The Reception of “Slavonic Apocrypha”

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Abstract

This paper examines the history of scholarship on medieval Slavonic religious literature. The bulk of these writings have been studied either by biblical scholars or by Slavacists under the name of “Slavonic Apocrypha.” The fifteenth century manuscript, *Slav* 29, typifies this scholarship. Slavonic translations of Hellenistic pseudepigrapha were used by textual critics for the reconstruction of biblical literature. Biblical scholars praise *Slav* 29 as the source of the best version of the Hellenistic romance, *Joseph and Aseneth*. Slavacists-medievalists celebrate it as the manuscript of the Serbian poetic masterpiece, *Slovoljubve* (*A Homage to Love*). They study *Slav* 29 as part of national Slavic literature. As a representative of medieval Slavic literature *Slav* 29 also includes biblical passages, theological discourses, historiographies, hagiographies, sermons, erotapokriseis, fables, medical prescriptions, and folk tales.

Keywords

Slavonic apocrypha – biblical studies – biblical canon – apocrypha – pseudepigrapha – Slavistics – Joseph and Aseneth – reception history.

The Reception of “Slavonic Apocrypha”¹

This paper is an attempt to mapping the trajectory that the study of medieval Slavonic religious literature took in modern scholarship, i.e. from the Enlightenment up to the 21st century. At the end of the 20th century researchers of

¹ This paper is delivered in a session of the meeting of European biblical scholars in which Slavists from around the world also took part. The idea was, in this last paper of the workshop,

this literature realized that in order for the field to advance, scholars of different concentration; Medievalist, Slavacists, and scholars of Religion, must bring their research techniques together and look at Slavonic religious literature as a united phenomenon. Although there is nothing new about advocating an interdisciplinary approach in today's scholarship, the nature of its necessity in Slavonic studies has not been discussed in detail in a single paper. Medieval Slavic religious literature has been mainly studied by two academic branches: Slavistics and Biblical scholarship. Because of various historical, religious, and cultural circumstances both fields of study were only partially interested and partially able to study fully these texts, which are often put under a Biblical term: "Slavonic Apocrypha." As a result, Slavonic religious texts were rarely studied. This paper discusses the circumstances which led to the neglect of the academic study of Slavonic sacred literature and attempts to explain how the interdisciplinary effort of Medieval Slavacists and Biblical scholars is necessary at this time.

The fact that both scholars of Slavic philology and languages and biblical scholars gathered together to discuss the religious texts in Slavonic under the auspices of a major international Biblical association demonstrates the recognition of the need for a joint effort in giving these texts the place they deserve in today's world. Because of the immediate context of the meeting and the expertise of the author, the focus will be on the perspective of Biblical studies.²

Because it was not a coincidence that the name of the unit at the EABS meeting in Leuven, 2016 was "Slavonic apocrypha," I will first address the reception history of the term, "Slavonic Apocrypha." I use Reception history (*Rezeptionsgeschichte*) as a methodology developed by Hans Robert Jauss and the German Constance School.³ This approach is recently placed under the umbrella of cultural criticism by biblical scholars, such as David Gunn and Fernando Segovia.⁴ Then, a short outline of the main scholarly research on extracanonical texts and on Slavic medieval literature will follow. My argument will

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"Slavonic Apocrypha," to discuss the name around which the scholars of Slavic literature and biblical scholars had gathered in Leuven: "Slavonic Apocrypha."

- 2 The name, "Slavonic Apocrypha" comes from Biblical studies and I have addressed it as a biblical scholar, which is what I am by training and education.
- 3 Rien T. Segers, Hans Robert Jauss, and Timothy Bahti. "An Interview with Hans Robert Jauss." *New Literary History* 11.1 (1979), pp. 83-95.
- 4 David M. Gunn, "Cultural Criticism: Viewing the Sacrifice of Jephthah's Daughter," in: *Judges & Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies*, ed. Gale A. Yee, Minneapolis, 2007, p. 204. Fernando F. Segovia, *Decolonizing Biblical Studies: A View from the Margins*, New York, 2000, pp. 13-15.

be demonstrated using the fifteenth century manuscript, *Slav* 29, as cataloged by the National Library of Serbia in Belgrade.⁵

1 The Meaning of the Term: "Slavonic Apocrypha"

Apocrypha is a term introduced in modern scholarship by Protestant Biblical scholars for the Old Testament books that are in the Roman Catholic Biblical canon but are omitted from the Protestant canon.⁶ When Martin Luther rejected Roman Catholic Scriptures, and adopted the shorter Jewish list for the books of the Old Testament, he put "extra" books in the Appendix of his 1534 translation of the Bible in German, with a note that they "are not held equal to the Sacred Scriptures and yet are useful and good for reading."⁷ New Testament books remained the same and still are for the majority of the Christian churches, making above defined term "Apocrypha" not applicable for the books of the New Testament.

In response to the institutionalization of Protestantism, the Roman Catholic Church held a Counter-Reformation Council in Trent from 1545-63 where it defined its faith over and against that of the Protestants. Among other things, it reaffirmed the traditional list of their Scriptures, establishing by this act the

5 *Slav* 29 was housed in the National Library of Serbia in Belgrade until 1941 when it burnt together with many other manuscripts of the library in the fire instigated by the German bombing of Belgrade. Fortunately, *Slav* 29 had been published by Stojan Novaković at the end of the nineteenth century (Stojan Novaković, "Srpsko-slovenski Zbornik iz vremena Despota Stefana Lazarevića," *Starine* (1877) 9, pp. 1-47.

6 These books are: 1 and 2 Maccabees, Judith, Tobit, Baruch (with the Letter of Jeremiah), Ben Sirach, Wisdom of Solomon, and additions to the books of Esther and Daniel.

