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# Mordechai ben Joseph Sułtański in Volhynia: An Attempt to Elevate the Legal Status of Karaites in the Russian Empire

Mordechaj ben Józef Sułtański na Wołyniu:  
Próba podniesienia statusu prawnego Karaimów w Imperium Rosyjskim

## Summary

The article analyzes the biography of Mordechai Sułtański and his potential contribution to the enhancement of the legal status of Karaites within the Russian Empire. A pious individual, Sułtański served as a hazzan and authored numerous works. He earned a reputation as a preeminent scholar of his generation, making a substantial contribution to the fields of Karaite religion and history. The study is based on the *Zecher Caddikim* manuscript (Ms. B 445), housed in the Russian Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg, Russia. It focuses on Sułtański's contacts with Tadeusz Czacki, Alojzy Osiński, and other high-ranking officials during the Karaite scholar's life in Volhynia. A selection of fragments has been published in Hebrew with an English translation.

**Keywords:** Karaite literature; Mordechai Sułtański; *Zecher Caddikim*; Tadeusz Czacki; Alojzy Osiński

## Streszczenie

Artykuł skupia się na analizie biografii Mordechaja Sułtańskiego i jego potencjalnego wkładu w poprawę statusu prawnego Karaimów w Imperium Rosyjskim. Jako osoba pobożna Mordechaj Sułtański służył jako hazzan, napisał wiele dzieł i zyskał reputację wybitnego uczonego swojego pokolenia, wnosząc tym samym znaczący wkład w dziedziny religii karaimskej i historii. Niniejsze opracowanie powstało na podstawie rękopisu *Zecher Caddikim* (Ms. B 445) przechowywanego w Rosyjskiej Akademii Nauk w Sankt Petersburgu i dotyczy kontaktów Sułtańskiego z Tadeuszem Czackim, Alojzym Osińskim i innymi wysoko postawionymi osobami w okresie życia karaimskego uczonego na Wołyniu. Wybrane fragmenty zostały opublikowane w języku hebrajskim wraz z angielskim tłumaczeniem.

**Słowa kluczowe:** literatura karaimska; Mordechaj Sułtański; *Zecher Caddikim*; Tadeusz Czacki; Alojzy Osiński

Following the late 18th-century annexation of territories with significant Karaite populations into the Russian Empire, Karaite religious leaders initiated concerted efforts to secure an elevated legal and social standing for their community. A primary tactic employed in this pursuit was the articulation of a distinct theological and legal identity, separate from Rabbanite Judaism, through formal petitions for special privileges. This strategy, while ostensibly aimed at collective communal advancement, also potentially served to enhance the individual prestige and authority of Karaite clerics within their community's social hierarchy. This study focuses on the activities of Mordechai ben Joseph Sułtański, a prominent Volhynian Karaite leader, to examine the interplay between communal interests and individual clerical ambitions in this context. The central research question guiding this investigation is: How did Mordechai Sułtański's efforts to secure distinct legal status for the Karaite community in the Russian Empire reflect and shape the dynamic between communal advancement and the consolidation of his personal authority? Furthermore, to what extent were his endeavors successful in improving the legal status of Karaites?

### Mordechai Sułtański in the Context of the History of the Volhynian Karaites

Born in Lutsk in 1775, Mordechai Sułtański hailed from a respected family within the Karaite community. His academic endeavors focused on the study of Karaite and Rabbanite literature, and he dedicated himself to the dissemination of knowledge pertaining to the non-Talmudic Judaism. Following his father's death, he assumed the position of hazzan, a role he maintained until a dispute with his student Abraham Firkowicz, his daughter-in-law's brother, led to a rift between them. The latter, aspiring to the position of hazzan, i.e. to replace Sułtański, began to plot and write denunciations in order to discredit the teacher and become his successor. Consequently, Sułtański relinquished his position in 1824 and relocated to the Crimea. He then resumed his position as hazzan, initially in Chufut Kale, and subsequently in Bakhchysarai. He also served as a teacher in the Eupatoria Karaite school.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See G. Akhiezer, *Sultansky, Mordechai ben Joseph*, in: *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 19, eds. F. Skolnik, M. Berenbaum, 2nd ed., Detroit 2007, p. 306; A. Kahana, *Two Letters from Abraham Firkovich*, "Hebrew Union College Annual," 3 (1926), pp. 359–370; I. Markon, *Sultanski, Mordechaj ben Josef*, in: *Jüdisches Lexicon*, vol. 5–4/2, Berlin 1927–1930, p. 776; N.N., *Sultanskiy, Mordekhay ben Iosif*, in: *Evreyskaya entsiklopediya*, vol. 14, S.-Peterburg [1908–1913], p. 637; N.N., *Sultansky, Mordejai ben Yosef*, in: *Enciclopedia Judaica Castellana*, vol. 10, México 1948–1951, p. 122; L. Nemoy, *Sultansky, Mordecai ben Joseph*, in: *Universal Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. 10, New York 1939–1943, p. 97; idem, *Sultansky, Mordecai ben Joseph*, in: *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 15, Jerusalem 1971–1972, p. 506; S. Ochser, *Sultansky, Mordecai*, in: *The Jewish Encyclopaedia*, vol. 11, New York 1901–1906, p. 584; P. Keppen, *Krymskiy sbornik. O drevnostyakh Yuzhnogo berega Kryma i gor Tavricheskikh*, Sankt-Peterburg 1837, p. 289.

Sułtański produced a substantial body of work aimed at promoting Karaite Judaism and substantiating its theoretical superiority over Rabbanite Judaism. The most renowned of these is the comprehensive Karaite chronicle known as *Zecher Caddikim*, which offers valuable insights into Karaite history. While this work is regarded as a significant contribution to the field, it also presents considerable challenges for modern historians because of its incorporation of myths, legends, and family traditions, which often serve to blur the lines between historical fact and embellishment. This blend of historical and folkloric elements has led to considerable debate among scholars regarding the accuracy and reliability of certain events and figures mentioned in *Zecher Caddikim*. Despite these inherent difficulties, the chronicle remains a crucial primary source for Karaite studies. Sułtański's other notable works include '*Or hag-Ganuz* [Hidden Light], *Palgey Mayim* [Streams of Waters], *Middot 'Oz* [Dimensions of Strength], *Sefer hat-Ta'am, Mikhtam sur Mera'* [Epigram Turning Away from Evil], *Yalqut* [Collection], *Dehiyat Ke'ev* [Proclamation], *Tetiv Da'at* [(The Tongue of the Wise) Uses Knowledge Rightly<sup>2</sup>], *Petah Tiqwa* [Gate of Hope<sup>3</sup>].

