



LIETUVOS BANKAS

Lithuanian Commemorative Coins



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Coins are minted at the Mint of Lithuania

Lithuanian Commemorative Coins
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50 LITAS COIN

ISSUED TO COMMEMORATE

THE 600th ANNIVERSARY OF THE SETTLING DOWN

OF KARAIMS AND TARTARS

IN LITHUANIA

Silver 925

Diameter 34 mm

Weight 23.3

*The words on the edge of the coin:
LIETUVA, TĖVYNĖ MŪŠŲ
(LITHUANIA, OUR FATHERLAND)*

Designed by Vladas Vildžiūnas

Mintage max 5 000

Issue 1997

Karaims and Tartars in Lithuania –

600
years

In 1397 the Grand Duke of Lithuania Vytautas brought with him to Lithuania many Tartar families and about 400 Karaims from the steppes, stretching along the Don and Volga rivers, and from the Crimea in 1398. These years are considered to be the beginning of settling down of the two Turk Kipchak ethnic groups in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (GDL).

Karaims profess the Karaim faith, which emerged in the 8th century as a reaction to the rabbinical Talmud and had been formed under the influence of Islam and Arabic philosophy. Karaims acknowledge only the Old Testament and pray in keneses, their houses of worship, still functioning in Trakai and Vilnius. They use the Hebrew language in religious and scientific literature, and in daily life the Karaim language, which developed on the basis of the Hazar and Polovc languages in the 9–10th centuries, is used. There are three dialects of the Karaim language: Trakai, Galitch–Lutsk and Crimea.

Karaims mainly lived in Trakai. In 1441 Kazimieras Jogailaitis, the King of Poland and Grand Duke of Lithuania, granted it the Magdeburg rights. Karaims enjoyed personal freedom, rights for trading and travelling by land or sea. The Karaim community used to elect vaitas, the senior of community, who judged Karaims and administered community affairs. He was only responsible to the ruler of Lithuania. Karaim warriors served as his personal guardians and protected the Trakai castle. Civilians served as clerks and translators of the Grand Duke, some of them cultivated land or earned their living by practising handicrafts and trading.



The Karaim kenesa in Vilnius

*Khadyg Seraia khan Shapshal (1873–1961) –
Karaim hakhan, philologist, orientalist*



After the third partition of the united state of Poland and Lithuania in 1795 Karaims preserved their individual and religious freedom. They had independent Spiritual Authority, directed by the senior priest – hakhan. Administrative officers, tradesmen, men of letters, other educated people were rather numerous among Karaims.

In the period between the two world wars Karaims experienced a national rebirth.

In 1924–1939 they were publishing a magazine “Mysl Karaimska” (“Karaim thought”) in Vilnius, and in 1934–1939 a magazine “Onarmach” (“The Rebirth”) was published in Panevėžys. In 1932 a Society of Supporters of Karaim History and Literature was founded and the Karaim museum was opened. In 1936 a religious Union of Karaims was established. In 1988 a Society of Lithuanian Karaim Culture under the Lithuanian Cultural Fund began its activities. Since 1995 a religious Community of Lithuanian Karaims has been existing. At present about 300 Karaims are living in Lithuania.

Tartars have been professing Islam since 13th century and are following its Sunni branch. Their religious life runs in the jammyats – religious communities governed by the priest – Mullah, elected by the community. Tartars pray in mosques, the Muslim houses of worship. Nowadays mosques are functioning in Kaunas, Nemėžis, Raižiai and in the Keturiasdešimt Totorių village (village of Forty Tartars). Tartars used dialects of Turk Kipchak languages, but they lost their mother tongue in the 16th century. In religious and secular literature, written in Arabic characters, the Byelorussian and Polish languages are used, while in daily life Tartars speak Slavonic, and from the 20th century – Lithuanian.



The Tartar mosque in the Keturiasdešimt Totorių (Forty Tartars) village



Tartars settled down in Lithuania as war prisoners or émigrés of the Golden Horde. Their main settlements – villages of Tartars and farmsteads – were concentrated around Alytus, Ašmena, Kaunas, Kréva, Naugardukas, Trakai and Vilnius. Tartars received estates from the rulers of Lithuania for service in the Army, where they served under separate flags as draftees or as troopers in the cavalry of the regular army. They also served under the family Colours of noblemen, i.e. the Radvila, were appointed as messengers and translators in the diplomatic service of the Grand Duke. Tartar landowners were given rights and freedom equal to those of the Lithuanian gentry, but Tartars could not participate in the political life of the state. Tartars dwelling in towns usually lived in separate parts of town, called “Tartar outskirts” and were engaged in market-gardening, carting, leather and jewellery crafts.

In the 19th century the belonging of Tartars to the gentry was officially confirmed. Many Tartars became famous for their distinguished military and civil service.

In the period between the two world wars, Tartars, like Karaims, took part in the national rebirth movement. In 1923 a Tartar Society was established in Kaunas (later renamed into Kaunas Muslim Society). In 1925, in Vilnius, Muslims confession was announced to be autocephalous: the Muslim Religious Union and Muftiat were founded and the chief priest – Mufti was elected. In the same year the Tartar Culture and Education Union began its activities. It was publishing a scientific edition “Rocznik Tatarski” (“Tartar Chronicle”) and magazine “Zycie Tatarskie” (“Tartar Life”). In 1988 a Society of Lithuanian Tartar Culture under the Lithuanian Culture Fund was set up. In 1995 the Union of Lithuanian Tartar Communities was formed.

At present about 6000 Tartars are living in Lithuania.



A Tartar Master of troopers, 17th century