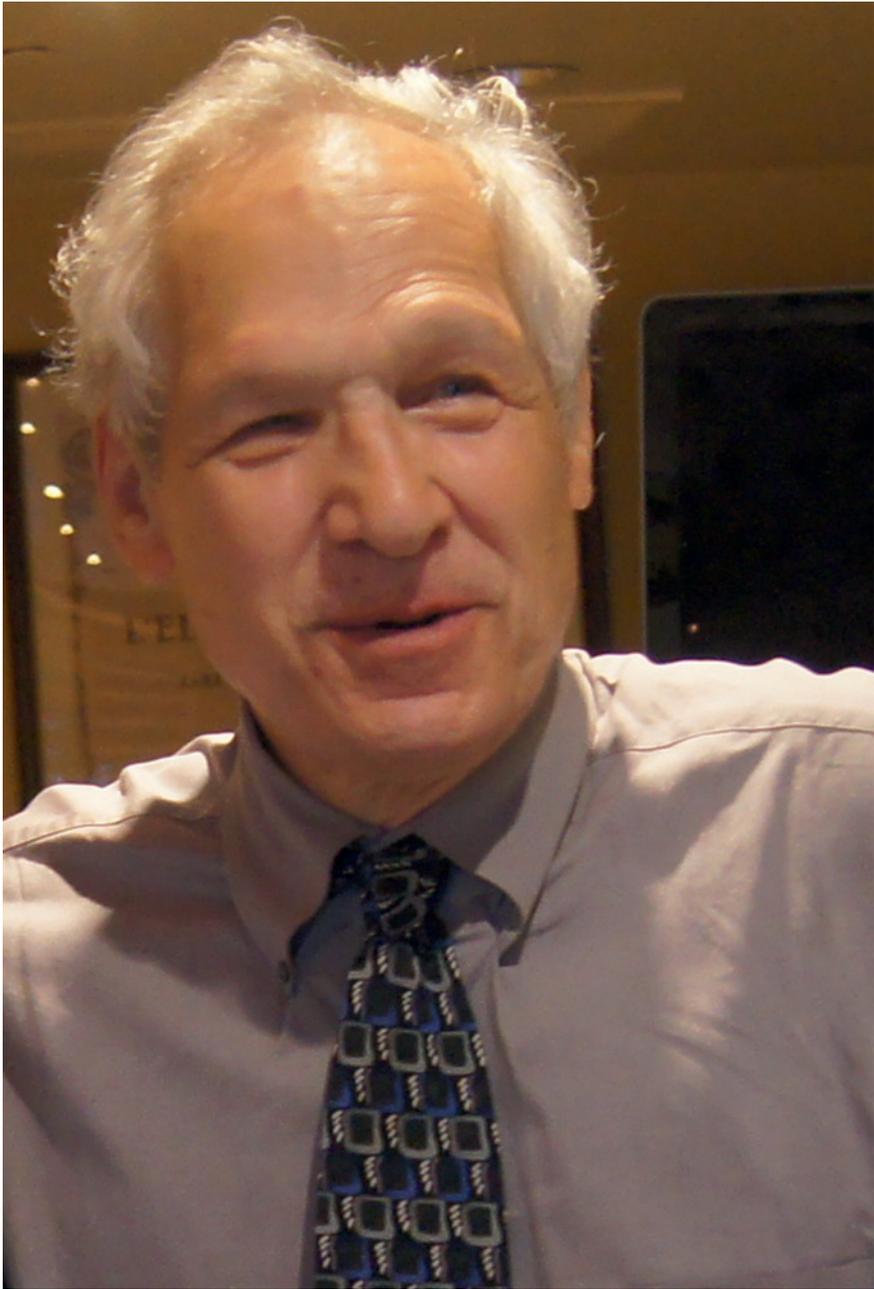


**Russia beyond the Traditional Boundaries:
Essays in Honor of David M. Goldfrank
Part 1**

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Introduction

Part I: Languages of Power and the Sacred in the Russian Lands

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David Goldfrank has devoted the main part of his scholarly career to a close study of seminal texts in the history of Russian Orthodox Christianity, particularly those by Iosif Volotskii and Nil Sorskii. His wide-ranging curiosity and constant engagement with the complexities of language and argument have frequently enabled him to penetrate to new understandings of late medieval and early modern realities. His refusal to accept traditional models, and his insistence that students dig deeper than might seem necessary at first glance, are reflected in the articles included in this section. Each study takes issue with common assumptions or generally accepted historical interpretations. Viewed as a whole, they continue Professor Goldfrank's fascination with the interrelations among Hebrew, Greek, Slavonic, Russian, Yiddish, and other languages used for "holy texts"; his attempt to define the power relations that underlay forms of religious expression; and his persistent questioning of what religion actually looked like "on the ground."



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From Bethlehem to Beloozero

Biblical Languages and National-Religious Boundaries in Muscovy

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Abstract

Inspired in part by conversations with David Goldfrank, this essay considers aspects of how attitudes toward biblical language contributed to representations of national and religious identity in late medieval and early modern Muscovite Russia. At roughly the same time in history that revived Hebrew and Greek study in Western Europe helped to stimulate the Renaissance and Reformation, bookmen in East Slavia also reconsidered the original languages of sacred writings. Contrary to what is sometimes assumed, such interest was neither unknown nor marginal within Muscovite religious culture. Hebrew-Russian glossaries circulated in leading monasteries from at least the thirteenth century; major infusions of Greek (and other) words and definitions in the sixteenth century transformed these texts into multilingual dictionaries. This mainstream tradition in Russian Orthodoxy can be linked to such important religious figures as Nil Sorskii and Maksim Grek. I argue that by “appropriating” biblical languages and terminology, often via inaccurate translations, Muscovite Russian literati created and defended their distinctive identity vis-à-vis Jews and Greeks, who were considered God’s former chosen peoples. These findings suggest reconsideration of the nature and boundaries of faith in Muscovy in the “age of confessionalism.”