The exact point at which Sułtański began to develop an interest in the legal status of the Karaites remains unclear. By all accounts, he was a staunch advocate for his people, aspiring to elevate the status of his community within the Russian Empire. Following the attainment of recognition from the local authorities, he established connections with prominent individuals and served as a representative of his community. Sułtański's approach entailed the meticulous presentation of a carefully crafted image of the Karaites — an amalgamation of authentic impressions and strategic omissions — with the objective of securing the most favorable representation of his community's interests. This study will contribute to a more nuanced and precise understanding of Sułtański's character, his diplomatic strategies, and the impact of his efforts on the legal status of the Karaites within the Russian Empire.

Despite the paucity of extant Hebrew material containing firsthand recollections, it appears that research has hitherto focused exclusively on Polish and Russian sources concerning Sułtański's activities among the Karaites in the Russian Empire. The following presentation comprises some fragments from the text of *Zecher Caddikim*, preserved in the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts at the Russian Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg, Russia (Ms. B 445).<sup>4</sup> This text was written in 1841, during the period in which Sułtański resided in Crimea, where he held the position of hazzan in Chufut

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Proverbs 15:2. The Bible verses are translated according to the King James Bible.

<sup>3</sup> This is a reference to a grammar of Biblical Hebrew which was published in Eupatoria in 1857.

<sup>4</sup> For the full text in Hebrew, please refer to the Appendix.

Kale. The manuscript under scrutiny constitutes the second version<sup>5</sup> of *Zecher Caddikim*, with the author intending it to serve as the textual foundation for the translation intended for academic scrutiny. Within the text, Sułtański pays tribute to His Imperial Highness the Heir, Tsesarevich, and Grand Duke Alexander Nikolayevich, coupled with a petition for imperial patronage and authorization for widespread publication.

In the preface to his chronicle, Sułtański provides a detailed exposition of the historical context that directly inspired the creation of *Zecher Caddikim*. The author notes that, while he was still in Volhynia, he was approached by prominent personalities whose support could help improve the life of the Karaite community. Sułtański provides a comprehensive account of these meetings, emphasizing his role as a representative of a unique religious group, different from the Rabbanite Jews. The author expresses a sense of pride in the genuine interest shown by prominent intellectuals such as Tadeusz Czacki, Alojzy Osiński, and Alojzy Kozłowski in Karaism, and in their conscious decision to engage with it to deepen their knowledge of the community. One can only trust that the narratives presented in the chronicle correspond to true facts.

### Mordechai Sułtański and Tadeusz Czacki

The name of Tadeusz Czacki<sup>6</sup> became well-known in Polish Karaite studies thanks to his *Rozprawa o Karaitach* [Treatise on Karaites], which was first published in Vilnius in 1807 and then in Krakow in 1860. The author's work is noteworthy for its comprehensive utilization of extant literature on the subject, with the exception of Hebrew sources, and for its direct engagement with the Karaite community through personal

<sup>5</sup> The initial version was composed circa 1837–38, while Abraham Harkavy subsequently published chapters 42–47 from a manuscript of a later version in *Hamelic* in 1877–1878, as well as in *Me'assef niddahim* 2 in 1878 (Vienna 1878; reprint, Jerusalem 1969–1970). The complete text of the first version was edited from a manuscript in the Library of the Great Synagogue of Warsaw and published with a concise summary of Karaite history by Samuel Poznański in 1920. See A. Harkavy, *Lequitim mik-kitvei hay-yad*, “Hamelic 14,” 1877–1878, pp. 109–110, 193–195, 319–320; (Vienna 1878; Jerusalem 1969–1970); M. Sułtański, *Zecher Caddikim: kronika historyczna*, Warsaw 1920.

<sup>6</sup> For more studies on Czacki's life and activities, see A. Knot, *Czacki Tadeusz (1765–1813)*, in: *Polski słownik biograficzny*, vol. 4/1, no. 16, ed. W. Konopczyński, Krakow 1938, pp. 144–146; A.F. Grabski, *Oświeceniowy antenat pozytywistów – Tadeusz Czacki jako historyk*, in: idem, *Orientacje polskiej myśli historycznej. Studia i rozważania*, Warsaw 1972, pp. 54–103; E. Melamed, *Poritskiy bibliofil*, “Almanach Bibliofila,” 5 (1978), pp. 115–126; I. Jakubowski, *Tadeusza Czackiego “Rozprawa o Żydach” a prawo rzymskie*, “*Studia Prawno-Ekonomiczne*,” 72 (2005), pp. 9–20; E. Danowska, *Tadeusz Czacki 1764–1813. Na pograniczu epok i ziem*, Kraków 2006; C. Langier, *Tadeusz Czacki. Pisarz, patriota, działacz oświatowy*, Częstochowa 2007; idem, *Tadeusz Czacki jako historyk*, “*Prace Naukowe. Pedagogika*,” 8–9–10 (1999–2000–2001), pp. 145–157; I. Bulkina, “*Izvestnaya famil'ya*: pol'skiy patriot graf Faddey Chatskiy,” *“Studia Russica Helsingiensia et Tartuensis”*, 12 (2011), pp. 250–264; Zavadovskiy, *Graf Zavadovskiy i Faddey Chatsky*, “*Russkaya Starina*,” 93 (1898), pp. 428–430; M. Pawelec, *Tadeusza Czackiego spotkania z Karaimami*, “*Almanach Karaimski*,” 6 (2017), pp. 135–162.

