

Scholar, Zionist, and Man of Letters: Reuven Fahn (1878–1939/1944) in the Karaite Community of Halicz

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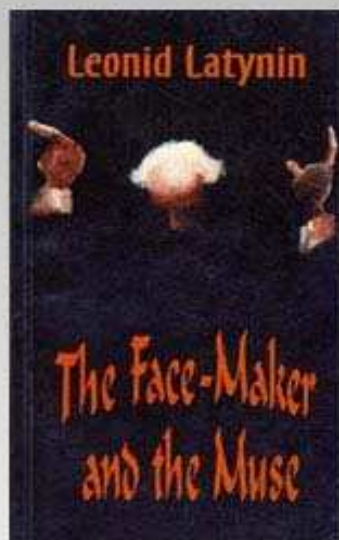
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**SCHOLAR, ZIONIST, AND MAN OF LETTERS:
REUVEN FAHN (1878–1939/1944)
IN THE KARAITE COMMUNITY OF HALICZ
(NOTES ON THE DEVELOPMENT
OF JEWISH ETHNOGRAPHY, EPIGRAPHY
AND HEBREW LITERATURE)**

**Ethnographer, Zionist, and Man of Letters: An introduction into the life
and literary activity of Reuven Fahn**

From the end of the nineteenth through the first half of the twentieth century Galicia, a homeland of many important Jewish leaders and men of letters, witnessed a number of drastic events such as World War I, disintegration of the Austro–Hungarian monarchy, Soviet–Polish war, World War II, coming of the Nazis, the Holocaust, rise of violent Ukrainian nationalism, and finally, annexation of the whole region by the Soviet Union in 1944.¹ Nevertheless, this turbulent epoch was at the same the period of the renaissance of the Galician Hebrew and Yiddish literature, the period which in many respects determined the further development of Jewish literature – and which was brutally disrupted by Nazi butchers. Paradoxically enough, by the end of the nineteenth century the literary life in Galicia, once a centre of the active Haskalic activity, became rather stagnant while Galician Jewish writers were ‘treated with scorn and derision.’² It was only at the beginning of the twentieth century that the rise of Zionist movement restimulated literary life in the region and produced a pleiad of important Hebrew writers, scholars and litterateurs such as Asher Barash, Abraham Ben–Yitzak (Sonne), Isaac Fernhoff, Samuel Agnon and, finally, the focus of my article, Reuven (Ruben/Rubin) Fahn.³

¹ I am grateful to Alfred Eidlisz (New York) and to Emanuela Trevisan Semi (Venice) for many insightful remarks concerning this article. A special word of thanks goes to Alfred Eidlisz for the permission to use Fahn’s rare publications kept in his private collection. A number of valuable bibliographic references were provided to me by Barry Walfish (Toronto). In order not to mislead my readers by anachronistic toponymes I am using here Polish (and not Ukrainian) placenames because after World War II many of them were changed or transformed beyond recognition (e.g. in 1952 Polish *Stanisławów* became Ukrainian *Ivano–Frankivs’k*; *Halicz* – Ukr. *Halych* or Russian *Galich*, etc.). I often indicate publishers’ names in view of the fact that some of them played important role in the life of Reuven Fahn.

² H. Hever, *Producing the Modern Hebrew Canon. Nation Building and Minority Discourse*, New York/London, 2002, p. 19.

³ For a detailed analysis of the literary life of Galicia in that period, see *ibidem*, 19–45. Cf. I. Parush, ‘Another Look at ‘The Life of ‘Dead’ Hebrew’. Intentional Ignorance of Hebrew in Nineteenth–Century Eastern European Jewish Society’, *Book History*, 7 (2004), p. 171–214 (the author starts her article with an eloquent citation from Fahn’s work of 1937; *ibidem*, p. 171).

Reuven Fahn (28 II 1878–1939/1944), a historian, ethnographer and epigraphist, on the one hand, and a poet, writer, journalist, and ardent Zionist, on the other, shared all the burdens of the uneasy twentieth-century history with the rest of Galician Jewry. He was born in the village of Starunia, which was located in the vicinity of the small town of Sołotwina (Ukr. Solotvyno; Solotvyn today), in the south-western part of Austrian *Ostgalizien* in 1878 next to the range of the Carpathian mountains. Raised in this little village Fahn managed to get excellent education which was given to him, apparently, by his parents. As he writes in his autobiography, in his childhood he was mainly influenced by ‘the *TaNaKh*, the nature of the Carpathian mountains, modern and classical Hebrew literature and translations from different languages into German.’⁴ In later periods of his life, according to his own words, he was influenced by the encounter with the Halicz Karaite community and its unique culture, and also by his intellectual work and studies in Vienna.⁵

Reuven Fahn was a *Wunderkind* who could easily speak and write literary Hebrew, German, Yiddish, and apparently, Polish and Ruthenian (Ukrainian) by the age of 15. He mentioned in his biography that already at the age of 13 he was a Jewish nationalist and admirer of *Erets Yisra’el*.⁶ His earliest journalist report in Hebrew, which was published in such an important Galician periodical as *Ha-Magid*, dated back to 1893, when he was only fifteen years old.⁷ At the age of 16 he penned a poem in Hebrew entitled *Beit Yisra’el* which was published in Drohobycz as a separate edition.⁸ In 1897 he married Rachel Keren from Halicz and moved to this town. Halicz (located ca. 120 km south-east from Lwów/Lemberg),⁹ which in the medieval period was the capital of the important Ruthenian duchy that gave his name to the whole region of Galicia, by the end of the nineteenth century became a typical Ruthenian provincial town, and also a *shtetl* with a Rabbanite and Karaite community. Halicz, a small provincial town in itself, was still much larger than Fahn’s native Starunia and Sołotwina.

Fahn spent a few years in Halicz, where he (or his wife’s family) owned a little shop. His commercial activity was quite successful – and he could dedicate his spare time to writing scholarly articles, journalist reports, and short-stories devoted mostly to the local Karaites and Zionists. In order to enrich and broaden his world outlook, anytime when he could leave aside his commerce, he travelled to the capital of Galicia, Lwów

⁴ See his autobiography published in R. Fahn, *Mivhar ketavim*, ed. Nurith Govrin, Tel-Aviv 1969, p. 260.

⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 259.

⁷ This was a report about the establishment of a Jewish school in Sołotwina by Baron Hirsch published in *Ha-Magid*, 30 XI 1893, p. 5. It was published in the column ‘Hadashot shonot’ and signed ‘Reuven Fahn Halevi.’ Fahn himself wrote in his autobiography that his first publication was a feuilleton in Hebrew published by Aharon Hirsch Żupnik in his *Drohobyczer Zeitung* in 1893 (R. Fahn, *Mivhar ketavim*, p. 259). This seems to be quite strange since *Drohobyczer Zeitung* was published in Judeo-German – and this first publication is absent from the complete list of Fahn’s Hebrew publications compiled by Nurith Govrin (*ibidem*, 264–275). Aharon Hirsch Żupnik, an important Galician Hebrew and Judeo-German writer and publisher (b. Drohobycz ca. 1850), later published many other works by Fahn (see below).

⁸ R. Fahn, *Beit Yisra’el*, Drohobycz: A. H. Żupnik, 1896.

⁹ Pol. *Halicz*, Germ. *Halitsch*, Russ. *Galich*, Ukr. *Halych*. Among the Karaites and Rabbanites there was apparently no convention as to how to write this place name in Hebrew; one can come across such different spellings as העליטש, העליטש, האליץ *et al.* The Karaim form was *Halits/Helits* because of the fact that among the Galician–Volhynian Karaites the letter ‘tsadi’ was usually pronounced as ‘ts’ (cf. also Ashkenazic Heb. *Helicz*, *Halic*, *Helie*). The town was mentioned in the Hungarian chronicles in 896, and in Russian – in 1138.

(Lemberg, Lviv), where he often met important Jewish men of letters such as Joseph Hayyim Brenner, Moses Kleinmann, Gershom Bader et al. His shop in Halicz, where he collected all Jewish newspapers and periodicals of that time which he could lay his hand on, became a sort of literary salon for local intellectuals.¹⁰ According to his autobiography, he had originally been *hovev Zion* – and Zionist later; in 1911 he joined the Zionist organization ‘Mizrahi’.¹¹ As one of the founder of the Galician branch of the party he was elected delegate to the Berlin congress of ‘Mizrahi’ (1911). Together with many other members of the organization he voted against ‘Mizrahi’s’ opting out of Zionist organization.¹²

With the approach of the Russian army after the beginning of the First World War he moved to Vienna – as well as many other Galician Jews rescuing their families from the atrocities of the war. Fahn warmly remembered the time which he spent in Vienna with its rich libraries and vibrant scholarly life.¹³ There he worked as a librarian in the local community until he was called to the army service which he ended on 2 November 1918, the day when Austro–Hungarian monarchy officially ceased to exist. Because of the fact that his house and property in Halicz were destroyed during the war, he moved to the regional centre, Stanisławów (Stanislav; modern Ivano–Frankivs’k). In spite of its being quite a large city in comparison to Halicz, Stanisławów remained a provincial centre in comparison to Vienna. There Fahn was appointed secretary to the National Council of Galician Jewry in the short–life West Ukrainian National Republic and remained in this position until its liquidation by the Polish government in May/June 1919.¹⁴ After this he continued his commercial, scholarly, literary and political activity as a Polish citizen.

