

CHAPTER 19

The Septuagint in the Eastern Orthodox Tradition

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INTRODUCTION

The family of Eastern Orthodox churches is formed by those Christian churches that trace their origin to the Byzantine commonwealth.¹ The oldest non-Greek Church in this family is the Georgian Church, founded in the fourth century. Since the ninth century, and especially after the fall of Byzantium in 1453, an ever-increasing role in the Orthodox world has been played by the Slavic states and churches, the Russian Church becoming the strongest and most numerous. The list of Eastern Orthodox churches that mutually recognize each other and therefore were officially invited to the Pan-Orthodox Council of 2016 included churches of Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem, Russia, Greece, Cyprus, Romania, Serbia, Bulgaria, Georgia, Poland, Albania, and Czech Republic and Slovakia. The canonical status of some other Eastern Orthodox churches is disputed. The churches that split off from the Byzantine commonwealth during the great Christological controversies of the fifth century CE (Coptic Church, Ethiopian Church, Armenian Church, Syriac Orthodox Church, Assyrian Church of the East, and their daughter churches) do not belong to this family, and are usually referred to as Oriental Orthodox churches. The emergence of Orthodox diasporas (Greek, Russian, Romanian) in Western Europe and North America brought inner-Orthodox theological developments and debates to the West.

OVERVIEW

The Old Testament Canon of the Eastern Orthodox Churches

The ambiguity that characterized the attitude of the Byzantine Fathers toward the problem of canon continues in the post-Byzantine Orthodox tradition.²

All Orthodox churches agree that the Old Testament of the Christian Bible contains some books that are not found in the Hebrew Bible. The standard, semi-official designation

¹Space considerations limit the number of translations surveyed. For a broader perspective on Bible in the Orthodox world see, e.g., Scouteris and Belezos 2015.

²On the topic of canon in Orthodox Churches see Meurer and Ellingworth 1992; Scanlin 1996; Desnitsky 2006; Konstantinou 2012; Crisp 2016; de Regt 2016.

for these books in Greek theological literature is ἀναγι(γ)νωσκόμενα (“those read”). The terminology goes back to the thirty-ninth festal letter of St. Athanasius (367), where he lists first βιβλία κανονιζόμενα (“books canonized,” i.e., the books of the Hebrew canon), then “βιβλία ... οὐ κανονιζόμενα μὲν, τετυπωμένα δὲ παρὰ τῶν Πατέρων ἀναγινώσκεισθαι τοῖς ἄρτι προσερχομένοις καὶ βουλομένοις κατηχεῖσθαι τὸν τῆς εὐσεβείας λόγον” (“books not canonized, but assigned by the fathers to be read to those now coming in and wishing to be catechized in the word of piety”).

Athanasius’s statement is ambiguous, since these books are, on the one hand, οὐ κανονιζόμενα, but on the other hand, ἀναγινωσκόμενα. The current Greek usage takes the second part of Athanasius’s definition: ἀναγι(γ)νωσκόμενα. The terminology may sound illogical since the canonical books of the Bible are also read in the Church. In contrast, the terminology adopted by the Russian Orthodox Church since the middle of the nineteenth century is based on the first part of Athanasius’s definition: неканонические книги (“non-canonical books” = οὐ κανονιζόμενα). However, some Russian theologians question the logical consistency of the notion of “non-canonical books of the Bible canon.”

The term “deuterocanonical books,” coined by the Post-Tridentine Catholic theologians, is often used in Orthodox theological literature, in Greece, Russia, and elsewhere, though sometimes condemned as non-Orthodox and “borrowed from Catholics.” The Orthodox tradition does not use the term “Apocrypha” with reference to these books. In Greek and Russian scholarly literature, the expression “Old Testament Apocrypha” refers to what in the English-speaking scholarship is usually called “Old Testament Pseudepigrapha.”

There is no agreement on the exact list of these books. All the Bibles published by Orthodox churches for Orthodox audiences include Judith, Tobit, Greek Esdras,³ three Maccabean books, Wisdom of Solomon, Wisdom of Sirach, Baruch, and Epistle of Jeremiah. The book of Psalms contains Psalm 151, and Daniel and Esther contain additions not found in the Hebrew Bible. In addition to these, printed Bibles used by the Greek Orthodox Church include 4 Maccabees, though usually as an appendix (παράρτημα). This book was never included in any edition of Church Slavonic or Russian Bible. On the other hand, printed editions of Church Slavonic Bible as well as the Orthodox editions of the Russian Synodal Bible include “3 Esdras” (= Apocalypse of Ezra = 4 Esdras of the Vulgate), which is absent from the Greek manuscript tradition and was translated into Church Slavonic and Russian from the Vulgate. The so-called Prayer of Manasseh is printed in Church Slavonic Bibles and in the Orthodox editions of the Russian Synodal Bible as an appendix to 2 Chronicles; in the Greek tradition it is included in liturgical books and compilations (e.g., in the Odes), but not in the printed Bibles.

Usually in printed Orthodox Bibles the “deuterocanonical” books of the Old Testament are interspersed among the “canonical” (just as it used to be in the manuscript tradition). Within the history of the Greek Bible an exception is the Athens edition of 1843–50, which puts these books in a separate volume. In the 1990s, the Russian Bible Society published an edition of the Russian Synodal Bible with the “non-canonical” books printed as a separate corpus between the “canonical” books of the Old Testament and the New

³LXX Ἑσδρας α' (Esdras α) is known as 1 Esdras in most English Bibles with apocrypha and in German scholarship as 3 Esra. This book is present in other traditions as well, known as 3 Esdras in the Vulgate and 2 Esdras in the Slavonic Bible.

