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Clerical Agency and the Politics of Scriptural Translation: The 'Canonisation' of the Gagauz Language in Southern Bessarabia

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The status of scripture within Christianity is a complex matter. Things are further complicated by the politics of language that surround sacred texts. The history of Christianity around the globe is full of instances of local languages being elevated, through scriptural translation, to literary status. Christianity is somewhat unique amongst religions in this regard. Acts of translation by Christian clerical elites and missionaries have helped set many ethnic groups on the road to nationhood.[1] Ethno-religious forms of minority identity abound in Central and Eastern Europe and these identities often have a strong linguistic component. Religious institutions and hierarchies, and particularly Christian Churches, have historically played an instrumental role in increasing the linguistic capital of local and regional communities through the translation of sacred scripture into the vernacular. The Gagauz community of southern Bessarabia presents one such case.

This paper aims to highlight the political implications of the translation of Christian scripture and liturgy into the languages of minority peoples. I will focus on the agency of the clergy and trace developments in the religious field that contributed to the emergence of an ethno-national movement amongst the Gagauz with a powerful religious symbolic base. The production, and the subsequent reception in the community, of vernacular language scripture and liturgy, I will argue, was *the* critical formative step towards the ethno-religious form of national identity that we find amongst the Gagauz of southern Bessarabia.

Firstly, I will speak more generally about the 'canonisation' of vernacular languages in the history of Orthodox Christianity and the relationship between sacred languages and linguistic capital.[2] I will then go on to describe the linguistic context

[1] A. Hastings cited in P. Gifford, 'The Bible as Political Document in Africa', in *Scriptural Politics: The Bible and Koran as Political Models in the Middle East and Africa*, London: Hurst & Company, 2003, p. 27. Benedict Anderson links the decline of transnational sacred communities to the rise of vernacular languages that pluralized the bases of sacred communities through education, increased literacy and the advent of printing. See B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, London and New York: Verso, 1983, pp. 12-19.

[2] My use of term the 'canonisation of language' was inspired by J. F. A. Sawyer, *Sacred Languages and Sacred Texts*, London and New York: Routledge, 1999**,** p. 25.

within which a canonical Gagauz scripture and liturgy emerged. Finally, I will discuss how the Gagauz language today represents a symbolic augmentation of Gagauz religious and political identity rather than a practical promotion of the local idiom. I highlight how the Gagauz language operates within the hierarchy of languages in the complex local milieu and how the various languages of Orthodoxy in Southern Moldova, Russian, Church Slavonic, Romanian and Gagauz, each possess differing qualities and quantities of religious 'capital', the result of the historically contested status of the Orthodox Churches in the region.

1. Sacred Language and Linguistic Capital

The translation of religious materials from the classical sacred languages of early Christianity, Greek and Latin, into local vernaculars was already widespread by the fourth century. Scriptural translations into Coptic, as far as we know, formed the first major literary achievement in that language and the translations of the books of the Bible elevated it from the vernacular of the illiterate masses to the sacred language of the Coptic Church. The Armenian script was devised around the year 400 CE and was first used to translate scripture from both Greek and Syriac with the aim of elevating Armenian to a similar status.[3]

Later, in the Orthodox east, translation was used as a tool by missionaries in their efforts to convert non-Christian peoples on the periphery of empire. In the ninth century, Cyril and Methodius devised the Glagolitic script (from which Cyrillic was soon developed) in order to translate the gospels and liturgy into Slavonic. Despite Pope Hadrian II's endorsement of Cyril and Methodius' Slavonic mission, attitudes within the Western and Eastern branches of the Church had begun to diverge with regards to the language of scripture and liturgy. Latin clerics argued that only Latin, Greek and Hebrew were suitable languages for the liturgy, a view that later became official Church dogma. This would seem to mark out an essential difference between Roman Catholic attitudes and Orthodox practice with regard to language. However, things were not so clear-cut. When Russian language Bibles first began to appear in the 1820s under the supervision of the Imperial Russian Bible Society, there was much resistance to their introduction as many senior clergy and monastics felt that

[3] Ibid., p. 78-79.

Church Slavonic was the only (Slavonic) language 'consecrated by ancient usage'. In much the same way as Greek, Latin and Hebrew, Church Slavonic came to take on the characteristics of a sacred language, a status that it retains to this day.

Work on the Russian Bible was only resumed when a less conservative Tsar, Alexander II, ascended the throne in 1855. Significantly, the Russian Church hierarchy did not object to the continued publication of sacred scriptures in other languages of the empire.[4] As early as the fourteenth century, the Russian Church had engaged in scriptural translation as part of its missionary work amongst the Finno-Ugric and Turkic peoples of the Russian North and East. Stephen of Perm (1340-96) devised a Zyrian alphabet and translated scripture and liturgy into the vernacular. From the sixteenth century on, in the wake of the Russian conquest of the Khanates of Kazan and Astrakhan, the Russian Church also turned its attention to the conversion of Muslim peoples. These efforts involved a combination of enforced conversion, economic coercion and persuasive tactics, such as the granting of special privileges. Under Peter the Great (1682-1725) education became one of the principle tools of conversion and a programme to train a native Orthodox Priesthood was initiated.[5] Coercive methods were never abandoned fully, but by the nineteenth century an emphasis was placed on education in the native languages of converts. For example, a catechism had appeared in the Tartar language as early as 1803.[6] By 1812 the Imperial Russian Bible society had been founded in association with the British and Foreign Bible Society, with the aim of building on earlier efforts and making the scriptures available in all the various languages of the empire. Despite these moves, the inherent conservatism within some powerful quarters in the Russian Orthodox Church ensured that the Church Slavonic liturgy was not threatened or displaced by vernacular languages.

It is not my intention here to discuss the situation in the Latin Church, where despite numerous pressures, the Church resisted the use of languages other than Latin and Greek in liturgical life until the 1960s.[7] The Protestant Reformation of course

[4] See G. Hosking, *Russia: People and Empire 1552-1917*, London: Harper Collins, 1997, pp. 138-142.
[5] A. Rorlich, *The Volga Tartars: A Profile of National Resilience*, Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1986, p. 40.
[6] ibid., p. 44.
[7] One notable exception to this is the case of Croatia where the use of Church Slavonic was permitted in the liturgy for much of its history.

brought to much of Europe an entirely new attitude towards the Bible and a complete reassessment of its place within the Christian tradition. Bible-centred forms of Christianity that have their roots in the Reformation, such as the Baptist churches, Adventists and more recently Pentecostal churches, developed a far more open and flexible approach to the translation, dissemination and use of scripture. Catherine Wanner, in her study of evangelical missions in Ukraine, has suggested that 'The strong emphasis on Scripture and its interpretation provides an authentic historical tradition and possibilities for local adaptation.'[8] Increased contact and competition between the Orthodox Churches of Eastern Europe and transnational Evangelical Protestant Christian groups has highlighted the considerable sociolinguistic and religious consequences of maintaining the use of languages with a sacred status. Whereas evangelical Christianity can be characterised by its adaptability in the linguistic sphere, Orthodoxy appears inherently conservative with regards to language. As we shall see below, the case of the Gagauz serves well to illustrate this point.

