Some Notes on the Life and Works of Maxim the Greek (Michael Trivolis, ca 1470 – Maksim Grek, 1555/1556)

Part 2: Maxim the Greek's Slavic Idiolect

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Abstract

The Old Church Slavonic language that Maxim the Greek used in his translated and original works was in many respects shaped by his theological views. Therefore, his specific use of the language was intentional.

Keywords

Maxim the Greek (Maksim Grek) – manuscripts – theological language – Bible translations – Church Slavonic

1 Introduction

The common belief that Maxim the Greek was a *Russian writer*¹ emerged very soon after his death, whereas it seems inappropriate to mark him as a forerunner of Russian “opinion journalism” (*publitsistika* in Russian) or the author of political essays.² An analysis of his works, especially with a fresh look at the

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1 I. Ševčenko, “The Four Worlds and the Two Puzzles of Maxim the Greek,” *Palaeoslavica*, 19 (2011), pp. 294–304, here p. 294.

2 A. В. Иванов, *Литературное наследие Максима Грека* [A. V. Ivanov, *The Literary Legacy of Maxim the Greek*], Leningrad, 1969, p. 145.

manuscripts, can lead to a re-evaluation of the general idea that during Maxim the Greek's stay in Moscow he became a Russian writer and an advocate of Russian hegemony over all Orthodox countries as well as an advocate of the Moscow Church autocephaly. His writings should be understood as theological treatises.

None of Maxim's manuscripts was completely written by his hand: all the preserved Slavic manuscripts of Maxim the Greek were either dictated by him or copied by somebody else. Only the preserved marginalia and author's insertions were identified as his original writings.

Three collections of his Slavic manuscripts are known (we shall refer to them using the abbreviations Iosif., Chlud./Sin., Rum. 264),³ all of them having been collected during his lifetime;⁴ among them is the Rum. 264. Collection (RGB Moscow), which remains almost completely unpublished. The collection of his writings kept in Paris by the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (Ms. Slav. 123)⁵ is also relevant, since it contains traces of the protograph that is older than the manuscripts kept in Russian libraries. Moreover, Maxim's last translation of the liturgical Psalter (1552)⁶ is to be taken into consideration as his authoritative selection of linguistic solutions in order to produce the most theologically pure Orthodox Slavonic.

- 3 See more: Н. В. Синицына, *Максим Грек в России* [N. V. Sinitsyna, *Maksim the Greek in Russia*], Moscow, 1977, pp. 221–249. For coll. Mss. Rum. 264, see also Л. И. Журо́ва, *Авторский текст Максима Грека: рукописная и литературная традиции* [L. I. Zhurova, *The Author's Text of Maxim the Greek: Its Manuscript and Literary Traditions*], Vol. 1–2, Novosibirsk, 2010–2011.
- 4 Moreover, Russian and European libraries keep a cache of his other manuscripts, which were extensively reported on by Nina Vasilievna Sinitsyna, particularly the manuscripts in the libraries of the ex-Soviet Union. Apart from his Slavic legacy, there are some Greek manuscripts with his confirmed handwriting (Michael Trivolis as copyist, correspondent, translator); there are also some of his notes in Latin.
- 5 See more: I. Ševčenko, "The Slavic Versions of Maksim Grek's Poems in the Manuscript *Paris Slave 123*," *Palaeoslavica*, 8 (2000), pp. 349–358, here p. 349, fn. 1, 2; Н. В. Синицына, "Раннее творчество преподобного Максима Грека" [N. V. Sinitsyna, "The Early Writings of St. Maxim the Greek"], in: Максим Грек, *Сочинения*, отв. ред. Н. В. Синицына (Рукописные памятники Древней Руси) [Maksim the Greek, *Works*, ed. N. V. Sinitsyna (Manuscript Monuments of the Old Rus')], Vol. 1–2, Moscow, 2008–2014, Vol. 1, pp. 15–80, here pp. 78–80; Н. В. Синицына, "Творчество преподобного Максима Грека 30–50 гг. XVI в. и собрание избранных сочинений из 47 глав" [N. V. Sinitsyna, "The Literary Work of Maxim the Greek in the 1530s–1550s and the Collection of the Selected Works in 47 Chapters"], in: *Ibid.*, Vol. 2, pp. 12–47, here pp. 12, 34–36.
- 6 Moscow, Russian Historical Museum (ГИМ), The Library, The Department of Manuscripts and Firstprints: Ms. Coll. Uvar. 85.