7 Luther was educated to become a biblical scholar. Luther studied Hebrew and his translation of the Old Testament was based on the Hebrew text and in conjunction with the Vulgate (Eric W. Gritsch, "Luther as Bible Translator," *The Cambridge Companion to Martin Luther*, ed. Donald K. McKim, New York, 2003, p. 63). He conceived his Old Testament canon as going back to Palestinian canon, understood as the canon of the Jews in Palestine in contrast to Roman Catholics who received Alexandrian canon of the Septuagint in Greek. What Luther had at his disposal in sixteenth century was the received tradition among European Jews about their Bible, and the received tradition of the Roman Catholic Church that experienced a strong opposition of scholars in Luther's times. Moreover the Renaissance spirit of going back to ancient sources of Western culture was translated to the *ad fontes* quest of the Bible. The last element was the translation of the religious texts into vernacular languages, what was against the Roman Catholic Latin eclecticism. All these circumstances led Luther to choose the Jewish canon, and reject seven books of the authoritative Old Testament and call them Apocrypha.

official Roman Catholic canon or list of Biblical books. Before this council, neither the Eastern Orthodox nor Roman Catholic Church had ever put forward an official, universally binding listing of their Biblical literature. To be sure, historically there had been a few local efforts in this direction, mainly in response to specific theological disputes, but a universal ruling on this question had never been promulgated.⁸ The Roman Catholic Biblical canon of both the New and Old Testament, put forward for the first time at Trent in 1546, is one of the dogmatic definitions of that Council. That is why we know exactly which books are Apocrypha.⁹ But, to make the matter more complicated, Roman Catholics renamed Protestant term, Apocrypha, into Deuterocanonical books.¹⁰ Subsequently the Old Testament Apocrypha and Deuterocanonical books are the same books, making the term rather into a disclosure of the confession of its user. According to this logic, Apocrypha are for both Roman Catholics and the Protestants the books about Biblical figures and events that are not included in the scriptural canon.

The other Christian Churches, including the Slavic Orthodox Churches, did not need to define their canons because no similar event happened in their history, and no official council decided on their list of Biblical books or the canon of their Biblical literature. As a consequence the list of the books that they include in their editions of the Old Testament may vary.¹¹

8 There is a list of several attempts on determining the canon, available on Open Web: Michael D. Marlowe. "Canon: Ancient Lists," *Bible Research*, 2001-2012 <<http://www.bible-researcher.com/canon8.html>>, Accessed 24 March 2018.

9 "if any one receive not, as sacred and canonical, the said books entire with all their parts, as they have been used to be read in the Catholic Church, and as they are contained in the old Latin vulgate edition; and knowingly and deliberately condemn the traditions aforesaid; let him be anathema ["Decree Concerning the Canonical Scriptures." in *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent; The Fourth Session*, trans. J. Waterworth, London, 1848), p. 19].

10 Although the Council of Trent was very explicit that all the books are to be held the same a tendency prevailed to categorize the biblical books into three groups following the division of Sixtus of Sienna (1520-1569), a Jewish convert to Roman Catholicism. In his *Bibliotheca Sancta*, 1566, he divides biblical writings into three orders: the first order is of protocanonical books, the second of deuterocanonical (Protestant Apocrypha), and the third are Apocrypha which he defines as those about which it was not clear if they were inspired by the Holy Spirit and therefore they were forbidden to be read in public, but were allowed to be read in private [*Bibliotheca Sancta ex praecipuis catholicae ecclesiae autoribus collecta, et in octo libros digesta*, Venetiis, 1566, pp. 1-2.

11 For example, *Joseph and Aseneth* is often included in Armenian canon and also in the thirteen century list of the Old Testament books made by Abed Esu, the Syrian bishop.

Martin Luther was not the first to coin the term Apocrypha or to go back to the "Hebrew Canon" of the Old Testament books. The discussions about the list of the Christian sacred texts were present from the birth of Christianity and the catalogs were made in the context of particular theological disputes. These lists also reflect the conviction of a person or a specific community who created them. Hence Athanasius of Alexandria (296-373) in his *Περὶ τῶν θείων γραφῶν* "Concerning the Divine Scriptures" (Thirty-Ninth Festal Epistle, 367), uses the word Apocrypha (τοῖς λεγομένοις ἀποκρύφοις) to designate the books on Biblical themes that were "not true (ἀπατῶμενοι τῇ ὁμωνυμίᾳ τῶν ἀληθῶν βιβλίων)."¹² His canon is close to the Jewish canon, but it was never accepted by the undivided Church, neither Roman Catholic, nor Orthodox.¹³ It is worth noting that Athanasius excluded the Book of Esther from the Old Testament canon, yet Esther is a part of Jewish canon today.¹⁴ Jerome (340-420), a few decades later (391), translated the books of the Old Testament from Hebrew, i.e. Jewish canon, into Latin. He calls the books that are not written in Hebrew and not included among 22 books of the Jewish canon, apocrypha (inter apocrypha seponendum).¹⁵ Neither was his canon accepted by the Church at large.

The history of the use of "Apocrypha" prior to its re-introduction by Luther is not relevant for the transmission of the term "Slavonic Apocrypha" both in Biblical scholarship and Slavic philology and literature. Therefore, for the purpose of the reception history of the term "Slavonic Apocrypha" it is important to follow the trajectory of Luther's determination of "Apocrypha" in the con-

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4 Maccabees are in the Georgian canon and sometimes in Slavonic Orthodox Churches, and *Jubilees* is in the Ethiopian canon.