interviews. The impetus for the composition of this work was Czacki's appointment in 1787 by the treasury commission<sup>7</sup> to undertake a tour of the southern provinces, through which he became immersed in the Karaite community. As a member of the Government Commission of the First Polish Republic, which addressed the matter of taxes imposed on the Karaite population, he advocated for their exemption from the poll tax in 1788. It is possible that he was the individual responsible for the submission of the Karaite petition from Lutsk, which sought the establishment of a distinct tax system for Karaites, separate from that applied to Jews. This petition, dated 1790, was addressed to the Polish parliament. Following the dissolution of the Polish state, Czacki persisted in his advocacy for the interests of Polish Karaites within the Russian Empire, notably through his service on the commission for the resolution of Jewish affairs established by Tsar Alexander I.<sup>8</sup>

The Princes Czartoryski Library in Krakow houses a letter from the Karaite community in Lutsk, dated August 4, 1807, addressed to Czacki. The text was published in a critical edition in *Myśl Karaimska* [The Karaite Thought] in 1938 by Włodzimierz Za-jączkowski, though he was unable to decipher any of the signatures. In 1989, the text was published again in *Tatarzy na Litwie i w Polsce. Studia z dziejów XIII-XVII w.* [The Tatars in Lithuania and Poland. Studies from the 13th-17th Centuries], in which Tyszkiewicz stated that one of the names should be read as "Mordko Josiowicz,"<sup>9</sup> which presumably — according to Mariusz Pawelec<sup>10</sup> — corresponds to Mordechai ben Joseph Sułtański, who at that time lived in Lutsk and served as hazzan. This document

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<sup>7</sup> T. Czacki, *Rozprawa o Karaitach*, in: *Rosprawa o Żydach*, Vilnius 1807, p. 267; M. Pawelec, *Tadeusza Czackiego spotkania z Karaimami*, pp. 137-138: "Appointed in 1787 by the Treasury Commission to conduct a tour of the southern provinces, and having become acquainted with the Karaites' practices, I proposed their exemption from the poll tax. The prevailing circumstances did not allow for the implementation of the planned reform concerning the Jews, and thus, this project did not come to fruition" ["Wyznaczony w 1787 roku przez komisję skarbową do objazdu południowych prowincji; poznawszy Karaitów sposób postępowania przełożyłem, aby od pogólnego byli wolnemi. Wiadome zmiany nie dozwoliły dokonać ułożonej reformy żydów, i ten projekt skutku nie otrzymał"].

<sup>8</sup> T. Czacki, *Rozprawa o Żydach i Karaitach*, Krakow 1860, p. 146; H. Kołłataj, *Korrespondencya listowna z Tadeuszem Czackim*, vol. 1, Krakow 1844, pp. 7, 48. In his previous work *On Lithuanian and Polish Laws, their Spirit, Sources, Connection and Things Included in the First Statute of Lithuania Issued In 1529* Czacki pointed out that, according to the 1790 census of the Jewish population, 2184 Karaite men (or 4368 Karaites together with women) lived on the territory of the Crown and Lithuania. He also mentioned an excerpt — found by Mateusz Nielubowicz in the Lithuanian Metric — from the case of the Karaites with the Jews. "Both denominations of Jews accused each other of using power, giving contributions and not printing books of the Old Testament in the Samaritan language for the Karaites" ["Obydwóch wyznań Żydzi, czynili wzajemne wyrzuty, szło o władzy użycie, o dawanie składek, niedrukowanie samarytańskim językiem ksiąg starego zakonu dla Karaimów"]. As a result, the Lithuanian chancellor Gastold, in the name of Sigismund I, freed this small group (see T. Czacki, *O litewskich i polskich prawach, o ich duchu, źródłach, związku i o rzeczach zawartych w pierwszym Statucie dla Litwy 1529 roku wydanym*, vol. 2, Krakow 1861, pp. 229-231).

<sup>9</sup> J. Tyszkiewicz, *Tatarzy na Litwie i w Polsce. Studia z dziejów XIII-XVII w.*, Warsaw 1989, p. 149.

<sup>10</sup> M. Pawelec, *Tadeusza Czackiego spotkania z Karaimami*, p. 137.

is a testament to the benevolent patronage of the Karaites by Czacki. Consequently, they composed a direct epistle to him, soliciting his endorsement for the establishment of a distinct community. They further apprised him of the fact that the Karaites in Dubossary, situated within the former boundaries of the Kherson Governorate, constituted an autonomous community and were subject to taxation “appropriate to Christians.”<sup>11</sup>

Tadeusz Czacki’s writings did not include any mention of Sułtański by name. However, Sułtański presented evidence of his personal interactions with a Polish nobleman. These interactions were occasions when the Karaite scholar presented the Karaite community in the most favorable light, potentially employing a combination of genuine information and strategic omissions:

In the year 563 of the short millennium from the creation of the world [1803],<sup>12</sup> the aforementioned Mr. Tadeusz Czacki came to the city of Lutsk and made my acquaintance.<sup>13</sup> He took a liking to me and, finding the courage to do so, invited me to his estate in Poryck, a town located eight parsas from the city of Lutsk. I readily accepted his invitation and visited him on three occasions, staying at his estate for more than a week on each visit. During these visits, we engaged in lively discussions on matters of wisdom, history, and the differences between our beliefs and those of the Rabbanites.

Sułtański even took the initiative of providing direct quotations from his personal conversations with Czacki, which presumably occurred in the Polish language. While the veracity of some of Sułtański’s attributed statements to Czacki is questionable, it is plausible that the Karaite author may have incorporated a degree of creative

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<sup>11</sup> W. Zajączkowski, *Z dziejów gminy karaimskiej w Łucku*, “Myśl Karaimska,” 12 (1938), pp. 109–110.

<sup>12</sup> In early 1803, Tadeusz Czacki began preparing an extended version of a treatise on the legal framework of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (*O litewskich i polskich prawach* [On Lithuanian and Polish Laws]). This treatise was to encompass his earlier observations on the legal status of Jews (“On the Laws for Jews” [“O prawach dla Żydów”]), including a section entitled “Division between Karaites and Pharisees or Rabbanites” [“Podział na Karaimów i Faryzeuszów czyli Rabinistów”]. This section included a comparative analysis of Karaite and Talmudic communities, newly framed as “Division of Jews in our country into Karaites and Rabbanites” [“Podział Żydów w naszym kraju na Karaimów i Rabinistów”]. It is plausible that, during this period, Czacki resolved to articulate specific legal themes in a series of distinct treatises and dedicate a separate monograph to the Karaite community, thereby separating them from the broader discussion of legal issues pertaining to the adherents of the Old Testament religion (H. Kołłataj, *Korrespondencya listowna z Tadeuszem Czackim*, pp. 7, 48; M. Pawelec, *Tadeusza Czackiego spotkania z Karaimami*, pp. 141–142).

