



INTRODUCTION TO THE *PALEYA*. MEDIÉVAL ORTHODOX WRITINGS ON THE OLD TESTAMENT¹

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This article gives an introduction to the *Paleyа* genre in all its varieties, the reasons for its existence, its function, target audience, and diffusion. A brief overview of scholarly research on the *Paleyа* is also presented.

What is the *Paleyа*?

In the medieval Slavia Orthodoxa, the *Paleyа* (also spelled *Paleja*, *Palaea*, or *Palaia*) was a common name for a kind of writing that dealt with the Old Testament—either retelling it or interpreting it or both. The name itself comes from the Greek παλαιά [διαθήκη]—“Old [Testament],” and this was indeed one of the names by which the Slavs, too, called the books of the Old Covenant, especially the Pentateuch and the Octateuch themselves (the latter sometimes combined with four books of Kingdoms).²

¹ This article is a shortened and adapted version of my MA thesis, “The World Through the Eyes of the *Tolkovaya Paleya*: The Story of Original Sin in the Hilandar Manuscript,” (Budapest: Central European University, 2005), written under the supervision of Prof. Johannes Niehoff-Panagiotidis. The thesis contains fuller argumentation, references and an edited and translated chapter of the *Tolkovaya Paleya* with a commentary and detailed description of the nearly forgotten Hilandar manuscript. An electronic copy of the thesis is available at the Hilandar Research Library, Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio.

² See В. Истрин [V. Istrin], *Очерк истории древнерусской литературы домосковского периода* (An Overview of the Old Russian Literature of the Pre-Muscovite Period) (Petrograd, 1922; reprint: Moscow: Academia, 2003), 270 (hereafter: Истрин 1922 [2003]), and Б. Ангелов [B. Angelov], *Из старата българска, руска и сръбска литература* (From the Old Bulgarian, Russian, and Serbian Literatures), vol. 3. (Sofia: Издателство на Българската академия на науките, 1978), 167, although the latter reference is rather vague. In the Western tradition, books of Kingdoms are styled 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings, but I shall refer to them as 1–4 Kingdoms, as some writings dealing with Byzantine and Orthodox culture do, retaining the Septuagint tradition.



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The Proto-Paleyā

Due to the testimonies of various medieval Slavic compilations (such as *Kaaf* and *Yatsimirsky's Miscellany*), which claimed to borrow some of their material from the *Interpretative [Tolkovaya] Paleya* or *Paleyā With Interpretation*, some nineteenth-century scholars supposed the existence of a purely interpretative writing that initiated the *Paleyā* genre as such. V. M. Istrin³ drew a persuasive conclusion that the *Paleyā* referred to was actually composed of excerpts from Theodoret of Cyrrihus' *Questions (and Answers) on the Octateuch*.⁴ In Istrin's opinion, Theodoret's *Interpretative Paleya* (or *The Interpretation of the Old Testament*) was undoubtedly one of the chief sources for the later *Interpretative Paleya* of Slavic origin, and it even gave the title to the latter.

Some other works occasionally called Paleya

The name *Paleyā* has also been given to some other works different in form or scope. In 1415 the translation of all four books of Kingdoms was done for Despot Stefan Lazarević under the title *Paleyā*,⁵ apparently in the same tradition of calling almost any work that deals with the Old Testament a *Paleyā*. In addition, it seems that a kind of the *Hexaemeron*—the interpretation of the six days of creation—received the same designation in some manuscripts.⁶

³ See В. М. Истрин [V. M. Istrin,] *Замечания о составе Толковой палеи* (Notes on the Structure of the *Tolkovaya Paleya*) 2 (St. Petersburg: Известия Отделения русского языка и словесности Академии наук, 1897), esp. 877–880 (hereafter: Истрин, *Замечания*).

⁴ Published in *Patrologia Graeca*, vol. 80. In fact, only a few months after making this speculation, Istrin found a nice confirmation in the *Catena Aurea* (Чепь золотая) of Trinity-St. Sergius Laura, which overtly quotes “[from] Theodoret's [work] on the Interpretation of the Old Testament,” (“Θεοδωριτωо отъ толкованія палея”). Истрин, *Замечания* 3, 512.

⁵ See Ђ. Трифуновић, *Азбуџник српских средњовековних књижевних појмова* (Dictionary of Serbian Medieval Literary Terms) (Beograd: Vuk Karadžić, 1974) (henceforth: Трифуновић 1974).

⁶ Cited thus in the manuscript Shchuk. 465 - 8° of the Library of the Moscow Historical Museum. This is the only copy I have examined, but I have not found anything about such a designation in scholarly literature.