12 λοιπὸν ἐντυχάνειν ἑτέρους ἄρξονται, τοῖς λεγομένοις ἀποκρύφοις, ἀπατῶμενοι τῇ ὁμωνυμίᾳ τῶν ἀληθῶν βιβλίων· παρακαλῶ ἀνέχεσθαι εἰ περὶ ᾧ ἐπίστασθε, περὶ τούτων καὶ γὰρ μνημονεύων γράφω, διά τε τὴν ἀνάγκην καὶ τὸ χρῆσιμον τῆς ἐκκλησίας. Athanasius of Alexandria, *Περὶ τῶν θείων γραφῶν*, *Thirty-Ninth Festal Epistle* in *Quellensammlung zur Geschichte des Neutestamentlichen Kanons bis auf Hieronymus*, Zürich, 1844, pp. 7-9.

13 In these early times the church was united and stayed so until the schism in 1054.

14 "Esther" has been disputed by Jews on its worthiness as a sacred scripture because it does not mention God. It is important to mention that "Esther" of the Jewish canon is not the same as "Esther" of the Old Testament. The latter is the one in Greek included by the Septuagint. This book mentions God.

15 Hic prologus Scripturarum quasi galeatum principium omnibus libris, quos de hebraeo vertimus in latinum, convenire potest, ut scire valeamus, quicquid extra hos est, inter apocrypha seponendum. Official Roman Catholic Church did not accept Jerome's canon. "St. Jerome's Prologue to the Books of the Kings," *Biblia Sacra Iuxta Vulgatam Versionem*; Adjuvantibus Bonifatius Fischer OSB, Iohanne Gribomont OSB, H.F.D. Sparks, W. Thiele; Recensuit et Brevi Apparatu Instruxit Robertus Weber OSB; Editio Tertia Emendata quam Paravit, etc., Stuttgart, 1983, pp. 364-66.

text of the Protestant doctrine of *sola scriptura* and *ad fontes* and its impact on the modern studies of Humanities in general. According to *sola scriptura*, the only infallible authority for Christian beliefs and practices are the Old and New Testaments, which are divinely inspired or revealed books. Everything else is secondary; every interpretation is secondary. In his rejection of the Roman Catholicism, Luther rejected its Holy Tradition.

Ad fontes: back to the sources is a tenet of the Renaissance that was adopted by the Protestant movement. This is the quest for the original Bible, the Bible given by God to the first human receptors. Because the Old Testament was written in Biblical Hebrew with a few chapters in Biblical Aramaic and The New Testament in Koine/Hellenistic Greek, by the study of these languages Biblical scholars were expected to uncover the original Bible. This tendency to go back to sources makes ancient teachings and practices be preferred to later, medieval ones.¹⁶

Because modern Biblical studies started and were developed by Protestant scholars, the term Apocrypha as defined above perseveres in Biblical scholarship. Because the Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and the majority of Protestant churches agree on which books are included in their New Testament canon, according to the Old Testament definition of Apocrypha, Apocrypha do not exist among the New Testament writings.¹⁷

16 Michael Marlowe, the creator of the web page "Bible Research," himself a conservative and Reformed Protestant who adheres to Westminster Confession of Faith explains well the mindset in his "Introduction to the Canon and Ancient Versions of Scripture," "Protestant teachings concerning the canon are in general based upon the same principle which is employed by Protestant theologians in all sorts of questions about doctrine and church order: the clearly ancient teachings and practices are to be preferred over the medieval. In questions that are not answered by Scripture itself, we inquire into the earliest available evidence for the teachings and practices of the churches, and have little regard for traditions that cannot be traced back to the generation that immediately followed the Apostles. And so with respect to the canon, we are interested to know what the earliest available sources have to say. That is why the resolution of this question partly depends upon an examination of the ancient canon lists. When these lists are examined, we find that the earlier ones omit the Apocrypha, and that the later ones (beginning at the end of the fourth century in the West) include it. The Apocrypha began to be put on the same level as our canonical books at about the same time as many other innovations entered into the Church." (Michael Marlowe, "Introduction to the Canon and Ancient Versions" in "The Canon of Scripture" *Bible Research*. Web. 2001-2012 <<http://www.bible-researcher.com/canoni.html>>).

17 Additional misunderstandings do occur because both the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches believe in the Holy Scriptures and the Holy Tradition. Consequently some of these "apocrypha" are included into their "holy tradition" such as Protoevange-

However, already confusing terminology got even more complex. The term Apocrypha is also used in the New Testament studies for the early Christian writings which were not received in the canon.¹⁸ In this case "New Testament Apocrypha" is countered by "Old Testament Pseudepigrapha." Both terms were used and the distinction between the two established in the 18th century by a Lutheran scholar, Johann Albert Fabricius the author of *Bibliotheca antiquaria* (1713). Thus, according to the influential Fabricius work the term Apocrypha has been applied to non-canonical books of the New Testament, and the same genre of the Old Testament has been designated as Pseudepigrapha.

If we apply the above definition of the Old Testament Apocrypha to Slavonic Apocrypha, then, they should include the books that are in the Slavonic Biblical canon but are not in the Protestant canon. For different academic reception communities, this statement means different things. From the point of view of Church history this does not make sense. There is no Slavonic, or Slavic church. The Christian Slavic churches that have been continuously reading their scriptures and conducting their services in Slavonic have been Orthodox Christians in communion with other regional or national Orthodox Churches, such as Greek, Antiochian, or Georgian. Their liturgical and religious texts were translated from Greek. Accordingly, the Slavonic Bible is the Greek Bible that goes back to the Septuagint. The Slavonic Apocrypha may, in addition to the books of Apocrypha of the Roman Catholic canon, include 3 and 4 Maccabees, Psalm 151, and the Prayer of Manasseh and that is about it!