Keywords

Bible – East Slavic – Greek – Hebrew – identity – language – Muscovy – religion – Russian Orthodox Christianity

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ἐὰν οὖν μὴ εἰδῶ τὴν δύναμιν τῆς φωνῆς, ἔσομαι τῷ λαλοῦντι βάρβαρος καὶ ὁ λαλῶν ἐν ἐμοὶ βάρβαρος.

аще оубо силоу не вѣмъ гласоу боудоу подобенъ гл(агол)ющоמוу иноязычъскы, и гл(агол)ющоמוу мнѣ иноязычъскы.

Therefore if I know not the meaning of the voyce, I shall bee unto him that speaketh, a Barbarian, and he that speaketh shall be a Barbarian unto mee.

I CORINTHIANS 14:11²

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A curious “layering of meaning” characterizes the language of Muscovite Russian political documents. Due to an intense saturation with the concepts of Orthodox Christianity, a broad spectrum of texts from the most mundane diplomatic instructions to the most propagandistic rhetoric bear the unmistakable stamp of biblical language—but with a noticeable twist. The ways that Russian literati³ understood ostensibly biblical terms and ideas differed significantly from their original forms. The conceptual genealogy of two of the most common words in such documents, помазанник (*potmazannik*, “anointed [tsar]”) and христос (*khristos*, “Christ”), clearly goes back to the single Hebrew word מָשִׁיחַ (*mashiah*, “anointed [king or priest], messiah”). Yet these two Russian words had quite distinct meanings, and each overlapped only partly with the sense(s) of

2 Ancient Jewish-Greek (Nestle-Aland Novum Testamentum Graece, 27th ed.); Muscovite Church Slavonic (Troitsa Sergiev Apostol, sixteenth century); early modern English (King James Version editio princeps, 1611). Church Slavonic *silou... glasou* (“the strength of the voice”) is a calque of Jewish-Greek *tēn dunamin tēs phōnēs*; the King James Version follows the idiomatic or extended sense. The Apostol text is: *Rossūskaia gosudarstvennaia biblioteka (RGB)*, f. 304.I (TSL main library), no. 71 (78), ll. 285ob.-286, available at: <http://www.stsl.ru/manuscripts> (this and all subsequent web pages were last accessed on 5 October 2012). Compare the 1581 Ostroh Bible, which substitutes слышащему (*slyshashchemou*, “hearer”) for the first гл(агол)ющоמוу (*glagolūshchomou*, “speaker”).

3 According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (www.oed.com), the word *literati* first appeared in English in the early seventeenth century as a term designating the learned class in China. I utilize it here in a similar sense, denoting the educated (literate) members of Muscovite Russian society, especially authors and scribes. See also: David Goldfrank, “Essential Glue: Muscovy’s Republic of Sacred Letters, Mid-XIV to Mid-XVI c.,” *Religion and Integration in Moskauer Russland: Konzepte und Praktiken, Potentiale und Grenzen 14–17. Jahrhundert*, ed. Ludwig Steindorff (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2010), 336–38.

the earlier Hebrew notion. The same could be said of numerous other Muscovite Russian concepts—and, indeed, of widespread biblical terminology in most if not all early modern European languages. This phenomenon is largely explained by the influence of Christian theological interpretation and translation. In the case of Russia, biblical concepts had usually passed over the course of centuries from Hebrew to Jewish Greek to Christian Greek to (Old) Church Slavonic before reaching Russian.⁴ Biblical Bethlehem and Russian Beloozero (the famous monastery town now known as Belozersk) represented distantly related semantic worlds—a chasm and a connection of time, space, and culture.

I became intrigued by this “layering of meaning” while writing my Ph.D. dissertation under the supervision of David Goldfrank.⁵ On the basis of these and other observations, I proposed to investigate the process whereby Muscovy’s own unique matrix of transmuted biblical concepts came to be formed; to define that system vis-à-vis the “original” semantic field or set of meanings evident in ancient Hebrew (and Greek); and to compare it to other contemporary reinterpretations. Dr. Goldfrank raised a pivotal objection: Did anyone in Russia at the time actually care about the original meanings of the concepts they used? This part of my research was therefore placed on hold until my supervisor returned from a trip to the Russian archives, bearing with him manuscript evidence that, yes, Muscovite scribes did indeed expend perceptible effort in trying to understand biblical Hebrew terms. The document he showed me⁶ was one of a number of early dictionaries or multilingual glossaries known to have been produced in Russian monasteries from the thirteenth to eighteenth centuries. The earliest extant versions, bearing titles such as *Rîêch’ zhidov’skago îazyka prelozhena na russkuû* (“Speech of the Jewish language

4 Some texts were translated directly from Hebrew to East Slavic, certainly by the 15th century and arguably in earlier periods. See: Anatoliï Alekseev, “Perevody s evreiskikh originalov v Drevnei Rusi,” *Russian Linguistics* 11 (1987): 1–20; Moshé Altbauer, *The Five Biblical Scrolls in a Sixteenth-Century Jewish Translation into Belorussian (Vilnius Codex 262)* (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1992); Horace Lunt and Moshe Taube, *The Slavonic Book of Esther: Text, Lexicon, Linguistic Analysis, Problems of Translation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998); Moshe Taube, “Transmission of Scientific Texts in 15th-Century Eastern Knaan,” *Aleph: Historical Studies in Science and Judaism* 10, no. 3 (2010): 315–53.

5 See Isaiah Gruber, *Orthodox Russia in Crisis: Church and Nation in the Time of Troubles* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2012).

