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**GAGAUZ RELIGIOUS MANUSCRIPT TRADITION IN THE CONTEXT
OF MOLDAVIAN ETHNIC AND CULTURAL INFLUENCE
(ON THE EXAMPLE OF THE ORIGIN OF THE GAGAUZ VERSION
OF THE EPISTLE ON SUNDAY)**

Rezumat

**Tradiția găgăuză manuscrisă religioasă în contextul
influenței etnoculturale moldovenești
(pe exemplul originii versiunii găgăuze
a Epistolei despre Duminică)**

În acest articol se investighează tradiția religioasă manuscrisă a găgăuzilor. Unul dintre cele mai răspândite printre găgăuzi texte apocrifice din Noul Testament este – Legenda Duminicii / Epistola lui Hristos („Epistola Domnului nostru Iisus Hristos ce ne-a trimis-o Dumnezeu din Cer”). Cercetarea se bazează pe materialele colectate în timpul studiilor individuale etnografice ale autorului (anii 2008–2012) în satele gagauze din sudul Moldovei. Rugăciuni apocrifice sunt studiate în plan comparativ cu texte similare, răspândite în rândul bulgarilor, moldovenilor și românilor. Se constată că rugăciunile apocrifice găgăuze reprezintă niște texte arhaice medievale păstrate în tradiția religioasă găgăuză până în prezent. Trăsătura caracteristică a lor este sincretismul păgân–creștin, în care predomină componenta păgână cu funcția distinctă de talisman. Putem concluda că, pe teritoriul Basarabiei, insuficiența cunoștințelor religioase și a literaturii găgăuzii o compensează cu ajutorul cărților și textelor religioase manuscrise, în primul rând în limba moldovenească/română. Este de remarcat faptul că această tradiție persistă în rândul populației găgăuze din Republica Moldova și în prezent.

Cuvinte-cheie: cultura scrisă creștină, texte apocrifice, epistolă, texte religioase manuscrise găgăuze.

Резюме

**Гагаузская религиозная рукописная традиция
в контексте молдавского этнокультурного влияния
(на примере происхождения гагаузской версии
«Эпистолии о Воскресенье»)**

В данной статье исследуется гагаузская религиозная рукописная традиция. Одно из распространенных у гагаузов новозаветных апокрифических сказаний – Эпистолия о воскресном дне («Эпистолия нашего Господа Иисуса Христа, посланная Богом с неба»). В основу исследования положены материалы, собранные в ходе индивидуальных этнографических исследований автора (2008–2012) в гагаузских селах юга Республики Молдова. Апокрифические молитвы исследуются в сравнении с аналогичными текстами, распространенными у болгар, молдаван и румын. Делается вывод о том, что зафиксированные у гагаузов апокрифические молитвы представляют собой архаичные средневековые тексты, сохранные в гагаузской религиозной

традиции до настоящего времени. Характерной их чертой является языческо-христианский синкретизм с преобладанием первого – языческого компонента и с ярко выраженной функцией оберега. В заключение констатируется, что на территории Бессарабии недостаток религиозных знаний и литературы гагаузы восполняли с помощью книг и рукописных религиозных текстов, в первую очередь на молдавском/румынском языке. Эпистолии, апокрифические молитвы и др. воспринимались и воспринимаются гагаузами как разновидности молитвы. Отмечается, что эта традиция продолжает функционировать среди гагаузского населения Республики Молдова и в настоящее время.

Ключевые слова: христианская письменная культура, апокрифические тексты, эпистолия, гагаузские рукописные религиозные тексты.

Summary

**Gagauz religious manuscript tradition in the context
of Moldavian ethnic and cultural influence
(on the example of the origin of the Gagauz version
of the Epistle on Sunday)**

The religious handwritten tradition of the Gagauzians is investigated in this article. One of the most widespread among Gagauz people is the apocryphal tale of the New Testament – The Epistle About Lord’s Day (“The Epistle of Our Lord Jesus Christ, Sent From Heaven by God”). The research is based on materials collected during the individual ethnographical research of the author (2008–2012 years) in the Gagauzian villages in the south of Moldova. The apocryphal prayers are studied in comparison with similar texts popular among Bulgarians, Moldovans and Romanians. We can conclude that Gagauzian apocryphal prayers represent some archaic medieval texts preserved in the religions tradition of Gagauzians until today. A peculiar feature of these texts is the pagan-Christian syncretism with the predominance of the pagan component and a distinct function of the talisman. We can conclude that on the territory of Bessarabia, Gagauz people substituted the lack of religious knowledge and literature with the help of books and handwritten religious texts primarily written in the Moldavian/Romanian language. The Epistles, apocryphal prayers and others were seen and perceived by the Gagauz as a kind of a prayer. It is noted that this tradition continues to operate among the Gagauzian population of Moldova even in the present.