Since A. V. Ivanov's seminal monograph,⁷ the most important progress in the study of Maxim's manuscripts and chronology of his works was made by Nina V. Sinitsyna.⁸

2 Maxim the Greek's Personal Language

The peculiarities of Maxim the Greek's use of Slavic language were scrutinised several times.⁹ Sometimes, Russian scholars have recognised them as non-Russian linguistic features or even mere mistakes. Nevertheless, his decisions about theologically pure linguistic expressions were, soon after his death, utilised in the Russian Slavonic recension of the liturgical Psalter. Such a view, however, was not shared by the decision-makers of the Russian Church at the two trials against him in 1525 and in 1531.

In 1525, Maxim the Greek was accused of "heretical errors in Russian holy liturgical books" allegedly made in his translation. A misunderstanding between the political body of the Russian Church and Maxim the Greek,¹⁰ as he was invited as a translator to Muscovite Russia, turned out to be the reason for even more serious accusations.

As a translator, Maxim has accepted the help of two Russian native speakers, Dmitri Gerasimov¹¹ and Vlas (Blasius), to whom he dictated in Latin his

7 Иванов, *Литературное наследие Максима Грека*.

8 Her distribution of Maxim the Greek's works is related to the Maxim's attitude towards monastic and monastery properties (Синицына, *Максим Грек в России*, pp. 186–216; Н. В. Синицына, "Послание Максима Грека Василию III об устройстве афонских монастырей (1518–1519 гг.)." [N. V. Sinitsyna, "The Letter of Maksim The Greek to Vasily III About the Arrangement of the Athonite Monasteries"], *Византийский временник*, 26 (1965), pp. 110–136). She expanded her views arguing that Maxim was firstly not so much opposing to the monastic properties, but to the distraction from the ascetic solitude.

9 Н. М. Olmsted, "Recognizing Maksim The Greek: Features of his language," *Palaeoslavica*, 10 (2002), pp. 1–26; Е. В. Кравец, "Книжная справа и переводы Максима Грека как опыт нормализации церковнославянского языка XVI века" [Е. V. Kravets, "The Revision of Books and the Translations of Maksim The Greek as the Normalisation of the Old Church Slavonic"], *Russian Linguistics*, 15 (1991), pp. 247–279, here pp. 256–259, 266–276, 271–272; В. Ф. Ржига, "Неизданные сочинения Максима Грека" [V. F. Rzhiga, "Unpublished Works of Maksim The Greek"], *Byzantinoslavica*, 6 (1935/1936), pp. 85–108.

10 Cf. Б. А. Успенский, *История русского литературного языка (XI–XVII вв.)* [B. A. Uspensky, *History of Russian Language (11th–17th cent.)*], Moscow, 2002³, pp. 213, 234–235.

11 See more: И. В. Вернер, "Нестандартная грамматика' библейских переводов Максима Грека: Влияние 'Доната' Дмитрия Герасимова на церковнославянский язык IV Маккавейской книги и книги Есфирь" [I. V. Verner, "Non-standard Grammar of

translations from Greek. As he explained himself in his *Confession of the Orthodox Faith*,

