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HALICZ KARAIM *sajan* ‘WAISTCOAT; SKIRT’

1. How ironic and frustrating, but at the same time beautiful and curious, the realm of etymology can be is something everyone working in the field is aware of.¹ The case under consideration is, in this respect, a jewel. That is why in my humble opinion such a case might be offered to the memory of Eugene Helimski, who discovered so many etymological treasures and confronted the Janus’s double-face of etymology so many times.

In 1932 Ananiasz Zajączkowski published a very important monograph on the nominal and verbal suffixes used in West Karaim, i.e. in the Karaim dialects spoken in Troki (Lith. *Trakai*) and Halicz (Ukr. *Галич*). There one can read that *sajan* ‘skirt (Pol. *spódnica*)’² is derived from the root *saj-* by means of the de-verbal suffix *-an* (Zajączkowski 1932: 77 [16] *sajan*).³ The definition provided by Zajączkowski with regard to the suffix *-an* (variant *-ań*) runs as follows: “[...] występuje w karaimskim rzadko. Tworzy imiona, przeważnie rzeczowniki, oznaczające podmiot lub przedmiot czynności.” (Zajączkowski 1932: 76 §10).⁴

So far so good. A close look at this word reveals that its Turkic nature is just an illusion. Moreover, the ultimate origin of *sajan* is “nearer” to Zajączkowski in a way he could have never managed to think about.

2. To begin with, the root **saj-* is attested nowhere in Karaim, apart from the very word *sajan*. Given the non-self-evident meaning of such root (it seems

¹ I would like to express my most deep and sincere acknowledgement to Michał Né-meth (Uniwersytet Jagielloński) for offering me this etymological challenge. He also provided materials and discussed with me previous versions of this paper. Thanks also to Professor Ralph Penny (University of London) for his help in proofreading the paper.

² Baskakov, Zajončkovskij and Šapšal (1974: 459b s.v. *caïan* th [sajan K, sajan M] юбка | *spódnica*).

³ Kowalski quoted the word too (1929: 247 s.v. *sajan* ‘*spódnica*’), but he offered no morphological segmentation. It is worth noting that Kowalski, like Zajączkowski, was a Polish Turkologist.

⁴ “[...] is rarely used in Karaim. It forms nominals, mainly substantives, denoting the agent or the patient of the action.’

that neither Kowalski nor Zajączkowski considered it to be worth mentioning), it is necessary to look for possible candidates throughout the Turkic lexicon. But before starting the external search, what about internal evidence? Would it be reasonable to think that the original meaning of the Karaim word *sajan* is not ‘skirt’, but another unattested primary meaning, and that ‘skirt’ is therefore secondary? In order to support the real value of the Karaim *sajan* – of course without doubting the reliability of Kowalski’s and Zajączkowski’s information – we can see the word in a more philological context. Sergiusz Rudkowski (1873-1944), a Karaim poet from Luck (Łuck), used this word with the meaning of ‘waistcoat (pol. *kamizelka*)’ in one of his verses:

*Bunar elcedim men ezimni erkienbe,
Kim sajan dzamanba botmahaj ma kienbe,
Da dahy kyskaba, hanuz kiep uzunba
Sawahat kylasen inno ez usunba!...*⁵

‘Dlatego zmierzyłem ja siebie liną,
Aby ubranie [= kamizelka?] czasem [= przypadkiem] nie było na mnie
{zbyt} szerokim,
A zarazem krótkim, [czy] jeszcze bardzo długim,
Wzbudzisz przychylność {Bożą} tylko swoją mądrością...’⁶

In a previous passage the kind of clothing they are talking about is clearly stated:

*Jakowusiu kari, karyndas barasen? ...
Erkinni nehe bu kolunda tutasen? ...
Saharha baramen, ajtty ma Rachelka,
Ki kierek ma hali janhy kamizelka...*

*Bu bary jachsydy, da nehe erkiendi? ...
Anlama awurdy, janhytyk bu neńdi? ...
Umuzumba kienmen, belimde inćkiemen ...
Elcewsiz necik men kumasny izdemen? ...*

⁵ Németh (2006: 20 [Polish philological transl.] ft. 26 [references], 66 [facsimile]). The nature of Németh’s work (critical edition) prevented him from going deeper into the etymological analysis of this word, though he already notes the oddity of Kowalski’s and Zajączkowski’s statements.

⁶ ‘That is why I measured myself with a rope, / so that the clothes (= waistcoat?) would not by chance be too big for me, / or too small, [or] even too long, / you ask benevolence (to God) only with your own wisdom...’.

