Translations from Hebrew in Rus′ in the Thirteenth through Fifteenth Centuries

Made by Converts?

After surveying the evidence for the early settlement of Jews in Rus′ and pointing out their southern provenance, we now address the main bulk of texts included in the first chronological group of translations from Hebrew attested in Muscovite compilations from around 1400 CE onward. In the discussion that follows we will try to set forth the criteria by which these texts are characterized as direct translations, to determine their intended readership, and finally to advance a hypothesis about the identity of the translators and their motivation.

In order for us to realize how unlikely the very emergence of such translations in medieval Rus′ appears to be, we begin with some historical background.

After the destruction of Kyiv by the Tatars in 1240, a new political power rose in northeastern Rus′, the lands known as "Beyond the Woods." To use Dan Shapira's (2018, 296) scathing yet cogent description of the rise of Muscovy:

> Eastern Slavic princes, monks, and settlers from the southwest and northwest had only recently colonized the vast territories of the Finno-Ugric tribes along the upper courses of the Volga and Oka rivers and established independent principalities. Then they were conquered by the Mongols and incorporated into their empire (whose northwestern segment was called the "Ulus of Juči," or, anachronistically, the Golden Horde). One of these principalities, vassals of the Mongols, gradually rose to prominence through total collaboration with the Khans. Eventually, using a mix of relentless cruelty and *Realpolitik*, this principality absorbed the neighboring principalities of "Beyond the Woods" and even supplanted the Golden Horde itself, thereby claiming the dual heritage of Byzantium and the Chinggizid Khans. This huge principality came to be known as Muscovy. Deeply immersed in the political traditions of the Great Eurasian Steppe, fiercely pro-Byzantine and anti-Latin ideologically, the

Muscovite juggernaut pushed east and west, annihilating peoples (such as the natives of Siberia) and states in its way.

With the Tatar invasion, Kyiv, as well as the neighboring towns like Chernigov and Vladimir-Volynsk, places in which a Jewish presence had been attested before the invasion, had lost their importance for centuries to come. The ancient center of the Rus′ polity, Kyiv, found itself separated from the northern and northeastern provinces that, from the fourteenth century onward, constituted the heart of Muscovite Russia. This rift became definitive when the principalities of Western Rus′ that escaped the Tatar yoke came under the control of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, a young state in full expansion, still pagan, and more and more Slavicized.[1]

Starting with the second half of the fourteenth century, all East Slavic territories with an ancient Jewish population became part of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. The Duchy now included in its sphere of control the principalities of Polotsk, Turov-Pinsk, Brest, Kyiv, Chernigov, and Volhynia. The fourteenth century was also the time when the Ashkenazi Jews began in earnest their immigration to Poland and Lithuania.

By contrast, the Muscovite principality in the fourteenth century, the era of its gradual liberation from the Tatar yoke and its ascension as a political power, did not know at all real, flesh-and-blood Jews. Vassilij I (1371–1425), the grand prince of Moscow who initiated the process of unifying Russia, did not admit Jewish immigrants, not even the visit of Jewish merchants; nor did his successors. To use the words of Alexander Pereswetoff-Morath (2002, 1:236), "There never were any Jewish communities on Muscovite territory, and Jewish visitors are almost unheard of before *c.* 1450." Yet unexpectedly, from the end of the fourteenth century onward, we begin to notice Russian compilations containing texts translated from Hebrew.

The appearance of translations from Hebrew is even more remarkable in view of the fact that Muscovy was not known as a place of great erudition and learning. Muscovite Russia had no significant printing before the middle of the seventeenth century, and no universities until the middle of the eighteenth century, when, in 1755, Mikhail Lomonosov founded Moscow University. Unlike in the West, the Russian clergy was, in most cases, barely literate. Nothing of the classical learning of the ancient Greeks and Romans penetrated the walls of pious obscurantism in Russian church institutions, including the monasteries (see Thomson 1999, esp. the introduction and chapter 7). Even the most curious monks in medieval and Renaissance Muscovite Russia had no access to the intellectual treasures of classical antiquity, except through some writings of John of Damascus, which, however, were not wildly popular or massively copied.