Testament. Despite the blessing of the Patriarch of Moscow, this edition was not popular among Orthodox and the Bible Society returned to the traditional order of Old Testament books.

There is no clear-cut Church verdict on whether “deuterocanonical” or “non-canonical” books should be treated as being on the same level as “canonical” ones. In the Early Church the boundary between “The Bible” and other books was not as sharp as in the Post-Reformation Western churches. The vehement discussion of the scope of the Biblical Canon started in the West in the context of polemics between Catholics and Protestants. The Orthodox churches soon became involved in the discussion, some theologians siding with Protestants, the majority with Catholics. In 1629, Cyril Lukaris, the Patriarch of Constantinople, published a confession of faith that was strongly Calvinistic in emphasis. Cyril states that only the twenty-two books approved by the Council of Laodicea should be called divine Scripture, while the “Apocrypha” (Cyril is almost unique within the Orthodox tradition in using this terminology) do not have such authority. Soon after Cyril’s death (he was executed by the Turkish government in 1638) the Synod of Constantinople of 1638 anathematized both Cyril and his confession of faith. This condemnation was confirmed by the synods of Constantinople (1642), Jassy (1642), and Jerusalem (1672). Thus, Cyril’s Confession of Faith was declared not Orthodox but Calvinist. The Jerusalem synod of 1672 explicitly declared the Wisdom of Solomon, Judith, Tobit, Bel and the Dragon, Susanna, the Maccabean books, and the Wisdom of Sirach to be genuine parts of Scripture. However, these local Synods do not have Pan-Orthodox authority and are often regarded by Orthodox theologians as reflecting strong Catholic influence.

In general, one can say that the Greek Orthodox theology is probably more inclined to neglect the difference between “canonical” books of the Old Testament and the ἀναγι(γ)νωσκόμενα, while the Russian Orthodox theology of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has given more attention to the difference (which is reflected in the abovementioned expression “non-canonical books”).⁴

The Pan-Orthodox Conference, held in Rhodes in 1961 to prepare a Pan-Orthodox Synod, included the issue of canon in the agenda of the forthcoming Pan-Orthodox Synod. However, later preparatory consultations removed this issue from the Synod’s agenda.

The Septuagint Text of the Greek Orthodox Church

Until the establishment of the independent Greek state in the beginning of the nineteenth century, the possibility for printing Greek books in Greece or Constantinople was almost non-existent. Greek books, including the Bible and liturgical books, were published in the West, for example in Venice and other Italian cities, and later also in Jassy (Moldova).

In 1821, several months after the start of the Greek War of Independence, the Russian Bible Society with the support of the Greek diaspora published the so-called Moscow Greek Bible. The Old Testament text was based on the edition of Breitinger (Zürich, 1730–2), which in turn was based on Grabe’s edition of Codex Alexandrinus (Oxford, 1707–20). Alexandrinus was chosen over Vaticanus because it was deemed to be closer to the late Byzantine manuscripts and the Church Slavonic tradition (an additional factor may have been the negative—for the publishers—associations between

⁴See also Konstantinou (2012: 44–5).

the name “Codex Vaticanus” and Vatican as the center of the Roman Catholic Church). The respect for this edition in Greece was so great that when, after independence, a new edition of the Septuagint was published in Athens (in four volumes, without the New Testament, 1843–50), it was based on the Moscow edition and entitled Ἡ Παλαιὰ Διαθήκη κατὰ τοὺς Ἑβδομήκοντα. Ἐκ τοῦ ἐν Μόσχα, ἀδεία τῆς ἱερᾶς διοικούσης Συνόδου πασῶν τῶν Ῥωσσιῶν, ἐκτυπωθέντος ἀρχαίου ἀλεξανδρινοῦ Κώδικος Μετατυπωθεῖσα (“The Old Testament according to the LXX. Reprinted from the ancient Codex Alexandrinus printed in Moscow by the permission of the Holy Synod ruling all of Russia”).

By the beginning of the twentieth century, copies of the Athens edition, not to mention the Moscow edition, had become extremely rare. In 1928 the Greek missionary brotherhood Zoe (Ἀδελφότης Θεολόγων «H Ζωή») published a new edition of the Greek Old Testament. According to the preface, it was based on what were considered the best editions of the Old Testament according to the LXX, following in all doubtful cases the critical edition of Tischendorf as most accurate. The second edition of the Zoe Bible, published in 1939, was prepared by P. I. Bratsiotis (Παναγιώτης Μπρατσιώτης; 1889–1982), probably the most well-known Greek Bible scholar of that time. In the preface to this edition, Bratsiotis stated that for the Old Testament texts read at Church services (including the full text of the Psalter and Jonah), he “relied on liturgical books in Athenian libraries, namely manuscripts and books printed in Venice, whose text almost exactly coincides with the manuscripts,” while the remaining texts (i.e., most of the OT) were reprinted from the 1935 edition of Rahlfs.