Key words: Christian written culture, apocryphal texts, Epistle, handwritten religious texts of the Gagauzians.

At the end of the XIX century and the beginning of the XX century, Bessarabian Gagauz people went through an intensive assimilation process of the Christian written culture, which is connected with the increase of their religiousness and strengthening of their language and ethnic identity. Until the beginning of the 20th century, they lacked any kind of literature in their native language including religious one. During their stay in the Balkans and a long period after they had moved to Bessarabia, the main source of knowledge about Christian history and dogmas for the Gagauz people were books in Karamanli language (written in the Turkish language using the Greek alphabet). Yet, these books cost much and few could afford to buy and read them.

On the territory of Bessarabia, Gagauz people encountered the lack of religious knowledge and literature and substituted them with the help of books and religious texts handwritten primarily in the Moldavian language. Beginning with the second half, and mainly the end, of the XIX century, in the archival sources appear evidences that a small part of the population of some Gagauz villages (especially men) have knowledge of Moldavian language and less of Russian. According to historiographical data, at the end of the XIX century the apocryphal text *The Dream of the Virgin Mary, Mother of Jesus* in the Moldavian and Russian languages was spread among Bessarabian Gagauz people [1, p. 18; 2, p. 24; 3, p. 53-54].

At present, it was possible to find some handwritten compilations of religious content in the Gagauz language written in the Cyrillic script. Field material was collected during individual ethnographical researches in 2008–2012 in Gagauz villages and towns situated in the south of the Republic of Moldova: Ceadir-Lunga district (town Ceadir-Lunga, village Gaidari, village Cazaclia, village Beșghioz) and partially Comrat district (village Beșalma). The material was collected from the representatives of orthodox belief – people of old age, committed Christians, who systematically attend church and perform the whole range of religious rites.

It should be mentioned that in the collected handwritten compilations, depending on the interest of the holder, different apocryphal texts are present: *The Epistle of Jesus Christ, The Epistles of Jesus Mother, The Ordeal of the Virgin Mary, The Dream of the Virgin Mary, Mother of Jesus, A Tale About 12 Fridays, The Meeting of the Archangel Michael with Avizuh, with Satan's Wing* and others. Nevertheless, the first three texts are present in all collected compilations. (Non-abridged texts and their variants will be published in the monograph research "The Apocryphal Texts through the Religiousness of Gagauz People". Some of them can be found in the supplement of the published monograph [4, p. 292-372; 5, p. 114-140, 407-442].

In this article, we will analyze one of the most widespread among Gagauz people apocryphal tale of the New Testament – *The Epistle about Lord's Day (The Epistle of Our Lord Jesus Christ, Sent from Heaven by God)*. This apocryphal text is well known by many Christian nations. In this text, Jesus prescribes us to live righteously and honor Sunday because on this day many important events took place: the Annunciation, the Baptism of Christ and His Resurrection, also the Doomsday will come on this day.

The Roman variant is considered to be the earliest one because it was mentioned in Jerusalem epistle. The time of its appearance is attributed to the V–VI century, while the scientists refer the creation of the Jerusalem variant (the original text in the Greek language) to the VII century. The first variant is translated from Greek into Bulgarian in the XI–XII century, and the second in the XIII–XIV century. In Slavic book tradition, the most widespread is the Jerusalem variant. There are known some editions that appeared at different times (Russian and South Slavic). The Bulgarians have both variants of this epistle *Епистолия за неделята*; overall they count more than 60 [11]. The Russian scientists attribute the appearance of Russian epistles about Lord's Day to the XV century (http://old_russian_writers.academic.ru). The apocryphal became widespread in the Ukrainian written tradition. The plot influenced the Ukrainian and Belarusian folklore and Russian spiritual poems [1, p. 68-96; 2; 3].