There were in Rus′ no Christian Hebraists like Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, Sebastian Münster, or Johann Reuchlin. We must therefore imagine a different scenario to explain the emergence of the translations from Hebrew.

The early group of translations from Hebrew—attested in manuscripts from ca. 1400 onward, but translated earlier, possibly in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries[2]—consists of historical accounts found in compilations such as the retelling of the Old Testament called *Tolkovaja Paleja* (Commented Palaea) (see Tvorogov 1987),[3] or incorporated into universal chronicles translated from Greek, called "Chronographs." The translations include:

(a) The Life and ascension of Moses, based on a late Midrashic account named in Hebrew *Divrej ha-jamim le-moshe rabbēnu (The Chronicles of Moses Our Teacher)* (see Shinan 1977; Taube 1993). It contains many episodes not provided in the Bible, such as:

 (1) A dream Pharaoh had about an old man standing in front of him with a pair of scales in his hand, in one pan all the inhabitants of Egypt and in the other pan only one child, and that child balanced the entire population of Egypt, which was interpreted to him by one of his counselors as an ominous threat to the kingdom from a newborn child from among the Israelites, explaining his order (Exodus 1: 15–22) that all the newborn sons be put to death.

 (2) An episode explaining how Moses became "heavy of lips" and "heavy of tongue," following an incident where the three-year-old Moses snatched the crown off Pharaoh's head and put it on his own head. Balaam the diviner, one of his counselors, then reminded the king of his dream and suggested the child be beheaded. God intervened by sending the angel Gabriel in the guise of one of the royal officials, who suggested a test in order to determine whether this was a premeditated act or not. Let the king order to be brought before him a shiny precious jewel and a fiery coal. If he stretches out his hand to grab the precious jewel, then it is proved that he possesses sense and deserves death. When they brought before him the precious stone and the burning coal, the boy reached out his hand in order to seize the jewel, but an angel pushed his hand and he picked up the coal and brought it toward his face, touching with it his lips and tongue, and was rendered "heavy of lips" and "heavy of tongue" (Exodus 4:10).

 (3) Details of Moses's adventures during his exile years after he killed an Egyptian and Pharaoh ordered that he be put to death (Exodus 2:11ff.), including his miraculous flight to Midian with the help of Michael the Archangel, and his forty-year stint as king of Cush (Ethiopia, in Slavic "Saracens").

   The translation of the *Chronicles of Moses our Teacher* was integrated into the *Commented Palaea*, and supplemented by excerpts from other Midrashic sources including additional details (see Taube 1993)—for example, on the miraculous finding of Joseph's coffin in the Nile on the eve of the Exodus thanks to Jacob's granddaughter Serah, as well as (see

below) on the making of the Golden Calf with the help of the piece of parchment on which Moses had written the ineffable name in order to bring up Joseph's coffin from the bottom of the Nile.

(b) Excerpts from the *Josippon* in the *Academy Chronograph*. The *Josippon* is a tenth-century Hebrew historical compilation based on the Latin reworking by pseudo-Hegesippus of Flavius Josephus's Greek work *The Jewish War*. The excerpts include stories about the last kings of Judaea and the Babylonian exile, along with details from the Midrash on the miraculous, albeit non-immaculate conception of King Jechoniah's son Salthiel in prison, on Salthiel's son Zerubbabel and King Darius, and on the persecution of Jews under Antioch IV Epiphanes, and the Hasmonean revolt (see discussion below). The excerpts were integrated, together with other Midrashic accounts, into the *Academy Chronograph*, a late fifteenth-century Russian compilation attested in three manuscripts (see Taube 1989; Tvorogov 1989).

