

**Fesach Agada ("Paschal Legend")
and its Significance for Kartvelology**

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Abstract: For hundreds of years oral translations of the Scriptures and prayers were created in the vernacular of the Georgian Hebrews. These translations were handed down orally from generation to generation, coming down to us. Text of the Fesach Agada – highly significant for Hebrews – is among them. It tells about the miraculous deliverance of the Hebrews from Egypt and is read in the first night of the festival Fesach (Passover) – dedicated to this event (in the diaspora it is read on the second night as well), at a specially arranged festive meeting.

As a rule, Agada was read in the holy language, but under conditions of millennial sojourn of Hebrews in Georgia a large part of Hebrews forgot Hebrew, and the text was incomprehensible to them. Therefore, the spiritual preceptors of Georgian Hebrews apparently decided to translate it into Georgian. Among Georgian Hebrews there presumably existed a ban on writing religious books in Georgian. Hence the translation was made orally.

The Agada text acquires special significance both for research into the translations of the Scripture and prayers and the languages and speech of the Hebrews, and for Georgian philology, for this is actually a living text coming down to us from the depth of centuries; it provides rich evidence for both the study of the history of the Georgian schools of translation and (what is more) for research into the history and historical dialectology of the Georgian language, inasmuch as through this text we can trace the process, the dynamics of changes, language layers (e.g. declension of nouns, the relationship of the modifier and the modified, the article, syntactic peculiarities, etc. Especially interesting is the rich vocabulary of the present translation.

Key words: *Fesach, Passover, Languages of the Jews*

Fesach ("Passover") is one of the major festivals of the Jews, which is also called festival of unleavened bread, for during its 8 day course (in countries of the diaspora, 9 days) Jews eat unleavened cakes instead of leavened bread. It has one more designation: festival of freedom. The point is that Fesach is a festival marking the miraculous deliverance of the Jews from Egypt. This event is narrated in the Genesis.

As all other festivals of the Jews, Fesach begins in the evening, and, after prayers, its first 'event' is the "night of ordering" ('Leil Haseder' in Ivrit), when all sit in a definite order round a laid table and read the Fesach Agada ("Paschal Legend"), listening to which, and in general, participation in the event is considered mandatory for all Jews. The Fesach Agada is a remembrance of the miraculous deliverance, in which biblical passages, additional telling of God-given miraculous happenings and commentaries on them by Hebrew scholars (rabbis) take place. The chief idea of Agada is to demonstrate the power of God and His favourable attitude to the Jewish people and which is most important, preaching the national idea through remembering the establishment of the Jews as a nation.

Over the centuries, the Jews residing in Georgia celebrated Fesach and similarly to all their fellow-men in all the corners of the world, at Leil Haseder, ardently supplicated God for their centuries-old dream to come true: *Beshana aba Birushalaim* "Next year in Jerusalem". Apparently, the feeling of unity with God and with one another saved the Jewish people from ultimate destruction, despite the countless trials suffered by them in exile. The Fesach Agada is written in Ivrit (and a small part in Aramaic). It was in this language that they should read and hear obligatorily on the evening of the advent of Fesach. But many Jews in Georgia and in the other countries of the diaspora, though praying in Hebrew, practically did not understand this language and, in order to make such an important text comprehensible to the congregation, created its translations in the so-called languages of the Jews (such as Jiddish, Ladino, Arabic, Hebrew, etc.) precisely in the same way as the biblical books. It may be said that this was an auxiliary medium, as the language of the Bible – the Holy language – unequivocally remained the basic ritual language. Naturally enough, a similar

translation was made in the vernacular of Georgian Jews.¹ It is a very involved question whether the conversational Georgian of Georgian Jews is one of the “languages of the Jews”, or one of the dialects of the Georgian language, or for that matter, a sequence of idioms of various Georgian dialects. Opinions differ on this problem whose consideration is obviously outside the theme of the present paper. I shall only note several basic points briefly: one of the principal reasons for the absence of an unequivocal answer to the question posed is that regrettably, the speech of Georgian Jews has not been studied properly (it is doubtful that this can be done in the future either, for the majority of the Georgian Jews no longer reside in Georgia and are gradually losing the peculiarities characteristic of this speech, and in a number cases the Georgian language in general. Of course one cannot say that nothing has been done in this respect: noteworthy studies have been published in Georgia and Israel by G. Tsereteli (unfortunately his work on the speech of Sachkhere Jews has not been printed to date), K. Tsereteli, N Babalishvili, G. Ben-Oren (alone or jointly with V. Moskovich), K. Lerner, T. Lomtadze, and others. The present writer too has published several studies; this list has no claim of being comprehensive; a complete list is presented in his book published in Ivrit: “Observations on the Tavsil, the traditional translation of Georgian Jews Bereshit or the Genesis” [4, p.162-164]. However, this is clearly not enough. As noted, there is a difference of opinion of students of the Hebrew languages: in an introduction to a report on a special discussion on the number of the languages of the Hebrews it is said that there exist 16 Hebrew languages. According to the appended overview, one of them is the speech of Georgian Jews [*Feamim*, 1, 1979, p. 41]. Prof. M. Bar-Asher, an eminent researcher into the languages of the Jews, notes that this Language does not belong to the category of Hebrew languages found in Arabic or Islamic countries. Unlike this, a book entitled “Sephardi and Eastern Jews and Their Literature” [Jerusalem, 2009, Editor: Prof. D. Bunis], devotes a special section to “the language of Georgian Jews. Almost all the peculiarities allegedly characteristic of the languages of the Jews, according to M. Bar-

