Nordisk Judaistik - Scandinavian Jewish Studies
Vol.18, No. 1-2, 125-129

Jews of the Land of Kedar.

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At present, it is safe to say that alongside the Slavic, Finnish, Scandinavian, Turkic, Baltic, Iranian, Caucasian elements the Jewish element has also played its role in the early period of the ethnocultural history of the vast region to the north of the Black and the Caspian seas. It should be pointed out that in the medieval context the term "Jewish/Judaic" is not purely ethnic. It denotes a special "Jewish civilization". According to the medieval Jewish sources, the members of Judaic communities belonged to various social and even racial groups. They varied in their customs, occupations and spoken language. In our opinion, this fact sheds light on the Jews whom the Jewish traveler Petahyah of Regensburg met in the Land of Kedar in the late 12th century. Petahyah traveled from Regensburg to the Middle East via Prague, Kiev, Crimea and Caucasus. The traveler wrote that six days after leaving Kiev he crossed the Dnieper and entered the Land of Kedar. He gives a detailed description of the everyday life of the residents of this land. From this description they can be easily identified as the nomadic Komans, Qypchaqs (called Polovtsi in the Russian chronicles). Petahyah says that in the land of Kedar there are no "perfect *(gmorim* in Hebrew) Jews and there are only heretics (*minim* in Hebrew). They slice bread on the eve of the Sabbath and do not light fire on this day. They were ignorant of the Talmud and their prayers consisted only of the psalms. When Rabbi Petahyah familiarized them with the rabbinical prayers they liked them very much.[1]

What were the origins of these Jews? What was the language in which they read the psalms and discussed religious matters with Petahyah? As the Sabbatical customs of Jews of the Land of Kedar resembled those of the Karaites, Zvi Ankori supposed in his capital work *Karaites in Byzantium* that these people were descendants of the Karaites who had arrived in these parts from Byzantium and Islamic countries.[2] However, Ankori could not convincingly explain why these "Karaites" knew nothing about the Talmud which they hated and why they were willing to listen to Petahyah's rabbinical teachings. Moreover, Petahyah himself did not identify these people as Karaites. Ankori understood the weakness of his explanation and did not reject S. Baron's opinion that Petahiya spoke with Judaized Khazars who used the biblical law because they were unaware of the Talmud.[3] But what was the language in which the Jews of the Land of Kedar read the psalms and had complicated

[1] Путешествие рабби Петахии Регенсбургского // Три еврейских путешественника XI и XII столетий. Эльдад данит, р. Вениамин Тудельский, р. Петахия Регенсбургский (еврейский текст с русским переводом). Перевод и примечания П. Марголина. Сант-Петербург, 1881, с. 4-5.

[2] Z. Ankori, *Karaites in Byzantium*, New York 1959, 62.

[3] Ibid., 62, note 13.

religious discussions with Petahyah. Even when Khazaria existed (one hundred and fifty years before Petahyah's visit) Hebrew was known only in a narrow circle of learned rabbis. It was impossible to preserve it in a totally isolated community amid primitive nomads. On the other hand, they could not use a Turkic language in which no literature existed.

In our opinion, this language could not have been other than the East Slavic (ancient Russian) which was already well developed at the time. And the Jews of the Land of Kedar were Slavic-speaking Judaic communities which emerged when the whole of the vast region from the Volga to the Dnieper had been part of the Khazarian kingdom.

It is evident from Petahyah's detailed report that Jews lived a settled life in those parts. Unlike the Kedars, they ate bread which they sliced on the eve of the Sabbath. Archeological data tell us that Slavs and other people began to settle in this area under Khazarian rule in the VII-VIII centuries.[4] The Slavic population was very numerous. Thus, according to Arab writers, the Arab warlord Marvan captured as many as twenty thousand Slavic families during his Volga campaign in 737.[5] Novoseltsev, the author of a capital work on Khazaria, thinks that the Slavs had been natural allies of the Khazars, in particular, in the war against the Arabs.[6] This can be illustrated by the case with Marvan's prisoners. They rebelled and tried to escape but the Arabs slaughtered all of them.[7] The tenth-century Arab writer Masudi notes that Khazarian king's soldiers and servants are Slavic and Russy.[8] Another proof of the wide use of the East Slavic language in Khazaria is that three of the seventeen persons mentioned in the well-known 10th century Kievan letter seem to have Slavic names: Gostyata, Severyata, Kupin.[9] This letter was published by N. Golb and O. Pritsak in 1982.[10]