<sup>13</sup> Czacki confirms his encounter with the Karaites in Lutsk but refrains from naming any local individuals: “I conducted research among the Karaites of Lutsk in July 1803” [“U Karaimów Łuckich czyniłem w Lipcu 1803 roku badania”], adding: “Their eldest rabbi resides in Kakaba [Kale] in the Crimea” [“Najstarszy ich Rabin mieszka w Kakaba (sic!) w Krymie”], thus not distinguishing any rabbi from Lutsk (T. Czacki, *O litewskich i polskich prawach, o ich duchu, źródłach, związkach i o rzeczach zawartych w pierwszym statucie dla Litwy 1529 roku wydanym*, in: *Dziela T. Czackiego zebrane i wydane przez Hr. E. Raczyńskiego*, vol. 2, Poznań 1844, p. 207, note 411).

license, aiming to underscore the pervasive esteem held by the general populace towards Karaites during that period.

Then Mr. Czacki exclaimed, 'Blessed are you, my brother Mordechai, for you have enlightened me and taught me things I did not know before.' He continued, 'Now I understand that all the Rabbanite scholars have been proven foolish to me. They are stubborn-hearted and unwise, for they deny the truth and fabricate falsehoods. And what wisdom do they have? They are people of limited intellect and possess a lesser degree of spiritual insight [...] They believe that they alone are pleasing in the eyes of God, and that all others are considered like dumb beasts in their eyes, and are despised in the eyes of the Creator, blessed be He. [...] And Mr. Czacki added and said to me, 'Although I see that your words are precious and true, yet according to the saying of King Solomon, 'The first one to plead his cause seems right, until his neighbor comes and examines him,'<sup>14</sup> I will invite one of the learned rabbis from my town, and you will debate before me, and I will see what he will reply to your arguments. Then I will know with whom the truth lies.' I said, 'Do as you have spoken, my lord.' Mr. [Czacki] immediately sent and invited a certain scholar from among the rabbis of his town, whose name was rabbi Chanina, a wealthy and important man, kind-hearted, and well-regarded in the eyes of Mr. [Czacki]. We two debated [...] in the Polish language, in the palace of Mr. Czacki. His wife<sup>15</sup> sat at Mr. [Czacki]'s right hand, and both of them inclined their ears like a funnel to hear our debate. It came to pass that the discussion between us was prolonged, and rabbi Chanina was defeated and ceased to answer, for he found no answer. Mr. [Czacki] said, 'Why are you silent?' Rabbi Chanina replied, 'What more can I argue, after I have realized that this *ribbi* will refute my arguments with true proofs from the Scriptures that I cannot deny?' Mr. [Czacki] said to him, 'If so, then you are compelled to admit the truth.' Rabbi Chanina answered, 'My lord, nobleman, I am not compelled to admit the truth out of necessity, but only because of the teachings of the Scriptures which the Karaites follow. There is only one Torah for all of us, though our sages have said that one who transgresses the words of the sages is liable to death<sup>16</sup> [...] I have known since then, and even now, that the truth is with the Karaites, but I am forced to always say that the truth is among us, out of fear of the masses. Some of our great sages, even now, know where the truth lies and secretly admit it in private, but they cannot publicize it in speech or writing, because the masses in our nation will call them heretics and Epicureans, and will open their mouths to scorn them and will condemn them and burn their books. They will become a mockery and a disgrace. Therefore, we remain silent and quiet until the coming of Elijah our prophet, who will unite our nation.'

In Czacki's discourse with Sułtański and rabbi Chanina of Poryck, the prevailing motif is that of authentic religion and remaining faithful to the Scriptures. Despite the

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Proverbs 18:17: צְדִיקָה רִאשׁוֹן בָּרִיבּוֹ יָבָא וְאֶ-רְעַשָּׂה וְחַקָּרָה.

<sup>15</sup> Barbara Dembińska (A. Osiński, *O życiu i pismach Tadeusza Czackiego*, Krzemieniec 1816, pp. 118, 229).

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Berakhot 4b:3: וְכֹל הַעֲזֹבֵר עַל קְבָרִי חֲכָמִים מִתְהָ

text not being regarded as a historical source in its entirety, it is evident that it contains an accusatory thread directed towards the Rabbanite, thereby testifying to the existence of considerable tension between the Karaites and the Rabbanites. Sułtański appears to deliberately portray the Rabbanite rabbi in a negative light, suggesting an inability to respond to specific allegations made by the Karaite hazzan. Conversely, the author portrays rabbi Chanina as a positive figure, acknowledging his secret admission of the righteousness of the Karaite faith. Sułtański's conceptualization of the Karaites as an integral component of the Israeli nation, alongside the Rabbanites, is further evidenced by his belief in the imminent arrival of prophet Elijah, who, according to Sułtański's own account, would serve to unify both groups into a single nation.

Mr. Czacki answered him and said, 'It is clear from your words that it is only out of fear of being ridiculed that you hide the truth and violate your own Torah. The Karaites, however, those wretched ones, even though they suffer burnings, curses, and persecutions from you, they do not compromise the truth and do not transgress their Torah. This is because of their fear of sin and their modesty and respectful attitude. [...] But you, the multitude of rabbis, do not act in the same way. For you are cunning towards the Karaites, and they, out of fear, remain silent. But if a Karaite happens to pass through the marketplace, the rabbis will surround him like a pack of mocking and impetuous dogs, to harass him with words that wound his religious honor, and even his personal honor. They call him by embarrassing nicknames, scold him, and even the smallest among you chase after him like a tail, kicking up dust and pelting him with stones. He, the poor wretch, does not open his mouth, but rather strives to find a way to quickly flee and escape from your hands, as I have seen in my old age with my own eyes here in my town. This is a great insult to those who are already insulted by you, so much so that I cannot bear it. A great duty is upon me to tell all this to our Lord, the Emperor, for He is a righteous king and he will avenge the Karaites against you.'

