

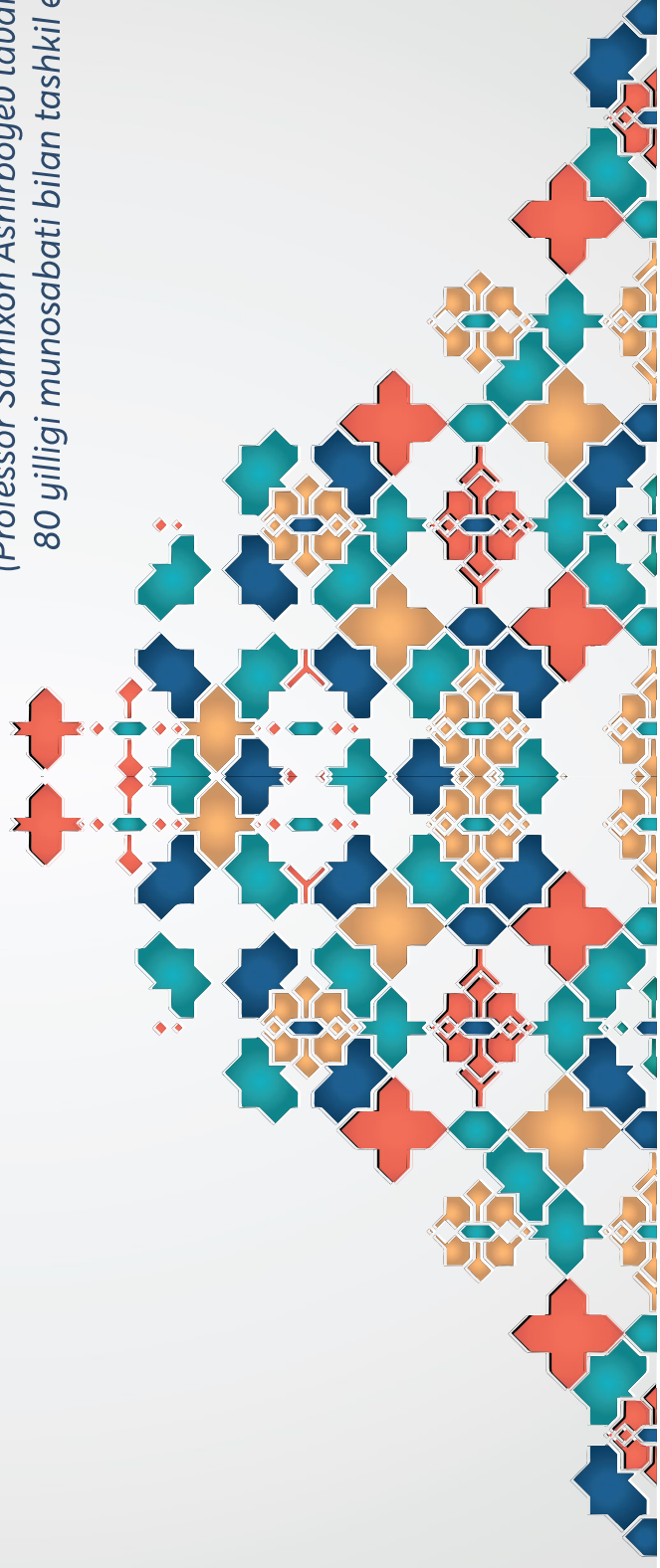


“O‘ZBEK FOLKLORI VA SHEVALARI TADQIQOTLARI: AMALIYOT, METODOLOGIYA, YANGICHA YONDASHUV”

mavzusidagi xalqaro ilmiy-nazariy
konferensiya materiallari

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*(Professor Samixon Ashirboyev tavalludining
80 yilligi munosabati bilan tashkil etilgan)*



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Ushbu to‘plamda Alisher Navoiy nomidagi Toshkent davlat O‘zbek tili va adabiyoti universitetida 2026-yil 23-mayda o‘tkazilgan **“O‘zbek folklori va shevalari tadqiqotlari: *amaliyot, metodologiya, yangicha yondashuv*”** mavzusidagi xalqaro ilmiy-nazariy konferensiya materiallari hamda filologiya fanlari doktori, professor Samixon Ashirboyevning tabarruk yoshi munosabati bilan yo‘llangan tabriklar o‘rin olgan.

