

## **Book Review: *Thesaurus of Judeo-Tat (Juhuri) Language of the Mountain Jews of the Caucasus* by Rabbi Ya‘akov Itzhaki**

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*Rabbi Ya‘akov Itzhaki, Thesaurus of Judeo-Tat (Juhuri) Language of the Mountain Jews of the Caucasus*, edited with an Introduction and Notes by Michael Zand (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute for the Study of Jewish Communities in the East, Yad Itzhak Ben-Zvi and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2016).<sup>1</sup>

Judeo-Tat / Juhuri is an Iranian language spoken by the native Jews of Daghestan and some other localities in the northern Caucasus, as well as in the northern part of the Republic of Azerbaijan. These communities are generally referred to as “mountain Jews,” a name given to them by Russian Imperial officials in order to distinguish them legally from the other (mostly Ashkenazi) Jews of the Empire, after the Russians had conquered the territories of Qajar Iran where these Jews lived between 1802 and 1828.

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<sup>1</sup>This small Hebrew book is the result of decades of work by the late Professor Michael Zand (1927-2018), may his memory be blessed. The book was published shortly before his death. The book is essentially an edition of a dictionary of the Judeo-Tati / Juhuri language with translations into Hebrew, written probably in the late 1870s, and Zand’s extensive notes on the entries.

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By most of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, they were calling their language “Persian”; during the Soviet era, “Tati”;<sup>2</sup> and now the preferred name is “Juhuri” (literally, “Jewish”; note the rhoticism which goes back to an earlier linguistic form of their language).

Modern Judeo-Tat / Juhuri is definitely a language of its own, distinct from Persian on many levels; and yet linguists describe it alongside the Persian of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Tajiki of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, and the Dari-Kabuli of Afghanistan. The modern Judeo-Tat / Juhuri was engineered by Soviet linguists in 1920s and 1930s, and our knowledge of the older strata of this language is rather limited though not non-existent;<sup>3</sup> the present book closes the gap to a great extent as it reflects the language of Derbend’s Jews in the 1870s.

To complicate matters further, along with the Judeo-Tat and the Tati dialects studied by Yarshater, there is another continuum of dialects also called Tat which are / were spoken by Shi‘a and Sunni Muslims, and (in the past) by Armenians in the northeastern region of the Republic of Azerbaijan (and in Daghestan).<sup>4</sup> They were seen by scholars as lying somewhere between Persian dialects and the Caspian languages. There was a constant decline in the number of speakers due to Turkification and assimilation into Azeri identity of the Republic of Azerbaijan, however there is now a small revivalist movement found mostly on the internet. As for the speakers of Judeo-Tat / Juhuri, the majority of them now live in Israel, the USA, Canada, and in the Russian Federation. It is an endangered language.

The author of the dictionary was Rabbi Ya‘aqov Yiṣṣḥaqī, who was born in Derbend in Daghestan in 1846 and passed away in Jerusalem from

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<sup>2</sup>The name of the language has very little to do with the Tati dialects of the northern Islamic Republic of Iran which have been studied in Ehsan Yarshater, *A Grammar of Southern Tati Dialects*, Median Dialect Studies I (The Hague and Paris: Mouton and Co., 1969).

<sup>3</sup>See V. Miller, *Materialy dlja izučenija jevrejsko-tatskogo jazyka, Vvedenije, teksty i slovar’* (Sankt-Peterburg: 1892); see also, *Jevrejsko-tatskije mā‘nī*, *Zapiski Vostočnogo otdelenija imperatorskogo ruskago arxeologičeskago obščestva*, t. 21, 1911-1912 (Sankt-Peterburg, 1913).

<sup>4</sup>A.L. Griunberg, *Jazyk severoazerbajdžanskix tatov*, Izdatel’stvo Akademii Nauk SSSR (Moscow, 1963). It is called *zuhun tati, farsi, parsi*.

hunger and misery during the Young Turks' *seferberlik*, shortly before the city was liberated by the British army, in the early summer of 1917. From 1868, Yiṣḥaqī served as the Chief Rabbi of Derbend and Daghestan. He spent time in the Land of Israel first in 1876, then in 1887, and finally established himself there in 1907. In that year, he and a group of Mountain Jews from Daghestan, along with some other Jews, established an agricultural settlement on land bought from a Lutheran German community; this is now the town of Be'er Ya'aqov, "the well of Jacob," named after the rabbi and author of the edited dictionary under review.