In 1924 he travelled to Palestine where he founded a colony for emigrants from Eastern Galicia. His data on the Karaite communities in Erets Israel apparently date back to that period.¹⁵ In 1925 he almost emigrated to Palestine, but decided to remain in Poland while being afraid of an economic crisis in the Land of Israel – a decision which turned out to be fatal for him and for many other Galician Zionists who preferred to stay in interwar Poland. In 1927 he was appointed secretary to the Jewish community of Stanisławów. There he organized a library where he has been working as a main librarian until the beginning of the Second World War. In 1930 he maintained correspondence with Hayyim Nahman Bialik (1873–1934) who encouraged him to write the story of the National Council of Galician Jewry.¹⁶ We do not possess exact data about the end of his days. Different studies supply different dates of Fahn’s death: 1939, 1940, 1943, and 1944. According to some unidentified (and rather unreliable) oral source available to

¹⁰ N. Govrin, ‘Reuven Fahn ve-mif’alo ha-sifrutí’, [in:] R. Fahn, *Mivhar ketavim*, p. 10.

¹¹ R. Fahn, *Mivhar ketavim*, p. 259.

¹² N. Govrin, ‘Reuven Fahn ve-mif’alo’, p. 11.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 260. There he wrote and published his major work on the history of the Haskalah in Vienna (R. Fahn, *Tekufat ha-haskalah be-Vina*, Wien 1919). At the same time he collected data on the relations between the Karaites and *maskilim* which resulted in an essay: R. Fahn, ‘Maskilei Yisra’el ve-hakhmei miqra’, [in:] R. Fahn, *Kitve Reuven Fahn*, pt.1: *Sefer ha-Qeraim* (Lwów, 1929), in the following footnotes: KRF, p. 65–141. According to Fahn, this essay was composed by him during sleepless nights in the army service (R. Fahn, *Mivhar ketavim*, p. 260).

¹⁴ This period of his life was described in his only major oeuvre in Yiddish (R. Fahn, *Geshikhte fun der yudisher national–oytonomie ins period fun der maarav–ukrainisher republic*, Lwów 1933).

¹⁵ See his ‘Edat ha-Qeraim be’erets Yisra’el’, KRF, p. 17–25.

¹⁶ See this correspondence published in R. Fahn, *Mivhar ketavim*, p. 261–262. Later Fahn realized this idea and published a separate study on the subject (R. Fahn, *Geshikhte*).

Nurith Govrin, he was arrested by the Soviets and killed a short while before the beginning of the Second World War.¹⁷ I think, however, that one should rather trust a report written soon after the end of the war by his colleague, Gershom Bader. According to this report, Fahn spent his last days in Stanisławów under the Nazi occupation. Only in 1944, when he had already been 66 years old, he was rounded – and subsequently murdered – by the Nazis with the help of the local Ukrainians.¹⁸ This report seems to be much more reliable than all those that have been used by previous students of Fahn's biography.¹⁹

Fahn left a very impressive literary heritage: ca. 14 separate monographs and brochures, and more than two hundred articles and reports in Hebrew, Yiddish, and German.²⁰ These publications included journalist reports, travel notes, poems, short stories, legends, feuilletons, and scholarly essays. His scholarly activity may be divided into two fairly equal parts, one dedicated to the Haskalah and Zionism, while the other – devoted to the history, epigraphy and ethnography of the Karaite Jews (Karaites) and their relations with the Rabbanites, in Galicia and elsewhere. The importance of his scholarly publications on the Karaites is also strengthened by the fact that many of the sources used by Fahn (e.g. tombstone inscriptions, manuscripts, and architectural monuments) were later lost or destroyed.

His belletrist publications attracted much attention and criticism on the part of famous Jewish litterateurs such as Agnon, Brenner, Berdichevsky, and Bader during his life-time. The popularity of Fahn's writings on the Karaites, which were translated into Russian and German, to some extent served him a bad service – his publications were a few times bluntly plagiarised by other Jewish authors. The Karaite audience, which did not welcome Fahn's publications at all – because of their bitter and not particularly favourable for the Karaites character – also did read his works, even though with apparent resentment. In spite of the fact that quite a few modern specialists mention Fahn's name alongside classical Hebrew litterateurs and focus their works on his writings,²¹ it seems that his figure still remains largely underestimated. As I argue in this article, Fahn occupies an exceptional position in the history of Jewish science as a pioneer of the scientific study of the Galician Karaite community at the early stage of

¹⁷ N. Govrin, 'Reuven Fahn ve-mif'alo', p. 16. This doubtful data was often used by other Fahn's biographers.

¹⁸ Bader also mentioned that, ironically, it was the Ukrainians, for the sake of whose national independence Fahn risked his life during the First World War, that delivered him to the Nazis (G. Bader, 'Er hot oysgeforst un beshriben dos leben fun di Karaimen in Galitsie', *Morgen Zhurnal*, 27 X 1946, p. 7). Gershom (Gustav) Bader (1868–1953) was important Galician Zionist and litterateur, an editor of a number of Yiddish and Hebrew periodicals.

¹⁹ Fahn's biographical sketch was composed by me on the basis of his own autobiography, and also on N. Govrin, 'Reuven Fahn vemif'alo', p. 7–38; *eadem*, 'Reuven Fahn – hayyav v-itsirato', M.A. Thesis (University of Tel-Aviv, 1967), p. 11–116; N. Schur, *Karaite Encyclopedia* (Wien, 1995), 103; G. Kessler, 'Fahn, Reuven (1878–1939?)', *EJ* 6, 1137.

²⁰ For a complete bibliography of his Hebrew publications compiled by Nurith Govrin, see R. Fahn, *Mivhar ketavim*, p. 275.

²¹ Hanna Hever, *Producing the Modern Hebrew Canon*; N. Govrin, 'Reuven Fahn ve-mif'alo'; *eadem*, 'Reuven Fahn – hayyav v-itsirato'; E. Trevisan Semi, 'Agli inizi della letteratura Ebraica contemporanea: *Me-Hayye ha-Qera'im* di R. Fahn, tra folclore e letteratura', *Annali di Ca'Foscari*, 26:3 (1987), p. 5–25. The study by Hanna Hever, despite its interesting analytical approach and a number of interesting ideas and conclusions, is somewhat compromised by the author's numerous mistakes in spelling and some other minor inaccuracies. E.g. Fahn's surname is consistently misspelled as 'Fahan', Ukrainian Cossack leader Olexa Dovbush is called 'Dovush', while translations from Hebrew are not always literal.

the development of Jewish ethnography and epigraphy. Furthermore, he remains the only Jewish man of letters who devoted the whole belletrist book to the Karaites. The aim of this paper is to analyse Reuven Fahn's publications dedicated to the Karaite community of Halicz and to remind scholarly public about the importance of the contribution to the field of Jewish studies and Hebrew literature of Reuven Fahn – writer, scholar, Zionist and a victim of Nazi persecutions. Furthermore, those interested in the history of Hebrew literature and Jewish science may find hitherto unknown data on the contacts between Fahn and important twentieth-century Jewish figures such as Samuel Agnon, Majer Bałaban, Sholem Asch, Samuel Poznański and others.

Reuven Fahn, Karaites, and development of Jewish ethnography: early reports (1894–1907)

Before starting to analyse Fahn's contribution to the field of Karaite studies it seems to be worthwhile thinking about the reasons which prompted him, a Rabbanite Jew, Zionist and Hebrew litterateur to become interested in a small and not-too-conspicuous group of non-Talmudic Scripturalists such as the Karaites.

Perhaps, a few words should be said about the Karaite movement itself. The Karaites are members of a medieval dissident religious movement within Judaism whose origins are still being debated. The Karaites apparently derive their name from the Hebrew word for Scripture. The Hebrew term *qaraim* (sing. *qarai*) should be translated as 'readers,' in the sense of 'those who read the Scripture.' The name itself reflects the main characteristic of the movement, viz. the recognition of the *TaNaKh* (i.e. the Old Testament) as the sole and direct source of religious law, with the rejection of the Oral Law (i.e. the Talmud, a later Rabbinic commentary and legal code based on the *TaNaKh*).²²

The movement originally started in the Near East. By the eleventh century Karaite communities were present in many countries of the Near East, Byzantium, Northern Africa, and the Iberian Peninsula. The earliest Karaite settlers appeared in the territories which belong to present-day Poland, Lithuania, Western Ukraine and the Crimea in the late Middle Ages, not later than the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries.²³ Scholars are still at a loss with regard to the exact date of the settlement of the Karaite community in Galicia in general, and in Halicz in particular. According to the late romantic Karaite tradition, this event happened in the mid-thirteenth century. Nevertheless, medieval Latin sources attest that there was a Karaite community in Lwów, then the capital of Galicia, already in the fifteenth century. In the early sixteenth century, most likely, the community emigrated to Halicz.²⁴ In the sixteenth century there were several other smaller Karaite communities in Galician towns such as Żydaczów, Tyśmienica, and Złoczów. It seems that these communities later also emigrated to Halicz. Especially interesting feature of the East European Karaite community (including that of Galicia) was their adoption of

²² For a general survey, see M. Polliack (ed.), *Karaite Judaism. A Guide to Its History and Literary Sources*. (Leiden 2003). See also slightly unreliable, but still rather handy N. Schur, *The History of the Karaites* (Wien 1992); *idem*, *Karaite Encyclopedia*.