For the book of Judges, Bratsiotis used the B text of Rahlfs, for Tobit the BA text of Rahlfs, and for Daniel he followed the “Theodotion” version of Rahlfs and the liturgical books. There are some minor orthographic changes to the Rahlfs’s text, bringing it closer to the Attic norm, for example, elimination of movable -v before consonants. Proper names that were in the Rahlfs edition left unaccented, Bratsiotis supplied with accents taken from earlier editions. It is not clear which particular liturgical texts Bratsiotis used or to what extent. A trial look at the texts of Judges, used in Orthodox liturgy (Judg. 6:2, 6, 11-24, 36-39; 13:2-8, 13-14, 17-18, 21) shows that, despite his statement in the Preface, in these places Bratsiotis used not the liturgical text of the Greek Church (*the Menaion*), but rather the B text of Rahlfs. In comparison with Rahlfs’s edition, the Bratsiotis edition (like that of Athens of 1843–50) lacks Odes and Psalms of Solomon. The order of books slightly differs from that of Rahlfs, and Fourth Maccabees is printed separately at the end of the Old Testament as an Appendix (*παράρτημα*). The Bratsiotis edition has become the standard Bible of Modern Greek-speaking Orthodox churches. It was reproduced many times, without any changes, by the brotherhood Zoe until the 1990s. Starting from 1997, essentially the same text (but with a new typesetting) began to be published by Ἀποστολική Διακονία, the official publishing house of the Church of Greece.

The Athens Septuagint of 1843–50 as well as the first edition of the brotherhood Zoe Septuagint had the blessing of the Holy Synod of the Church of Greece. It is commonly understood that this blessing concerns also the second edition of the Zoe Septuagint and its reprints. In the Eastern Orthodox liturgy, the Old Testament texts are read during Vespers and Hours. In the Byzantine period, the collection of these readings (the so-called *Prophetologion*) functioned as a separate liturgical book.⁵ The manuscripts of the *Prophetologion* are often referred to as Old Testament lectionaries. In the post-Byzantine

⁵On the Prophetologion see Miller (2010).

period, copying of the *Prophetologion* ceased (only one printed edition is known) and the Old Testament readings were scattered through several liturgical books containing mostly non-Biblical texts and hymns, namely the *Menaion*, the *Triodion*, and the *Pentecostarion*.

The relationship between the OT liturgical readings of the post-Byzantine Greek Church and the earlier Byzantine lectionaries is yet to be studied. According to Mihăilă (2018: 47–51), the liturgical readings from Judges 6:2, 6, 11–24 represent an eclectic text, closer to Codex Alexandrinus than to Vaticanus.

Translations of the Old Testament into Modern Greek

Vernacular Greek paraphrases of the Bible (especially of the Psalter) started already in the sixteenth century. Christian paraphrases of the OT books were based on the LXX. But a new stage in the history of Bible translation into Modern Greek began with the initiatives of the British and Foreign Bible Society (BFBS) in the beginning of the nineteenth century.⁶

The BFBS established contact with Adamantios Korais, the leading figure of the Greek Enlightenment, who played a decisive role in laying the foundations of Modern Greek literature and the “purified” Greek language (*Katharevousa*). In his letter to the BFBS, dated 1808, Korais speaks against translation of the OT from the LXX:

The actual state of knowledge (which is also beginning to penetrate into Greece) would not justify the measure of adopting the version of the Septuagint as a standard text ... There is only one objection to be made to a version from the Hebrew itself, and that is, the veneration which our nation entertains for that of the Septuagint; but, besides that this prejudice is growing weaker and weaker in proportion as we are becoming enlightened, it would be easy to prevent these alarms in feeble minds, by inserting at the bottom of the page, in the form of variations, all the passages in which the version of the Septuagint departs from the original and by consequence from the new Greek version. (Clogg 1969: 252–3)

Around 1820, the BFBS commissioned a new Bible translation from Hilarion, archimandrite of Sinai and later metropolitan of Tirnovo, but eventually decided to reject Hilarion's translations because they did not comply with the BFBS guidelines, for example, Hilarion followed the LXX. This decision proved to be fatal. Contrary to Korais's forecast, the rejection of the LXX by the BFBS made almost all Greek Orthodox clergy opponents of the Bible Society.

The new BFBS project of Bible translation into Modern Greek was accomplished by Neophytos Vamvas (Νεόφυτος Βάμββας; 1770–1856), an Orthodox archimandrite, professor of philosophy (later dean) of the Athenian University, and one of the very few Greek Orthodox clerics who shared the translation principles of the BFBS, including the superiority of the Masoretic Text. Between 1831 and 1851, Vamvas translated the entire Bible, namely the books of the Hebrew canon (translated directly from Hebrew) and the NT. Vamvas's translation was immediately condemned by Church officials. The Holy Synod of the Church of Greece disapproved of it between 1834 and 1836 in several letters and declarations. As a reaction to Vamvas's translation, the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Constantinople issued an encyclical condemning any translation of the

⁶On the history of the Modern Greek Bible translations see Vapori (1994); Delicostopoulos (1998); Clogg (2004); Livanios (2014).

Bible into vernacular Greek (1836). Constantinos Oikonomos (1780–1857), an eminent Greek Orthodox scholar and theologian, wrote a four-volume treatise in defense of the LXX (see Dafni 2010). Nevertheless, since 1851, Vamvas’s translation has been republished many times by the Bible Societies, first by BFBS, later by the Hellenic Bible Society (Ελληνική Βιβλική Εταιρία), established in 1992. It is used almost exclusively by the Greek Protestant community.