Beginning with the XVI century *The Epistle about Lord's Day* became widespread among Moldavians and Romanians. The epistle is known under different titles: *Epistolia Domnului nostru Iisus Hristos ce a trimis-o Dumnezeu din cer* / "The Epistle of Our Lord Jesus Christ, Sent From Heaven by God", *Epistolie din Cer pentru respectarea Zilei Domnului* / "The Epistle From Heaven to Venerate Lord's Day", *Epistolie din Cer pentru respectarea Zilei a Duminicii* / "The Epistle from Heaven to Venerate Sunday", *Epistolia lui Hristos pentru paza Duminicii* / "The Epistle of Christ to Protect Sunday", *Legenda Duminicii* / "The Legend of Sunday". Even today, according to Romanian researchers, the epistle and other apocryphal texts (for instance *The Dream of the Virgin Mary, Mother of Jesus*) have a wide circulation, as a talisman, on the given territory [16].

In this context, the question of primary importance is how apocryphal texts appeared in the Gagauz milieu. In Gagauz handwritten compilations, the title of the apocryphal text *The Epistle of Our Lord Jesus Christ, Sent from Heaven by God* has minor differences that are connected with the translation style and use of religious terminology: *Епистолия Бизим Саабинин Иисус Христосун, ани ёллады Аллах гёктян* (Ceadir-Lunga), *Епистолия Бизим Падишахымыс Иисус Христос, ани ёллады Аллах*

гѣктян (Beșghioz); *Епистолия бизим Аллахын оолу Иисус Христос ёлады бизя гѣктян* (Gaidari); *Епистолия Саабинин Иисусу Бизим Христозун, ани ёламыш Аллаа гѣктян* (Beșghioz).

In Gagauz handwritten tradition, the Jerusalem variant of *The Epistle About Lord's Day* is widely spread. We could not find in archival and historiographical documents any evidence about the time of its appearance and spread in the Gagauz milieu, that makes it difficult to identify the time of appearance of the Gagauz variant and determine "the first source" of the translation into the Gagauz language of the mentioned epistle and of other ones. Therefore, we found it reasonable to study peculiarities of epistles in the Gagauz language in comparative aspect with analogical texts widespread among neighboring peoples first of all Bulgarians, Moldavians and Romanians. Due to this method, we could identify textual differences of epistles in the Gagauz language, the peculiarities of their style and writing, as well as the presence of foreign vocabulary. These aspects connected with Gagauz apocryphal texts are presented in some of our publications [6, p. 346-377; 7, p. 460-483, 602-614]. This allowed us to make preliminary conclusions regarding "the first source" from which translations into the Gagauz language were made.

While comparing the epistle in Gagauz language (it was taken the text from Ceadir-Lunga compilation as the most accurate and complete) with Bulgarian version [11], it was found that although the plot and structure are in general the same, there are substantial differences not only in details but also in the content, a thing we can not say while comparing the Gagauz variant with Moldavian/Romanian ones. The translation of the title of the Gagauz Epistle about Lord's Day *Епистолия Бизим Саабинин Иисус Христосун, ани ёлады Аллаа гѣктян* coincides completely with one of the titles used by Moldavians and Romanians to name the same epistle *Epistolia Domnului nostru Iisus Hristos ce ne-a trimis-o Dumnezeu din Cer*. Not less important is the fact that the sequence of epistles in Gagauz compilations (*The Epistle of Jesus Christ, The Epistles of Jesus Mother, The Ordeal of the Virgin Mary*) coincides with handwritten traditions of Moldavians and Romanians (*Epistola lui Hristos, Epistola Maicii Domnului, Această carte arată muncile creștinilor*).

The comparison of the content of epistles about Lord's Day in the Gagauz language with similar texts widespread among Moldavians and Romanians shows practically their complete identity. According to researches the oldest Romanian variant of "The Epistle of Christ" (*Epistola lui Hristos*) is also known under the name of "The Legend About Sunday" (*Legenda Duminicii*) presented in the collection of B. P. Hasdeu [14]. For the comparison, we used the

epistle in Moldavian/Romanian language (transliterated variant) that we managed to find in the internet: *Epistolia Domnului nostru Iisus Hristos ce ne-a trimis-o Dumnezeu din Cer* [12].