In order for a language to have sacred status its use has to be legitimized by a religious institution or community. I use the term 'canonization' to refer to this process of bringing languages within the 'rule' of the Church; that is, through the process of translating scripture and liturgy into a vernacular language, an authorised and sacred form of that language, with appropriate script, terminology, and mode of expression, comes into being. Sanctified by the Church, this form of the language takes on symbolic meaning within the religious community.

The notion that a language can generate 'capital' for a speech community originates with Pierre Bourdieu.[9] He draws attention to the complex processes that result in a language or set of linguistic practices emerging as dominant in a particular historical context. In European history this has often been linked to the formation of nation-states.[10] The knowledge and deployment of the dominant or legitimate language in situations gives the speaker authority and power. As holders of linguistic capital, agents have the chance to amass material or symbolic profit.[11] Religious institutions and elites play an important role in defining the legitimate use of language,

[8] C. Wanner, 'Advocating New Moralities: Conversion to Evangelicalism in Ukraine,' in *Religion, State and Society*, 31:3 (2003), p. 276.
[9] On the nature and uses of the term 'linguistic capital' see P. Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992.
[10] J. B. Thompson, 'Introduction', in Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, p. 5.
[11] Bourbieu, *Language*, p. 51.

both within and beyond the confines of the religious sphere. In this sense, the translation of scripture and liturgy invariably becomes a political as well as religious act. Translating scripture, therefore, can be socially and politically transformative or even subversive. The particular kind of linguistic capital that arises from the canonisation of vernacular languages, I will argue, results in a language carrying a status and resonance beyond the speech community and results in the accumulation of what I term, following Bourdieu, 'symbolic linguistic capital'.

As the title of this paper suggests, I am also concerned here with the agency of clerical elites and their ability, through acts of translation of scripture and the performance of liturgical rites, to shape broader political and social changes. I aim to highlight how, through religiously motivated and formulated acts, members of the clergy produce symbolic capital that aids the emergence of national movements and the political mobilization of minority groups.

2. The Gagauz and Orthodoxy

The Gagauz of Bessarabia are a Turkish speaking Orthodox Christian population that settled in their present home in the Budjak steppe region of what is today the Republic of Moldova during the Russo-Turkish wars of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[12] They arrived as part of a major colonisation programme initiated by the Russian imperial authorities intended to permanently secure the region from Ottoman control. Settlers arrived in the region from all over the eastern Balkans between 1776 and 1840. In the course of the twentieth century in their new homeland, which they shared with an extremely diverse array of other ethnic groups including Bulgarians, Germans, Ukrainians, Moldovans and Albanians, the Gagauz emerged as a distinct ethno-religious component. By the 1930s, a Gagauz national consciousness was being articulated by an educated elite, principally the result of initiatives taken within the religious sphere. Following the Second World War, Bessarabia was incorporated into the Soviet Union, with the Gagauz communities falling mainly within the Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic. With the break up of the Soviet Union, the Gagauz resisted incorporation within the newly independent Republic of Moldova. Following a brief armed confrontation between Moldovan and Gagauz militias, they were eventually

[12] Smaller groups of Gagauz can be found today in Bulgaria, Greece and Romania. These communities are beyond the scope of this article.

granted wide-ranging territorial, cultural and political autonomy in 1994. The Gagauz Autonomous region, officially referred to as *Unitatea Teritorială Autonomă Găgăuzia* or UTAG for short, also commonly referred to as *Gagauziya*, is home to a population of 155,646 according to the 2004 Moldovan census, of which 127,835 are recorded as ethnic Gagauz.

The Gagauz initially attracted much interest from historians and ethnographers due to the combination of a Christian Orthodox religious heritage and a Turkish linguistic identity. Whilst they remained within the Ottoman Empire their Christian identity tied them legally and administratively to their Orthodox Greek and Bulgarian neighbours. The Gagauz, however, are Turkic speaking, their language is the closest Turkic language to the Turkish of modern Turkey and to the Turkish spoken in the Balkans during the Ottoman Empire. This dual identity has led to much speculation regarding their origins, not least amongst the Gagauz themselves. Gagauz historiography has therefore traditionally concentrated on the ethno-genesis of the Gagauz, with special concern shown for the possible time and place of conversion of the Gagauz to Christianity, key to which is a complicated history of migrations and settlement.[13]

Mihail Çakir (1864-1938), the principle figure I will be referring to in this paper, is considered the founder of the Gagauz national movement and the father of Gagauz letters. From the early years of the twentieth century, as a priest in the Orthodox Church, he embarked on translating the entire Orthodox canon into the Gagauz language. Alongside his translation and publication activity, he became a central figurehead for the Gagauz community during the inter-war period in Greater Romania when, through publications on Gagauz history and traditions (he was the first to attempt to synthesize the various strands of scholarship on Gagauz origins and ethnogenesis for a Gagauz audience), he represented the Gagauz community to a Romanian readership.[14]

Gagauz identity can be characterised by a central dichotomy that exists between Orthodox Christianity on the one hand, and a Turkish linguistic heritage, which carries historical and cultural associations with Islam, on the other. This was

[13] For an overview see S. Bulgar, *Istoriya i Kultura Gagauzov*, Komrat & Kishinev: Pontus, 2006, pp. 8-31.

[14] For an overview of Mihail Çakir's role in both the Church and ethnic politics during this period see. J. Kapaló, "The Career of Father Mihail Çakir (1861-1838) – The Cyril and Methodius of the Gagauz," *Solanus* 21 (2007): 5-18.

partly the product of a national discourse that identified both religion and language as the central touchstones of identity. The Turkish language acquires its religious significance in the case of the Gagauz due to its ambivalent status in relation to Christianity. Therefore, religion and the linguistic dimension of Gagauz ethno-religious feeling are central to understanding the trajectory of the Gagauz national movement.[15]

I have addressed the issue of this dichotomy in a previous publication, which examined the relationship between the Romanian national projects and the emergence of Gagauz national consciousness in inter-war Romania.[16] In that paper, I argued that Çakir's work and writings were instrumental in generating a Gagauz national consciousness that was primarily moulded by the concerns of the Orthodox Church at the time. The various allegiances he formed allowed him to negotiate the difficult political rivalries between Russia and Romania, whilst at the same time forging close ties with Kemalist Turkey. The building blocks of Gagauz national identity that were laid by Çakir in the first three decades of the twentieth century were revived and assimilated into an emergent Gagauz political identity in the post-Soviet era.