¹ Georgian Jews used the form *შემობრძანება* (advent, arrival) in respect of Jewish festivals, to stress their deference.

Asher's theoretical teaching, are typical of the speech of Georgian Jews as well [1, p. 221-240]. Actually, the only (but highly significant) difference is that the latter – unlike the majority of other Jewish communes – did not use Hebrew letters for the translations of the holy books and prayers. Furthermore, in general they did not write down these translations, handing them orally from generation to generation. Prof. Lerner points out that there seems to have existed a decision on this, taken centuries ago by the rabbis of Georgian Jews [9, p. 145]. Yet, one must be careful in deciding such significant issues. Research should continue into the speech of the Georgian Jews (if this is feasible), and only then will it be possible to answer the question whether the speech of Georgian Jews should be considered to be one of the languages of the Jews.

The Georgian translation of the Fesach Agada has not been recorded, being handed down orally from generation to generation. A phrase is current among Georgian Jews: "Read the Agada in Tavsil". This means that, traditionally in many families of Georgian Jews the text of the legend was not only read in Hebrew but it was translated into Georgian for those present, more precisely into the speech of Georgian Jews. For example, my father did exactly this in trying to explain each detail of the legend to the members of the family. He first read each section in Hebrew (tentatively they may be called articles) and then translated it word for word according to the traditional translation. It is a translation that for centuries was transmitted from generation to generation. At one such evening our guests addressed my father, saying that his translation needed translation anew; by this they underlined the fact that the language of his translation was not modern but archaic Georgian, approximately like the one we have in "Tavsil", i.e. the translation of the Torah or the Pentateuch.¹

Over the past sixty years the tradition gradually lost ground and today there are few people who know the translation. The reasons are well known: the obstacles raised by Soviet authorities to the study of the Torah (as well as the books of other religions) and the mastery of Ivrit; the replacement of traditional Hebrew upbringing with general education; the change of the Hebrew way of

¹ I have published the text of this translation [see 3].

life, etc. Clearly, it should also be borne in mind that an overwhelming majority of Georgian Jews returned to Israel, learned Ivrit and do not need a translation to understand the Agada text. And for those who failed to gain a good mastery of this language translations into modern Georgian, issued in Israel, are available (by Gershon ben-Oren, the rabbi Aron Elashvili, and others), and use of these translations is more convenient for them. As said above, the traditional translation was taught specially. At present, when there is actually no need of using it, attention is not paid to its study.

Unfortunately, we have no direct or indirect evidence regarding the time of creation of the translation. Hence only an assumption can be made: observation of the character of the translation and its linguistic peculiarities shows unequivocally that it has the same characteristics that are specific to the Tavsil or traditional oral translation of the Pentateuch. According to some indirect historical evidence and linguistic data, the latter translation must have been made in the 11th-12th centuries [see 4, p.3-9]. I think, the Fesach Agada must have been translated in the same period, immediately after the completion of the Tavsil. I, of course take into consideration that in the process of oral transmission over the centuries [see 5, p. 126; p. 180] the language of the translation suffered changes, yet we can still judge about the main linguistic layer that points to the early stage of middle Georgian¹ - the 12th century. The lasting significance of the study of the cited traditional translation for research into the history of the Georgian Jews, and in general of the history of Jewish diasporas is clear. The same may be said of the spoken language of the Georgian Jews as well as of research into the languages of the Jews. Finally, this translation is of major significance from the standpoint of the study of the history of the Georgian language, for this oral transmission which, as noted, was handed down from generation to generation and, if one may put it so, as a "living document", brought to us the centuries-old breath of the Georgian language. Hence, it can help us in conceptualizing

¹ Of course I do not intend to become involved in the debate on the periodization of the Georgian literary language (A. Shanidze, A. Chikobava, P. Ertelishvili, Z. Sarjeladze and others). "Middle Georgian" for me is a so-called working term.

the developmental path of a number of forms of the Georgian language. The purpose of the present paper is to demonstrate the significance of this translation for Georgian philology.