To identify the stylistic and textual differences between Gagauz variants and Moldavian / Romanian ones, as well as to review elements of lexical borrowings, we have chosen the most important fragments from our point of view. For instance, in both variants of "The Epistle of Jesus Christ" the main stress is placed upon the criticism of Christians, who are called pagans because they do not pay attention to the outer forms of religiousness. Also one and the same terms are used: *împriloștiților* and *păgîn*, that means pagan.

O! răilor, o! împriloștiților și păgânilor ce sunteți voi / "Oh! You bad Oh! Filthy and pagan you are!"

In the three texts (from Cazaclia and Beșghioz compilations), the original language from which the translation was made is completely preserved, as we may think it is connected with the difficult character of the fragment to translate. The fragment was placed between brackets as an unclear specification, the omission of which was banned: (*рыилор ши ыпрыленицилорь ши ынгарицелор че сынтець вой*). In Beșghioz compilation this fragment is rewritten without translation but with significant distortion: (*пилар*) *ши инпрелов сынлор че сынтец ваи; рыилор ши инпрелестнимл лор ши ынграфиелор че сунтец вой*.

In the text taken from Ceadir-Lunga compilation in the result of translation, the original language was preserved only fragmentarily: *О фяналар хем ынпрелестляр, хем ыгерецляр, нейсинис сис? / «Oh, malicious, filthy and pagan you are!»*. The text from Beșalma compilation has a free translation although the word *pagan* is preserved: *Дьявол ярдым едер сизя, да булунерсыныс башка ишлердя, о феналар пагынар* / "The Devil helps you, and you find for yourself other things, oh malicious and pagan".

Another fragment, indicating "the first source" language of the Gagauz variant, is connected with the enumeration of sins. In the given fragment Moldovan / Romanian terms denoting family relationship are used:

Oh! Vai de nașul ce va face păcatul cu fină-sa și finul ce va face păcat cu nașă-sa; vai de cumnatul ce va face păcat cu cumnată-sa! / "Oh! Woe to godfather, who will sin with his goddaughter and godson, who will sin with his godmother; woe to brother-in-law who will sin with his sister-in-law!"

In one text taken from Beșghioz compilation, the "original language" is partially preserved in the given fragment (*Ох-вай, о саадыча, ани япаер гунах кумицасынан, вай, о де кумптул, чине фаче покатул ку кумнетяса* – Beșghioz), while in the other two texts this fragment is translated entirely

into the Gagauz language using Gagauz terminology of family relationship: *нуна, кумица, куми, кресница, драгинку, булю, еништя, балдыска.*

Words of damnation are very frequently used in Gagauz epistles and are expressed with terms used by Moldavians and Romanians – *бластмат*. While mentioning the ordeal to which sinners will be subdued, the lexeme *мунка* is widely used as in the Romanian variant:

Goni-l-voi de la Mine blestemaților, în focul cel de veci, cel nestins, în muncă <...> și blestemat să fie acel om care va lucra de Simbătă seara până Luni la răsăritul soarelui <...>

Гидинь, бластаматлар, вечника атешь ичиня, ани хич сюнмер мункая <...>; хем бластаматъ олурса о адамъ, ким ишлярса джума[а] ертеси вечерняданъ сора та пазар ертеси гюн дуунджа <...> (Cazaclia).

The lexeme *мунка* in the meaning of “ordeal” is frequently used in many variants of this and other Gagauz epistles. Only in texts from Ceadir-Lunga and Beșalma compilations this term is substituted with Gagauz term of similar meaning – “зеет”: *Хем куртардым адамы ждендемин зеетиндян / “The person was released of the ordeal of hell”; вечника атешя, ани сунмяз зеетя / “To the ordeal of fire, that never dies out”; биясинис, ани джендемин мункаларна гидеджинис / “and know, you will be sent to suffer the ordeal of hell” (Beșalma).*

In the process of translation, some foreign words and expressions were simply rewritten, a thing that might be connected with poor knowledge of Moldavian/Romanian language by the translator. Later, the copyists distorted even more the words, which subsequently led to transformation of lexemes and of the meaning of the whole sentence (as an example can serve fragments that contain the word *pedepsele* and others).

So, in the Moldavian/Romanian variant, the given fragment reads as follows: *Atunci veți merge la mormintele morților și veți striga: Ieșiți voi morților din mormânturi să intrăm noi de vii, că nu mai putem răbda muncile și pedepsele ce ne-a trimis Dumnezeu / “Then you will go to the graves of the dead and you will cry: “The dead, come out of your graves to let us, those alive, to enter them as we cannot bear the ordeal and punishment that God sent on us anymore”.*

As we can see in some Gagauz variants the given lexeme is almost unrecognizable. What concerns the translation, then it coincides completely with the Moldavian/Romanian variant presented above.