²³ For a discussion, see M. Kizilov, 'The Arrival of the Karaites (Karaims) to Poland and Lithuania: A Survey of Sources and Critical Analysis of Existing Theories', *Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi*, 12 (2003/2004), p. 29–45; G. Akhiezer, D. Shapira, 'Karaïm be-Lita u-ve-Vohlyn–Galitsiyah ad ha-meah ha'18', *Pe'amim*, 89 (2002), p. 19–60.

²⁴ M. Bałaban, 'Karaïci w Polsce', in his *Studia Historyczne* (Warszawa 1927), 15–18.

the Turkic Karaimo–Kypchak language (a.k.a. Karaim) in the thirteenth/fourteenth centuries as their *Umgangssprache*. This feature differentiated the Karaites from their ethnic neighbours – the Yiddish-speaking Ashkenazic Jews, the Slavic Poles and the Ruthenians (Ukrainians), and even from their Tatar-, Greek-, and Arabic-speaking Karaite brethren of the Crimea, Turkey, and the Near East.

By the time of Fahn's arrival the Karaite *qehilah* of Halicz, once the largest Karaite community of the region, diminished to only 167 Karaites compared with 1,450 Rabbanites living in the town.²⁵ Still, it was a fairly vibrant community with unique ethnographic culture and centuries-old traditions which were so drastically different from those of the local Rabbanite Jews that immediately attracted attention of the young intellectual from the province. According to Fahn's own words, everything about the Karaites was fascinating and alien: their everyday Turkic language, their hard 'Sephardic' pronunciation of Hebrew, their strange manner of praying, their customs, non-Ashkenazic anthropological type, unusual traditions, legends and manuscripts. However, it was not only exoticness that attracted Fahn to the Karaites. Surprisingly, this young provincial intellectual undoubtedly saw in them a most appropriate object for an ethnographic study – a study which he could easily do whilst living on the street adjacent to the Karaite quarter of Halicz.

Now, it is important to remember that the end of the nineteenth/beginning of the twentieth century was the time of the conception of Jewish ethnography as a science. The term 'folklore' itself had been coined by European science in England only in 1846. Until the mid-nineteenth century Jewish society did not bother too much to record and document Jewish folklore, customs, and tradition. Most Jewish scholars were engaged in research focused on text criticism, Bible interpretation and suchlike. The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, for example, did not appreciate and even discouraged the study of oral traditions.²⁶ In spite of the fact that a few ethnographic and folklorist works appeared in print in the second half of the nineteenth century,²⁷ Jewish ethnography remained in its embryonic state perhaps until the establishment of the *Gesellschaft für jüdische Volkskunde* by Max Grunwald in Hamburg in 1897. A year before the establishment of the society Grunwald published an appeal and a detailed questionnaire which could serve as a guide on how to conduct ethnographic and folklorist research.²⁸ Later this questionnaire was published by several Hebrew and Yiddish newspapers – and was read by many Jewish intellectuals of that time, including, apparently, young Reuven Fahn. About ten years later Shloyme Zanzl Rappoport (better known by the pseudonym Shimon An-ski, 1863–1920) established Jewish Historico-Ethnographic Society in Russia. Thus, Fahn, who carried out his ethnographic research in the Halicz Karaite community from the 1890s through the 1910s, chronologically was one of the earliest Jewish ethnographers. Furthermore, he carried out his studies on his own initiative, without any financial or academic support from centres of Jewish education – and became the first (and perhaps the only) Jewish ethnographer to devote his time and attention to the East European Karaites before the First World War.

²⁵ B. Janusz, *Karaici w Polsce* (Kraków 1927), 52. The whole population of Halicz of that time was ca. 5,000 inhabitants. Thus, the Jewish (Rabbanite and Karaite) community constituted about one third of the *Stadtbevölkerung*.

²⁶ D. Noy, 'Eighty Years of Jewish Folkloristics: Achievements and Tasks', *Studies in Jewish Folklore*, ed. F. Talmage (Cambridge, MA, 1980), p. 3.

²⁷ E.g. the study on the mountain Jews of the Caucasus by Joseph Judah Chernyi (1835–1880): *Sefer ha-masaot be-erets Kavkaz* (St. Petersburg 1884). For a short bibliography of folklorist publications before 1897, see D. Noy, 'Eighty Years', p. 2–3.

²⁸ D. Noy, 'Eighty Years', p. 1.

In addition to purely academic curiosity, Fahn's interest in the Karaites also seemed to be motivated by his Zionist views. There is no doubt that originally he viewed the Karaites as a part and parcel of 'am Yisra'el, a remote fragment of Jewish civilization belonging to the body of Israel. In 1894, at the end of his first essay on the Karaites Fahn thoughtfully remarked: 'In their love for Zion are they not our brethren [?]'²⁹ Nevertheless, no later than 1908 Fahn apparently became much less compassionate and more sarcastic with regard to the Karaites – either because of his personal conflict with some of them after the publication of his first reports or for some other reason (see more below).

Fahn visited Halicz for the first time in 1894, at the age of 16, apparently, to settle down some matters related to his future marriage. Nevertheless, the young amateur ethnographer decided to undertake his first field research in order to 'provide readers of *Ha-Magid* with true and original data based on what he studied and explored by himself.'³⁰ His first report on the Karaites was written in 1894 as a response to the article by a certain Rothblum about the Karaites which according to Fahn was neither exact, nor based on the author's own impressions.³¹ Already in this first pioneering report one can find everything that one may expect from a trained journalist and/or ethnographer: data about social and spiritual differentiation between the Karaites into 'modernist' and 'traditionalist'; preliminary description of their customs and architectural monuments (synagogue); elements of field work with local informants (Karaites and Rabbanite alike).³² Three years later he composed a new report, published in three parts in *Ha-Magid* under the same unsophisticated title *Ha-Qaraim be-Halits*' (The Karaites in Halicz). This report represented a substantially enlarged version of the previous one and this time included more historical, statistical, social, and oral data.³³ This report is highly important for anyone interested in 'real' history of the Galician Karaites since in his later works Fahn sort of censored some not-too-politically correct data published in this article (e.g. his information about the curse put on the Karaites by the Hassidic *rav*, Meir of Przemyślany).

Fahn's journalist reports apparently attracted much interest on the part of Jewish readers. As a sign of the interest in his activity one can interpret the fact that soon Fahn for the first (but not the last) time became the victim of plagiarism. In 1902 another important Jewish periodical of that time, *Ha-Tsefirah*, published an article by Mordecai Pinkowski, also entitled *Ha-Qaraim be-Halits*'.³⁴ To readers' great surprise, this article represented... exact copy of Fahn's second report with some slight variations. According to Nurith Govrin, however, this was a deliberate attempt to dishonour Pinkowski, a known author and apparently Fahn's friend, by some of his enemies.³⁵

Fahn published his third report on the Karaites in 1907.³⁶ This was his last article on the Karaites before the publication of his major oeuvre, *Me-Hayye ha-Qeraim*.

²⁹ R. Fahn, 'Ha-Qaraim be-Halits', *Ha-Magid*, 7 VI 1894, p. 177. In another place he called the continuation of the Karaites' existence 'wonder of wonders' (R. Fahn, 'Ha-Qaraim be-Halits', *Ha-Magid*, 6: 15 (1897), p. 119).

³⁰ R. Fahn, 'Ha-Qaraim be-Halits', *Ha-Magid*, 8 IV 1894.

³¹ This article was published in *Ha-Magid* ante 1894. Regrettably, I was not able to locate this article so far.

³² R. Fahn, 'Ha-Qaraim be-Halits', *Ha-Magid*, 7 VI 1894, p. 177.

³³ R. Fahn, 'Ha-Qaraim be-Halits', *Ha-Magid* 8 IV 1897; 15 IV 1897; 29 IV 1897.

³⁴ See M. Pinkowski, 'Ha-Qaraim be-Halits', *Ha-Tsefirah*, 4 XI 1902; *ibidem*, 11 XI 1902.

³⁵ N. Govrin, 'Reuven Fahn – hayyav v-itsirato', p. 43.

³⁶ R. Fahn, 'Yishuv shel Qaraim be-Galitsia', *Ha-Olam*, 20 II 1907, p. 86–87; *Ha-Olam*, 27 II 1907, p. 98–99.