The traditional translation of Agada, whose text with a study I have submitted to Jerusalem University Press, was recorded by me from two speakers: one is rabbi Khakham Abram Gagulahsvili whose text (it preserves more of the archaic features) I call redaction A, while the other from Mr. Shalom Chikvahsvili. The latter is not a rabbi but was one of the distinguished pupils of the universally known Kutaisi rabbi Khakham Iakob Davarashvili. In a number of cases Mr. Chikvahsvili was asked to perform the duty of rabbi. I called his text redaction B. The text of these two redactions are being printed separately, as occasionally there is a significant difference between them (incidentally it is these differences that are of primary interest to specialists of the languages of the Jews and to the researchers into the history of the Georgian language). Along with this, under the designation of redaction D, I issued a translation that was current in the 1960s in typescript form issued by the underground movement. It is basically a modern translation, presenting some features of the traditional translation only at the beginning of the text (approximately in its first third).

A number of highly peculiar linguistic forms and lexical units are attested in the Agada translation that must doubtless be of interest to researchers into the history of the Georgian language and historical dialectology. I shall focus attention on some of them.

A number of phenomena are found in the translation that are characteristic of Old Georgian. Of course this does not mean absolutely that the language of the translation is Old Georgian. The more so that, as is well known, in Old Georgian there were forms characteristic of every-day speech, in other words dialectism [13, p. 110]. The changes began in Old Georgian itself, and our text may serve as evidence of the transitional stages from Old to Middle Georgian (and occasionally New Georgian). Sometimes represented in our text are the so-called double translations, when the speakers themselves add an old form to their commentary that, in their view, might be unclear for the congregation. Occasionally these commentaries represent rather archaic forms, enabling us to trace the various possibilities of rendering one and the same idea at

different stages of language development. At present one problem, discussed below, will form the subject of my discussion.

Questions connected with declension of nouns and number

The absolutive form occurs in the translation seldom.¹ For example, in redaction B we have: "შინა გადასავალსა მდინარისასა ცხოვრობდენ მამები თქვენი უკუნისამდინ - თერახ, მამა აბრაამისა და მამანახორისა და ემსახურებოდენ კელპებსა უცხოებსა" ["Your fathers lived across the river till eternity **Therakh** - father of Abraam and father of Nakhor and they served strange idols"]. Instead of the underlined absolutive form, in redaction A the same noun is attested to in the Nominative case: თერახი. Presumably, initially we had the absolutive form in the translation, and later, in the wake of the development of the language, it was replaced with the Nominative. At first sight, there is nothing new in this, for much is known about the change of absolutive forms, but the translation of the Agada enables us to follow the process in living speech.

A similar parallelism is found in the ergative case as well, where we have forms ending in -მან [-man] and -მა [-ma] those ending simplified case marker side by side. E. g. in redaction A we: *მთებმან იხტუნეს ერკემლებისებრივ* [The **mountains** skipped like rams], while in redaction B the same noun is presented in *მთებმა* [mtebma] form.

We have a very interesting picture with respect to adding the emphatic vocal ა (*a*) to the case markers. As it is known, the rules of adding it were confused back in Old Georgian [see 7, p. 708-711]. Our translation too shows the same situation. In using two nouns side by side with the same function one has an emphatic vowel, while the other has not: E. g. "რომ შინა ყოველ იმა ღამეებსა ჩვენ ვჭამთ ხამეტს ან მაგასა და ამაღამის ღამეს - სუყველა ის - მაგასა" ["that in each of those nights we eat **khamets**-leavened bread or **matsa**-unleavened, and tonight - all **matsa**-unleavened bread"].

¹ At this point I am interested only in form and not its qualification. The so-called *absolutive* is a separate case if these forms are only a variant of the Nominative. No matter what we call them, in Old Georgian we had nouns represented in the form of stems.

Khamets (leavened) and *matsasa* (unleavened) (twice) are direct object, but one has the extension ა (a), and the other is without it similarly ღამეს [night] and ღამეებსა [nights] are adverbial modifiers of time, but from the standpoint of adding the emphatic vowel the situation differs.