On the whole, one can agree with the Russian Slavist Lamansky who thought that Slavs constituted the majority of Khazaria's population. Khazarian kagans ruled over Slavs until the Scandinavian Varyags took over. Lamansky had good reason to think that the ancient Scandinavian name for Rus - Gardariki (Garzariki) - has derived from the word Khazaria. Lamansky put forward a convincing argument that Cyrill's mission to the Khazars in 862 had in fact been a mission to the Dnieper Slavs who, as the subjects of the Khazarian Kagans, were called Khazars. Cyrill brought them a Slavic translation of a few books of the

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[4]Петрухин В. Я. Славяне, варяги и хазары на юге России. К проблеме формирования территории Древнерусского государства // Древнейшие государства Восточной Европы. М., 1995, 117-118.

[5] Кляшторный С. Г. Древнейшее упоминание славян в Нижнем Поволжье // Восточные источники по истории Юго-Восточной и Центральной Европы. М., 1964, 18.

[6] Новосельцев А. П. Хазарское государство и его роль в истории Восточной Европы и Кавказа. М., 1990, 202.

[7] Сказания мусульманских писателей о славянах и русских/собрал, перевел и обьяснил А. Я. Гаркави. Санкт-Петербург, 1870, 92-93.

[8] Там же, 130.

[9] Торпусман А. Н. Антропонимия и межэтнические контакты народов Восточной Европы в средние века// Имя-Этнос-История. М., 1989, 48-51.

[10] N. Golb & O. Pritsak, *Khazarian-Hebrew Documents of the Tenth Century*, London 1982, 71.

Scripture, including the book of Psalms.[11] Virtually, this was the beginning of the ancient Russian literature which had a certain influence on the Slavic-speaking Judaic communities.

Judaism became Khazaria's state religion nearly hundred years before Cyrill's mission. Kiev was Khazaria's western outpost and, according to Pritsak, the Khazarian dominance ended there in the early 10th century. Perhaps, the Scandinavian Varyags, the new rulers of the city, stopped paying tribute to the Khazars. However, the struggle between the Khazars and the Varyags was not religious. Although Princess Olga adopted Christianity, the Kiev Christians were persecuted by pagans under her son Prince Svyatoslav. Moreover, according to Tatischev, chronicles show that the defeat of Khazaria by Svyatoslav in 965 strengthened the Judaic element in the Kievan Rus. Many Khazars were moved to Russian cities by the Prince, and some did it voluntarily in order to preserve the Judaic religion.[12] Archeological data show that Kievan Prince's men-at-arms were buried Khazarian-style. This proves the information of the Russian chronicles about Khazarian Jews persuading Prince Vladimir to adopt Judaism.[13]

Harkavy wrote in the 19th century that Slavic-speaking Judaic communities existed as late as after Christianity became the state religion in the Kievan Rus. Thus, he noted that Ashkenazi Jews in the Eastern Europe used pre-Christian Slavic names (especially the female ones): Bela, Zlata, Mirka, Slava, Slova.[14] Torpusman also gives such names as Badane, Chvole, Zhvi.[15] Medieval Jewish sources mention Jewish scholars from Russia.[16]

However, the most important testimony of the spiritual activity of the Slavic-speaking Jewish community is the large number of Slavic translations made directly from the Hebrew originals. In Professor Alexeyev's opinion, these translations had been made with the assistance of East European Jews before the Ashkenazi Jews migrated from Central Europe. In 17 out of 20 preserved copies of the ancient Russian Pentateuch the text is divided into weekly chapters *(parashiot* in Hebrew). Such structure was doubtless modeled according to the translations *(targums* in Hebrew) of the Holy Scriptures used by Slavic-speaking Judaic communities.[17] Other authors, for example, Borisov, have shown that the ancient

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[11] Ламанский В. И. Славянское житие св. Кирилла как религиозно-зпическое произведение и как исторический памятник. Петроград, 1915, 55-56; 58.

