

The Russian Bible and Russian Bible Scholarship between the MT and the LXX

MIKHAIL G. SELEZNEV

The LXX has a peculiar place in the Russian Church and the Russian Culture. The only Bible text authorized by the Russian Church for liturgical reading and for use in prayer-books is the Church Slavonic text of 1751-1756, which belongs mainly to the LXX tradition. On the other hand, the only Bible text widely used for private reading, as well as for academic and religious study of the Bible is the so-called Russian Synodal translation of 1876, which belongs mainly to the MT tradition. As the result, when an ordinary parishioner wants to better understand the meaning of a Church Slavonic psalm in his or her prayer-book (in fact, the Church Slavonic language is very difficult to understand for a modern Russian person without special philological training) and turns to the standard Russian Bible for clarification, it immediately becomes evident that the two texts, Church Slavonic and Russian, differ significantly from each other and cannot be used to clarify each other. The situation is, probably, unique: the differences between the LXX and the MT tradition become evident and important not only for those in the academy, but also for laypeople.

Taking this into account, one might have expected LXX studies to flourish in Russia. This is not the case. Like all other areas of the Bible scholarship, LXX studies faltered tremendously owing to seventy years of communism, and the consequences are felt up to this very day.

The LXX and the Church Slavonic Bible

The manuscript tradition of the Church Slavonic Bible is extremely rich and complicated. The earliest manuscripts date to the early eleventh century. Modern introductions into the history of the Church Slavonic Bible include A. Alexeev, *Textology of the Slavonic Bible* (in Russian, St. Petersburg: Dmitriy Bulanin Publishing House, 1999) and F. Thomson, "The Slavonic Translation of the Old Testament" (in *The Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. J. Krašovec,

Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998, 605-920); see also extensive surveys of the Slavonic Bible tradition by A. M. Bruni in *Textual History of the Bible* (Leiden: Brill, 2016-2017).

The manuscript tradition goes back to the translations by the saints Cyril and Methodius and their disciples, made in Moravia in the 860s - 880s from the Greek Bible. It is believed that by 885 (the year of death of Saint Methodius) the whole of the New Testament and most of the Old Testament was already translated into Slavonic. In the following centuries the Slavonic Bible texts were often revised against the Greek manuscripts or translated anew from the Greek. Translational activities of the time of Bulgarian king Simeon (893-927) were especially important for the Slavonic Old Testament.

Occasionally, the Masoretic text also exercised its influence on the Slavonic Bible tradition. For example, the East-Slavonic translation of Esther (earliest manuscripts date to the 14th century) follows the MT, even with regard to the length of the book (without the LXX additions). Most East-Slavonic manuscripts of the Pentateuch also exhibit the influence of the MT, mainly in marginal glosses and in subdivisions of the text corresponding to the weekly Torah readings.

The influence of the Vulgate on the text of the Church Slavonic Bible is felt especially in the first full Church Slavonic Bible, the so-called *Gennady Bible*, written in 1499 for Gennady, archbishop of Novgorod. In matters of canon the Gennady Bible differs from the Greek Bibles and follows the Vulgate. E.g., in addition to "I Ezdra" (= canonical Ezra, = Vlg I Ezrae), "Nehemiah" (= canonical Nehemiah, = Vlg II Ezrae), and "II Ezdra" (= LXX Εσδρας α', = Vlg III Ezrae), it includes "III Ezdra" (=Apocalypse of Ezra, = Vlg IIII Ezrae, absent from the Greek manuscript tradition and translated from Latin).

Several books that were unavailable to the scribes in Slavonic (Chronicles, the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, Tobith, Judith, Wisdom, 1-2 Maccabees, parts of Esther and Jeremiah) were translated for the *Gennady Bible* from Latin. The chapter arrangement in Jeremiah, and to a large extent, the text itself of Jeremiah followed the Vulgate.

The *Gennady Bible* served as the basis for the printed editions of the Church Slavonic Bible, namely the *Ostroh Bible* of 1581, the *Moscow Bible* of 1663 and *Elizavetinskaya Bible* ("Queen Elizabeth's Bible") of 1751-1756, which became the official Bible text of the Russian Orthodox Church.

