
The First Jews of Ukraine

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BY THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY, Jews were one of the larger ethnic groups in Ukraine, so much so that Ukraine was sometimes called ‘Yiddishland’. Yiddish was an official language of the Ukrainian People’s Republic, in existence at the final stage of the First World War, and one of the founding fathers of modern Zionism, Ze’ev Jabotinsky, frequently stated that there could be no independent Jewish state without an independent Ukraine. Jewish history was shaped, to quite a large degree, by the fact that Jews inhabited Ukraine; in the same way, the destinies of other ethnic groups in Ukraine were determined by their sojourn with Jews of Ukraine. Here I consider ‘Ukraine’ as a cultural and ethnic condominium, rather in Paul Robert Magocsi’s vein.¹ However, it is difficult to confine the histories of different segments of the populations of Ukraine, among them the Jews, in the Procrustean bed of modern political boundaries; in addition, Ukraine has always been open to influences from outside, as, for example, in the case of those whom I call ‘the first Jews of Ukraine’. Because of Ukraine’s colonial past, the question whence Jews first came there has been made into a political one, sometimes without a Ukrainian context; thus, if Ashkenazi Yiddish-speaking Jews of the last five centuries are viewed as having come from Poland, with all the obvious, and sometimes tragic, implications, the (non-)question of what happened to Khazarian Jewry evolved in the Russian imperial context into ‘who was here first’, ‘who deserves to be granted political and human rights’, and ‘why it went wrong’. On the Jewish side, attempts to define the beginnings of the Jewish presence in Ukraine went hand in hand with apologetics and with the desire of Jews to find (or invent) a cultural pedigree and identity: were the Jews a ‘Western’ (i.e. ‘German-like’) cultured people? Were they ‘autochthonous natives’ of Mosaic faith? Did they come from the shores of the Mediterranean or from the Caucasian mountains? Have they, simply, belonged, and if so, in what way?

In this essay, I shall deal solely with clear-cut evidence and shall completely ignore the various Khazarian speculations, for we have absolutely no evidence about Jewish–Khazarian continuity in Ukraine or elsewhere.² We have very little material

¹ See P. R. Magocsi, *A History of Ukraine* (Toronto, 1996).

² Thus, I ignore any contribution by the late Omeljan Pritsak, as great a scholar as he was, made in N. Golb and O. Pritsak, *Khazarian Hebrew Documents of the Tenth Century* (Ithaca, NY, 1982). A refutation of the many mistakes and misconceptions found in this book would call for another book-size publication.

at our disposal about the Jews of Kievan Rus or about the first two Lithuanian centuries in the history of Ukraine—that is, before the influx of Ashkenazi (including Bohemian) Jews from Poland.³ At the same time, we have a good deal of material—relative to the scarcity from Kievan Rus territories—from the ‘marginal’ territories of Ukraine, namely from the Crimea, that part of Ukraine whose shores could be said to be ‘washed by the waters of the Mediterranean’, to borrow a Polish saying. And this logic of the evidence in our possession will guide my further presentation.

Of all ethnic groups inhabiting present-day Ukraine, Greeks and Jews are the most ancient. They have lived there for more than two millennia, though there is lack of continuity in their physical presence on the territory of what is now Ukraine. Both Greeks and Jews first settled in the Crimean peninsula and in adjacent areas of the Black Sea coast. Initially, Jews appeared in the Crimea in the first century BCE, or even earlier. Their immigration was part of the Jewish dispersion in the Hellenistic world. The documented Jewish population of the northern Black Sea basin included Hellenistic Jews, Jewish converts, and ‘God-fearers’ who lived in Greek cities that were part of the Kingdom of Pontus. Remnants of these Jewish communities were unearthed beginning in 1828.⁴ The Romans ruled the Crimea from 63 BCE, followed by the Byzantines. The Jewish community of Byzantine-ruled Chersones continued to exist, possibly with interruptions, until the late eleventh century.⁵ The first Christians in Ukraine were possibly converted Jews of Chersones and semi-converts to Judaism, the ‘God-fearers’. Basically, the spread of the Christian Gospel was no different in the Crimea and Black Sea Ukraine from that in Galatia and other Jewish centres of Asia Minor; before becoming a Christian site in the fifth century CE, the basilica of Chersones had served as a synagogue.⁶ It is not known whether Hellenistic Jews of earlier times survived the tribulations of the epoch of mass migrations (*Völkerwanderung*) or whether new Jews reached the Crimea from other places. There is an old and unsolved question about a Samaritan presence in the Crimea in Byzantine times.⁷

³ See the contributions by A. Kulik and J. Kalik in the recent work edited by A. Kulik, *Toledot yehudei rusyah, i: mimei kedem ad ha’et hahadashah hamukdemet* (Jerusalem, 2010) (Russian version *Istoriya evreiskogo naroda v Rossii, i: Ot drevnosti do rannego novogo vremeni* (Moscow and Jerusalem, 2010)): A. Kulik, ‘Hakdamah: toledot yehudei rusyah’, 17–20; id., ‘Hayehudim berusyah hakedumah: mekorot veshihzur histori’, 169–77; J. Kalik, ‘Yahadut rusyah ha’atidit: hayehudim behalakeiha hamizrahayim shel mamlekhet polin–lita’, 205–21. The issues regarding sources have not changed dramatically since the appearance of I. Berlin, *Istoricheskie sud’by evreiskogo naroda na territorii Russkogo gosudarstva* (Petrograd, 1919).

⁴ Their documents known by the mid-nineteenth century were published in A. Harkavy, *O yazyke evreev, zhivshikh v drevnee vremya na Rusi* (Vilna, 1865); id., *Hayehudim usefat haslavivim* (Vilna, 1867).

