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Slavonic (Para)Biblical Traditions

The 26th volume of *Slavia Meridionalis* is devoted to medieval and modern Slavonic cultures, with a special focus on the biblical and parabiblical templates embedded in them and their importance as a specific field of research for contemporary scholarship. The volume has been designed to reflect the results of the research conducted by the "Slavonic Parabiblical Traditions" Research Unit under the auspices of the European Association of Biblical Studies (EABS).

At the forefront of the formation of the "Slavonic Parabiblical Traditions" Research Unit was Prof. Florentina Badalanova Geller, whose rigorous research activity and collaborative efforts with international colleagues directly catalysed its establishment. Its foundations were laid during the 2016 European Association of Biblical Studies (EABS) conference, which hosted special thematic sessions linked to the German-Israeli Foundation project, "Visitors from Heaven, Visitors to Heaven: Judaeo-Christian Encounters and the Last *Lingua Sacra* of Europe" (2015–2018). Executed jointly by the Topoi Excellence Cluster (FU Berlin) and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem – with key collaboration between Prof. Badalanova Geller, Prof. Dr. Rainer Kampling, Prof. Alexander Kulik and Prof. Moshe Taube – the project aimed to compare and contrast Slavonic apocalyptic heritage with Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, Syriac, Latin, Romanian, and Armenian traditions, including oral traditions and iconography.

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Formally established at the EABS in 2017, the Research Unit was initially chaired by Prof. Badalanova Geller (Topoi Cluster, FU Berlin), who subsequently invited Prof. Anna-Maria Totomanova (Sofia University) and Prof. Anatoly Alexeev (Saint Petersburg State University) to join as co-chairs. The EABS endorsed this arrangement. Since its inception, the Research Unit has organised annual sessions at EABS conferences globally, including Berlin (2017), Helsinki (2018), Warsaw (2019), Wuppertal/Virtual (2021), Toulouse (2022), Syracuse (2023), Sofia (2024), Uppsala (2025), and Leuven (2026). The prominence of Slavonic Parabiblical Traditions over many years was a major factor in the decision to organise the EABS annual conference in Sofia in 2024, with Prof. Totomanova as official host of the event. Her personal commitment and energy were crucial to making the conference a great success, while drawing attention to Sofia University as a prominent centre for innovative scholarship. By all accounts, the Sofia EABS conference was an important step towards strengthening the relationship between Slavonic and biblical studies.

Parallel to its conference presence, the unit's leadership evolved. While the founding chairs served until 2020, the 2021–2022 term saw Dr. Alexandra Vukovich join Badalanova Geller and Totomanova as a co-chair. For the 2023–2024 period, the committee expanded to include Dr. Ewelina Drzewiecka. Following the 2025 Uppsala conference, Prof. Badalanova Geller stepped down as chair, with Prof. Magdalena Lubanska subsequently appointed as her successor. Throughout these institutional shifts, the Research Unit's core focus remained unchanged, while its analytical emphasis gradually deepened and its thematic scope expanded to encompass several distinct research initiatives.

Over the years, following the establishment of this Research Unit, the scholarly community has benefited from strong representation of the field of Slavonic biblical and parabiblical traditions – a field that was previously overlooked in international forums. By bringing together scholars from Eastern and Western Europe, the Research Unit has established an innovative interdisciplinary model that widens and deepens the epistemological scope of the European Association of Biblical Studies and the Society of Biblical Literature.

For the last few years, the overall aims and objectives of the "Slavonic Parabiblical Traditions" Research Unit have been formulated and articulated as follows:

