

Title: Relevance of the Hebrew Original to the Assessment of Slavonic Translations of Isaiah
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Ancient and medieval translations from the Hebrew Bible represent one pre-modern field of “constrained translation” (translation requiring non-literal techniques characteristic of literary translation, yet constrained by a need for accountability and recoverability of original content imposed by the needs of the client or public for whom the translation is carried out). Translated versions were subject to critical scrutiny by users for whom multiple levels of meaning were of the utmost import, and even the modern scholarly literature is replete with claims that one or another early translation more or less “faithfully” renders the content of the original (Torrey 1944: 1 being an oft-cited example in regard to the Septuagint translations). I have examined two Slavonic redactions of an excerpt from Isaiah, based on all manuscripts of the Croatian Church Slavonic Missal (as inventoried in Corin 1991), and compared the Slavonic text to the Septuagint, Vulgate and Hebrew, utilizing the most authoritative critical editions. Based on this analysis, I argue that in order to assess the faithfulness of the Slavonic translation, one must go beyond its immediate Greek and Latin textual antecedents and encompass also the Hebrew text and its interpretive framework. Through such a process, the Slavonic versions come to provide evidence of semantic drift over the course of successive translations, through unconscious “telephone game” effect, conscious interpretive translation techniques, and vacillation in the underlying Hebrew text. Evidence emerges of contact between the Slavonic translators/editors and one or another version of the Hebrew text, as does the relevance of the functional role of the Hebrew text in the milieu in which it originated.

Works Cited

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