As an enthusiastic adherent, Sułtański lauded the Karaites' piety, diligence, honesty, and fidelity to their faith and the Holy Scriptures. Concerning the trepidation evoked by the Rabbanites, it is acknowledged that the speculative nature of this characterization of the scholar remains unproven, particularly in light of the current state of knowledge in Karaite history. The absence of analogous descriptions from the studied manuscripts further complicates the substantiation of such claims. Nevertheless, these speculative suggestions may, to a certain extent, reflect actual historical truth.

Mr. [Czacki] turned to me and said, 'You, my beloved *ribbi* Mordechai, since I have already known you in this manner, be assured that upon my arrival in the royal city soon, I will recommend you to our Lord, the Emperor. Surely he will elevate you to a higher position and grant you the gift of an estate of two or three villages, for you are worthy of it.' Not long thereafter, Mr. Czacki set out on his journey to go to the royal city of Petersburg. While he was on the road,

a voice fell from heaven<sup>17</sup> to end his life. He died and was buried on the road. Due to our sins, his words did not bear fruit for our benefit, according to his [Czacki's] desires.

Tadeusz Czacki passed away in Dubno, Volhynia, in 1813, leaving unfulfilled his efforts to improve the social and legal standing of the Karaite community within the Russian Empire. Sułtański attributed the persistent marginalization of the Karaites to a perceived decline in religious observance within the community. He emphasized the importance of individual spiritual renewal and encouraged a return to the core principles of Karaite faith as a means of strengthening the community and achieving greater social recognition.

### Mordechai Sułtański and Alojzy Osiński

Following this, Sułtański required another eight years to seize an opportunity to speak on behalf of his Karaite people. Prior to his relocation to Crimea, he had received an invitation from the Catholic canon Alojzy Osiński. Osiński was employed as a teacher of Polish and Latin literature, as well as Classical Studies, in Kremenets. He was appointed in 1808 and served there for 18 years, first at the Volhynian Gymnasium, which was then transformed into the Volhynian Lyceum.<sup>18</sup> In 1812, Metropolitan Sierestrzencewicz absolved him from his monastic obligations. In 1817, he was designated a canon of the Lutsk Cathedral and prelate, and in 1818, he became a member of the Warsaw Society of Friends of Science. In recognition of his services, Pope Pius VII awarded him the title of Roman Companion of the Lateran Court in 1820, together with the Order of the Golden Spur.<sup>19</sup>

Osiński was a distinguished Polish scholar and philologist who dedicated his personal time to literary pursuits. In 1816, in Kremenets, Osiński published *Rozprawa o Życiu i Pismach T. Czackiego* [A Tractate on the Life and Writings of Tadeusz Czacki],

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<sup>17</sup> Cf. Daniel 4:28.

<sup>18</sup> On October 1, 1805, Czacki inaugurated the Volhynian Gymnasium, a ten-year educational institution divided into four lower classes and three two-year courses. The curriculum for the lower classes was comprehensive and included instruction in five languages: Polish, Latin, Russian, French, and German, as well as arithmetic, moral philosophy, and geography. Later courses extended this foundation with studies in mathematics and logic, physics, chemistry, natural history, world history and geography, law, and literature. The faculty of the Krzemieniec Lyceum, as it came to be known, included such notable figures as Aleksander Mickiewicz, who lectured on law; Euzebiusz Słowacki, the father of the poet; Alojzy Osiński; and Józef Korzeniowski. The latter three were mainly involved in teaching literature (*Spis nauczycieli: szkół wyższych, średnich, zawodowych, seminarjów nauczycielskich oraz wykaz zakładów naukowych i władz szkolnych*, ed. Z. Zagórowski, Lviv-Warsaw 1924, p. 62).

<sup>19</sup> See S. Orgelbrand, *Osiński (Alojzy)*, in: *Encyklopedia powszechna*, vol. 20, Warsaw 1865, pp. 114-115; J.B., *Ksiądz Alojzy Osiński*, "Dziennik Warszawski," 1855, no. 291, 2 November, p. 3.

a second addition of which appeared in Krakow in 1851. In this work, Osiński mentions *Rozprawa o Żydach i Karaitach* [Treatise on Jews and Karaites] among Czacki's published books.<sup>20</sup> It can only be speculated that Osiński and Czacki discussed the subject of the Karaites, thus leading to a shared interest in the matter.

In the year 581 from the creation [1821], I was summoned by Canon Osiński, Professor of Literature at the gymnasium in the town of Kremenets, through the police of Lutsk, to come immediately to the city of Kremenets to the Gymnasium. I did not know why, and upon arriving there, I came to the aforementioned Mr. Osiński, fearful, anxious, and trembling. Upon seeing me, Mr. Osiński said to me, 'Do not be afraid, for this is for your good, for Mr. Miller,<sup>21</sup> a Minister, Privy Councillor, and Cavalier, has written me a letter with these words, namely: 'Our Lord, the great Emperor Alexander Pavlovich, has tasked me with a mission: to pose questions to the learned scholars of the Karaite community. The purpose of this is to gauge their intellectual capacity and determine the depth of their knowledge, ultimately revealing whether there are truly wise men among them or not. Now, to fulfill the Emperor's decree, I am considering inviting the *ribbi* of the Karaite community from the city of Lutsk to my residence in the city of Warsaw for a scholarly debate before me. However, I am aware that these people are of modest means and may struggle to cover the expenses of such a journey. Alternatively, I could undertake the journey myself to meet with them. Yet, given my advanced age and frailty, I fear that the rigors of such a trip would be too much for me. Therefore, since you are close to the town residences of the Karaites, I entrust you with this matter. I want you to invite the *ribbi* of the Karaites to your place in the city of Kremenets. There, you will question him using the questions from our lord the Emperor that I am sending you. Whatever he answers, write it down in your own hand and send it to me by post. I will then inform the Emperor, who has a favorable view of them and wishes to elevate their status. However, he wants to know their origins first. That is why I summoned you through the police; this is a royal order. Now, prepare yourself for the answers.' Then, all the great scholars of the gymnasium, that is to say, all the teachers and the qualified students, were called together. They all sat down to listen to the matter. The aforementioned Mr. Osiński began to ask me, one by one, all of the Emperor's questions.<sup>22</sup> There were more than fifty questions, and I answered them as best I could. He wrote down everything I said.