Озаманъ гидедженисъ ёлюярин мезарларына да ба[а]радженис: Чыкын, ёлюяр, мезарын ичиндянь, гирелим бис – дириляр, зере даянамэ[э] рыс мункаяра хем недяпсолара, ани ёл[л]ады бизя Алла (Gaidari); Озаманъ гидедженис ёлюеринъ мезарларнаъ да ба[а]раженисъ: Чыкын, ёлюяръ,

мезарын ичиндянь, гирелимъ бизь – дириляр, зере даянамаерисъ мункалара хемъ недяпсалара, ани ёл[л]ады бизя Ал[ла]а (Cazaclia) / “Then you will go to the graves of the dead and you will cry: “The dead, come out of your graves to let us, those alive, to enter them as we cannot bear the ordeal and punishment that God sent on us anymore”.

Although one text from old Beșghioz compilation is written with many grammatical mistakes, however mainly this word is written correctly having the ending that corresponds to the rules of Gagauz language – *недяпсалара*.

The next fragment has a special meaning in the text. It represents an invocation in which the heaven origin of the letter is explained and the means it should be spread is stipulated. In the fragment, foreign lexemes are preserved (in the text they are underlined) that indicate “the first source” from which it was translated into the Gagauz language: *fiii* («сыновья»), *vor moșteni* («унаследуют»).

Și să știți că această epistolă nu este făcută din firea pământească, ci este din cer și am trimis-o pe la voi, creștinilor ca să vă părăsiți păcatele voastre și să faceți voia lui Dumnezeu, ca să fiți fiii luminii; iar vai de preotul sau de călugărul sau dascălul sau diaconul care nu o va citi înaintea oamenilor. și să o scrie și să o aibe tot omul în casa sa și să o trimeată și pe unde nu va fi, că de mare folos este în casa omului; iar vai de acela ce o va scrie și va lipsi vreun cuvânt dintr-însa, iar ferice de cei ce vor cumpăra această sfântă epistolă și o vor da de pomână: acelor oameni li se vor ierta păcatele și vor moșteni împărăția cerului de vor face poruncile lui Dumnezeu ca Avraam și ca Isaac și ca Iacob (mold./rom.).

What concerns the meaning of the given fragment that is present as well in Gagauzian epistles, then it almost coincides word by word with the Romanian text. In all variants are used lexemes such as – *фиюль* (“sons”), *моштина олур* (“will inherit”) (Gaidari), *фиюль, моштина олур* (Cazaclia), *фиул, муштина олур / моштитин олур* (Beșghioz).

Хем биясинис, ки бу кият ди[у]л[ъ] япылма топрак юстюндя инсандан, ама гёк юз[ю]ндянь ёланма, оласыныс фиюль дюн[н]едя. Хем вай, о показын хем калугерин, хем о даскалын, дяконун джанына, ангысы|да <...> олсун хер бир адамын евиндя да ёласын нерелярдя ёк зере бю[ю]к файдасы вар адамын евиндя олсун, хем геня ким язарса пропустит едырса, вай, бир слово онун ичиндянь, не мутлу джанына ким сатын алырса бу святой кихады да башиларса – о адамын гюнахлары прост олур, да моштина олур гёк юз[ю]ндя, хем тамана тутарсэ Ал[л]ахын лафларны, Аврамлан хем Исаклан, хем Яковлан... (Gaidari) / “And know that this epistle is not written by man on earth, but sent to you, Christian people, to make you leave your sins and comply with God’s

will to become sons on earth. Woe to that priest or monk or psalm-reader or deacon who will not read it to people. And it should be rewritten and it should be present in the house of each person and be sent to places that lack it as it is of great use to the house of a person who has it. Woe to the copyist who will miss a single word. Blessed is the man who will buy this sacred epistle and will make it a present as all their sins will be forgiven and he will inherit the Kingdom of Heaven if they comply with God's will as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob did".