⁵ See M. Kizilov, *Krymskaya Iudeya: Ocherki istorii evreev, khazar, karaimov i krymchakov v Krymu s antichnykh vremen do nashikh dnei* (Simferopol, 2011), 33, 86, 90.

⁶ E. Overman, R. Maklennan, and M. I. Zolotarev, ‘K izucheniyu iudeiskikh drevnostei Khersonesa Tavricheskogo’, *Arkheolohiya*, 1997, no. 1, pp. 57–63. However, one cannot trust the Hebrew text in this article.

⁷ As signalled by the Life of St Constantine, the Enlightener of the Slavs; see J. T. Milik, ‘Abba

In the eighth century, the Turkic-speaking and still pagan Khazars ruled parts of the Crimea. The longer version of the Letter of Khazar King Joseph, written presumably to the Cordoban vizier Hasdai ibn Shaprut, did mention a series of localities in the Crimea, apparently because they had Jewish populations.⁸ Later, after the destruction of Khazaria in 965–8, a Jewish presence was again recorded in the formerly Khazar regions of the Crimea. In Partenith, a Crimean locality mentioned in the longer version of the Letter, Jewish tombstone inscriptions were found in the 1860s and were reviewed by Abraham Geiger in 1869; according to Daniel Chwolson, they can be dated prior to the eighth century.⁹ According to the Life of St Constantine, around 861 CE Jews were present in Chersones and learning Hebrew was essential if one were to enter the Khazar realm.

The study of Crimean Jewry, especially that of Crimean Karaites, has long been hampered as a result of extensive interference with documentation such as manuscripts and burial inscriptions, including the creation of actual forgeries, by the collector and communal functionary Abraham Firkovich during the 1840s–1860s,¹⁰ and also because of the nationalist separatists who came after him, who attempted to rewrite the Karaite history of the Crimea. The source material has been affected to such a degree that it was hard for some to write about the Jews of the Crimea and Ukraine without relying on rewritten and forged documentation. However, the epigraphic materials upon which Firkovich based his ‘theories’ have been checked anew, and scholars are in a position to reconstruct the different stages of Jewish history in the Crimea with a high degree of accuracy.¹¹

Zosimas et le thème des Tribus Perdues’, *Bulletin d’études karaïtes*, 1 (1983), 7–18, where the evidence is blurred. Syrian Christians from Chersones are mentioned in the Old Church Slavonic texts: see D. Shapira, ‘Irano-Slavono-Tibetica: Some Notes on Šaxaiša, Mithra, Lord Gshen-rab, Bon, and a Modern Myth’, *Khristianskii Vostok*, new ser., 3 (9) (2002), 308–17; V. M. Lurye, ‘Okolo “Solunskoi legendy”’: Iz istorii missionerstva v period monofelitskoi unii’, in *Slavyane i ikh sosedi*, vi: *Grecheskii i slavyanskii mir v srednie veka i rannee novoe vremya* (Moscow, 1996), 23–52.

⁸ P. K. Kokovtsov, *Evreisko-khazarskaya perepiska v X veke* (Leningrad, 1932).

⁹ D. Chwolson, *Corpus Inscriptionum Hebraicarum* (St Peterburg, 1882), 142–7.

¹⁰ A. Firkovich, *Sefer avnei zikaron* (Vilna, 1872); cf. A. Harkavy, *Altjüdische Denkmäler aus der Krim, mitgeteilt von Abraham Firkowitsch (1839–1872)* (St Petersburg, 1876); A. Harkavy and H. L. Strack, *Catalog der hebräischen Bibelhandschriften der Kaiserlichen Öffentlichen Bibliothek in St. Petersburg* (St Petersburg, 1875).

¹¹ D. Shapira, ‘Yitshaq Sangari, Sangarit, Bezalel Stern, and Avraham Firkowicz: Notes on Two Forged Inscriptions’, *Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi*, 12 (2002–3), 223–60 (a Russian version appears in *Materialy po arkheologii, istorii i etnografii Tavrii*, 10 (2003), 535–55); id., ‘Iitskhak Sangari, Sangarit, Betsalel’ Shtern i Avraam Firkovich: Istoriya dvukh poddel’nykh nadpisei’, *Paralleli*, 2–3 (2003), 363–88 (a slightly different Russian version of the preceding); id., ‘Remarks on Avraham Firkowicz and the Hebrew *Mejelis* “Document”’, *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, 59/2 (2006), 131–80 (a fuller version: ‘The *Mejelis* “Document” and Tapani Harviainen: On Scholarship, Firkowicz and Forgeries’, in M. Alpargu and Y. Öztürk (eds.), *Omeljan Pritsak Armağam / A Tribute to Omeljan Pritsak* (Sakarya, 2007), 303–93); id. (ed.), *Matsevot beit ha’alemin shel hayehudim hakara’im betsufatkeh, krim: duah mishlahat epigrafit shel mekhon ben-tsevi* (Jerusalem, 2008); A. Fedorchuk and D. D. Y. Shapira, ‘Ketovot matsevot 1–326 mesefer avnei zikaron le’avraham firkovits benushan

In the Khazar era, Jews lived in the Crimea, primarily in Kerch on the eastern side of the peninsula. This is confirmed both by archaeological discoveries and by two Khazar–Hebrew documents: one is known as the Cambridge Document,¹² the other is the longer version of the Letter of Joseph, the Khazar king. The author of the latter text was a Jew who knew the Crimea better than any other part of Khazaria. It is significant that this author, while noting a series of Crimean localities apparently populated by Jews, does not, however, state the names of places that later became important Jewish–Karaitic settlements, such as Sulkhāt, Kaffa, and Qırqyer (Çufut-Qal‘eh), for the simple reason that these places did not yet exist in the ninth century CE. As already hinted, there has been speculation about Khazar converts to Judaism who could have formed a major component of future Ukrainian Jewry; however, the depth of Judaization in Khazaria was rather shallow and it seems that the majority of Khazar converts reverted to Islam after the collapse of the Khazar state, as Muslim sources tell us.

