Rewritten Bible in the “Museum” Slavonic Translation of the Song of Songs

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Summary

The so-called “Museum” Slavonic translation of the Song of Songs contains a specific recension enrooted in Jewish Second Temple traditions. It becomes more plausible that the Slavonic translation has been produced in the earliest period of Slavic writing directly from Syriac rather than from Hebrew, as it was proposed earlier.

Keywords

Songs of Songs – Slavonic translations from Syriac – Slavonic Bible – Second Temple Jewish exegesis

1 Introduction

Among the Slavonic versions of the Song of Songs, there are two which are now considered as being directly translated from the Hebrew. The later, whose Sitz im Leben is known, is dependent on the earlier. The earlier one remains rather enigmatic and, therefore, is the object of the present study.

Both translations are preserved in the unique manuscripts: the earlier one in the so-called Museum manuscript (= Mus; Russian State Library, coll. 178, Nr 8222; first published by Anatoly Alekseev in 1981)1 and the later one in the Vil-

1 А.А. Алексеев, “Песнь Песней по списку XVI века в переводе с древнееврейского оригинала [The Song of Songs according to a Manuscript of the 16th Century Translated from a Hebrew Original],” Палестинский сборник, 27 (1981), pp. 63-79. Alekseev’s actual publication on the topic is ch. 5 “Два древнерусских перевода Песни Песней с еврейского
narius manuscript (= Vil; F 19-262), both of the sixteenth century. Both manuscripts are certainly Christian.

The scholarly consensus is that the Vilnius translation is of “West Russian” origin, that is, Ruthenian or Belorussian. The translation could be either Jewish or Christian. In the latter case, it would have been produced with a help of a Jewish informant or convert. What is important for our study, the Vilnius translation, even though, normally, follows closely the Masoretic Hebrew text, often borrows from the earlier translation. In one place it even repeats a peculiar digression of Mus from the Masoretic text in Cant 1:17 (s. below, section 2.1). The Vilnius translation is roughly dated to a period preceding the date of the manuscript but not very distant one, that is, the late fifteenth or the early sixteenth century.

The West Slavic features are presented in the Museum translation as well. The problem is, however, whether they belong to the original translation or are linguistic deposits accumulated during the textual transmission in the Ruthenian-speaking area. Alekseev and Taube opt for the second alternative, whereas Thomson for the former: “there can be no doubt but that the translation was made in Ruthenia in the fifteenth century.” This Thomson’s conclusion is at odds with his own famous methodological principle that he formulated against Aleksei Ivanovich Sobolevsky (1857-1929): pace Sobolevsky, the lexical features are easily changeable in the literary transmission in Slavonic and, therefore, could never been used as proofs of the origin of the translation itself. More-


over, as Alekseev and Taube have shown, the Slavonic language of the translation is basically (especially on the level of syntax, but also in the lexica) Southern Slavic and not Ruthenian (nevertheless, pace Alekseev, this observation still does not exclude Ruthenian origin but simply increases the comparative likelihood of the alternative hypothesis, that is, that of a non-Ruthenian origin).

According to Taube, however, the South Slavic features “...point rather at the 15th century as the more probable time of translation, if it is assumed to have been made in Russia” (italics mine). Taube implies the epoch of the so-called “Second South Slavic influence” in Russia. One can feel that he, at least, does not exclude the Ruthenian hypothesis, but his formulation is compatible even with a hypothesis of a South Slavic origin of the translation. Moreover, he gives to understand that, if the origin is not Russian, an earlier date is possible.

Alekseev now (2002) shares Taube’s dating (but includes the late 14th cent. as the earliest possible date), whereas, at first (1981), he localised the translation in the Kievan Rus’ that implied the date of the 11th-12th centuries. Alekseev excludes a South Slavic or precisely Bulgarian origin under the pretext that the direct translations from Hebrew in Bulgaria are unknown (argumentum ex silentio).