It is not clear whether the excerpt in the *Hypatian Chronicle* from the *Josippon* on Alexander the Great visiting Jerusalem, discussed in the first chapter, belongs to the same translation as those in the *Academy Chronograph*. In both cases the excerpts were integrated into later compilations, which makes the task of precisely defining the translation in terms of time and place extremely difficult.

(c) *The Third Capture of Jerusalem by Titus*, a Slavic translation of a Hebrew reworking of the last part of the *Josippon*, dealing with the destruction of the Second Temple. The reworking was done at some point between the eleventh and the fifteenth centuries and subsequently translated into Slavic. The Hebrew version, attested in a single lacunary manuscript dated 1462, is preserved at the Bodleian Library in Oxford, Huntington collection MS 345, and carries the title *Josippon ben Gorion*. The Slavic version, titled *Vzjatie Ierusalimu tretee Titovo* (The third capture of Jerusalem by Titus), was integrated into the Russian compilation called *Letopisets′ Ellinskij i Rimskij vtoroj redaktsii* (Hellenic and Roman chronicler of the second redaction) (see Taube 1989, 2014; Tvorogov 1999–2001).

The common denominator of the translations in this group is the fact that they all deal with Jewish historical figures and events, both of the Old Testament and of later periods, topics that are of great interest to Jews, but even more so to Christians. Given the absence of Christian Hebraists in Rus′ (see discussion above), we must assume the participation of a Jewish translator, perhaps a convert to Christianity, with good knowledge of Hebrew and familiarity with Talmudic and Midrashic sources.

The Russian compilations in which the translations from Hebrew are attested are basically made up of Byzantine sources translated from Greek into Slavic, such as the historical books of the Old Testament and the Greek chronicles of the

sixth-century John Malalas and the ninth-century George Hamartolos, and are obviously destined for Christian readers. But, as has been shown convincingly by Francis Thomson (1999, chapters 2–3), Russian editors in general did not know Greek, and when they did enlarge their compilation by using other texts of Byzantine origin, it was invariably by quoting translated texts already available in Slavic, not by translating anew from Greek. Hence, if we do not expect a medieval Russian compiler to be able to translate from Greek, we certainly do not expect him to be able to translate from Hebrew. Therefore, when we come across an editor of a Russian compilation who displays excellent knowledge of Hebrew written sources, we should be very attentive. Such is the case with the editor of one of the redactions of the *Commented Palaea*, a compilation of the fourteenth or perhaps even thirteenth century. Since all the witnesses are East Slavic, one has to assume that it was probably compiled in Rus′. Nevertheless, a Bulgarian scholar (see Slavova 2002, 386ff.) proposes that its earliest version was compiled in Bulgaria in the early tenth century and then copied and augmented in Rus′.

Thus, in the 1406 redaction of the *Commented Palaea* we read a retelling of Deuteronomy 9:17, where Moses reminisces about breaking the tablets of the Law after descending from Mount Sinai and seeing that the Israelites had in the meantime made a golden idol: "And I took the two tablets, and cast them out of my hands, and broke them before your eyes. Judging that you are not a people worthy of the deposition of the true Law, like a bride having fornicated in front of her wedding canopy" (Deut. 9:17; see appendix 13).

The second sentence is a comment by the editor on the biblical verse, and its final part—"like a bride having fornicated in front of her wedding canopy"— reflects the words brought in two variants in the Babylonian Talmud, Gittin 36b: ʾaluva kalla she-zinta be-qerev ḥuppatah; *Shabbath* 88b ʾaluva kalla mezanna be-tokh ḥuppatah (Wretched is the bride who fornicated amid/within her wedding canopy). Exegetes like Rashi (on Gittin 36b) and Maharal (on Shabbath 88b) link this expression explicitly with the making of the Golden Calf, while Moses was still on Mount Sinai receiving the tablets of the Law. The editor's familiarity with the Talmudic and Midrashic expression, "like a bride who fornicated before her wedding canopy" is quite impressive and unexpected.