Scholars do not even have information concerning Jewish settlement in either Çufut-Qal‘eh or Mangup in the Crimea in the middle of the thirteenth century, immediately following the Mongol invasions. Nevertheless, it was at the beginning of the Mongol era that the first Karaite communities in the Crimea were founded. One may assume that these Karaites came from Iran and Central Asia (directly or via the trade cities of the lower course of the Volga), and from Egypt—the places whence came the first Muslim preachers and traders to the Crimea, along with the Jews—and also from Constantinople.¹³ The same applies, partly, to Karaite communities in Galicia and Podolia, as well as to those in ethnic Lithuania, which were established not earlier than the mid-fifteenth century, by immigrants from the Golden Horde, the former Byzantine realms, Jerusalem, Egypt, and the Crimea.¹⁴

As already stated, Jewish, and especially Karaite, presence in Ukraine in this period, prior to the influx of Ashkenazi Jews from Germany to Poland in the early sixteenth century, is better documented in Crimea than in other Ukrainian territories. We possess very little reliable information about a Jewish presence in Ukraine proper before the Ashkenazi immigration. We now have a letter written by a Rabbanite Jewish community in the tenth century that deals with the community of Kiev.¹⁵ Whatever the authorship, or the addressee, the existence of a Rabbanite

ha’amiti ve’im hata’arikhim ha’amitiyim: pirsūm makdim’, in D. D. Y. Shapira and D. J. Lasker (eds.), *Eastern European Karaites in the Last Generations* (Jerusalem, 2011), 36–82.

¹² Or the ‘Schechter Document’: see S. Schechter, ‘An Unknown Khazar Document’, *Jewish Quarterly Review*, new ser., 3/2 (1912–13), 182–219; cf. Golb and Pritsak, *Khazarian Hebrew Documents of the Tenth Century*.

¹³ D. Shapira, ‘Persian, and Especially Judeo-Persian, in the Medieval Crimea’, in Sh. Shaked and A. Netzer (eds.), *Irano-Judaica: Studies Relating to Jewish Contacts with Persian Culture throughout the Ages*, vi (Jerusalem, 2008), 253–89; cf. G. Akhiezer and D. Shapira, ‘Kara’im belita uvevolhin-galitsiyah ad hame’ah ha-18’, *Pe’amim*, 89 (2001), 19–60.

¹⁴ See Akhiezer and Shapira, ‘Kara’im belita uvevolhin-galitsiyah ad hame’ah ha-18’.

¹⁵ See Golb and Pritsak, *Khazarian Hebrew Documents of the Tenth Century*.

community at that time in Kiev is beyond doubt. A 'Jewish gate' is mentioned in the *Rus Primary Chronicle* three times in the first half of the twelfth century. But the majority of our information on Jews in Kiev comes from twelfth-century western European Jewish sources: during that century, the talmudic scholar Moses of Kiev visited western Europe.¹⁶ He was in correspondence (and, probably, in personal contact) with Jacob son of Meir Rabbenu Tam in Ramerupt and with the *gaon* Samuel son of Eli in Baghdad. Ysaak de Russia, mentioned in English sources between 1180 and 1182, is probably the same as Isaac (*y-ts-h-*) of Chernigov (*ts-r-n-g-m-b*) in *Sefer hashoham*; Benjamin Hanadiv of Vladimir was mentioned in Cologne in 1171;¹⁷ and Asher son of Sinai from the land of Russia is mentioned in Toledo in the early fourteenth century.¹⁸

Petahyah son of Jacob Halavan (= Weiss) from Prague and Regensburg travelled in the Middle East between 1170 and 1180;¹⁹ though he passed through Ukraine twice, his only reference to Jews is perhaps in a comment about some 'heretics' (*minim*) whom he found in the steppe next to the Crimea: apparently the people he noted lived amongst the local Turkic-speaking nomads or Slavonic-speaking Brodniks. Scholars have generally identified them with Karaites. However, Petahyah's stories about his travels were not recorded by him personally but by his former mentor, the renowned scholar Judah the Pious (Yehudah ben Shemuel Hehasid), known for his anti-Karaite bias. It thus seems that Petahyah's stories about simple-minded and ignorant Jews living in the Ukrainian steppe among nomads were interpreted by Judah the Pious as stories about his own enemies, the Karaite 'heretics'.

There is evidence in Jewish sources about western European Jews who visited Rus/Ukraine, or about Jews from Rus who went abroad. At least three sources demonstrate that these Jews knew the local language of Rus, or that it was their mother tongue. When Kiev was annexed by Lithuania in 1320, local Jews were granted certain rights; during that period, both the Rabbanite and the Karaite communities seem to have grown in numbers and achieved prosperity.

I have also undertaken a survey of Jewish centres in the Crimea. This shows that Sulkhat (Sulxat), called Eski Qırım or simply Qırım in Turkic and Stary Krym in Ukrainian, was the first capital of Muslim Turkic Crimea. Its name came to be used for the entire peninsula. The fact that Jews had a presence there is not surprising, as it served as the capital for the rulers of the Mongol Horde. The Karaite scholar Aaron the Elder, author of *Sefer hamibhar*, may have been born there; he mentions an event that occurred there in 1278 to which he was a first-hand witness: a dispute between Karaites and Rabbanites concerning the *molad* of the month of Tishrei (the

¹⁶ *Sefer hayashar* (Vienna, 1811), no. 522. There were attempts to identify this person with the Moses of Russia mentioned in *Sefer hashoham*. In scholarship, he was frequently confused with his namesake, who lived in the second part of the fifteenth and beginning of the sixteenth centuries.

¹⁷ *Sefer hazekhirah* by Ephraim son of Jacob. In the same century, under 1288, Jews are mentioned in Vladimir in the *Hypatian Chronicle*.