Alekseev’s actual terminus post quem seems to me unjustified. It is based on a hapax legomenon, the Germanic word вирохъ (4:14, rendering לְבוֹנָה but not the toponym τοῦ Λιβάνου of the Greek Bible) “odour, smell; frankincense” (cf. Middle High German wîrouch, wîroch, wyroch etc.). According to Alekseev, this word could have been borrowed though the language of the Ashkenazim Jews

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7 Alekseev was the first who mentioned “the Second South Slavic Influence,” when he was still thinking that the translation itself belongs to the Kievan Rus’: «...в Муз. замечательно выдержаны орфография II южнославянского влияния, а также церковнославянская морфология в своем русском варианте (...in Mus, the orthography of the Second South Slavic Influence as well as the Church Slavonic morphology are remarkably kept)» (Алексеев, “Песнь Песней,” p. 72, cf. pp. 74-76 on the Kievan Rus’ as the Sitz im Leben). This is a case when a fact (South Slavic orthography) and an interpretation (Second South Slavic Influence) are confused, as if all other places and epochs where the South Slavic orthography was in use are excluded a priori.
8 Алексеев, Песнь Песней, p. 142.
9 Алексеев, “Песнь Песней,” p. 74: «Поскольку ничего не известно о переводах с древнееврейских оригиналов у южных славян... (Because nothing is known on the translations from the Hebrew originals among the South Slavs...)».
and, therefore, is to be dated to the epoch when the Ashkenazim were settled in the Slavic lands, not earlier than in the fourteenth century.\textsuperscript{10} I do not see any necessity in this recourse to the Jews. The word could be a part of the Ruthenian “linguistic deposits.” Middle High German dialects were spoken in relatively large areas of Poland (e.g., one of such dialects resulted into the present Wymysorys, or the Wilamowicean language spoken in the Polish town of Wilamowice in the middle of a Slavic-speaking area, near the Czech and Slovak lands). Wyroch is until now an extremely widespread last name in Poland.

Therefore, neither Alekseev nor Taube provided a convincing \textit{terminus post quem}.

The Ruthenian hypothesis is the least problematic from the point of view of the presently available knowledge in the history of the texts. Indeed, in Ruthenia, a direct translation from Hebrew would have never been a sensation. All other hypotheses would be, by necessity, in some conflict with the “common knowledge” concerning the lines of textual transmission in Slavonic. Nevertheless, non-Ruthenian hypotheses could better respect the South Slavic features of translation’s Slavonic language.

Alekseev considers the earlier translation to be Jewish and proposed for synagogal usage. According to his hypothesis, a number of Slavic biblical translations were either adapted or created by Russian Jews for their synagogal liturgy in Slavonic.\textsuperscript{11}

So far, nobody has brought into question that the Hebrew original of Mus was the known Masoretic text. It is this opinion that I would like to challenge now. I will try to show that the original text contained substantial discrepancies with both Hebrew and Greek known texts of the Song of Songs. These discrepancies are certainly Jewish and fitting without problems with Second Temple Judaism(s), where the Song of Songs was considered as a midrash-like reading accompanying the book of Exodus.\textsuperscript{12} The Slavonic translation looks as a targumic elaboration on the original Hebrew text. Needless to say, however,

\textsuperscript{10} Алексеев, \textit{Песнь Песней}, p. 142.


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**SCRINIUM** 14 (2018) 257-272
that the extremely elaborated rabbinic Targum of the Song of Songs has no textual intersections with our Slavonic text. We are dealing, in the latter case, with a text lost from the rabbinic tradition, which was a usual fate of “rewritten Bible” texts.

Moreover, I will argue that there is no specific linguistic or philological grounds for postulating Hebrew as the original language of the Slavonic translation. Syriac is a no less fitting option that would agree with my considerations about the Syriac impact on the earliest Slavonic writing, which I have developed elsewhere.

2 Alleged Mistakes in Translation and Their Jewish Context

We have to consider four peculiar readings of the Museum translation. This is a substantial number for a relatively short book, which became even shorter due to the lacunae (missing are 5:15b-6:8a, 3:2, and the beginning of 7:1).

2.1 Cant 1:17: “Boxtree” Instead of “Cypress”

In 1:17, Vil repeats Mus, and both are going away from both Hebrew\(^{13}\) and Greek\(^{14}\) known texts (s. Table 1). “Other Slavonic” means here a text close or identical to that of the Elizabeth Bible (1751; the actual standard Bible in Slavonic), which, for the Song of Songs, goes back to the Ostrog Bible (1581); it is provided only as an example of rendering the Septuagint text in Slavonic, in order to facilitate the comparison for the readers familiar with the Slavonic Bible.