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The Historical Paleya

Besides these variants of secondary importance, there are three basic types of *Paleya*.⁷ The *Historical Paleya* retells the content of the Old Testament (with some apocryphal interpolations and short explanations), but does not try as much to interpret it. It is an abbreviated exposition of Old Testament history up to King David's census (i.e., to the end of the 2 Kingdoms [2 Samuel]).⁸ A. Popov, the first publisher of the Slavic translation, analysing the sources for this *Paleya*, points out it could not be written before the ninth century (as it quotes St. Theodore Studites, who died in 826), but refrains from suggesting a more precise date. As a grammatical analysis clearly shows, the Slavonic translation was done very early—at the latest in twelfth-century Bulgaria.⁹ Some scholars opt for an even earlier date of translation—not later than the first quarter of the

⁷ This differentiation was made for the first time by V. Istrin and K. Istomin (see B. Истрин, “Редакции Толковой Палеи,” [Redactions of the *Tolkovaya Paleya*] *Известия Отделения русского языка и словесности Академии наук* 10 (1905): Vol. 4, 135–203; 11 (1906), Vol. 1, 1–43; Vol. 2, 20–61; Vol. 3, 418–450 [hereafter: Истрин 1906], and K. Истомин, “К вопросу о редакциях Толковой Палеи,” [On the Redactions of the *Tolkovaya Paleya*] *Известия Отделения русского языка и словесности Академии наук* 5 (1905): Vol. 1, 147–184; 11 (1906): Vol. 1, 337–374; 13 (1908): Vol. 4, 290–343; 18 (1913): Vol. 1, 87–172 [henceforth: Истомин 1905–13]) at the beginning of the twentieth century, but until then researchers styled all kinds of *Paleya* simply as the *Tolkovaya Paleya*. Even today, there are many articles (particularly in encyclopaedias and dictionaries) which do not make a clear difference among *Paleyas*.

⁸ This holds true for most copies, but the Krušedolski manuscript, for instance, also has a chapter on King Uzziah according to 2 Chronicles 26. Greek manuscripts of the *Historical Paleya*, varying considerably in content, also have passages on the demon Asmodeus, the prophets Daniel and Habakkuk, and some other passages omitted in Slavic copies. For comparison of contents, see М. Сперанский [M. Speransky], “Югославянские тексты –Исторической Палеи и русские ее тексты” (South Slavic Texts of the *Historical Paleya* and Its Russian Texts) *Из истории русско-славянских литературных связей* (Moscow: Издательство министерства просвещения РСФСР, 1960, 104–145. Original edition: Belgrade, *Споменик* 16, 1892, 1–15) (henceforth: Сперанский 1892).

⁹ For the critical edition and dating, see *Книга бытия небеси и земли – Палея Историческая* (The Book of the Genesis of Heaven and Earth – the Historical Paleya), ed. А. Н. Попов [A. N. Popov] (Moscow: Императорское общество истории и древностей российских при Московском университете, 1881), esp. xxii–xxxii (hereafter: Попов, *Книга бытия*). The Greek edition in А. В. Васильев [A. V. Vasilev], *Anecdota Graeco-Byzantina, Pars Prior* (Moscow: Московский университет, 1893).



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eleventh century.¹⁰ There were three different translations of the Greek original into Church Slavonic: Western Bulgarian, Serbian, and Middle Bulgarian (spread in Moldova).¹¹ Manuscripts of the *Historical Paleya* usually bear the title *The Book of the Genesis of Heaven and Earth* (Книга бытия небеси и земли) or *The Eyes of the Paleya* (Очи палейныя), and date from the fifteenth to the seventeenth century.

The *Historical Paleya* gave rise to the special *Abbreviated Paleya of Russian Redaction*.¹² This type, although it includes a considerable number of additional apocryphal stories, can still be regarded as a historical *Paleya*. Indeed, sometimes it retells in detail minor events totally omitted by the longer *Historical Paleya* (e.g., a detailed account of prophet Samuel's life). It is interesting that, now and then, it uses folk narrative techniques. Popov's edition ends with the capturing of the Ark of the Covenant by the Philistines (1 Kingdoms [1 Samuel] 5:2), but the end of the manuscript is lost.¹³ In this mutilated form, it is approximately half the length of the unabbreviated *Historical Paleya*. Popov's edition is based on a sixteenth-century manuscript. There were also some Serbian attempts to create an abbreviated *Historical Paleya*.¹⁴

The Tolkovaya (Interpretative) Paleya

This *Paleya* is much broader in scope, with pretensions to encyclopaedic knowledge. The earliest incomplete codex is from the fourteenth century and the earliest complete from 1406, copied in Kolomna (near Moscow) by a certain

¹⁰ See Т. Сумникова [T. Sumnikova] “К проблеме перевода Исторической палеи” (About the Problem of the Translation of the *Historical Paleya*), in *Изучение русского языка и источниковедение*, ed. В. Ф. Дубровина [V. F. Dubrovina] (Moscow: Наука, 1969), 27–30; Т. Славова [T. Slavova] “Архивският хронограф и Тълковата Палея” (The *Archival Chronograph* and the *Tolkovaya Paleya*) *Palaeobulgarica/Старобългаристика* 48 (1994/4), 48–63 (henceforth: Славова 1994).