Not only does the editor of the *Commented Palaea* show acquaintance with Jewish sources; he occasionally even boasts about it. Thus, in retelling the account of Moses finding Joseph's bones in the Nile on the eve of the Exodus from Egypt, the editor of the 1406 version of the *Commented Palaea* seems to know the Midrashic account about the Egyptians having hidden Joseph's coffin in the Nile so that the Israelites should not be able to take his bones with them when leaving Egypt, as they had been made to swear by Joseph to do before his death. He then adds: "But you, Jew, tell us, how did they take Joseph's bones, (how did they) find them, being sunk in the sea for four hundred years? If *you* do not know *we* will tell you, for everything is to be known . . ." (see appendix 14)

And indeed, the *Commented Palaea* goes on and relates in detail the events on the eve of the Exodus, based on the Babylonian Talmud (Soṭah 13a) and Midrash Genesis Rabbati (see appendix 15).

The primary references of this account are the biblical verses, Genesis 50:25:

> And Joseph took an oath of the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from hence.

and Exodus 13:19:

> And Moses took the bones of Joseph with him: for he had straightly sworn the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you; and you shall carry up my bones away hence with you.

The main elements of the story, including the name of Serah, daughter of Asher, as the one who knew the location of Joseph's relics and the mentioning of the metal coffin immersed in the Nile, are outlined already in the Babylonian Talmud, Soṭah 13a (see appendix 16).

Further details from the Midrash, reflected in the Russian version, resemble very much those found in Genesis Rabbati (a late Midrashic compilation usually attributed to R. Moses ha-Darshan of Narbonne [first half of the eleventh century]). In this Midrash we finally witness all the elements of the account united in a single compilation, sometimes as variants attributed to anonymous *ve-jesh omrim* ("and there are those who say") (see appendix 17).

Admittedly there are differences. The Slavic version modifies and at times corrupts some of the details: thus Asher's daughter and Jacob's granddaughter Serah, who is listed in rabbinic sources, starting with the post-Talmudic treatise Kallah rabbati, as one of the group of chosen people who went straight to paradise while still alive, becomes a nameless "daughter of Jacob." The pebble or golden foil thrown into the Nile becomes "a piece of parchment," and Micah becomes a nameless "hard-hearted Jew."

Beside the historical accounts, the *Commented Palaea* also contains anti-Jewish invectives and remarks, such as the frequently appearing words *slyshishi li okajannyj zhidovine* ("do you hear, cursed Jew?"). This suggests that the text was intended as a polemic against the Jewish religion or the Jewish people. Muscovite Russia, however, did not have Jews living within its borders. It is for that reason that Alexander Pereswetoff-Morath aptly called his book about anti-Judaic texts in medieval Russia *A Grin without a Cat*, alluding to the fading Cheshire cat in Lewis Carroll's *Adventures of Alice in Wonderland*, and quite appropriately described the *Commented Palaea* as a "comprehensive, basically Christological commentary to books of the Old Testament in an anti-Judaic vein" (Pereswetoff-Morath 2002, 1:31).

In some instances we witness in the Palaea direct addresses of contemporary Jews in a straightforward attempt to proselytize them, such as "But you, Jew, living today, why are you not jealous of the Israelites of old, on whose account Egypt was

punished? . . . So also you, Jew, do not be insensate and irrational like the snakes. The prophecies you have read, the time of Creation you know. Renovate your body, regain the sight of your eyes, throw off the decayed garment which is incredulity, become renewed through the Holy Baptism, rush to Christ and become one with us" (see appendix 18).

Beside the Palaea, there is another Russian compilation with passages translated from Midrashic sources, and this is item **b** in our list of translations (see above, p. 15), the *Academy Chronograph* (see Taube 1992). In it we find inserted a narrative describing the attempt to enforce the Hellenization of the Jews of Palestine during the reign of the Seleucid king Antiochus IV Epiphanes (ca. 215 BC–164 BC), an attempt that resulted in the revolt led by the family of the Hasmoneans. The story of the revolt is based on *Josippon* but contains additions of Talmudic and Midrashic origin, providing interesting details—for example, the decree issued by the Greek authorities banning Jewish women from observing the practice of ritual immersion (*tevila*) and the miracle that happened when the Jews found, each in his own house, a source of water allowing them to continue their practice. The account in the *Academy Chronograph* is very similar to the one in the Midrash Maaśeh Ḥanukkah (see appendix 19).