The editors who were preparing the new Church Slavonic Bible in the first half of the 18th century were instructed to correct the earlier editions to comply exactly with the "Greek Bible of the Seventy", but they found themselves at an impasse given the differences between different editions of the "Greek Bible

of the Seventy". As a rule, they kept the readings of the *Moscow Bible* of 1663 if these were supported by at least one Greek edition at their disposal.

On the one hand, in preparation of the printed editions, most of the texts that had been translated in the *Gennady Bible* from Latin were translated anew from Greek. On the other hand, the editors of the printed Church Slavonic Bibles often used the Vulgate to correct the translations made earlier from the Greek. For example, it is well known that "Molech" is absent from the Greek Pentateuch, being replaced with ἄρχων. However, in the printed editions of the Church Slavonic Bible "Molech" reappears in the Pentateuch, having been borrowed from the Vulgate, first as a marginal gloss (*Ostroh Bible*), then in the main text (*Elizavetinskaya Bible*). In Hos 11:1 the *Gennady Bible* and all the printed editions follow the MT/Vulgate reading "out of Egypt I called my son" instead of the reading "out of Egypt I called his children" unanimously witnessed to by the LXX tradition. In this case the MT/Vulgate reading was preferred over the LXX for dogmatic reasons.

The canon of the printed editions of the Slavonic Bible follows the Vulgate (e.g. it includes III Ezdra (= Vlg III Ezrae)). The chapter order in Jeremiah follows the Vulgate, verses present in the MT and Vulgate, but absent from the LXX Jeremiah are kept in translation from Latin.

Sometimes, when the editors of the *Elizavetinskaya Bible* were unsure whether to include some words in their, they put them in brackets. E.g., in Proverbs 3:22 the half-verse present in the LXX tradition, but absent from the MT and Vulgate, was put in brackets. This practice was later used on a much larger scale by the editors of the Russian Synodal version.

In ideological debates of 19th-21st centuries Russia, the Church Slavonic Bible has often been represented as the true daughter of the true LXX. This is far from reality, at least in terms of the printed editions.

Russian studies on the LXX sources of the Church Slavonic Bible

The desire to pinpoint the Greek sources of the early Slavonic Bible translations played an important role in the development of LXX studies in Russia. Study of these sources may also be important for the history of the textual tradition of the Greek Bible.

Serious interest in the Church Slavonic tradition of the Old Testament arose in the beginning of the 20th century at the Septuaginta-Unternehmen. In 1910 A. Rahlfs asked I. Evseev, the most prominent Russian scholar of the Church Slavonic Bible of that time, to participate in preparation of the critical text of the LXX. According to Evseev, an energetic desire to use the Slavonic tradition

of the Old Testament for the reconstruction of the history of the LXX was shown already by de Lagarde (I. Evseev, "Manuscript Tradition of the Slavonic Bible" (in Russian), *Khristianskoye chteniye* 1911, N4, P. 435-450, here P. 439-440). As a first step the Septuaginta-Unternehmen tasked Evseev with compilation of the full catalogue of Slavonic Old Testament manuscripts, in a similar fashion to Rahlfs' catalogue of the Septuagint manuscripts. This work was done and even paid for by the Unternehmen, but the printing of the catalogue in Berlin ceased because of technical and, later, political problems. After the Russian Academy of Sciences agreed to publish the catalogue in St. Petersburg, the manuscript of the catalogue was returned to Evseev. The revolution and the ensuing events put an end to the project. By now we have only the draft version of the catalogue left over in the private archive of Evseev after his death in 1921 (Alexeev, op. cit., P. 130).