In Mus and Vil, we see πύκσος (from πύκσυ < πύξος “boxwood/box-tree”) “(made) of boxwood” instead of expected ‘of cypress.”

\(^{13}\) Quoted according to the recent critical edition by Piet B. Dirksen in BHQ, fasc. 18: General Introduction and Megilloth, eds. P.B. Dirksen et al., Stuttgart, 2004, pp. 11-24. Other books of the Hebrew Bible, for lack of their BHQ edition, will be quoted according to BHS.

\(^{14}\) The Song of Songs volume in the Göttingen Septuagint is still in preparation. Therefore, I have used the list of variant readings (including those from the other than LXX Greek translations and Latin translations) in the unpublished dissertation by J.C. Treat, Lost Keys: Text and Interpretation in Old Greek “Song of Songs” and Its Earliest Manuscript Witnesses, Ph.D. diss., The University of Pennsylvania, 1996. I have used as well the apparatus in F. Field, Origenis Hexaplorum quae supersunt. 2nd ed., 2 vols., Oxford, 1875, vol. 2, pp. 411-424, which includes the readings of the Syriac Ḥarqleian version (which is a literal translation from Greek; no critical edition so far).
This does not conform with the other known recensions of the Song of Songs, including rabbinic Aramaic\textsuperscript{15} and Syriac\textsuperscript{16} ones. However, in the traditional Jewish exegesis, “our house” here is the eschatological temple,\textsuperscript{17} and the traditional description of the species of wood used in this temple is that of Isa-

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Mus & Vil & Other Slavonic & MT & LXX  \\
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<с>тѣны домовь нашѣ кедровы, латы наше пик’соусови & стѣны домовъ нашихъ цедровы, латы наши пискусовы & преклади дому нашего кедровии, дски наши & доски дикюи & ḫזים בָּתֵּ֨ינוּ אֲרָזִ֔ים  \\
ник’соусови [read пик’соусови] & ник’соусови [read пик’соусови] & кипарисныя & & רחיטנוּ בְּרותִֽים  \\
the walls of our houses are of cedar, our boards are of boxwood & the walls of our houses are of cedar, our boards are of cypress & the beams/rafters of our houses are cedars, our ceiling rafters are cypresses & & δοκοὶ οἴκων ἰμῶν κέδροι, φατνώματα ἰμῶν κυπάρισσοι  \\
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\caption{Table 1}
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\textsuperscript{15} The rabbinic Targum of Song of Songs (commonly dated to the 8th cent. CE) contains almost uninterrupted midrashic digressions. The text survived in two recensions, Eastern and Western. There is no critical edition, but Ph. S. Alexander, \textit{The Targum of Canticles} (The Aramaic Bible, 17A), Edinburgh, 2003, provided an eclectic translation taking into account the variant readings of both recensions. The most accessible is the electronic edition of the Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon Project (http://calh.cln.huc.edu). There are scholarly editions of both recensions but only that of the Eastern one was available to me: R. Hai Melamed, “The Targum to Canticles According to Six Yemen Mss. Compared with the ‘Textus Receptus’ (Ed. de Lagarde),” JQR, NS, 10 (1919-20), pp. 377-410, 11 (1920-21), pp. 1-20, and 12 (1921-22), pp. 57-117 (also in a separate edition from the off-prints); there is an English translation of this edition by J.C. Treat, \textit{The Aramaic Targum to Song of Songs}, published electronically on his personal page at the University of Pennsylvania: (http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/~jtreat/song/targum). 


\textsuperscript{17} Cf. in Tg. Cant: “Solomon, the prophet, said: ‘How fair is the Temple of the Lord that has been built from cedar-wood, but fairer still shall be the Temple that is going to be built in the days of King Messiah, the beams of which will be of cedars from the Garden of Eden, and the joists will be of cypress, teak, and cedar’” (Alexander, \textit{Targum of Canticles}, p. 95).
The “museum” Slavonic Translation of the Song of Songs

The Hebrew has גִּcapeיָה which allows two readings: either “time of pruning [sc., of vines]” = the first harvest or “time of signing”.

