

ALEKSANDER DUBIŃSKI (1924–2002), ON THE 20TH ANNIVERSARY OF HIS DEATH

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Abstract: The aim of the article is to present the profile and professional path of Aleksander Dubiński (1924–2002) on the twentieth anniversary of his death. A long-time researcher at the Institute of Oriental Studies at the University of Warsaw and a student tutor, he was interested in many aspects of turcological knowledge, with a particular emphasis on research on the culture of the Karaim minority and Lithuanian-Polish Tatars. The article also discusses the Oriental book collection and periodicals left by Aleksander Dubiński.

Keywords: Aleksander Dubiński, Karaims, Karaites, Karaim language, Karaim studies, Tatar studies

It is 20 years already since Aleksander Dubiński, my father, is no longer among us. He ended his scholarly activity more than a quarter of a century ago, in the mid-90s of the previous century, so a whole generation of researchers has grown up who did not have a chance to get to know him personally. Therefore, I would like to recall some of his activities and achievements in the scholarly field. Aleksander Dubiński's research interests, as a turcologist, focused on both Karaim and Tatar topics. The former was a natural choice due to his origin and place of upbringing and is better known than the latter.

Aleksander Dubiński was born on May 22, 1924, in Troki (Trakai). His father, Józef Dubiński (1872–1943), was a farmer and horticulturalist like most of the Troki Karaims at that time. His mother, Zofia née Łobanos (1884–1948), came from a long line of Karaim mayors, who had exercised administrative and judicial power in the Karaim community for many decades. It is worth mentioning here that the family tree of the Łobanos, developed by Dr. Anna Sulimowicz-Keruth, includes as many as 21 generations, known at least by the names of subsequent ancestors.

Young Aleksander attended the Polish Primary School in Troki in 1930–1937 in the mornings, and just like his peers, – the Karaim school in the afternoons. The principal teacher at that time, who conducted classes for Karaim youth, was Szymon Firkowicz (1897–1982). During the lessons, students learned not only the Karaim language, which for most of them was the first or the second language used at home next to Polish but, above all, the original language of the Holy Scriptures. The youth tried to become fluent in the complex art of reciting the Holy Scriptures, which consisted of reading in Karaim the text written in the Holy Language of the original. Aleksander’s friends recalled that in this period, he had already distinguished himself as a diligent student who made rapid linguistic progress. Undoubtedly, this was influenced by family traditions: a religious father and a learned uncle – a poet and writer, the Vilnius hazzan (clergyman) Józef Łobanos (1880–1947). The meetings with Professor Tadeusz Kowalski (1889–1948), an orientalist and researcher of the Karaim language, also made quite an impression on young Aleksander.

In 1938, Aleksander entered the Adam Mickiewicz State Gymnasium in Vilnius, and during the war, he attended schools with Lithuanian as the language of instruction. Then, in March 1945, Aleksander volunteered to join the Polish Army and arrived in the vicinity of Warsaw.

After the war, in 1948, Aleksander Dubiński became a student at the Institute of Oriental Studies, University of Warsaw. Here he studied Middle East philology under Prof. Ananiasz Zajączkowski (1903–1970) and Old Turkic linguistics under Prof. Marian Lewicki (1908–1955). After completing his studies and presenting his master’s thesis on Old Turkic writing, he was employed in the Turkology Department of the Oriental Institute at the University of Warsaw in 1953, where he worked until his retirement forty years later.

Alongside with his employment at the University Turkology Department, Aleksander Dubiński was also involved in research at the then Department of Oriental Studies within the Polish Academy of Sciences. Initially, he participated in the work on the Kipchak Dictionary. Then, in 1953, he was assigned to work in a team on the Karaim–Russian–Polish Dictionary¹.

In 1963–1964, he completed research internships in Paris and Hamburg, where he prepared his doctoral dissertation on the infinitive in Turkic lan-

1 *Karaimsko–russko–połskij slovar’*, N. A. Baskakow, A. Zajączkowski, S. M. Szapszał (red.), Moskva 1974.



Aleksander Dubiński (on the left) with Stanisława Płaskowicka-Rymkiewicz (1914-1989) and Prof. Ananiasz Zajączkowski (1903-1970), Warszawa 1955.



Aleksander Dubiński at the Orientalist Congress, 1975. In the background, Prof. Tadeusz Lewicki (1906-1992).



Aleksander Dubiński, 1993.

guages, which he defended in 1965, obtaining a doctoral degree. At the University of Warsaw, Aleksander Dubiński was a student group tutor for many years. He conducted lectures, exercises, and seminars in Turkish, Uzbek, and Karaim philology. In addition, he supervised the preparation of several master's theses, which reflected the main areas of his scholarly interest. They dealt mainly with linguistic matters, including morphology, syntax, and above all, the vocabulary of the Turkish language.

Nevertheless, there were also topics related to the Turkic peoples' rituals and Karaim biographies. As a scholar, Aleksander Dubiński focused on several branches of turkological knowledge. His initial involvement in the Turkic languages lexicography – as mentioned above in the Kipchak Dictionary and the Karaim–Russian–Polish Dictionary – was crowned with being the co-author, together with Lucyna Antonowicz-Bauer, of the Turkish–Polish and Polish–Turkish Dictionary² published in 1983 and repeatedly re-edited in the subsequent twenty years.