To‘plam materiallaridan filolog mutaxassislar, ilmiy tadqiqotchilar, magistratura va bakalavriat talabalari, shuningdek, keng o‘quvchilar ommasi foydalanishlari mumkin. Maqolalar sifati, mazmuni va haqiqiyliги uchun muallifning o‘zi javobgar hisoblanadi.



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**QARAY (KARAIM) TURK TILI: LINGVISTIK XUSUSIYATLARI VA YOZUV
AN'ANASI**
KARAIM TURKISH: LINGUISTIC FEATURES AND WRITING TRADITION

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Annotation. *This article examines the language and writing tradition of the Karay Turks from Turkological and historical-linguistic perspectives. It analyzes the position of Karay within the Turkic language family, particularly its affiliation with the Kipchak group, while also noting the preservation of certain Oghuz features. The study further explores the role of the Karaite religious tradition in the formation of Karay ethnic identity, as well as the historical processes of geographic dispersion of the community.*

From a dialectological perspective, Karay is divided into Crimean, Halych, and Trakai varieties. The paper evaluates their current sociolinguistic status and functional vitality, while discussing phonological, morphological, and lexical changes resulting from prolonged contact with Slavic languages alongside the retention of archaic Turkic elements.

The article also investigates the historical development of the Karay writing tradition. The transition from the Hebrew script to Latin and Cyrillic alphabets is interpreted within the context of religious and cultural transformations of the Karay community. The author highlights the central role of religious texts in the formation of Karay written literature, as well as key literary figures.

The Karay language provides significant material for the study of the historical development, dialectology, and language contact phenomena within Turkic languages. As an endangered language today, its preservation and systematic documentation remain among the priority areas of contemporary Turkological research.

Key words: Karay Turks; Karay language; Kipchak Turkic; language contact; endangered languages

Introduction

Karaim Turks constitute one of the most distinctive ethnic communities within the Turkic world in both historical and cultural terms. The question of their origins has long attracted the attention of Turkological scholarship. Although different views have been proposed regarding the ethnic background of the Karaims, the phonetic, morphological, and lexical features of the Karaim language clearly demonstrate its affiliation with the Turkic language family. Talat Tekin and Mehmet Ölmez classify Karaim within the northwestern, namely the Kipchak, branch of Turkic languages [9, p. 127]. Selma Gülsevin, however, emphasizes that Karaim preserves not only Kipchak characteristics but also certain Oghuz elements [4, p. 305].

Historically, the term *Karaim* initially carried a religious meaning. Used in forms such as “Karay,” “Karaim,” and “Karaite,” the term originally referred to the Karaite faith and later came to denote the ethnic community that adopted this belief system. Karaite Judaism emerged in Babylonia during the eighth century and developed as a religious doctrine that regarded the Torah as its primary sacred authority. Rejecting the Talmud, this belief system grounded religious life directly in the Torah itself [7, pp. 9-10]. The spread of Karaite Judaism among Turkic

communities, particularly during the period of the Khazar Khaganate, played a significant role in associating the Karaims with a Turkic identity.

One of the oldest settlements of the Karaims was Crimea. Alongside Crimea, cities such as Istanbul, Trakai, Halych, Lutsk, Kraków, and Moscow became important centers of Karaim habitation. During the nineteenth century, policies introduced by the Russian Empire enabled Karaims to settle in different regions, which contributed to their wider geographical dispersion [8, pp. 209-214]. In the modern period, however, the Karaim population has declined considerably, and this demographic decrease has seriously affected the future of the Karaim language.

Linguistic Features of the Karaim Language

For a long period, the Karaim language existed in three principal dialects: Crimean, Halych, and Trakai. Tadeusz Kowalski classified Karaim into two major groups on the basis of dialectal features, distinguishing between Eastern and Western Karaim. In his classification, the Crimean dialect belongs to Eastern Karaim, whereas the Trakai and Halych dialects are included within Western Karaim [1, p. 59]. Today, the most vital branch of Karaim is the Trakai dialect. The Halych dialect has nearly disappeared from use, while the Crimean dialect has gradually lost its speaking environment under the strong influence of Crimean Tatar Turkish and Russian [2, pp. 135-139].