In 1997 the Hellenic Bible Society published a translation of the Bible into the modern vernacular (*Dimotiki*), commonly called Today’s Greek Version. The textual basis for the books of the Hebrew canon was the MT, while the deuterocanonical books were translated from the Septuagint. The Hellenic Bible Society publishes Today’s Greek Version in two formats: with the deuterocanonical books (for Orthodox, with a recommendation letter from the Greek Church authorities as a preface), and without them (for Protestants).

A translation of the LXX into Modern Greek was announced by the Hellenic Bible Society in the 1990s, with publication expected by 2005, but later delayed. Two other projects of translating the Septuagint into Modern Greek were planned in the 2000s, one by the publishing house Psychogios (Εκδόσεις Ψυχγιός), and the other by the theological association Artos Zois (Άρτος Ζωής), but as of 2019 no publications have yet appeared.

An interesting, though almost forgotten page in the history of the translation of the Greek Bible is the publication of the Septuagint text and a Modern Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible in parallel columns, prepared by Athanasios Chastoupis (Αθανάσιος Χαστούπης), a specialist in classical and oriental languages (Athens, 1954–5). The juxtaposition of the two versions permitted a diachronic perspective on the Bible text. For example, in Ps. 137 (138):1 the Septuagint column read *ἐναντίον ἀγγέλων ψαλῶ σοι* (“before the angels I will sing psalms to you”), while Chastoupis’s translation of the Hebrew gave a much more archaic reading “παρουσία τῶν (ἀλλοτρίων) θεῶν ψάλλω εἰς σὲ ὕμνους” (“in the presence of (alien) gods I sing hymns to you” = $\text{פָּאָרְזֵי אֱלֹהִים לְךָ שִׁירִים}$). Chastoupis’s publication may be called a unique attempt at a “modern Hexapla.” However, without a serious commentary, this edition, with two adjacent columns explicitly contradicting each other, was doomed to create more confusion than understanding. The print run was limited and it was never reprinted.

The Septuagint and the Church Slavonic Bible

The first Slavonic Bible translations were made from the Greek by saints Cyril and Methodius and their disciples in Moravia in the 860s–880s. In the following centuries, Slavonic Bible texts were often revised against the Greek manuscripts or translated anew from the Greek.⁷

It is often taken for granted that the Church Slavonic tradition, being later than the Syriac, Coptic, or Armenian, cannot provide any additional information on the early history of Bible texts. However, the situation with the apocryphal literature (e.g., 2 Enoch exists in Slavonic translation only) suggests that such a judgement may be premature.

⁷General introductions to the Church Slavonic Bible tradition are Alekseev (1999), Thomson (1999), Bruni (2016).

Serious interest in the Church Slavonic tradition of the Old Testament was expressed in the beginning of the twentieth century at the Septuaginta-Unternehmen. In 1910, Rahlfs asked 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. As a first step, the Septuaginta-Unternehmen tasked Evseev with compiling the full catalogue of Slavonic Old Testament manuscripts, in a fashion similar to Rahlfs's catalogue of LXX manuscripts. This work was done and even paid for by the Unternehmen, but printing of the catalogue in Berlin was prevented by technical and, later, political problems (the First World War). After the Russian Academy of Sciences agreed to publish the catalogue in St. Petersburg, the manuscript of the catalogue was returned to Evseev. But the Russian Revolution and the ensuing events put an end to the project. Today we have only the draft version of the catalogue in the private archive of Evseev, after his death in 1921 (Alekseev 1999: 130).

Taking as his starting point the conception of de Lagarde, Evseev wanted to trace what he thought were the "Lucianic" and "Hesychian" text traditions in the Russian manuscripts. According to Evseev, Slavonic liturgical readings from the Old Testament as well as the Slavonic 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 work may be regarded as primary witnesses to the Bible text of the Church of Constantinople in the ninth century. Evseev called this text the Eastern Vulgate and, following the famous notice of Jerome, identified it with the "Lucianic" recension of the Septuagint. Slavonic Bible translations in the catenae manuscripts were, according to Evseev, made later, at the time of the Bulgarian king Simeon. Evseev (1911: 445–50) deemed them to belong mainly to the "Hesychian" tradition, and suggested that the Bulgarian kings turned away from the "Lucianic" Eastern Vulgate to the "Hesychian" text because of their desire to be free from the cultural influence of Byzantium.

Looking back, we see that these reconstructions are significantly out of step with modern scholarship with regard to both general methodology of textual studies and the history of the Septuagint text. The modern approach to the problem of the "Lucianic" tradition—as concerns its history, main features, and scope—is completely different from the picture drawn by de Lagarde, which was the basis of Evseev's hypotheses. A test comparison of Slavonic manuscripts of Kingdoms with the Greek text of Kingdoms in manuscripts *boc2^e2*, which are main witnesses to the Antiochean redaction, has demonstrated that neither liturgical nor continuous texts of the Slavonic tradition were oriented toward the tradition represented in *boc2^e2* (Alexeev 1999: 119–23). Moreover, the hypothesis of political factors leading to a change from "Lucianic" to "Hesychian" text is an obvious anachronism. As concerns the "Hesychian" recension, its very existence has been put in doubt by modern studies.⁸ Evseev's reconstructions being thus rejected, the problem of the Greek sources of the early Slavonic manuscripts still awaits its explorer.