In this paper, I will focus more closely on Çakir's translation of scripture and liturgy and the subsequent reception of the Gagauz language into Orthodox religious

[15] In my use of the terms 'national movement' and 'national consciousness', I agree largely with Hroch who posits that relations between group members remain 'relatively constant' and take on a stable character within objective social relations. The essential characteristics of the nation can therefore be sought in the plurality of social relations, including the religious, linguistic, political etc. 'National consciousness' - and its expression in the form of 'national movements' - in this light, should be seen as a dialectical relationship between concrete existential conditions and social relations and the awareness or aprehension by individual agents of his/her situatedness in this particular web of relations. By approaching the formation of nations in this way, emphasis is shifted from inventaries of 'national traits' to social relations and their negotiation, emergence and definition across religious, linguistic, political and economic boundaries, none of which are fixed. See M. Hroch, *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe: A Comparative Analysis of the Social Composition of Patriotic Groups among the Smaller European Nations*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985, pp. 3-13. In relation to the role of ethnic boundaries see F. Barthes, (ed.) *Ethnic groups and boundaries*, Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1969.

[16] J. Kapalo, 'Clerical Agency and the Development of Gagauz National Consciousness in Greater Romania', in T. Georgescu and R. Chris Davis (eds), *Greater Romania's National Projects: International Dilemmas, Ethnic Classification, and Political Instrumentalisation of Ethnic Minority Identity*, Budapest/New York: CEU Press, (forthcoming 2010).

life. I begin by describing the linguistic situation in the Orthodox Church when Çakir began his translation work at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth century. I then discuss the interwar period in Greater Romania when Çakir's project was challenged by the Romanianization of the Church in Bessarabia. Finally, I will discuss the current position of the Gagauz language in liturgical and religious life and relate this to broader questions regarding the symbolic status of the Orthodox Church in contemporary Gagauz society and the political and social significance of the canonization of the Gagauz idiom.

3. The Gagauz language and Orthodoxy

The colonists who arrived in Bessarabia in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century from the Balkans spoke a variety of languages.[17] The liturgical language of these largely Orthodox peoples would have been either Greek, for those originating on the western seaboard of the Black Sea, or Church Slavonic, for communities from further inland. We know very little about religious life amongst the Gagauz in the first century of settlement. It is only in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century that we have reports, which indicate that the Gagauz were ignorant of Russian and that this was causing some concern for the local Russian or Russophile clergy in southern Bessarabia.[18] The Russian army general turned ethnographer, V. A. Moshkov, wrote in 1900, 'The weakest element of Gagauz religious life is that the Church religious service is conducted in unknown languages, in Old Church Slavonic and Moldavian'.[19] Moshkov also suggested that the Gagauz themselves were keen to overcome this linguistic barrier to greater engagement with their faith. He reports the use of *Karamanlı* Turkish language Christian literature in Gagauz homes and also witnessed it being used in Church services. Some local priests, according to Moshkov, encouraged the use of this literature in order to facilitate greater engagement on the part the parishioners in the service. He also remarks at the delight of the congregation

[17] In large parts of the Eastern Balkans, from where the Bulgarians, Albanians, Gagauz and other nationalities migrated to the Budjak, Turkish operated as a lingua franca and may even have continued to do so amongst the colonists in the early years of the settlement in the Budjak.

[18] C. Clark, *Bessarabia: Russia and Roumania on the Black Sea*, New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1927, p. 103.

[19] Quoted in S. Bulgar, *Stranitsy Istorii i Literatury gagauzov XIX-nach. XX vv.*, Kishinov: Pontus, 2005, p. 10.

on hearing the Lord's Prayer and the Symbol of the Faith recited in *Karamanlı* Turkish.[20]

Karamanlı, also known as *Karamanlidika*, is Turkish language literature written with Greek characters. Published from the early eighteenth through to the twentieth century in Istanbul and some European centres, including Odessa and the Danube Principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia, this largely religious themed literature was produced to satisfy the desire of Turkish speaking Orthodox Christians for literature in their mother tongue.[21] The language of this literature, despite its distinct name, conforms very closely to the standard literary Ottoman Turkish of the period of publication, and is therefore generally not considered to be a separate language or even a dialect discrete from the Anatolian Turkish of the Muslim majority. However, it is quite different from the spoken Turkish idiom that was used by the Gagauz and would have been only partially intelligible to Gagauz readers. However, according to Moshkov, the Gagauz prized their *Karamanlı* literature very highly, not least because of its rarity.[22] The Russian linguist Lyudmila Pokrovskaya suggests that *karamanlı* literature had a profound influence on Gagauz religious terminology supplying the Arabic and Persian religious terms that today constitute about one third of the religious terminology of the Gagauz language.[23] However, if we are believe

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[20] From V. Moshkov, *Gagauzy Benderskogo Uezda (Etnograficheskoe obozrenie)*, Moscow, 1900, p. 42, quoted in Bulgar, 'Stranitsy Istorii', 2005, p. 5. Ivanova, in a brief discussion of language use amongst the Gagauz of Varna, cites some evidence to suggest that the Gagauz in Bulgaria had access to *Karamanlı* religious literature in the pre-Besarabian period. See S. Ivanova, 'Varna during the Late Middle Ages – Regional versus National History', *Études Balkaniques*, 2 (2004), pp. 129-130.

[21] For a full survey of the *karamanlı* literature see. E. Balta, 'Périodisation et typologie de la production des livres karamamlı' in F. Hitzel (ed.), *Livres et lecture dans le monde ottoman, Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée*, no. 87-88 (1999), pp. 251-75. On the publication of Karamanli literature in the Romanian principalities see D. Simonescu, 'Impression de Livres Arabes et Karamanlis en Valachie et en Moldavie au XVIII Siècle', *Studia et Acta Orientalia*, V-VI (1967), pp. 49-75.

[22] From Moshkoff, 'Gagauzy Benderskogo Uezda', 1900, p. 42, quoted in Bulgar, *Stranitsy Istorii*, p. 5. See L. Pokrovskaya, 'Musulmanskie elementi v sisteme hristianskoí religioznoíí terminologii gagauzov', *Sovetskaya Etnografiya*, 1 (1974), pp. 139-144.

[23] L. Pokrovskaya, 'Musulmanskie elementi v sisteme hristianskoí religioznoíí terminologii gagauzov', *Sovetskaya Etnografiya*, 1 (1974), pp. 139-144. For a comprehansive discussion of the etymology of Gagauz relifious terminology see N. L. Luka, *O proiskhozhdenii narodnoi religiosnoi i kalendarnoi termonologii наречий gagauzov Bessarabii*, Kishinev: Tipografia Centrală, 2009.

Moshkov's reports, *karamanlı* literature did not play a significant part in Gagauz religious life and the books, as well as those that were able to read them, were extremely rare.