Taking as the starting point the conception of de Lagarde, Evseev wanted to trace "Lucianic" and "Hesychian" text traditions in the Russian manuscripts. According to Evseev, Slavonic liturgical readings from the Old Testament as well as the Psalter preserve texts going back to saints Cyril and Methodius. Since they were officially commissioned by the Church of Constantinople to translate the Bible into the language of Slavs, their translations are to be regarded as primary witnesses to the Bible text of the Church of Constantinople in the 9th century. Evseev called this text the "Eastern Vulgate" and, following the famous notice of Jerome, identified the "Eastern Vulgate" with the "Lucianic" edition of the LXX (Evseev, op. cit., P. 445-450).

Slavonic Bible translations in the Catenae manuscripts were, according to Evseev, made later, at the time of Bulgarian king Simeon. He deemed them to belong mostly to the "Hesychian" tradition, and suggested that the reason for turning away from the "Lucianic" "Eastern Vulgate" was the desire of Bulgarian kings to be free from the cultural influence of Byzance (Evseev, op. cit., P. 448).

Looking back, we see that these reconstructions were well behind modern scholarship with regard to both, the methodology of textual studies and general understanding of the history of the Septuagint. The modern approach to the problem of the "Lucianic" tradition – its history, main features and scope – is completely different from the picture drawn by de Lagarde, which was the basis of Evseev's hypotheses. Preliminary comparison of Slavonic manuscripts of Kingdoms with the Greek text of Kingdoms in manuscripts boc₂e₂ (A. Alexeev, op. cit., P. 119-123), which are main witnesses to the Antiochean redaction, has demonstrated that neither liturgical, nor continuous texts of the Slavonic tradition were oriented towards the tradition represented in boc₂e₂.

As concerns the “Hesychian” revision, its very existence is put into doubt by modern studies.

Evseev’s reconstructions being rejected, the problem of the Greek sources of the early Slavonic manuscripts still awaits its explorer.

LXX manuscripts in Russian collections

The Orthodox faith, common with that of the Greeks, helped the Tzars and the Russian Church to build one of the largest collections of Greek manuscripts, including those of the Bible. It is known that Sofia Paleolog, niece of the last Byzantine Emperor and wife of Ivan III of Moscow, brought to Moscow in 1472 a big Greek library as her dowry; unfortunately the fate of the library is not known. In 1653-1654 a delegation was sent to Mt. Athos by Tzar Alexey and Patriarch Nikon of Moscow, to give charity to the monasteries and to acquire Greek manuscripts; the delegation, headed by Arseny Sukhanov, brought from Athos 498 Greek manuscripts. Collecting Greek manuscripts continued in 18th and 19th centuries, the most famous episode being, of course, the acquisition of the Codex Sinaiticus in 1862 by K. Tischendorf for the Emperor’s Public Library.

The Codex Sinaiticus was sold to the British Library in 1933. However, the Russian National Library (St. Petersburg) still possesses six isolated fragments of the Codex (with texts of Genesis 23-24, Numbers 5-7 and the Shepherd of Hermas). Among other early Old Testament manuscripts one can mention several uncial fragments (from Codices Rahlfs G, K) in the Russian National Library (St. Petersburg). Rahlfs 127 (Syn.Gr.31) in the State Historical Museum (Moscow) is one of the few witnesses of the Antiochean text in Kingdoms. Moscow and St. Petersburg possess a collection of important Psalter manuscripts, and Russian scholars cooperate with the Septuaginta-Unternehmen to ensure that their readings are taken into account in the critical edition of the Psalter.

The study of B. Fonkich, “Greek manuscripts in Soviet repositories” (in Russian; in: *Studia Codicologica* (ed. K. Treu), Berlin 1977, 189-195) gives a general overview and provides references to published catalogues of individual collections of the former Soviet Union.

The defense of the value of the LXX in 16th-18th century Russia

Already in the 16th century saint Maxim the Greek, a Greek monk who was invited from Mount Athos to translate Greek books into Slavonic and became

an important figure in the history of Russian culture, defended the LXX in a polemical pamphlet against Ioannes Lodovicus Vives, a friend of Erasmus, who was the first to doubt the authenticity of the Letter of Aristeas. The defense of the Septuagint becomes, in Maxim's pamphlet, an attack on Jerome and Catholics, who "neglected" the LXX and turned to the Scriptures of the "deicide Jews".