¹¹ See Сперанский 1892, although Ё. Turdeanu does not agree and supposes only one Western Bulgarian translation; see Ё. Turdeanu, “La *Palaea* Byzantine chez les Slaves du Sud et chez les Roumains,” *Revue des Études Slaves* 40 (1964), 195–206.

¹² Also published as an appendix to Попов, *Книга бытия*, from a sixteenth century miscellany of Novgorod provenance.

¹³ This is a proof that the *Paleya*, even in its shortest form, cannot be styled “Octateuch,” as some uninformed writers do (see, e.g., Д. Петканова [D. Petkanova], *Старобългарска литература, Енциклопедичен речник* [Old Bulgarian Literature: An Encyclopedic Dictionary], Sofia: Петър Берон, 1992b entry “Палея”).

¹⁴ See Trifunović 1974.



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Cosmas, but there are more than thirty-one other extant manuscripts.¹⁵ It retells biblical history up to the reign of Solomon,¹⁶ but adding many apocryphal stories—most prominent among them are those about Satanael, Abraham (“The Revelation of Abraham” and an account of how Abraham destroyed his father’s idol workshop), “Jacob’s Ladder,” “The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs,” and Moses—a few apocryphal details). Numerous explanations of natural phenomena, in the spirit of ancient and medieval natural science, are inserted throughout the text. The author describes the structure and functions of the human body, the soul-body relation, some traits of real (octopus, cuckoo, eel, seal, lion, snake) and mythical (alconost, phoenix) animals, the nature of fire and the atmosphere, twelve precious stones, and gives a table of connection between lunar and solar cycles. The *Tolkovaya Paleya* is not only descriptive, but also polemic writing. Besides some minor Christian theological disputes and a few attacks on the “dirty Muslim faith,” it constantly debates with Jews and Judaism, frequently calling the attention of a fictitious Jewish listener—“O, (wretched) Jew”—to the fact of Christian truth and Jewish error.

The compiler in the beginning draws heavily on *Hexaemeron* of John the Exarch (which probably took its material from St. Basil’s *Hexaemeron*) and Severian of Gabala, St. John Chrysostom’s *Interpretation of the Genesis*, and also resorts to Cosmas Indicopleustes’ *Christian Topography*, St. Ephraem Syrus’ *Exhortation (Parainesis)*,¹⁷ the *Revelation* of Pseudo-Methodius of Patara, and others. One of the sources is a hypothetical paraphrase of biblical history that included many apocryphal stories, and this writing was, it is suggested, the common source for the famous “Philosopher’s Speech” incorporated into the *Tale of Vygone Years* (Повесть временных лет, under the year 986).¹⁸

It also handles material from the lives of the saints. In the chapter on the Fall it mentions several saints (Barbara, Tryphon, Abercius of Hierapolis) and

¹⁵ For the best list, see Т. Славова [T. Slavova], *Тълковата Палея в контекста на старобългарската книжнина* (The *Tolkovaya Paley* in the Context of Old Bulgarian Literature) (Sofia, Университетско издателство Св. Климент Охридски, 2002) (hereafter: Славова 2002).

¹⁶ Not so in its earliest fourteenth-century copy, where it stops with the reign of Solomon’s son Rehoboam, but the end of the manuscript has been lost, so the point to which it continued is unknown.

¹⁷ A Slavic compilation of St. Ephraem’s homilies, unknown in Greek in this form.

¹⁸ О. В. Творогов [O. V. Tvorogov], “Летопись–Хроника–Палея: Взаимоотношение памятников и методика их исследования (Chronicle–Chronograph–*Paleya*: Interrelations of These Documents and Methods of Studying Them),” in *Армянская и русская средневековые литературы*, ed. Д. С. Лихачев [D. S. Likhachev] (Yerevan: Издательство Академии наук Армянской ССР, 1986), 19–30.



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gives an account of the discovery of the Holy Cross by St. Helena, while in the section on the book of Judges it interpolates the story about St. George and the dragon.