On the other hand, from Gagauz religious folklore it is evident that some of the themes that appear in the *Karamanlı* literature became very popular amongst the Gagauz. The biblical narratives of 'Josef the son of Jacob', 'Sacrifice of Isaac', as well as the popular verse about 'Aleksius the Man of God', which appear in the *Karamanlı* literature of the 19th century, all found their way into Gagauz religious folk songs that are still widely known today.[24] A few rare examples of *Karamanlı* literature can still be found in *Gagauziya* in the possession of parish priests, villagers and at the local history museum in the village of *Beşalma*.[25] Despite the fact that *Karamanlı* books had a limited circulation amongst the Gagauz of Bessarabia this literature nevertheless appears to have influenced local religious life and certainly acted as an inspiration and source of linguistic material for the next stage in the development of a Gagauz scriptural and liturgical language.[26]

It was in this context that the Gagauz Priest Mihail Çakir embarked on an ambitious project to translate the entire Orthodox Christian canon into the language of his people. His efforts are first mentioned by Moshkov, who noted in 1895 that Çakir was translating the Gospels into Gagauz.[27] Later, following efforts to sponsor the use of the Romanian language in education, Çakir turned his attention to the linguistic problems faced by his own people. In 1906 he was made president of the 'Special Commission for Translation and Education of the Gagauz of Bessarabia' and embarked on the translation of all the essential liturgical texts and several extracts from scripture into the Gagauz language.[28] Çakir was part of a tiny educated Gagauz elite and for much of his life and career he lived in the capital of Bessarabia far from

[24] For a brief account of these themes as they appear in the religious folk songs of the Gagauz see E. Kvilinkova, *Moldova Gagauzların Halk Türküleri*, Chişinău: Pontus, 2003.
[25] The author also discovered a fragment of a handwritten copy of 'Aleksios the Man of God', which had been transcribed into Cyrillic dating from the first decades of the 20th century. The text appears to be a direct copy of a *Karamanlı* original and maintains its *Karamanlı* linguistic features (notebook of Fyodor Fydorovich Stoykov, village of *Tomay* [undated]).
[26] Bulgar, *Stranitsy Istorii*, p. 15.
[27] S. Bulgar, 'Mihail Çakırın Biografiyasi', in M. Çakir, *Gagauzlar: Istoriya, Adetlär, Dil hem Din*, Pontos: Chişinău, 2007, p. 17.
[28] I. Şpac, 'Un credincios al Basarabiei', *Luminatorul*, Nr. 5, (2001), p. 43.

the Gagauz communities of the south. However, working alongside him, as part of a team of translators, there appear to have been other junior Gagauz churchmen.[29]

The initiative to translate scripture into the Gagauz idiom may appear surprisingly late, given the earlier efforts of the Russian Orthodox Church to translate the Bible and liturgy into other Turkic and Siberian languages of the empire. In the case of these other peoples, this was done in order to assist the Church's efforts at conversion, which had become a priority for both Church and state as the empire expanded to include an ever larger number of Muslims and pagan animists; of course, in relation to the Gagauz, this vital motive was absent, as the Gagauz were already a community established in the Orthodox faith. The Gagauz were also located on the empire's western borders in traditionally Christian lands rather than in the politically and religiously contested regions of the Caucasus and Central Asia.

In the introduction to the reprint of his 1909 translation to the Gospel of Matthew, Çakir reveals his motivation for having undertaken the mammoth task of translating the Christian scriptures into the Gagauz language.

> It is because our ancestors, fathers, mothers, who didn't know how to read, went to the monasteries and requested that the monks should read the advice of the New Testament and listened with all their soul. What joy for the Gagauz of today who know how to read! What joy for the Gagauz of today that can read for themselves from the Holy Gospel, God's words in the Gagauz language; and also find new help in difficulty and times of trouble.[30]

The volumes published in Çakir's name include the following: 'The History of the Saints of the Old Testament', 'Short Prayer Book', 'The Gospel according to Matthew', 'The Gospel According to Mark', 'The Psalter', 'The Acathists of the Mother of God', 'The Holy Liturgy', and 'The Hours'.[31] Çakir was also responsible

[29] I found reference to one member of Çakir's team in a notebook discovered during my fieldwork in the village of *Tomay* in 2006. The following was written on the inside cover of the notebook: 'Translated from Moldavian-Russian into Gagauz by *Psalomşik* Stefan Grozav member of the translation mission. 1911.'

[30] 'Evangheliei ocueadjac Gagauzlara nasaat sioziu' reprinted in S. Bulgar, *Stranitsy Istorii*, p. 272.

[31] The following are bibliographical details of all the liturgical and scriptural translations that Çakir published between 1908 and 1936 in chronological order: *Kratkii Slavyano-Gagauzskii Molitvennik: Kısa dua kitabı: Slavänca (hem) Gagauzça*, Kishinev: Hristosun Doumasının Doorusaltanatlı Kişnoflu Kardaşlıın Tiparı, 1908; *Liturgiya*, Kishinev: Pechatano v Kishinevskoi Eparhialnoi Tipografii, 1911; *Svyatsennaya Istoria Vetkhago zav'ta: Eski Baalantının Ayozları İstoriyası*, Kishinev:

for the publication of the Gagauz language Orthodox newspaper *Hakikatın Sesi* (The Voice of Truth), which appeared from about 1907 into the 1930s and gives us an important insight into the religious and political ideas that occupied Çakir at the time.[32] Today, due to his efforts to create a Gagauz liturgical language and his prolific translation work, Mihail Çakir is referred to as the 'Cyril and Methodius' of the Gagauz and is honoured annually in Schools and Colleges throughout *Gagauziya*.

The literary form that Çakir's liturgical Gagauz took is suffused with Arabic and Persian terms. As already mentioned, he was certainly influenced by *Karamanlı* literature but he also introduced some innovations in the form of composite terms and expressions that he devised himself. Initially, during the first period of publications, from 1906 to approximately 1916, he employed a Cyrillic script based on Russian. At this time, he also first used the term *Eski Türkçe* or Old Turkish along side *Gagauzça*, to refer to the Gagauz language.

4. The Problem of Liturgical Turkish

Turkish is a language closely associated with Islam. Consequently, historically, we have some evidence that during the Ottoman Empire there was resistance from the Orthodox Church towards the use of Turkish in liturgical life. This was despite the existence of a large *Karamanlı* Turcophone Orthodox population in Cappadocia, Istanbul and other centres in Asia Minor. The attitude of Orthodox clergy towards the Turkish language is reflected in cases cited by Richard Clogg in his study of *Karamanlı* Christians in Asia Minor, in which he suggests that 'there appears to have

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Eparhialnaya Tipografiya, 1911; *Svyatsennaya Istoria Novago Zaveta po Russki i Gagauzski (po Drevne-Türetski): Eni Baalantının Ayozlarlı İstoriya Ruscha hem Gagauzcha (Eski-Türkchia),* Kishinev: Eparhialnaya Tipografiya, 1912; *Akafist: Djumledaniyoz Allahıdourana,* Kishinev, 1913; *Ai (aiozlu) Evanghelieasâ hani Apostol Matfeidean eazâea ghecilmiş*, Gagauzlarân Popular Bibliotecasâ No. 1, Chişinău: Tipografia Eparhială – "Cartea Românească", 1934; *Ai (Aiozlu) Evangheliea Marcudan* – Gagauzcea (eschi Tiurccea), Chişinău: Tipografia 'Tiparul Moldovenesc', 1935; *Dua Chitabâ Gagauzlar icin*, Chişinău: Tiparul Moldovenesc, 1935; *Psaltir Găgăuzcea –(Tiurccea) Găgăuzlar icin hem Tiurklear icin*, Chişinău: Tiparul Moldovenesc, 1936.

