

## Tracking from Adam and Eve to the Amalekites in the 2012 Chechen translation of the Holy Bible – Where does specific terminology come from?

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The Chechens are a dominantly Muslim ethnic group in the Northeastern Caucasus, where they live in the Republic of Chechnya, Novolasskiy and Khasavyurt in Dagestan as well as Eastern Ingushetia. The Chechens had Christian communities in the past but when Imam Shamil founded his Imamate, many Christians went to Georgia, where they paradoxically converted to Islam years later (as it is often assumed that they did not leave for religious reasons, but due to massive droughts), so that Islam and Chechen-ness became connected and Islam an important part of identity. As such, it is interesting to analyze how specific Bible terms are translated in a Chechen Bible translation, or in other words, what does the Bible look like in a specific Non-Christian's language. This paper only takes the Christian framework in general, the beginning of the Genesis (in Chechen: Doladalar) and the origin of the Chechen name for the Book of Leviticus (Chechen: Amaljar) into account, as analyzing larger parts – or even the whole Bible – would be a complex issue in itself.

In 2012, the Russian Institute for Bible Translation (Institut Perevoda Biblii) published a full text Bible in Chechen language, called “Delan Jozanaş” (Делан Йозанаш). The word ‘delan’ (делан) means holy or divinely, which also includes the word for God, which is ‘dala’ (дала). The term itself does not refer to any specific God. It originates out of Vaynakh mythology where Dala was the highest divinely Being, which was identified with the sun in contrast to the moon or god of darkness. The word later transformed into the meaning of God in general and was used by the Vaynakh Christian communities to identify their God and is still used by Muslim Chechens to refer to Allah. In addition, the word ‘dala’ is part of several proverbs and idioms, such as ‘dela reza hūlda xan’ (дела реза хуьлда хьан), a way to show politeness or gratitude. Therefore, ‘delan’ literally means ‘of God’ or “God’s”, and the word ‘holy’ implies that it is something given by God or which is God’s source. A literal though not proper English way to translate the term also might be “God-ish” since something which is given by God includes God in everything and all. The word “jozan” (йозан) literally means book or notebook, and therefore the Bible literally is translated as ‘the Book of God’ or ‘the book that includes all of what is

God'. The ending –aş normally indicates a plural, but this might not be a surprise here, since the Bible as a full work consists of several books in itself. The term 'jozan' also implies that it is something official (jozanan mott), which has an authoritative status. The Old Testament is called 'tovratan teptarş' (товратан тептарш), including the word 'tovra' (товра) referring to the Holy Book of the Jews. Like in 'Delan', the ending '-an' shows origin, thus 'of the Torah'. In the book of Genesis, the origin or 'sxadalar' (схьадалар), the divinely seizure or the taking into the creative process is described. The 'doladalar' (доладалар) consists of the word 'dola' which means 'care' and 'dalar' which might be translated with the Russian word 'končina' (кончина). It seems that both words are compound words, however, the first one seems to be a neologism for 'beginning' or 'start'. The 2012 Chechen Bible uses sub-headtitles within the books, for instance "Adam a, Xava a" (Адам а, Хъава а) which means Adam and Eve. Both, Adam and Khava are typical Chechen names until today, and the word 'adam' means 'man, human-being'. A foot note informs about the origin of the word, writing "адам – леархойн маттах ,зуда'бохург,стар' бохучуьнца цхъаьна доьзна ду". However, there is the common belief that Adam comes from adamah (אָדָמָה) meaning „earth“ referring to the fact that God created humans out of earthly mud, and a direct meaning for human-being or man in Hebrew through the connection of adam does not exist, though אָדָם literally means ‚red‘, and thus might either refer to blood or bloodily or the red color of wet mud. Eve in Hebrew is called חַוָּה being pronounced Khawâ in Biblical Hebrew (with the strong *kh* sound and a long *a*). It was adopted into Arabic Khava (حَوَاء), the name in Chechen thus has a Judeo-Muslim continuity (cp. Greek Εὔα and Old Latin Heva).