There are two opposing tendencies in the narrative structure of the *Tolkovaya Paleya*: one is to ignore all side stories of the Old Testament—which make the Book so authentic—to concentrate on the main stream. This is done rather skillfully. However, the retelling is constantly interrupted with exegetical sections, which regularly leads into peculiar details and slows down the narration considerably. In spite of interruptions and the heterogeneous material it uses, the *Interpretative Paleya* maintains a remarkable degree of literary unity—unlike most early Slavic compilations—and is regarded as a masterpiece of old East Slavic literature.

Several questions of primary importance have been disputed by scholars: Was the *Tolkovaya Paleya* compiled in Byzantium or by the Slavs? If by the Slavs, where—among the East or South Slavs?¹⁹ When did it emerge? And finally—which redaction is older and the basis for the later one—the *Tolkovaya* or the *Chronographic*? (The latter type will be presented in the next section.)

Early researchers in the nineteenth century supposed that the *Tolkovaya Paleya* was a translation of a lost Greek original.²⁰ However, no one has ever discovered a Greek text that could remotely resemble the *Interpretative Paleya*. A. Mikhaylov showed that it doubtless used a previously existing Slavonic translation of Genesis (modifying it to serve special interpretative purposes),²¹ while others have determined that the text made use exclusively of Slavic

¹⁹ There is also an isolated opinion about the Moravian origin of the *Tolkovaya Paleya*, expressed first by Shakhmatov (he claimed that the *Proto-Paleya* was composed by St. Methodius or his disciples), and now supported by V. Panayotov. See A. Шахматов [A. Shakhmatov], “Толковая Палея и русская летопись” (The *Tolkovaya Paleya* and Russian Chronicles),” *Статьи по славяноведению* 1 (1904), 199–272; В. Панайотов [V. Panayotov], “За редакциите на Тълковната Палея,” (On Redactions of the *Tolkovaya Paleya*) in *Епископ-Константинови четения*, vol. 2 (Shumen: Университетско издателство “Епископ Константин Преславски,” 1996), 256–260.

²⁰ E.g. В. Успенский [V. Uspensky], *Толковая Палея* (The *Tolkovaya Paleya*) (Kazan: Православный собеседник, 1876); Е. Голубинский [Ye. Golubinsky], *История Русской Церкви* (A History of the Russian Church) (Moscow: Московский университет, 1900–1911).

²¹ А. Михайлов [A. Mikhaylov], “К вопросу о тексте книги Бытия пророка Моисея в Толковой Палее,” *Варшавские университетские известия* 9 (1895): 1–35; 1 (1896): 1–23 (hereafter: Михайлов 1895–96).



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translations throughout.²² F. Thomson infers that the biblical texts used are, by and large, from the East Slavic redaction.²³ Some still suggest a very early (tenth century) Bulgarian origin,²⁴ while the majority accept an East Slavic provenance and much later date—thirteenth century—as is evident from an examination of its biblical text and some other characteristics.²⁵ As a matter of fact, the mere number of early Russian copies on the one hand, and (with only one exception of a later date) the practical non-existence of any of South Slavic manuscripts on the other can be accepted as a positive demonstration of East Slavic provenience, as A. Mikhaylov has already pointed out.²⁶

In 2002 T. Slavova made an exceedingly helpful contribution in her monumental work, *The Tolkovaya Paleya in the Context of Old Bulgarian Literature*,²⁷ a product of amazing diligence and the main recent critique of the Russian-origin hypothesis. Slavova's chief argument is linguistic proofs, based on grammatical, syntactic, and lexical analyses. The *Tolkovaya* teems with archaisms and South Slavic sentence and word structures. This is undeniable, and other scholars have explained this with the fact that it is a compilation that draws on older translated literature, and most of these sources were translated in South Slavic literary centres. It is also indisputable that the text abounds in Russianisms (East Slavicisms) in all parts.

There have also been attempts to establish a hypothetical Greek work that was the basis for the “added” Slavic material of the *Tolkovaya*, but the material (though frequently from earlier Slavic translations of Greek writings) is so overwhelmingly of Slavic origin that the proposed Greek core would almost count for nothing, as V. Adrianova has noted.²⁸ Thus, we can conclude that the

²² Истрин 1906; В. Адрианова [V. Adrianova], “К литературной истории Толковой Палеи,” *Труды Киевской Духовной академии* 8 (1909): 377–415; 9: 134–157 (henceforth: Адрианова 1909).

²³ F. Thomson “The Slavonic Translation of the Old Testament,” in *Interpretation of the Bible* (Ljubljana: Državna založba Slovenije, 1998): 872–873 (hereafter: Thomson, 1998).

²⁴ Славова 1994 and 2002.

²⁵ Истрин 1906, Адрианова 1909, Thomson 1998.

