

***The History of the Slavonic Bible:  
what makes the Slavonic Biblical  
Tradition so special?***

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- In the history of the Slavonic Bible there is a “before” and an “after”: this point is the moment when **the Bible, as an entire codex, appeared in Slavonic**. It dates back to the very end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century: **1499**, and is known as **Gennady’s Bible (GB)**. It was named after Gennady, the archbishop of Novgorod who set the task of collecting all the Biblical texts in Slavonic together in one book.

- Before that, separate Biblical texts (and in fact there were three different types of them: *четьи*, *служебные* and *толковые*) could take up the whole manuscript or, in most cases, they were a part of collections of texts (*сборники*) in one manuscript.

- One of the peculiarities was that they could appear in codices (*сборники*) that consisted only of Biblical texts and also in the codices of a mixed nature (which included both Biblical and non-Biblical texts).

- The distribution of the Biblical texts in the manuscripts shows that there was a kind of idea of the Biblical canon in the Slavonic Literary Tradition, but the idea was not rigid (the Church Authorities did not raise the question of the canon, it was somehow assumed according to the texts that were circulating and according to the acquired Byzantine canonical and ecclesiastic tradition).

- *Another peculiarity of the Slavonic Biblical Tradition* is the **quantity of our written texts.**
- In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Ivan Evseev made a catalogue of Slavonic manuscripts containing Old Testament texts, and the total number of them from the 11<sup>th</sup> to the 17<sup>th</sup> centuries came to 4,145 (among them 3,750 manuscripts containing the Psalter). But the real number must be higher.
  - The total number of New Testament manuscripts is unknown (from the first centuries 11<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> there are at least 500, while from the 16-17<sup>th</sup> the number is much higher, possibly twice that of the Old Testament manuscripts).

- *Another feature* that makes the Slavonic Bible quite special is the existence of text criticism problems (or what we call *textual history problems*) *of a peculiar nature*.

Firstly, there is the volume of the material (which makes it almost impossible to research it “in a manual way”).

The other difficulty is that Biblical texts are *controlled texts* (the “correct” text was created by means of comparing different sources).

- In most cases, the correction of the text - *правка текста* - was accomplished by using two or more manuscripts of the same text (so there was no need to invent the right translation; it could be chosen from one of the sources). Thus the intention to create the correct text produced, in fact, more textual variability.



- Given that they were translated texts, the Biblical texts were sometimes “corrected” using an original text, and in this case there were two possibilities: 1) the Slavonic text was corrected according to the original; 2) it was corrected according the translating principles in existence at that moment.

- *The time and place of the translation, the language from which the translation was made: another complex question*

- As for the original language of a translation, in this respect we might also have more variability than other medieval literary traditions: most of the Slavonic translations were produced from Greek, though we also have some translations from Latin.

- There is an everlasting debate on supposed early East Slavonic Translations from Hebrew (among them the Book of Esther).

- And, as if the previous one was not enough, Basil Lourie challenges us with possible translations from Syriac.

- The only criterion for establishing *the place and the time of the translation* is the linguistic one. And here again, we face a lot of difficulties.
- The usage of rare words sometimes really helps in attributing the translation (for the oldest translations there can be words like the archaic verbal form сАТЬ *said*, particle еша *hopefully*), but it works only for early translations.

## **Possible criteria for attributing the origin of a Biblical text**

A.Alexeev suggests a few, he states: *If a group of Biblical translations*

- 1) originates in the same Greek textual type
- 2) is translated using the same principles of translation
- 3) is linguistically common

*then we can conclude that this group of Biblical texts has a common origin.*