¹⁸ *Even ha'ezer*, no. 118.

¹⁹ M. Grinhaut, *Sivuv harav rabi petihah meregensburg* (Frankfurt am Main, 1905).

conjunction of the earth, moon, and sun—the beginning of the New Year). This is the earliest literary testimony of the presence of Karaite Jews in the Crimea. The Rabbanite scholar R. Abraham Qırımî wrote his important work *Sefat emet* in this city in 1358, upon the request of the Karaite *nasi*, Hizkiyah b. Elhanan.²⁰ There is just one surviving tombstone from the town (that of Mordechai son of Mordechai, 1517 CE), though the three medieval Jewish cemeteries of Sulkhat are described in the 1830s as huge and ‘ancient’; however, in the mid-eighteenth century there was only one Karaite left in Sulkhat, for the former residents of Sulkhat had moved, towards the eighteenth century, to the more prosperous Çufut-Qal‘eh.²¹

Kaffa (Capha, Keffe, Theodosia, Feodosiya) was established as a Genoese settlement after the years 1261–3. The Jewish presence there was already well documented in the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century (1309 CE?), when a synagogue, presumably the Karaite one, was built. It seems that Sulkhat and Kaffa, Sulkhat’s seaport, had a significant Jewish presence. Jews from Italy, Crete, Anatolia, and north-western Iran were attracted to the port, one of the largest in the world at the time, which stood at the northern end of the Silk Route, reopened as a consequence of the Mongol invasions. The city’s economy was based on trade with the Far East, trade in local produce from the area that is today Ukraine, and trade in Turkic slaves, who were much in demand in Mamlûk Egypt. At the end of the fourteenth or the beginning of the fifteenth century, the captive German soldier Johann Schiltberger noted that ‘two kinds of Jews’ resided in Kaffa, generally identified as Karaites and Rabbanites, and that they had two synagogues.²² In 1381 the Karaites of Kaffa were writing letters to Karaites in Kiev, implying the existence of a community there.²³

In 1449 the Genoese republic published an edict prohibiting the Catholic bishop of Kaffa from meddling in the internal affairs of the Armenian, Greek, and Jewish communities. In 1455, following the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople, the Genoese republic relinquished its hold on settlements in the Black Sea basin to

²⁰ S. Tsinberg, ‘Avraam Krymskii i Moisei Kievskii’, *Evreiskaya starina*, 11 (1924), 92–109.

²¹ See M. Ezer and D. Shapira, ‘Sulkhat’, in Shapira (ed.), *Matsevot bet ha’alemin shel hayehudim hakara’im betsufat-kaleh, krim*, 198–204.

²² See H. Schiltberger, *Reisebuch nach der Nürnberger Handschrift*, ed. K. F. Neumann (Munich, 1859), 57; *Hans Schiltbergers Reisebuch* (Tübingen, 1885), 63. See also ‘Puteshestvie Ivana Shil’ tbergera po Evrope, Azii i Afriki, s 1394 goda po 1427 god’, ed. and trans. F. Brun, *Zapiski Imperatorskogo Novorossiiskogo universiteta*, 1 (1867), 1–2; cf. *Regesty i nadpisi: Svod materialov dlya istorii evreev v Rossii (80 g.–1800 g.)*, i: *Do 1670 g.* (St Petersburg, 1899), no. 185. Many scholars ascribe to this important source the statement that Jews also possessed 4,000 houses in the outlying areas, but these words are not in the original manuscript: see M. Kizilov, ‘K istorii maloizvestnykh karaimskikh obshchin Krymskogo poluostrova’, in *Tirosh: Trudy po iudaïke*, vi (Moscow, 2003), 123–40; D. Shapira, ‘Beginnings of the Karaites of the Crimea Prior to the Early Sixteenth Century (with Contributions by M. Ezer, A. Fedortchouk, M. Kizilov)’, in M. Polliack (ed.), *A Guide to Karaite Studies: The History and Literary Sources of Medieval and Modern Karaite Judaism* (Leiden, 2003), 709–28. The actual wording used in the printed editions is ‘Es sein zwaierlei Juden in der stat und haben zwoc sinagog auch in der stat.’

²³ See Berlin, *Istoricheskie sud’ by evreiskogo naroda*, 190.

the Genoese Saint George Bank. The bank then sent its officials to Kaffa to improve the increasingly ineffective administration of the city. The heads of the residents of the city sent a letter of petition to the bank, asking for the retention of the bank commissioner, Niccolo Bonaventura, in his post. Leaders of the Jewish community appended their signatures to this letter. They included Obadiah b. Moses, Nathanel b. Abraham, Canibey b. Paşa, Jacob b. Rabbani, and Kokoz b. Isaac.

A wealthy and influential Jew from Kaffa, Khozya (= Khwâja, 'master') Kokoz (or Kokos), was the principal political and economic agent for the Grand Prince of Muscovy, Ivan III, in the Crimea in the 1470s. He served in this consular capacity before the authorities of Kaffa, the Armenian Greek Prince of Mangup, and the Khan Mengli-Girây. He might be identical with, or related to, Kokoz b. Isaac, a signatory of the letter of petition discussed above. A generation or so later, relatives of Khozya Kokoz, possibly his sons, donated Pentateuch scrolls to the congregations of Kaffa and Sulkhât.²⁴