²⁶ Михайлов 1895–96. The only non-Russian manuscript is a copy of the *Tolkovaya Paleya* from 1632/33, kept in the Serbian Monastery of Hilandar on Mount Athos. It was almost completely forgotten. Special thanks go to Mary-Allen Johnson from the Hilandar Research Library (the Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio) who drew my attention to the manuscript and provided me with the high-quality xerographic copies made from the microform and sent me innumerable other publications. Without her my MA thesis and this article would have been impossible.

²⁷ Славова 2002.

²⁸ Адрианова 1906.



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compiler was certainly Slavic, probably a Russian who lived in the thirteenth century, although the last premise is open to debate.

The Chronographic Paleya

The third type of *Paleya* is the *Chronographic Paleya*, considered by many scholars to be merely a longer version of the *Tolkovaya Paleya*. It continues the narration about the most important historical events not only to the birth of Christ, but goes on to the tenth century and relations between the Byzantine Empire and the Russians. Its main sources are two Byzantine chronicles—from the sixth century by John Malalas and from the ninth century by George the Monk (also known as Hamartolos—the Sinner).²⁹ There are two versions—the full and the abbreviated—and the latter is considered to be an abridged version of the former. The earliest manuscripts are from the second half of the fifteenth century; ten copies of the *Full Chronographic Paleya* are known and eight copies of the abbreviated version.³⁰ Some manuscripts of this work are followed by a series of texts usually styled *Addition to the Paleya*, and several among them belong to the genre of disputations with the Jews.³¹

Some scholars, especially K. Istomin, have argued that the *Tolkovaya Paleya* is an abridgement of the *Chronographic Paleya*.³² The author of the *Tolkovaya* announces several times his intention to continue writing at least to one New Testament event (the Virgin birth), and many untouched Old Testament parts. On the other hand, The *Chronographic* variant fulfils these expectations at least to some extent. Istrin was well aware of this fact, but he explained it in a sense that the author lacked the further interpretative material and also found it difficult to maintain the same zealous polemical mood, so he intentionally put an end to his work with the reign of Solomon.³³

It might be that the compilers of *Chronographic Paleyas* disliked the *Tolkovaya's* interruptions of narration and accumulation of typological

²⁹ Both sources were used in the *Tolkovaya Paleya* as well, but to a limited extent.

³⁰ See Tvorogov's entry on the work in *Словарь книжников и книжности Древней Руси*, Vol. 2. ed. Д. С. Лихачев [D. S. Likhachev], (Leningrad: Наука, 1987–1989), but for a fuller list see Славова 2002, 33–34.

³¹ See О. Творогов [O. Tvorogov], *Древнерусские хронографы* (Old Russian Chronographs) (Leningrad: Nauka, 1975) (henceforth: Творогов 1975). Such additions occasionally occur with the *Tolkovaya Paleya*, too, such is, e.g., the manuscript Eparkh 363 – 1^o of the Library of the Moscow Historical Museum, which I had the opportunity to see.

³² See Истомин 1905–13. He rather failed to prove his viewpoint.

³³ Истрин 1922 (2003), 269.



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interpretations, so they decided to quote important biblical passages *in extenso*, and to remove or relocate many explanations so as not to disturb the storytelling. The *Chronographic* redactions use clearer language and syntax, but texts were added too mechanically and the arrangement lacks the graceful touch of the *Tolkovaya* compiler, who succeeded in gracefully intertwining narrative and interpretative parts. Not only is the *Chronographic Paleya* deprived of the stylistic unity and artistic skilfulness of the *Tolkovaya*, but it also lacks its daring to handle material freely and to subject it to higher purposes (as when the *Tolkovaya* gives the true meanings of Jewish names but also interprets them according to phonetic similarity to Slavic words).

Istrin linked the emergence of the *Chronographic Paleya* with the heresy of Judaizers and the Third Rome theory. In his view, it served as a companion in the struggle against the heretics, and it connected the history of Russia with the sacred history of the Jews and Byzantines. Taking into consideration how powerful the idea of the New Israel was in Russia at that time, one can fully embrace this hypothesis.³⁴ It is in any case much more plausible than the theories that even the *Short Chronographic* version was created in tenth-century Bulgaria.³⁵

The Communist Period and Afterwards

It should be noted that research on the *Paleya* was suppressed after the Russian Revolution, and only a few more articles were published in the 1920s (V. Istrin's article in 1925 and A. Mikhaylov's in 1928). A revival started slowly in the mid-1970s with Tvorogov's book on old Russian chronographs,³⁶ which is careful not to touch any "dangerous" theological issues. At the end of the 1980s the Communist government relaxed its stance on religion, which resulted in the revival of *Paleya* studies—at first only in some encyclopaedia and dictionary articles, but later in the main literary and scientific journals. Today, study of the *Paleya* thrives, as in Russia so too in Bulgaria, and there is a tendency to bring this ancient text "not only into scholarly but also onto a broad cultural horizon"³⁷—to make it accessible to the general reader. The main experts in the

³⁴ For the New Israel ideology in medieval Russia, see Daniel B. Rowland, "Moscow – The Third Rome or the New Israel?" *Russian Review* 55 (1996): 591–614.