One of the main peculiarities of the speech of Georgian Jews, especially in western Georgia is the systemic loss of the Dative case marker in nouns with consonant stem [2, p. 162-163, 166-167]. This phenomenon is not alien to Georgian dialects [17, p. 551]. Hence it is interesting to follow such cases in our translation. In the text we have the only case of the loss of the Dative case marker in redaction B (to which manifestation of innovations is not alien): "აკეთებდა გამგენი ყველაფერ თავის სიძლიერით შინა მიცრაიმშიდა" ["The Creator did everything through his power in Misraim"]. We could presumably assume that scarcity of such examples was due to the fact that nouns add an emphatic vowel and there is no possibility of the Dative case marker being lost.

But, as we saw in the previous example, *khamets* does not lose the Dative case marker even when the emphatic vowel is not added to the noun. It is interesting that the word ყველაფერ [everything] was apparently absent in the translation: it is not required according to the original, hence, it is not represented in redaction A, while in redaction B the speakers (perhaps even our speaker) added the word by way of explanation and on this occasion used the natural form without the Dative case marker. If this reasoning is correct, then we may assume that by the time of making the translation the process of the loss of the Dative case marker had not commenced yet which, I am deeply convinced, is an interesting conclusion for researchers into Georgian historical dialectology.

Attention is claimed by a very interesting form of translation: და წავიდა იგი მიცრაიმსა [*tsavida igi micraimas*]. *Micraim* is the Hebrew designation of Egypt. The original gives the *Micraima* form, in which the last ა (*a*) is expressive of direction. The italicised form can be separated thus *micraim-a-s*. Thus, the *Micraimas* form (in place of the expected *Micraims* [Egypt] form) may be obtained in two ways: 1. Directly through the influence of Hebrew. 2. ა was conceptualized as Old Georgian Directional (Adverbial) case marker, but gradually the form became

incomprehensible for the congregation (and probably for the speakers as well); it was taken for a stem and the Dative marker was added according to the usual Georgian rule, i.e. we obtained Dative form, which is equally noteworthy for researchers into the languages of the Hebrews and students of Georgian dialectology. In the translation of the Agada (similarly to the translation of Torah Pentateuch) [4, pp. 88-91]) there is a whole system of the use of particle, based on the rules existing in Old Georgian.¹ But the influence of Hebrew is also obvious. The fact of the existence between the redactions A and B of the Agada translation regarding the use of the particle must be interesting for the students of the history of the Georgian language. To be sure, it occurs in both redactions, but in almost all cases in redaction A, when the particle is present in the original, it is taken over into the translation, while redaction B does show such consistency. In a rare case the article is used even in the underground translation. For example, we have the particle in all the three redactions in the following sentence (including differences which I shall not touch upon here), already quoted: "რომ შინა ყოველ იმა ღამეებსა ჩვენ ვჭამთ ხამეტს ან მაცასა" ["that in each of those nights we eat leavened or unleavened bread"].

In another sentence all particles to be expected according to the original are represented in redaction A, while redaction B uses only one of them, leaving out the rest: და გაიხსენა ღმერთმან იგი პეემანი მისი იმის აბრაამისა, იმის იცხაკისა და იმის იაკობისა" ["And God recalled this meeting with that Abraham, that Itskhak and that Jacob"]. Of the italicized particles only the first occurs in redaction B. This is apparently not accidental, the particle იმის [imis] is added to proper names, which was not accepted according to the rules of Old Georgian, and is the result of clear influence of the original – it replaces the Hebrew *et* particle (the traditional translations of Georgian Jews use it as the definite article as its equivalent). There is, however, no fixed boundary between the redactions. Occasionally it is in redaction B that the particle is

¹ On the particle (as well as the controversy around its qualification) see [16, pp. 42-43; 15; 6, pp. 249-276; 7, pp. 318-276; 7 pp. 318-320; 13, pp. 379, 514; 14. pp. 62-64]

present, being absent in redaction A: “და თუ არ გამოვეყვანეთ ჩვენი იგი მამები ჩვენი იმის მიგრაიმისაგან...” [“...and had we not brought out **those fathers of ours** from that Micraim...”]. The second particle (იმის) is only in redaction B. On this occasion the speakers do not show its use with a geographical name. The main thing is that the particle is found neither in the original, i.e. it is added by the speakers, apparently with a stylistic function – to stress that reference is precisely to Egypt where the Jews had been so long as slaves. I think, in studying the history of the particle (demonstrative pronoun this kind of shade should also be stressed).