At the end of 17th and beginning of 18th century there was a confrontation in Russia between, on the one hand, theological circles inspired by the Kiev academy and following the patterns of Catholic (Latin) scholarship and, on the other hand, the philhellenist movement led by Likhud Brothers (two Greek monks who founded and managed the Slavic-Greek-Latin Academy in Moscow from 1685 to 1694). The polemics on the value of the LXX resumed with new force. The most important monument of this polemics was the anonymous "Refutation of the Denigrators of the Holy Translation of the Bible made from Hebrew to Hellenic dialect by the Divinely Wise, Filled with Holy Spirit and Wisdom LXXII Interpreters", which traced the differences between Orthodoxy and "Catholic aberrations" to the differences between the Septuagint and the Vulgate, the latter being translated from the supposedly corrupt Jewish text.

The main thrust of the polemics in defense of the Septuagint was not so much against the Jews, as against the Catholics.

The Moscow edition of the Greek Bible, 1821

In the second half of 1810-s the Greeks, both under the Ottoman rule and in the diaspora, started preparations for liberating Greece from the power of the Ottomans. It was in this context that the Greek diaspora in the Russian Empire together with the Russian Bible Society launched the project of publishing the Greek Bible, as a spiritual support for the patriots. The print run was ready by September 1821, several months after the start of the Greek war of Independence. Most of the copies were brought to Constantinople and to the cities of Greece. The respect for this edition in Greece was so great that when, after the independence, the Greeks published a new edition of the Septuagint, in Athens, it was based on the Moscow edition and entitled "Ἡ Παλαιὰ Διαθήκη κατὰ τοὺς ἑβδομήκοντα. Ἐκ τοῦ ἐν Μόσχᾳ, ἀδείᾳ τῆς ἱερᾶς διοικούσης Συνόδου πασῶν τῶν Ῥωσσιῶν, ἐκτυπωθέντος ἀρχαίου ἀλεξανδρινοῦ Κώδικος Μετατυπωθεῖσα". This was the official text of the Greek Church until the beginning of the 20th century.

The Old Testament of the *Moscow Bible* was based on the edition of Breitinger (Zürich, 1730-1732), which, in turn, was based on Grabe's edition of Codex Alexandrinus (Oxford, 1707-1720). Alexandrinus was chosen over Vaticanus because it is closer to the late Byzantine manuscripts and to the Church Slavonic tradition (an additional factor may have been the negative – for the publishers - associations between the name ‘Codex Vaticanus’ and Vatican as the centre of the Catholic Church).

The Synodal Bible translation and its unique attempt to reflect both, the MT and the LXX

By the beginning of 19th century, the Russian literary language established itself as a linguistic entity different from the Old Slavonic, with a flourishing body of literature. The Russian Bible Society (1814-1826) launched a project of Bible translation into Russian. Because of opposition from the more conservative part of the Orthodox clergy, the project was finished only in 1876. Published under the aegis of the Holy Synod, the Russian Bible is commonly called Synodal. It was (and still is) authorized for private reading only, not for liturgical use.

Following the example of the British and Foreign Bible Society, the Russian Bible Society took the Masoretic text as the base text for the Old Testament, a decision that caused a lot of criticism and struggle within the Church. Among the champions of the Masoretic text was saint Philaret (Drozdov), the metropolitan of Moscow (1782-1867). His memorandum *On Dogmatic Value and Conservative Usage of the Greek Septuagint and Slavonic translations of the Holy Scripture* (1858) was, despite the title, a defense of the Masoretic text as the basis for a Russian translation. However, the Septuagint and the Slavonic Bible, according to Philaret, are to be used as guides where there are historical or dogmatic reasons to suggest the corruption in the Masoretic text (he cites as examples Isa 7:14, Psa 15:10, 21:17, 109:3). The LXX is called a “mirror of the Hebrew text as it was two hundred years or more before Christ”. The memorandum of saint Philaret is one of the most important documents of the Russian Orthodox Church on textual problems of the Bible, often quoted and referred to right up to the present time. It may also be considered the starting point of the Septuagint studies in Russia.