Another account of Hebrew origin to be found in the *Academy Chronograph* (see Taube 1992) is the story of the captivity of Jechoniah, the penultimate king of Judea, who was taken prisoner by the Babylonians, and of the miraculous conception of his son Shealtiel (in Slavic, following the Greek, the name is rendered *Salathiel*). (See appendix 20.)

The account in the *Chronograph* resembles very much the ones found in the Talmud (Sanhedrin 37b–38a) and Midrash (Leviticus Rabbah 19). In the Hebrew we have several more details, like the Sanhedrin approaching the Babylonian king's wife through her hairdresser, like the upright position, owing to the lack of space, in which Shealtiel was conceived in jail, and the learned opinion of the Talmudic source—namely, that normally a woman cannot become pregnant in that position. Hence this conception was obviously a miracle (see appendix 21).

Once again we witness in these accounts the intimate acquaintance with Talmudic and Midrashic traditions on the part of the translator into Slavic, even if some of the details in the Midrash are omitted. Such acquaintance can only be attributed to a learned Jew and cannot be expected from a non-Jewish scholar in Rus′.

The last text of the early group to be discussed in this chapter is item **c** in our list of translations (see above, p.15), the account called *The Third Capture of Jerusalem by Titus* (i.e., following the first capture by Nebuchadnezzar II, king of Babylon, in 597 BC and the second capture by Antiochus IV Epiphanes in 167 BC). This historical account, relating the suppression by Rome of the Judaean Revolt and the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE by Titus, has always been of great

interest to Jews and Christians alike. All the extant narratives of these events ultimately go back to the writings of Joseph son of Matthias, a Jew from Palestine, one of the leaders of the revolt in Galilee, who went over to the Roman side and later called himself Flavius Josephus, in honor of his master, the emperor Titus Flavius Vespasianus.

Here is a schematic chronological presentation of the account about the destruction of the Second Temple:

1. First century CE., Josephus Flavius, *Jewish War*, written in Greek.
2. Second (or perhaps fourth) century, (pseudo-)Hegesippus, *Historiae*, anonymous Christian adaptation in Latin of the Greek text.
3. Tenth century, *Josippon*. An anonymous Jewish adaptation in Hebrew of Hegesippus's Latin *Historiae*.
4. Sometime between the tenth and the fifteenth centuries, an anonymous Hebrew reworking of the last part of *Josippon* on the sacking of Jerusalem by Titus. A Jewish adaptation.
5. Eleventh or twelfth century, anonymous adaptation of Flavius's *Jewish War* into the language of Rus′. Translation from Greek.
6. Sometime between twelfth and the fifteenth centuries, an anonymous translation of the Hebrew reworking of *Josippon* into the language of Rus′. Translated by a (converted?) Jew.
7. Fifteenth century (first half), integration of the translation (in 6) by a Christian editor (or converted Jew?) into the Russian compilation *Hellenic and Roman Chronicler* with the title *O vzjatii Ierusalimu tretee Titovo* (On the third capture of Jerusalem by Titus).

The initial text, Flavius's *Jewish War* (no. 1), an *apologia pro vita sua*, reflects the author's tendency to rationalize and justify his betrayal, coupled with an attempt to denigrate his former comrades in arms, the stubborn rebels, and by the same token to exonerate his Roman mentors and protectors, with Titus first among them. This biased approach of the author, who never ceased maintaining that he had always remained a loyal Jew, caused manifold complications by the time it reached its Slavic form (or rather Slavic forms), as we shall demonstrate below.

