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Slavic Text Editions of Biblical Content. Problems And Perspectives. An Introduction

The Slavic Bible and its manuscript tradition are at the core of Slavic philological studies. Since the days of J. Dobrovský, himself a biblical scholar, Church Slavonic manuscripts of biblical content were systematically collected in order to study the language, its spread and development, translation techniques and lastly, its influence on modern versions in the various Slavic languages¹. In this pioneering work, a key role was played by the edition of the oldest surviving codices. The publication of the Gospel of Ostromir, edited by A.Ch. Vostokov (1843), and later that of the Codex Marianus, edited by V. Jagić (1883), are milestones not only for studies on the Church Slavonic Bible, but also for Slavistics in general².

With the earliest editions, some complex issues arose and became the subject of debate and often controversy among scholars who developed different orientations. First of all it has to be acknowledged that we do not possess any manuscripts of the full Church Slavonic Bible, which hagiographic sources suggest was translated by Methodius in Moravia. The first available manuscripts with biblical content are actually books for liturgical use, such as the Gospel, Apostle and Old testament lectionaries and the liturgical Psalter, or others that were adapted for liturgical use, such as the Tetraevangelium, while at least a century and a half separates them from the time of Cyril and Methodius. To find a codex containing the entire Slavonic Bible we have to go back to the end of the fifteenth century, with the creation of the Gennadij Bible, which showed evident signs of the influence of the Vulgate³.

Right from the very beginning of research, it was also clear that there was a significant difference in the spread of Gospel and Psalter books, numerous manuscripts of which have survived, compared to the books with Old Testament content, especially of a historical and sapiential genre, which are far more rare. At the same time, scholars had to deal with

¹ On Dobrovský as biblical scholar see Thomson 2004.

² See our volume Garzaniti 2001: 60, 76. More generally about the history of research into the Church Slavonic Bible, see F.J. Thomson's comprehensive essay (Thomson 1998).

³ Its phototype edition was started in the 1990s, only to be interrupted once again. Only four volumes were published, containing the Gospels, the Psalter, the Acts of the Apostles, the Epistles and the Apocalypse. Lastly a fifth volume appeared, dedicated to the introduction and appendices of this Bible (cf. *Biblija 1499 goda i Biblija v sinodal'nom perevode s ilustracijami. Biblija knigi svjaščennogo pisanija Vetchogo i novogo zaveta*, IV, VII-IX, Moskva 1992-1998).

the complexity of the translation work, which could follow different methods, as well as having to consider the much more complex manuscript tradition of the Greek originals.

Within the context of the widespread dissemination of books with biblical content, Slavists gradually began to focus on the different variants of Slavic speech, as well as the different schools in which the practice of copying could also include checking translations according to different manuscripts, or even Greek codices, inevitably different from those previously used. Not to mention the need to consider the Croatian-Glagolitic tradition with its specific books containing the biblical readings, the missal and the breviary, which were produced by correcting the Slavic version according to the Latin tradition in which the different forms of the *Vetus Latina* and the *Vulgata* coexisted.

Taking into account the complexity of the manuscript tradition of the books containing the Gospels and the Epistles, in the second half of the nineteenth century already, G.A. Voskresenskij tried to group the codes with the Gospels or the Pauline letters into a number of major redactions which shared certain linguistic and textual characters. After having identified the main manuscripts, the Russian scholar proposed the edition of St. Mark's Gospel complete with a critical apparatus with variants from over a hundred codices (1894). This important publication was followed by editions of some Pauline letters (1892-1908). Essentially, the interpretative scheme constructed by the scholar is still valid today⁴.

During the First World War, a complex project was launched in Russia to produce an edition of the Slavic Bible; its completion, however, was interrupted by the subsequent tragic turn of events. The project had been promoted by the "Commission for the Scientific edition of the Slavonic Bible" (1915-1929), created at the initiative of I.E. Evseev. Even today, the debate involving Evseev and A.V. Mikhailov on the criteria for such an edition remains an essential starting point for the latest initiatives⁵. No less important was the work of J. Vajs, professor of "Slavonic translation of Holy Scripture and Slavic liturgy at the University of Prague", who was responsible for the first complete edition of the Church Slavonic Gospel, but also the publication of some books of the Old Testament that showed the importance of the Croatian-Glagolitic tradition for reconstructing the ancient translation⁶.