The lexeme *moštenî* / *моштина* is frequently found in other fragments and other variants of Gagauz epistles: *Да ёля ёлыиджам рай ичиня олсун муштина вечникая; да моштина олур гёк юз[ю]ндя* (Gaidari); *ёлы[й]джам рай йчйня моштениит олсун вечника* (Beşghioz) and others / "I will send (that man, who will have the epistle) to Paradise and he will inherit the Kingdom of Heaven".

In general, all epistles in the Gagauz language are rich in lexemes and expressions that show connection with Moldavian/Romanian variants. With the passing of time, some of the borrowed words became part of the Gagauz language and their meaning is clear to ordinary people. For instance to denote the concept of "witness" the Gagauz people widely use the term *мартур*. This lexeme is equally used in both Romanian and Gagauz variant: *Pentru aceasta alergați la duhovnicii voștri de vă mărturisiti păcatele voastre iertate vor fi* (mold./rom.).

The content of this fragment is reflected in the Gagauz variant: *Да гезярсинь духовныларын ардына, мартурисин простедясин гюнахлармызы* (Gaidari); *да гезярсин духовнилярин ардына, мартурис едясинись гюнахларнызы* (Cazaclia); *да гезерсинис духевпоиларын (?) ардына мартурисит едясинис гёнахларнызы* (Beşghioz) / "Go to your confessors and confess your sins".

A special connection between Gagauz and Moldavian/Romanian Epistle about Lord's Day can be seen in one text from Beşalma compilation. The same formula of damnation addressed to Arianism is presented in it as in the Moldavian/Romanian text of The Epistle of Jesus Christ:

Аш олмас о адама кусар барсакларны нижя Аренин / "Damned will be that man and will puke their guts as an Arian" (Beşalma).

Anatema să fie acel om, si să se verse mâțele sale ca ale lui Arie [12].

It is supposed that in more recent Epistles about Lord's Day in the Gagauz language the given fragment was omitted due to historical irrelevance and complete blur of meaning of the given fragment to religious people of new age. We would like to point out that according to one of the main thesis of Arianism, Christ was created by God, and as a result has the beginning of his origin and is not equal to

God, that is to say Christ is not consubstantial with God. Arianism is a theological teaching of the IV–VI century AD. In 325, at the First Ecumenical Council, Arianism was condemned for heresy, and as creed (Nicene Creed) was adopted the doctrine about Trinity consubstantiality. Until the VI century, Arianism was the state religion of Germanic states [15].

The comparison of Epistles of Jesus Christ in Gagauz language (8 in number) shows that almost in all of them Moldavian/Romanian terms and expressions are present. The texts from Ceadir-Lunga compilation have the most accurate translation. Many Moldavian/Romanian lexemes are substituted with Gagauz synonyms, for instance: *зет* (instead of *мунка*), *евлатлары* (instead of *фиул*), *ёмюр единеджеклярь* (instead of *моштина олур*) and so on. However, it still contains some Moldavian/Romanian words, as for example *педяпсалара* and others.

It was possible to identify some mistakes of meaning, passing from one text to another with the help of Ceadir-Lunga and Moldavian/Romanian variants. Referring to "the first source", we can state that in Ceadir-Lunga texts, expressions that are characteristic to Moldavian/Romanian language (*мункада рьсина*) are sometimes present but as a rule, they are accompanied by the translation of their meaning into the Gagauz language. What concerns Russian words in Gagauz texts, we should take into account the fact that Moldavian/Romanian texts have the same amount of such words. On this basis, we can say that the apocryphal literature in Moldavian/Romanian language served as one of the sources of Slavic vocabulary into Gagauz religious texts.

Multiple rewriting of texts and illegible handwriting very frequently became the cause for changing the meaning and writing foreign lexemes. In many compilations, the illegible words were corrected by the copyist and instead of them words similar in sound to Gagauz ones were written that subsequently led to the transformation of the content of separate fragments, which passed from text to text. As a result, the texts were adapted through the prism of people's mind taking into account the moral and legal norms of Gagauz people.

Thereby, the lack of any kind of evidences in the statements of local Bessaraban clergy about the existence of apocryphal texts in the Gagauz language at the end of the XIX century proves the fact that the texts were translated into the Gagauz language later. The presence of many foreign borrowings in the Gagauz texts eloquently points to "the first source" of translated Gagauz texts from Moldavian/Romanian language. Moreover, in one of Beşghioz compilations the title of *The Epistle of Jesus Christ* and *The Epistle of Mother of Jesus* is preserved in the

Moldavian/Romanian language while the content of the rest of the text is translated into the Gagauz language: *Епистолия Домнулуй ностру Исус Христос че-о т[р]ймеск Думнезеу унсиу черю* / “The Epistle of Our Lord Jesus Christ, Sent from Heaven by God”, *Епистолия Майка Домнулуйя* / “The Epistle of Mother of Jesus”. The form of addressing to Jesus Christ coincides entirely with the form in the Romanian variant: *Доамне Исусе Христоасе, Домне Исусе Христосе* and so on.