1. Comparing and contrasting particular *topoi* within Slavonic literary, iconographic, and oral heritage, also attested in earlier Jewish and/or Christian intellectual environments, while further anticipating relationships with Islamic texts and traditions.
2. Conducting detailed analyses of the religious and ritual contexts of these *topoi* from the standpoint of liturgical calendars and worship to enhance the understanding of Slavonic texts. This includes encouraging explorations into the history of liturgical music, religious art, and iconography.
3. Examining scriptural and parascriptural intertextuality within the three Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam) through the prism of these *topoi*. The investigation of parallel attestations of specific templates (such as common socio-religious processes and cross-cultural metanarratives) within the Slavonic intellectual landscape has stimulated research to address shared questions from diverse perspectives across a chronological framework spanning from Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages to modern times.
4. Investigating historical and comparative linguistics, with a special emphasis on Palaeoslavonic scribal strategies for transmitting and disseminating canonical and apocryphal books within the Byzantine Commonwealth and beyond. This framework considers the conceptual milieu of *Slavia Orthodoxa* and *Slavia Catholica* alongside the cultural environments of *Slavia Judaica* and *Slavia Islamica*, focusing on the multilingual and cross-cultural transmissions of texts originally composed in "original biblical languages" and their subsequent dissemination through Slavonic translations.
5. Applying an interdisciplinary approach to the modern interpretation of biblical *topoi* and parabiblical themes in contemporary literature, art, and music, while encouraging the study of popular culture phenomena and modes of prayer and worship from anthropological, ethnographic, and folkloric perspectives.

The framework of the 26th volume of *Slavia Meridionalis* is defined in accordance with the Research Unit's focus. It reflects the unique role that Old Church Slavonic played as the ultimate vehicle for the transmission and dissemination of Christianity in the Slavonic domain of the Byzantine

Commonwealth. Hence, Old Church Slavonic may be defined as a unique cultural phenomenon bound by the Bible's reception history. The development of Old Church Slavonic scribal practices was strongly influenced by the translation of the Bible into the language spoken by those who were being converted to Christianity. The historical development of the philological patrimony of Old Church Slavonic is thus essentially different from that of the three "classical" biblical languages, since the latter were moulded according to the linguistic matrices of their respective forebears. While centuries-long scribal traditions in Hebrew, Aramaic, Syriac, Latin, and Greek had existed independently of the biblical corpus – as well as belonging to it – Old Church Slavonic literary conventions were the product of a different background that had been significantly impacted by the theological agenda of *Pax Christiana*.

We aim to explore the unique history of the reception of the canonical biblical texts within the Slavonic intellectual domain, as well as that of parabiblical writings that have not received proper attention in Western scholarship. With this volume, we emphasise why and how Slavonic parabiblical heritage goes far beyond its significance for Slavonic studies. Thus, as already acknowledged by many scholars, even though Church Slavonic manuscripts containing witnesses to some ancient Judaeo-Christian writings may date from a relatively late period, they appear to derive from much earlier texts (originally composed in Hebrew and Aramaic, but also in Greek, Syriac, and Latin). Also, the *Vorlagen* of many of these compositions may date to much earlier periods. Hence, the study of Slavonic parabiblical writings can contribute significantly to a better understanding of Hellenistic Judaism and, by extension, the roots of Rabbinic Judaism, early Christianity, Gnosticism, and later mystical thought. On the other hand, the way in which biblical models of interpretation are appropriated in *Pax Slavia Christiana* reflects issues similar to those faced by Western European society. In this context, a significant role in cultural transfers is played by parabiblical written texts, as well as iconography and vernacular oral tradition (including "Folk Bible" compositions).

The structure of the present volume addresses the research questions indicated in the call for papers. Although it mainly focuses on the work of the EABS "Slavonic Parabiblical Traditions" Research Unit, we decided to include papers presented at EABS conferences within the framework of another research unit, "Mariological Discourses", since they fit the volume's thematic scope and agenda. The eighteen selected papers are organised into two main thematic clusters. The first one is focused on comparisons of particular *topoi* within

Slavonic scribal heritage that are related to or based on earlier Jewish and/or Christian traditions; it covers issues related to both Jewish–Christian relations and scriptural reception and transformation in Church Slavonic literature, with special emphasis on written heritage. Therefore, it consists of two thematic sections: "(Para)biblical *topoi* and cultural transfers" and "(Para)biblical *topoi* in Slavonic scribal heritage". The second cluster provides comprehensive analyses of the cultural, religious and ritual contexts and transmission of (para)biblical *topoi* in various visual, oral, and literary compositions; as such it consists of three sections: "(Para)biblical *topoi* in visual compositions", "(Para)biblical *topoi* in vernacular compositions", and "(Para)biblical *topoi* in (early) modern literary compositions".

We hope the contributions of our colleagues and friends within the EABS "Slavonic Parabiblical Traditions" Research Unit will spark further intellectual curiosity and a passion for developing future research.

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