We do in fact have several Slavic texts narrating these events. One of them is a translation (no. 5) of Josephus's *Jewish War*, made from the Greek, and preserved exclusively in Rusian witnesses (Istrin et al. 1934; Meshcherskij 1958; Pichkhadze et al. 2004).

Beside the Rusian version of Josephus's *Jewish War* we have a different text, translated from a Hebrew version (no. 6), integrated into the historical compilation of the first quarter of the fifteenth century, a compilation known as the *Second Redaction of The Hellenic and Roman Chronicler* (no. 7). This version is titled *The Third Capture of Jerusalem by Titus*.

The *Third Capture of Jerusalem*, however, is not a direct descendant of the *Jewish War*. It is based on the work (no. 2) sometimes attributed to another deserter, the second-century Palestinian Jew converted to Christianity known as Hegesippus, whose account, based on Josephus, but augmented with Christian elements, survived in Latin. In recent scholarship this attribution has been contested and it is now customary to speak of *pseudo-Hegesippus*, a Latin work, written ca. 370 AD by an anonymous Christian author.

In the tenth century an anonymous south Italian Jew translated from Latin into Hebrew large portions of pseudo-Hegesippus's account, expurgating its most obvious Christian elements and adding details from other Jewish sources. This adaptation (no. 3) is known as the *Josippon*.

Some passages deriving from the *Josippon* (for example, the account of Alexander the Great entering Jerusalem, discussed in the first chapter), are preserved in the *Hypatian Chronicle* under the year 1110, and their presence in this chronicle gave rise to the claim that the *Josippon*, perhaps even in its entirety, was available in Russian translation in the early twelfth century.

Our present text, *The Third Capture of Jerusalem*, however, differs from these passages in that it does not derive, at least not directly, from the *Josippon*. The *Third Capture of Jerusalem* is actually a translation of a later, thorough reworking in Hebrew (no. 4), done sometime between the tenth and the fifteenth centuries, of the final chapters of the *Josippon* starting with Titus waging war on the rebels in Jerusalem, followed by a description of the destruction of the Temple, and ending with the collective suicide of the Jewish rebels on the fortified Mount Masada in the Judaean desert.

The Hebrew reworking is attested in a single manuscript (Oxford, Bodleian Library, Huntington collection, ms 345), dated to 1462. The Huntington copy is quite distinct from the *Josippon* in its wording as well as in its order of episodes, despite its carrying the same title *Josippon ben Gorion* (Josippon son of Gorion).

Thus, the parable of the captain struggling to bring his ship to safe harbor, which in the *Josippon* proper is part of Josephus's speech to his fellow rebels when he tries to convince them to join him in his decision to abandon the battle and to surrender to the Romans after the Battle of Jodaphath in Galilee (Flusser 1980, 1:317), is placed in the reworking in the mouth of Titus in his speech to his soldiers after their initial defeat in Jerusalem. Although David Flusser, the editor of the Hebrew *Josippon* (1980, 2:254) mentions the Huntington copy among the manuscripts belonging to what he calls the "original version," he does not include it in his *stemma codicum* (2:53), nor does he quote variants from it, with the exception of Elazar's speech to the rebels gathered at Masada at the very end of the text; and even there (see Flusser 1980, 2:355ff.) his variants are not given as readings of a word or even of a phrase, as is the case with all his other variant readings, but as variant readings of whole paragraphs, indicating that it is indeed a radically different text.

The *Third Capture of Jerusalem by Titus*, like all translations made from Hebrew in the East Slavic lands, has to be the work of a Jew. The earliest manuscript

containing it (Saint Petersburg, BAN 33.8.13) is from the last quarter of the fifteenth century and shows dialectal features of the language of the Novgorod area, an area in which, unlike in Moscow, Jews could occasionally be found, at least until its annexation by Muscovy in 1478. The Russian translation is very precious for the history of the Hebrew text of the reworking, since it conserves portions of the text missing owing to a lacuna of six folia in the still unpublished unique Hebrew Huntington manuscript.