The peculiar forms with -ებ [eb] plural are highly interesting; they are found in the translation of Agada: in the plural of nouns whose stem ends in ა [a] vowel the stem is not clipped [2]*. Attention to the existence of such forms in Old Georgian was first drawn by I. Imnaishvili, demonstrating one example of this kind [7, p. 104]. In sources published later I traced several more of such examples. The translations of Agada appear to continue this tradition. In a study by R. Saghinadze and R. Enoch a cautious assumption is made to the effect that in one of the set of dialects or even in one school of learning it was natural to use such forms. As these forms are and they must be of interest to students of the literary language and dialectology, I shall present a few specimens. It should be noted that in clipped forms of ებ [eb] – plural are evidenced in both redactions of the Agada translation – occasionally parallel to each other, or sometimes only in one.

Five cases of the use of the stem საკვირველობაებ [sakvirvelobaeb] is evidenced in the recorded text. Here are two examples: 1. “და გამოგვიყვანა ჩვენ უფალმა იმის მიგრაიმისაგან შინა ხელითა ძლიერითა, შინა მკლავითა გაწვდილითა და შინა შიშითა დიდითა და ნიშნებითა და საკვირველობაებითა” “And the Lord brought us out of that Micraim with a strong hand, an extended arm and great fear and tokens and miracles” or Let God try us for Him to adopt us as His nation in the future out of other nations in our experiences, tokens and **miracles**.¹

¹ The cited example supplies the researcher into the history of the Georgian language with other material as well.

In this sentence we come across other examples too for the type of our interest – the unclipped stem: ესე ასეთი ცემულეზაები¹ [“these ten Commandments] რომ მიაყენა აკადოშ ბარუხუმ² ზედა იმა ”მიცრაიმელეზედა” (according to redaction B) [These Ten Commandments that the Holy Blessed ordained for those people of Micraim]. Alongside this we have a lexical unit usual for Georgian, but again with an unclipped stem რამდენი ცემაეზი შინა თითითა. რამდენი მართაფაეზი კარქეზი თანაგამჩენსა ზედა, ჩვენსა მომზადებულე აქ”.

We had similar forms in Middle Georgian and such occur in Georgian dialects as well (Sh. Dzidziguri, M. Khubua, O. Uridia). Quite a few questions are raised in connection with the use of prepositions in the translation. 1. Attention is claimed by the dual use of prepositions: the same or different prepositions with a single noun. Two examples:

1. ყმეზად ვიყავით ჩვენ თანაფარყოსთვისშინა მიცრაიმშიდა [We were serfs of Pharaoh in Micraim]. Both nouns (parege [=pharaoh] and Micraim) have two prepositions each – one before and the other following. Especially interesting is the use of თანა- [tana] in the function of a preposition. This phenomenon is usual with the traditional translations of Georgian Jews. In particular, it replaces the *le* preposition of the original, which often expresses possession.

2. As is known, in Old Georgian we had a number of prepositions, added to two cases each [8, pp. 177-182; 7, pp. 325-342; 10, pp. 203-246] – to the Dative and Possessive, unlike Modern Georgian, in which actually only one such preposition ვით (vit) has survived.³ This phenomenon crops up in traditional translations as well, including the translation of the Agada too... Furthermore, some such prepositions are represented in the instrumental case as well on

¹ ცემულეზა [tsemuleba] (as well as its variant ცემულოზა [tsemuloba]) is a highly interesting lexical unit characteristic of the speech of Georgian Jews, but it is beyond the scope of the present paper.

² Akadosh Barukhu (Heb.) = Holy Blessed=God

³ This is one more specific lexical unit of speech A of Georgian Jews: მართაფა [martapa]=dignity (it is precisely this variant that is used in Rabbi Gagulashvili's variant).

which, as far as I know, attention has so far not been focused. For example: 1. მიგვეწურე ჩვენ და დაგვამადლიანე ჩვენ მრავალ მოყადიმებსა სხვებსა იმა მიმავლებსა წინსაგებრად ჩვენთვის თანა შვიდობითა”.

Clearly enough, the postposition is added to the Instrumental form. Of course, this fact can be very easily accounted for by the influence of the original¹ - *tana* is again an equivalent of the original's preposition *le*, but from the formal standpoint it is in the Instrumental case, therefore, the postposition *tana* is added to this case (already to the third case!). It goes without saying that one must look for the cause that made this possible. 2. The postposition ზედა [zeda] also occurs in the Instrumental (third!) case: ზედა სახელითა, რომ გადახტა აკადომ ბარუხუ ზედა სახლებსა მამები ჩვენისა ზედა მიცრაიმშიდა”. Here too italicized postposition occurs with the noun in the Nominative case under the influence of the original, but this changes nothing from the formal standpoint. 3. The postposition შინა [shina] also occurs in this case: “და შინაკლავითა გაწვდილითა, ესე იგი ხმალი”.

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¹ მოყადიმებსა [moqadimebsa] [Heb]=festivals.

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