[12] Татищев В. Н. История России. Часть 1// Татищев В. Н. Собр. соч. М., 1994. Т. 1., 328-329.

[13] Петрухин В. Я. Славяне, варяги и хазары на юге Поссии, 120.

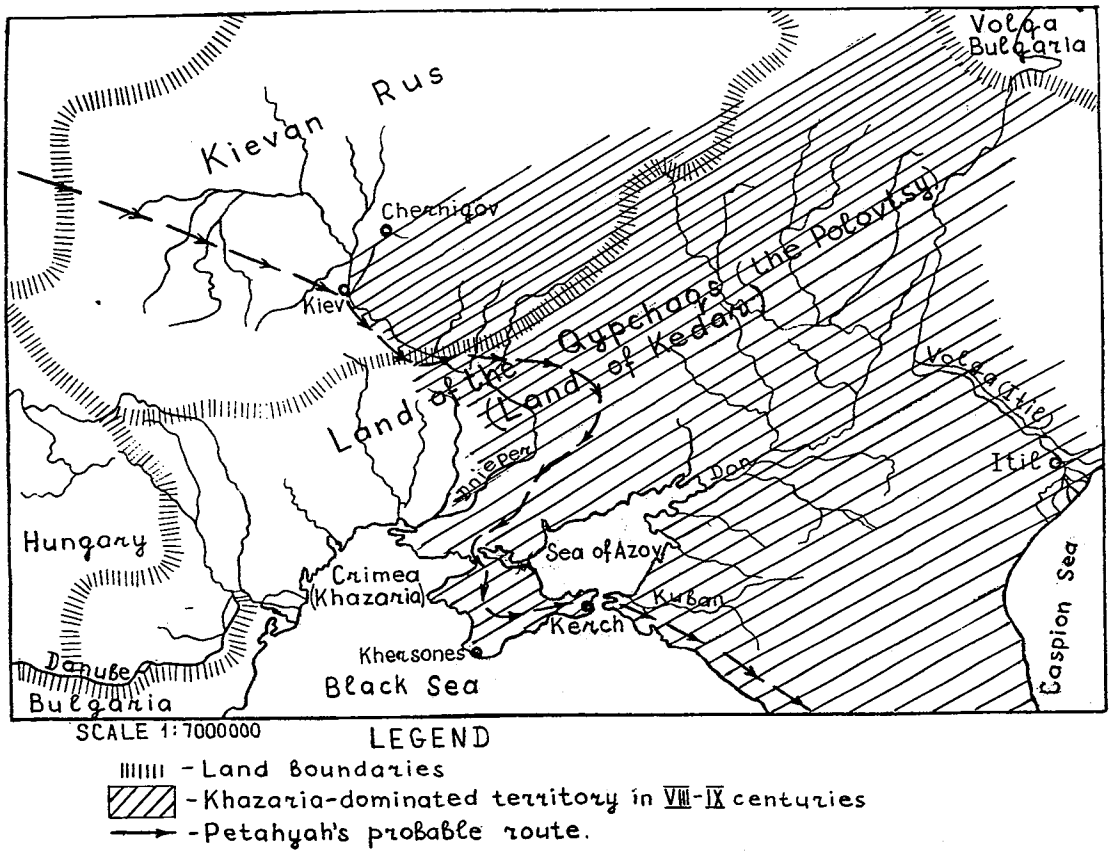
[14] Гаркави А. Я. Об языке евреев, живщих в древнее время на Руси. Санкт-Петербург 1866, 19.

[15] Торпусман А. Н. Антропонимия и межзтнические контакты, 57-64.

[16] Гаркави А. Я. Русь и русское в средневековой еврейской литературе// Восход. Санкт-Петербург, 1882. Книга 1, 246-247.

[17] Алексеев А. А. Переводы с еврейских оригиналов у восточных славян в зпоху Средних веков// Славяне и их соседи. Еврейское население Центральной, Восточной и Юго -Восточной Европы: Средние века - начало Нового времени. М., 1993, 11. Алексеев А. А. Переводы с древнееврейских оригиналов в древней Руси// *Russian Linguistics*, 11, 1987, 1-20.