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<sup>20</sup> A. Osiński, *O życiu i pismach Tadeusza Czackiego*, p. 402.

<sup>21</sup> Regrettably, the individual known as Miller (Müller), whose state activities included Karaite studies, is absent from the surviving correspondence. Relevant material may exist in private archives.

<sup>22</sup> A similar interest in Karaite themes is evident in the work *Avney Zikkaron* by Abraham Firkovich, a student of Mordechai Sułtański. In the Hebrew year 5598 (1838 CE), the French Field Marshal Auguste de Marmont arrived in Eupatoria (Gözleve), accompanied by Prince Golitsyn, Governor-General of Novorossiya Mikhail Vorontsov, and Count Witte. The delegation visited the Karaite synagogue, where they were received by Yashar, Aben Yashar, Abraham Firkovich, and the elders of the community, led by Simcha Yerushalmi Bobovich. Field Marshal Marmont posed questions to the assembled group in French, inquiring about the origins of the Karaites: When did they arrive in the Crimean Peninsula? Where did they originate? The manner of their arrival was also queried, specifically whether they had been prisoners of war or had voluntarily come seeking peace and livelihood. Count Vorontsov rendered these inquiries into Russian, yet the Karaites found themselves unable to respond,

Indeed, the imperial theme constituted a significant component of the Sułtański's correspondence. The author underscored that he presented his work *Hod Malkhut* as a tribute to the Emperor during the meeting, although there is no extant evidence to substantiate whether the text was in fact delivered to the Emperor. Continuing the account, Sułtański noted that the information he provided was well-received at higher levels, as evidenced by a letter of commendation he received. Notably, within this context, the author was able to underscore the position of the Karaites, portraying them as the "best of Jews" [*me-ha-tovim she-ba-yehudim*].

As for the third part of the examination, I showed Mr. Osiński my book *Hod Malkhut*, composed in honor of His Majesty the Emperor. When the news about me and all my answers reached the aforementioned Mr. Miller in the city of Warsaw from the aforementioned Mr. Osiński, he was very pleased with me. He sent me a letter of commendation, called 'list pochwalny', according to the Emperor's decree, in which he assured me that the Emperor is indeed well-disposed towards me and my community, as he was satisfied with [what he learned about] us. In that same letter, Mr. Miller wrote to me in these words: 'until today, I had thought that you were truly from the Sadducees, as I had learned from the historical accounts and Rabbanite teachings. But now, I have learned from your truthful evidence that you are not from the Sadducees, but only from the best of the Jews. Your religion is an ancient religion, and now I no longer believe the words of the scribes who write only evil opinions about you, nor the rabbis who speak maliciously against you intentionally, solely to diminish you [so far his statement]...' I, the humble one, became full of hope, constantly awaiting the Emperor's favor. Behold, [he had] a heart disease, and my hope was dashed, for the Emperor was taken from this world, and I remained in despair, forgotten until this day.

It is reasonable to hypothesize that Sułtański harbored elevated expectations regarding the successful realization of his endeavors to elevate the social status of the Karaites. Regrettably, these expectations were not fulfilled. The death of the Russian Emperor Alexander I Pavlovich in 1825 served to impede the execution of his plans.

Mordechai Sułtański and Alojzy Kozłowski

Sułtański's visit to the Krzemieniec Gymnasium in 1821 led to a meeting with Alojzy Kozłowski<sup>23</sup> of the Lutsk seminary. These two individuals came from the same town,

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a fact subsequently recounted by Firkovich with the following words: "Shame covered our faces, we became embarrassed and confused." In 1839, following the establishment of the Odessa Society of History and Antiquities, Abraham Firkovich was commissioned to collect Karaite artifacts in response to an inquiry from the Count M. Vorontsov, regarding the ethnic origins of the Karaites (A. Firkovich, *Avney Zikkaron*, Vilnius 1872, p. 5).

<sup>23</sup> Alojzy Kozłowski, son of Antoni, was born in 1744 into a family of noble lineage. His education encompassed studies in Buczacz, followed by further academic pursuits at the Lviv Academy and Vienna. In 1802,

yet it was in these circumstances that a conversation was initiated between them. During this exchange, the Karaite scholar provided Kozłowski with detailed information about Karaism, presenting him with his book *Sefer hat-Ta'am* as an expression of this intellectual interchange.

Among the great scholars of the gymnasium present that day was also Canon Alojzy Kozłowski, a scholar and professor of linguistics from the seminary in the town of Lutsk. He also presented me with four questions in written form, as part of an examination. He ordered me to provide written answers as well, according to my understanding. Immediately, I went to my lodgings and on that very day, I wrote the answers and compiled them into a small book with only a few pages, which I called *Sefer hat-Ta'am*. I then delivered it to the gymnasium.

In 2007, Yosef Algamil published this treatise, entitled *Sefer hat-Ta'am* (pp. 191–212), in the collection Karmey Yosef: 'osef 'igrot we-divrey hokhma, mi'utey had-dapim, we-hashuvey han-nos'im. In the introduction, Sułtański elucidates the impetus for this composition by underscoring that it was the Royal Resolution of "our mighty Lord, our King, mighty, pious and merciful Caesar, great Emperor, ruler over all lands, Alexander I, son of Paul, may he live forever." He delegated this task to Miller, the confidential advisor of the Empire, who was to study the differences between the Karaites and the Rabbanites, as well as the causes of their separation.