In 1475 Kaffa was conquered by the Ottomans and became the capital of an *eyâlet* ruled by the future sultan, Selim the Grim (1470?–1520, ruled from 1512). It would appear that the Jewish community did not particularly suffer from the Ottoman conquest. Just a few years later, a unified Rabbanite community was organized in Kaffa that included Ashkenazim, Romaniots, Sephardim, Babylonians, and others, headed by R. Moses Hagoleh Harusi, an exile from Kiev who had been taken captive by the Tatars in Lyady in Lithuania and was brought to the Crimea in 1506. Later generations ascribed to him the creation of the Rabbanite prayer book for festive days, *Minhag kafah*, but this is in actuality an earlier composition. In the early sixteenth century, the Rabbanite community of Kaffa existed alongside the Karaite one, and it was the anti-Karaite activities of R. Moses of Kiev that prompted the final schism between the Karaites and the Rabbanites, the amalgamation of different Rabbanite communities into one, and the secession of the Karaite groups. According to Ottoman sources, the Jewish community of Kaffa had a mixed constitution in 1545.²⁵

'Western' Jews (Sephardim or Ashkenazim?) lived in the neighbourhood of Giri Yüzbaşı/Frenk Hisâr (42 houses, 270 persons). There were also Efrenciyân Jews (eight houses, 64 persons), among whom were forty unmarried people (indicating that it was a new community, presumably Western judging by its name, and not mentioned in the previous census). A small number of Circassian Jews (with three houses, 15 persons) also lived in Kaffa. The Işhaq Yüzbaşı community (81 houses, 465 persons), possibly Karaite, was the largest community. In 1545 Jews made up 8 per cent of the total non-Muslim population of Kaffa; Armenians constituted

²⁴ See M. Ezer and D. Shapira, 'Kaffa', in Shapira (ed.), *Matsevat beit ha'alemin shel hayehudim hakara'im betsufat-kaleh, krim*, 204–17; Kizilov, *Krymskaya Iudeya*, 191–6, 209.

²⁵ A. Bennigsen et al., *Le Khanat de Crimée dans les archives du Musée du Palais de Topkapı* (Paris and The Hague, 1978); A. Fisher, 'The Ottoman Crimea in the Mid-Seventeenth Century: Some Problems and Preliminary Considerations', *Harvard Ukrainian Studies*, 3–4, pt. 1 (1979–80), 215–26; id., 'The Ottoman Crimea in the Sixteenth Century', *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 5/2 (1981), 135–70.

65 per cent. According to the 1545 census, there were 134 Jewish households in Kaffa.²⁶ By the seventeenth century, Kaffa had already turned into a remote provincial city; its Jewish community, then mostly Karaite, persisted until the twentieth century.

Beginning in the mid-sixteenth century, the Rabbanite community of Crimea moved from Kaffa, relocating mainly to the town of Qarasubazar or Qarasu (now Belogorsk), where Tatar-speaking Jews—of mixed Sephardi, Ashkenazi, Byzantine, Italian, Georgian, and Circassian extraction—survived until the Holocaust; the Rabbanite synagogue was built in 1516. This isolated community produced—or preserved—an extremely rich assortment of manuscripts, and it was from there that the bulk of the Firkovich First Collection (now stored at the Russian National Library in St Petersburg) came. On the other hand, Karaites were migrating en masse in the same period into Çufut-Qal'eh, abandoned by then by its Tatar khans, who had just built the new capital of Bâhçe-Serây nearby. The result of these two interwoven emigration waves from Kaffa by the first half of the sixteenth century was that the Rabbanites found themselves in the dying town of Qarasubazar, while the Karaites achieved prosperity at Çufut-Qal'eh. This wealth was a consequence of their eager involvement in the slave trade,²⁷ which quickly developed after the Crimean Tatars set upon raiding Ukraine, Muscovy, and Poland from the late fifteenth century on. The community of the Rabbanites of Qarasubazar was constantly strengthened by Ashkenazi Jews captured in Ukraine and ransomed in the Crimea, to the extent that the Ashkenazi component totalled one-third of the community.²⁸

From the fourteenth century through the third quarter of the fifteenth, Mangup/Theodoro/Dori in the Crimean mountains served as the capital of the Gavras monarchy, the Princedom of Theodoro. The dynasty was perhaps of Armeno-Trabезundian origin and claimed a relationship to the Comnenus imperial family; in about 1395 the town was visited by the hieromonk (*hieromonachos*) Matthew, who produced a poem of 153 verses about the town.²⁹ The town was destroyed by Timur-Lang and rebuilt by Prince Alexios I (ruled 1402–34).³⁰ The

²⁶ See Ezer and Shapira, 'Kaffa'.

²⁷ M. Kizilov, 'Slave Trade in the Early Modern Crimea from the Perspective of Christian, Muslim and Jewish Sources', *Journal of Early Modern History*, 11/1–2 (2007), 1–31; id., 'Slaves, Money Lenders, and Prisoner Guards: The Jews and the Trade in Slaves and Captives in the Crimean Khanate', *Journal of Jewish Studies*, 58/2 (2007), 189–210.

²⁸ See D. Shapira, 'Some Notes on the History of the Crimean Jewry from the Ancient Times until the End of the 19th Century, with Emphasis on the Qrimçaq Jews in the First Half of the 19th Century', in W. Moskovich and L. Finberg (eds.), *Jews and Slavs: Essays on Intercultural Relations*, xix: *Jews, Ukrainians and Russians* (Jerusalem and Kiev, 2008), 65–92.

²⁹ H.-V. Beyer, *Istoriya krymskikh gotov kak interpretatsiya Skazaniya Matfeya o gorode Feodoro* (Ekaterinburg, 2001), reviewed in 'Geschichte der Krimgoten als Interpretation der Darlegung des Matthaios über die Stadt Feodoro', *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, 96/1 (2003), 283–5.

