

Proselytes in Khazars Khaganat and "Judaizers" of Russian Empire – possible connection

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Abstract. The paper is devoted to a long and complicated story of medieval Judaic proselytes and heresy of the "Judaizers" in Russia. The hypothesis of some possible connections of events in 10th- 12th and 18th- 20th centuries is presented. We consider a number of facts and arguments in favor of this hypothesis throughout the last millennium.

Keywords: Judaism, Khazar Khaganat, proselytes, tribe Sever, "Judaizers" of Russian Empire.

The Kievan Letter is an early 10th-century letter thought to be written by representatives of the Jewish community in Kiev. The letter, a Hebrew-language recommendation written on behalf of one member of their community, was part of an enormous collection brought to Cambridge by Solomon Schechter from the Cairo Geniza. It was discovered in 1962 during a survey of the Geniza documents by Norman Golb of the University of Chicago. The letter is dated by most scholars to around 930-960 CE (Pricak and Golb [2], Golden [3]). It is assumed that the letter was written when Khazars were no longer a dominant force in the politics of the city Kiev.

Surprisingly, the most informative part of this letter were the 11 signatures (minyan) of the members of the community. Linguists are interested in the letter because the names are of Turkic, Slavic, and Hebrew origins (for example, names such as: "*Hanukkah*," "*Yehudah*," "*Gostjata*," and "*Kiabar*").

The letter was signed by the Jews, but very rare Jews, the Khazar Jews. The names partly turned out to be Turkic. Together with quite canonical Judah bar Yitzhak Levi, there was both *Manas* and *Manar*, there were some weird Jacob ben *Chanukah* and *Sinai* bar Shimshon.

Recent studies determined that at least one of the names of signatories is Slavic [11, 14], nevertheless, of the Cohen genus. That it is likely that the signatories with non-Jewish names, there were Jews who adopted local names [2].

All signatories indicated, as a rule, after the name of their father. But there was an exception. A certain Judah, instead of his father's name, stood יהוה סורט - called *Severta* (or *Surta*). Only Judah's father is not mentioned, since this is clear evidence that the father of Judah was no Jew.

Only Judah has instead of father's name has nickname. Omelyan Pritsak [2] suggests that the name Surt is of Turkic origin, Torpusman [14] believes that it is the Slavic name again, like *Gostjata*. It seems, of course, but both names end in different letters of Hebrew, something here does not match. The same problem appears with the word *Sirota* – orphan,

However, there is another possibility. In the Ossetian language, the suffix "ta" means clan affiliation. *Severta* simply means - from the clan 'Sever; (or Sur) [5]. That means the name of his clan in the language of this clan.

Only Ossetian language in the North Caucasus is known today from Alanian languages, belonging to a rich Iranian language family. At the end of the 1-st millennium, the Alans of the Eastern European forest-steppe, together with their relative *Burtases*, were part of Khazar Khaganat, the Burtas had some autonomy. In Khazar sources they are called As, "*Яс, Јас, Јасин*" in Slavic. Both of the names mentioned are related - the word *Burtas* means in Ossetian language "*Furt As*" - the *separated son* of as [7].

Thus the father of *Judah* was no Jew. According to signature *Judah* was Jew. So he was proselyte, and in view the language, proselyte of Alan origin [5], [15].

The Alans and relative tribes dwelt in "*лесостепь*" (forest-steppe) between Dnepr and Volga, including Don river basin.

The name of the rivers Sura, Seversky Donets, and the tribe of *Sever* (Nestor, the Tale of Temporary Years [16]) is also associated with the region of the Alans. The archaeologist Sedov [12] noted that many toponyms and hydronyms of the land of the tribe of Sever are of Iranian origin. The Alans of the Dnieper basin were in the process of important changes, the tribe Sever was assimilated by the Slavs at the turn of the 1st and 2nd millennia, enriching the Eastern Slavic languages with numerous words of Iranian origin. But Burtas are mentioned for a long time. Volga Burtas paid tribute to the Moscow tsar in the 17th century.

The acceptance of Judaism by Khazars was not at all similar to the adoption of Christianity or Islam in other countries. Simply, the ruling clan of the Khazars was recognized as one of the lost tribes of Israel. Only. The rest of the birth did not concern, the former religion was not persecuted as pagan and false. Nevertheless, the religion of the ruling Khazar dynasty was quite attractive for vassals of Khaganat, in particular, for tribes in the process of essential changes. This could stimulate proselytism. New customs, sanctified by authority, took root in IX and X centuries.