However, the list of the books of "Slavonic Apocrypha," is very long and includes also cluster books around an important Biblical hero. For example Adamic material consists of: *Slavonic Life of Adam and Eve*, *Adam Octipartite*, *Sataniel Text*, *Story of God's Creation of Adam*, *Legend about the Wood of the Cross*, *The Struggle of the Archangel Michael with Sataniel*, *The Legend of the Tiberian Sea*, *The Discourse of the Three Hierarchs*, *The Homily of Adam to Lazarus in the Hell*, and fragments *Seventy Names of God* and *About All Creation*.

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lium of James, but some are not, such as Gnostic libraries to which the Gospel of Thomas belongs. In the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible scholarship another term, pseudepigrapha, is added for the books that do not belong to any canon in order to distinguish them from Old Testament Apocrypha. The term, pseudepigrapha, is also used for the early Christian literature and is often interchangeable with apocrypha.

- 18 The discussion about the term New Testament Apocrypha its adequacy and the debate about it among New Testament scholars see Petra Heldt, "New Testament Apocrypha," in *The Blackwell Companion to the New Testament*, ed. David E. Aune, Oxford, 2010, pp. 652-655. Herewith it seems like the New Testament term goes back to Athanasius' definition of apocrypha, while the Old Testament term relies on Jerome's designation.

There is an attempt to designate these texts as Slavonic pseudepigrapha, as a more suitable term, but this term is also controversial as we saw above.¹⁹

2 The Reception of “Slavonic Apocrypha”

To help us understand why Biblical scholars and Slavists were gathered in Leuven at 2016 meeting of EABS around this debatable term, “Slavonic Apocrypha,” we must look at reception history of the term.²⁰ There are two main academic reception communities which use this term: one represents the horizon of religious studies and modern Biblical scholarship, which is Protestant based, and the other is the horizon of Slavic/Slavonic literary studies.

If “Slavonic Apocrypha,” as a scholarly term, includes other texts (which, as we know, is actually the case), i.e. texts such as *2 Enoch*, *Apocalypse of Abraham*, the *Ladder of Jacob*, *3 Baruch*, or *Life of Adam and Eve*, *Joseph and Aseneth*, *Apocalypse of Abraham*, *Apocryphon of Zorobabel*, *The Gospel of St. Thomas*, *Gospel of Nicodemus*, *Protoevangelium of James*, *Abgar's Epistles* – to make a long list short – then, according to the historians of religion, Slavs who used Slavonic apocrypha in their worship were not mainline Christians and belonged neither to the Eastern Orthodox nor the Roman Catholic Church. They were either pagans or members of a dualistic religious sect, such as the Bogomils.²¹

19 Andrei Orlov, *Selected Studies in the Slavonic Pseudepigrapha* (Studia in Veteris Testamenti Pseudepigrapha, 23), Leiden, 2009, pp. 3-5.

20 When a group of readers who share the intellectual, political, or cultural background interpret the text in a similar way they represent a reception community with their own horizon of experience.

21 In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century a theory was popular that connected the preservation and even creation of these Slavonic texts with dualistic Bogomil's movement in medieval Balkans. Based on reading of a sentence in the *Index of the Forbidden Books* (14th and 15th century), influential Slavists of the nineteenth century, A. Pypin, V. Jagić, and F. Rački identified the books mentioned in the *Index* as Bogomil's work (Z. Zlatar, *The Poetics of Slavdom: The Mythopoeic Foundations of Yugoslavia* 2, Frankfurt am Main, 2007, pp. 534-36). The other Slavists of the time followed suit. Although M. Sokolov pointed out that none of the apocrypha attributed to Bogomil shared Bogomil's teachings, but are purely orthodox, the great authority of other Slavists persuaded Western scholars that popularity of Slavonic apocrypha is due to Bogomil influence (Steven Runciman, *The Medieval Manichee*, 1947; A.S.D. Maunder, “The Date and Place of Writing of the Slavonic Book of Enoch,” *The Observatory* 41 (1918), pp. 309-316); J. Ivanov, *Богомилски книги и легенди*, София, 1925). However, recent scholarship challenged this theory, because it becomes very difficult to find a relation between Slavonic apocrypha

Biblical scholars, themselves, did not care about the religious affiliation or the cultural context of the groups who preserved the manuscripts. They were mainly textual critics who in Slavonic manuscripts found a great repository of Hellenistic Jewish texts that had otherwise been lost or poorly preserved. Like many lost texts of the Second Temple Judaism that were discovered in Qumran caves and are known as the Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS), many other lost texts from this period are, for unknown reasons, found in Slavonic translations, such as *2 Enoch*, *Apocalypse of Abraham*, *The Ladder of Jacob*, *3 Baruch*, and *Life of Adam and Eve*. The fact that the DSS were excavated, and that most of the Slavonic texts were received, i.e. transmitted by Slavs did not come into their consideration. Both of these attitudes: of historians of Religion who considered Slavs as pagans or Bogomils, or Biblical scholars who ignored the event of translation among the Slavs, if not understood from the context that they arose from, can easily appear offensive and derogative to the Slavs and the culture that made and preserved these manuscripts.²²

The bottom line is that Biblical scholars used Slavonic translations of lost or poorly preserved Greek texts, in order to retrieve their Greek original, i.e. they retranslated them into Greek, or another "original" language. The Slavonic texts were evaluated according to their ability to throw light on the original Bible and its world. They were not studied in their own medieval context.