³⁵ See Славова 2002, 279.

³⁶ Творогов 1975.

³⁷ A good example is Kamchatnov's edition: *Палея Толковая (The Tolkovaya Paleya)*, tr. and ed. А. Камчатнов [A. Kamchatnov], foreword by В. Кожин [V. Kozhinov] (Moscow: Согласие, 2002).



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field today are Ye. G. Vodolazkin and O. V. Tvorogov in Russia, and R. Stankov and T. Slavova in Bulgaria.

Why the *Paleyā*?

What was the purpose of compiling the *Paleyā*, particularly in its Interpretative version? Here I present my own observations and challenge a deep-rooted notion of the *Paleyā* I believe to be wrong.

A chronological overview of the Old Testament and a substitute

When, near the end of the fifteenth century, Novgorod Archbishop Gennady wanted to collect and publish the whole Bible, he was not able to find the books of Chronicles (1-2 Paralipomenon), Ezra (Ezra, 1-2 Esdras), Nehemiah, Tobit, Judith, the Wisdom of Solomon, Maccabees, parts of Esther and Jeremiah. All these were then translated from the Latin Vulgate—the work was completed in 1499. More than six centuries after the death of St. Methodius (885), the Slavs got the full collection of Old Testament books. This does not mean that the Orthodox Slavs were unconcerned with studying the Old Testament, but that part of the Bible has always been present in a special form. The Orthodox Church emphasises the prefigurative role of the Old Testament, and in its liturgy it points out again and again the typology between the testaments. Thus, in the *parimeyniki*, Old Testament readings selected for church services, only the events which were said by the Church Fathers to act as major prophetic symbols of New Testament events are to be found.

Outside the *parimeyniki*, the Old Testament most often occurs in interpretative writings or miscellanies, such as St. Hesychius of Jerusalem's and Theodoret of Cyrillus' commentaries on the Psalter, Theodoret's explanation of all the prophetic books, St. Philo of Carpasia's interpretation of the Song of Songs (permeated with excerpts from St. Gregory of Nyssa, St. Hippolytus of Rome, and Pseudo-Procopius of Gaza), and St. Hippolytus' commentary on Daniel. It is evident that these most common interpretative works deal exclusively with the prophetic books of the Old Testament,³⁸ while the historical books were completely neglected.

The main function of the *Paleyā* was to provide the Orthodox reader with a general chronological overview of the holy history before Christ's birth, which is otherwise scattered in hundreds readings from the *parimeynik*, totally deprived of

³⁸ According to a strong Christian tradition; Judaism has a different way of grouping and naming the books of the Hebrew Bible.



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their historical and temporal sequence. Essentially connected with this is the fact that the *Paley* functioned as the substitute for quite rare Old Testament books.³⁹

General worldview and meditative guidelines

As noted above, the *Tolkovaya Paleya* has a tendency to offer the reader encyclopaedic knowledge, the comprehensive worldview of an educated Orthodox Christian. That is why the compiler presents so much natural scientific material—on the human body, relations between the soul and the body, real and fantastic animals, the qualities of the atmosphere and fire, the outlook and properties of precious stones, and calendar cycles. The reader should be acquainted not only with sacred history and basic theological truths, but has to be able to read theology from everything that surrounds him and see in everything God's astonishing wisdom, His arrangement and plan. Therefore, the *Paley* is a kind of intellectual exercise which teaches the reader how to think and gives guidelines for further reflection. This explains why it picks up only several animals from the bestiary and why it does not expand contemplation on the elements and other scientific categories.

Judging by the number of the extracts found in various other writings, it is evident that in the later centuries the *Paley* was perceived as an encyclopaedia. Portions were taken from its biblical verses mingled with fragments of interpretation, as well as from its apocrypha and natural scientific sections. From this role, which was—one may presume—the primary objective of its author, a conclusion can be drawn that the target audience the compiler had in mind was any Christian soul who needed enlightenment, rather than any Jew or Muslim, however often addressed in the book.