**‘Me-Hayye ha-Qeraim’ (From the Life of the Karaites):
Reuven Fahn as a belletrist**

In 1908, aged thirty, Fahn published his most important and most controversial book entitled *Me-Hayye ha-Qeraim: Tsiyyurim ve-tipusim* (From the Life of the Karaites: Sketches and Characters). It was published three times during his life–time³⁷ and at least once after his death.³⁸ This book represented a collection of unrelated to each other short stories about the life of the Halicz Karaite community, their customs, mores, passions, community life, religious practices, and personal tragedies. The book starts with the short story *Siyur be-rehov* (A walk along the [Karaite] street) which introduces the main character of the story, a certain Rabbanite traveller, who visits the Karaite quarter on the Karaite street in Halicz for the first time. A traveller, who should be undoubtedly understood as Fahn’s *alter ego*, takes a walk along the Karaite quarter, talks to the local Rabbanites about the Karaite community, enters the Karaite synagogue and has a lengthy conversation about the essence of Karaism with the Karaite *hakham*.³⁹ In fact, this introductory story may serve as a good metaphor to characterize the whole book, which represents a long excursion into the Halicz Karaite quarter and the life of its inhabitants. In this book a reader meets one after another different Karaite characters and gets acquainted with their everyday and spiritual problems, longings and tragedies. Furthermore, a reader also enters the Karaite synagogue and a house, attends a Karaite wedding ceremony and a funeral, reads passages from Karaite prayer–books and listens to indignant monologues of the local Rabbanites about their ‘heretical’ neighbours.

Surprisingly, his excellent knowledge of Hebrew notwithstanding, in this book and most later publications of his, Fahn consistently vocalized the Hebrew word *qaraim* (קְרָאִים – Karaites) as *qeraim* (קֶרָאִים – phonetically close to Hebrew ‘tears’, ‘those who are torn’). According to Alfred Eidlisz this strange phonological preference should be explained by a deliberate pun on the words of the ‘Shulhan Arukh’ related to behaviour at the time of the death of an immediate family member. One of the traditional Jewish customs in such case is to make a tear in the shirt of the immediate family members (children and parents). This custom is known in Hebrew as *qeriah*. The ReMA (R. Moshe Iserlis) in his commentary on the ‘Shulhan Arukh’ says: *Ha-qeraim einam mitakhim le’olam* (Heb. ‘that tear is never allowed to be repaired’ – which may also be phonetically interpreted as ‘The Karaites can never become brothers’).⁴⁰

This play on words (*qaraim* vs. *qeraim*) has been used by several Rabbanite authors before Fahn. Judah Leib Gordon (1831–1892), one of the most famous nineteenth-century Hebrew poets, for example, wrote in 1882 (or in 1892) a poem about an unsuccessful love affair between a Rabbanite maiden and a young Karaite man. In a note the author mentioned that he originally thought that the expression *ha-qeraim einam mitakhim* had been first formulated by *rav* Saadia Gaon (882/892–942) who was known for his polemics against the Karaites. Nevertheless, later Gordon read this poem to the famous Russian Jewish scholar Albert (Abraham) Harkavy who himself dedicated much time to the study of Karaite history and epigraphy.⁴¹ The latter attributed the origin

³⁷ R. Fahn, *Me-hayye ha-Qeraim: Tsiyyurim ve-tipusim* (Halicz: M. Akselrod / Drohobycz: A. Župnik, 1908; added t. p.: *M’chaje Ha’Kraim: Skizzen und Typen aus dem Leben der Karaiten von Rubin Fahn*); *ibidem* (Berlin: Benjamin Harz, [192–?]); *ibidem*, in *KRF*, p. 145–240.

³⁸ R. Fahn, *Mivhar ketavim*, p. 39–130.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, 39–45.

⁴⁰ Alfred Eidlisz, private communication, XII 2005.

⁴¹ E.g. A. Harkavy, *Altjüdische Denkmäler aus der Krim mitgeteilt von Abraham Firkowitsch (1839–1872)* (St. Petersburg 1876).

of this pun not to Saadia, but to one of the rabbis in the Council of the Four Lands.⁴² Basically, both Fahn and his predecessors, who used this world play, implied that the Karaites could never be rejoined to the body of Israel. Furthermore, in a folk-tale entitled *Tahorah* (Purification) Fahn used a different word-play: *qeraim* (קרעים – legs) vs. *qaraim* (קראים – Karaites).⁴³ This sarcastic and not-too-tolerant attitude to the Karaites stands in contrast to his earlier publications, where Fahn explicitly referred to the Karaites as ‘brethren.’ Was this sarcasm caused by his personal conflict with the local Karaites – or by hostile attitude to his early reports on their part? Unfortunately, we do not have any data concerning this change in Fahn’s attitude to the Karaites which happened most likely around 1908.

Immediately after its first publication the book received much attention – and at the same time harsh criticism – on the part of Karaite and non-Karaite audience alike. First to react to Fahn’s book was none other as the perhaps most famous Galician Jewish poet and writer, young Samuel Agnon (1888–1970), who at that time himself was ten years younger than Fahn. In his review of the recent Galician Hebrew literature he generally criticized it and found it to be very repetitive and unoriginal. He used one of Fahn’s stories from *Me-Hayye ha-Qeraim* as a ‘good’ example of such repetitious and unoriginal literature.⁴⁴

The critique by another famous Jewish litterateur, Micah Joseph Berdichevsky (1865–1921) had at the same time ideological, literary, and linguistic character. On the ideological level, Berdichevsky apparently was dissatisfied even with the idea of dedicating time and attention to the Karaites and forgetting about general problems that European Jewry was facing at that moment: ‘he forgets that our [Rabbanite] settlements are not firm either and that we are also in the exile.’⁴⁵ Speaking about the literary shortcomings of the book, Berdichevsky found it to be very repetitive and sad: ‘the author copies in his stories *entire prayers* from a prayer-book; he sometimes completely forgets that he is a narrator.’ Furthermore, Berdichevsky accused Fahn’s literary style of being too lyrical and too elaborate while some expressions, in his view, ‘were not to be found by any generations of the Jews, guardians of the Hebrew language.’⁴⁶ Another important literary critic, Menahem Mendel Feitelsohn (1870–1912), criticized Fahn of idealizing the Karaites as a minority just because they *are* a minority without substantiating this idealization by any other arguments. Feitelsohn mentioned that the tragedies of Karaite individuals described by Fahn could be felt ‘only in our heads, and

⁴² Yehudah Leib Gordon, ‘Dibur mefotsets’, in his *Kitve Yehudah Leib Gordon: Shirah* (Tel Aviv 1950), p. 326–327. Was Gordon’s poem composed as a reply to Eliza Orzeszkowa’s (1841–1910) famous *Meir Ezofowicz*, a classical Polish novel about a romance between a Rabbanite man, Meir Ezofowicz, and a Karaite woman, Golda? This novel was first published as E. Orzeszkowa, *Meir Ezofowicz: Powieść z życia żydów* (Warszawa 1878).

⁴³ R. Fahn, ‘Me-aggadot ha-Qeraim’, in *KRF*, p. 263. In this tale a Karaite walking the streets of Bratislava (Pressburg) becomes a victim of a prank of Rabbanite boys who threw water on him and made him wet all over. The local rabbi, having heard his complaints, says: *Ve-ha-kerev ve-ha-qeraim yirhatsu ba-maim* (Heb. ‘entrails and legs [of the sacrifice] should be washed with water’ in the sense ‘Karaites should be washed with water’ another pun on *qaraim/qeraim*). Taking into account its sarcastic anti-Karaite character, this folk-tale most probably originated in the Rabbanite milieu.

⁴⁴ Adondon [Samuel Agnon], ‘Bibliyografiah’, *Ha-poel ha-tsair*, 1, 10–11 (1908), p. 27.