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and Bogomils (Dmitri Oblensky, *The Bogomils*, 1948; F.I. Andersen, "Pseudepigrapha Studies in Bulgaria," *JSP* 1 (1987), pp 41-55; E. Turdeanu, *Apocryphes slaves et roumains de l'Ancien Testament*, SVTP, 5; Leiden, 1981) See also Yuri Stoyanov's work on medieval Christian dualism, especially "Pseudepigraphic and Parabiblical Narratives in Medieval Eastern Christian Dualism" in *Cathars in Question*, ed. Antonio Sennis, Sufflok, 2016, pp. 151-176). The semantic history of "dualism" (coined in the eighteenth century) questions the use of this term for the pre-modern religious concepts, and there is a discrepancy in its application between historians of religion and early Christian and Hellenistic Jewish scholars (Yuri Stoyanov, "Religious Dualism and the Abrahamic Religions." Oxford Handbooks Online. Oxford University Press, 2015. Date of access 30 Jan. 2017 <<http://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199697762.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780199697762-e-30>>). Dualism is a characteristic of apocalyptic genre, according to the latter group of scholars. Quite a few of Slavonic Apocrypha include apocalyptic texts. Thus, the frequent presence of dualism in Slavonic Apocrypha does not make them a "sectarian" library.

- 22 These tendencies reflect the influence of post-reformation scholarship which tried to find a neo Gnostic sect similar to early Christian Gnosticism and to blow out their importance in transmission of these texts. While these notions expressed the Reformation spirit of supporting oppressed minorities, uplifting a relatively minor presence into a full blown out movement appeared to majority of Slavs as falsification of historical data.

Slavicists represent the other reception community. Along with Anglistics, Germanistics, Romanistics, and other fields of academic study of national languages and literature, Slavistics as the study of Slavic/Slavonic philology and culture emerged in post Enlightenment period together with national revivals among Slavs. This revival was the expression of the emphasis of a particularity of a single Slavic nation on one side and its unity with other Slavs in common Slavic origins on the other. Pan Slavic movement, that stressed the common origin of all Slavs, was a product of Romanticism and became very unpopular in the nineteen-nineties with the fragmentation of Slavic lands and their identification as a part of Europe. There has been a pronounced tension between nationalists and pan-Slavists, or those who place their cultural and religious memory in national and those that place it in trans-national context. In the study of medieval Slavic texts the nationalistic tendencies play out mainly in the issues of their ownership.²³

Before 1980 the relationship between Slavic national literature and Slavonic Biblical and liturgical texts resembled the relation between science and religion, or Humanities and theology in post seventeenth century scholarship. Although the religious roots of Slavonic script and Slavic literature were not seriously challenged, the ultimate criterion for a text to be studied as literature was its poetic and esthetic dimension. Its independent creative status was underlined. As a consequence ecclesiastical texts have been rarely considered as literature. For example, liturgical poetry was denied the aesthetic value, because it served religious purposes. Because its study requires specialized knowledge Slavists would have needed to collaborate with theologians, which they rarely did especially during the second half of the twentieth century, because theology was not considered a serious academic field.²⁴ And as a result

23 The Cyrillo-Methodian studies reflect the state of this dynamics. For the newest positive directions of these studies, see A. Miltenova, "The Study of the Cyril and Methodius Mission among the Slavs at the beginning of 21st century: problems and prospects" in: Κύριλλος και Μεθόδιος: Παρακαταθήκες Πολιτισμού, Thessaloniki, 2012, pp. 117-132). About some of the use of "Cyrillo-Methodian idea" in the national politics check P. Ivanov. "The Controversial Saints: Representations of Cyril and Methodius in Modern Slavic History: Chronology and Theses," *Slavic Studies Faculty Publications* 11, New London, 1996, or S. Rohdewald, "Figures of (Trans-)National Religious Memory of the Orthodox Southern Slavs before 1945: An Outline on the Examples of ss. Cyril and Methodius." *Trames. Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences*, 12.3 (2008), pp. 287-298.

24 "In the past liturgical poetry was defined, on the one hand, as literature with purely religious purposes, which (according to the dogmatic concept of 'literature' that predominated from the 1950s to the 1980s) had no aesthetic value; on the other, liturgical poetry

medieval Slavic religious texts were rarely studied.²⁵ According to the same logic it did not bother Slavists that some Slavonic sacred texts were called Apocrypha. Only recently they started to care that this term compromises the religious tradition of the majority of Slavs. In the aftermath of the fall of the Berlin Wall which affected the majority of the Slavic states, the study of theology has been reintroduced to the universities. At the same time Biblical scholars recognized the need to address the readings and interpretations of the Bible among the Slavic Christians. The moment was ripe for the fusion of the two academic horizons.

Slavists acknowledge that from its beginnings the Slavonic written literature was religiously and Biblically colored, as conditioned by the historical circumstances of its birth. Slavonic literacy finds its roots in the ninth century translations from Greek into Slavonic of the Christian texts necessary for church services and catechesis. One of the achievements of the Golden age of the Byzantine Empire (843-1025) was an intensive missionary effort to convert Slavs to Christianity in order to stop constant wars at its Northern borders. For this purpose a young accomplished scholar and philologist, Constantine of Thessalonica (monastic name: Cyril), and his brother Methodius were chosen to create a Slavonic script and translate the necessary literature from Greek.²⁶ In those times, the Bible did not exist as a book in the way that we are used to seeing it now, in the post-Reformation period of printed Bibles. Not only that as such it did not have a central position, but also the most important criterion for a divine inspiration of a discourse on a Biblical theme was its expression of the correct belief, i.e. the correct theology rather than whether it belonged to a list of divinely sanctioned texts. Thus, in the translation project of Cyril and Methodius, which was developed with great success by their Slav students, Clement, Naum, Angelarius, and Gorazd, the Bible was not perceived as being of a different level of holiness than the other stories that were about saintly

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was a largely uncharted area, since its study required very specialized knowledge (Milenova, 2012, p. 124)."