³⁰ See N. Bănescu, 'Contribution à l'histoire de la seigneurie de Théodoro-Mangoup en Crimée', *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, 35 (1935), 20–37.

first tombstone with Jewish inscriptions dates from this period. It was apparently under Alexios II (ruled 1434–44), son of Alexios I, and under his brother, John-Olubey (ruled 1444–60), that Jews came from Constantinople/Istanbul because of its Byzantine–Greek cultural milieu (Constantinople was about to fall into the hands of Turkish-speaking Ottomans) and because the site was suitable for tanner-ies, the traditional trade of the Constantinopolitan Karaites. It seems that their emigration strengthened between 1453 (when the Ottomans conquered Constantinople) and 1475, when Mangup/Theodoro itself was conquered by the Ottoman Grand Vizier, Gedik Ahmet Paşa. In any event, the total number of surviving tombstone inscriptions at Çufut-Qal'eh versus those at Mangup-Qal'eh in the fifteenth century (but prior to 1475) is comparable; nevertheless, the presence of Jews in Mangup in that time span is more articulated than in Çufut-Qal'eh.³¹ The land of the Jewish cemetery had served earlier, according to the description by the aforementioned hieromonk Matthew (c.1395), as gardens for the inhabitants of the town, who built a set of terraces there. It was only later, in the mid-fifteenth century, that these terraces were used for Jewish burial.³²

As already mentioned, in the very early 1470s the Crimean Jew Khwâja Joseph Kokoz of Kaffa, called Khozya Kokoz in Russian sources, served as a political and financial agent of the Muscovite Prince Ivan III (1440–1505) at the court of the princes of Mangup and before the notables of the then Genoese Kaffa.³³ The Ottomans conquered the fortress in December 1475 after a bloody siege of six months; after they seized the town, there was a massacre of the local Christian population.³⁴ After the Ottoman conquest, the territory of the Principedom of Theodoro became the Mangup *qadîh*, part of the Keffe *eyâlet*.³⁵ In 1493 the town burned down; the Ottoman governor of Mangup, Tzula, rebuilt the city walls after 1503. In 1520 there were forty-eight Jewish families at Mangup, about a quarter of the total population (935 people, of which 460 were Greeks, 252 Karaites, 188 Muslims, and 35 Armenians);³⁶ in 1542/3 the community had shrunk to thirty-five families. With

³¹ See D. Shapira, 'Istanbul/Qushta', in id. (ed.), *Matsevot beit ha'alemin shel hayehudim hakara'im betsufat-kaleh, krim*, 272–3.

³² A. G. Gertsen, 'Archeological Excavations of Karaite Settlements in the Crimea', in *Proceedings of the Eleventh World Congress of Jewish Studies*, division B, vol. i (Jerusalem, 1994), 181–7 (Russian version 'Arkheologicheskie issledovaniya karaimskikh pamyatnikov v Krymu', *Materialy po arkheologii, istorii i etnografii Tavrii*, 6 (1998), 744–51); id., 'Raskopki Mangupa v 1992 g.', *Krymskii muzey*, 1994, no. 1, p. 139; id., 'Jewish Community of Mangoup According to Archeological Data', *Proceedings of the Twelfth World Congress of Jewish Studies* (Jerusalem, 1999); A. G. Gertsen and Yu. M. Mogarichev, 'Chufut-Kale—iudeiskaya krepost', in E. Solomonik (ed.), *Evrei Kryma* (Simferopol and Jerusalem, 1997), 23–32; A. G. Gertsen, *Krepost' dragotsennostei: Kyrk-Or. Chufut-Kale* (Simferopol, 1993).

³³ Ezer and Shapira, 'Kaffa', 206.

³⁴ See A. G. Gertsen, 'Po povodu novoi publikatsii turetskogo istochnika o zavoevanii Kryma', *Materialy po arkheologii, istorii i etnografii Tavrii*, 8 (2001), 366–87.

³⁵ See Shapira, 'Beginnings of the Karaites of the Crimea', 722–6.

³⁶ See H. Jankowski, *A Historical-Etymological Dictionary of Pre-Russian Habitation Names of the Crimea* (Ann Arbor, 2006).

a similar shrinkage of the non-Jewish populations, Jews made up one-third of the total population.³⁷ The Polish ambassador, Marcin Broniewski, visited Mangup in 1578 and noted that the city had been devastated; one Greek was living there, and a few Jews and Turks.³⁸

When the ‘New Mosque’, or Valide Cami‘i, was built in Istanbul in 1597–1663 on the site of the old Karaite quarter, near the modern Galata Bridge, the Karaite community was forcibly removed to Hasköy, the Sultan’s private village on the other side of the Golden Horn; deprived of their property, many Karaites preferred to emigrate to the Crimea, to Çufut-Qal‘eh and Mangup. Indeed, the Karaite communities in the Crimea grew significantly during the first quarter of the seventeenth century, owing to immigration from Istanbul. Sometimes such immigration has been described as religiously motivated, as appears on the tombstone inscription from 1627 of ‘Raḥel the elder that came from Qusṭanṭhinah to the town of Mangup to keep the paths of faith, zealous in her religion’.³⁹

During the same period, in the first third of the seventeenth century, the Crimea was a target of constant raids by both the Zaporozhye and the Don Cossacks; at least once, in 1626, they penetrated as deep as Mangup and wreaked havoc in the area.⁴⁰ Some Karaites were killed by the Cossacks, as is evident from tombstone inscriptions—from the year 1629, for example.⁴¹

The most famous Karaite community in the Crimea is that of Çufut-Qal‘eh. Its fame is in no small way due to the fact that Abraham Firkovich, who lived there for a number of years, rewrote its history in a somewhat tendentious manner. The city was originally known by the Turkic name Qırqyer/Qırq-Or. Islamization of the

³⁷ See G. Veinstein, ‘La Population du sud de la Crimée au début de la domination ottomane’, in *Mémoire Ömer Lûtfi Barkan* (Paris, 1980), 242. See also Fisher, ‘Ottoman Crimea in the Mid-Seventeenth Century’, 221. Cf. also Ezer and Shapira, ‘Kaffa’, 207–9.