A liturgical companion

There is one liturgical writing that requires greater knowledge of the Old Testament than can be grasped from any of these materials (including the *Paley*)—St. Andrew of Crete's *Great Repentant Canon*. Sometimes it seems the *Paley* does not use the *Canon* to elucidate or adorn its own material, but to clarify it. Popov identified more than twenty direct quotes from the *Canon* in the

³⁹ For the study of the Slavonic translation of the Bible, it is a point of interest that some quoted parts of the Wisdom of Solomon (4:19–5:7) cannot be found even in the *prophetologium* or the *Balance of Justice*, the only Cyrillic writings which more or less extensively quote this book.



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*Historical Paleya.*⁴⁰ The *Canon* plays an important part in the Lenten services of the Orthodox Church, especially in the first week and in the exact middle of Great Lent, and is generally considered one of the most significant canons.

There is a slight possibility that the *Paleya* served—partly—as an explanatory companion to the *Great Repentant Canon*. In any case, highlighting all the crucial prototypical events and motifs of the Old Covenant and connecting them with the New Testament, the *Paleya* undoubtedly helped literate worshippers to comprehend innumerable references and allusions to pre-Christian occurrences put forth by the Orthodox liturgical books.

A polemic companion and a reaction against the Judaic Khazars and the Jews

One theory holds that the *Tolkovaya Paleya* had a practical social role. It was, according to one such presumption, a companion for, or an embittered reaction to, the struggle of Kievan Rus' against the Khazar Khanate.⁴¹ Yet, this theory relies on the erroneous supposition that there were no anti-Judaic polemics in Russian literature from the twelfth all the way to the fifteenth century and the occurrence of the Judaizers' heresy, and it rests on a strange dating of the *Paleya* uncorroborated by any historical or philological evidence.⁴² Nonetheless, one cannot entirely discard the speculation that it might also have been intended for practical argumentation against the Jews.

The greatest authority on the *Tolkovaya Paleya*, V. M. Istrin, also held a view that this work emerged as a reaction to a historical movement of the Jewish people. He proposed the following hypothesis: At the time of the Crusades (from the eleventh to thirteenth centuries) Jews in Western Europe, particularly Germany, became socially oppressed, which made them turn to a deeper study of their religion and caused a migration to the East—to neighbouring Slavic countries. At the same time, northeastern Rus' began to assume the primary role among the Russian regions and had many contacts with the West. Consequently, the Jewish merchants and even settlers were more and more present in northeastern Rus', and one should not exclude a possibility, says Istrin, that a Jewish messianic sect emerged there. This provoked a reaction among educated

⁴⁰ See Попов, *Книга бытия*, xxiv–xxvii.

⁴¹ Attests V. Kozhinov in the introduction to the *Палея Толковая* 2002. See also M. Тихомиров [M. Tikhomirov], *Русская культура X–XVIII веков* (Russian Culture From the Tenth to the Eighteenth Century) (Moscow: Наука, 1968).

⁴² For a true picture of anti-Judaic writings in ancient Rus', see Pereswetoff-Morath, *A Grin Without a Cat*, vol. 1 (Lund: Lund University, 2002) (hereafter: Pereswetoff-Morath 2002).



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Orthodox people who compiled the *Tolkovaya Paleya* and the thirteenth-century *Jewish Chronograph*. The linguistic evidence, indeed, shows that these writings might have been produced in this region. Istrin notes that some Greek anti-Judaic manuscripts were created at the same time and most likely for the same reasons.⁴³

Yet, modern historiography recognizes Jewish communities of the thirteenth century only in the far Russian west—in eastern Galicia and Volhynia. As a matter of fact, these communities absorbed the Jewish migration from Germany and Bohemia caused by the persecutions of the fourteenth (the time of the Black Death) and fifteenth centuries. Lithuania gained control over western Russia from the beginning of the fourteenth century, and it granted the first extensive privileges to Jewish communities at the end of the same century. But truly large waves of Jewish immigrants began to appear in Ukraine only from the middle of the sixteenth century.⁴⁴ The hypothesis of the thirteenth-century Jewish communities in northeastern Rus' is not supported by material evidence. Thus, it is not impossible but is rather unlikely that the author of the *Tolkovaya Paleya* was so much alerted by the Jewish presence that he compiled such an anti-Judaic encyclopaedia, especially in the light of facts that will be examined in the next passage. Furthermore, there is no evidence for the existence of a Jewish messianic sect in this region in that period.

Simply—Christian

In any case, Christianity in general, and Orthodox Christianity in particular, in polemicizing against Judaism and making a difference from Judaism the departure point of its own existence saw God's eschatological plan, expressed in the words of St. Paul:

If some of the branches were broken off [i.e. the unbelieving Jews], and you [Gentiles], a wild olive shoot, were grafted in their place to share the richness of the olive tree, do not boast over the branches... You will say, 'Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in.' That is true. They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand fast only through faith. So do not become proud, but stand in awe... And even those of Israel, if they do not persist in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft them in again... I want

⁴³ See Истрин 1922 (2003), 262–273.