2.2 “The Time of Slavim” (Cant 2:12) and “Turtledoves” (Cant 1:10)

Cant 2:11-13 is the only passage of the book where its setting in the liturgical calendar becomes explicit: the early spring – which is the time of the Passover. The verse 2:12 in Mus contains a peculiarity: година славим “the time / hour of slavim.”

The Hebrew has גִּcapeיָה which allows two readings: either “time of pruning [sc., of vines]” = the first harvest or “time of signing”. Vil, together with

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18 The LXX and other Greek translations of Isaiah are quoted according to J. Ziegler, Isaias (Septuaginta: Vetus Testamentum Graecum, 14), Göttingen, 1939.

19 The rabbinic Targum Pseudo-Jonathan of Isaiah is quoted here according to the most comprehensive edition, which is the electronic edition of the Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon Project <http://cali.cn.huc.edu>.
other Slavonic translations, chose “harvest” (час жатвы). The Septuagint mirrors the Hebrew with the meaning “pruning”: καιρὸς τῆς τομῆς (cf. κλαδεύσεως in Aquila and Symmachus); Peshitta follows the Septuagint: ܙܒܢܐ ܕܟܣܚܐ. The Aramaic Targum strays so far from the Hebrew text that it contains no direct equivalent of the Hebrew phrase; nevertheless, it elaborates on Passover topics, especially the slaying of the first-borns. 20

There are two suppositions on the meaning of the mysterious slavim, both by Anatoly Alekseev:21 either Gen. pl. of the hypothetical word *slavima “song” or the hypothetical form (Gen. pl.) of the real word slavii “nightingale.” Both hypotheses are incompatible with the known facts of Slavic languages and appear as a kind of “popular etymology” invented ad hoc.

In my opinion, slavim is a rare but really attested to plural form of the Hebrew word יַעַל “quail(s)” used for both singular and collective plural. The plural form יַעַלְיָשׁ, however, is used in Num 11:31: “and brought quails from the sea.” Its ideal Slavonic transliteration would look as *salvim, but the actual slavim fits perfectly with the unvocalised Hebrew original. This rare form of the plural does not occur except Num 11:31 (even in the next verse, Num 11:32, the regular form of the collective plural is used). Therefore, it is very likely that it was not recognised by the translator of our text, whose competence is already questioned by modern scholars.22

Once more the Exodus imagery reappears. Notice that the episode with quails is highly important for the Jewish Merkabah mysticism tradition, which is directly referred to in our Slavonic text in 3:10 (s. next section): “the wind of quails” is one of the winds produced by the wings of the Metatron.

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20 Tg. Cant 2:12: “And Moses and Aaron (who are likened to palm branches) have appeared to perform miracles (וּרְאוּ) [sounds like “blossom” <nazə – translator’s note] in the land of Egypt. The time has arrived for the slaying of the firstborn” (tr. by J.C. Treat here and below). In the commentary to the next verse (2:13), the Targum elaborates on the topic of singing as well, with no direct connexion to the verse commented: “The Assembly of Israel (likened to the first fruits of the figs) opened her mouth and sang the Song at the Reed Sea. Even youths and sucklings praised the Lord of the World with their tongue [cf. Ps 8:2].”

21 Алексеев, Песнь Песней, p. 139.

22 Taube, “Slavic Translations,” p. 204: “The many erroneous renderings of Hebrew grammar (there are over forty of them ...), even more than the numerous lexical mistranslations (some of which he [Alekseev] does mention) support Alekseev’s assumption that Mus. was translated by a Slav who was not proficient in the Hebrew language.” There is a need to notice, however, that the alleged mistranslations reported by Alekseev, according to the present author, are not mistranslations at all, whereas Taube adds no more example. Therefore, there will be a reason for improving this impression of translator’s ability.
according to 3 Enoch 23:4. In the verse 2:12, the mention of quails results in parallelism with the further mention of turtledove (“the time of quails has come, and the voice of turtledove [חֲקָרָה נָאִים] / φωνὴ τοῦ τρυγόνος] is heard in our land”).