[32] None of the extant copies of *Hakikatın Sesi* are dated. Numbers 6, 14 and 15 of the journal were published in the Cyrillic alphabet, whereas number 25 uses the Romanian-based Latin script that Çakir adopted in the 1930s. The earlier editions were published by *Tipographia Eparhială "Cartea Românească"* whereas number 25 was published through *Tipografia Uniunii Clericilor Ortodocşi din Basarabia*.

existed a belief that it was somehow sacrilegious to translate the deepest mysteries of the Orthodox faith into Turkish'.[33] The clearest example he cites comes from an anonymous compendium of the Christian faith intended for the edification of Turkish speaking Christians.

> If you ask why these morning and evening prayers are written solely in Greek, you should know that the mysteries and rites of our religion may not be translated into common Turkish …these prayers are written in Greek only, so that the Christian who reads them does not blaspheme against God.[34]

Similarly to the *Karamanlı* Christians of Anatolia, the Gagauz are a Turkish speaking people without any historical record of having confessed Islam. And yet, unlike the clergy in Anatolia, Çakir does not appear to have had concerns about the suitability of the Gagauz language for expressing the mysteries of the Christian faith through its use in scripture and the liturgy. This may have been because Çakir was operating from the Russian Empire, free from the pressures that Christian communities faced in the Islamic Ottoman state. As already mentioned, the Russian Church had state support in actively seeking to convert the various Turkic peoples of the empire to Orthodoxy, primarily through Christian education in their vernacular languages.

Writing in 1933 in his *History of the Gagauz of Bessarabia*, Mihail Çakir refers to contacts he had with Metropolitan Makarii of Moscow.[35] Whilst on a visit to Bessarabia to see Archbishop Vladimir of Chişinău, Makarii asked to meet some Gagauz or to read something in their language as he was curious to know what kind of people they were. Makari had been a missionary amongst the Tartars and other Turkic peoples of the Russian Empire and was therefore familiar with the Turkic languages of the Russian Empire. Upon reading Çakir's translations of prayers and the Gospels, he is reported by Çakir to have said:

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[33] R. Clogg, 'A Millet within a Millet: The Karamalides', in *I Kath'imas Anatoli*: *Studies in Ottoman Greek History*, Istanbul : The Isis Press, 2004, p. 398.
[34] *Apanthisma tes Christianikes Pisteos yâni Gülzâr-ı Mesihî*, Âsitânede Patrikhânede olan Basmahânede, 1803, p. 81, quoted in Salaville and Dalleggio, Karamanlidika, vol. 1, pp. 115-16.
[35] M. Ciachir (Çakir), *Basarabyalı Gagauzların Tarihi*, Niğde: Tolunay Yayıncılık, 1998.

> The Gagauz language is a pure Turkic language, the true Turkic language, it is very similar to that of the Uygur, who live now in the Asian Altay mountains, and to that of the Turks, who live on the banks of the Orhon river. The Uygur of the Altay and the Turks of the Orhon river are the ancestors of the other Turks, they speak just like the Gagauz. The Gagauz are also of the Turk family; they speak the same way as the Turks spoke Old Turkish a thousand years ago. History tells us that many Turkic tribes (nations) passed from Asia to the Russian lands from where they passed to the other side of the Danube when they were attacked by the Mongols and the Tartars. Amongst them were to be found the Gagauz.[36]

According to Çakir, Makari not only considered the Gagauz to be linguistically related to the 'Old Turks', he also spoke of such 'true Turks' as 'good spirited, open hearted, honest, hospitable people, they always make good Christians'.[37] In his 'History of the Gagauz of Bessarabia' Çakir favours the theories on the origins of the Gagauz that connect them with the pre-Islamic Turkic tribes of the steppe, 'most renowned writers have clearly shown that the Gagauz have their origins in the Turkic Uz, in the Oguz, and in the family of the true Turk'.[38]

Çakir's use from an early stage of the term *Eski Türkçe* to refer to the Gagauz language of his liturgical translations may have been a move to disassociate the language from Islam and the Turkish of the Ottoman Empire. An association with pre-Islamic Turkish history and with the Turkic peoples of the Russian Empire would seem to alleviate the problem of the appropriateness of a Christian liturgical form of Turkish.

The political changes that resulted from Russia's loss of Bessarabia to Greater Romania in 1918 drastically altered the trajectory of Çakir's mission to canonize the Gagauz language. In the inter-war period the Romanian authorities, and especially the Romanian Orthodox Church, which now had jurisdiction over the Bessarabian

[36] Ibid., p. 77. Note, in reality the Gagauz idiom, contrary to Metropolitan Makarii's comments, is not amongst the Turkic languages most closely related to Turkic of the Altay region and of the Uygur and is certainly not mutually intelligible with the Turkic languages and dialects of Mongolia and Xinjiang.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid., p. 79.

Metropolitan See, were determined to reverse the more than century-long Russian influence on the character of the territory.

Across Bessarabia the use of the Romanian language in the Orthodox Church had been in decline especially since the Russification campaign of Archbishop Pavel (1871-1882).[39] By the time ethnic Romanians were once more at the helm of the Bessarabian Church,[40] many priests were unable to preach in Romanian – a situation that the new church authorities were keen to rectify. The Romanianization of the Bessarabian Church included opening of a new theology faculty in Chişinău, attached to Iaşi University in Romania, and importing a host of university professors from Romania to teach there. Two new seminaries were also opened in the province with the result, according to one Romanian church historian, of 'forming a new generation of priests bred in the Romanian spirit, who worked with great effect next to the old generation formed in the Russian period. They acted gradually to remove the Russian practices from worship and for the return of the old authentic Romanian tradition'.[41] By the 1920s many Gagauz villages had ethnic Moldovan Romanian-speaking priests, and Çakir's attempts to introduce Gagauz as the language of the liturgy were halted prematurely.

Following a hiatus of almost twenty years, it is only in the mid-1930s that Çakir published Gagauz language religious texts once again. The change of political order not only delayed Çakir's project but also transformed its outward form. The Cyrillic script he had employed earlier was abandoned in favour of a Latin based alphabet, which closely mirrored the Romanian orthographic system of the time. The new Romanian authorities greatly distrusted their newly acquired minorities in Bessarabia and had an interest in steering them away both culturally and politically from their pro-Russian sympathies. The switch from Cyrillic to Latin was a

[39] I. Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1995, p. 95.
[40] The first Archbishop of Chişinău to be appointed by the Romanian Holy Synod was Nicodim Munteanu, previously of the Eparchy of Huşi just over the river Prut in Romanian Moldavia. He was followed in 1919 by Gurie Grosu, a native of Transylvania, who remained in post until 1936 (in 1928 the Archbishop of Chişinău was raised to the rank of Metropolitan Bishop. Following the suspension of Grosu by the Holy Synod in November 1936 a series of deputies took over until 1944. None of the senior hierarchs in this period were native to Bessarabia. See M. Păcurariu, *Basarabia: Aspecte din Istoria Bisericii şi a Neamului Românesc*, Iaşi: Editura Mitropoliei Moldovei şi Bucovinei, 1993, p. 111.
[41] Ibid., p. 113.

symbolically significant one. During the Tsarist period Romanian had continued to be been written in Cyrillic in Bessarabia, unlike in the Romanian lands that formed the new Romanian state, where a Latin script was adopted. The Latin script was therefore associated with Romanian statehood, Cyrillic with foreign oppression.[42] Çakir's politically expedient use of a new Latin script for his translations of scripture brought his canonical Gagauz in line with Romanian state and Church ideology.