6 *Skazanie rîêchem” nedovîedomym, ezhe ôbriêtaem v” s(vîa)tykh” knigakh”, ôt grecheskago îazyka, i ôt evreiskago, i ôt sirskag(o), i ôt latynskag(o), i ôt slovenskag(o), i ôt inykh, in: Rossîiskâia nâtsional’naia biblioteka (RNB), KB 25/1102* (Sixteenth-century miscellany associated with Innokentii Okhliâbinin, with works of Nil Sorskiï), ll. 147–158. See: Goldfrank, “Essential Glue,” 346; David Goldfrank, ed. and trans., *Nil Sorsky: The Authentic Writings* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Studies, no. 221, 2008), 37–39, 66 n. 8 [with a typographical error as “KB 24/1102”], 131 n. 2, 199 n. 81, 273–76.

translated into Russian”), comprise simple lists of Hebrew words with attempted translations into Russian. Over time, these texts expanded to include a more substantial Greek vocabulary, and also a smattering of words from other languages, such as Latin, Arabic, and Permian (Komi). Maksim Grek, the sixteenth-century Athonite monk turned Russian translator and book corrector, is usually credited with compiling one of the most significant such dictionaries. That text, evidently written by a fluent Greek speaker, is extant in at least three redactions, attested by multiple copies of the late sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries.⁷

The multilingual dictionaries of late medieval and early modern Russian history have gone largely unnoticed in historiography (as distinct from philological and textual studies). That is unfortunate, since these texts contain profound clues about how Russian Orthodox Christianity of the Muscovite period negotiated critical boundaries of language and identity. Language itself is often a key factor in defining “belonging” to a given people group, even when the group is known primarily by some other characteristic (such as religion, ethnicity, or statehood). The significance of language for modern nationalism is of course well known.⁸ Yet the connection between language and identity is certainly not new to our age. To cite a common example, ancient Greek texts nearly always refer to speakers of foreign languages as βάρβαροι (*barbaroi*), “gabbling ones” or “barbarians” in the sense of cultural inferiors. As Mark Janse explains, a closely related concept was often applied to non-native speakers of Greek: βαρβαροφωνία (*barbarophōnia*) meant “speaking bad Greek,” such as the distinctive Jewish-Greek of the Septuagint (LXX) translation or a despised dialect like Cappadocian.⁹

7 Liūdmila Kovtun, *Azbukovniki XVI–XVII vv.: starshaia raznovidnost'* (Leningrad: Nauka, 1989); Liūdmila Kovtun, “Azbukovniki sredi drugikh tekstov drevnei leksikografii i problemy ikh izdaniia,” *Trudy Otdela drevnerusskoĭ literatury* 36 (1981): 3–12; Liūdmila Kovtun, *Leksikografiia v Moskovskoi Rusi XVI-nachala XVII v.* (Leningrad: Nauka, 1975); Liūdmila Kovtun, *Russkaia leksikografiia epokhi Srednevekov'ia* (Moscow: Akademiia nauk SSSR, 1963); Mikhail Alekseev, *Slovari inostrannykh iazykov v russkom azbukovnike XVII veka* (Leningrad: Nauka, 1968); Raliā Tšeitlin, *Kratkii ocherk istorii russkoĭ leksikografii* (Moscow: Uchpedgiz, 1958).

8 See: Eric Hobsbawm, “Language, Culture, and National Identity,” *Social Research* 63, no. 4 (Winter 1996): 1065–80; Stephen Barbour and Cathie Carmichael, eds., *Language and Nationalism in Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Joseph Alpher, ed., *Nationalism and Modernity: A Mediterranean Perspective* (New York: Praeger, 1986); Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, new ed. (London: Verso, 2006), 42–49, 69–84, 121–52, 182, *passim*; Margalit Shilo [Shiloh], “Milḥemet ha-śafot ke-‘tnu’ah ‘amamit’ [“The war of languages as a ‘popular movement’”]; in Hebrew, *Cathedra [Katedrah]* 74, no. 5 (Dec. 1994): 87–119.

9 Mark Janse, “Aspects of Bilingualism in the History of the Greek Language,” *Bilingualism in Ancient Society: Language Contact and the Written Word*, ed. J.N. Adams, Mark Janse, and Simon Swain (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 334–37, 341–42, 355–56, 388–90.

Language difference has often been an important conceptual element in defining boundaries of collective identities since ancient times, due both to practical reasons and to cultural prejudices or customs. Itamar Even-Zohar argues that ubiquitous linguistic diversity causes conflict only when language becomes linked to competing “higher-level semiotic organizers of culture... [i.e.,] ideologies that determine the goals of a society through its conception of itself.”¹⁰ That is, language differences become problematic only when they are tied to conflicting definitions of collective identity. Many modern nationalisms certainly illustrate this point. However, earlier history also offers instructive examples, including those related to religious instead of specifically national identity. Conflict with the Latin West prompted Greek-speaking Byzantine Christians of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries to “reshape their identity” and rename themselves “Ἕλληνας (Hellenes, Greeks) after centuries of being known as Ρωμαῖοι (Romans).¹¹ The “age of confessionalism” in early modern Europe featured conflicts among competing religious identities derived from new and different attitudes toward language. Contemporary controversies over Hebrew versus Latin readings within scripture, or Latin versus vernacular readings of scripture, both reflected and stimulated differences between competing collective identities based on religion.¹²

10 Itamar Even-Zohar, “Language Conflict and National Identity: A Semiotic Approach,” in Alpher, ed., *Nationalism and Modernity*, 127.

11 Michael Angold, *Church and Society in Byzantium under the Comneni, 1081–1261* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 508, 512, 527–28. Greek Jews did not undergo the same transformation and are known as “Romaniotes.” Forms of “Roman” also continued to be used in designating Greek Orthodox Christians, particularly within the later Ottoman empire.

12 “The controversial process of replacing Latin texts with vernacular translations was not an outgrowth as much as a cause of the Reformation.” Gordon Thomasson, “Languages, Vernacular,” *Renaissance and Reformation*, ed. James Patrick (New York: Cavendish, 2007), 698. For a dissenting view, see John Yamamoto-Wilson, “Latin, English and the Henrician Reformation,” available at: http://sophia.academia.edu/JohnYamamotoWilson/Papers/1161270/Latin_and_the_Vernacular_at_the_Dawn_of_the_English_Reformation. See also: Stephen Burnett, “German Jewish Printing in the Reformation Era,” in *Jews, Judaism, and the Reformation in Sixteenth-Century Germany*, ed. Dean Phillip Bell and Stephen Burnett (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 503; Hugh Seton-Watson, “State, Nation, and Religion: Some General Reflections,” in Alpher, ed., *Nationalism and Modernity*, 16–17; Evangelia Balta and Mehmet Ölmez, eds., *Between Religion and Language: Turkish-Speaking Christians, Jews and Greek-Speaking Muslims and Catholics in the Ottoman Empire* (Istanbul: Eren, 2011); Zeynep Turkeyilmaz, “Anxieties of Conversion: Missionaries, State and Heterodox Communities in the Late Ottoman Empire” (PhD diss., UCLA, 2009).