The phonetic system of Karaim has preserved many of the general characteristics of Turkic languages. At the same time, prolonged contact with Slavic languages introduced certain changes into its phonological structure. Selma Gülsevin notes that some phonetic features of Karaim display similarities with Azerbaijani Turkish. One notable example is the loss of the initial “y” sound in certain words, a phenomenon also observed in Azerbaijani Turkish. Thus, forms such as *ip* instead of *yip*, *igit* instead of *yigit*, and *ürek* instead of *yöräk* occur in Karaim usage [4, p. 305].

Another noteworthy feature of the Karaim language is the presence of palatal consonants. Sounds such as *d'*, *l'*, *ń*, *ś*, *t'*, and *ź* are particularly widespread in the Halych and Trakai dialects. Researchers generally associate this characteristic with the influence of Slavic languages [5, pp. 197-198]. The vocabulary of Karaim likewise reflects several linguistic layers. Alongside words of Turkic origin, the language also contains a substantial number of Hebrew, Arabic, Persian, and Slavic loanwords.

The alphabets used by the Karaims were closely connected with their religious and cultural history. In the earliest periods, Karaims employed the Hebrew alphabet. For the Karaim community, the Hebrew script represented not merely a writing system but also an important component of religious and cultural identity. In later centuries, Karaims living in Lithuania and Poland adopted Latin-based alphabets, while during the Soviet period the Cyrillic alphabet came into use [6, p. 280]. The Karaims attempted to adapt these writing systems to the phonetic structure of their language, which eventually led to the emergence of distinct writing traditions.

Karaim Written Language and Its Contemporary Situation

The Karaim written language developed primarily on the basis of religious texts. Translations of the Torah, prayers, hymns, and other religious works formed the core of Karaim written literature. Öztürk traces the origins of the Karaim written tradition to the translation of the Torah into Karaim in the tenth century [7, p. 17]. In subsequent centuries, various religious and literary texts were produced in Karaim, and written literature experienced a particularly notable development among the Crimean Karaims during the nineteenth century.

Alongside religious writings, poetic works also occupied an important place in Karaim literature. Authors such as Pinehes Malecki, Simon Kobecki, A. Mardkowicz, and Mykolas Firkovičius played a significant role in the development of Karaim written literature. The journal *Karay Awazi*, published in the early twentieth century, held particular importance for the preservation and continuation of the Karaim literary language [3, p. 54].

The twentieth century proved to be a difficult period for the Karaim language. Wars, assimilation policies, the fragmented existence of Karaim communities, and the growing influence of dominant languages all contributed to the weakening of Karaim. Today, Karaim is listed among the endangered languages recognized by UNESCO. Although certain initiatives aimed at preserving and revitalizing the language are currently being carried out in Lithuania and Poland, the extremely small number of speakers continues to raise serious concerns about the future of the language.

Conclusion

The Karaim language occupies a distinctive position within the Turkic linguistic continuum, both as a historically layered variety and as a structurally conservative representative of the Kipchak group. Despite sustained contact with diverse linguistic environments over centuries, it has retained a set of archaic Kipchak features, which remain crucial for reconstructing earlier stages of Turkic linguistic development. Its multilayered writing tradition – manifested through Hebrew, Latin, and Cyrillic scripts – further reflects the sociocultural transformations experienced by the Karaim community across different historical contexts.

Currently classified as a highly endangered language, Karaim has undergone significant contraction in its domains of use as a result of migration, assimilation, and prolonged exposure to dominant language environments. Nevertheless, recent philological and descriptive studies, particularly those conducted in Lithuania and Poland, have played a decisive role in the documentation and preservation of its linguistic and textual heritage.

From a comparative Turkological perspective, Karaim constitutes a valuable linguistic reservoir for examining diachronic developments within Turkic languages. Its preservation of archaic structural elements, alongside contact-induced features, renders it particularly relevant for studies of language change, divergence, and areal interaction.

In conclusion, the preservation of Karaim transcends the scope of a single ethnolinguistic community. It represents a significant component of the broader Turkic cultural and linguistic heritage, encapsulating archaic Kipchak features that have persisted through extensive historical continuity. Accordingly, sustained scholarly engagement with Karaim should be considered a priority research direction within contemporary Turkology, particularly in the domains of historical linguistics, language contact studies, and comparative analysis.

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