Jakowusiu dokąd, bracie, podążasz?...
 Czemu to trzymasz w swojej ręce linę?...
 Idę do miasta, powiedziała mi Rachelka,
 Że potrzebna mi teraz nowa kamizelka...⁷

To wszystko dobrze, lecz dlaczego ta lina?...
 Zrozumieć ciężko, co to za nowina?...
 W ramionach jestem szeroki, w talii jestem cienki...
 Jak ja materiał wyszukam bez miarki?...⁸

The meaning, as is obvious from the above quoted text, remains in the semantic field of clothing. It is impossible to find other contexts where Karaim *sajan* means something else, for there are no other written records. Therefore, the original meaning of the word in question is likely to be ‘skirt’ or ‘waist-coat’.⁹

3. Now, from the external viewpoint, the first obvious candidate, based on criteria of shape, is the well-known root *saj+*, that Clauson (1972: 858a s.v. 1 *sa:y*) defines as “[...] originally ‘an area of (level) ground covered with stones; stone desert’”. Semantics alone should lead us to refrain from comparing this root with the Karaim word under consideration. Unless an extraordinarily complicated semantic shift (not recoverable by any means) had taken place, *saj+* ‘area covered with stones’ is likely to have nothing to do with the Karaim term. Other roots with the same shape also fail to fit the semantics of the Karaim word. I quote them just for the sake of argument: **saja-* ‘to be rare’, e.g. in Tatar *sajaq* ‘rare’ (Räsänen 1969: 395) or **saj-* ‘to slander, lie’, e.g. in Uzbek *sajiy* ‘delirium’ (ibid.), Uyghur *saj-* ‘to pierce’ (Räsänen 1969: 400). The well-known root **sā(j)-* ‘to count, to consider’ (Clauson 1972: 781-2 s.v. *sa:[y]*) must be also rejected on both semantic and phonological grounds.

⁷ ‘My dear brother Jacob, where are you going? / Why are you holding a rope in your hands? / I am going to the town, Rachel has told me / that now I need a new waist-coat...’.

⁸ Németh (2006: 19-20). ‘Everything is fine, but why that rope?... / I hardly understand what news is that?... / My shoulders are broad, my waist is thin... / How will I be looking for material without a measure?...’.

⁹ We have to keep in mind that Zajączkowski used in his works materials mainly from the Troki dialect, whereas Rudkowski was a speaker of the dialect of Łuck. As a matter of fact, Rudkowski’s utterance appears inserted in a poetic context. Therefore, it is legitimate to wonder whether either dialectal or non-linguistic motivations could have altered the original meaning of *sajan*.

All this rather suggests that there is no Turkic material that can be related to Karaim *sajan*.¹⁰

4. If there is no Turkic evidence for this word, it is necessary to consider the borrowing option. Where does a linguist have to look for it? Given the geographical location of the Western Karaim dialects, the Slavic family of languages appears to be the first good place to check. Many loanwords from Polish, Ukrainian and Russian are extensively documented in the Karaim lexicon, as Dubiński (1987) or Németh (2004) have already noticed in a number of publications. Unsurprisingly, the solution to the riddle can easily be found on the pages of Vasmer's and Brückner's etymological dictionaries. Thus, Vasmer (1955: 584) says about *саян sajan* 'Sarafan aus farbiger Glanzleinwand, offener Sarafan', a loanword from Old Polish *sajan*. Brückner (1989⁵ [1927]: 479a-b s.v. *sajan*) tells us that "Rej wymienia między włoskimi i hiszpańskimi wymysłami »ony dziwne płaszcz, *sajany*, kolety, obercuchy«".¹¹ Classical authors of Polish literature like Mikołaj Rej or Jan Kochanowski quoted this word, but rather as an old fashioned item. It is not surprising therefore to find that it was lost at the beginning of the 18th century. Reczek (1968: 437b s.v. *sajan*) just confirms what was said by Brückner. Therefore, we can conclude that the reason why Zajęzkowski and Kowalski did not recognize Karaim *sajan* is because, though they were native speakers of Polish and philologists, for them *sajan* was already a forgotten word in Polish.¹² They were victims of the historical changes that the lexicon of their own language underwent a couple of centuries ago.