An illustrative example of the differences between the *Josippon* proper and its Hebrew reworking is a passage in which we find enumerated the many ominous signs that God had sent, to no avail, to the Jews of Jerusalem in order to warn them of the imminent destruction of the city and the Temple. The immediate source of *Josippon*—namely, pseudo-Hegesippus—clearly tainted by Christological bias, added here the words *Lord Jesus* and *Maria*, whereas the *Josippon* censored the Christian portions, omitting these names (see appendix 22).

Nikita Meshcherskij, who edited the East Slavic translation from the original Greek of Josephus's *Jewish War*, quotes in his introduction (1958, 146) two small portions of this passage from the *Josippon*, together with the text of the *Third Capture of Jerusalem* (see appendix 23), as proof that the *Third Capture of Jerusalem by Titus* is based directly on the *Josippon*, albeit on a special version thereof; however, we will see presently that this is not the case, since the *Third Capture of Jerusalem by Titus* has a rather different account from that of the *Josippon*.

If we disregard the typographic errors and the errors of translation ("all the simple folk" instead of "some of the simple folk"), we observe (see appendix 24) that Meshcherskij has left out the words where the *Josippon* and the *Third Capture of Jerusalem by Titus* differ radically: the *Josippon* predicts (see text in appendix 22) that "when the edifice of the Temple will be quadrangular, then there will reign a king over Israel, a king who reigns and rules over the whole earth," whereas the *Third Capture of Jerusalem*, following the Hebrew reworking of the Huntington copy, predicts the appearance of this mysterious ruler of Israel for the time when the Temple will be 420 years old. The number of years for the duration of the Second Temple—420—is a well-known Talmudic figure, quoted in eschatological contexts (see appendix 25).

Despite the correspondence on this probative detail, the unique Huntington copy is not identical with the *Third Capture of Jerusalem* (see appendix 26), as it has a much more extensive account. Most of the extra portions in the Huntington reworking, as compared to the Slavic version of this passage in the *Third Capture of Jerusalem*, such as the ominous signs of the quadrangular Temple, the beautiful human figure hovering above the Temple, the cow giving birth to a lamb, and the footsteps in the Temple calling for a withdrawal from the city, derive from the *Josippon*, too, although they are dispersed in different locations of the *Josippon* and are not found as a single passage as they appear in the sequence attested here.

The most significant import of establishing the Huntington reworking of the *Josippon* as immediate source for the Russian translation lies in instances where

the Hebrew exposes the biases and tendencies of the Russian version (the examples of the *Third Capture of Jerusalem by Titus* are from Tvorogov's 1999 edition of the *Hellenic and Roman Chronicler*).

Thus, in the description of the beginning of the military campaign against Jerusalem by the Romans, the *Third Capture of Jerusalem by Titus* reads (Tvorogov 1999, 1:224 1.1):

> *i radovashas′ vrazi nashi paguby ego radi.*

> And our enemies rejoiced over its demise.

Huntington 345:

> *vajiśmeḥu ojvim ʿal mishbateha.*

> And enemies rejoiced over her demise.

There is no comment on this difference in Tvorogov's edition. The addition in the Slavic, speaking of *our* enemies, cannot but reflect the input of the Jewish translator.

A second example, speaking of the rebels in Jerusalem (12.11):

> *vēdjashe bo Iosif jako ne xotjat mira.*

> For Joseph knew that they did not want peace.

Huntington 345:

> *ki yodeaʿ yosef ki nitʿav beʿeyneyhem ʿal asher nasa ʿalav ʿol romiim.*

> For Joseph knew that he was abominable in their eyes, for he had taken upon himself the Roman yoke.