Quails are a symbol of erotic and especially sinful desire, ἐπιθυμία in Hellenistic Jewish Greek. The “time of quails” could be understood as referring to a special time of day, evening (in accordance with Ex 16:13 “about at evening that the quails came”). As the Hellenistic Jewish Book of Wisdom23 says, “Afterward they saw also a new kind of birds, when desire led them to ask for luxurious food; for, to give them relief, quails came up from the sea” (Wis 19:11-12: ἐφ᾽ ὑστέρῳ δὲ ἔδιναν καὶ γένεσιν νέαν ὄρνεων, ὅτε ἐπιθυμία προσαχθέντες ἠτέλεσαν έδέσματα τρυφῆς· εἰς γάρ παραμυθίαν ἐκ θαλάσσης ἀνέβη αὐτοῖς ὀρτυγομήτρα). In the book of Numbers24 the episode with the quails is treated in the same manner: “And he called the name of that place Kibrothhattaavah (ךִּבְרוֹת חָתָאָב / Μνήματα τῆς ἐπιθυμίας): because there they buried the people that lusted (τὸν λαὸν τὸν ἐπιθυμητήν)” (Num 11:34 KJV). The language of the Septuagint is even more specific than that of the Hebrew Bible: the latter mentions “sin” in general, whereas the former “(sexual) desire”.

The topic is continued by the Christian exegesis with Paul: “Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them, and they were struck down in the wilderness. Now these things occurred as examples for us, so that we might not desire evil as they desired (εἰς τὸ μὴ εἶναι ἡμᾶς ἐπιθυμητὰς κακῶν, καθὼς κάκεινοι ἐπεθυμησαν)” (1 Cor 10:5-6).

The turtledoves in Cant 2:12 are mentioned immediately after the word rendered in Mus as slavim. The Hebrew Bible reads at this place “the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land.” In the immediate context of Song of Songs, a mention of turtledove refers to 1:10, where Mus provides the same translation as the Septuagint: “your jaws are beautiful as turtledoves” (τί ὡραῖον ήσαν σιαγόνες σου ὡς τρυγόνες; cf. Hebrew בַּתֹּרִים לְחָיָי נָאוו “your jaws/ cheeks are beautiful with pendants” and ἐν κοσμίμασιν in Symmachus). The translators of the Septuagint and Mus chose the homonymic meaning of ἐπιθυμία “turtledove” instead of the most obvious meaning “pendant” (or another kind of ornament), which is chosen by Symmachus.

The translation of Mus is here even more consequent than that of the Septuagint, because in the next verse (1:11) מִקְרָא נֵצֶף וַשַּׁבֵּר “We will make you

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23 Quoted according to J. Ziegler, Sapientia Solomonis (Septuaginta: Vetus Testamentum Graecum, 12, 1), Göttingen, 1962.
24 The Greek text is quoted according to J.W. Wevers, Numeri (Septuaginta: Vetus Testamentum Graecum, 3, 1), Göttingen, 1982.
plaits/circlets of gold,” where another derivate of the same root is used, and
where the Septuagint translates ὅμοιώματα χρυσίου ποιήσομέν σοι “we will
make you images of gold,” 25 Mus has горлицѣ златыя сттворим тѣбѣ “we
will make you (two) golden turtledoves.” Given these readings, in Mus, in the
verses 1:10 and 1:11, we have to conclude that, in 1:10, the translator understood
ῥαβδίνας as “with/between two gold earrings in the shape of turtledove”.

In such a context, “the voice of a turtledove” in 2:12 recalls the voice of the
bride. The meaning of the Hebrew homonym in 2:12 has predefined its un-
derstanding and translation in 1:10 and 1:11. This explanation is applicable also to
Cant 1:10 LXX.

2.3 The Temple of Solomon and the Merkabah in Cant 3:9-10

Cant 3:9-10 is an extremely important text in the history of the Jewish exege-
tical tradition. No wonder that the modern Slavists, without knowing the his-
tory of the exegesis, have found here a number of “errors” in both Mus and Vil
(s. Table 2).