The Synodal Bible contains all the canonical books of the Old Testament, translated from Hebrew, the Apocrypha/Deuterocanonical books translated from Greek and III Ezra (=Vulgate III Esrae) translated from Latin. The influence of the Septuagint/Church Slavonic tradition is often felt in canonical

books as well. Moreover, as a compromise between the proponents of the Masoretic text and the Septuagint, the words, clauses and passages that exist in the Septuagint but are absent from the MT were translated and inserted (in brackets) inside the translation made from the MT. One may say, these brackets played the same role as the obelos in the Hexapla. As far as I know, the Synodal Bible is the only widespread Bible translation, after Origen, which tries to combine several base texts and, at the same time, to distinguish them with text-critical markers.

This practice was carried out very inconsistently. Altogether, according to my calculations, there are 2405 additions from the LXX to the Synodal translation. The distribution of these additions is very eclectic. There are 418 additions to the book of Genesis, 941 – to the rest of the Pentateuch, 153 – to the Psalter, 9 – to Isaiah, 4 – to Jeremiah, 4 – to Ezekiel. These statistics do not correlate in any way with the number of actual discrepancies between the LXX and the MT (judging by these statistics, the discrepancies between the MT and the LXX in Genesis would be 100 times more numerous than in Isaiah or Jeremiah!). It rather reflects individual preferences of editors of different books.

Worse still, the same sign (brackets) was used both as a text-critical marker and as a punctuation sign. Quite often it is impossible to tell the intended meaning of the brackets in a given place without consulting the Greek and Hebrew Bibles. A Protestant version of the Synodal translation that appeared at the end of 19th century, omitted almost all the words in brackets, treating them as the Septuagint additions, alien to the “*Veritas Hebraica*”. In this way several “innocent” passages were omitted that had been translated from the MT and put in brackets for purely stylistic reasons.

The compromise did not save the Synodal translation from criticism by the partisans of the Church Slavonic text. Saint Theophan (Govorov), a well-known Russian ascetic writer, wrote a series of articles against the new translation; he hoped that this “modernist Bible”, foreign to the Church Slavonic tradition, would be burned in the main square of the Russian capital.

The beginning of the LXX scholarship

It was in the context of discussions around the Synodal Bible that Septuagint scholarship in Russia began. In 1870es P. Gorsky-Platonov (Moscow Spiritual Academy) and I. Yakimov (Saint-Petersburg Spiritual Academy) gave, in several articles, a scholarly response to the assaults of Theophan (Govorov) on the Synodal translation. In this response, ideologically motivated

polemics were replaced by sound historico-philological analysis. The first sizeable work of research on the LXX in Russia was a thesis on the LXX of Jeremiah defended in 1874 by I. Yakimov. Studying the differences between the MT and the LXX, he was in favor of the priority of the MT. In his speech at the defense of his thesis Yakimov even suggested to revise the Church Slavonic text in order to make it closer to the MT. In 1875 N. Eleonsky published an extensive paper “Sources on history of the LXX translation and the degree of their credibility”, showing the pseudepigraphical nature of the Letter of Aristeas. The culmination of 19th century Russian scholarship on the LXX was the first (and, for the moment, only) full-fledged introduction to the LXX, published in 1897 by I. Korsunsky (Moscow Spiritual Academy).

The translations of the LXX into Russian

The Synodal translation was heavily criticized for its eclectic nature. Several alternative translations have been offered. Even before the official endorsement of the Synodal Bible, bishop Porphyry (Uspensky), a scholar, traveler and collector of ancient manuscripts, translated from the LXX (partly – from the medieval manuscripts in his own possession) several Bible texts: Genesis 1-18, several Psalms, Proverbs 1-12, 31, Song of Songs, Old Testament liturgical readings. His translations were published in 1869 as “Samples of Russian translation of the Holy Scriptures of the Old Testament from the Greek translation of the 72 interpreters”. Later, Porphyry published a translation of Esther; a full translation of the Psalter was published posthumously in 1893.