Surprisingly, when one reads through the book, it seems that Sułtański has not dealt with these questions precisely, for there are four questions that follow: 1) By whom and when was the world created? Why in six days, according to the Torah of Moses, and not earlier or later? 2) What is the human soul? Where does it come from? What is its portion after its separation from the body? 3) Why does the moon change its light, sometimes increasing during the day and sometimes decreasing? Is it capable of influencing bodies other than itself, like the sun? 4) What are the opinions about the discovery of the new world, i.e. America? What did they think of the way it came into being? How was it settled? How was it inhabited and for how long? Sułtański's decision to write about America is open to question, with the possibility that this was a deliberate attempt to impress the Russian authorities with his extensive knowledge. Furthermore, it should be noted that the manuscript published by Algamil is incomplete. The provenance of this fragment remains uncertain; it is unclear whether it was

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he received priestly ordination from the Archbishop of Lviv, K. Kicki (1797–1812), subsequently serving as his chaplain. In 1816, presumably in connection with the Russian annexation, Kozłowski arrived in territories under Russian control, where in Lutsk he swore an oath of allegiance to the Tsar. Initially, for a period of three years, he taught German and French languages in schools within the Vladimir-Volynsky Uyezd (Powiat włodzimierski). In 1819, he commenced his tenure as a lecturer at the seminary, where, from 1819 to 1821, he conducted classes in Latin, and during the years 1819–1825, he instructed in homiletic elocution (P. Grabczak, *Seminaria duchowne lucko-żytomierskiej diecezji w latach 1798–1842*, Biały Dunajec-Ostróg 2006, p. 323).

copied from the final work presented by Sułtański to Alojzy Kozłowski, or whether it is a preexisting text from a time when the work had not yet been completed.

## Conclusion

Reconstructing Mordechai Sułtański's interactions with Russian authorities presents significant challenges due to the limitations of surviving historical records. His documented interactions with figures such as Tadeusz Czacki, Alojzy Osiński, and Alojzy Kozłowski, along with the receipt of a commendatory letter from Russian court councilor Miller, suggest an attempt to establish influential connections within the Russian administrative apparatus. However, the precise outcomes of these interactions, and their possible impact on the legal status of the Karaite community, remain partially obscured. While specific, tangible achievements attributable solely to Sułtański are difficult to pinpoint in subsequent periods, his efforts likely played a role in the broader, gradual process of legal status elevation. To fully address the research questions posed, further examination into Sułtański's activities is essential. This would facilitate a more nuanced understanding of the dynamic between the Rabbanite and Karaite communities and provide deeper insights into the formative stages of Karaite legal status development within the Russian Empire. Future research should prioritize the examination of archival materials that may shed light on the specific petitions and negotiations undertaken by Sułtański and the resulting legal and social changes implemented by the Russian authorities.

## Appendix

### Hebrew text (from Ms. B 445)

זה כי בשנת תקסג' פרט קטן ליצירה כשבה האדון טאדאום טשצקי ע"ל לעיר לוצקא והכירני ומצתי חן בעניינו והרבני ובקשי לבוא לבית דירתו לעיר פורייצק עיר אחזתו ח' פרסאות מעיר לוצקא ולמלאת גזרתו הילכתי לכתילה לעירו עד ג' פעמים ובכל פעם עשית אצלו – בארמוני יותר משבוע ימים נושאים וגנותים בפלפול הҳכחות וקדמונות דברי הימים ובהפרש שבינו ובן הרבני: אז אמר האדון טשצקי ברוך תהיה אני מרדכי שהשכלתני והודיעני מה שלא ידעת עדנה וכבר נאמנה כי כל הҳכחים סכלים מהה עקש ללב ולא נבונים אחר שמחחים האמת ובודים דברים לא כן וחכמה מה להם ומה נופלים מאדם ופחוות הנפש [...] סבוריים שההה לבדים טובים בעניין האלים וכל זולתם נחשבו כבמהות נדמו בעניינהם וגופים בעניין הבודאי [...] ויסוף האדון טשצקי ויאמר אליו אם כי רואה אני דבריך יקרים ואמתיים אך על דרך מאמר שלמה המלך צדיק הראשון בריבבו ובא רעה וחקרו אזמן מלומד אחד מהרבנים שבעיר ותתוכחו לעניין ואראה מה ישיב לטענותיך ואז אדע אצל מי האמת ואומר כן תעשה אדוני כאשר דברת [דברת] וישלח האדון תכף והזמן מלומד א' מרבני עירו שם ר' הניתה איש עשר וחמש וטוב לב ומוכבד בעניין האדון ונתוכחנו שניינו [...] בלשון פולין באરמון האדון טשצקי והשיגל יושבת בימין האדון