The understudied 1547 Constantinople Pentateuch (CP) illustrates some of the complexities arising from the mutual entanglements of language, religion, and identity in early modern history. This unique text constituted a polyglot edition of the Jewish Torah, with five columns or sections on each page setting forth: a) the Hebrew Masoretic (canonical) text; b) a translation into neo-Judeo-Greek; c) a translation into Ladino, or Judeo-Spanish; d) the ancient targum (Aramaic translation) attributed to Onkelos (fl. 100 CE); and e) the famous commentary of Rashi (Rabbi Shlomo Yitshaki, 1040–1105). The CP utilized Hebrew script for all texts, which thus encompassed four parallel versions of scripture plus one commentary. This ambitious collection was printed by the well-known Jewish publishing house of Soncino for the benefit of Sephardic and Romaniote communities under Ottoman Turkish rule, particularly “the youths of the sons of Israel” (*na'are bne yiśra'el*, in the Hebrew of the title page), so that they could learn “to speak clearly” (*ledaber tsaḥot*, an expression taken from Isaiah 32:4).¹³

Since the 1547 CP contained essentially a “new LXX,” it is valuable for understanding how contemporary Greek Jews understood the Hebrew text of Torah. From a linguistic perspective, the Greek column “constitutes the most important corpus of Greek written in a Jewish community... from the late Middle Ages to the beginning of Modern Times.”¹⁴ In addition to its utility for the study of Judeo-Greek or “Yevanic” language, the CP also represents a prime source for investigating the development of the modern Greek language in general. Despite following its Hebrew original virtually word-for-word, containing numerous Hebraisms, and probably being influenced by earlier Judeo-Greek versions, the CP Greek translation (phonetically transliterated with Hebrew letters) nonetheless represents one of the very best known sources on common Greek vocabulary and pronunciation in the early modern Ottoman empire. According to Henri Tonnet, “In the [Constantinople] *Pentateuch*, [the translator] does not write what *should* be written [ce qu’il *faut* écrire], conforming to the orthography and sometimes the morphology of ancient Greek, but rather what one hears actually.”¹⁵ Other Greek books from the century or two after 1453 are rare, and usually influenced by regional dialects (especially

13 *Sefer kulo mahamadim hamishah humshe torah... bo targum ha-mikra' be-lashon yeyani ve-lashon lo'ez...* (Constantinople [Istanbul]: Soncino, 1547 [1 Tamuz 5307]); electronic version (National Library of Israel): <http://aleph.nli.org.il/nnl/dig/books/bk001288589.html>.

14 Georges Drettas, “Le corpus judéo-grec et l’étude des vernaculaires médiévaux du grec,” *Studies in Greek Linguistics* 27 (2006): 128.

15 Henri Tonnet, *Histoire du grec moderne: La formation d'une langue*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Langues et mondes, 2003), 153.

Cretan) and attempts to imitate ancient style. As far as is known, the 1547 CP Judeo-Greek translation was the first Greek text printed within the Greek-speaking world.¹⁶ The first (unsuccessful) attempt to establish a Greek Christian printing press in Constantinople/Istanbul would not come for another eighty years.¹⁷ Though it would have been inaccessible to almost all contemporary non-Jews,¹⁸ the Jewish CP is thus irreplaceable in attempting to reconstruct the authentic popular or demotic Christian Greek of the period.

Nor does the irony end there. Greek Christian language and identity have always depended heavily on Jewish Greek texts—especially the LXX and the collection of first-century Jewish messianic writings that came to be known by Christians as the “New Testament” (NT). These and other important texts have been preserved in a hybrid Jewish-Greek language.¹⁹ Perhaps for this reason, Greek Christians frequently defined themselves in opposition to Jews or “Hebrews” (Εβραίοι). Michael Angold summed up a wide body of evidence as follows:

The Byzantine identity was complex... both the new Romans and the new Israelites... the chosen people of the New Testament. They saw the

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- 16 Nicholas de Lange, “The Greek Bible Translations of the Byzantine Jews,” *The Old Testament in Byzantium*, ed. Paul Magdalino and Robert Nelson (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 2010), 39–54; Julia Krivoruchko, “The Constantinople Pentateuch within the Context of Septuagint Studies,” *XIII Congress of the International Organization for Septuagint and Cognate Studies: Ljubljana, 2007*, ed. Melvin Peters (Atlanta: SBL, 2008), 255–276; Natalio Fernández Marcos, *The Septuagint in Context: Introduction to the Greek Version of the Bible* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 174–87; Maks Fasmer [Max Vasmer], “‘Rīech’ tonkosloviā grecheskago’ – pamiatnik srednegrecheskago ĭazyka XIII v.,” *Vizantiiskii vremennik* 14 (1907): 458; Lazare Belléli, “Une version grecque du Pentateuque du seizième siècle,” *Revue des études grecques* 3, no. 11 (July–Sep. 1890): 289–308; Lazare Belléli, “[Review of] D.C. Hesselning, *Les cinq livres de la loi (le Pentateuque)*,” *Revue des études juives* 35 (1897): 132–156. For a transcription in Greek letters of the CP Judeo-Greek translation, see D. C. Hesselning, *Les cinq livres de la loi (le Pentateuque): Traduction en néo-grec publiée en caractères hébraïques à Constantinople en 1547* (Leipzig: Harrasowitz, 1897). For transcriptions in Latin letters of the Ladino text, see works by Moshe Lazar and Haïm-Vidal Sephiha.
- 17 G.D. Bökou, “Stēn tourkokratoumenē Ellada,” *Ē kathēmerinē* [I Kathimerini] (Sun. 24 Mar. 1996): “Epta ēmeres” supplement, 8.
- 18 Compare Nicholas de Lange, “A Thousand Years of Hebrew in Byzantium,” *Hebrew Study from Ezra to Ben-Yehuda*, ed. William Horbury (Edinburgh: Clark, 1999), 160.
- 19 See: Coulter George, “Jewish and Christian Greek,” *A Companion to the Ancient Greek Language*, ed. Egbert Bakker (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 267–280; Anastassios-Fivos Christidis, ed., *A History of Ancient Greek from the Beginnings to Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 638–53, 1074–79.