⁴⁵ M. Y. Berdits’evski, ‘Peri sefer’, *Ha-Olam* 2 (8 VII 1908): 363; idem, ‘Od be-sifrut ha-yafe: alef. ‘Me-hayye ha-Qeraim’, in his *Kitve Mikhah Yosef Bin-Gorion (Berdits’evski)* (Tel Aviv 1964), p. 272–273.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*.

not in our hearts.’ In his opinion, the Karaite characters depicted by Fahn were very similar and resembled one another. Furthermore, all their personal tragedies and problems were related to their belonging Karaite community while among the ‘characters’ portrayed by Fahn one could only see female and male Karaite *types* and not men and women with their personal and individual traits.⁴⁷

Perhaps the most scathing criticism of Fahn’s work was expressed by Joseph Hayyim Brenner (1881–1921), another important Hebrew writer and literary critic. Brenner, who spent about a year in Galicia in 1908 before leaving the region for Erets Israel, launched an attack on the entire body of Hebrew literature produced in Galicia at that time and specifically on works by Fahn and Isaac Fernhoff.⁴⁸ Brenner seemed to appreciate Fahn as a journalist and reporter, but denied him ability to create belletrist literature. He ridiculed his attempts to be an artist, his ambition to describe ‘characters and illustrations’ of the Karaite life, his poor literary style and his stilted Hebrew. Furthermore, in his opinion, tragedies and problems described by Fahn were peculiar not only to the Karaites, but to all European Jews – which made Fahn’s book lacking any originality of design and concept. ‘A prayer–book is not a life!’ exclaims Brenner in his review of Fahn’s book.⁴⁹

In my opinion, however, such negative reception of the book was determined not as much by poor belletrist qualities of *Me-Hayye ha-Qeraim* as by political and ideological convictions of the critics themselves. They were apparently exasperated by the fact that the young Galician author dedicated his time and effort to a group of obscure non–Talmudic Karaite Jews. Today, being armed by a time perspective and a hundred–year historical distance between us and *Me-Hayye ha-Qeraim*, we may attempt much more objective evaluation of this book. This book was more sympathetically analysed by post–war critics⁵⁰ and recently, by Hanna Hever⁵¹ and Emanuela Trevisan Semi.⁵² Perhaps, the most correct approach to the analysis of Fahn’s work was taken by Trevisan Semi, who analysed *Me-Hayye ha-Qeraim* as standing between an ethnographic essay and a literary novel. The scholar tried to examine this book in framework of the development of Jewish ethnography and literature. Furthermore, Trevisan Semi came to the conclusion that Fahn’s book, in style and richness of the description of Jewish everyday life, more resembled Yiddish literary works than those written in Hebrew, which normally tried to avoid such mundane matters as *Alltagsleben*.⁵³

In our opinion, whilst composing his oeuvre, Fahn committed a grave stylistic mistake: he tried to combine two mutually exclusive elements, an ethnographic study and *belles lettres*. Apparently, he had originally planned to publish two separate works: an ethnographic essay and a belletrist book. But then he for some reason decided to make an interesting literary experiment – and combine these two together. Indeed, lengthy quotations from the Karaite prayer–books, tombstone inscriptions, numerous phrases and expressions in the Turkic Karaim language, lengthy and detailed descriptions of

⁴⁷ M. M. Feitelsohn, ‘Me-hayye ha-Qeraim’, *Ha-Shiloah*, 20 (1910), p. 368–371; *idem*, ‘Me-hayye ha-Qeraim’, in his *Behinot ve-ha-arakhot: mivhar ketavim*, ed. A. B. Yoffe (Ramat Gan, 1970), p. 153–158.

⁴⁸ For details, see H. Hever, *Producing the Modern Hebrew Canon*, p. 19–20, 37–38.

⁴⁹ Y.H. Brenner, ‘Min ha-sifrut ha-galitsit (bibliyografiah)’, *Reshafim* 1 (1909), p. 29–32; *idem*, *Kol kitve Y. H. Brenner*, ed. M. Poznański (Tel Aviv 1960), p. 233.

⁵⁰ N. Govrin, ‘Reuven Fahn ve-mif’alo’, p. 7–38; *eadem*, ‘Reuven Fahn – hayyav v-itsirato’.

⁵¹ H. Hever, *Producing the Modern Hebrew Canon*, p. 23–25.

⁵² E. Trevisan Semi, ‘Agli inizi’, p. 5–25.

⁵³ *Ibidem*, p. 25.

ethnographic customs such as funerals, weddings, and purity laws – all these makes the book look more as an ethnographic study than a work of art. Furthermore, there is no doubt that ethnographic parts of the book, which provide us with abundance of the most valuable ethnographic material, might be – and should be – used as a primary source for any study focusing on the ethnography of the Galician Karaites. On the other hand, many parts of the book, narrating personal stories of the Halicz Karaites, still make it a literary work.

As has been mentioned above, this unusual experiment was not properly evaluated by contemporary critics. Still, there is no doubt that *Me-Hayye ha-Qeraim* became quite popular reading during Fahn's life-time – for those who were interested in the Karaites and for those who were not alike. Excerpts from the book were translated into German and Russian.⁵⁴ Furthermore, at least two interwar Yiddish authors tried to present direct adaptations from Fahn's publications as their own 'impressions' from their stay in Troki and Halicz in the 1930s.⁵⁵ Unfortunately, we do not have too many data on the reaction to Fahn's book in Karaite circles, but various factors indicate that it could hardly be a positive one – the book often showed those hidden parts of the Karaite life which the local community apparently would rather have remained secret. Even the fact that Fahn eliminated some, most sarcastic stories and legends in later editions of his novels, suggests that they received a harsh criticism on the part of the local Karaites.

On the other hand, the Karaites themselves did realize the importance of Fahn's contribution to the field of Karaite history and ethnography. In 1911 the second issue of the Moscow Karaite periodical, *Karaimskaia Zhizn'* (Karaite Life), published a strange report from Galicia by certain 'D.F.' with the subheading 'from our journalist.'⁵⁶ A number of conspicuous parallels between this report and early articles by Fahn strongly suggest that it was Fahn who tried to conceal his identity under these two initials. In fact, 'D.F.' is, most likely, a corruption of 'R.F.,' Reuven Fahn's initials (in Hebrew, handwritten 'resh' and 'dalet' are easily confused).⁵⁷ Furthermore, in the next year *Karaimskaia Zhizn'* published a Russian translation of the selected excerpts from *Me-Hayye ha-Qeraim* – but without indicating Fahn's name as their author.⁵⁸

In 1928 Fahn republished *Me-Hayye ha-Qeraim* in his collected works.⁵⁹ He took into account criticism on the part of Rabbanite and Karaite audience and considerably reworked his book. He eliminated many sarcastic and bitter fragments which could offend Karaites and made a considerable effort to improve its literary style. He also added a story about the fate of two Karaite soldiers who had taken part in military actions

⁵⁴ R. Fahn, 'Aus dem Leben der Karaiten', transl. H. Blumenthal, *Ost und West*, 1 (1912), p. 66–70; *Ost und West*, 2 (1912), p. 135–144; *idem*, 'Aus dem Leben der Karaiten', transl. H. Blumenthal, in *Das Volk des Ghetto*, ed. A. Landsberger, p. 353–366 (München 1916); 2nd ed. Berlin/Wien, 1921 (sketches: 'In der Karaitengasse' (p. 354–357); 'In der Karaërsynagoge' (p. 357–361); Eine Karaitenhochzeit' (p. 361–365)).

⁵⁵ N. Aizakson, 'Karaimer gehen unter', *Di Idishe Shimme*, 3 III 1935; Z. Shohet, 'Di Karaimen fun Galitsye: haynt un amolige tsayten', *Der Forverts*, 6 VII 1930.

⁵⁶ D.F., 'Pis'mo iz Galitsii (ot nashego korrespondenta)', *Karaimskaia Zhizn'*, 2 (1911), p. 73–75.

⁵⁷ There are a few strange details about this account: it was published in 1911 as an original contemporary report in Russian. Nevertheless, a year later a Galician Karaite wrote a letter to *Karaimskaia Zhizn'* where he mentioned that the report reflected the situation from the first half of the nineteenth century ([Abram Leonowicz], 'Pis'mo karaima iz Galitsii', *Karaimskaia Zhizn'*, 8–9 (1912), p. 74).

⁵⁸ Paradoxically enough, the Russian translation was done from the German translation and not from the Hebrew original ([R. Fahn], 'Sredi galichskikh karaimov', *Karaimskaia Zhizn'*, 8–9 (1912), p. 70–74).

⁵⁹ R. Fahn, 'Me-hayye ha-Qeraim', in *KRF*, p. 145–240.

in Austria and Italy and met on the ruins of the Karaite synagogue in Halicz after the war.⁶⁰ This time the book apparently got much warmer reception. Famous Jewish scholar, Isaak Markon (1875–1949), for example, found it to be “most interesting and worthwhile reading” while the whole composition of the book “very vivid and written in good Hebrew.”⁶¹

Scholarly studies: Reuven Fahn as a pioneer ethnographer, historian, folklorist, and epigraphist

In spite of the lack of proper academic education, Fahn is especially important for us as the author of a few most valuable scholarly studies devoted to the Karaites of different countries of the world, especially those of Galicia. Fahn based his studies not only on rare printed sources, but first of all on his own field work with the local informants (Karaite and Rabbanite alike) and their private archives and libraries. His scholarly studies, which pioneered *academic* research into the history of Galician Karaism provide us indispensable amount of most valuable historical, ethnographic, folklore, and epigraphic information. Here I will analyse only those of his scholarly studies which focused on the Galician Karaites.⁶²

To give an example, his historical study ‘On the history of the Karaites in Galicia’⁶³ is the only source which informs us about the arrival in Halicz ca. 1670 of two well-educated Karaite leaders, brothers Joseph ben Samuel (later nicknamed *Ha-Mashbir*, Heb. ‘provider’ or ‘deliverer of the bread’⁶⁴) and Isaiah ben Samuel. This event became a watershed in the history of the Halicz community which before the arrival of these two enlighteners was ‘enshrouded with impenetrable mist.’⁶⁵ This study is also the only source describing the conflict between the Halicz Karaite community and the Rabbanite *hevra qaddishah* which took place in 1848, after the death of Samuel ben Levi Leonowicz, the important leader of the community and the brother of the *hazzan* (i.e. head of the Karaite community) Abraham Leonowicz. According to Fahn, in the course of the burial, Rabbanite morticians somehow insulted the honour of the deceased. The Karaites, who found out that the honour of the deceased had been insulted, informed the *hazzan*. Faced with this problem, Leonowicz was forced to change the religious law. He issued a special *takkanah* which permitted the Karaites to inter their dead by

⁶⁰ R. Fahn, ‘Shenayim she-nifgeshu’, in *KRF*, p. 167–170.