ושניהם הטו אזם כאפרכסת לשימוש פלפלון וכי ארכו הדברים בגיןו וינוצה ר' חנינה וישבות מענות כי לא מזא מענה ויאמר האדון מודיע ההכרשת והשיב ר' חנינה לאמר מה אוסף לטען אחריו שידעת כי בעל רבי זה בטל בראשותיו האמתיות מהכתוב אשר לא אוכל להכחיש ויאמר לא [לו] האדון אם כן מכרח אתה להודות על האמת ויען ר' חנינה ויאמר אדוני השר אין לי להודות על האמת מfaultה ההכרחה רק מצד אמות הכתובים אשר דרכו גם הקרים כי תורה אחת לכלנו וגם כי חכמוני אמרו שהעובר עד' [על דברי] חכמים חיב מיתה [...] ואני מאו וגם עתה יודע שהאמת אצל הקרים אך מכרח אני תמיד לומר אצלנו האמת מיראתה מההמון וכמה גדולים מוחכמים גם עתה יודעים אצל מי האמת ומודים בסתר בהצנע אך לפרסם בדברים בדבר או בחבורו אין יכולם כי המון העם באמתנו חזקם מיניהם ואפיקורוסים יגידו פיהם לזללים ווירימו אותם ואת ספריהם באש ישרופו ויהיו ללוען ולקלס ולכנן נדום ונחריש עד הגלות אליונו הביאנו ויאחיד אותנו ויען האדון שצצקיי ויאמר לו נודע מדבריך שלבד מיראת זלזול בכוכבם אתם מסתירים האמת ועובדים על תורתכם ולא כן הם קרים אלו העולבים כי אם הם סובלים מכם שרפנות וקלות וככפ' הרבניהם לא כן עושים כי נוכלים אתם להקרים והם עכפ' מהרישים כי אם יוזמן לקרי אחד לעבור בשוק יסובבוهو כעדת לבים לצים ופוחזים להואיבו בדברים נגעים לכבוד דתו אף לכבודו ומוכנים אותו בכינויים פחותים וקוראים אהריו מלוא ואפילו הקטנים שכם ירשו צבון ומפערים בעפר ומסקלים באבנים והוא העולב באלים לא יפתח פיו אך משתדל למצוא דרך למהר להמלט להנצל מידיכם כמו שראיתי זה בימי חרפי בעני פה בעיר: וזה עלבון גדול להולבים מכמ' עד שלא אוכל לסבול וחוב גדול מוטל עלי להגיד כל זאת לאדוןנו הקיסר כי מלך צדק והוא ונוקום נקמת הקרים מכמ' ויפן האדון אחריו כזב ונכון ומקלים באבנים והוא העולב באלים תחיה כי בהגישי לעיר המלוכה בקרב אפרסדק לאדוןנו הקיסר ובוודאי יעלה אותו למדרגא ויתהן במנת אחותה שנים שלשה כפרים כי אתה ראוי לכך ולא ארכו הימים והאדון שצצקיי שם לדרכ פגעיו לכלת לעיר המלוכה פטריבורג ובחיותו בדרך קל מן שמי נחית לחותם את חייו ומת ונקרבר בדרך בעונתו לא עשו דבריו פרי לטובתנו עלפי מאוי [...] בשנת תקפא' ליצירה נקרה נקרואי מאת קנויניק אושינשקיי פרופעשור ליטערא טורי בגעמאזיזום של עיר קראעמנזען על ידי פוליציא [policja] דלוצקאה להוזמני בהירה לעיר קראע' קראעמנזען לגעמאזיזום ולא ידעתי מה ובגישי שם באתי אצל האדון אושינסקיי הניל' ירא וחדר [וחדר] ובנהל ובראותוandi האדון אושינסקיי אמר אליו אל תירא כי זה לטובך כי האדון השר מילילד [ר' טעינוי נדורני סועע' סועעטני] [тайныи надворный советник] קאואליר [kawaler] כתוב אליו אגרת בזה הלשון הינו אדוןנו הקיסר הגדל אלכסנדר בן פול מסר לידי שאלות וגזר עלי לשאול אותן מלהלדי עדת הקרים לראותם הייש יכולת בידם להשיב כדי להבחן איקות למודם עד שיודע מה זה היש הקרים בהם אם לא ועתה למלאת גורת הקיסר אם אומר להזמין את הרב של הקרים מער לוצקאה למוקם מושבי עיר ורשאב להעמידו על הפלפלול לפני ידעת כי קצרי יד המה ולא יעמדו על הוצאה הדרך ואם אומר לлечת אני בעצמי אצלם הנה זקנתי ושבתי ולא אשען על טורה הדרך ובכן בהיותך קרוב לעיר מושב הקרים הני מוסר עניין זה להעשה על ידך כשתזמן אצלך את הרב של הקרים לעיר קראעמנזען ותנסחו על פי שאלות אדוןנו הקיסר אני שולח לידי ומה שישיב עליהם תרשום בכתב ידך ותשלח עי' הפוצטה [poczta] לידי להודיען אל הקיסר כי עני טוביה עלייהם להרים רק רצונו לדעת מקדם איכותם ועל זה קראתי להזמין על ידי פוליציא כי גורת מלך

הוא ועתה הכהן והכהן עצמן על התשובות ואז נקרוו כל גдолו' בית מדרש הגעמינאנז'ום ר"ל כל המלמדים והتلמידים המוסמכים וישבו כלם לשמו' בדבר והשר אושינסקי הנ"ל שואל מני אחת אחת כל שאלות הקיסר ההן יותר מהמשיכים שאלות ואני מшиб אליהן ההלכה לפי יכלתי והוא כותב כל היוצא מפי ושם נזדמן להיום בין גдолו' הגעמינאנז'ום גם החכם קנון אלואיזי קולולסקי פרופסור ומוו' (מלמד המבטה) מן סעמינאנרום של עיר ליטזקאו וימסור גם הוא אליו ארבע שאלות על פי כתוב בדרך ביהינה: וגזר עלי שתהינה גם תשובה עלייהן גם כן על פי כתוב וכפי השגת דעתך תכף הלכתי לבית אושפיזיט ובעצם היום הוא כתבת התשובות וככלתי אותן בספר קטן מעט הכתום קראטיאו ספר הטעם ומסרטיו לגעמינאנז'ום: גם על הבדיקה על פי תנאי (פונקט [punkt]) השלישי הראייתי להשר אושינסקי את ספרי הור מלכות שחברתי לכבוד הקיסר ירחה' [ירום הווין] ובഗיע ההודעה אודותי וכל תשובה עלי' ורשבא לאדונן השר מילליר הנ"ל מאת השר אושינסקי הנ"ל נהנה למרא רוחו מני וישלה אליו כתוב אשרו'ו' הנ'ק' פוחולני ליטע עפ' גזרת הקיסר ושם מבטיחנו כי הקיסר ייעד היהות עינו לטובה עלי' ועל קהלהי כפי שנחה דעתו מתנו אף שם באותו כתוב כותב האדון השר מילליר אליו בזה הלשון לאמר עד היום היתי חושב להיותכם ממש מהצדוקי' כפי שלמדתי מדברי הקרוניקי ודברי הרבנים אך כתע נודע לי מראיותך האמתיות שאינכם מהצדוקי' רק מהטוביים שביהודים ותיכם דת ישנה ומעתה אין לי להאמין לדברי הסופרים הכותבי' רק בסברה גרוועה אודותיכם גם להרבנן המדברים משטנה עלייכם בכוננה רק להפיחתכם עכל [עד כו' לשונו] ואני העני נהיתי בתוכה משבה מצפה להטבת הקיסר והנה מחלת לב ותוחלת נזובה כי נלכח הקיסר לעולמו ונשארתי במפה נפש נשכח מל'ב עד היום...

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