Romania's alignment with the Central Powers in the 1930s facilitated close ties with Kemalist Turkey, which, in the inter-war period showed great interest in the Turkic peoples of the Soviet Union and the neighbouring countries. The Pan-Turkist ideology of the new Turkish intellectual and political elite was based on the desire to see all Turkic speaking peoples of the world united into one great civilisation. The aid that Turkey began to offer to the Turks and Tartars of Romanian Dobrudja in the sphere of education and culture was also extended to the Gagauz. For the secular Turkish government and the pan-Turkic activists of the 1920s and 30s the Christian religion of the Gagauz was no object to close brotherly ties.

In the 1930s Çakir forged a close relationship with Hamdulla Suphi Tanrıöver, the Turkish ambassador to Romania. They toured the Gagauz villages together and planned Turkish funded cultural and educational projects for the Gagauz. At this time school teachers trained in the newly opened Muslim medrese in the town of Medgidia in south-eastern Romania were sent, at Turkey's expense, to Gagauz villages to teach Turkish and, according one Gagauz historian, 'to spread the pan-Turkic ideology'.[43] News of Çakir's translation work reached Turkey and the Istanbul press where he was lauded for his pan-Turkist ideals.[43]

The Turkish government at the time was also keen to foster a close relationship between the Gagauz and Turkey's own tiny Turkish speaking Orthodox minority, which under the nationalist hierarch *Papa Eftimi* (Pavlos Karahisaridis) had broken away from the authority of the Ecumenical Patriarch to form the Independent

[42] On the politics of language in the history of Moldova see D. Dyer, *The Romanian Dialect of Moldova*, New York: The Edwin Mellen Press Ltd, 1999 and C. King, *The Moldovans: Romania, Russia, and the Politics of Culture*, Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 2000, pp.63-88.

[43] S. Bulgar, 'Türkiye Gelen 1934-1940-cı Yillarda Gagauz Üürenicileri', *Sabaa Yıldızı*, 13 (2000), p. 18.

Turkish Orthodox Church.[44] The Church hoped that the Gagauz could be persuaded to accept the Turkish Orthodox Patriarch as their head as a way of undermining the authority of the Ecumenical Patriarch in Constantinople and there were also plans, again instigated by Tanrıöver, to settle some Gagauz in the Marmara region of Turkey, which would have made this a demographically viable prospect.[45]

The connections that Çakir helped forge between the Gagauz and Turkey in the interwar years set a precedent for the renewed relationship that has emerged following Moldova's independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. In a similar situation to the one described above in the 1930s, Turkey continues to operate as an alternative centre of gravity for the Gagauz. Today, Turkey plays a highly visible role in cultural and economic life in *Gagauziya* and the notion that the Gagauz could play a role in the establishment of ethnically Turkish Orthodox Church back in Turkey has not disappeared.[46] The agency deployed by Çakir in the creation of a canonical Turkish liturgy and scripture has provided the Gagauz community with religious capital that distinguishes the Gagauz liturgically from their ethnic Bulgarian and Moldovan neighbours. This is significant when we consider the politically symbolic role of the Orthodox Church amongst the Gagauz and how Gagauz nationhood has come to be linked politically with Turkey and Turkishness.

5. The Use of Gagauz in Liturgical Life

Despite these early efforts by Çakir to introduce the Gagauz language into the liturgical life of the Church in the interwar years, it did not become a common feature in Gagauz villages. During this period Romanian became the dominant language replacing Church Slavonic. Later, during the Soviet period, in the few Churches that remained open, Church Slavonic was reintroduced as the primary language of the

[44] This Church was formed from the tiny remnant of *Karamanlı* Christians, mostly closely related to *Papa Eftimi*, who avoided deportation in the population exchanges between Greece and Turkey in the 1920s because of the their support for the Turkish nationalist cause.

[45] F. Tevetoğlu, *Hamdullah Suphi Tanrıöver: hayati ve eserleri*, Ankara: Sevinç, 1986, pp. 206-210.

[46] The secretary of the Independent Turkish Orthodox Patriarchate, Sevgi Erenerol, has made a number of visits to *Gagauziya* since the 1990s and been in conversation with influential members of the Gagauz clergy. However, the prospect of any Gagauz clergy abandoning the Moscow Patriarchate in favour of the canonically unrecognised Independent Turkish Orthodox Patriarchate is highly unlikely.

liturgy. It was not until the advent of Glasnost and Perestroika in the late 1980s, when Churches began to reopen across the Soviet Union, that effective attempts to introduce Gagauz into liturgical life could be made.

Inevitably, the history of language and liturgical practice in the Orthodox Church has affected contemporary attitudes and practices amongst the Gagauz. Remarkably, all three liturgical languages maintain a place, to a greater or lesser degree, in Gagauz village services. In all the villages inhabited by Gagauz, the Slavonic rite predominates. However, in many, depending on the nationality of the priest, prayers, certain songs, readings from the gospels, elements of the liturgy, and sermons are often included in the Gagauz language, and in all villages I visited, the priests have copies of Çakir's version of the Liturgy and Psalter for use in services. The extent to which Gagauz is employed is entirely at the discretion of the local priest and varies tremendously from village to village.

Romanian also continues to fulfil a minor role in church services; *Tatăl Nostru* (Our Father), the *Rugăciunile începetoare,* or opening prayers, and the refrain *Doamne miluieşte* (Lord have mercy) can be heard in most church services. Often 'Our Father' and certain other prayers and refrains will be said in three languages, first Russian, then Romanian and finally Gagauz.

Each of the three liturgical languages carries with it a historically charged symbolic meaning for Gagauz believers. The strong attachment of both the clergy and the lay practitioners to use of Slavonic and Russian is expressed in terms of 'gratitude' towards 'Holy Russia' and the Tsar; the Gagauz preserve the historical memory of fleeing from the Ottomans and having been granted their land by Imperial Russia. The Russian church is also perceived as the defender of Orthodoxy and the champion of 'true doctrine', especially in its adherence to the Julian calendar. In addition to this there is the added attraction of Russian in the secular sphere, where it is regarded as the language of high culture and learning. During the Soviet period, mastery of Russian was essential for personal advancement. Today, through their knowledge of the Russian language, the Gagauz have a window on the world via the Russian media and access to the Russian labour market at a time of severe economic depression in Moldova.