A peculiar feature of the medieval Slavonic Bible manuscript tradition is the ample evidence of direct contacts between the Orthodox Christians and the Jews, which left traces on Christian Bible manuscripts. Over the last few decades, this has become an important topic in the study of the Church Slavonic Bible.⁹ The East-Slavonic translation of Esther (earliest manuscripts date to the fourteenth century) follows the MT and does not contain the Septuagint additions. Most East-Slavonic Pentateuch manuscripts also

⁸See the short exposition of the history of research in Fernández Marcos (2000b: 241–2).

⁹See Alexeev (2014), Taube (2012), Grischenko (2018) with literature.

exhibit the influence of the MT, mainly in marginal glosses and in subdivisions of the text corresponding to the weekly Torah readings. The very notion of a “Pentateuch” is alien to the Byzantine manuscript tradition (where the first books of the Bible were usually transmitted as an “Octateuch”: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth) and is sometimes regarded as a sign of a Jewish influence.

The influence of the Vulgate on the text of the Church Slavonic Bible is especially clear in the first full Church Slavonic Bible, the so-called *Gennady Bible*, a manuscript written in 1499 for Gennady, archbishop of Novgorod. In matters of canon, the *Gennady Bible* largely follows the Vulgate. For example, it includes the Apocalypse of Ezra (= Vulgate IIII Ezrae), which is absent from the Greek manuscript tradition and was translated from Latin.¹⁰

Several books that were unavailable to bishop Gennady and his scribes in Slavonic (e.g., Chronicles, MT Ezra and Nehemiah, Tobith, Judith, Wisdom, Maccabees, non-MT parts of Esther, non-LXX parts of Jeremiah) were translated for the *Gennady Bible* from Latin. The chapter arrangement in Jeremiah, and to a large extent, the text itself of Jeremiah, also 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 1751–6, which became the official Bible text of the Russian Orthodox Church.

As concerns the Latin influence of the printed Church Slavonic Bibles, the situation is complicated. On the one hand, in preparation of the printed editions, most of the texts that had been translated in the Gennady Bible from Latin had been re-translated 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 (“ruler”). 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*). Similarly, 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,” the latter unanimously witnessed to by the Septuagint tradition. In this case the MT/Vulgate reading was preferred over the Septuagint for dogmatic reasons.

As noted, the canon of printed editions of the Slavonic Bible goes back to the medieval Vulgate, through the *Gennady Bible*. However, it differs from the standard Catholic edition, *Vulgata Clementina*, since the OT books relegated by *Vulgata Clementina* to the separate Appendix at the end of the Bible (the non-canonical books of Ezra, Psalm 151, and Prayer of Manasseh) are kept by the Slavonic Bible in the body of the OT corpus (the Prayer of Manasseh is appended to 2 Chronicles). The canon of printed Slavonic Bibles also differs from the *Vulgata Clementina* by including 3 Maccabees and differs from the printed Greek Bibles by not including 4 Maccabees. Additionally, the chapter order in the book of Jeremiah in the *Elizavetinskaya Bible* follows the Vulgate, and verses present in the MT and Vulgate but absent from LXX Jeremiah are kept in translation from Latin. In ideological debates of nineteenth through twenty-first-century Russia, the Church

¹⁰Starting with the *Gennady Bible*, the names of the books linked in the in the Slavonic and Russian Bibles with Ezra/Esdras are the following: “I Ezdra” (canonical Ezra, Vulgate I Ezrae), “Nehemiah” (canonical Nehemiah, Vulgate II Ezrae), “II Ezdra” (LXX Ἐσδρας α', Vulgate III Ezrae), “III Ezdra” (Apocalypse of Ezra, Vulgate IIII Ezrae).

Slavonic Bible has often been represented as the true daughter of the true Septuagint. But clearly this is far from reality, especially as concerns the printed editions.

Translations of the Old Testament into Modern Russian

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Russian literary language established itself as a linguistic entity different from Old Slavonic, with a flourishing body of literature. In 1815, the Russian Bible Society (1814–26) launched a project of Bible translation into Russian. But because of opposition from the more conservative part of the Orthodox clergy, the Bible Society was closed in 1826 and the whole print run of the new Russian Pentateuch was burnt. After several decades of debates, the translation project was resumed in 1858 and finished in 1876. Published under the aegis of the Holy Synod, the Russian Bible is commonly called the Synodal Bible. It was (and still is) authorized for private reading only, not for liturgical use.¹¹

Following the example of the British and Foreign Bible Society, the Russian Bible Society used the MT as the base text for the Synodal Old Testament, a decision that received much criticism and created conflict within the Church. Among the main champions of the MT was St. Filaret Drozdov, the metropolitan of Moscow (1782–1867), who wrote a memorandum entitled *On the Dogmatic Value and Conservative Usage of the Greek Septuagint and Slavonic Translations of the Holy Scripture* (Filaret 1858). Contrary to the title, the memorandum seeks to defend *both* the LXX tradition (reflected in the Church Slavonic version as well) and the MT. First, St. Filaret mounts a series of arguments in favor of LXX readings. For example, he argues that the LXX is a “mirror of the Hebrew text as it was two hundred years or more before Christ,” and that “in the Orthodox teaching of Holy Scripture it is necessary to attribute a dogmatic merit to the Translation of the Seventy, in some cases placing it on an equal level with the original and even elevating it above the Hebrew text.” However, next he makes a series of arguments in favor of the MT readings (the quotations from Hos. 11:1 in Mt. 2:15 and Isa. 42:1 in Mt. 12:18, references to Church Fathers’ usage of the Hebrew text, etc.). The memorandum of St. Filaret is thus one of the most important statements of the Russian Orthodox Church on textual problems of the Bible, often quoted and referred to right up to the present time.