During the twentieth century, studies on the manuscript tradition of the various biblical books made significant progress, but research generally aimed to reconstruct the different language redactions in the major geographical areas linked to the contemporary Slavic nations. This meant primarily focusing on the orthographic-phonetic form and only secondarily on the lexical and syntactic issues in the manuscripts. This led to multiple editions of individual codices mostly accompanied by an apparatus that highlighted the local characters related generally to certain centers. Also thanks to a more or less scrupulous paleographic analysis, available in the new manuscript catalogues, this complex research helped to identify the different language redactions and schools and, therefore, to group manuscripts

⁴ On the Gospel edition see Garzanti 2001: 96-102.

⁵ See *ivi*: 135-137.

⁶ See for the Gospels *ivi*: 153-166, while for the Old Testament again Thomson 1998: *passim*.

together. In some cases the edition of a single manuscript was accompanied by an apparatus in which variants of other codices belonging to the same group or to the same linguistic redaction were presented. The focus on the orthographic-phonetic aspect with its complex stratification inevitably led to a series of difficulties in the transcription of the main manuscript and variants, at a time dominated by the traditional art of printing. Especially in the second half of the twentieth century, thanks to the modernization of printing, photographic reproduction was possible, often allowing errors in previous editions to be corrected.

In recent decades, moreover, greater attention has been paid to the liturgical use of most manuscripts with biblical content. Rubrics, glosses or appendices that had often been expunged from previous editions have turned out to provide valuable evidence for reconstructing the historical context of the manuscript tradition in the wider context of the complex liturgical history both of the Orthodox and the Latin area. Today we can fully appreciate the influence of the changes in the liturgical practice reflected in the structure of Gospel, Apostle and Old testament lectionaries. The liturgical memories contained in the manuscripts, of fundamental importance for the history of the cult of saints in the Slavic world, are also significant for grouping the codices. The liturgy itself, beginning with the Eucharistic celebration, provides key evidence of the presence of the Bible in the Slavic world. Not only because reading from the Holy Scriptures occupies an important place, but also because the language of prayer, and more generally the liturgical hymnography, are inspired by the Bible, replicate it or comment on it abundantly. Precisely for this reason the editions of liturgical texts and books of biblical content must face and solve similar ecdotic problems.

At the same time, scholars have made in-depth studies of the manuscript tradition of the biblical books that are not usually read during the liturgy. Among these, the Song of Songs, but also Old Testament books present in chronicles or miscellanies of ascetic-moral content, deserve special mention⁷. Their presence and their spread may also be inferred from citations both in translated and original works. This has opened the way to an entire field of research concerning the presence of biblical quotations in manuscript production, essential to understanding how the Bible penetrated Slavic culture. In this context, the translation of patristic texts and more generally of monastic writings, often representing patchworks of biblical quotations enriched by theological commentaries, has played a fundamental role. The weight of the translator's or author's personal memory, the importance of liturgical mediation, the usual practice of re-translating the Holy scriptures, without referring to the existing Slavic version, are factors that significantly help to reconstruct the view of the reception of the Slavic Bible.

In recent decades, the extraordinary abundance of the manuscript transmission of the Gospels has posed a series of problems that have become the subject of reflection and debate. We have realized, in fact, that the presence of a handwritten controlled tradition makes it impossible to apply traditional instruments drawn from classical philology with

⁷ See, for example, the recent edition of the Book of Exodus according to the manuscripts of the East Slavic chronographs (Vilkul 2015).

the construction of family trees that define direct and unambiguous relationships between manuscripts. Scholars have faced a complexity which, already in New Testament philology, has led to the development of several methods for reconstructing the Greek original and its transmission. In this context, A.A. Alekseev's theoretical reflections were developed, and above all the Gospels of St. John and St. Matthew were published, based on a very large number of manuscripts taking into account the "variation-units"⁸. This publication has become the object of debate in Paleoslavistics⁹. In the same years, the first three-volume edition of the Old Testament "ancient-Bulgarian version" came out, coordinated by S. Nikolova, where we see a different approach¹⁰.