- 25 There are some exception such as the work of a Serbian theologian, Dimitrije Bogdanović (1930-1986), who defended his doctorate on a theological topic at the Department of Philosophy, and ended as the professor at the Department of History where he taught Old Slavonic language and Cyrillic paleography. He worked at the National Library of Serbia in Belgrade in archeographical branch. His work, *Историја старе српске књижевности* (The History of the Old Serbian Literature), Београд: 1980, is still a seminal work of this genre.
- 26 G. Ostrogorski, *History of the Byzantine State*, New Brunswick, 1986, pp. 203-04; A-E.N. Tachiaos, *Cyril and Methodius of Thessalonica: The Acculturation of the Slavs*, Yonkers, New York, 2001.

Biblical figures, theological discourses, sermons, historiographies, hagiographies, encomiums, liturgical hymns, or sermons.²⁷ As Anissava Miltenova explains so well, didactic interest was much more important than the distinction between canonical and non-canonical.²⁸ A theologian, or a historian of religion would explain the same phenomenon by pointing out that official teachings of both Eastern Orthodox and Roman-Catholic churches (which were still united in the ninth century) considered the Scriptures and the Holy Tradition equally divinely inspired and holy.

Initially for the purpose of training the clergy, two literary academies of Slavonic were established very early, one in Preslav and one in Ohrid. Very soon afterwards, the composition of original Slavonic/Slavic works followed. Then, it is not a surprise that the Slavonic manuscripts are a repository of the texts that, organically, integrates scripture and tradition, folk beliefs and recipes, and original poetic creations. Miscellanies with mixed context, a popular genre of 13th and 14th century incorporated mixed genres such as short narratives (paterikon tales and legendary stories), chronicles, vitas, books of divination, erotapokrisis, and recipes.²⁹ The fifteenth century manuscript, *Slav* 29, is a good example of Slavonic manuscripts. It assembles various genres of literature: theological discourses, historiographies, hagiographies, epic poems and folk tales, encomiums, original works of contemporary writers, and translations of Hellenistic texts, some with a clear and some with loose connection to Biblical themes.

27 D. Petkanova underlines that Clement of Ohrid/Preslav, to whom the foundation of the first Slavonic university was attributed, used the so called non-canonical texts in the descriptions of biblical figures (Донка Петканова, Апокрифната литература в България, Sofia, 1982).

28 "The incorporation of elements from the "apocryphal" texts into those with a didactic function, they became equal with the latter not only in terms of their reception, but also in their prestige and the differences between canonical and non-canonical disappeared completely. The mechanisms of intertextuality in the Bulgarian (and generally the Slavic) Middle Ages and the supremacy of the didactic stream were more powerful and more long-standing than the discernment of marginality and the differentiation of the texts according to canonical/non-canonical, prestigious or social and cultural features. In this respect medieval Bulgarian literature do not differ very much from the broader literary practice of the Ancient Near Eastern and Ancient Mediterranean cultures (A. Miltenova, "Апокрифал Tradition in Medieval Bulgaria: Adaptation or Deviation?" Paper presented at the International Meeting of SBL. Vienna, Austria, 10 July 2014."

29 Miltenova, 2014., n.p.

2.1 Case Study: the Reception of Slav 29

A close look at the history of scholarship of *Slav 29* and specifically of *Žitie Asenethi*, aims to reveal the accomplishments of modern study of Slavonic texts and its need to change the received practice.

The manuscript, *Slav 29*, is of special interest for both Slavists and Biblical scholars. It contains a Serbian medieval poetic masterpiece, *Slovoljubve* (*A Homage to Love*), attributed to Despot Stefan Lazarević and also *Žitie Asenethi*, which is a Slavonic translation of what many Biblical scholars call the best version of a Hellenistic pseudepigraphon, *Joseph and Aseneth*. *Slav 29* typifies the scholarship on Slavonic texts. Known to Serbian philologists as the manuscript of *Slovoljubve*, and studied as part of the precious corpus of a national Slavic literature, it is also cherished by textual critics of Hellenistic pseudepigrapha as a source for the reconstruction of Biblical literature. The facsimile of the manuscript of *Slav 29*, which was housed in the National Library in Belgrade, was destroyed, along with other manuscriptal collections, in the German air-raid in 1941. Fortunately, the text had been already published in 1877 by Stojan Novaković.³⁰

2.2 The Reception History of Žitie Asenethi in Biblical Studies

I am going to examine the reception history of Slavonic texts (Apocrypha) in Biblical scholarship based on the example of *Žitie Asenethi*. Thereby I intend to illustrate why the interdisciplinary approach is essential for the future of the study of the Slavonic Bible.

The method of Reception History applies amiably to our situation. Rezeptionsgeschichte exposes the active task of interpreting, appropriating, and applying the texts of our manuscripts, whether in academic discourse, religious ritual and sermons, national epic memory, or conscious cultural re-readings in literature, film, or art. Hans Robert Jauss developed his Reception Theory on medieval French literature, which resembles medieval Slavic literature in some important features. Both belong to a pre-Renaissance literature in the sense that "the singular work is generally viewed neither as a one-time, self-enclosed, and final form, nor as an individual production of its author."³¹ Both literatures were religiously colored, with rhetoric, imagery, and style that rarely appeals to

30 Novaković, Stojan. "Srpsko-slovenski Zbornik iz vremena Despota Stefana Lazarevića." *Starine* 9 (1877), pp. 9: 1-47.

31 In the medieval understanding of literature, the singular work is generally viewed neither as a one-time, self-enclosed, and final form, nor as an individual production of its author, to be shared with no one else. [Hans Robert Jauss and Timothy Bahti, "The Alterity and Modernity of Medieval Literature," *New Literary History* 10.2 (1979) p. 191].

a modern aesthetic experience. Translated into the language of reception history, access to immediate enjoyment of the text of medieval literature remains denied (obscured) to the modern reader. Then, what is it that makes us read and research these texts? By applying (Hans Georg) Gadamer's fusion of horizons, Jausse proposed that the past aesthetic experience is fused with the present one through:

1. the pleasure of familiarity of elementary themes.
2. aesthetics of reception: the pleasure of a recognition of the contrast with modern experience, and
3. surprise through alterity: surprising otherness: the pleasure of understanding other consciousness.