³⁸ See *Martini Broniovii, de Biezdzsede, bis in Tartariam, nomine Stephani Primi Poloniae Regis legati, Tartariae Descriptio* (Cologne, 1595), 7.

³⁹ D. Shapira, A. Fedorchuk, and D. Vasyutinski, *Tombstone Inscriptions from the Jewish-Karaite Cemetery of Çufut-Qal‘eh, the Crimea*, i: *The Oldest and Forged Inscriptions*, forthcoming.

⁴⁰ According to the Armenian chronicle of Xaçatur Keffec‘i: see E. Schütz, ‘Eine armenische Chronik von Kaffa aus der ersten Hälfte des 17. Jahrhunderts’, *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, 29/2 (1975), 133–86; this raid remained unnoticed by ‘Evliyâ’ Çelebî, who visited Mangup only two decades later. On other Cossack razzias, see M. Berindei, ‘Le Problème des “Cosaques” dans la seconde moitié du XVI^e siècle’, *Cahiers du monde russe et soviétique*, 13/3 (1972), 338–67, and, especially, id., ‘La Porte Ottomane face aux Cosaques Zaporogues, 1600–1637’, *Harvard Ukrainian Studies*, 1/3 (1977), 273–307. See also V. Ostapchuk, ‘The Human Landscape of the Ottoman Black Sea in the Face of the Cossack Naval Raids’, in K. Fleet (ed.), *The Ottomans and the Sea: Papers from a Conference Held in Cambridge, England, in 1996* (Rome, 2001), 23–99.

⁴¹ The same date is equated with 1649 in *Avnei zikaron*, Çufut-Kal‘eh no. 327: Shapira, Fedorchuk, and Vasyutinski, *Tombstone Inscriptions from the Jewish-Karaite Cemetery of Çufut-Qal‘eh*, vol. i. This inscription is quoted in G. Akhiezer, ‘The History of the Crimean Karaites during the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Centuries’, in Polliack (ed.), *Guide to Karaite Studies*, 731. Cf. D. Shapira, ‘Martyrdom and Strange Death’, in id. (ed.), *Matsevot beit ha‘alemin shel hayehudim hakara‘im betsufat-kaleh, krim*, 283–5.

region had only just begun, and in 1346 Khan Canibek built a mosque there. The earliest Jewish tombstones in Çufut-Qal'eh date from this period. Among them is that of Manus, the daughter of Shabetai, from 1363/4; that of Sarah, the daughter of Abraham, from 1386/7; perhaps that of a woman called Parlaq from 1330; and that of Yeshuah son of Zadok, perhaps from 1383. These are the oldest medieval Jewish burial sites in Ukraine as well as in the whole of eastern Europe. The names indicate that the interred had affiliated with the Turkic cultural sphere, yet there is no information as to whether they were Rabbanites or Karaites (though Yeshuah son of Zadok was almost certainly a Karaite). The origin of the buried people—or of their ancestors—might have been Sulkhath.

In winter 1385–6 Toqtamış, the Khan of the Golden Horde, conquered Tabrîz, a large Turkic-speaking commercial city in south Azerbaijan/north Iran known for its large Armenian and Jewish populations. Toqtamış took many captives, including a number of artisans and craftsmen, and brought them to his encampment on the lower course of the Volga. It is noteworthy that the provenance of many Crimean families of Jews and Armenians, and similarly of the manuscripts (copied prior to 1385) owned by them, is Tabrîz. There are some vague Karaite and Armenian traditions that connect their arrival in the Crimea in general and at Çufut-Qal'eh in particular as representing a migration from the Volga region in connection with the events of the wars between Toqtamış, Mamai, and Timur-Lang. It seems that there was a large concentration of Karaites in the cities of the Golden Horde and the lower course of the Volga. Some of the Karaite, Armenian, and Tatar refugees reached the Crimea; others escaped to Troki and Lutsk, the capital cities of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.⁴² Indeed, in the early fifteenth century there was a significant growth of the Jewish community, whose members were buried at the Çufut-Qal'eh cemetery; again, the rule of Khan Hacı-Girây in the Crimea between the 1440s and 1460s was beneficial both for the Crimea and for its Jewish population. Crimean khans were interested in attracting Jews to Qırqyer and granted them *yarlıqs* (bills of rights) in 1459, 1468, and 1485 (and later).⁴³

In 1475 the Ottoman Grand Vizier, Gedik Ahmet Paşa, began the conquest of the Crimea, starting with the former Genoese colonies and proceeding to the principality of Theodoro/Mangup. One indirect consequence of the Ottoman conquest of the Crimea was the final and formal victory of the Grand Principality of Muscovy over the remnants of the Golden Horde. Lithuania lost permanently its former ally, the Crimean Khanate, which passed to the Ottoman sphere, and the Crimean Tatars began invading southern Poland–Lithuania, posing a permanent threat to

⁴² Akhiezer and Shapira, 'Kara'im belita uvevolhin-galitsiyah ad hame'ah ha-18'.

⁴³ I. S. Kaya, 'Khanskies yarlyki, dannye krymchakam', *Evreiskaya starina*, 7/1 (1914), 102–4; V. D. Smirnov, 'Tatarsko-khanskies yarlyki iz kollektzii Tavricheskoi uchenoi arkhivnoi komissii', *Izvestiya Tavricheskoi uchenoi arkhivnoi komissii*, 1918, no. 4, pp. 1–19; S. E. Malov, 'Izuchenie yarlykov i vos-tochnykh gramot', in N. I. Konrad et al. (eds.), *Akademiku V. A. Gordlevskomu k ego semidesyatipy-atiletyu: Sbornik statei* (Moscow, 1953), 187–95; A. P. Grigoryev, "'Yarlyk Edigeya": Analiz teksta i rekonstruktsiya soderzhaniya', *Istoriografiya i istochnikovedenie istorii stran Azii i Afriki*, 11 (1988), 55–9.

both Jews and non-Jews there for some three hundred years. Thus, in 1482 Kiev was sacked and many Jews were taken to the Crimea as captives (*yasır*), both Karaite and Rabbanite, and the Karaite community of Kiev fled to Volhynia; some of the Karaite captives of the invasion are buried at Çufut-Qal'eh, for example Daniel from Man-Kermân (Kiev), who died in 1483. In 1495 Jews were expelled from Kiev and Lithuania (they were allowed to return to the latter in 1503); some found refuge in the Crimea.⁴⁴ Among them were a number of Karaites from Lutsk who found refuge in Çufut-Qal'eh and served as religious leaders there, as indicated by their tombstone inscriptions.

