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## RENDERING EUPHEMISTIC בָּרַךְ 'BLESS' IN THE TRANSLATION OF JOB IN THE VILNIUS FLORILEGIUM 262

The language of the Hebrew Bible teems with various kinds of lexical substitutions, often euphemistic. These consist in substituting an inoffensive term or turn of phrase for one that is considered taboo, offensive or blasphemous. Among the topics considered taboo in the Bible we find, as in many other cultures, words for death, sex acts and genitalia, and other unspeakable bodily activities which require figurative language.

In a culture that believes in the performative power of words denoting malediction and benediction, vocables denoting the latter are to be avoided in inappropriate contexts and be replaced by other words and phrases. One of the inappropriate contexts is the linking of any negative attribute or activity to God, which would be considered blasphemous. Hence the notion 'curse', expressed in the Hebrew Bible by various lexemes deriving from four roots (קלל, קבב, גקב, ארר) is sometimes avoided with reference to God as its object by using a euphemism. We should remember nevertheless that the replaced lexemes are regular words for a highly-valued activity, one with powerful effects (especially when performed by God himself or by one of his authorized messengers, see II Kings 2:23–24) and with sought-after professional performers (see Numbers, chapters 22–24).

There are nevertheless differences in the use of euphemisms between the Biblical Books, authored at different times and places. Thus, in Leviticus 24.10–16 we encounter an episode of an Israelite (whose father was Egyptian) who cursed God during a quarrel with another Israelite, his resulting punishment (directly ordered by God to Moses) that he be stoned to death by the congregation (24:14), and the general prohibition (by God through Moses) of such acts (24:15–16).

In all instances in this passage the verbs for ‘curse’ are maintained throughout, in spite of having God as object, however ‘God’ is referred to by ‘the Name’ (הַשֵּׁם) in 24:11 and ‘Name’ (שֵׁם) in 24:16.

In the general prohibition that Moses addresses to the Israelites (but which is valid also for the stranger), a differentiation is made between ‘whoever curses his god’ (אִישׁ כִּי יִקְלֵל) and him who ‘specifically mentions [in his curse] the [ineffable] name of the Lord’ (וַיִּקְבֹּשׁ שֵׁם-יְהוָה). The former ‘shall bear his sin’ (וַיִּשָּׂא חַטָּאתוֹ), while the latter ‘shall surely be put to death, *and* all the congregation shall certainly stone him: as well the stranger, as he that is born in the land, when he blasphemeth the name *of the LORD*, shall be put to death (KJV)’.

In the present paper, dedicated to my dear friend Svetlina Nikolova, I will analyze the instances of ‘curse’ and ‘bless’ by juxtaposing the Ruthenian translation in the Vilnius Florilegium (Vil., see details below) and its source, the Hebrew Masoretic Text, accompanied by the English translation in the King James version (KJV) of 1611. For the purpose of comparison, the parallel verses from the 1499 Gennadij Bible as preserved in MS ГИМ. Син. № 915 (GB) will also be given, along with the Septuagint text (LXX) on which it is based, accompanied by Sir Lancelot Brenton’s 1844 English translation of the Septuagint (Brent.).

In the Book of Job we do encounter twice the verb קלל ‘curse’ in its straightforward, non-euphemistic function, in verses 3:1 and 24:18. In both cases the verb is rendered literally in the Septuagint, in the Gennadij Bible and in the Vilnius Florilegium.

3:1

אֶת־רֵיבֹן פֶּתַח אִיּוֹב אֶת־פִּיהוּ וַיִּקְלֵל אֶת־יוֹמוֹ

KJV: After this Job opened his mouth and **cursed** his day.

Vil.: по семъ ѿвори<sup>а</sup> ѿвѣ оуста свои и **кля**<sup>а</sup> день свои

GB: по семъ ѿврѣзе ѿвѣ уста свои . И **прокля**<sup>а</sup> днь свои

LXX: Μετὰ τοῦτο ἤνοιξεν Ἰὼβ τὸ στόμα αὐτοῦ καὶ κατηράσατο τὴν ἡμέραν αὐτοῦ

Brent.: After this Job opened his mouth and **cursed** his day

24:18

וַיִּקְלֵל חֶלְקוֹתָם בְּאֶרֶץ

KJV: their portion is **cursed** in the earth.