In 3:9, the word ἀφίριον < φορεῖον, as Alekseev said, “became difficult for
both translators.” 27 In fact, “palace” in Vil is one of the two possible – but
wrongly chosen – translations of the Aramaic בֵּית. In Mus, “steps” seem to be
replaced from 3:10 LXX with the variant reading having the plural ἐπιβάσεις or
its Hebrew original, if there was one. If, however, in 3:9 Mus the plural βςςχο-
δαί is an erroneous reading instead of the singular βςςχοδῆ – which is very
likely due to the poor quality of the textual transmission and the similarity
between the Cyrillic letters ы and ъ – the meaning becomes much clearer: the
calque of a noun with the root ῥκβ “to mount” and the meaning “chariot.”
Compare, in 3:10 LXX, ἐπιβασείς as a rendering of merkabah, and, in Ps 103:3
LXX, τὴν ἐπίβασιν αὐτοῦ as a rendering of רְכֻב “his chariot.” 28 In this case, the
content of the verse 3:9 would be in conformity with that of 3:10. This under-
standing is corroborated with one of the three Syriac variant readings, كُورِسِيا.

25 Translation by J.C. Treat in A New English Translation of the Septuagint and the Other Greek
Translations Traditionally Included under That Title, eds. A. Pietersma and B.G. Wright,
26 Here the conjecture by Alekseev горлицѣ instead of горницѣ “(two) upper-rooms” in the
manuscript is quite justified.
27 Алексеев, Песнь Песней, p. 139: “затруднило обаих переводчиков.”
28 The dictionaries of the Septuagint Greek do not provide the meaning “chariot” for Cant
3:10 and Ps 103:3. Cf. T. Muraoka, A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint, Louvain,
2009, p. 268: “that which one stands on: ‘steps’”; J. Lust et al., A Greek-English Lexicon of the Sep-
approach, access Ps 103 (104), 3: steps Ct 3, 10.”
“throne, seat,” viz. “throne of Solomon” according to the literal meaning but referring to the image of the throne of God. This Syriac word could have been a rendering of merkabah or another derivate from the root rkb with the meaning of either “throne” or “chariot” or both.

It seems that the verse 3:9 in Mus goes back to an original different from all recensions known to us, where the word אַפִּרְיון was replaced with a derivate of the root rkb. The same reading reached us through one of the variants of Peshiṭta.

In Cant 3:10, Vil follows the Targum, the Hebrew original of Symmachus, and the Hebrew original of Peshiṭta in choosing “covering/curtain” instead of “seat/chariot”. This is the mainstream tradition of the Jewish exegesis considering this place as referring to the curtain of the Temple of Solomon.

Mus follows another line of the Jewish exegesis. Francis Thomson enumerated the reading “chariot” instead of “seat” in 3:10 Mus as the first among the

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**Table 2**

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“risible” mistakes of the translation (the second one is “turtledoves” in 1:10, s. above). In fact, his remark shows this unique thing: philological training without knowledge of the exegesis is not sufficient for evaluating the quality of mediaeval biblical translations.

The late antique *Midrash Shir ha-Shirim Rabbah* provides no less than five interpretations of the place we are investigating. The first three are referring to the curtain, the last two (both in ch. III, 23) to the root *rkb* and the topics related to the chariot. It is worth noting that there is no interpretation related to a “stationary” seat/throne.

The fourth and the fifth midrashic interpretations refer to the chariot of God implicitly through a verb derived from the root *rkb*: “THE SEAT/CHARIOT OF IT/HIM OF PURPLE: as it says, *He rides* (רוכב, cf. ὁ ἐπιβάινων LXX) *the heavens to your help* (Deut 33:26)” and “THE SEAT/CHARIOT OF IT/HIM OF PURPLE: as it says, *To Him that rides* (לוהיט, cf. τῷ ἐπιβαίνοντι LXX) *upon the heaven of heavens, which are of old* (Ps 68:34 MT).” Both Deut 33:26 and Ps 68:34 exclude interpretation of the *merkabah* in Cant 3:10 as an immobile seat and both of them require its understating as a chariot.

An explicit interpretation of “chariot” in Cant 3:10 is preserved in the 13th-century midrashic commentary on Deuteronomy, *Be-Midbar Rabbah* 12:4 (this part is composed in the 11th cent.): “He [king Solomon] made for himself a palanquin of wood from Lebanon. He made … its chariot of purple. This is the sun which is situated above and rides in its chariot (במרכבה רוכב) and illuminates the world. As it says [Ps 19:6], [He placed in them a tent for the sun] who is like a groom coming forth from the chamber, etc. And because of the power of the sun, the rains fall, and from the power of the sun, the earth yields fruit.”