⁴⁴ All these data taken from the *Encyclopaedia Judaica* – CD-Rom Edition, ed. C. Roth, G. Wigoder et alii (Jerusalem, Judaica Multimedia [Israel] Ltd., 1997), articles "Russia" and "Ukraine" (henceforth: *Judaica* 1997).



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you to understand this mystery, brethren: a hardening has come upon part of Israel, until the full number of the Gentiles come in (Rom 11:17–25).

So, the Jews were cut off because of their unreadiness to believe, but God's plan is to take them back after the Gentiles are enlightened with the truth. Jewish apostasy was anticipated in God's economy, their unbelief became proverbial—the symbol of all unbelief, but His plan foresees their final conversion, too. Christianity is a witness to Judaism's "agony"—it exists in this tension between acceptance and non-acceptance, belief and unbelief, falling off and being grafted in again. Christianity is called to testify to the Jews and to expect their return to the truth.⁴⁵

The polemic with Judaism, consequently, is not conditioned merely by political circumstances, but is in the very essence of Christianity. It was not only inherited by Russia from Byzantium, but absorbed with (Orthodox) Christianity. The most "theological" among the gospels—the Gospel of John—constantly mentions "Jews," almost as a synonym of unbelief and resistance to God's will,⁴⁶ and the Orthodox liturgy, especially services for Holy Week, are permeated with "anti-Judaic" comments. There has been no century when patristic authors and prominent theologians have not spoken or written against Judaism. The *Paley* just "goes with the flow"—reminds the Jews of their blindness and calls them back. In all probability, this is just a literary device, a means to stimulate the Orthodox reader to ponder the magnificent truths of Christianity. If the author of the *Tolkovaya Paleya* had wanted to create a purely anti-Jewish work, he could

⁴⁵ For these classical Christian views on non-Christian Jews, see the *Epistle of Barnabas*, St. Justin's *Dialogue With Trypho*, Tertullian's *Against the Jews*, St. Hippolytus of Rome's *Against the Jews* and *On the Antichrist*, St. Gregory of Nyssa's *Great Catechism*, St. Aphraates' *Demonstrations*, St. John Chrysostom's *Homilies Against the Jews*, St. Ambrose's *Epistles* 72–75, St. Augustine's *Sermon Against the Jews*. On the final conversion of (a part of) the Jewish people which should occur just before the end of the world and about which at least two dozen of the Church Fathers speak, see Chrysostom's *Homily on the Epistle to the Romans* XIX, Augustine's *City of God* XX, 29, St. John Damascene's *Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* IV, 26. These are just a few significant titles from the early period; otherwise, it seems there were few patristic authors who did not write against the Jews. A recent major study discussing Christian attitude towards the Jews is by H. Schrekenberg, *Die christlichen Adversus-Judaeos-Texte*, 3 vols. Europäische Hochschulschriften Reihe XXIII-Theologie, vols. 172, 335, 497 (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1995 [2nd ed.], 1997 [3rd ed.], 1994).

⁴⁶ On this remark, see the Roman Catholic commentary on the Gospel of John, appended to the so-called *Jerusalem Bible* (New York: Doubleday, 2000). The *Judaica* agrees, in the article "Christianity," see *Judaica* 1997.



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have used many more anti-Judaic texts, which he almost certainly had at his disposal.⁴⁷

Next, the *Tolkovaya* does not show the vehemence that is so characteristic of anti-Latin Old Russian writings.⁴⁸ Muslims and Islam in the *Tolkovaya* are always preceded by the epithet “filthy,” while the Jews are spared any such designation. V. Istrin finds the address “O, wretched Jew” not at all despising but rather pitying, compassionate, and fatherlike-instructive.⁴⁹

And lastly, it should not be overlooked that the title of the work is *Tolkovaya – Interpretative*, which indicates its key function, although some copies have extra words “Which is Against the Jew” (яже на Иудея). The author is a master of typology, regardless of where he found his data. For each Old Testament event he handles, he finds a New Testament parallel. Would that be an accomplishment of a man who just wants to rebuke Jews?

⁴⁷ Pereswetoff-Morath 2002: 52.

⁴⁸ St. Theodosius of Kiev explicitly states that “even that what the Jews do not do, they [Latins] do.” See Chapter 37 in the *Paterik of the Kievan Caves Monastery*, “The Question of the Pious Prince Izyaslav About the Latins.” The critical edition is *Киево-Печерський патерик*, ed. Д. И. Абрамович [D. I. Abramovich] (Kiev, 1931).

⁴⁹ Истрин, *Замечания* and Истрин 1922 (2003).