

Nobody is perfect: Correcting a mistake which appeared in my 2018 paper on the origin of names in the Chechen Bible

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Science is human-made and as humans are always subject to error, errors can be made in science as well. No scientist can be perfect and therefore, he has to make a mistake here and there in his career. This does not only appear in empirical disciplines, where the scientist might conduct an error within his method leading to statistical errors or errors in describing his findings. Also in text analysis mistakes might occur. In most cases, these mistakes are detected within the peer review process and can be corrected before publication. But the peer-reviewer is human as well, and it can happen that even reviewers, no matter how intensive they check the findings, might oversee something. The danger to oversee something in text analysis is much higher than in statistics, since statistical models can easily be controlled with quantitative models, while a text analysis which does not use quantitative models has no mathematical formula to control the theories. In other words, qualitative methods have no automatisms to detect mistakes properly, if the method was used correctly.

Such a mistake appeared in my paper *Tracking from Adam and Eve to the Amalekites in the 2012 Chechen translation of the Holy Bible – Where does specific terminology come from?* which was published in Volume 2 Issue 1 (2018) of this journal after being reviewed properly. At first, we must be aware how the mistake could happen. The article was dedicated to a Bible analysis of a Chechen Bible. The first problem here is that most Chechens are Muslims and the number of Christians is extremely scarce. On the one hand, this was the interesting challenge: which kind of terminology does a non-Christian ethnic group use in its Bible? Though Chechen has a lot of native terms for Muslim technical terms, in the last years many Arabisms made itself into the language (e.g. nowadays many Chechens use the word *хиджаб/ hijab*, though there is a native word which is *йӀолакх/ yolaq*). When native words get more and more into the background, native speakers will not recognize these words anymore, especially if the dominating religion is very strong and thus old words with pagan origin, for instance, disappear as being unorthodox. The second problem is that Chechen is not a language of major

research, which also means that the materials on the language are rather scarce. Within my research, I always asked native speakers about the meaning of the word, in case that I could not find it in a dictionary or had doubts about the meaning in this particular case.

What was the particular issue of research? Islam and Chechen-ness are strongly connected and Islam became an important part of the nation's identity. As such, it was interesting for me to analyze, how specific Bible terms were translated in a Chechen Bible. As text source, I used the 2012 Chechen Bible published by the Russian Institute for Bible Translation. The reason for doing the research was simply my curiosity on what does the Bible look like in a specific Non-Christian's language.

What was the methodology? A problem here, of course, was the fact that I could not analyze the whole Bible. So I decided to frame my work on the Pentateuch and the New Testament.

Which were problems that I did not see back then? Chechen is a complex language, but I already dedicated my attention to Chechen works, such as history or ethics, which was only possible due to the help with native speakers who could explain things to me and who helped me to translate. However, concerning the Chechen Bible, though native speakers were willing to help me, none of them were skilled in reading non-Islamic texts. In addition, my own Chechen is not good at all, and I think I overrated my own skills.

What were the findings? I could find out, where the name from the Chechen Bible comes from, the terminology for the word 'Old Testament' as well as the names Adam and Eve and other names in the Chechen Bible. I found out that Chechens either use vocabulary from traditional concepts which they re-interpret into the particular religion's framework, but also used the traditional names from Hebrew. I also pointed out the origin of several New Testament names. The name for Jesus was taken from Arabic, Mark was most probably taken from Russian, and Matthew was most probably taken from Greek. All in all, many names are either taken from Hebrew or Arabic, but also Greek and Russian cognates appear. Natural phenomena and relationships among the people are described through common Chechen words. Concerning the writing style, the Bible uses the prestigious orthography from the Soviet Union. Though this orthography is still official today, many people tend to write words rather after pronunciation, which leads to differences in the daily *de facto* writing. One reason for this is that Chechen is a daily spoken language, but Russian is still the dominant written language in Chechnya.