During his life, Yiṣḥaqī penned several religious and historical compositions in Hebrew, but also wrote an article in Russian for the Ministry of Interior. He worked with the prominent Russian-German Iranist Bernhard Dorn (1805-1881), and with Abraham Harkavy (1835-1919), the great scholar of Jewish manuscripts, both of whom stressed to the author that the translations of his dictionary entries should be in Russian (or German), and not in Hebrew, in order to make his work accessible to those who did not read the language.<sup>5</sup> And indeed, though Naftaly-Ṣebi / Nikolay Anisimov (1886-1966), himself a Mountain Jew and a scholar, gave a lecture at a Moscow institution in 1926-27 about "the Yiṣḥaqī's Manuscript of the Judeo-Tat-Russian Dictionary," nothing is known about this manuscript.<sup>6</sup> However, it seems that there was not only a Hebrew version of the dictionary, but a Russian one, too. Dorn asked the author to compose a Tati grammar in Russian, too, and in Yiṣḥaqī's notebooks there are traces of the initial stages of this work.<sup>7</sup>

In 1975, Yiṣḥaq Yiṣḥaqī, the son of the author, donated two of his father's notebooks to the Ben-Zvi Institute for the Study of Jewish Communities in the East, an institution established by the second President

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<sup>5</sup>Rabbi Ya'akov Itzhaki, *Thesaurus of Judeo-Tat (Juhuri) Language of the Mountain Jews of the Caucasus*, edited with an Introduction and Notes by Michael Zand (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute for the Study of Jewish Communities in the East, Yad Itzhak Ben-Zvi and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2016), 21.

<sup>6</sup>Itzhaki, *Thesaurus*, 23.

<sup>7</sup>Itzhaki, *Thesaurus*, 16.

of Israel, Yiṣṣhak ben Zvī, who had been Yiṣṣhaq Yiṣṣhaqī's friend since their days in Ottoman Istanbul where they were both students. The book under review is the product of Professor Michael Zand's decades-long study of these notebooks. The structure of the work indicates the extensive research and synthesis of its contents. The book's table of contents is in Hebrew only. The preface, written in 1976 by Yiṣṣhaq Yiṣṣhaqī, the son of the author, is found on pp. 9-12; the introduction, pp. 13-27; the thesaurus proper, pp. 31-71; the notes, pp. 73-149; a list of abbreviations used in the notes to the dictionary, pp. 151-153; a list of abbreviations used in the MS, p. 155; and the bibliography, pp. 157-161.

Some examples of the entries in the dictionary (elucidated by Zand in his extensive notes):

*nifri*, “curse”; *asb*,<sup>8</sup> “horse”; *ajal*,<sup>9</sup> “death”; *aqraba*, “relations”; *qadā*, “disaster”; *qarib*, “proselyte/stranger”<sup>10</sup>; *šovar*, “a wife's husband” (Persian: *šawhar*); *šafaqat*, “mercy”<sup>11</sup>; *manqal*, “grill”; *kaqāz*, “paper”; *kayf*, “delight, party”; *nasus*, “pump”, from Russian *nasos*; *mīḥanaf*, “sycophant”, a “fully assimilated” Hebraism; *maqbul*, “sadness, worry”, a strange meaning of the word though attested in Tati sources collected by Griunberg; *xilix*, “a wild boar's jaws”, from Turkic; *yort*, “property, inheritance”, from Turkic; *yašāv*, “rest, calmness”, apparently, a local Hebraism; *yad*, “alien, enemy”, from Turkic *yat*; *yāqi*, “enemy” (*yāḡī*); *ḥarōm*, “forbidden”; *zarrab*, “money changer” (*šarrāf*); *zīvan*, “damage, loss” (*ziyān*); *was*, “enough” (*bas*); *wasāl*, “spring”; *wa'dā*, “time”, an old Aramaic word appearing in Judeo-Persian and Judeo-Middle-Qıpčaq. As well, there are quite a number of Turkic words; some words in the dictionary are also rendered in Arabic, like *mīxag*, “clove”, which is “*qaranfīl* in Arabic”;<sup>12</sup> and Zand suggested that these are reminders of the author's life in the Holy Land.

<sup>8</sup>Note the use of the *'Ayin*, frequent in the spelling of this word in Judeo-Persian.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>This meaning is also attested in Judeo-Middle-Qıpčaq.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Itzhaki, *Thesaurus*, 22, 111.

This work is the final academic legacy of Professor Michael Zand, a great scholar of Persian and Tajiki poetry and literatures and the rich cultures of the Oriental Jewish communities of Greater Iran and the former Soviet Union.