In 1994, on his 70th birthday, colleagues from the University of Warsaw presented Aleksander with a Memorial Book as a sign of friendship and recognition of his scholarly achievements. This jubilee volume was entitled *Caraimica*³ and it contains Aleksander Dubiński's selected works from 1958–1993 on Karaim matters. These works were grouped according to the topics related to the following matters: Karaims – an ethnic and religious minority; history of Karaim studies; Karaim language; Karaim vocabulary; Karaim literature; social and cultural life of the Karaims; Varia, etc.

In addition to his primary interest in Karaim studies, Aleksander Dubiński also researched the Tatars, which went hand in hand with the long years of cordial relations he maintained with the Polish Muslim community. The publication list includes works on Polish-Lithuanian Tatars, focusing on their writings, language, legends, settlement, social life, and ethical standards, as well as translations from the Crimean Tatars language.

A less-known episode in his academic life is his late professional interest in Tatar manuscripts written in Arabic script. Unfortunately, he was not able to devote himself to this issue due to his progressive illness.

Aleksander Dubiński participated in many international conferences and turcological congresses. At one of them, he met the turcologist, Ms. Éva Ágnes Csató, which resulted in scholarly cooperation and friendship. That

2 A. Dubiński, L. Antonowicz-Bauer, *Słownik turecko-polski, polsko-turecki*, last edition Warszawa 2003.

3 A. Dubiński, *Caraimica. Prace karaimoznawcze*, T. Majda (red.), Warszawa 1994.

led to the Karaim language summer schools being organized later in Trakai for many years, which played a significant role in the attempts to improve the language competencies of the participants. The summer schools were initially organized by members of the Karaim community in Lithuania, in cooperation with prof. Csató. The summer school initiative, launched over 20 years ago, is continued by Karaim organizations and social activists to this day (subject to the latest pandemic conditions). It gathers many members of the Karaim community coming to Trakai from all over the world. Moreover, numerous accompanying events help to broaden the knowledge of national heritage, customs, and rituals, not to mention improving the knowledge of the Karaim language.

In this context, it is impossible not to mention those who would have appreciated this wonderful initiative, as their primary concern was to preserve the Karaim language and culture, including: the above mentioned Szymon Firkowicz, Seraja Szapszał (1873–1961), Michał Firkowicz (1924–2000), Marek Ławrynowicz (1938–2011), and many other members of the Karaim community. In addition, Aleksander Dubiński was always close with his teachers and friends living in Vilnius and Trakai. He visited them often, alone and with his family, and took an active part in the preservation of the Karaim heritage.

In recent decades, efforts have also been made to preserve the sound of the language, which is listed on the *UNESCO Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger*⁴. The audio documentation started almost 50 years ago when Aleksander Dubiński made field recordings of Karaim native speakers from Łuck and Halych who lived in the 1970s in Poland. Today, as we all know, the southwestern dialect they spoke should be considered extinct.

Aleksander Dubiński belonged to many scholarly societies and organizations. He was a member of Societas Uralo-Altaica and Société Asiatique and belonged to the Executive Committee of the World Conference for Religion and Peace. For many years he acted as the vice president of the Polish Oriental Society and member of the Central Board of the Poland-Turkey Society.

In parallel with his research and teaching, the protagonist of this text actively participated in the Karaim community life, which may be a separate topic. However, it should be mentioned that for many decades he was the

4 *UNESCO Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger*, <http://www.unesco.org/languages-atlas/index.php> [15.01.2022]

secretary of the Karaim Religious Union in Poland. Fluent in the Karaim liturgy, he actively participated in and led celebrations and religious ceremonies. As a result of this, he was considered an unquestionable authority in the Karaim language, religion, and customs.

Allow me a personal reflection – Aleksander Dubiński was a witty person who loved telling jokes and bringing people together. His wife supported him, making delicious traditional Karaim food, and serving it while scholars discussed the latest topics in the Dubiński family little living room. Their house was a center of activity, always full of people from East and West, Karaims and non-Karaims.

Aleksander Dubiński passed away on September 23, 2002, and was interred at the Karaim Cemetery in Warsaw. Eleven years later, in 2013, on the 60th anniversary of Aleksander Dubiński taking up employment, his oriental book collection was donated free of charge to the Oriental Faculty at the University of Warsaw. The list of books donated and stored at the Turkology and Iranian Studies library includes over 11 hundred volumes cataloged digitally and marked with reference numbers beginning with the owner's initials – A.D. This resource was included in the general catalogue at the Library of the University of Warsaw. At the same time, Orientalist periodicals were also donated free of charge to the turcological collections within the Faculty of Modern Languages at the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań.

Conclusions

In his research, Aleksander Dubiński paid much attention to the history of Oriental studies in Poland and abroad as well as to Turkic linguistics, focusing mainly on Karaim and Tatar topics, devoting many publications to the Karaim language, including the culture and religion of his own community. He left behind many works on biographies, literature, and writings of the Turkic peoples.

Aleksander Dubiński was, in the best sense, an orientalist of the old school who devoted a large part of his life to Karaim studies and made a considerable contribution to preserving the Karaim linguistic, cultural and religious heritage, not forgetting the Polish-Lithuanian Tatars. His work and his initiatives facilitated novel valuable activities and new scholarly research that is still alive and ongoing now.