Russian literature has borrowed many plots directly from the Talmud.[18] Thus, the ancient Russian religious literature, including the literature of Slavic-speaking Judaic communities, had reached a high level in the three centuries from Cyrill's mission to Petahyah's visit. Yet, the Jewish scholarship was likely to survive only in Kiev and, perhaps, Chernigov. Rabbi Eliezer of Prague found the Torah studies to be on the average at a low level when he visited Rus in the 12th century.[19] There is no doubt that on the former Khazarian lands, which did not become part of Kievan Rus, the situation was even worse because of the lack of permanent contacts with Jews in Europe and other countries.



Oriental sources quoted in the work of the Israeli scholar Polak testify that a significant Slavic population lived among Polovtsi in the Land of Kedar even after Khazaria's

[18] Борисов А. Я. К вопросу о восточных элементах Древнерусской литературы // Палестинский сборник. Ленинград, 1987, N 29, 154-166.

[19] Берлин И. Исторические судбы еврейского народа на территории русского государства, Петербург, 1919, 173.

collapse.[20] The memory of this once powerful state was long-lived. Thus Petahyah calls the Crimea Khazaria.[21] There are no reasons to doubt that the followers of the former state religion Judaism have survived amid this Slavic-speaking population, but most often in a primitive way. The Jewish-Khazarian correspondence shows that the Talmudic scholarship was only brought to Khazaria by rabbis invited from other countries.[22] Funny situations arose when such rabbis were not available. Thus according to Arab writers Ibn Ruste and Gadrizi people in the Sarir area of the South Khazaria visited the mosque as Muslims on Fridays, the synagogue as Jews on Saturdays and the church as Christians on Sundays.[23]

There are no reasons to doubt that Petahyah and his fellow travelers knew the East Slavic language. Their native Regensburg lay on the great ancient trade route "from Germans to Khazars" (Regensburg-Krakov-Prague-Kiev). The Regensburg corporation of Jewish merchants played an active role in the trans-European trade between Spain and Khazaria.[24] Ibn Khordadbeh noted in the 10th century that these merchants knew this language.[25] This is also shown by the fact that in the Jewish text of the letter sent by Khazarian King Joseph to Khasdai Ibn Shaprut the Slavic word "NMTs" (Nemets) is used to designate Germany.[26] As for Petahyah, he had had very close contacts with the Slavic world because his brother was a rabbi in the Slavic Prague. It was in this city that Petahyah started and finished his long travel. Thus everything suggests that Petahyah's audience in the Land of Kedar had been members of a Slavic-speaking Judaic community, evidently of a mixed ethnic origin, who had preserved reminiscences of former Khazaria's state religion.

Another unexpected proof of the special origin of Lithuanian, Belorussian and Ukrainian Jews may be the recent genetic data. Researches carried out in the USA, Israel and Russia are showing that only their descendants have the so-called "Lithuanian" mutation .[27]

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[20] Поляк А. Н. Новые арабские материалы позднего средневековья о Восточной и Центральной Европе// Восточные источники по истории народов Юго-Восточной и Центральной Европы. М., 1964, 46.

[21] Путеществие Петахии Регенсбургского, 4-6.

[22] Коковцов П. К. Еврейско-хазарская переписка в X в. Ленинград, 1932, 97.

[23] Заходер Б. Н. Каспийский свод сведений о Восточной Европе. М., 1962, 150.

[24] Незаренко А. В. Русь и Германия в IX-X вв.// Древнейщие государства Восточной Европы. М., 1994, 27; 33-34.

[25] Ибн-Хордадбех. Книга путей и стран. Баку, 1986, 123.

[26] Гаркави А. Я. Об языке евреев, живщих в Древнее время на Руси, 23-24.

[27] Липовецкий Б. М., Мандельщтам М. Ю., Васильева Л. Е.. О частоте и проявлениях "литовской" мутации среди евреев с II типом гиперлипидемии и их реакции на лечение флувастатином.// Кардиология. М., 1997 (в печати).