The same tradition, without an explicit reference to the Song of Songs, is preserved in the eighth- or ninth-century *Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer* 6: “And the sun rides in its chariot (רוכב במרכבה) and rises crowned like a groom and like a hero, eager to run his course. As it says [Ps 19:6], *who is like a groom coming forth from the chamber, like a hero, eager to run his course.*”

These midrashic interpretations are now connected with the fifth- and sixth-century mosaic pavements in seven Palestinian synagogues excavated

32 Translation by Miller, “Epigraphical’ Rabbis,” p. 54, quoting Higger’s ed.
since 1921, where the chariot of Helios / Sun with four horses is placed in the centre of the twelve signs of Zodiac.33 I would like to add some arguments to those of the art historians who, following the intuition of E.R. Goodenough, argued that this composition is related to the prominent place of the sun in some Jewish Second Temple traditions, where the chariot of the sun is either a symbol of God34 (as it is in 3 Baruch) or belongs to a divinised human figure such as Enoch-Metatron35 (as it is in 2 Enoch) or Joseph (Joseph and Aseneth).36

3 The Title of the Slavonic Translation in Mus

The title of the translation in Mus transliterates Cant 1:1 and adds a Slavonic translation: Ширь гаширим ашир’ли шломо. Рекше: пѣсни пѣснем, иже к Соломону “Shir ha-shirim asher li-Shlomo [לִשְׁלֹמֹֽה אֲשֶׁ֥ר הַשִּׁירִ֖ים שִׁ֥יר]. That is, songs [plural instead of singular] of songs that are to [sc., of, a Semitism] Solomon”. The plural form пѣсни and the expected singular form пѣснь are not similar enough to be easily confused.

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36 Cf. S. Fine, “The Jewish Helios: A Modest Proposal Regarding the Sun God and the Zodiac on Late Antique Synagogue Mosaics,” in his Art, History and the Historiography of Judaism in Roman Antiquity (Brill Reference Library of Judaism, 34), Leiden, 2014, pp. 161-180, who insists that all these images were fitting with the Rabbinic Judaism of the epoch.

37 Corrected by Alekseev from гаширим.
This title is considered by the Slavists among the proofs that the translated text is the standard one of the Hebrew (Masoretic) Bible, but we have demonstrated that the translated recension is sometimes different from the preserved Hebrew recension. Variant readings of the title with the plural “Songs” are known in a large part of the Greek manuscript and exegetical traditions, since the fourth-century Codex Alexandrinus (ἅσματα τῶν ἁσμάτων), and in the Aramaic Targum (שירים ושבחן שמלת “The Songs and Praises which Solomon spoke...”).

In Peshiṭta the title varies, but some variants preserve the Hebrew title (followed by a translation into Syriac), and this is only in the forms שֶׁרֶת שֶׁרֶיֶן or שֶׁרֶת שֶׁרֶיֶּן. Both phrases are apparently transliterations from Hebrew having no specific meaning in Syriac. However, the case is not as simple as that.

The transliterations use the Syriac marker of plural Syāmē (two dots above some letter of the word in plural). In the first case, the plural ᵐ fraught ᵐ “song” (instead of the masculine שיר used in the Masoretic text, whose meaning is the same) is intended; this word is to be pronounced as שִׁירוֹת, which would explain use of alap in שֶׁרֶת instead of the expected yod. It seems that the lack of Syāmē on the first component of שֶׁרֶת שֶׁרֶיֶּן is an incidental omission made by Syriac scribes rather than a deliberate intention of rendering some other morphological derivate.

The second component of the Peshiṭta transliteration is certainly Aramaic, that is, שֶׁרֶי instead of the Hebrew plural שִׁירִים. One can suppose that at least some of the sources of the Peshiṭta readings, which do not always coincide with the known Hebrew and Greek texts, were Aramaic.