Jews as their chief rivals and competitors. This meant that a Byzantine identity would be constructed in opposition to the Jews.... Persecution and prejudice against the Jews were always features of Byzantine life.... Greeks used to address Jews they met in the streets in the following contemptuous terms: ‘Oh sheepish bleater from Bethphage, oh honourable Beelzebub, oh Hebrew with a heart of stone, the Lord has come and hurled lightnings at your head.’²⁰

Muscovite representations of collective identity in the late medieval and early modern period were similar. Even prior to the existence of significant numbers of Jews in the Russian empire, anti-Jewish statements and insults were ubiquitous. Jews were often considered a threat to Russian identity, at least in part because of their continuing claim to be God’s chosen people. The predominant “New Israel” or “replacement” theology of Christianity claimed that the Jews, God’s original chosen people, had been rejected and replaced or superseded by the Christian collective. Like the Roman and Byzantine empires, Muscovite Russia applied this notion to itself. Just as Rome and Byzantium had considered themselves the New Israel, Russia likewise called itself “Israel” or “New Israel.” After the fall of Constantinople in 1453, no other Orthodox Christian *tsarstvo* (khanate or empire) existed in the world. Muscovite national-religious identity in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries appears to have drawn significantly on this knowledge to enable a usually implicit claim that Russia itself was now God’s specific chosen people. Widespread imitation of biblical forms ostensibly helped to actualize such claims.²¹

20 Angold, *Church and Society*, 508–9.

21 See: *Akty, sobrannye v bibliotekakh i arkhivakh Rossiïsskoï imperii Arkheograficheskoiu ekspeditsieiû (AAE)* (St. Petersburg: Imp. Vel Kantseliariia, 1836), 2: 8; *Polnoe sobranie russkikh letopisei* (St. Petersburg: Aleksandrov, 1910), 14.1: 2–7; Daniel Rowland, “Moscow – The Third Rome or the New Israel?” *Russian Review* 55, no. 4 (Oct. 1996): 591–614; Joel Raba [Yo’el Raba’], *The Contribution and the Recompense: The Land and the People of Israel in Medieval Russian Thought* [in Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 2003), 92–104; Alexander Pereswetoff-Morath, *A Grin without a Cat*, vol. 1: *Adversus Iudaeos Texts in the Literature of Medieval Russia (988–1504)* (Lund: Lund University, 2002); Paul Bushkovitch, “The Formation of a National Consciousness in Early Modern Russia,” *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 10, nos. 3–4 (1986): 355–76; Donald Ostrowski, *Muscovy and the Mongols: Cross-Cultural Influences on the Steppe Frontier, 1304–1589* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 164–65, 204, 219–43; Kevin Kain, “Before New Jerusalem: Patriarch Nikon’s Iverskii and Krestnyi Monasteries,” *Russian History* 39 (2012): 173–231; Gruber, *Orthodox Russia*, 23–50, 86–89, 109, 127, 143, 153, 155, 166, 174, 180–84. According to Iosif Volotskii, the Apostle Peter called Roman Christians the “New Israel” and “holy nation” (се [зраи]ль

In asserting its own national-religious identity, early modern Russia imitated and competed not only with the “old” Israel, but also with Byzantium. Despite a shared Orthodox Christian heritage and extensive, if selective, Russian borrowing from Byzantine Christian precedents, Muscovite claims to be the new capital of sacred history conflicted (almost) as much with Byzantine ecclesiastic pretensions as with Jewish attachment to Jerusalem. Muscovite texts spoke of Russia as “Israel” potentially in disregard of other Orthodox Christians who also considered themselves part of the “New Israel.” The Muscovite regime routinely referred to its own standing council of church hierarchs as вселенский (*vselenskiĭ*, “universal, ecumenical”).²² Aside from contradicting ecclesiastic statute, this choice may have demonstrated an attitude of casual defiance toward the rest of the Orthodox Christian world.²³ Thus, “Israel and the Greek domain” were viewed, on the one hand, as sacred models to be imitated; but on the other, as prototypes to be superseded.

These observations suggest various potential avenues of investigation, but I want to focus here on how attitudes toward biblical languages interacted with early modern Russia’s sense of religious and national identity. It is true that the use of the word *national* in this context may arouse some suspicion. Hugh Seton-Watson expressed a common view in asserting, “In the ancient world... nations did not exist,” and in allowing only that “some” (a very few) nations may have existed in early modern Europe.²⁴ However, from a linguistic perspective it is a mistake to phrase the question so absolutely. Several words in ancient languages (i.e., Hebrew *goy*, Greek *ethnos*, Latin *gens*) may have no exact equivalents in modern language but are often closest to our conception of *nation* (and were frequently translated as such into early modern English). These ancient precedents—including especially biblical depictions of national Israel—strongly influenced the self-conceptions of medieval and early modern Christian peoples (including both Kievan and Muscovite Rus’) long before modern nationalism. In Slavonic, such terms were generally rendered by the word *īazyk*”, which carried the meanings “tongue, language, people, tribe,

НОВЫИ, се языкъ с[в]я[т]ь; *se Izrail’ novyi, se īazyk’ sviat’*). Iōsif Volotskiĭ, *Prosvītitel’; ili ōblichenie erezī zhīdovstvūūshchikh*, 3rd ed. (Kazan: Imp. universitet, 1896), 414; note the striking contrast with biblical Romans, ch. 11.