Vil.: да **проклинется** ролюа их оу земли

GB: **Проклята** вѣди часть их по земли

LXX: καταραθεῖη ἡ μερὶς αὐτῶν ἐπὶ γῆς

Brent.: let his portion be **cursed** on the earth

On the other hand, the Hebrew Masoretic Text replaces the verb קלל ‘curse’ with its antiphrastic partner ברך ‘bless’ in all the instances where it refers to אֱלֹהִים [elohim] ‘God’.

It is of great interest to see what the translators of the Biblical texts do in such cases. Do they translate the verb literally, thus keeping the euphemism (though perhaps the reader might not be aware of this), or do they sacrifice the euphemism for the purpose of the sense intended?

As for translations into Slavic, as a rule, the problem has already been addressed in the intermediary text from which the translation was made: the Greek Septuagint for the Orthodox Slavs and the Latin Vulgate for the Catholics, so that the Slavic translations are expected to follow them respectively.

We are facing a different situation when studying the rendering of this euphemism in the Ruthenian<sup>1</sup> translation from Hebrew attested in the Vilnius Florilegium.

The Florilegium, comprising *i.a.* a collection of nine Old Testament *Hagiographa* – קְטוּבִים [ketubim], is attested in a unique manuscript written between 1517 and 1530 (see Temchin 2008), formerly kept at the Supraśl monastery and now preserved at the Academy Library in Vilnius as MS F-19-262. The text is clearly a copy of a translation made somewhat earlier, probably in the late 15th century (see Thomson 1998: 876).

With the exception of the Psalms, adapted from the extant Russian Church Slavonic version (see Taube 2004), the remaining eight books were translated directly from Hebrew, either entirely, thus Proverbs (see Taube 2015), Job (see Taube 2005), Ecclesiastes (see Altbauer 1992), Esther (see Перетц 1915; Altbauer 1992), Ruth (see Altbauer 1992), Lamentations (see Altbauer 1992) and the Song of Songs<sup>2</sup> (see Altbauer 1992), or partly also on the basis of earlier translations, thus Daniel (see Евсеев 1902; Архипов 1995: 147–240).

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<sup>1</sup> Ruthenian is a convenient neutral designation in English for the language of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, referred to by various names, some of them historically and politically charged, such as *prosta mova* ‘simple speech’, *Ruska mova* ‘Russian speech’, as well as *staroukrains’ka [mova]* ‘Old Ukrainian’ and *starabelaruskaja mova* ‘Old Belarusian’ in the writings of Ukrainian and Belarusian scholars respectively, whereas traditionally Russian and Soviet scholars call it *zapadno-russkij* ‘West Russian’.

<sup>2</sup> The translation of the Song of Songs in the Vilnius Florilegium has some lexical similarities to another Ruthenian translation of this book, preserved in a single mid-16th-c. Russian copy, Russian State Library, Museum collection, № 8222. The translator of the Vilnius Florilegium was probably familiar with the Museum translation. On the controversy surrounding the source-language of the latter translation, its time and location, see Алексеев 1980; Алексеев 1981; Алексеев 1983; Алексеев 2002; Taube 1985; Lunt 1985; Thomson 1998: 873–874, and recently Lourié 2018 and Grishchenko 2019.

We have to assume a collaborative effort by a Jew and a Christian in translating these Biblical books, since in many instances the translation shows traces of using traditional Jewish exegesis, mainly Rashi and Gersonides (see Taube 2005; Taube 2015; Taube 2020). In addition, we have no information about Christian Hebraists in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (or Muscovy) for that time (see Taube 2012).

Of the six instances where ‘bless’ is used euphemistically in the Masoretic Text, four appear in the Book of Job<sup>3</sup>.

1:5

כִּי אָמַר אֵיבֹב אוֹלֵי הַטָּאִו בְּנֵי וַיְבָרְכוּ אֱלֹהִים בְּלִבָּבָם

Vil.: рек во ѿвѣ ачеи съгрѣшїли снѣе мои и ганили боу вѣ срѣци своємъ.

KJV: for Job said, It may be that my sons have sinned, and **cursed** God in their hearts.