The fusion of the aesthetic experience of the past and present does not presuppose "unbreakable tradition," but includes the rediscovery of the ancient world, antiquity, medieval Byzantium, or the Slavic intellectual presence in the Middle Ages. This pleasure of new knowledge, of the discovery of "an archaic, politically and culturally self-contained historical world," is the aesthetic experience familiar to all scholars of "Slavonic Apocrypha:" of researchers and scholars, be it philologists, medievalists, ethnographers, art historians, Biblical scholars, or scholars of religion. In the case of *Slav* 29, the aesthetic experience of Serbian medievalists and Biblical scholars is the same.

The pleasure of familiarity of elementary themes (element one of fusion of horizons) does not apply to the esthetics of modern scholars. We do not represent a group that takes pleasure in reading *Žitie Asenethi* as the fulfillment of our craving for romance and adventure, in the sense that the Hellenistic, Medieval, and today's reader can enjoy, or enjoys the edifying pleasure of a human who became a saint; we did not gather here to admire rhyme and the language of *Slovoljubve*. Or, to use Jausse's words, we are not assembled here in order to "enjoy the charm of an already ongoing game with known rules and still unknown surprises."³² This aesthetic experience belongs to the groups who chose these texts to be copied and included in the manuscripts, and also to those responsible for adaptation and transmission of this literature into the Slavic poetic memory.

The aesthetic presence of Biblical scholarship was the satisfaction of *ad fontes* research. Biblical scholars discovered in Slavonic translation previously unknown Hellenistic Jewish and Christian texts along with previously unavailable versions of the known Greek texts. Biblical scholars classified these texts as

³² Ibid., p. 189.

extracanonical, because according to Biblical studies, they did not make it into established Biblical canons. They are mostly known as pseudepigrapha.³³ *Žitie Asenethi* belongs to this category.

Žitie Asenethi is a translation of a well-known Hellenistic Jewish pseudepigraphon, written in Greek, which scholars named *Joseph and Aseneth*. It is preserved in sixteen Greek manuscripts and multiple translations of which the most numerous are in Armenian and Slavonic.³⁴ There are two main versions of the Hellenistic apocryphon, a long and a short one. *Žitie Asenethi* of Slav 29 is regarded as a rendition of the best Greek text of the short version.³⁵ As many scholars today consider this version to be the closest to the original text of *Joseph and Aseneth*, it is not difficult to imagine the satisfaction of the *ad fontes* aesthetic experience of textual critics in working on this South Slavonic version in Old Serbian redaction.

It is important to underline that Biblical scholars were quite comfortable to work with *Žitie Asenethi* of Slav 29 even though there was no facsimile of it. There is another copy of this translation (Slav. 306) that is housed in the Romanian National library in Bucharest (Biblioteca Academiei Române, [Slav. 306. f. 435(432)r-457(454)v] and which includes *Žitie Asenethi* in the collection of *Vitae*. The manuscript is preserved, but has not been published.

However, even if a facsimile had been available it would not have helped Biblical scholars much because most of them could not read Slavonic. Also,

33 Named pseudepigrapha because some of them are attributed to a renowned figure from the Bible, although not written by them.

34 There are 43 Armenian manuscripts of well preserved translations of *Jos. Asen.* dating from the thirteenth to the eighteenth century. It amounts for half of the entire corpus of preserved manuscripts of *Jos. Asen.* in all languages altogether [Christoph Burchard and Carsten Burfeind, *Gesammelte Studien zu Joseph und Aseneth* (Studia in Veteris Testamenti Pseudepigrapha, 13), Leiden, 1996, pp. 105-111; Christoph, Burchard, Carsten Burfeind and Uta Barbara Fink, *Joseph und Aseneth; kritisch herausgegeben* (Pseudepigrapha Veteris Testamenti Graece, 5), Leiden, 2003, pp. 319-321). The reason for this number of Armenian manuscripts is that *Joseph and Aseneth* is a "canonical" biblical book in the Armenian Church.

35 The Vorlage of the fifteenth-century South-Slavonic manuscripts of *Joseph and Aseneth* (Slav.) is regarded as the best representation of the short version in Greek of the Hellenistic tale, the least tampered with by the later editors/copyists and consequently the closest to the original Hellenistic romance. See especially Marc Philonenko, *Joseph et Aseneth; Introduction, texte critique, traduction et notes* (Studia Post-Biblica, 30); Leiden, 1968), Ross S. Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph: a Late Antique Tale of the Biblical Patriarch and his Egyptian Wife Reconsidered*, Oxford, 1998); and Angela Standhartinger, *Das Frauenbild im Judentum der Hellenistischen Zeit: Ein Beitrag anhand von 'Joseph und Aseneth,'* Leiden, 1995).

they were not very concerned with the date, script, and the literary context of the very manuscript. They were interested in the reconstruction of the Greek Vorlage of *Žitie Asenethi*. Novaković's publication served their purpose very well. Moreover, Christoph Burchard made it available to the scholarly world in his *Gesammelte Studien zu Joseph und Aseneth* published in 1996.³⁶

The *Žitie Asenethi* was used in the reconstruction of the original Greek text. The main discourse was about which version was original, or older: the short or the long one. Scholarly interest in the context of the medieval manuscript reached only as far as it could reveal the information of the possible intentional or unintentional errors, additions or omissions which the medieval translators and copyists could have made to the texts. As a consequence, although the short Slavonic version of *Joseph and Aseneth* was used and researched extensively, no critical edition of *Žitie Asenethi* was even conceptualized. The irony is that the trade of textual critics is to make and publish critical editions of the texts they study.