What went wrong? At first, a minor mistake appeared due to a wrong pronunciation of a name in Chechen. In Chechen, the name for Isaac is *Исхъакх/Isxaq*. I pointed out that the root is not clear here, but of course, *Isxaq* comes from Hebrew *Yitzchak*. A much bigger mistake appeared, however, when I talked of the origins of the book names. I pointed out that Leviticus is called *Амалъяр/Amaljar*, and assumed that it is a reference to the Amalekites. At first, Leviticus is indeed called *Amaljar*, but it has

nothing to do with the Amalekites at all. Back then, I had no idea what Amaljar means and searched for its meaning without success. I also asked native speakers about the meaning, but none had any idea. It was suggested by some that it has to be a name. Since the Levites are a tribe, I used to compare all tribal names, and saw a closeness in the 'Amal'. The hint given in the Bible was that it is the book of the Amaljar tribe of the Israelites. So despite the Amalekites, there was no other tribe which sounded close, though the Amalekites were not Israelites. I made my doubts clear and wrote that "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. [...] 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." (2018: 32) I would describe myself very well-read in the Bible, but at first, the Bible is a big secret and every day I learn more and more details. Second, it is more difficult to read the Bible in a language, in which Christianity is almost completely absent and it cannot be compared to 'normal' Bible reading, especially, if it is a rather rare language.

How did I discover that I made a mistake? As pointed out before, I simply overrated my Chechen language skills back then. However, I read Bible translations in various translations every day, and of course, the mystery of Leviticus in the Chechen Bible did not let me go. I already want to spoil here that Amaljar most likely means 'priest', and thus it refers to the Levites. So the *Amalian* generation of the Israelites, as the book is commented, means the priestly generations, and thus, the Levites. The reason why I did not find the meaning is twofold. At first, the word 'priest' in Chechen is of Pagan origin and as a pagan priest does not exist in Islam of course, many Chechens do not know this word anymore. The second reason why I did not discover the mistake from the beginning was the fact that the word *amaljar* does not appear at certain places where one expects it. For instance, Leviticus 1:5 says "And he shall kill the bullock before the LORD: and the priests, Aaron's sons, shall bring the blood, and sprinkle the blood round about upon the altar that is by the door of the tabernacle of the congregation." (KJV). Indeed, the Chechen bible writes Aaron's sons (Ахларонан клентий/ Ахаронан кентий), but the word *amaljar* does not appear. Leviticus 1:7 writes "And the sons of Aaron the priest shall put fire upon the altar, and lay the wood in order upon the fire" (KJV) and again, *Aharonan kentij* is written, but the word *amaljar* does not appear. The same appeared in Leviticus 1:8. In Leviticus 1:9 there is only talk of "the

priest”, and once again, this particular term does not appear. The same goes to Leviticus 1:15, etc. So since the word was not mentioned where I expected it, indeed, I had to think that it refers to a tribe which is not being mentioned, such as the Amalekites, as I was told by native speakers that it must be a tribal name. However, since the Amalekites were not Israelites, from time to time I doubted that the mistake was made by the Bible translation crew, but rather that it must be my mistake. Especially, because the full name is Amalek and not Amal, so why should the translator shorten it? One can double check this by searching for Amalek in the Bible where his name is openly used. Indeed, in Genesis 36:12, the Chechen bible writes *Амалеку/Amaleq*. Therefore, I think that *Amaljar* must mean ‘priest’, though the word must be extremely rare. And again, this is just a suggestion, I am not hundred percent sure, whether I am right, but I am sure that the Amalekites are not meant, but the ‘priestly generation of the Israelites’ (i.e. the Levites).

Why didn’t the reviewers notice the mistake? Indeed, we have a reviewer in Russia as well as a reviewer in Romania who is very fond of Russia-related topics, but neither of them speaks Chechen. I expressed my views in the text and they checked it as most deeply as possible, e.g. comparing my etymological suggestions. As even many Chechen native speakers do not recognize this word today, no one could have expected from my reviewers that they do know the meaning. As author of the paper, I had to expect anything in the Chechen Bible, so I could not take for granted that Leviticus really refers to the Levites in this translation, since different translations of a word can always appear, consciously or unconsciously. Therefore, it would be wrong to state that one could have known it.

What does the mistake mean for the other findings? I think that the other findings are not touched by this mistake, which means that the original article can still be useful for researchers, but only the second part of the article, where I talked of Leviticus, is concerned.

Why is this mistake corrected here? We think that this journal is scientific and therefore has to meet scientific demands. Mistakes in science happen, but when we discover them, it is our duty as scientists to correct them. We want to keep the journal as transparent as possible to keep it a reliable source for our fellow scientists.