GB: гл҃аше во ѿвѣ егда како снѣе мои в разꙋмѣ своємъ **злоє помыслиша кѣ бѣ.**

LXX: ἔλεγεν γὰρ Ἰὼβ Μή ποτε οἱ υἱοὶ μου ἐν τῇ διανοίᾳ αὐτῶν **κακὰ ἐνενόησαν** πρὸς θεόν.

Brent.: for Job said, Lest peradventure my sons have **thought evil** in their minds against God.

In this example Hebrew וַיְבָרְכוּ, literally ‘and blessed’, is rendered by и ганили ‘and rebuked’. This choice seems to be triggered by the fact that we are dealing here with an internal act of the mind, not an explicit pronouncement. The Ruthenian verb ганиити ‘rebuke, reprove, condemn’ appears several times in the Vilnius Florilegium. In 31:34 ганил ми with a pronominal dative as object, ‘rebuked me’, renders Hebrew יִתְחַנֵּי ‘terrified me’. In the Song of Songs 8:1 не ганили бы мнѣ renders לי לא יבזוּזוּ ‘they would not despise me’ (see Altbauer 1992: 92–93), while in Lamentations 1:8 ганили еи stands for הִזְיִלוּהָ ‘they despised her’ (see Altbauer 1992: 108–109). The Gennadij Bible, following the *Septuagint*, has ‘thought evil’. So does also the reading зълаѣ помыслиша ‘thought evil’ in the oldest Slavonic translation of the Prophetologium (see Афанасьева, Шварц 1980: 22).

<sup>3</sup> The remaining two occur in the Masoretic Text of I Kings 21:10 and 13. In 21:10: בִּרְכַתְּ אֱלֹהִים וְהַמֶּלֶךְ literally ‘you blessed God and the king’, is rendered in KJV: Thou didst blaspheme God and the king. In 21:13: בָּרַךְ נָבוֹת אֱלֹהִים וְהַמֶּלֶךְ, literally ‘Naboth has blessed God and the king’, is rendered in KJV: Naboth has cursed God and the king. In both cases the Septuagint (III Kings 20:10, 20:13) keeps the euphemism, literally following the Masoretic Text, rendering Hebrew בָּרַךְ by the corresponding forms of εὐλογέω ‘bless’.

1:11

אֵלֶיךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְעַל-פְּנֵיךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְעַל-פְּנֵיךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ

Vil.: справнѣ простри оуже рѣкж свою и тѣкни во все иже его не в лицѣ твоє **пригани** ти.

KJV: But put forth thine hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will **curse** thee to thy face.

GB: Но послѣ рѣкѣ твою . косни во все еже имѣ . аще ѡво не прѣ лилицемъ тѣ **влѣвнѣ**

LXX: ἀλλὰ ἀπόστειλον τὴν χειρὰ σου καὶ ἅψαι πάντων ὧν ἔχει· εἰ μὴν εἰς πρόσωπόν σε εὐλογήσει.

Brent.: But put forth thine hand, and touch all that he has: verily he will **ble**ss thee to *thy* face.

In this example, where Satan addresses God, the translator into Ruthenian renders Hebrew  $\text{יְהוָה}$ , literally ‘he will bless you’, by **пригани** ти ‘he will reprove you’. The Historical Dictionary of Belarusian (*HSBM*) does not adduce this example under **приганити** in either of its two subentries, respectively glossed *асудзіць, напракнуць* ‘condemn, rebuke’ and *абразиць, абняславіць* ‘insult, discredit’. The Gennadij Bible, following the Septuagint, has the literal rendering ‘he will bless you’. So does also the reading **влѣгословествитиъ тебе** ‘will bless you’ (see Афанасьева, Шварц 1980: 23) in the oldest Slavonic translation of the *Prophetologium* (see Thomson 1998: 709ff.; 792ff.), the lectionary of Old Testament liturgical lessons known in Slavic as Паримейник.

2:5

אֵלֶיךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְעַל-פְּנֵיךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְעַל-פְּנֵיךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ

Vil.: справнѣ простри оуже роукѡу свою и дотыкнисѣ кѣ кости его и к мѣсоу его не в лицѡ твоє воудѣ **ганити** тобѣ.

KJV: But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will **curse** thee to thy face.