The Slavonic title of Mus, after having reproduced in transliteration the Hebrew one, goes back to the ancient tradition, where the Hebrew title was first transliterated and then translated into the language of the given version. Moreover, the words иже к Соломону, being a blatant Semitism – but not necessarily a Hebraism as it is treated by Slavists – are a demonstration that even this part of the title, already being a translation from Hebrew, is translated into Slavonic from a Semitic language. The plural from песни “songs” instead of the singular form just transliterated from Hebrew in the very same title in Slavonic would point to either an unknown Hebrew text (such as the

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38 BDB, s.v.
The hypothetical lost original of the Greek reading with plural) or a text in rabbinic Aramaic or Syriac.

The Slavonic title as a whole is certainly a direct translation from a Semitic language. However, the original Hebrew title is, in Slavonic, encapsulated within the transliteration, and the following translated title does not coincide with it. The only natural explanation of these phenomena is a supposition that the Slavonic title is translated from a Semitic title, which was in a language other than Hebrew and already contained a transliteration and a translation of the Hebrew title in slightly different forms. Similar titles in a Semitic language survived in Syriac in some manuscripts of Peshiṭta.

4 Conclusion: the Textual Transmission

The consensus opinion that Mus is translated directly from Hebrew is not as evident as one had thought.

First, the ultimate original of the Slavonic translation is not the Masoretic text but some other unknown recension, even though this recension is compatible with both Rabbinic and Second Temple period Judaism. It elaborates on the exegetical traditions that originated in the Second Temple period but have never completely disappeared from the rabbinical exegesis.

Nevertheless, the Slavonic title in Mus appeared as a translation from a Semitic text already translated from Hebrew. This is a weighty argument for the existence of an intermediary Semitic text between the Hebrew and the Slavonic.

Needless to say that the features of the Slavonic translation that, according to the widely held opinion of the Slavists, reveal an original in Hebrew could be equally interpreted as revealing an original in some other Northwest Semitic language, such as some dialect of Aramaic, either rabbinic or Syriac.

Moreover, the peculiar plural form in the Slavonic title, “songs of songs” instead of the singular “song of songs” is compatible with both Aramaic rabbinic Targum and Syriac Peshiṭta but not the Masoretic Hebrew text. This argument, however, is not decisive, because the presence of the plural variant in some manuscripts of the Greek version points, with a substantial likelihood, to the existence of such variant in Hebrew too. Nevertheless, the Hebrew title that is transliterated in our Slavonic text keeps the first word “song” in singular. Therefore, it is unlikely that the title of Mus goes back to an original in Hebrew and not in another Semitic language.

It is also of importance that one of the readings of Peshiṭta in 3:9 (“throne” instead of “palanquin”) corroborates the recension of 3:9-10 in our Slavonic
text, whereas the Hebrew and the other versions have completely different readings.

Far from being a translation of the Peshiṭta recension, our Slavonic text, however, reveals some specific proximity with the Aramaic in general and especially Syriac tradition.

Finally, let us add, the translations made directly from Syriac are known in the early Slavonic literature – for the texts unavailable in Greek. Our text is certainly absent in Greek. If the Slavonic translation is not Russian with South Slavic features but genuinely South Slavic, it could belong to the earliest period of Slavic writing.⁴⁰

The balance of the probabilities⁴¹ points to the following historical scheme:

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\begin{align*}
\text{Mus ("westernised" recension of the South Slavic translation)} & \uparrow \\
*\text{Early South Slavic translation} & \uparrow \\
*\text{Syriac recension} & \uparrow \\
*\text{Aramaic or Aramaised Jewish recension} & \uparrow \\
\text{Hebrew text (similar or identical to the Masoretic one).} & 
\end{align*}
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⁴¹ This balance could be changed in a near future with new and still unpublished data by Alexander Grishchenko. He discovered one more folio of the Museum manuscript (overlooked by Alekseev) and, moreover, found some parallels in mediaeval Jewish exegesis in Yiddish. Anyway, the Jewish exegesis discussed above is ancient but another path of its tradition (through the Ashkenazim Jewish diaspora and western Slavic lands instead of a Syriac intermediary and a South Slavic *Sitz im Leben* of the Slavonic translation) is still not excluded. I am very grateful to Alexander Grishchenko for discussing with me his findings.

⁴² I would like to express my gratitude to Dr Camille Miller for improving my English.