The only translation of *Žitie Asenethi* in a modern language is the one in Serbian made by the Serbian Slavacist, Tomislav Jovanović.³⁷ The absurdity of the situation is that there are translations in the modern languages of the short version of *Joseph and Aseneth* which are based on diplomatic editions, with the rendition of *Žitie Asenethi* as the source text, but the discussion of the setting is of the Hellenistic apocryphon and the critical apparatus serves for the reconstruction of the original Greek text of *Joseph and Aseneth*.³⁸

The horizon of the aesthetic experience of the Greek original of the *Žitie Asenethi* is a fascinating project that involves the world that enjoyed Hellenistic romances, i.e. the stories of love and adventure with a main female protagonist who is a proactive and adventurous heroine. But the world of the medieval Slavonic translators, who chose to translate this version of Hellenistic romance into Slavonic and read it as the life of saints, is also a fascinating subject in itself.³⁹ This study belongs to the Biblical reception in Slavic milieu, or to the

36 'Joseph und Aseneth Serbisch-Kirchenslawisch Text und Varianten', in *Gesammelte Studien zu Joseph und Aseneth*, ed. Christoph Burchard (Studia in Veteris Testamenti Pseudepigrapha, 13), Leiden, pp. 53-91.

37 Томислав Јовановић, "Апокрифи о Јосифу и Асенети," *Источник*, IV, 14-16, Београд (1995), pp. 131-150.

38 The most used English translation of *Joseph and Aseneth* is based on the short version retrieved from the Greek rendition of *Žitie Asenethi* as its diplomatic edition: D. Cook, 'Joseph and Aseneth', in *The Apocryphal Old Testament*, ed. H.F.D. Sparks, Oxford, 1984, pp. 465-503 (translation of Philonenko's Greek text).

39 "The elementary need for a fantasy world of adventure and lovers' rendezvous, of the mysterious and the wish-fulfilling, may explain the success of this "evergreen" of the

study of Biblical written traditions in Slavonic. Therefore it should be integrated into the field of Biblical studies.

Along with this aesthetic of reception of the Slavonic medieval world, Biblical scholars found in the Slavonic mindset to Biblical literature a precedent that can help in the redefinition of the subject matter of Biblical literature that makes it inclusive. The present categorization along canonical-non canonical, pseudepigrapha, apocrypha, including the more recent terms such as paraBiblical literature or paratextual literature assumes the elitism of Protestant and Jewish Biblical books that Biblical scholarship of today wants to change.⁴⁰ Slavonic Apocrypha are certainly not the only context of this inclusive scriptural approach, but because of a specific historical precedent of the necessity of integration of a number of Slavic countries and their cultural contribution into European Union, they are on the forefront of this project. These are exciting times now for both new generation of Biblical scholars and the scholars of Slavonic literature to grasp this research opportunity and to contribute collaboratively to the old-new field of study: Slavonic religious literature.

3 Looking Forward

To conclude, whatever trajectory Slavonic literature took in the last centuries and the way it was researched, I am glad to see that scholars of different fields have decided that it is time that we all bring our research techniques together and try to look at Slavonic literature as a united phenomenon and give it the

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medieval imagination. (H.R. Jauss and B. Timothy, "The Alterity and Modernity of Medieval Literature" *New Literary History* 10.2 (1979), p. 184." Reception history of Slavonic texts:

1. Their esthetics for the broader audience: elites, monastic-clerical, or illiterate people (transformed in oral tradition). 2. Reception of the literary work itself: Slavic philologists 3. Reception in Biblical studies.

- 40 See for the application of the Gerard Genette' term "paratextual" to ancient and medieval literature, Alexander, Philip S., et al. *In the Second Degree: Paratextual Literature in Ancient Near Eastern and Ancient Mediterranean Culture and Its Reflections in Medieval Literature*, Brill, 2010. For the term para-biblical see a blog of Robert Kraft <<http://orion.mscc.huji.ac.il/orion/archives/1996b/msg00514.html>>. Emanuel Tov uses the term para-biblical texts for the literature of the Dead Sea Scrolls. For its application to Slavonic literature see William Adler, "Parabiblical Traditions and Their Use in the Palaea Historica" in *Tradition, Transmission, and Transformation from Second Temple Literature through Judaism and Christianity in Late Antiquity: Proceedings of the Thirteenth International Symposium of the Orion Center for the Study of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Associated Literature, Jointly Sponsored by the Hebrew University Center for the Study of Christianity, 22-24 February, 2011*, ed. Kister, Menahem, et al. Brill, 2015, pp. 1-39.

place it deserves. It is an exciting time because we can work together to synthesize our finds. There is so much more to be discovered in an “interdisciplinary” approach. Biblical scholars coined the term “Slavonic Apocrypha.” And so it is also fair that Biblical scholars, who work on pseudepigraphical literature, Hellenistic Jewish Literature, and the texts of late Antiquity, be the ones who instigate the change in today’s scholarship by calling for these texts to be researched in their own right.