At the end of the 10th century, the Khazar state disintegrated under the blows of the Rus, Pechenegs and Alans. The fate of its population was quite unenviable. In Ossetian, the word "khazar" means "*slave*" [5].

East Slavic pagan deity "*Khors - Хърсъ*" is considered to have Iranian roots. Iranian neighbors of the Slavs were just Alans. The ancient Russian chronicles, cursing the pagan gods, among other filthy ones, repeatedly commemorate "*Khors Zidovin*" [6]. Of course, Hors is not a Jew, among gods there is only one Jew in general - Jesus Christ, but here it is more interesting, why was he so called. It will not be a strong stretch to assume that the ancient Russian authors knew the modern Alans, they knew both their pagan gods and the traditions of the Alans. Something in these traditions caused "*Khors Zidovin*".

In the South Russian dialects of the Don and Kursk area, the *sevruks* are the names of grumbling people [16]. The connection with tribe Sever seems possible. Until now, in the villages is known a dialect called "*surzhik*". It is considered a common mixture of Russian and Ukrainian and is not respected. Nevertheless Surzhik was known for a long time, moreover, the first works of Ukrainian literature appeared in Surzhik.

Chronicler Nestor in the 12th century, already took the tribe Sever to the Slavs, fixing the assimilation [16].

In 1174, the prince of Jaroslavl Andrey Bogolubski was killed by his brother-in-law and key keeper by name Anbal Yasin, "*Анбал Јасин*", ". Yasin in 12th century was the known name of alan and burtas in central Russia. Anbal means "going to battle" in Ossetian language, "bandy guy" in Russian. His enemy called him Jew – "*Жидовин*". "*о еретиче! помнишь ли ты, жидовине?...*", It looks more like an insult concerning Alans, This is perhaps the first mention of Alan, accused of being Jewish, in the Russian chronicle (1175) [16, 10]. The Old Russian chronicles often write about modern Jews, as a rule, in the spirit of religious controversy, but sometimes the names of these Jews are not very typical. Anbal is not a name from Old Testament.

A number of terms from the religious practice of Judaism is preserved in the Ossetian language. Kosher, in particular [10]. The Khazar-Jewish heritage was mentioned in the traditional culture of Karachai in the Caucasus [9].

Petahiah from Regensburg about 1180 found a few days of way together with Cedar (kuman, *половец*) east of Kiev a community of seemingly Jews, that observed the Sabbath and other Jewish customs, even knew the prayers, but did not know Talmud.

On the land of the Khazars, he does not mention any Jews, but he found something in the Cedar land: "*Real Jews are not in the land of the Cedars, and only Minim live there (Heretic, sectarians). When R. Petahiah asked them why they did not believe the words and legends of wise sages, they answered: "Because our ancestors did not teach us." On the eve of the Sabbath they cut all the bread that they eat on the Sabbath, they eat it in the dark and sit all day in one place. Their prayer on this day consists only of reading psalms and when Rabbi Petachiah read to them our prayers and prayer after eating, he established by Talmud, it is they really liked it, and they said that they never heard of Talmud and do not know the Talmud.*" [4].

But the psalms (in Hebrew) these *minim* know and Petachiah seems to have heard and understood them! He does not write the name of these strange Jews. The place was in Don basin, in forest-steppe.

Giljom de Rubruk and Plano Karpini visited in 13th century after Mongolian invasion the capital of the Golden Horde near Volga, at Burtas area.. They mentioned some Jewish tribes around this area, but without details [1].

The next few centuries were times of decline in the forest-steppe due to drought and wars. Few documents left, there were even few literate to write them. The population decreased, people left dangerous places, customs became simpler. For example, the complicated rules of slaughtering could be forgotten, maybe as a result the Molokan (of the word "*молоко*") sect simply stopped eating meat, confining itself to milk.

In the 15th century, far from the forest-steppe, a heresy arose in Novgorod. The heresy was called by its opponents the "Judaizers - *жидовствующие*". It was "bojar heresy", mostly "clergy, grand clergymen, bojar children – "духовенство, великокняжеские дьяки, дети боярские." The heretics read "Logika" of Maimonid (*Моисей Египетский*), "*Шестокрыл*" and other translations of medieval Jewish philosophers. They were interested mostly in theoretical and philosophical aspects (astrology, astronomy, calendar, mystic).

It was a heresy of protestant kind, not literally Judaism. But enemies called them "Judaizers". The heretics rejected the external manifestations of the Christian cult, denied the services and ceremonies; denied the dogma of the Most Holy Trinity, the divinity of Jesus Christ and his resurrection from the dead.