Let all ye, blessed bishops and most honourable princes and boyars, be informed that it was not me, the sinful one, who corrected the Triodion. I communicated to your interpreters Mitya [sc., Dmitri] and Vlas in the Latin language, since I had not yet learned your language perfectly. If you find the terms 'He was sitting/he sat' (*сѣдѣл еси*) and 'having sat / he had sat' (*сѣдѣв*) offensive, it is they and not me who are to be rightly blamed for such an ugly negligence, because I knew not the difference between these words then. Had I known it, I would never have kept it to myself, but would have instead corrected such an ugly error. Because what profit there is to me from this black frock and the prayers of monastic life and many years of these my sufferings if I turn out to be blaspheming against the Lord God and my Saviour Jesus Christ, who has been my hope since my tender young age.¹²

Maxim was accused that, by using the past perfect tense, he expressed his disbelief in the eternal being of Jesus Christ. Maxim uttered the perfect tense in Slavonic – that he seemed to understand as a formal analogue to the aorist form – in contrast to the imperfect. In Slavonic, the aorist was a marked form of the past tense, used mainly in descriptions or in parallel with another

the Biblical Translations of Maksim the Greek: The Influence of 'Donat' by Dimitry Gerasimov on the Old Church Slavonic Fourth Book of Maccabees and the Book of Esther"], in: *Священное Писание как фактор языкового и литературного развития (в ареале авраамических религий)*, ред. Е. Н. Мещерская [*The Holy Scripture as a Factor of the Language and Literary Development (in the Areal of the Abrahamic Religions)*], ed. E. N. Meščerskaya], St. Petersburg, 2011, pp. 197–222. About D. Gerasimov and his circle of translators, see: A. Isačenko, "Vpliv slovenskega jezika na obdelavo zgodovine ruskega jezika 16. in 17. stoletja" ["The Influence of the Slavonic Language on the Development of the Russian Language in the 16th and 17th centuries"], in: *Slovansko jezikoslovje: Nahtigalov zbornik [ob stoletnici rojstva]: prispevki z mednarodnega simpozija v Ljubljana, 30. junija – 2. julija 1977*, ed. F. Jakopin, Ljubljana, 1977, pp. 109–119, here p. 112); Н. А. Казакова, "Дмитрий Герасимов и русско-европейские культурные связи в первой трети XVI в." [N. A. Kazakova, "Dimitry Gerasimov and Cultural Relations between Russia and Europe in the First Third of the 16th cent."], in: *Проблемы истории международных отношений. Сборник статей памяти Е. В. Тарле*, ред. В. И. Рутенбург [*Problems of the History of the International Relations. A Memorial Volume Dedicated to E. V. Tarle*], ed. V. I. Rutenburg], Leningrad, 1972, pp. 248–266, here p. 254.

12 Максим Грек, *Сочинения*, Vol. 2, p. 55. Cf. in the manuscript: Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Mss. Coll. Slav. 123, f. 16^r.

action, sometimes in repetitions.¹³ Maxim's use of the aorist was in accordance with the earliest Glagolitic Slavonic translations (from the ninth to the eleventh centuries) but not with the earliest Russian Gospel recension, the so-called *Ostromirovo evangelie* (1059).

Moreover, Maxim's replacement of aorist forms with perfect ones resulted in a distinction between the second and the third person singular ('you sat/he had sat'): these forms are identical in the aorist but different in the perfect. As a side effect, in this way, he made the Russian Slavonic verbal system closer to the Latin one.¹⁴ In his *Confession of the Orthodox Faith*, Maxim used the Slavonic perfect tense as the analogue to the Greek aorist (and only rarely the imperfect tense), and to the Latin form of perfect tense, which possesses the ability to express the significant absoluteness of grammatical tenses¹⁵ – which in a certain aspect responded to the non-temporal/indefinite quality of biblical time.

