm, pale, wise good countenance, his long gray beard, his Turkish turban and medieval gabardine added to the kingly dignity of his general behavior - impelled all men to respect, revere and honor his majestic personality. Even the Russian Governmental Authorities held him in high esteem, and when the Royal Order was issued in 1886 to deport all foreigners out of Russia, he was allowed to remain, through the intervention of governors, professors throughout the land of the Czar, in his behalf.

His passionate love for the Holy Land equaled only that of Jehudah Halevi. He considered himself in exile all the thirty-three years he spent in Karasubazar among the Krimchaks, and in all of his books published in Russia, he expressed in the warmest terms his deep desire and great longing for his dear Fatherland. In his preface to the fifth volume of the "Sedeh Hemed" he writes some very inspiring words concerning Jerusalem. He even wrote a number of poems that are full of yearning, hope and love for Jerusalem. The reasons for his longing for a return to Palestine are manifold. First, Palestine was his birthplace, it was the cradle of his nation the center of the universe, the place where the "Schechinah" dwells. Second, because there he hoped to come in contact with great scholars of his liking, there he could sit and study the "Torah" and write his great works, in peace. For in Karasubazar, he was too much occupied with communal affairs connected with his office, so that he could neither study nor write as much as he wanted. In Palestine, he expected to retire from his active ministry and devote all his time to study and Talmudic research.

At last in 1889, his heart's desire was fulfilled, and he returned to Jerusalem. The Krimchaks tried their very best to keep him, at least persuade him to stay a few more years with them but without avail. He was determined to leave the Crimea, although not without a sense of deep regret, because he was very much attached to his community, who saw in his departure, the loss of a great leader, the equal of whom they never had and perhaps shall never have again. The feeling of regret and sorrow of his departure, was therefore mutual. I am sure, no Jewish leader was ever given a warmer send-off than the Haham in 1889. Men, women and children marched after him, upon leaving the city of Karasubazar, with sad drooping heads and gloomy faces, as though the father of the community was leaving them orphaned, without any one to help them in their difficulties and comfort them in their sorrows. People from all parts of the Crimea turned out in large numbers to meet him at the station as he passed by and thousands went as

far as Sebastopol to see him for the last time, whence he sailed on steamer to Constantinople. My father who was one of his great admirers and who too went to Sebastopol to bid him good-bye, told me he never saw a more touching scene in his life.

#### Works of The Haham.

The Haham is without question the most prolific writer of Halachic works of our age. He wrote more than twenty volumes of remarkable Rabbinic studies, which place him in a class by himself and mark him as the most profound scholar in Rabbinic law of our times. In them he exhibits a most wonderful memory, the keenest perception and deepest insight into the works and thoughts of the ancient Rabbis of the Talmud. It may be said that he caught the spirit of the Talmud as no one else has done since the day of Moses Maimonides. In fact, he resembles Maimonides in many ways, in style, in ease, in memory, in system and in order, and just as we stand in awe, and wonder how one man could possibly have systemized the "Halacha" in such clear, easy logical and convenient fashion out of that awful Talmudic chaos - into a gigantic work like that of the "Yad-Hachazakah", so do we likewise stand in awe and wonder, when we consider the greatness of the almost impossible creation of the Haham's stupendous literary work of the "Sedeh Hemed" - an encyclopedic collection of laws, decisions and responsa arranged in a perfect alphabetic order covering almost every conceivable question of life, treated halachically by the former and latter Rabbis this very day. Such an undertaking would be considered remarkable enough had it been the accomplishment of a whole committee of editors consisting of a number of the most learned scholars, especially so when it is the result of just one man's brain; a man who, in addition to book writing, has had a thousand and one other things to attend to, as communal leader, or Rabbi of large congregations, as leader of his generation the world over. But it is an old story, what we ordinary men can not possibly even conceive of being accomplished, the genius does accomplish and does it well, too. Herein the greatness of our great lies. Our Gaon Hayyim Hezekiah Medini has proved it to be true. He made the seemingly impossible, possible, and created a work which will remain a monument of glory for all ages to come, even as is the work called "Mishneh Torah" by the Rambam.

Still he was so meek and so humble that he would never admit that he had done anything so wonderful, and he often insisted that his friends cease praising his works, since they contain nothing profound, scholarly nor anything original. For unlike the medieval style Rabonim, he refrained from pilpul and Talmudic speculation. His mind was too logical, too straight to the point, I imagine, to follow their methods of Talmudic study. His system was almost scientific, clear, orderly, direct and to the point. He did not believe in "innovations" and did not depend on his own learning and scholarship, he always leaned upon the ancients and decided cases of right and wrong according to their ideas and decisions in the past. He was neither a Mekilim, nor Mahkmir, he did not dare to take the law in his own hands, but faithfully followed

the Rambam and the Gaonim of all ages past.