22 AAE, 2: 21; *Pamīatniki diplomaticheskikh snoshenīi s derzhavami inostrannymi*, 10 vols. (St. Petersburg: Imp. Vel. Kantseliāriiā, 1852), 2: 664–65.

23 Compare the Muscovite treatment of a visiting Orthodox patriarch: Borys Gudziak, *Crisis and Reform: The Kyivan Metropolitanate, the Patriarchate of Constantinople, and the Genesis of the Union of Brest* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 168–87.

24 Seton-Watson, “State, Nation, and Religion,” 14–15.

nation.” Early modern Muscovites clearly did possess a conception of “language-nations” (*îazytsi*), among whom they could reckon themselves. It is even possible, though controversial, that a sense of distinct national identity was forming by the late sixteenth century.²⁵

The linguistic-national and religious sides of Russian identity had to mesh somehow. Muscovite literati were fully aware that virtually their entire Orthodox Christian corpus of literature had been translated from Hebrew and Greek. They considered Hebrew the original “chosen language.” They knew that Greek came next in the order of biblical transmission.²⁶ How did they deal with these realities while also asserting their succession of and superiority over Israel and the “Greek domain”? How did Muscovite Russian scribes relate to Hebrew and Greek language while defending their collective identity against Jews and Byzantines?

The multilingual glossaries of the thirteenth to sixteenth centuries reveal a perception of biblical language as both foreign and one’s own. Muscovite literati could not read or understand Hebrew, and native Russians with competence in Greek were rare.²⁷ Almost by definition, biblical language was foreign to Muscovites. Yet by appropriating and subsuming elements of earlier biblical and Christian history, Muscovite Russia created its own unique national-religious character and identity. As Nikolai Kapterev explained:

Greece, having enlightened Russia with Christianity... became a model that Rus’ would constantly have in mind in the arrangement of its own religious-ecclesiastical life... But if... our ecclesiastical life was arranged according to the Greek model, then... it could not help but submit also to the particularities of Russian life proper.²⁸

25 I.I. Sreznevskii, *Materialy dlîa Slovarîa drevne-russkago îazyka po pis'mennym pamiatnikam*, 3 vols. (St. Petersburg: Imp. Akademiia nauk, 1912), 3: 1646–49; Giles Fletcher, *The English Works of Giles Fletcher, the Elder*, ed. Lloyd Berry (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1964), 326; Edward Reisman, “Determinants of Collective Identity in Rus’, 988–1505” (PhD diss., Chicago, 1987), 122; Bushkovitch, “Formation of a National Consciousness”; Gruber, *Orthodox Russia*, 190–95.

26 Kovtun, *Russkaia leksikografiia*, 13–14; Kovtun, *Leksikografiia v Moskovskoi Rusi*, 313–49; Pereswettoff-Morath, *Grin without a Cat*, 2: 66; Gruber, “Russians, Jews, and Hebrew,” 132–36.

27 Fletcher, *English Works*, 260; Francis Thomson, *The Reception of Byzantine Culture in Mediaeval Russia* (Brookfield, VT: Ashgate, 1999), x–xii, xix, xx n. 77; Pereswettoff-Morath, *Grin without a Cat*, 2: 66; William Ryan, *The Bathhouse at Midnight: An Historical Survey of Magic and Divination in Russia* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), 9–10; Fasmer, “Rîech’ tonkosloviia grecheskago.” (See also the books by Kovtun cited above.)

28 N. Kapterev, *Svîetskie arkhieieiskie chinovniki v drevnei Rusi* (Moscow: Sovremen. izviest., 1874), 1.

Widespread Muscovite copying of Hebrew and Greek glossaries should be viewed within this overall cultural context. By translating biblical language—or the languages of biblical peoples—into Russian, Muscovite scribes made it both comprehensible and “their own.” They could then use it as they wished. Hebrew and Greek precedents were both models and competitors. Strict accuracy was usually not the primary goal in borrowing from earlier civilizations. In the case of the glossaries, it was the didactic value of words that mattered. A large number of Hebrew names were explained in accordance with allegorical interpretation, usually drawing on a selective utilization of classical and medieval precedents (glossaries and commentaries). The toponym гета (*geta*; presumably corresponding to Hebrew *gat*, “winepress, Gath”) was rendered as *впадениѣ жидомъ* (*ōtpadeniē zhidom*, “the falling away of the Jews”).²⁹ The “sons of Қораһ” (с[ы]н[о]ве корѣѣви, *synove korēēvi*) received the interpretation “Jews, who became naked of piety” (жидове, ти бо быша голи *вт бл[а]гочѣстьѣ*; *zhidove, ti bo bysha goli ot blagoch’st’ā*).³⁰ The expression *коле фарокрома* (*kole farokroma*, a scribal mix-up of *коре фалакрома*, *kore falakroma*: “to Қораһ, baldness”) or simply *фалакрома* (Greek *φαλάκρωμα*, *phalakrōma*; “bald head”) was said to mean *разгнѣвасѣ б[ог]ъ на жиды* (*razgniēvasiā bog na zhidy*, “God was enraged at the Jews”).³¹

The above examples illustrate how “Jewish language” (termed in the glossaries *жидовский* or *еврейский язык*, *zhidovskii/evreiskii iazyk*) could be used to promote a collective identity in opposition to the Jewish people or nation (also called *zhidovskii/evreiskii iazyk*). Jewish terminology was appropriated and used to express anti-Jewish sentiments. Many of the anti-Jewish interpretations in the glossaries had been derived from the 4th-century commentaries attributed to (pseudo-)Athanasius of Alexandria, which reached Rus’ in the form of a so-called *Tolstovskaiā psal’tyr’* or “Explanatory psalter” by the

29 Kovtun, *Ruskaia leksikografīa*, 37, 407, 419. The form гета (*geta*) and the cited interpretation may have resulted partly from conflation of *геѣъ* (*gef*”, “Gath [of the Philistines]”) with *егупѣ/египетѣ* (*egupt/egipet*”, “Egypt”).