The Ottoman era in the annals of the Crimea lasted from 1475 to 1774. The territories conquered by Gedik Ahmet Paşa were incorporated into the empire proper. These territories included former European—Genoese and Venetian—colonies and the land of the Principality of Theodoro, together with Doros/Mangup, its capital, whereas Qırqyer/Çufut-Qal'eh, next to Mangup, was not included in the new Ottoman territories. The Crimean Karaites strengthened their connections with their brethren in Istanbul and Edirne (Adrianople), and a strong current of migration began to flow towards the Crimea. The Karaites of Istanbul and Edirne were drawn to the Crimea owing to the great prosperity that accompanied the early stages of the establishment of the Khanate in the Ottoman sphere. In the sixteenth century, and again in the 1620s–1640s, a huge flow of Karaites went from Istanbul to Çufut-Qal'eh, as revealed in an unprecedented growth of burials. The division of the peninsula between the two entities, the Empire and the Khanate, was a direct continuation of the pre-Ottoman situation; the Ottoman *eyâlet* of Crimea took the place of the Christian entities (the Principality of Theodoro and the Genoese colonies). In the course of the Ottoman period, this dual and parallel situation of Khanate and *eyâlet* left an increasingly pronounced impression on the Crimean Jewish Karaite community. However, during the Ottoman era, this duality was not only caused by political factors, but was also the result of the final transition of the Crimean Karaites to the sphere of influence of the Karaites from Istanbul. This distinction is reflected in migratory patterns. Hence, on the one hand there was migration of Karaites from Constantinople who followed the conservative approach of R. Bali and R. Bagi, who settled in Ottoman Mangup, and on the other hand there was the migration of those who took the conciliatory and pro-Rabbanite approach of the Bashyatsi dynasty, who settled in Çufut-Qal'eh of the Girâys. Of great importance was the migration from Istanbul in about 1501 of Sinan Çelebi, otherwise known as Joseph b. Moses b. Caleb Rabitsi, the brother of the well-known Karaite author from Edirne, Belgorod (Aq-Kermân), and Istanbul, Caleb Afendopulo (Firkovich called him an immigrant from Persia).

Now that the *pax Ottomana* had reached the region, Mengli-Girây began to build a new capital beside Qırqyer, according to the Ottoman model, called 'Palace of

⁴⁴ For Muscovite sources referring to Kievan Jews who fled to Çufut-Qal'eh, see Kizilov, *Krymskaya Iudeya*, 122.

Gardens' (Bâhçe-Sarây). He died, however, in 1515. Sahib I Girây, who ruled between 1532 and 1550, transferred the capital to Bâhçe-Sarây at the beginning of his reign (apparently in 1532), and Muslim residents of the former capital joined him in moving there. It was only non-Muslims—Jews and some Armenians—who remained in the city of Qırqyer. Known as Çufut-Qal'eh, meaning 'Fortress of the Jews', it became something of a ghetto or a suburb of the new capital.

All told, Çufut-Qal'eh functioned as the capital of the Khanate for only about a century (1420–1520). One can state with certainty that it was during these hundred years that the Jewish Karaite community, which formed between 1330 and 1410, became established and took shape. While, in general, the Ottoman takeover led to a decline in the importance of the older cities—including those with Jewish communities such as Kaffa and Sulkhât—Bâhçe-Sarây and Çufut-Qal'eh flourished and experienced an era of unprecedented prosperity in the history of the Jewish Karaite community, which absorbed immigrants from the older cities of the Crimea, Istanbul, and elsewhere. Little is known about the immigration to the Crimea from the somewhat obscure Karaite communities of Anatolia. Later on, new cities would rise in the Crimea and attract Jews: Gözleve (Eupatoria, Evpatoriya), which had both a Karaite and a Rabbanite community, and Qarasubazar (Qarasub), which primarily absorbed Rabbanite Jews from Sulkhât and Kaffa.

A new pan-Karaite centre was taking shape in the Crimea that would replace the old centre of Edirne–Istanbul. Among its characteristics was linguistic and cultural Turkification. It should be added that an unusual situation existed in the Crimea, where the centre of gravity and hegemony within the Jewish collective was inclined in favour of the Karaite faction, whereas the Rabbanites were seen more as an accretion.

What picture can we assemble from these pieces of a puzzle? It is no surprise that the conclusion is the same that one would draw when reflecting on the history of Ukraine as a whole. Though Byzantine by religion, basically, Kievan Rus/Ukraine was the most eastern outpost of this chain of western and central European states. Jews who came to Kievan Rus proper, or left it, came from the west or went west; prior to the Ashkenazi influx in the early sixteenth century, this territory had a very small Jewish population. By contrast, the Crimea was always part of the world that the conquest of Alexander the Great had created and Jews and others here were connected to Italian cities or to their Aegean colonies, to Constantinople/Istanbul, to Anatolia, and to northern Iran. The territory of what is now Ukraine thus included, like Byzantium, the pre-Classical Ottoman empire, northern Iran, and Anatolia, a heterogeneous Jewish population with a distinctive Karaite tint.

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