All this is in stark contrast to the response that the Romanian language often provokes, for it carries with it far more negative connotations. The older generation remember the Greater Romania period between the World Wars as one of repression

accompanied by furious attempts to Romanianize the population. Moreover, the presence of Romanian priests during the inter-war period is said to have brought with it a corrupted and debased form of Orthodoxy. One Gagauz priest blamed the spread of all apocryphal texts, pseudo-religious healing practices and superstition on their pernicious influence: 'What they brought with them, that was not Orthodoxy! The Gagauz had a pure faith before they came along.' All this said, many older people also reflect on the beauty of the Romanian liturgy and of the prayers and hymns they learned in their childhood. However, the strength of anti-Romanian and anti-Moldovan feeling has been bolstered by more recent memories of the brief conflict with Moldovan nationalist militias in 1992 that attempted to extinguish the nascent Gagauz Autonomous Region.

For even the most elderly informants I interviewed in the course of fieldwork in *Gagauziya*, their first experience of the Gagauz language being used in Church came only with the re-opening of the churches in the early 1990s. Only a tiny proportion of churchgoers knew any canonical prayers or hymns in Gagauz before this period.[47] Today, there is a strong cadre of Gagauz priests who, together with an unshakable devotion to the Russian Church, have a strong sense of belonging to the Gagauz nation. This nation, in the view of the clergy, has been legitimized through the translation by Çakir of the Divine Liturgy and scripture into the Gagauz language, and this in turn presents Gagauz believers with a strong affirmation of the Orthodoxy of 'Gagauzness'. However, the relationship that Çakir's liturgical and scriptural translations seemed to cement between the Gagauz language, Orthodoxy and the nation have been challenged since Moldovan independence by the success of Baptist and Adventist missionary groups in *Gagauziya*.

6. The Gagauz Language and Evangelical Missions

[47] I reached this conclusion based on extensive questioning of lay church-goers regarding knowledge of canonical prayers; which language they had first learned to pray in, at home, school and church; and which language they prayed in at home. Only one of my informants could clearly remember having been taught the Lord's Prayer and the Symbol of the Faith in Gagauz as a child in the 1940s and she was the daughter of the *daskal* (choir master) of the village of *Tomay* (Garçu (Terzi)Varvara, born 1935, *Tomay* village).

As early as the 1920s the Orthodox Church perceived a threat from the *sectanţii*, mainly Baptist and Adventist groups that had a growing presence in the Russian empire, and especially Ukraine and Moldova, since the 1860s. In his 'History of the Gagauz of Bessarabia' and his Gagauz language journal, *Hakikatın Sesi*, Çakir expresses clearly what he believes to be the most serious danger to the Gagauz people and to Orthodox Christianity in 1930s Greater Romania. He warns the Gagauz of the *Allahsız komunist*, the 'Godless Communist', and of Baptists and Adventists and other heretics and sects:[48]

> Some Gagauz have begun shamelessly to abandon the religion of their mothers and fathers, to discard the true faith of Orthodox Christianity, like the Jew, to sell and discard the cross of Christ, and to become Baptists, Adventists, and join other sects…Amongst the foolish Gagauz will be found such stupid men who shamelessly become atheist communists, godless wolves.[49]

Today, Protestant groups place an emphasis on worship, prayer and congregational singing in the Gagauz language and also, most significantly, on Bible study. The freedom to adapt quickly to local circumstances, in this case the ethno-linguistic dimension in *Gagauziya*, has given evangelical groups an advantage over the centralised and somewhat authoritarian approach of the Orthodox Church. The Gagauz have attracted the interest of Baptist missionaries in particular because of their Turkic language. One Baptist website openly suggests that the Gagauz could play a 'strategic role in reaching the Muslim nation of Turkey for Christ'[50] and Southern Baptist groups have already encouraged ethnic Gagauz missionaries to go

[48] Çakir devoted much of his Gagauz language religious newspaper *Hakikatın Sesi* that he produced throughout the inter-war period to attacking the new 'sects' of Baptists and Adventists and the Communists that, as Çakir perceived it, posed a threat to Orthodoxy, the moral order and the Gagauz nation. These were not just Çakir's concern as the Moldovan Orthodox Church in general in its journal *Luminătorul* often devoted space during this time to reporting on the *lupta cu sectanţii*, 'the battle with the sects', in the south of Bessarabia. See for example I. Belodanov, "Activitatea misionarilor cerc. I jud. Ismail," *Luminătorul* 42 (1921): 79-82.

[49] Ciachir (Çakir), M, *Gagauzlar: Istoriya, Adetlär, Dil hem Din*, Pontos: Chişinău, 2007, p. 79.

[50] 'Gagauz people: Key to Turkey', available at: <URL: http://archives.tconline.org/Archives/200006/Gagauz.htm> [accessed 29 November 2006].

and work in Turkey. A 2006 report by the Georgia Baptists following an evangelistic 'crusade', to quote their own words, in the Gagauz town of *Ceadır-Lunga* remarked:

> The people who had been given New Testaments were ecstatic. It was the first time they had ever had a Bible in their Turkish dialect.[51]

The Bible referred to above is the second of two recent translations of the New Testament[52] that are used by, and, in this case the translation itself was sponsored by, Protestant missionary groups. One young Baptist convert I spoke to emphasised the significance of Orthodox attitudes towards the Bible in her conversion to Baptism.

> No one in the Orthodox Church had ever encouraged me to read the Bible; no one tried to explain to me what its message is. Now I read it for myself and I know the truth. Orthodoxy is just tradition, it is not Christianity.

(Young Baptist Gagauz woman hitchhiking to Chişinău, 24.05.06).

The approach of the 'Bible' Christian missionaries presents a problem for the Orthodox Church, which traditionally does not place much importance on individual study and knowledge of the Bible as the key to living a Christian life. Neither of the two translations of the New Testament now available in the Gagauz language is regarded by the Orthodox Church as correct or suitable for use by the Orthodox faithful and the Church actively discourages people from reading them. Orthodox believers therefore have none of the Holy Scriptures available to them in their own language. Çakir's translations have never been widely distributed and the Orthodox Church has not reprinted his translations of the Gospels since the 1930s. Bibles are of

[51] J. Gerald Harris, 'Moldovan response to festivals inspires Georgia Baptists', June 22, 2006, available at: <URL:http://www.christianindex.org/2332.article> [accessed 29 November 2006].

[52] The first translation of the New Testament (excepting of course Mihail Çakir's translations already referenced above, see note 29.) appeared in 2003 and was the work of Boris Tukan of the Ben Zvi Institute in Jerusalem – *Eni Testament* (trans. B. Tukan), Kishinev: Paragon, 2003. The second was published in 2006 and was translated by Gagauz Adventist Stefan Bayraktar for the Biblical Translation Institute in Moscow – *Eni Baalantı; İi Haber İi Hristos için*, (trans. S. Bayraktar), Moskva: Bibliyayı çeviren İnstitut, 2006.

course available in the Russian and Romanian languages. This situation would seem to give the Protestant missionaries an advantage in appealing to the Gagauz on ethno-linguistic terms. Indeed, as one Soviet sociologist pointed out, despite the high level of linguistic competency in Russian of the Gagauz, many of whom master Russian far better than their mother tongue, the Gagauz have maintained a strong ethnic self-awareness,[53] to which mother-tongue scripture and services appeal.