30 Kovtun, *Ruskaia leksikografīa*, 38–39, 41, 43, 398. On the sons of Қораһ, see scriptures including: Exod. 6:24; Num. 16; 1Chr. 9:19; Psa. 41/42, 43/44, 44/45, 83/84, 84/85 [numberings depend on language used].

31 Kovtun, *Ruskaia leksikografīa*, 36, 398, 406, 419. See in LXX: Lev. 13:40–43, 21:5; Dt. 14:1; Amos 8:10; Isa. 3:24, 15:2; Jer. 29:5; Ezek. 7:18. Instead of *phalakrōma*, the 1547 CP Judeo-Greek used (inter alia) *farakla’da*, transcribed by Hesseling as *φαρακλάδα* (*pharaklada*) and translated into French as “calvitie.” The modern Greek word for “baldness” is *φαλάκρα* (*phalakra*). *Sefer kulo mahamadim*, fols. 211, 229, 350v. [electronic image nos. 212, 230, 352]; Hesseling, *Les cinq livres*, 222, 240, 376, 442.

eleventh century.³² Yet in making extravagant claims about the hidden meanings of biblical words and phrases, even Athanasius may not have intended his far-ranging allegorical commentaries to be understood as denoting the actual *linguistic* content of the terms in question. That particular transformation was a function of fuzzy translation and perhaps intentional Russian innovation.

Other glossary entries addressed more familiar concepts, with a variety of accuracy and inaccuracy in translation. Hebrew *'amen* (“truly, so be it”) was accorded several plausible renditions, including: право (*pravo*, “rightly, truly, correctly”); истиною (*istinoū*, “truly, verily”); and буди тако (*budi tako*, “let it be so”).³³ A sixteenth-century glossary found in the library of the Kirillo-Belozersk (KB) monastery, one of Russia’s greatest scriptoria and institutions of learning,³⁴ gave several approximate equivalents in various languages for Russian б[ог]ъ (*bog*, “God”): in “Jewish” or Hebrew (евреиский, *evreiskyi*), Аданай (*Adanai*, for Hebrew *'adonai*, “great lord”); in Arabic, ама (*ama*, a scribal error for алла, *alla[h]*); in Greek, вѣсѣ (*ōfes*, for ὁ θεός, *o theos*); in Armenian, арства (*arstva*, for *astvats*); in Tatar, пенгри (*pengri*, for the sky god *Tengri*); in Permian, ень (*en'*, for *En*, one of the top figures in the Komi pantheon).³⁵ The same text translated the term for an episcopal vestment, вмофор (*ōmofor* [or *omophor*], from Greek ὀμοφόριον, *ōmophorion*, “cloak, hood”), as избыток (*izbytok*, “abundance, superfluity”).³⁶ Another transliterated Greek word, дѣвѣтра (*diōptra*, for Greek διόπτρα, *dioptra*) was rendered as зеркало (*zertsalo*, “glass, mirror, speculum”), a rough characterization of the ancient optical instrument.³⁷ Such examples illustrate the eclectic nature and varied translation techniques of the Russian glossaries.

32 The word толстовская (*tolstovskaiā*, “fattish, explanatory”) in this text’s customary title sounds odd to the modern ear, which expects instead толковая (*tolkovaia*, “explanatory”). Kovtun, *Russkaia leksikografiā*, 18–41; Anatolii Alekseev, *Tekstologīa slavianskoī Biblii* (St. Petersburg: Bulanin, 1999), 160; O.V. Tvorogov, “Drevnerusskaia knizhnost’ XI–XIV vekov: Katalog pamiatnikov,” *Trudy Otdela drevnerusskoī literatury* 56 (2004): 11; N.B. Mechkovskaia, *Īazyk i religīa: Lektsii po filologii i istorii religii* (Moscow: FAIR, 1998), 290.

33 Kovtun, *Leksikografiā v Moskovskoi Rusi*, 264, 270; Kovtun, *Russkaia leksikografiā*, 398, 407.

34 Robert Romanchuk, *Byzantine Hermeneutics and Pedagogy in the Russian North: Monks and Masters at the Kirillo-Belozerskii Monastery, 1397–1501* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007); S.A. Semīachko, ed., *Knizhnye tsentry Drevnei Rusi: Kirillo-Belozerskii monastyr'* (St. Petersburg: Bulanin, 2008).

35 *Skazanie rīchem" nedovīedomym*, 150v.

36 *Ibid.*, 152. See Matt. 12:34.

37 *Skazanie rīchem" nedovīedomym*, 152v.

The sixteenth-century KB glossary partly coincides with but also deviates considerably from the general corpus of contemporary Russian glossaries.³⁸ This is not entirely surprising, since the process of collecting disparate manuscripts and copying new ones has always introduced variation into any textual tradition. However, recent discoveries suggest a much different phenomenon at work. In 2011, Sergejus Temcinas published his initial findings on “a Cyrillic sixteenth-century manuscript manual of Hebrew and Vilnius Old Testament florilegium.” These two remarkable documents contain Hebrew excerpts from the Tanakh in Cyrillic transliteration, Ruthenian translations made directly from Hebrew, and *accurate* renditions and translations of Hebrew words and phrases, including those illustrating the Jewish underpinnings of Christian concepts. In terms of content, the Hebrew manual and florilegium (anthology) diverge completely from the other known Muscovite translations, commentaries, and glossaries of Jewish language. Unlike the latter, these texts were composed originally by some person or persons possessing a thorough knowledge of Hebrew, almost certainly Ukrainian or Belorussian Jews. The manuscripts can be linked by their inscriptions to the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and northern European Russia.³⁹ The Hebrew teaching manual manifests a familiarity with both Hebrew and Greek versification and was clearly designed for the dissemination of authentic Hebrew linguistic knowledge (as opposed to just theologically motivated appropriations) among East Slavic Christians.⁴⁰

The discovery of these texts is sure to reinvigorate a longstanding historiographic debate about the presence of “Judaizers” in Muscovy, and whether or not the Novgorod and Moscow “heretics” of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century had any bona fide ties to Jews, Judaism, Hebrew language, and textual criticism.⁴¹ For our purposes here, it is sufficient to note that some real

38 According to my comparisons with multiple glossaries reproduced in the books by Kovtun cited above.

39 Sergej Temchin, “Kirillicheskiĭ rukopisnyiĭ uchebnik drevneevreiskogo ĭazyka (XVI v.) i vilenskiĭ vetkhozavetnyiĭ svod,” *Knygotyra* 57 (2011): 86–99.