The “deuterocanonical” books of the Synodal Bible were translated from Greek and included 3 Esdras from Latin. But the editions that catered to the Protestant audience are limited in their OT to the MT canon.

The influence of the LXX/Church Slavonic tradition is often felt in the canonical books of the Synodal Bible as well. As a compromise between the proponents of the MT and the Septuagint, the words, clauses, and passages that exist in the Septuagint but are absent from the MT were translated from the Septuagint and inserted (in brackets) inside the translation otherwise 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, that tries to combine several base texts and, at the same time, to distinguish them with text-critical markers.

Unfortunately, this practice was carried out very inconsistently. In the 1990s, the author of the present chapter was involved, as the editor-in-chief of the Russian Bible

¹¹See Batalden (2013, 2017) with earlier literature.

Table 19.1 Septuagintal Additions to the Synodal Version

<i>Book(s)</i>	<i>Additions</i>
Genesis	418
Leviticus – Deuteronomy	941
Psalter	153
Isaiah	9
Jeremiah	4
Ezekiel	4

Society, in checking the textual accuracy of the Synodal version. Altogether, according to my calculations, in the Synodal translation there are 2,405 additions from the Septuagint marked with brackets (and an unknown number of additions and changes not marked). The distribution of these additions is very uneven, as shown in Table 19.1. But these statistics do not correlate in any way with the number of actual discrepancies between the LXX and the MT. For example, they give the misleading impression that the discrepancies between the MT and the LXX in Genesis are one hundred times more numerous than in Isaiah or Jeremiah! Instead, these statistics reflect the individual preferences of editors of different books. Worse still, the same siglum (brackets) was used 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. A Protestant version of the Synodal translation that appeared at the end of the nineteenth century omitted almost all the words in brackets, treating them as the LXX additions, alien to the “*Hebraica Veritas*.” As a result, several “innocent” passages were removed that had actually been translated in the Synodal version from the MT and put in brackets for purely stylistic reasons.

The Synodal translation was heavily criticized for its eclectic nature, both by those in favor of the Septuagint and by those in favor of the MT. Several alternative translations have been offered. Already in 1869, bishop Porfiry (Uspensky), scholar, traveler, and collector of ancient manuscripts, had published samples of Russian translation of several important OT texts from the Septuagint. A full translation of the Psalter by Porfiry (from the LXX) was published posthumously in 1893. In 1909–17 P. Yungerov, professor of Kazan Spiritual Academy, published his translations of Proverbs, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, the Minor Prophets, the Psalter, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, and the beginning of Genesis. This project was conceived as a full-scale traditionalist alternative to the Synodal version. However, the Russian revolution of 1917 prevented Yungerov from completing a full translation of the Old Testament.

The idea behind Yungerov’s 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 Alexandrinus differed from the *Elizavetinskaya Bible*, he checked the apparatuses of available Greek editions for readings that could support the *Elizavetinskaya*. If such readings were not attested in the Greek tradition, he sometimes translated directly from Church Slavonic (e.g., Hos. 11:1, the passage that in the Church Slavonic Bible had been translated from the Latin for dogmatic reasons). Usually he reflected in his apparatus the divergences between his main Greek

editions and the Church Slavonic text (strangely, he forgot to do it in Hos. 11:1, where his translation had no support in the Greek tradition). All in all, Yungerov's goal was not the translation of the LXX 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 appeared in the last decades to be used alongside the Church Slavonic Psalter (Birukova and Birukov; Timrot) follow Yungerov's model, creating a Russian version of the "Greek-Slavonic text."

The years of Communism (1917–91) did not favor Bible studies in Russia. However, in the last decades of Communist power and especially in the 1990s, there appeared several translations of individual books of the Old Testament, made by philologists and specialists in ancient languages, mostly from the MT.

In 1990, the famous Russian philologist S. Averintsev published six Psalms of the Orthodox Morning Service, translated from the Septuagint, and, at the same time, prepared a translation of almost all of the Psalter from 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 translational experiment may serve as precedent for the coexistence of two types of translation within the same cultural milieu. In the 1990s and 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 the author of the present chapter, at that time editor-in-chief of the re-established Russian Bible Society. The translation of the Hebrew text of the Old Testament was supported by the United Bible Societies already in the 1990s (published in 2011 by the Russian Bible Society as part of the Contemporary Russian Version), and the project of translation of the Septuagint was discussed by the Russian Bible Society and UBS, but never realized.