In the doctrine of the Orthodox Church scripture is seen as only one part of twofold tradition. Bulgakov explains 'tradition' to be the 'living memory of the Church' and scripture is the 'perfectly recognised' aspect of that tradition.[54] However, scripture does not necessarily hold primacy over other aspects of tradition; legitimacy of Church doctrine in Orthodoxy does not rely on scripture. The two, tradition and scripture, are rather seen as a whole 'united, but not identical.'[55] As part of this duality of tradition, the Church sees itself as the primary source for the interpretation of scripture. This situation changed little in the twentieth century, especially during the periods of harsh state repression of religion, when copies of the Bible were very hard to come by. The dissemination of scripture amongst the Gagauz by Protestant groups may have the effect of seriously undermining the authority of the Orthodox Church amongst believers.

Initially, in the early 1990s, the Moscow Patriarchate supported the efforts of the Swedish Bible Society to translate the scriptures into the Gagauz idiom. However, disagreements soon arose between the various denominations involved and the Orthodox Church withdrew from the project. Some Orthodox Priests in *Gagauziya* are keen for translation work to be resumed locally, but there is no consensus on how this should be done. Çakir's canonical texts, as already stated, represent significant symbolic capital for the Gagauz community. However, in practical terms, they also cause a dilemma for the Orthodox Church. Çakir's translations have a canonical status and in much the same way as Church Slavonic was said to have been 'consecrated by ancient usage', the particular liturgical form of Gagauz devised by Çakir, his *Eski*

[53] M. Guboglu, 'Ethnolinguistic Processes in Southern Moldovia', *Soviet Sociology*, 13: 3 (1974-75), p. 50. cited in I. Livezeanu, 'Urbanisation in a Low key and Linguistic Change in Soviet Moldavia Part 2', *Soviet Studies*, vol. 23, no. 4 (1981), p. 587.
[54] S. Bulgakov, *The Orthodox Church*, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1988, p. 10.
[55] Ibid., p.12.

Türkçe, has taken on an eternal status. Any future translations of scripture that are produced by the Orthodox Church will have to operate within the parameters of the paradigm set by Çakir. The literary language Çakir created for liturgy and scripture, which even at the time utilized archaisms and contained many idiosyncratic terms of Çakir's own creation, has over the decades become increasingly distant from the contemporary spoken form. The literary form of Gagauz that is employed in Bible translations distributed by Protestant groups is much more accessible and closer to the modern spoken idiom. Translators of the Protestant Bible are free from the constraints that 'canonization' has placed on the Orthodox Church in this regard.

Conclusion

In November 2008, following a year-long consultation involving the Church, the State and the academic community in *Gagauziya*, a special conference was convened, entitled 'Orthodoxy and the Identity of the Gagauz'. The express purpose of this gathering was to determine an official date for the annual commemoration of the time and place of the Christianization of the Gagauz. The importance attached to the event by the Executive Committee of the Government of *Gagauziya*, the State University of Comrat and the Bishopric of Comrat & Cahul, is a clear demonstration of the powerful symbolic capital invested in the mythic past and a restatement of the central role of Orthodox Christianity in shaping a modern Gagauz 'official' identity.[56]

The Gagauz language played a defining role in the emergence of a Gagauz national consciousness. Through the agency of the Church, the Gagauz language was canonized and its use legitimized in the public sphere. In this way, the Gagauz language was inseparably bonded to the other primary defining feature of Gagauz identity, Orthodox Christianity. The primary motivation for Çakir's translation mission was to enhance the Gagauz community's connection with the Church and with the divine. The increased linguistic capital that resulted from the canonization of the language was primarily of a symbolic character. In the political and social conditions of interwar Romania the existence of a liturgical form of Turkish was a powerful symbol that helped raise the profile of the Gagauz in Turkey.

[56] The conference took place in *Çadır-Lunga* from the 6th-8th of November 2008 and was attended by representatives of the Gagauz religious and political leadership of Moldova, Bulgaria, Ukraine and Greece.

The introduction of the Gagauz language into the liturgical life of the Orthodox Church has differentiated the community in terms of religious practice from the rest of the Russian Orthodox of the region. This symbolic augmentation of the ethno-religious community has encouraged some Gagauz political leaders to question the organisational structure of the Orthodox Church in the region. The Gagauz communities in the Gagauz Autonomous Region belong to the Bishopric of Comrat and Cahul, which encompasses a much wider area of southern Moldova and includes many different ethnic groups. The creation of a Gagauz eparchy, to reflect the ethno-linguistic character of the community, has resurfaced intermittently since the Gagauz struggle for autonomy in the early 1990s.[57] Although this idea has little popular support amongst the Gagauz clergy, the idea remains alive that Orthodox Churches, despite semi-official dogma, are more naturally expressed in the form of an ethno-linguistic community rather than through territoriality.[58]

In sharp contrast to the symbolic status that canonical Gagauz has for Gagauz community and Gagauz Orthodoxy, Protestant Evagelical groups have been able to capitalize on the Turkish language of the Gagauz in a more pragmatic way. Sponsoring the use of the Gagauz idiom in local religious life presents a challenge to the Orthodox for the reasons outlined above and ultimately may jeopardise the future Orthodoxy of the Gagauz nation, just as Çakir feared.

The Gagauz represent an example of a national movement that was initially largely religion-driven in which Gagauz Orthodoxy became equated with Gagauzness. The vernacular language of the Gagauz was elevated to liturgical status and has

[57] Tensions currently exist between the Bishop of Cahul and Comrat and a small group of clergy in *Gagauziya* - which includes the highest ranking cleric resident in *Gagauziya*, Archimandrate Julian of Comrat - the cause of which is partly reported to be the separatist aspirations of this minority of priests (Interviews with several parish priests, July 2009).

[58] A local Orthodox synod held in Constantinople in 1872, following the establishment of a Bulgarian exarchist Orthodox Bishopric in the city, condemned attempts to organise churches and create diocese on a ethnic or racial basis, something referred to as the heresy of phyletism. Geography was affirmed to be the proper foundation for Orthodox churches. This principle has been violated on a number of occasions. The establishment on the territory of Moldova of the Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia in 1992 to serve the ethnic Moldovan Romanian-speaking believers who no longer wished to belong to the Moscow Patriarchate is a good illustration of this tendency. For a discussion of this problem in relation to other nationalities in the region see K. Matsuzato, 'Inter-Orthodox Relations and Transborder Nationalities in and around Unrecognised Abkhasia and Transnistria', in *Religion, State and Society*, 37:3 (2009), pp. 239-262.

become a symbolic marker of identity. In the light of the current developments in the religious sphere in Moldova, the Turkishness of the Gagauz language, as both a vehicle for evangelical proselytising and the inspiration for phyletism, seems in danger of subverting its own sacred status within the Orthodox community and undermining the indissoluble bond between the Gagauz and the canonicity of their Orthodoxy. As I pointed out at the opening of this article, the relationship between language and scripture in Christianity is a complex affair. The case of the Gagauz would seem to highlight how the canonization of language can operate as a double edged sword for the Church.

Anderson, B., *Imagined Communities*, London and New York: Verso, 1983.

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