GB: И никакоже . но послѣ рѣкѣ свою . и коснисѣ кости его и вѣ плоть его . аще ѡво прѣ лилицемъ тѣ **влѣвнѣ** .

LXX: οὐ μὴν δὲ ἀλλὰ ἀποστείλας τὴν χειρὰ σου ἅψαι τῶν ὀστέων αὐτοῦ καὶ τῶν σαρκῶν αὐτοῦ· εἰ μὴν εἰς πρόσωπόν σε εὐλογήσει.

Brent.: Nay, but put forth thine hand, and touch his bones and his flesh: verily he will **ble**ss thee to *thy* face.

In this example, where Satan again addresses God, the translator into Ruthenian renders Hebrew  $\text{יְהוָה}$  literally ‘he will bless you’, by **пригани** ти ‘he will reprove you’. The *HSBM* does not adduce this example under **приганити** in either of its two subentries, respectively glossed *асудзіць, напракнуць* ‘condemn, re-

buke' and *абразиць, абняславиць* 'insult, discredit'. The Gennadij Bible, following the Septuagint, has the literal rendering 'he will bless you'. So does also the reading **ѠА БЛГСВЕСТВИТЬ** 'will bless you' in the oldest Slavonic translation of the *Prophetologium* (see Афанасьева, Шварц 1980: 26).

2:9

בָּרַךְ לַיהוָה וּמָת

Vil.: **примѡ** бѡу да оумри

KJV: **curse** God, and die.

GB: **Но рци нѣчто слово кѣ** бѡу и оумри.

LXX: ἀλλὰ εἰπὼν τι ῥῆμα εἰς Κύριον, καὶ τελεῦτα.

Brent.: **but say some word against** the Lord, and die.

In this fourth and final example of בָּרַךְ, literally 'bless', it is Job's wife who urges him to "bless" God. The Vilnius Florilegium renders the verb with the imperative of the Ruthenian verb **примовити**, glossed in the *HSBM* under three subentries: *напракнуць, сказаць з'едліва, зрабіць заўвагу; прамовіць, звярнуцца да каго-н. словамі; паклікаць* 'rebuke, say sarcastically, make a remark; to speak, to address someone in words; to call'. Our example is listed in *HSBM* under the second subentry 'to speak, to address someone in words', presumably a guess based on the reading in the Septuagint, though to my mind, 'rebuke' seems closer to the sense intended. In Modern Ukrainian **примовити** means 'put in a word', but also 'to utter an incantation (conjunction)'. The Gennadij Bible, following the Septuagint, has 'say some word'. So does also the reading **нѣ рци глѣ єдинѣ** 'but say one word' in the oldest Slavonic translation of the *Prophetologium* (see Афанасьева, Шварц 1980: 27).

In conclusion, we observe that the Jewish translator of Job preferred in all instances the sense-to-sense translation of the euphemistic 'bless' over literality. We must assume that he was led in that direction here, as in other instances (see Taube 2005; Taube 2015; Taube 2020), by the traditional Jewish exegetes, from Rashi onward, who understood this verb as 'figurative language' (לשון כנוי) with an antiphrastic negative meaning.

#### ABBREVIATIONS

GB	The Gennadij Bible, manuscript Sin. 915 in the State Historical Museum (GIM), Moscow.
<i>HSBM</i>	Гістарычны слоўнік беларускай мовы. Т. 1–37. Мінск, 1982–2017.
KJV	King James Version
Vil.	The Vilnius Florilegium. Manuscript F-19 262 in the Library of the Lithuanian Academy of Science (formerly at the Supraśl Monastery)

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*(Summary)*

The paper deals with the choices made by the late fifteenth-century Jewish translator of the Book of Job into Ruthenian in rendering the euphemistic instances of the verb 'bless' when the opposite 'curse' is intended. The examples from the sixteenth-century copy of the Vilnius Florilegium F-19 262 are compared with the Hebrew original, the 1492 Gennadij Bible and, when available, with the Old Slavonic *Prophetologium*. The choices appear to follow from the Jewish exegetical tradition.

*Keywords:* Ruthenian Bible translations; Euphemistic usage; Slavic Translations from Hebrew; Jewish Exegetical tradition.

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