Data provided by different sources indicate that a part of Gagauz population spoke Moldavian language and not other languages (partially the Bulgarian language, and before the end of the XIX century beginning of the XX century the Russian language). In addition, the presence of foreign vocabulary in Gagauz texts points to the ethnical environment from which these texts appeared as a result of intense ethno-cultural contacts. Due to some objective factors, the Gagauz environment happened to be a fertile ground that accepted and carefully preserved the Moldavian (and Russian) apocryphal heritage. Despite the common structure and content of the texts, Gagauz texts absorbed the peculiarities of the Gagauz language and people's views, representing independent variants of these testimonials.

In general, we can say that the systematization and analysis of the material, in the framework of previously unexplored sphere of the spiritual culture of the Gagauz people, gives us opportunity not only to study their religious notions of good and evil, virtue and sin and of the other world more profoundly, but also gives the possibility to look in a new light at the process of ethno-cultural interaction of the Gagauz people with neighbouring nations that took place on the territory of Bessarabia in the XIX – XX centuries.

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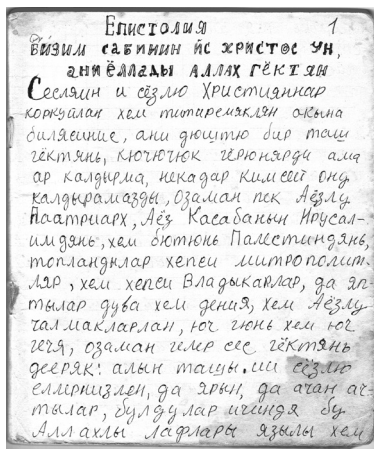


Foto 1. “The Epistle of Our Lord Jesus Christ, Sent From Heaven by God” (Ceadir-Lunga)

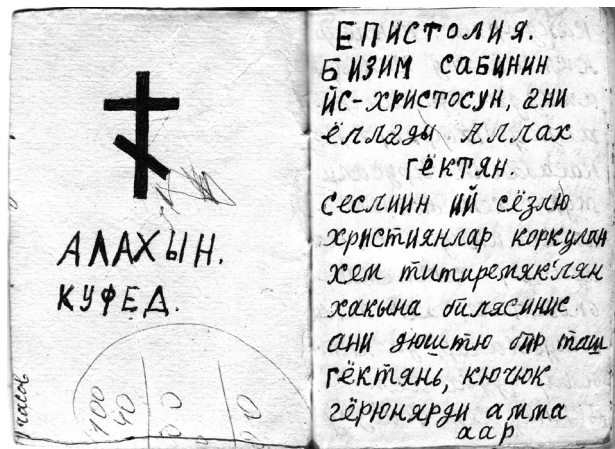


Foto 2. “The Epistle of Our Lord Jesus Christ, Sent From Heaven by God” (Beshgioz)

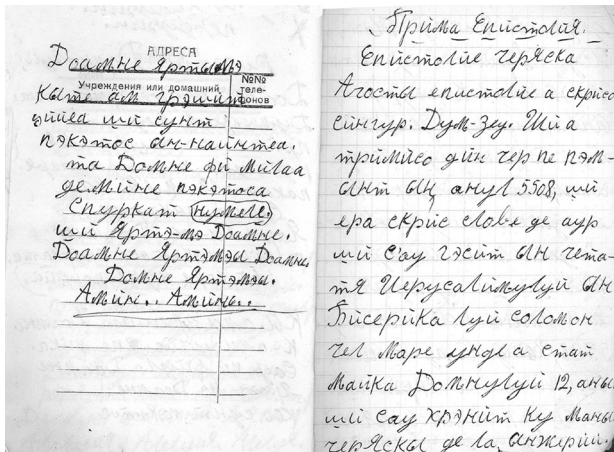


Foto 3. “The Epistle About Lord’s Day” (Comrat)