⁶¹ I found an offprint of the review of Fahn’s book by Isaak Markon, which was published in a German-language Jewish periodical in the late 1920s, in the first volume of *KRF* kept at the Bodleian library at Oxford. Regrettably, I could not find the exact reference to this review or find out where and when it was published.

⁶² Fahn has published a few articles on the Karaites and maskilim, on the establishment of the Karaite movement and on the history of the Karaite community in the Land of Israel (see R. Fahn, ‘Le-tsmihatah shel kat ha-Qeraim’, in *KRF*, p. 3–16; *idem*, ‘Edat ha-Qeraim be-erets Yisra’el’, in *KRF*, p. 17–25; *idem*, ‘Maskilei Yisrael ve-hakhmei miqra’, in *KRF*, p. 65–141.

⁶³ R. Fahn, ‘Le-qorot ha-Qeraim be-Galitsiah (Polin qatan) (yishuvehem ve-hakhmehem-hazzanehem)’, in *KRF*, p. 26–59. This study has been originally published in the periodical *Ha-Qedem* 3: 1–4 (1911–1914) and also as a separate offprint from the periodical (Berlin 1912).

⁶⁴ In the book of Gen. 42: 6 Joseph son of Jacob is called *Ha-Mashbir*.

⁶⁵ Z. Zarachowicz, ‘Przyczynki do dziejów gminy karaimskiej w Haliczu. Z dokumentów przeszłości’, Manuscript Division of the Lietuvos Mokslų Akademijos Biblioteka, Vilnius, F.143, no. 1334, fol. 1.

themselves.⁶⁶ ‘On the history of the Karaites in Galicia’ contains also many other highly important historical data on the history of the Karaite communities of Lwów, Halicz, and Kukizów based on the author’s work with printed, archival and oral sources which have not survived.

Fahn is also highly important for us as an ethnographer. Unusual purity laws of the Halicz Karaites, their Turkic language, their ethnographic customs and ceremonies – all these apparently fascinated the young and talented provincial intellectual and challenged him to document this treasure house of ethnographic data. Unfortunately, he has not published a separate ethnographic study and, as has been mentioned above, incorporated his ethnographic data mostly into *Me-Hayye ha-Qeraim*. Thus, the task of every student of the Karaite ethnography is to differentiate Fahn’s ethnographic observations from his belletristic insights – and analyse them as a highly valuable ethnographic source. As I argue in my earlier studies⁶⁷ this dissection of *Me-Hayye ha-Qeraim* into ethnographic and belletristic parts can be easily done by those who take pain to read *Me-Hayye ha-Qeraim* carefully enough. ‘Ethnographic’ parts of the book can easily be differentiated from ‘belletristic’ ones by a number of excessive non-literary detail and descriptions providing ethnographic information.

Especially significant is Fahn’s contribution to the field of Karaite epigraphy. The problem of the dating of Crimean Karaite tombstones became a subject of the heated debate in European science in the second half of the nineteenth century.⁶⁸ Nevertheless, Fahn was the *only* scholar to devote his attention to documenting epigraphic monuments of the Galician Karaites. The next research on the Galician Karaite epigraphy followed as late as the 1990s! His study documented tombstone inscriptions of the Karaite cemetery in Halicz before the partial destruction of the cemetery during the First and Second World wars. It is only due to Fahn’s work that we possess full texts of tombstone inscriptions of several important seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Karaite leaders such as aforementioned Joseph ben Samuel *Ha-Mashbir*.⁶⁹

Fahn also tried to provide readers with some linguistic information – but in this case his data are much less valuable since one does need to be a trained professional in order to properly collect and analyse language material. Still, he provided readers with important information about the way the Halicz Karaites pronounced Hebrew at the beginning of the twentieth century – and apparently in earlier periods as well. Furthermore, he also tried to supply samples of the texts and expressions in the Halicz dialect of the Karaim language. Now, there comes a question of how strong was Fahn’s knowledge of this dialect. In his *Me-Hayye ha-Qeraim* Fahn narrates a story about a certain Rabbanite boy, who started to receive lessons of Karaim from one of the Karaite youngsters. When elder Karaites heard about it, they beat the young teacher and did not allow him to continue the lessons.⁷⁰ It is very likely that this story reflects Fahn’s own experiences. Whatever the case may be, Fahn certainly possessed some, though fairly

⁶⁶ R. Fahn, ‘Le-qorot’, p. 49.

⁶⁷ M. Kizilov, *The Karaites of Galicia: An Ethnoreligious Minority Among the Ashkenazim, The Turks, and the Slavs, 1772–1945*. Leiden / Boston: Brill, 2009 (=Studia Judaeoslavica. Vol. 1), p. 15–17.

⁶⁸ For details, see D. Shapira (ed.), *Matsevot beit ha-’almin shel ha-Yehudim ha-Qaraim be-Chufut-Qal’eh, Qrim / The Tombstones of the Cemetery of the Karaite Jews in Cufut-Qal’eh (the Crimea)*, Jerusalem 2008.

⁶⁹ R. Fahn, ‘Sedeh ha-qevaret le-Qerae Halits’, in *KRF*, p. 60–64. In fact, he published more tombstone inscriptions in his historical study, ‘Le-qorot ha-Qeraim be-Galitsiah’, than in this short article.

⁷⁰ R. Fahn, ‘Aus dem Leben der Karaiten’, *Ost und West*, 1 (1912), p. 69–70.

limited knowledge of Karaim. In his publications he often cited short fragments and/or phrases in Karaim.

Fahn is equally important for us as a collector of the Karaite folklore. In 1921 he published a collection of Karaite legends which until today remains perhaps the only collection of genuine Karaite legends dating back to the nineteenth century.⁷¹ Fahn's collection of legends, as well as *Me-Hayye ha-Qeraim*, also stood on the border between ethnography and literature, i.e. it contained original folklore plots which underwent some sort of literary adaptation. Such approach to folklore materials was and still is accepted by many editors of folk legends. This indispensable volume contained legends and tales from Galicia, Troki (Lithuania), Jerusalem, and Constantinople. One tale takes place in Pressburg (Bratislava). Three of the legends take place in Galicia. One is related to the problem of burying a Karaite in a Rabbanite cemetery outside of Halicz, the second tells about the martyrdom of pious Karaite maiden being chased by some unidentified pogromists (apparently, Chmielnicki's Cossacks or Haidamacks), while the third focuses on the the historical origins of the Karaite settlement in Halicz. The latter legend, *Bene segulah* (The chosen ones) existed in two different versions: the Karaite and the Rabbanite one. The Rabbanite variant openly mocked the Karaite version, according to which the Karaites arrived in Halicz in the thirteenth century as a result of the treaty between the Tatar Khan Batu and Galician Prince Daniel.⁷² According to the Rabbanite versions, the Karaites were received by Daniel of Galicia in exchange for the pair of thoroughbred dogs.⁷³ It is of interest that this legend, because of its apparent sarcastic character, was not published by Fahn in the German edition of his legends.

Students of Hebrew literature may be interested to know that Fahn's collection of Karaite legends was read by Samuel Agnon despite his earlier (1908) disapproval of Fahn's *Me-Hayye ha-Qeraim*. In one of his later novels, *Be-levav yamim* (In the heart of the seas), Agnon used two Fahn's legends, the one about the Constantinople Karaite community and another focusing on the Jerusalem Karaites. In Agnon's novel the Karaite community is destined to never grow above the *minyán* (i.e. ten persons) because of the curse put on the community by a local Rabbanite sage. The sage was enraged to find the book of Rambam being profaned by the Jerusalem Karaites who put it under the stairs leading to their synagogue – so that every Karaite could step and humiliate it.⁷⁴ This plot was taken by Agnon directly from Fahn's legend *Milhamah be'ad yerushat ha'arets* (The fight for the inheritance of the land).⁷⁵

What was the reaction of academic circles to Fahn's scholarly publications? It was certainly much less critical than with regard to *Me-Hayye ha-Qeraim*, but still rather condescending. Jacob Mann (1888–1940), an author of a classical study on the Karaites, found Fahn's doubts about the authenticity of some Karaite documents 'groundless,'

⁷¹ R. Fahn, *Me-aggadot ha-Qeraim* (Wien 1921); *idem*, 'Me-aggadot ha-Qeraim', in *KRF*, p. 241–263. See abridged German translation: *idem*, *Legenden der Karaiten* (Wien 1921). It is unclear whether it was Fahn himself who translated this collection into German or it was somebody else. Two of his legends were later reprinted in A. M. Haberman (ed.), *Me-sipurei ha-Qaraim* (Tel Aviv, 1947).