5. The ultimate origin of Old Polish *sajan* is from the far west. Already in Republican times, soldiers from Rome used to be dressed in *saga*, plural form of the noun *sagum*, *-ī* 'kurzer Mantel' with the variant *sagus*. This word has continued in a number of Romance languages (for a general overview cf. Meyer-Lübke 1935: 621b s.v. [7515] *sagum*), one of them being necessarily the original source of the Slavic forms. The earliest of all such continuations is documented

¹⁰ Why Zajęzkowski was silent about this fact goes beyond the goal of this paper. Let us say, however, that in theory there is no reason to doubt the Turkic nature of the word. The root and suffix structures fit completely what one expects from a Turkic word and many examples confirm this, e.g. Karaim *soyan* 'onion' vs. Turkish *soğan* 'id.', or Karaim *saban* 'plough' vs. Turkmen *saban* 'id.', both quoted by Zajęzkowski and Kowalski.

¹¹ For the complete quotation, *vide* Linde (1859: 208a): "Ony dziwne płaszcz, *sajany*, kolety, obercuchy, aż straszno o nich mówić", transl. 'those strange coats, short coats, [k. of] jackets, [k. of] dresses, that it is simply awful to talk about them'.

¹² The most recent etymological dictionaries of the Polish language (Długosz-Kurczabowa 2003, Boryś 2005) do not contain it, of course. Bańkowski (2000) has yet to reach the letter *s*.

in Spanish, a language in which in fact one can find two different results: *sago* (elevated style, already old fashioned) < Latin *sagum*, and *saya* (and its derivate *saya*) < Vulgar Latin *sagĭa*, documented for the first time as early as 935.¹³ Corominas (1967² [1961]: 527a s.v. *saya*) already notes that the Latin word could be the Greek diminutive *σαγίον* (sic!) or from the adjective **sagĕa*, with later semantic shift. Contrary to Corominas’s assumption, the Greek diminutive is traditionally considered to be a secondary formation from *σάγος* ‘wollener Mantel, Soldatenmantel’ ← Latin *sagus*, variant of *sagum* itself (Frisk 1970: 670). The fact that *σαγίον* appears only in Modern Greek (pl. *σάγια*) provides further validation for this analysis. On the other hand, the (unattested) adjective **sagĕa* is unnecessary, since it is *communis opinio* that the usage of the plural *sagĭa* instead of the singular *sagum* / *sagus* was the result of analogical influences of *toga*, -*æ* ‘a particular outer garment’ (Walde and Hoffman 1954: 464).

However, given chronological and geographical difficulties, neither the Spanish forms nor the Latin variants could be the source of the Slavic words. It will be necessary to go a bit deeper to try to figure out which language served as donor for the Slavic word. As far as French *saie* (feminine, direct descendant of Vulgar Latin *sagĭa*, ca. 1212) is concerned, Bloch and von Wartburg (1975: 569b) explain that it was used “[...] notamment en parlant du manteau des acteurs jouant le rôle d’ancients Romains [...]”. As such, the French term is useless in trying to trace the origin of Slavic *sajan*. However, it turns out that *saie* (but masculine!, 1510), a paradigmatic analogical form taken from Spanish *saya* (1400), was borrowed by Italians, yielding first the naturalized noun *saio* (Cortelazzo and Zolli 1990-1991: V.1119a s.v. *sàio*, 1531-1535) and, after derivation, *saione* (Battisti and Alessio 1951: V.3312 s.v. *saio* → *saione*, not glossed in Cortelazzo and Zolli).¹⁴ Italian *saione* is probably the original source of Old Polish and Russian *sajan*. This is also the opinion of Borejszo (1990: 77, 85-6, 176).¹⁵ Moreover, she goes further in developing her position and adds no fewer than 16 additional Italian loanwords in Old Polish, all of them referring to different kinds of clothes documented during the 16th century, e.g. *żupan* ‘traditional dress of noblemen’ < *giuppone*, *giubbone* ‘a k. of shirt of coat’ (cf. Spanish *jubón* ‘a k. of bag’) or *pontal* ‘a k. of trousers’ < *puntale* ‘id’ (cf. Spanish *panta-*

¹³ Corominas says 941, despite the fact that two earlier sources exist: the first of 935 and the second of 937. For further details, see Menéndez Pidal, Lapesa and García (2003: 566a-b s.v. *saia*, *saga*, *sagia*, *saja*, *saya*).