Septuagint-based Bible Translations in the Orthodox Diaspora

Although the priority of the Septuagint over the supposedly "corrupt" MT is often asserted in preaching, in reality the Orthodox diasporas mostly use the same Bible translations as other Christian denominations: in English-speaking environments the NKJV or RSV, in French-speaking environments the TOB, etc. The liturgical books, of course, are translated into the target language from Greek or Church Slavonic; this is also mostly true with regard to the Psalter, one of the most important liturgical texts of the Orthodox tradition. There exist several English versions of the Orthodox Psalter, some in print, some on the internet.¹²

The most widely published Orthodox Bible edition in English is the Orthodox Study Bible (OSB). The first edition (1993) contained the NKJV text of only the Psalter and New Testament, with annotations written from the point of view of Orthodox theology. It was heavily criticized by Orthodox believers especially for using the NKJV text of the Psalter. Even the numbering of Psalms followed not the LXX, but the NKJV/KJV/MT model. The second edition (2008) contains the whole Bible with the deuterocanonical books. The NT is the NKJV, while the OT is based on the NKJV but is sometimes revised according to the LXX (Rahlfs's edition), with some help from the English translation by Brenton (1844). The revisions concerned only the few points that were important from

¹²For a (conservative) Orthodox evaluation of the existing Bible texts in English, see Whiteford (2015).

the point of view of the editors, otherwise the OT text of the OSB follows the NKJV and diverges from the LXX even in some well-known passages. For example, in Gen. 4:8, according to the OSB, “Cain talked with Abel his brother” (without any further details, as in the MT), while according to the LXX, he told him “let us go to the plain” (διέλθωμεν εἰς τὸ πεδίον). Similarly, according to the OSB, the flood begins (as in the MT) “in the six-hundredth year of Noah’s life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month,” while according to the LXX it was “on the twenty-seventh” day (ἐβδόμη καὶ εἰκάδι; Gen. 7:11).

Recent decades have seen a marked growth of scholarly interest in the Septuagint, witnessed by—among other things—its translation into English (NETS), French (*La Bible d’Alexandrie*) and German (*Septuaginta Deutsch*).¹³ However, there was no contact between these projects and theological institutions of the Orthodox diasporas. It seems that modern Septuagint scholarship and these theological institutions belong to two different worlds, having little in common.

DEBATES

While opening the international theological conference “Contemporary Biblical Studies and Church Tradition,” metropolitan Hilarion (2017: 31–3), the President of the Synodal Biblical and Theological Commission of the Russian Orthodox Church, stated that

The Orthodox Church never canonized any one particular text or translation, or any one particular manuscript or any one edition of the Holy Scriptures. There is not a one and only generally accepted text of the Bible in Orthodox tradition ... The Apostolic Church did not strive towards canonizing any one particular type of biblical text. The Orthodox Church does not do this either.

Still, as the metropolitan stressed, the Septuagint is an important part of the Orthodox identity. In fact, many ideas one can encounter in modern Orthodox debates have their roots in the Patristic age. These include, for example, the idea that the Jews had deliberately corrupted the messianic passages of the OT, or the notion of inspiration of the Septuagint accompanied by readiness to use the Hebrew or Hexaplaric material for homiletical and exegetical purposes.¹⁴

It is interesting that Orthodox anti-Latin polemics that followed the schism between the Greek-speaking Byzantine Church and the Latin-speaking Western Church did not include Catholic use of the MT-based Vulgate until the late middle ages. It appears that the first outright Orthodox attack on the “Jewish” textual basis of Vulgate was provoked by a Western attack on the *Letter of Aristeas*. In the extensive commentary on Augustine’s *De civitate Dei*, published in Basel in 1522, Luis Vives (Joannes Ludovicus de Vives) cast doubts on the authenticity of *Aristeas*. De Vives’s commentary was heavily criticized by Maksim (c. 1475–1556), a learned monk of Greek origin and unusual biography. As a youth, he studied Greek and Latin in Italy, where he was deeply impressed by the Dominican friar Girolamo Savonarola. Later he became a monk at Mt. Athos from where he was sent to Russia to translate spiritual literature. He was proclaimed a saint in 1988.

¹³On these translations, see the chapter by Ross in the present volume.

¹⁴On patristic biblical theory see Gallagher (2012) and in the present volume.

In a pamphlet entitled “Against Ioannes Ludovicus,” written in Church Slavonic, St. Maksim criticized Vives’s “aberrations,” among which was his negative attitude toward the Septuagint. This criticism turned into a full-scale denunciation of Jerome and Catholics, who—Maksim claimed—had neglected the Septuagint and turned to the Scriptures of the “deicidal Jews” (Maksim 1862: 3.203-26).

After the appearance of the MT-based Protestant translations, the Septuagint has become a symbol of Orthodoxy in its struggle on three fronts: against Jews, against Catholics, and against Protestants. The polemics become especially bitter when the Orthodox churches are confronted with foreign missionary activity or when new Bible translations are launched.

In many regards, archimandrite Vamvas’s work with the BFBS on the Modern Greek translation may be compared with the work of the Russian Bible Society, and its most outstanding member, archimandrite (later metropolitan) Filaret Drozdov (1782–1867), on the Russian Synodal Bible published in 1876. In both cases, new translations were initiated by the agents of the BFBS but carried out by local Orthodox clergymen. In both cases, the translations came under heavy attack from two angles: first, because of use of vernacular instead of traditional Church language, and second, because of the Hebrew text used as the basis for the OT translation. The different fate of the two translation projects—the ultimate success of the Russian Synodal Bible and the rejection of its Greek counterpart by the Greek Orthodox—is probably to be explained by the very special position the Septuagint occupies in Greek culture and in the Greek Church. As Delicostopoulos (1998: 297) has put it, “the Greek nation has the rare privilege of having as its mother tongue the language of the New Testament as well as of the Septuagint (LXX).” Within Greek culture, the Greek NT and the Greek Septuagint are not perceived as mere versions of the Bible, but rather as *The Bible*, connected in a unique way to the Greek language and Greek history. Any move to replace them with a modern translation risks being perceived as an attempt to deprive the national culture of this unique possession.

