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FOLKLORE TRADITIONS OF MOUNTAIN JEWS

Until the mid-20th century, the folklore of Mountain Jews included tales of common Iranian origin and tales based on biblical themes. The latter can be found in the culture of every Jewish group; in the Jewish religious tradition, they are known as ha-gadah (הגדה) — “narrative”. During this period, the Mountain Jews’ storytelling practices were dominated by tales in their native language.

Tales in Azerbaijani, Nogai and Kumyk also played a significant role. The speakers of these languages for a long time enjoyed political dominance in the regions where Mountain Jews lived, and these languages were used for interethnic communication. Less common in the storytelling practice of Mountain Jews were tales in North Caucasian languages. The folklore traditions of their territorial groups differed somewhat from each other due to the influence of the neighboring people’s traditions. The Mountain Jews can be divided into northern and southern groups, each with their own sub-dialect. The northern group speech was influenced by Kumyk and Nogai, which were languages of interethnic communication in the area, while in the area where the southern group dwelled, this was Azerbaijani. Northern group Jews were fluent in Kumyk or Nogai, but few of them understood Azerbaijani, while for the southern group it was the other way around. Since the mid-20th century, they have been gradually replacing their native language with Russian. This process is now almost complete. The displacement of their native language by Russian has led to the transformation of their folkloric traditions: their tales, proverbs, sayings and jokes are now predominantly traditionally Russian. As a result, their territorial groups are experiencing a universalization of their folklore traditions, and they are familiar with their traditional Mountain Jewish folklore in Russian translations. Some tall tales, fairy tales, historical anecdotes, proverbs and sayings of Mountain Jews were recorded by the author in 1994 from the words of the Derbent storyteller Rafail Aviyaevich Rafailov (1924–1997). Currently, there are no longer any storytellers of Mountain Jewish folklore in their native language — R. A. Rafailov was the last.

Keywords: *intercultural dialogue in the Caucasus, periodization of cultural influences in the Caucasus, displacement of the native language of Mountain Jews by Russian, storytellers, funeral lamentation*

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