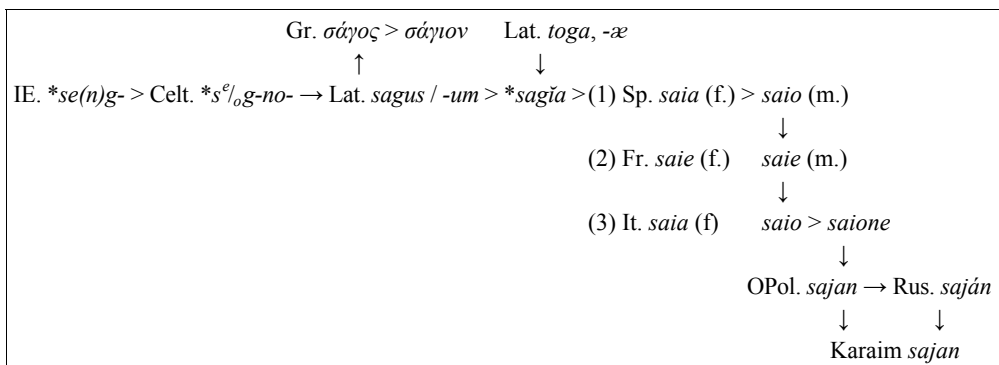
¹⁴ Italian *sàia* (1264) is the direct descendant of Vulgar Latin *sagĭa*.

¹⁵ Borejszo (1990: 85 s.v. *sajan*) states that the Italian word was directly inherited from Latin, despite the fact that phonology does not support this view. In any case this misunderstanding may be due to Borejszo’s sources. In addition, the author says nothing about Russian *saján*. On the other hand, Polonists should be aware of the misprint “sajony” in Karłowicz, Kryński and Niedźwiedzki’s Polish dictionary (1902: 451a-b s.v. *obercuch* [~ *obertuch*], emended in 1912: 7a s.v. *sajan*).

lón ‘id’). These examples also confirm the fact that as a rule the final vowel of the Italian words is lost in the process of naturalization.¹⁶ The most curious thing is, therefore, that the word which has been borrowed in Old Polish and/or Russian is not the inherited one, but the masculine variant developed originally in Spanish and later spread first into French and finally into Italian.

To close the circle, a few words about Latin *sagum*. Polybius already tells us that *σάγος* is of Gaulish (= Celtic) origin. Walde and Hoffman (ibid.) consider that Irish *sachilli* is from *sagellum*, the diminutive of *sagum* in Vulgar Latin, whereas Irish *sái* or Welsh *sae* are said to be from Middle Latin *saia*.¹⁷ However, these Celtic words are obviously not the origin of Latin *sagum*. Pokorny (1959: II.887 s.v. *seg-* 2) derives the Latin word from the Proto-Indo-European root with nasal infix **se(n)g-* ‘heften, anhängen’, to which also belong Old Persian *frā-hajam* ‘hängte auf’, Old Indian (*ā-*)*sájati* ‘heftet an’, Welsh *hoenyn* (*hwynyn*) < **sog-no-* and Middle Irish *sēn* < **seg-no-* ‘Fangnetz’, Old Church Slavonic *segnōti* ‘ergreifen’, and also Old Prussian *sagis* and Lithuanian *sagà* ‘Klammer, Schnalle’ (Fraenkel 1965: 754a). Inherited forms in Celtic and Slavic makes even more ironic the external etymology of Old Polish and Russian *sajan*.

Therefore, Karaim *sajan* has probably completed the following lexical route (I prefer not to quote every word cited above in order to avoid confusions; in the chart “>” stands for “genealogical” or “derivative process”, and “→” for “loanword relation” or “under the influence of”):



¹⁶ Leeming (2001) comments on some Italian loanwords from this time. However, *sajan* is not among the selected items, maybe because Leeming correctly considered that it does not deserve any observation.

¹⁷ Though not indicated by Walde and Hoffman, *saia* is the regular outcome of the Vulgar Latin adjectival form *sagīa*, also attested in early Spanish, see above fn. 13.

Finally, taking into consideration geographical and sociological issues, the rest of the Turkic languages in which this word can be identified, certainly received it through Russian.

6. Ockham’s Razor asks that *Entia non sunt multiplicanda præter necessitatem*. Without a Turkic background, but with many loanwords from Polish and Russian, the origin of Karaim *sajan* ‘skirt’ turns out to be in fact a perfect example for Ockham’s Razor. The issue of whether the borrowing was from Polish or Russian is something that has the same degree of uncertainty as whether Russian took the word from Polish or Italian. In any case, it is irrelevant to determine the origin of the Karaim word (and of the Russian too!).

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