In fact, the unmarked perfect tense was the verbal form that could properly denote a biblical non-temporality that was crucial for the linguistic choice of Maxim the Greek, especially when it was related to a specific duration in denoting the "time" of God the Son.¹⁶ Maxim the Greek has tried to explain to the Russian ecclesiastical circles, what is the "eternal" (non-historical) time of the Holy Scripture. For Maxim, the duration/position of the being the Son of God on the right side of the Father was never questionable, as he wrote in the preceding part to the quoted above fragment from the *Confession of the Orthodox Faith*:

- 13 B. Havránek, "Aspects et temps du verbe en vieux slave," in: *Mélanges de linguistique offerts à Charles Bally*. Sous les auspices de la Faculté des Lettres de l'Université de Genève, par des collègues, des confrères, des disciples reconnaissants, Genève, 1939, pp. 223–230, here p. 227.
- 14 Успенский, *История русского литературного языка*, p. 232; cf. И. В. Вернер, "О языковой практике Максима Грека раннего периода *Sub specie grammaticae*" [I. V. Verner, "On the Linguistic Practice of Maksim the Greek in his Early Period *Sub specie grammaticae*"], *Славяноведение*, 4 (2010), pp. 30–40.
- 15 J. Clackson, G. Horrocks, *The Blackwell History of the Latin Language*, Oxford, 2011, pp. 192–194, 214, 221.
- 16 We oppose the belief that Maxim was correcting the Russian liturgical books with narrow-minded grammatical tendency, cf. Кравец, "Книжная справа и переводы Максима Грека," pp. 249, 252, 265. Cf. more realistic opinions: В. Ягич, *Рассуждения южно-славянской и русской старины о церковно-славянском языке* [V. Jagić, *The Treatises of South-Slavic and Russian Antiquity about the Church Slavonic Language*], St. Petersburg, 1896, pp. 295–332; M. Barrachi, "La lingua di Maksim Grek," *Rendiconti. Istituto Lombardo di scienze e lettere. Classe di lettere, scienze morali e storiche*, Vol. 105/2 (1971), pp. 253–289, here p. 275.

And upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high (Heb. 1:3) et cetera – thus I sing all days and nights with all of you, pious ones. “And who ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of the Father” [Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed].¹⁷

Indeed, Maxim wanted to stress the duration of the time that has been lasting from the past through the present, and further on to the future. That is why he used the present tense for the voice of Jesus Christ in the manner that believers could feel the fear at His last Judgment as well as an insight into His Highest Grace. Maxim the Greek explained his use of the perfect tense in the context of Psalm 89 LXX (90 MT), when he wrote in an answer to bishop of Tver’s criticism against his translation of Ps 89:2 LXX (*Lord, you became a refuge to us in generation and generation*¹⁸):

But this phrase *you became* [был еси, lit. *you were*] does not separate us from God’s providence and his refuge, as interprets the Monsignor [bishop of Tver], but most clearly confesses and firmly demonstrates God’s Providence about us. It clearly says that you, Lord, are not only now our refuge but from the beginning of the human race was or have been (бысть или был еси) our refuge. This is to be said to us with (the phrase) *in generation and generation*, that is, “always” (вину), that means “from the beginning and now you are a refuge to us, and until the end of the age you will be with us and we with you, as said the undeceiving promise” <...>. The difference between the two forms (пословицам) is the following: when this form is applied to the first person [= grammatical 2nd person], that is, when we are expressing our gratitude to the Saviour and say to him directly about his charity toward us, then it will be the case to say in the following manner: *Lord, you became a refuge to us in generation and generation*, that is, always (вину). And when it is applied to the second person [= grammatical 3rd person], that is, when we,¹⁹ boasting, tell to others what happened, which are His good deeds²⁰ toward us, then we

17 Максим Грек, *Сочинения*, Vol. 2, pp. 55–56. Cf. in the manuscript: Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Mss. Coll. Slav. 123, f. 16^r.

18 English tr. by Albert Pietersma in: *A New English Translation of the Septuagint*, ed. A. Pietersma, B. G. Wright, New York – Oxford, 2007, p. 592.

19 Thus according to the manuscript. In the printed edition, there are the 3rd-person forms throughout this sentence (“when one ... tells ...” etc.).