In this regard we cannot underestimate the contribution of computer science with programs whose automatic ability to produce results is sometimes overstated. At the same time we should consider positively the creation of digital platforms that adopt common sets of characters that enable the scientific community to produce editions with a searchability function. Although we are still at an experimental stage, we need to seize all the opportunities that these new means offer, while nevertheless exercising a careful critical spirit.

All these problems arose in different contributions that were written in the aftermath of the Round Table entitled *Slavic Text Editions of Biblical Content. Problems and Perspectives*" (Florence, 12.02.2015). The Round Table brought together some of the best-known scholars in the field of Church Slavonic text editions, in particular of biblical texts; its aim was to highlight the complexity of the editing work involved, highlighting the methodological aspects and offering possible solutions obviously applicable not only to the biblical texts.

As regards the editorial work, generally ecdotic practices are examined and different methods of editions are discussed. The reports submitted to the Florentine workshop aimed to deal with editorial issues in a broader perspective, taking into account the cultural context and the scribal production in which the Slavic Bible was passed down. Certainly the focus is still on the problems of textual criticism and linguistic analysis as shown by V. ŽELJAZKOVA's reflections on Exodus, one of the main books of the Old Testament, and C.M. VAKARELIYSKA's on the edition of the so-called Gospel of Curzon, a key manuscript for understanding the history of the transmission of the Gospels in the South Slavic area. But even in this case, the question was expanded to the experience of publishing practice, considering the preliminary work and the complex choices that are often not considered in the essays accompanying the editions. The close connection of the Slavic Bible with the corpus of liturgical books makes it extremely important to deal with the editorial practice of these texts, as T. AFANASYEVA showed us, reasoning on the edition of the Liturgy of John Chrysostom and the Liturgy of Basil.

⁸ See his essay *Tekstologija slavjanskoj biblii* (Alekseev 1999) and editions of the aforementioned Gospels (Alekseev *et al.* 1998, 2005).

⁹ Finally, in particular, to the vexed question of the precedence of the lectionary or tetraevangelium see Strachova 2015.

¹⁰ Zlatanova 1998, Taseva, Jovčeva 2003, Ilieva 2013.

Attention also shifted to different aspects, showing the complexity of the manuscript tradition of the Church Slavonic Bible. The Glagolitic version in the breviary and the missal according to Latin rite was examined by V. BADURINA STIPČEVIĆ, who suggests that there may once have been a full Croatian-Glagolitic Bible. In the context of the Slavic version of the Gospels, A. PIČHADZE indicated the need to consider the very complicated question of the lexical adaptation that occurred already in the earliest phase of the tradition more carefully, while A. ALBERTI reminded us how important it is to consider the Greek manuscript tradition, which, being so widespread, cannot be dealt with by traditional methods of textual criticism, but forces us to use statistical methods.

The reconstruction of the version of the Old Testament books that shows a quantitatively less numerous manuscript tradition may appear easier, but in this case, other factors come into play. We must take into account that these books are often accompanied by commentaries, as M. DIMITROVA illustrated about of the Song of Songs. On the other hand, L. OSINKINA pointed out that the spread of the Old Testament books is also attested by the quotes that occur both in translated texts and in original works. The spread of commentaries, mostly of patristic origin, inevitably raises the question of the presence of the exegetical tradition of the early centuries in the Byzantine-Slavic area, as shown by B. DANILENKO in his work on the Slavic versions of the work of Methodius of Patara.

The difference in approach and philological schools, the diversity of the problems, and the variety of responses developed constitute riches that every Slavist can treasure.

On behalf of the International Committee of Slavists who entrusted me with leading the Biblical Commission, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all who took part in the Florentine round table, preceded by the fruitful meeting in Venice (2014), and especially my gratitude to those who have sent in their contributions.

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