⁷² R. Fahn, 'Bene segulah: 'al pi nusah ha-Qeraim', in his *Me-aggadot ha-Qeraim*, p. 17–18; *idem*, 'Bene segulah: 'al pi nusah ha-Qeraim', in *KRF*, p. 259–260.

⁷³ R. Fahn, 'Bene segulah: 'al pi nusah ha-yehudim', in his *Me-aggadot ha-Qeraim*, p. 18; *idem*, 'Bene segulah: 'al pi nusah ha-yehudim', in *KRF*, p. 260–261.

⁷⁴ Sh. Y. Agnon, 'Be-levav yamim', in his *Kol sipurav shel Shmuel Yosef Agnon*, vol. 2 (Jerusalem, 1974), p. 526–527; *idem*, *In the Heart of the Seas: A Story of a Journey to the Land of Israel*, transl. I. M. Lask (New York, 1948), p. 83–85.

⁷⁵ R. Fahn, 'Milhamah be'ad yerushat ha-arets', in his *Me-aggadot ha-Qeraim*, p. 3–5.

while his sketch of the history of the Galician Karaites containing ‘several deficiencies.’⁷⁶ The ‘Halicz’ chapter of another classical study, the work by one of the most famous Jewish scholars of the twentieth century, Majer Bałaban (1877–1942/3), in fact contains an almost direct adaptation of Fahn’s ‘On the history of the Karaites in Galicia’. Nevertheless, Bałaban himself only twice, and with apparent unwillingness, referred to Fahn’s work in his study.⁷⁷ Should this unwillingness to recognize Fahn’s contribution to the field of Karaite studies be explained by some sort of conflict between these two scholars? In 1911 Bałaban himself mentioned that he was in correspondence with Fahn.⁷⁸ Moreover, in his autobiography Fahn himself mentioned that in his Karaite studies he was supported by two important Jewish scholars, Majer Bałaban and Samuel Poznański (1864–1922).⁷⁹ Isaak Markon’s review of Fahn’s scholarly publications also was far from being sympathetic. The scholar reproached Fahn for the ‘superficial understanding of the problem’ and suggested that he read more of Harkavy’s, Poznański’s, and Markon’s own publications on the subject.⁸⁰

As it seems to me, as was the case with *Me-Hayye ha-Qeraim*, this somewhat arrogant scepticism with regard to Fahn’s works mostly missed the point. Indeed, many of Fahn’s insights looked slightly amateur because of his lack of professional education. Nevertheless, for an amateur author his publications looked very impressive and useful. In addition – something that Fahn’s academic contemporaries should have been aware of – he was indeed a pioneer in many aspects of scientific research aimed at studying the East European Karaites. Furthermore – something that Fahn’s critics could hardly have expected – nobody followed Fahn in his task of documenting the Galician Karaites’ history, epigraphy and ethnography until the 1990s! Indeed, in the comparatively peaceful 1920s nobody could imagine the rise of Nazism – and further destruction of European Jewry during the Second World War and the Holocaust. In spite of the fact that the East European Karaite community survived the Holocaust virtually unscathed,⁸¹ after 1945 the community practically lost its unique religious and ethnographic tradition. Before this happened, however, several interwar scholars tried to document ethnographic customs of the Karaites in Galicia and elsewhere in Eastern Europe. Nevertheless, their publications had rather linguistic than ethnographic character.⁸²

The Polish Orientalist, Jan Grzegorzewski, was probably the first and the only scholar whose intention was to write a comprehensive study on the Galician Karaite community.

⁷⁶ J. Mann, *Texts and Studies in Jewish History and Literature*, vol. 2: *Karaitica* (Philadelphia 1935), p. 587.

⁷⁷ M. Bałaban, ‘Karaici’, p. 25, 36.

⁷⁸ M. Bałaban, ‘Iz istorii karaimov v Galitsii’, *Evreiskaia Starina* 3:4 (1911), p. 117.

⁷⁹ R. Fahn, *Mivhar ketavim*, p. 260. We do not know much about relations between Fahn and Poznański apart from the fact that Poznański certainly did read and possessed Fahn’s publications. Several books by Fahn, which are currently kept in the Jewish National and University Library in Jerusalem, come from Poznański’s personal library.

⁸⁰ Isaak Markon, a review of *KRF* kept in the Bodleian library at Oxford. Markon must have known Fahn’s works at least from 1911 as an editor of the periodical *Ha-Qedem*.

⁸¹ For details, see M. Kizilov, *Karaites*, p. 294–302.

⁸² T. Kowalski, ‘Przyczynki do etnografii i dialektologii karaimskiej (Beiträge zur karaimischen Volkskunde und Dialektologie)’, *Rocznik Orientalistyczny* 5 (1929), p. 201–239 (contains texts on the preparation of *matsah* and Passover seder in Halicz (p. 221–229); idem, ‘Pieśni obrzędowe w narzeczu Karaimów z Trok’, *Rocznik Orientalistyczny* 3 (1925), p. 216–254. Before that, a couple of articles on the Karaite ethnography were published by the Karaite press (I. Zh., ‘Russkie karaimy: etnograficheskii ocherk’, *Karaimskaia Zhizn*’ 3–4 (1911), p. 86–102; ‘K etnografii karaimstva’, *Karaimskaia Zhizn*’ 10–11 (1912), p. 29–33).

Unfortunately, the scholar could not accomplish his work because of his death in 1922.⁸³ Until the recent publication of the complete catalogue of the Halicz Karaites cemetery⁸⁴ Fahn's research in the field of Karaite epigraphy in Galicia remained virtually the *only* source of information about this cemetery and the burial customs of the local Karaites. Furthermore, Fahn's studies in the field of Karaite epigraphy in many respects look much more impressive than those conducted by many other nineteenth-century Jewish scholars⁸⁵ – it is important to remember that in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century European and Jewish ethnography, archaeology and epigraphy were in its, so to say, embryonic stage of development.

Fahn's collection of Karaite legends is perhaps, the only reliable collection of original Karaite folk tales and legends to date. Indeed, there were several other attempts of documenting Karaite legends before and after Fahn. In 1904 the Karaite hazzan of Ekaterinoslav, Samuel ben Shemaria Pighit, published a collection of legends and fairy-tales from Turkey and the Crimea – but in contrast to Fahn's collection only some of them were about the Karaites.⁸⁶ A very important collection of Karaite legends from Lithuanian and the Crimea had been collected in the 1930s by a Karaite author, Abraham Szyszman. Paradoxically, Szyszman's good knowledge of the Karaite history and literature distracted him from documenting oral traditions in their original 'raw' shape. In contrast to Fahn, Szyszman often deliberately distorted the Karaite legends, inserted there references to Karaite literature and even whole passages testifying to the Karaites' alleged 'Turkic' identity.⁸⁷ Later editions of Karaite legends are even less reliable – and all focus on the legends of the Crimean Karaites.⁸⁸ Thus, Fahn's research in the area of the Galician Karaite folklore remains absolutely unique.

In 1928, now aged fifty, Fahn decided to publish his collected works as a sort of *Festschrift*. The first part, entitled *Sefer ha-Qeraim*, was published in Lwów in 1929.⁸⁹ A bit earlier, in December 1928, he published another article on the Polish Karaites which seems to be never re-published in any other collections of Fahn's writings.⁹⁰ He has

⁸³ For the draft of Grzegorzewski's study, see Archiwum Nauki PAN i PAU, Kraków, K III–6, no. 16. Grzegorzewski's archival legacy received absolutely groundless sarcastic evaluation by Tadeusz Kowalski (see his 'Materjały karaïmskie ś.p. Jana Grzegorzewskiego', *Mysł Karaïmska*, 10 (1934), p. 19–28). I intend to dedicate a separate article to a new, more objective analysis of Grzegorzewski's archival collection.

⁸⁴ I. Yurchenko, O. Kefeli, N. Yurchenko, and O. Berehova's'kyi, *Karaïms'ke kladovyshche bilia Halycha. Katalog nadmohylnykh pam'yatnykiv* (L'viv–Halych, 2000). For the review, see M. Kizilov, "Vor dem Vergessen bewahren – Neue Forschungen zu den Karäern Ostgaliziens (Ukraine)," *Judaica*, 4 (2003), p. 299–304; D. Shapira, 'Matsevoit Helits' – katalog shel matsevoit qarayot me-mizrah Eiropah', *Pe'amim*, 103 (2005), p. 147–150.

⁸⁵ E.g. D. Chwolson, *Corpus Inscriptionum Hebraicarum Enthaltend Grabschriften aus der Krim* (St. Petersburg 1882).

⁸⁶ S. Pighit, *Sefer davur davur* (Warszawa 1904).

⁸⁷ See the manuscript collection of Karaite legends from Troki: Abraham Szyszman, *Legendy i predaniia karaïmov*, 1932–1944 (Manuscript Division of the Lietuvos Mokslų Akademijos Biblioteka, Vilnius, F.143, no. 1531). At the present moment this collection of the Karaite folklore is being prepared for the publication by Mikhail Kizilov.

