THE BOOK OF PROVERBS IN VILNIUS 262*

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Dedicated to the memory of Moshe Altbauer (1905–1998),
who first wrote on the Vilnius 262 Book of Proverbs in 1967

A Ruthenian version of the Book of Proverbs is included in ms. 262 of the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences in Vilnius. It is one of nine Old Testament books preserved in this unique early 16th century codex, which formerly belonged to the Supraśl Monastery, located in northeastern Poland. In addition to Proverbs, the codex contains Ruth, Psalms, Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, Job, Daniel and Esther. The translation was made into the language of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, i.e., Ruthenian, basically an East Slavic composite of vernaculars, comprising mainly Northern (Belarusian) but also Southern (Ukrainian) components. Several scribal errors make it clear that the codex is a copy of a somewhat earlier translation, most probably from the last decades of the 15th century. The scribe was undoubtedly Christian: he noted in the margin the working days on which the copying was done, and these include Saturday as well as Sunday, with the latter written in cinnabar. One of the translators, however, was clearly Jewish, making use in the translation of Jewish exegesis and, at least for some of the books, preserving the textual makeup of the Massoretic text (hereafter MT).

The books of Daniel and Psalms in the codex were translated with collateral use of Christian sources, namely Russian versions of the Church Slavonic texts of these books, alongside the Hebrew Massoretic Text. Thus in the bilingual (Hebrew-Aramaic) Book of Daniel the pre-Symeon OCS translation in a later Russian version was used to render the Aramaic parts of the original text (except for chapter 3), but was carefully checked against the Massoretic text and revised from the Aramaic (cf. Thomson 1998: 878). On the other

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hand, as I have shown elsewhere (cf. Taube 2004), the *Psalter* is based on the Church Slavonic text in its Russian form and revised from the Latin, without any attempt to make it conform to the Hebrew MT.

No Christian sources have been used for the translation of the other books. In the *Song of Songs* the translator made use of, but carefully revised, an earlier Ruthenian translation from Hebrew (see Алексеев 1981; Taube 1985; Thomson 1998: 874–875). The other books, Ruth, Ecclesiastes, Job, Lamentations, *Esther* and, as I will show, *Proverbs*, were translated using the Hebrew Massoretic Text exclusively.

1. *Proverbs* in Vilnius 262: A Jewish Translation

The effort to conform to the MT is reflected, among other things, in the imitation of the outward shape of the text, which places spaces between verses where they traditionally occur in the Hebrew, thus dividing the book into thematic sections called *parashot*, a division that is well established and discussed in the Talmud. As in *Job*, so also in *Proverbs* there are spaces left between certain verses creating “closed” and “open” *parashot*, representing more or less accurate thematic blocks. Thus there are “closed” spaces, with the next verse continuing on the same line, between 1.7-8, 3.6-7, 3.26-27, 4.19-20, 5.6-7, 6.5-6, 6.19-20, 10.13-14, 11.26-27, 26.21-22, 29.17-18, and 31.9-10. There are also “open” spaces, with the next verse continuing on a new line, between 3.17-18, 6.11-12, 6.15-16, 6.26-27, 8.12-13, 8.31-32, 15.19-20, 19.9-10, 21.11-12, 21.29-30, 22.21-22, 23.5-6, 23.14-15, 24.22-23, 25.13-14, 27.22-23, 28.10-11, 28.16-17 (put erroneously in the wrong place), 30.14-15, 30.17-18, 30.23-24, and 30.28-29. In this way the spaces precisely and exhaustively reflect the Hebrew Massoretic Text.

1.1. Copyist’s errors

A series of omissions, doublets and corruptions clearly indicates that 262 is a copy, not the protograph of the translation.

1.1.1. Omissions

14.33 И ПОСРЕДЕ АЧЄРОЗУМНЫХ СКАЖЕТСЯ

Heb.:

עַבְכַּר חֶשֶׁלִים חַכָּמִים

KJV: *but that which is in the midst of fools is made known.*

The omission of the negative prefix *не* turns *fools* into *wise men*.