20 Corrected according to the manuscript: *еже его к нам благотворение* instead of the senseless *еже его к нам благодарие* [“his <sc., God’s!> gratitude toward us”] in the printed edition.

say in the following manner: *The Lord became* [бѣсть, lit. was/has been] *a refuge to us*, according to it is said elsewhere: *My strength and my celebration is the Lord; he became deliverance for me* [Ps 117:14 LXX²¹].²²

In this passage Maxim made an observation that the aorist form (бѣсть) in the Holy Scripture does not signify the aspect of ‘always’ (всегда), as the bishop of Tver argued against him. He noticed that the form of ‘always’ signifies less firm being than the more ancient form (быху).²³ The quoted text further explains his understanding of the theological dimension of Biblical time by the use of temporal adverbs in the Bible: he says that the aorist form “were/was” does not replace the meaning of the adverb “always” related to the ever-present, which refers to the existence, springing from Genesis. It therefore means the possibility of eternity, indicated with the word быху that could be used only in the relationship with God the Father, and, consequently, it is used with the verbal copula бѣсть. He gave an argument for both cases by quoting from the Gospel of John (Jn 1:3), explaining his understanding of the perfect form used in the Bible. Related to the Christian interpretation of the New Testament and the beginning of the new (time) with the birth of the Son of God, the latter presupposes the perspective of eternity and immortality. Maxim the Greek added: “Thus, consider yourselves: everything came into the being at once (единою), and not in a way that new heavens and earth and other creatures would come into the being each time (всегда).”²⁴

Maxim respected the latter principle in the translation of the liturgical Psalter, for example in Psalm 108:5 LXX, where he replaced the ancient form (быху) with the newer one (всегда), because in that verse the latter form had to mark the everlasting will of the Lord at the Last Judgment concerning unrepentant sinners. Maxim the Greek stressed also that this use of the tense was not constant in the Russian liturgical manuscripts. He explained his own use of an aorist form (бѣсть), always when it was related to God the Father, and the perfect with copula (быху еси), especially to denote the divine and human natures of Jesus Christ with regard to His instant presence in the human mind.

21 English tr. by A. Pietersma in: *A New English Translation of the Septuagint*, p. 606.

22 Maxim the Greek, *The Epistle to Brother Gregory on the Saying* Lord, you became a refuge to us, in: Максим Грек, *Сочинения, изданные при Казанской духовной академии* [Maxim the Greek, *Works Published with the Theological Academy of Kazan*], Pt. 2, Kazan, 1860, pp. 421–423, here pp. 422–423. Cf. in the manuscript: Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Mss. Slav. 123, ff. 86^v–87^r.

23 *Старославянский словарь (по рукописям X–XI веков)*, под ред. Р. М. Цейтлин и др. [The Dictionary of Old Church Slavonic (Based on the Manuscripts of the 9th–11th Centuries)], ed. R. M. Tseitlin et al., Moscow, 1994, p. 160.

24 Максим Грек, *Сочинения, изданные при Казанской духовной академии*, p. 423.

Russian scholars of the twentieth century tended to understand this point as if Maxim approached the text from a grammatical point of view only, whereas Maxim himself approached it from a theological point of view and aimed at the deeper theological dimension of the Biblical use of words.

For Maxim, the Son of God and God the Father, different by person but both non-interchangeable, both existed before any time, but Jesus Christ, as the incarnate Son of God, exists also as the most immediate presence in the believer's present time. Maxim's purpose was not only to express the recognition of the two personalities of the Holy Trinity, but also the non-touchable presence of God. A similar approach is traceable in the very early Slavonic manuscripts.²⁵ Obviously, Maxim the Greek understood the grammar mostly as an expression of an implied theology.

25 N. van Wijk, "vi. De l'emploi du parfait et de l'aoriste en vieux-slave," *Revue des études slaves*, 13 (1933), pp. 242–244, here 242.