So we can see that Chechens either use vocabulary from traditional concepts such as the mythological word for God and then re-interpret it into another religion's framework, as 'dala' is not only re-interpreted as Christian God, but is also used by Muslims to simply refer to God in general. Some vocabulary has traditional roots in Hebrew and Arabic. As both languages are Semitic languages, it is sometimes not clear, whether the translator adopted the name from Hebrew or whether the translator used the Arabic equivalent, especially in Adam and Eve that are almost the same in both languages, and even exist as such as names in Chechnya till today. Sometimes it seems that the term was taken from Arabic, such as the name Ibrahim is used in the Chechen Bible instead of Abraham. In other cases the origin is not really traceable, e.g. Isaac is called Isxâq (see Gen. 22:6-8), while in Hebrew and Arabic the term Ishaq is used. Till today, Chechens bear the name Isa (Иса), which probably refers to the Arabic cognate of Jesus who is called Isa in the Quran. In the Chechen Bible, Jesus is called Isa (Ийса) as well, and thus it goes back to the Arabic root, rather than Hebrew Yeshua (ישוע) or Yehoshua (יהושע). The Gospel of Mark is called "Mark" (Марк) in Chechen, which is

neither Latin (Marcus), nor Hebrew (מרקוס) nor Greek (Μάρκος), and thus probably derived from Russian. The Gospel of Luke is called “Laka” (Лака) which stands for itself and shows no direct relation neither to Russian, nor Arabic or Biblical languages. The Gospel of Matthew is called “Mattay” (Маттай), which shows a relation to Greek Matthaïos (Ματθαῖος). Jesus’ parents Joseph and Mary are called ‘Jusup’ (Юсуп) and ‘Marjem’ (Марем), both probably Chechenized versions of the Hebrew-Aramaic names Yosep and Mariam, though the first also shows close relatedness to Arabic ‘Yusuf’.

Finally, many technical terms can be described through indigenous words, the Holy mother is called ‘nana’ (нана) which means ‘mother’ (cp. Mat. 1:18), and also other Christian words might be described by literally translating them through Chechen words.

To put it in a nutshell, the Chechen Bible uses names mainly from Hebrew and Arabic, but also sometimes shows Greek or Russian cognates in rare cases such as the Gospel of Matthew and Gospel of Mark. Natural phenomena and relationships among the people can be described through normal Chechen language, specific terms might be literally translated by creating compound neologisms or using words from mythology that get re-interpreted in a Christian context.

Concerning the writing style, the Bible uses the prestigious elder standard orthography as it was used in the Soviet Union and which is still official until today. However, this prestigious high writing style is hardly found in Chechnya nowadays itself. After two wars, Chechen language suffered a lot: first, as there was the try to switch the language to Latin alphabet in the 1990s which did not work as the new government policies were contested by other factions between 1991 and 1996 which led to the fact that Latin and Cyrillic was used next to each other to write Chechen. In between 1997 to 1999, the official government did not control most of its area, which had also an impact on the language policy. During the war periods, most schools were defunct and people left the country. In addition, during the phase of independence as well as after the takeover by Russian forces, Russian was the mainly written language, while Chechen is the daily spoken language, but also used for entertainment, folklore, music, etc. As a result, a modernized orthography appears nowadays. While the traditional orthography writes ‘tahana’ (today), ‘muha’ (how), ‘dika’ (good), the modern orthography writes these words ‘tahan’, ‘muh’, ‘dik’, as the ‘a’ in the end is silent and not pronounced.

The books’ names itself are translated into Chechen, and thus ‘Doladalar’ – the finishing of the creation – stands for the Genesis, ‘Aradaqqar’ (Арадаккхар) means Exodus, ‘Amaljar’ (Амалъяр) for the Leviticus (which is probably a reference to the Amalekites, which is not certain since they are

never mentioned explicitly by name but Lev 27:29 and 27:19 indirectly refer to the Amalekites when there is talk that the enemy shall be put to death; and other reference makes no sense, especially since the Chechen Bible talks about an Israelite tribe 'Dalla Amaljaran' – lit.: the Amalian generation), 'Lelar' (Лелар) refers to Numbers though the Chechen name literally means 'motion'. 'Karlabäqqina' (Карлабаьккина) refers to Deuteronomy.

Concerning the name of the Book of Leviticus as mentioned above, we are not exactly sure where the Chechen name comes from and we can only make assumptions. Bible Chechen can be tricky at some points, since there are almost no Chechen Christians, and therefore almost no experts on the Bible in Chechen language on special terminology. However, the commentary in the Chechen version makes reference that the Book is named after the 'Israelites of the Amalian generation', which most possibly is a reference to the Amalekites. Neither Amalek, nor the Amalekites are mentioned by name in Leviticus, but might be a back reference to either Exodus or Deuteronomy. In Exodus, Amalek is shown as symbol of evil and it is in Lev. 27: 29 that "No person devoted to destruction may be ransomed; they are to be put to death." (NIV). The symbol of ransom and destruction most possibly might be a reference to the Amalekites as symbol of evil. In addition, Deut. 25:17-19 show reference to this. Last but not least, one has to keep in mind that Leviticus is the book of law, mainly for priests, but not the less dedicated to morality.