⁸⁹ Yu. A. Polkanov (ed.), *Legendy i predaniia karaev (krymskikh karaïmov-tiurkov)* (Simferopol 1995); L. I. Red'kina (ed.), *Legendy karaïmov Kryma* (Evpatoriya 2000); V. Z. Tiriayaki (ed.), *Legendy i predaniya krymskikh karaïmov* (Evpatoriya 2002).

⁸⁹ R. Fahn, *Kitve Reuven Fahn*, pt. 2 (Stanisławów 1937).

⁹⁰ R. Fahn, 'Ha-Qaraim be-Polin', *Ha'olam*, 14 XII 1928, p. 951–953.

never returned to Karaite studies ever after – apparently, being satisfied by the research done by him before World War I and having no new Karaite sources at hand.

To conclude, for any student of Zionism, Jewish science and Hebrew literature in Eastern Europe Reuven Fahn remains a highly interesting and in many respects absolutely unique figure. As was mentioned above, Fahn's name should be placed among the names of the first Jewish ethnographers and epigraphists. His studies, their somewhat amateur character notwithstanding, can easily compete with publications of classic Jewish authors such as Daniel Chwolson, Shimon An-ski, Majer Bałaban and many others. Furthermore, Fahn remains perhaps the only Jewish ethnographer and epigraphist who penned a few important studies focusing on the Galician Karaites. Today, after the drastic events of two world wars and years of Soviet vandalism, when many Karaite monuments, manuscripts and objects were destroyed, his research on the history, ethnography and epigraphy of the Galician Karaites became not only a valuable study, but also a source of unique information on this community.

Reuven Fahn also was one of the earliest East European authors to compose poetry and prose in the Hebrew language. Fahn remains the only Jewish author who made Karaites foci of the whole belletristic book. His *Me-Hayye ha-Qeraim* represents a most interesting experiment in the history of Hebrew literature – an attempt to mix two mutually exclusive elements – ethnographic study and fiction. In spite of rather harsh critique on the part of other Jewish litterateurs of his time, this book was widely read both during Fahn's life-time and after. Furthermore, today, after almost complete disappearance of the Karaite community in Halicz,⁹¹ *Me-Hayye ha-Qeraim* represents a sort of time-machine which gives us a unique chance to get infiltrated into the world of the Karaite life in provincial Halicz, meet its inhabitants and observe their unusual customs and traditions. Another important Jewish writer, Sholem Asch (1880–1957), planned to write a belletristic book about the Karaites in Yiddish. For this purpose he travelled to Troki where he rented a room in a Karaite house in order to observe Karaite life *de visu*. Nevertheless, next day, when his Karaite landlord (who happened to be a *shamash* in the local Karaite synagogue) discovered that Asch was a writer, he expelled the belletrist from his house. The Karaites preferred not to be exposed to the public again – and this planned book about the Karaites had never been composed.⁹²

We lose Fahn's traces after 1939. As has been mentioned above, he was most likely killed by the Nazi butchers ca. 1944. In 1946, after the end of the war, his colleague and friend, Gershom Bader, wrote an article in Yiddish entitled 'He Had Studied and Described the Life of the Karaites in Galicia'.⁹³ This might have been a good epitaph to be placed on his tomb – if we only knew where exactly he was buried. I hope that this article does justice to this hitherto rather neglected figure in the history of Karaite studies, Galician Zionism, and Hebrew literature.

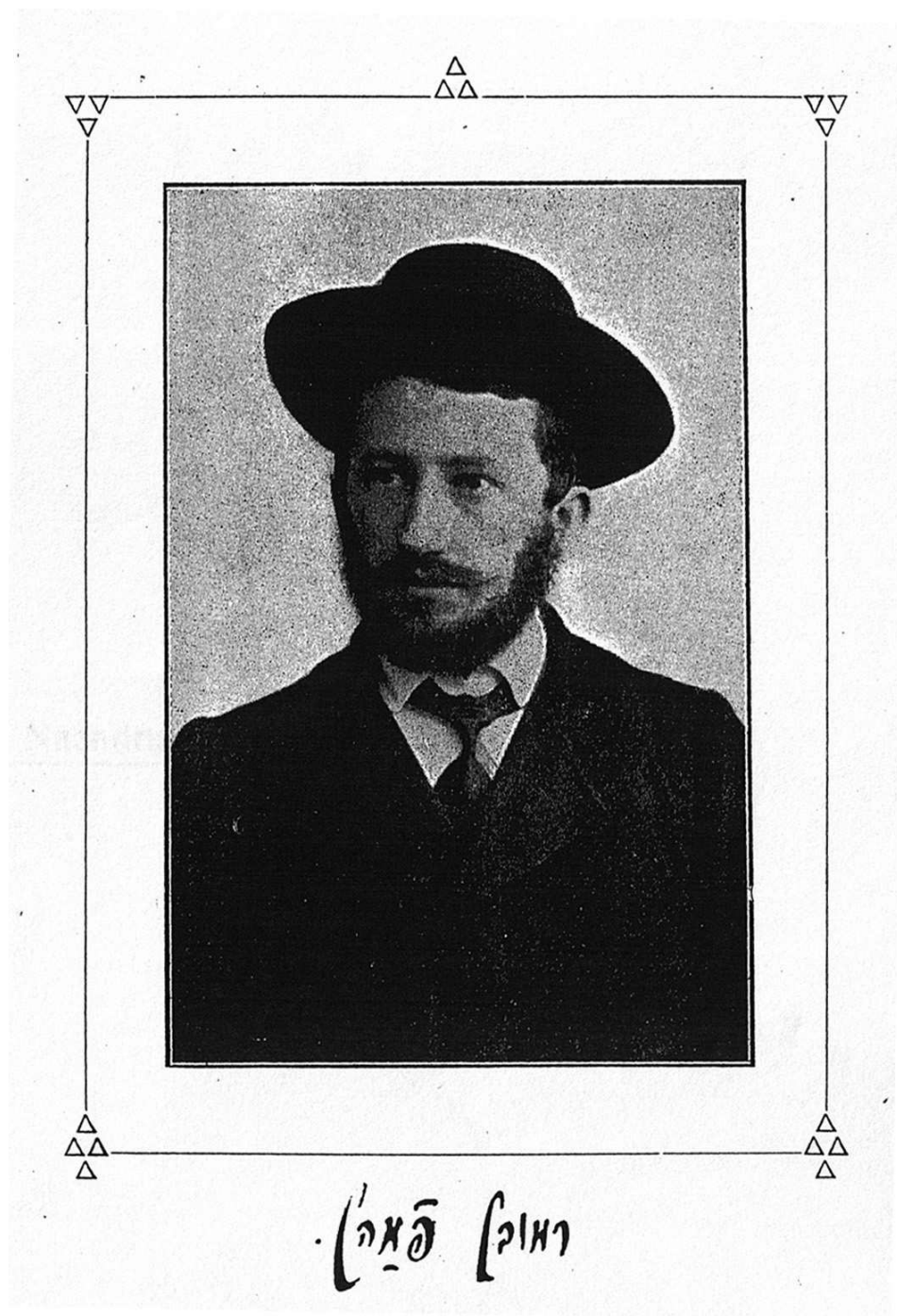
Mikhail Kizilov – Scholar, Zionist, and Man of Letters: Reuven Fahn (1878–1939/1944) in the Karaite Community of Halicz (Notes on the Development of Jewish Ethnography, Epigraphy and Hebrew Literature)

Keywords: Reuven Fahn, Karaites, Karaite studies, Galicia, Zionism, Hebrew literature, Halicz

⁹¹ Only two elderly Karaites live in Halicz as of April 2008 and ca. 1,500 in the whole of Eastern Europe (for details, see M. Kizilov, 'Faithful Unto Death: Language, Tradition, and the Disappearance of the East European Karaite Communities', *East European Jewish Affairs*, 36:1 (2006), p. 73, 81).

⁹² Asch narrated this story to Fahn by himself (R. Fahn, introduction to *KRF*, p. iii).

⁹³ Bader, 'Er hot oysgeforstht.'



1. Reuven Fahn in 1908.

ר א ו ב ז פ א ה ז

מְחַיֵּי הַקְרָאִים

ציורים ומפוסים.

(עם תמונת המחבר.)



הוצאת מ. אכסלרד.



האליטש, תרס"ה.

בדפוס א. ה. זופניק, ק. אונד ק. האפליעפערצאנט, דראהאביטש.

M'CHAJE HA'KRAIM

SKIZZEN UND TYPEN
AUS DEM LEBEN DER KARAITEN
VON RUBIN FAHN.

HALICZ 1908.

Druck von A. H. Župnik, k. u. k. Hoflieferant, Drohobycz.

2. Title page of *Me-Hayye ha-Qeraim* (Halicz/Drohobycz, 1908).



3. Samuel Poznański's exlibris on Fahn's *Legenden der Karaiten* (Wien 1921) kept in Jewish National and University Library in Jerusalem.