The Haham published his first book call "Miktab-Le-Hezekiah", Smyrna in 1865. This book contains his first Talmudic studies and responsa. Commenting on this prime literary work of the Haham, the Gaon Beza, <sup>22</sup> Kohan of Vilna, said "If I had not been aware of the fact that the author of this book is living with us to-day, I would be apt to ascribe it to one of the Rishonim."

In 1874 he edited his second book at ~~Amir~~, called "Or-Li". On this book, which treats similar subjects as the first, the author failed to write his name, but through his dedicatory blessing to his new Karasubazar congregation, who helped him greatly in his publication, we recognize its author, and love him the more for his unassuming personality.

"Pakuoth Sadeh" is the name of his third book of studies in Talmudic Judaism, published at Jerusalem in 1900, but the grandest of his works, the most tremendous task and accomplishment of his noble life, is reached in the publication of the eighteen volumes of the "Sedei Hemed", Warsaw 1890-1911. Thirteen out of these eighteen volumes were published by the Haham during his life time, while the remaining five volumes were edited by his faithful and devoted disciples, the brothers Moses and Mayer, Pesah and Abraham Ashkenazi.

In volume fourteen, the publisher Joseph Zevi Lev, prints the will of the Haham, written thirty-four years prior to his death. In it the Haham makes some very interesting statements, but on account of the unusual length of his will, I shall be obliged to limit myself just to those parts which are most essential to my present task. For instance, he asks in his will, that his body be washed inside the house, not outside in the yard, as is the custom among the Krimchaks. He also requests that his death notice in the papers throughout the world, be brief, just stating "That the Haham, the author of the "Sedei Hemed", of Kalo Vida had passed away, on such and such a day and his greatest wish, was that his friends upon hearing of his departure, study one chapter in the "Sedei Hemed" for the benefit of his soul."

He furthermore requests that no eulogies be made after his death and no preachers invited to publicly lament the loss and praise the life work of the deceased. On his tombstone, he requests that just the following be written, without the addition of any titles whatsoever, "This is the monument of Hayyin Hezekiah Medini, son of Kalo Vida, (his mother's name) who died on such and such a day, may his soul rest in peace, and blessed be he who will study a chapter of Mishnah or read a psalm for the benefit of his soul." He likewise mentions in his will that no one be smoking in the room where he gives up his ghost for seven days after his death. That many books be placed on the table in that room so that anyone who wishes to study for the peace of his soul do so.

He even mentions in his will how much the funeral directors be paid for their work and, strange enough, he requests that his fine Sabbath clothes be sent back to Karasubazar to the brothers Pesah and sold there, because in Palestine they would not be sold for as good a price. He furthermore advises that each one of his pupils buy a piece of his clothing, remarking "That they need not fear lest they contract a disease through them because I never had a contagious disease in my life, but in case I contract one, in time, ere I die, let them sell them to the Turks.".

After giving a long list of borrowed books he asked to be returned and enumerating the names of many Jesiboths to which he bequests his own books, he speaks about his life work, the "Sedeh Hemed" saying, that in case he dies ere he completes the great task, that his beloved disciples Mayer and Moses, Pesah, and Abraham Ashkenazi be entrusted to complete and edit his works, but on condition that they do neither add nor subtract from what he wrote on the subjects treated in the "Sedeh Hemed." These true disciples toiled untiringly day and night, in the work of arranging and copying the works of the Haham, which were originally written in the Frankish script, used by the Haham, until they finally completed all the editions of the "Sedeh Hemed", that is to say, from the letter Mem, where the Haham left off, to the last letter of the alphabet. But had it not been for the personal devotion of the publisher, Joseph Zevi Lev, to the Haham and his admiration for the great Gaon of Karasubazar, the "Sedeh Hemed" would never perhaps, been completely edited and published as we <sup>HAVE</sup> now see it. Mr. Lev is one of those typical Jewish publishers who are just as much interested in the contents of the books they publish as they are in the mechanical and profitable part of the business. Joseph Lev is himself a great scholar and the son of an old family of scholars. He is also a very pious and God fearing Jew. His interest in the Haham's work was intense because he appreciated the great learning of the Haham, and learned to love him through his business dealings which were so supremely honestly conducted. Mr. Lev says, again and again, that the motive that prompted him to edit all the Haham's works was purely out of (the) love for the Haham and the honor of having his name associated with the Haham's great personality. He confesses that there was no money in it and that the work was hard, but he is glad he did it just the same. Such publishers deserve a separate place in our literature and I always wish ~~we~~ Jews had given our great publishers the place they occupy in the gentile literature. There is much more to be said on the subject, but I fear I said already too much as it is. I shall add just this, the story goes, that on the second night after the Haham's death, some muslemen stole in gently into the cemetery where he was buried and attempted to dig his body out of the grave and carry him to their cemetery, but their scheme was luckily discovered in time and a guard was placed on the Jewish cemetery to guard the remains of the Haham.



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