P. Yungorov, professor of Kazan Spiritual Academy, published in 1908-1917 his translations of Proverbs, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Minor Prophets, Psalter, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, and the beginning of Genesis. This project was conceived as a full-scale traditionalist alternative to the Synodal version. The revolution prevented Yungorov from completing the full translation of the Old Testament.

The idea behind his project was to create a Russian Bible text as close as possible to the official Church Slavonic text (*Elizavetinskaya Bible*). The textual basis of most of his translations was Codex Alexandrinus. Where the Alexandrinus differed from the *Elizavetinskaya Bible*, he checked the apparatuses of available Greek editions for readings that could support the *Elizavetinskaya Bible*. If such readings were not witnessed to in the Greek tradition, he sometimes translated directly from Church Slavonic (e.g., Hos 11:1). Usually he reflected in the apparatus the divergencies between main Greek editions and the Church Slavonic text (strangely, he forgot to do it in Os 11:1, where

his translation had no support in the Greek tradition). For the Psalter he took as the basis of his translation the text of printed Psalters of the Greek Orthodox Church, which were closer to Church Slavonic Bible than ancient manuscripts. Yungarov's faithfulness to the *Elizavetinskaya Bible* is evident in the fact that he kept in his translation even the "textological" brackets of the *Elizavetinskaya Bible*, though they have no precedent in the Greek tradition (usually he describes in his notes, which editions support the words in brackets and which do not support). All in all, Yungarov's goal was not translation of the Septuagint as such, but rather creation of a Russian version of the "Greek-Slavonic text" (the expression he often used in prefaces to his translations).

Two translations of the LXX Psalter that have appeared in recent decades and are intended to be used alongside the Church Slavonic Psalter (E. Birukova, I. Birukov (1994); Amvrozy Timrot (1999)) follow, in fact, the model of russifying the "Greek-Slavonic text", as suggested by Yungarov.

In the 1990s the famous Russian philologist S. Averintsev published "six Psalms of the morning service" translated from LXX, and, at the same time, prepared a translation of almost all of the Psalter from the Hebrew. The two translations differed not only in their base text, but also in their stylistic features and the register of the Russian language. This unique translational experiment (a LXX-based translation and a MT-based translation by the same translator) may serve as precedent for co-existing of two types of translation within the same culture.

In the 1990s/2000s the necessity of having two different Bible translations, one from the Hebrew and one from the Greek, corresponding to two different stages in the development of the Bible tradition, was voiced by M. Seleznev, editor-in-chief of the re-established Russian Bible Society ("The Hebrew text of the Bible and the LXX: two base texts, two translations?", 2008). The translation of the Hebrew text was supported by the United Bible Societies already in 1990s (published in 2011 by the Russian Bible Society as part of the *Contemporary Russian Version*), the project of translation of the Greek text was discussed by the Russian Bible Society and UBS, but it was never realized.

LXX and cognate studies after the fall of Communism

Since the end of 1980s Russian Bible scholarship is slowly recovering, but the interruption of academic tradition makes the process difficult. This affects the LXX studies as well. On the one hand, the LXX started to figure prominently in the Orthodox theological discourse and in philosophical literature (I. Vevurko, A. Vdovichenko). On the other hand, historical and philological works

are few, even if one takes into account the cognate disciplines as well. One may mention a general introduction to the LXX and its literary environment by A. Alexeev, as well as his works on the Slavonic and Russian Bibles in their relationship to LXX; studies on the Hellenistic Judaism and “Aristeas” by A. Kovelman and E. Matusova; on the translation technique of the LXX by M. Seleznev, O. Lazarenko and M. Yurovitskaya; on poetics of the LXX by A. Desnitsky; on Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha by A. Shmaina-Velikanova and N. Braginskaya.

MIKHAIL G. SELEZNEV

National Research University – Higher School of Economics

Ss Cyril and Methodius School of Post-Graduate and Doctoral Studies

Moscow, Russia

mgseleznev@gmail.com