The Synodal Bible created in Russia a completely new situation: a predominantly LXX-based text used in liturgy and a predominantly MT-based text authorized for private reading. Up to the middle of the twentieth century, all the official and semi-official documents of the Russian Church, as well as almost all theological literature quoted the Bible in Church Slavonic version only. Starting from the middle of the twentieth century all such quotations follow the Synodal Bible.

As concerns the Greek Church, the Septuagint has always been treated as *the* authoritative text. Though the Orthodox version of Today’s Greek Version is published with the letter of approval of the Church authorities, this letter states that this translation can be used for studying the truth revealed by God, but that it cannot replace “in the liturgical and general use in our Holy Orthodox Church the translation of the Seventy.” This position is partly reminiscent of that of the Russian Orthodox Church: in both cases the liturgical text is LXX-based and archaic in language, while the modern language MT-based translation is authorized for private usage only. However, the sphere of usage assigned to the Today’s Greek Version is significantly narrower (at least for the time being).

Other Orthodox Bible translations oscillate between the Russian Synodal model (MT as the main base text with some respect for the LXX) and the LXX-only model (see Mihăilă 2018).

Differently from medieval Greek Fathers, modern Orthodox theologians must face the problem of numerous differences between the Septuagint and modern MT-based Bible translations. It is not possible to ascribe all of these differences to the supposed “corruption” of the MT. Sometimes conservative Orthodox theologians follow the option suggested by Augustine after he had become aware of the differences between the Septuagint and the *Hebraica Veritas* of the Vulgate: “Orthodox believe that the changes in the LXX were made under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and are to be accepted as part of God’s continuing revelation” (Ware 1963: 208).

After the Qumran discoveries, Orthodox proponents of the “Septuagint-only” ideology announced that the Dead Sea Scrolls have shown the priority of the LXX text over the MT, an idea that has become quite popular in the Orthodox milieu. In Russia, sometimes one can hear appeals to reject the Synodal Bible because of its “Jewish” textual base (MT). An extreme case is represented by a project to translate the OT back into Hebrew from the *Elizavetinskaya Bible*, the Queen Elizabeth’s Church Slavonic Bible of 1756 (Shamir 2009).

On the other hand, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, in Greek, Russian, and Romanian theology and Bible scholarship, one can see developments toward recognizing textual pluralism as an inherent feature of the Orthodox approach to the Bible. Miltiades Konstantinou (2012: 53), one of the main participants in the Hellenic Bible Society project translating the LXX into Modern Greek, states that “the Orthodox Church ... must recognize as her own heritage both texts, the Hebrew and the Septuagint, encouraging their study and research” (see also Seleznev 2008). The Romanian Biblical scholar Mihăilă (2018: 33) formulates this in a rather aphoristic way: “The slogan for Orthodox biblical studies should be ... ‘back to Hexapla,’ not ‘back to the Septuagint.’”

The Hexapla analogy is not to be taken as an indication that the duality of the LXX and MT should be treated as a purely textual phenomenon, like the difference between two codices. There are important theological and ecclesiological aspects behind this duality. From the theological point of view, this duality is rooted in the double nature of the Old Testament of the Christian canon. On the one hand it is the text stemming from ancient Israel and Judah, from the world of the Ancient Near East; it is pre-Christian and pre-Hellenistic. On the other hand, it is a part of the Bible of the Christian Church from the beginning of the Common Era. There is a diachronic dimension within the Bible itself that comes into play. From the ecclesiological point of view, this duality is linked with the fact that, on the one hand, Orthodox churches are heirs to the Byzantine tradition, and on the other, a part of world Christianity. Rejecting the Septuagint would mean betraying the Orthodox identity, rejecting the MT and MT-based translations would mean going into a self-created “Orthodox ghetto.”

ONGOING RESEARCH QUESTIONS

As we have seen, the Septuagint tradition after and outside Byzantium has drawn much less attention than the history of transmission and usage of the Septuagint texts in antiquity and the medieval Greek-speaking world. Among the areas that are definitely under-researched one may cite, for example, the study of Greek Septuagint lectionaries and their reflection in post-Byzantine liturgical texts; the problem of Greek sources of Church Slavonic Bible texts and their role for reconstructing the textual history of the

Septuagint; and the history of Georgian OT translations, which may well go back to the Septuagint of the early Byzantine period.

As concerns the debates about the place of the Septuagint tradition in the Orthodox world, they are not just objects of historical study, but they have direct bearing on the matter of Orthodox identity. Questions that modern Septuagint scholarship poses before Orthodox communities deal not only with textual matters, but also with theological presuppositions and with the nature of religious tradition.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

1. Pentiu (2014). A monograph on the role of the Old Testament in Eastern Orthodox tradition, including issues of text, canon, interpretation, and liturgical usage.
2. Mihăilă (2018). A brief study of historical and theological aspects of the LXX–MT controversy in the Orthodox world.
3. Scouteris and Belezos (2015). A brief essay on the history of the Bible in different regions of the Orthodox world (Greek-speaking world, Slavonic countries, Romania, Georgia, Arabic-speaking world) from the seventeenth century onward.
4. Meurer, Siegfried, and Ellingworth (1992). Collection of papers devoted to the status of Apocrypha/Deterocanonical writings in the Christian tradition.
5. Magdalino and Nelson (2010). Collected essays on different aspects of the OT in Byzantium, including an important essay on the Prophetologium.