40 Sergej Temchin, “Kirillicheskiĭ rukopisnyiĭ uchebnik drevneevreiskogo ĭazyka (XVI v.): Publikatsiĭa i obshchaĭa kharakteristika pamiatnika,” *Naujausi kalbų ir kultūrų tyrimai*, eds. Violeta Meiliūnaitė and Nadežda Morozova (Vilnius: Europos kalbų ir kultūrų dialogo tyrėjų asociacija, 2012), 137–80.

41 See: ĭakov Lur'e, *Ideologicheskaĭa bor'ba v russkoĭ publitsistike kontsa XV-nachala XVI veka* (Moscow: Akademiiĭa nauk, 1960); Henrik Birnbaum, “On Some Evidence of Jewish Life and Anti-Jewish Sentiments in Mediaeval Russia,” *Viator* 4 (1973): 225–56; David Goldfrank, “Burn, Baby, Burn: Popular Culture and Heresy in Late Medieval Russia,” *Journal of Popular Culture* 31, no. 4 (Spring 1988): 17–32; Francis Thomson, “The Slavonic Translation of the Old Testament,” *Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Jože Krašovec (Ljubljana: Slovenska

Hebrew knowledge did make its way to early modern Muscovy. Speculatively speaking, perhaps one or more small “schools” existed of Russian Orthodox Christians who shared a genuine interest in Hebrew. Had this become the dominant approach to biblical language, representations of Muscovite national-religious identity would have had to change. For in the mainstream of Russian Orthodoxy, the Hebrew and Greek languages were used to define Russian identity over against Jews and Greeks. Authentic Greek (let alone Hebrew) knowledge was generally viewed with suspicion and often provoked accusations of heresy.⁴² Foreign sacred languages had to be appropriated and made “one’s own”—which is to say, transformed into something different—to be acceptable.

David Goldfrank has argued that the thinkers, writers, editors, and copyists of Muscovite Russia collectively constituted a “republic of sacred letters” that allowed for a modicum of discussion and innovation within the context of a jealously guarded and overwhelmingly conservative tradition. The threat of violent repression stood in the way of “anything which might undermine Orthodoxy,” including alternate approaches to the sacred texts if they challenged the ruling paradigm and elite.⁴³ Thus, there may have been some flexibility, but no actual freedom. In such a “republic,” complete openness to Jewish knowledge of Hebrew and interpretation of scripture, or even to Greek Orthodox Christian revisions of Muscovite misunderstandings, was seen as highly threatening. The boundaries of Russian religious and national identity could not stretch far enough to encompass whatever a more authentic or original linguistic truth might turn out to be.

Muscovite scribes knew that *вифлеѡмъ* (*viflëōm*; Hebrew *bet lehem*, “Bethlehem”) meant “house of bread” and referred to a town of Roman Judea that had featured a monumentally important feeding trough.⁴⁴ But what *meaning* did they attribute to that knowledge? Did it speak to them of the

akademija znanosti in umetnosti, 1998), 651–54; David Goldfrank, “Theocratic Imperatives, the Transcendent, the Worldly, and Political Justice in Russia’s Early Inquisitions,” *Religious and Secular Forces in Late Tsarist Russia: Essays in Honor of Donald W. Treadgold*, ed. Charles Timberlake (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1992), 30–47, 287–97; Moshe Taube, “Eres’ zhidovstvuiushchikh’ i perevody s evreiskogo v srednevekovoi Rusi,” *Istoriia evreiskogo naroda v Rossii*, ed. Alexander Kulik (Jerusalem: Gesharim, 2010), 1: 367–97; Goldfrank, “Essential Glue,” 348–49.

42 See: Jack Haney, *From Italy to Muscovy: The Life and Works of Maxim the Greek* (Munich: Fink, 1973), 116; Makariĭ [Bulgakov], *Istoriia russkoĭ tserkvi*, new ed., vol. 6, bk. 10 (Moscow: Spaso-Preobrazhenskii Valaamskii monastyr’, 1996): 114–27; Gruber, *Orthodox Russia*, 194.

43 Goldfrank, “Essential Glue,” 349–51, 358–59.

44 *Skazanie rĭechem’ nedovĭedomyĭ*, 153v. Compare Kovtun, *Russkaia leksikografiia*, 406, 419.

Jewish origin, Semitic language, and Middle Eastern culture of Jesus (Yeshu'a ben Yosef)? Did such fragments of linguistic knowledge suggest to them the inadequacy of their own language and culture to reproduce biblical realities recorded in Hebrew and Greek? Or did these literati, the ostensible definers of national culture, instead find ways to appropriate and familiarize (rather than defamiliarize) a historically disparate setting? Biblical concepts had traversed a long distance—physical, temporal, and cultural—before reaching medieval Muscovite monasteries. They had undergone considerable transformations along the way, before coming to provide a foundation for a sense of Russian collective identity. Occasionally, contact with native Jews and Greeks offered Russians the opportunity to revise their interpretations. The extent to which they did or did not take advantage of such opportunities for learning about biblical languages—something that historiography is still in the process of discovering—reflected and reified their own (conscious and subconscious) delineation of the boundaries of religious and national identity. Early modern Muscovite interaction with biblical languages helped to define who was Russian and who was “barbarian.”