This is an intentional distortion of the Hebrew text, reversing the roles of hero and villain, a distortion that has to belong to the translator into Russian, or (although this is less likely) to the editor who integrated the *Third Capture of Jerusalem* into the *Hellenic and Roman Chronicler.*

The Russian version of *The Third Capture of Jerusalem by Titus* thus embodies the whole spectrum of ambivalence in the attitude of Russians toward Jews, since it represents several consecutive layers of reworking and adaptation of the same account, with different, sometimes conflicting, biases and ideas about the sense of the story and about who the heroes, and particularly about who the villains, are. Are these the Romans or the Jews? Are these all the Jews or just the rebels? Is Titus the villain of this story or the designed carrier of God's wrath against the Jews? And is Joseph a positive or a negative figure? The ambivalence about most of these points, with the exception of the unanimous condemnation of the zealous rebels, is maintained in the Jewish tradition as well, and gets further confounded in Slavic.

Thus far we have engaged in the exposition of the East Slavic texts of the early group and their sources. Let us return now to the question of the possible

scenarios for the circumstances that could have given rise to this group of translations.

For the dating of the translations, we have posited the thirteenth through fifteenth centuries as the possible time range, although the extant manuscripts are from 1400 onward. As for the place of translation, the Galician-Volhynian regions, where a Jewish presence is attested from the thirteenth century on, is a possibility, although we lack more precise evidence, linguistic or historical, to confirm it.

Regarding the intended readership of the translations, the answer, as already pointed out, seems to be clear: they were made for Christians, since the texts were written down in Cyrillic and were preserved in Russian Orthodox compilations, kept mainly in monasteries, and not accessible to observant Jews, even assuming they could read Cyrillic (an unlikely possibility).

Moreover, that Christians would be interested in Old Testament figures, especially in Jacob's descendants, is obvious, since Christendom views itself as the New Israel. Of special interest would of course be the last kings of Judea from the House of David and their offspring (at the time of the exile to Babylon, Jechoniah, and after the exile, Shealtiel and Zerubbabel), since all of them are part of Jesus Christ's pedigree (Matthew 1:11–13). The Slavic texts consequently show great interest, respect, and even admiration for the Israelites of old.

Nothing of the kind, however, is reserved for Jews of their own time. As we have seen above, the latter are treated as the cursed people who refuse to accept the Christian truth and they are addressed by rude invectives accompanied by explicit calls to repent and embrace the Christian faith.

Such a mixture of familiarity with Jewish sources, as we have seen, together with an anti-Jewish, proselytizing approach, strengthens the suspicion that we are dealing with a rather familiar picture, that of Jews converted to Christianity, using Jewish sources for polemics against their former coreligionists. Despite being formally addressed to a Jew, such texts are nevertheless internal Christian polemical works. We are therefore led to posit a scenario with Jewish converts to Christianity involved in the early group of translations, at least in some of them, translations of polemical texts dealing with the ancient Israelites and with many Old Testament figures of interest to a Christian audience.

We do not have concrete evidence for the existence of such converts before the second half of the fifteenth century, when we encounter in the 1470s the case of an Ashkenazi Jew converted to Orthodox Christianity, after arriving in Moscow from Kyiv—Feodor the Jew (see Zuckerman 1987). This convert left us an epistle to his former brethren, imploring them to follow his example, as well as a collection of prayers purporting to be a "Psalter," but Feodor (whose Jewish name is not given), who converted around 1470, could not have been the translator of the early group. We are thus, as happens to be the case more often than not, left in the realm of speculation.

A second case of a convert, about whom we know even less, is mentioned by Archbishop Gennadij of Novgorod in a letter from 1490, in which he tells about a newly baptized Jew from Kyiv who took the name of Daniel, and who, on his arrival in Novgorod on his way to Moscow, told his companions at the table of the inn where he was staying about the not very friendly farewell he had received from his Jewish brethren in Kyiv (see below in chapter 3).

Our third and final chapter discusses a different kind of texts, no longer Jewish historical accounts originally written in Hebrew, but scientific and pseudoscientific texts originally written in Arabic or in Judaeo-Arabic, translated into Hebrew, and then from Hebrew into East Slavic. This would require a different kind of translator, with different capabilities and a different motivation.