At the beginning the prince Ivan III patronized heresy. But he invited in 1490 a Jewish doctor from Venice, a certain *Leon Zhidovin (Mistro Leon Zhidovin)*, and "told him to treat his son Prince Ivan". The treatment turned out to be in vain, the executioner cut off the head of the Jewish doctor. The "Judaizers" lost the patronage of the monarch and were condemned and cursed at church councils. Many of them were executed.

The heresy was quickly forgotten after the defeat and killing of high ranking supporters because it was restricted by intrigues inside the courtyard of the prince.

In the first half of the 18th century, the priest Dmitriy Rostovsky knows "Judaizers" on the river Don, ("иже по жидовски субботу постят") [10] whom he called "щельники", they were mixed with the Molokans, also called "*селезневцы и иконоборцы*" [16].

At the end of the 18th century the observance of Saturday was discovered by official authorities.

Cossack Kosyakov, together with his brother, turned at the end of the 18th century to the ataman of the Don Cossack Army, with a petition for permission to freely practice their Hebrew faith [10]. Then, in 1811, there were unexpectedly found "Judaizers" in a lot of localities.

The sectarians of the Kashirsky district of the Tula province, stated that they profess their faith "*since ancient times* [8], [10]."

In the first quarter of the 19th century heresy was found in the provinces of Moscow, Tula, Oryol, Ryazan, Tambov, Penza, Saratov, Astrakhan, Stavropol and Voronezh [16], in the region of the Don Army, the Middle Volga and around, among peasantry and cossacks.

The majority of the citizens of the city of Alexandrov (now in Donbass) in the middle of the 19th century refused to carry out city duties on Saturdays [8].

There were many heretics, tens of thousands or even more. Different sects, interpretations and wings (*субботники, шельники, селезневцы, иконоборцы, геры, молокане...*) among "Judaizers" is proving the long and complicated history of heresy. Heresy did not look arisen suddenly. Different sects have distinct sources in the area around forest-steppe of Russian Empire. This does not look like a new and modern trend. The heretics of Kashira district declared that "*they have practiced their faith since ancient times.*" The revival of the customs of Judaism was part of the general revival of sectarianism in the 18th and 19th centuries. It looked more like remnants of some pagan beliefs, like worship of stones or trees. But the customs of "Judaizers" were significantly different.

The heretics were cracked down according to the traditions of the empire. "Severe measures were taken to combat this sect, ranked as one of the most harmful (sect chiefs were sent to military service, if they are suitable for it, deportation to Siberia, banning sectarians from their place of residence, etc.) and in the forms of "ridicule over delusions" and excitement among the people "disgust" to them it was commanded "to call the subbotniks a Jewish sect and announce that they are truly Jews" [8], [16]. There were also pogroms of heretics.

As for the origin of heresy, there is not enough information here. "The connection with "Judaizers" from Novgorod and Moscow of 15th century and later Molokans is doubtful" [16]. The Jews also were not much suspected because Ashkenazim were far of the place.

And now let me point out that the heresy of the "Judaizers" was discovered on the territory roughly coinciding with the tribal territory of the *Alan* tribes in the 10th century. The difference of seven centuries, of course, is far from trivial. On the other hand, by the tenth century, these tribes lived for about a thousand years of first millennium on the same territory. Their descendants were here next seven centuries, gradually assimilating, until their old name was erased in human memory.

It can be assumed that the russified descendants of the Alans also did not really change their place of residence. Having changed the language and self-identification, they nevertheless could well preserve the customs of antiquity, not very much delving into the origin of these customs. Among the sectarians there arose various kinds of deviations, right up to the frank transition to Judaism. Among them were the emigrants to Palestine, whose descendants are fairly well known in the history of Israel.

It is worth mentioning that there is a much simple explanation for the appearance such heresy in the south-east of Russia. Of course, you can become a Sabbath by reading the Old Testament. But such explanation has weak point. It was impossible to read the Old Testament in modern Russian until 1861 - there was no translation. There were still few connoisseurs of Old Slavonic or Ancient Greek, but they were mostly found among the church elite.

The heresy of the "Judaizers" was not discovered at all in this environment, but among a completely different public, far from the centers of academic Orthodoxy. In addition, it is known that at least part of the "Judaizers" observed the rite of circumcision. But it is difficult to learn this from the book; here you need, perhaps, a teacher and some tradition. However, the role of the Old Testament should not be neglected.

The sects of subbotniks in English-speaking countries, where the Bible is publicly available and sectarians are no longer persecuted, most likely go back to the Old Testament.

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