



Anna Rozonoer

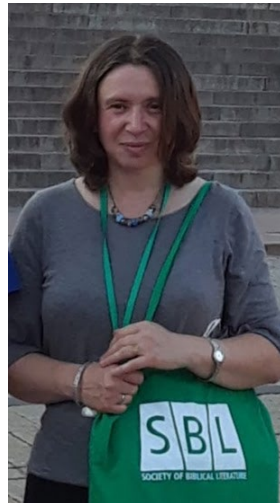
4 Maccabees in the Georgian Bible: A Gem in the History of Biblical Canon “Ins and Outs”

Abstract

The non-canonical book of 4 Maccabees is printed only in the Georgian Bible, constituting a unique case amidst the Orthodox Bibles' current editions. This paper researches the history of 4 Maccabees as the book made its way into the Georgian canon, while exploring the more significant issues of the fluidity and flexibility of biblical canon, and tracing the history of 4 Maccabees across the other Orthodox biblical traditions.

Keywords

Old Testament, 4 Maccabees, biblical canonicity, Georgian Bible, history of Orthodox biblical canons



Dr Anna Rozonoer, PhD in Biblical Studies, Hebrew Bible, Boston University, 2014, Independent Scholar, Adjunct Assistant Professor at Hellenic College, Brookline, MA, USA

The Georgian Orthodox Bible is the only contemporary Orthodox Bible containing the book of 4 Maccabees. Today, this book has disappeared from all the other Orthodox versions that used to contain it as a non-canonical book and has only remained in the Georgian one. This paper attempts to get a better feel for the fluidity of the boundaries of the biblical canon¹ based on the history of 4 Maccabees vis-à-vis its presence in the Georgian Bible and, in a broader context, tracing the appearance and disappearance of the book in other biblical traditions.

As far as the literary history of 4 Maccabees goes, Christian transmission preserves all Jewish-Greek works, 4 Maccabees among them. 4 Maccabees appears in two of the three great uncial manuscripts of the Septuagint, Codex Sinaiticus, and Codex Alexandrinus.² The two traditions are different, and most of the early editors considered the Sinaiticus manuscript to be less influen-

¹ For a comprehensive discussion and analysis of the canonical traditions, see Lee Martin McDonald and James A. Sanders, eds. *The Canon Debate* (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002) and E. Becker, O. Gußmann, N. Irrgang, & S. Scholz, *Kanon in Konstruktion und Dekonstruktion* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011).

² The uncials are of the entire Bible in Greek (both Testaments). The text of the LXX, which does not exist independently as such, is reconstructed largely from the three great foundations: Sinaiticus, Vaticanus, and Alexandrinus. The remark is targeted at New Testament scholars who often refer to them as "New Testament manuscripts" (as if they did not contain books of the OT as well). This almost universal tendency stems, in part, from regarding only the Hebrew Bible as the authoritative OT. In Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Alexandrinus, all of the "deuterocanonical" books are integrated by genre among the so-called "proto-canonical" books. They are not segregated from the others, as in the Protestant manner, which has applied and popularized Jerome's negative definition of "Apocryphal" in a pejorative and now confessional manner to the books per se. The same is true for 4 Maccabees in those codices (= Bibles), fully integrated by genre.

tial.³ While the book has been lost from Codex Vaticanus,⁴ that manuscript tradition is thought to be represented by what remains in the eighth- or ninth-century Codex Venetus (where, however, chapters 5.11–12.1 are lacking). A particular group of manuscripts is the so-called Menologia tradition, where 4 Maccabees appears among the lives of the saints, organized by date. There is also a Syriac tradition in the Peshitta, whose readings have not yet been fully integrated. 4 Maccabees is preserved in the Greek Orthodox Bible as an “appendix” and is not included in the Vulgate. A Latin adaptation of the hagiographic genre entitled *Passio Sanctorum Macchaebaeorum*, dating to around the fourth century is known from over thirty manuscripts. The Slavonic translation was undertaken in Russia by Maksim Grek⁵ between 1517 and 1531. This version survives in twenty-one manuscripts and was not included in the Church-Slavonic printed Bibles. The Slavonic manuscript tradition attributes the work to Josephus, and the combination of these factors, most likely, indicates that 4 Maccabees was not part of the Church Tradition, but remained within the framework of hagiographic “literature” customarily ascribed to Josephus.

The Georgian 4 Maccabees had the following literary history. According to Natia Jangulashvili,

The biblical books of Maccabees most likely were not translated into the ancient Georgian language [as part of the biblical canon] (...) As we mentioned in the beginning, four books with the name titled “the Maccabees” are known in Bibliology. All of them are present in a printed format, in the Bible published by the Georgian Patriarchy in 1989 (in New Georgian language). It also turns out that similar to Greeks, the text of 4 Maccabees was considered by Georgians as a hagiographic composition. (...) Nowadays, there are two manuscripts (Bodleian 1 in Oxford, UK and K-1 in Kutaisi, Georgia, dating

³ M. Coogan, ed. *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Books of the Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), v. 1, p. 32.

⁴ Codex Vaticanus does not contain *any* of the Maccabean books.

⁵ Known otherwise as Maximos the Greek or Maximus Tribolles.

back to the eleventh and sixteenth centuries respectively) presenting one and the same Georgian translation (with minor orthographic differences) of the fourth book of Maccabees.⁶

This historical gist for the Georgian 4 Maccabees, a twofold conclusion, is corroborated by Ketevan Gadiliya, a historian of the Georgian Bible:

- a) The old Georgian translation is kept in two manuscripts (in Oxford and Kutaisi) and *was never part of the Bible but was used as a hagiographic composition.*
- b) 4 Maccabees was translated into modern Georgian only once in 1989 for the contemporary edition of the Bible in 1989.⁷

This unusual path of 4 Maccabees' entry into the canon differs drastically from more predictable canonical "comings and goings." ⁸ These twofold facts are the hard data for the inner Georgian history of 4 Maccabees; the hagiographic composition from a very early period, and its eventual translation and inclusion in the Bible in 1989, lay a very important path of inquiry to be followed for future research. It would be essential to find the editor-in-chief or the publisher of the 1989 edition, since that person would be qualified to answer the question of why the decision to include 4 Maccabees into the Bible was made and who made the decision. No secondary literature and no "history of reception" are, unfortunately, yet available for this discussion. Thus, a certain amount of personal correspondence with scho-

⁶ N. Jangulashvili. "For Correlation of Maccabees Biblical Books and Georgian Translations of the Hagiographic Composition." *The Kartvelologist: Journal of Georgian Studies* 26 (2017).

⁷ See K. Gadiliya, "Notes on the History of Georgian Bible Translation," *The Bible Translator* 62/1, p. 49 (46-54): "The Bible of 1989 is a new translation into modern Georgian."

⁸ For the purposes of a comparative study, a history of 4 Maccabees in the Romanian Bible will be traced in the course of the paper.

lars on the subject in this interim period inevitably finds its way into the present article.

The latter part of the inquiry, as to which “legislative body” had made the decision to include 4 Maccabees into the 1989 edition, leaves us potentially with the following two options: the academic editorial board or the church hierarchy. If the decision was made by an academic council, the answer to the question “why” becomes less significant since academic-based decisions tend to be all-inclusive for scholarly purposes. If, however, the decision was made by the Church hierarchy, this inclusion would open up interesting issues; in this case, we may discover some unusual, peculiar, and “personal” reasons, rather than generic causes, by which biblical books commonly make their way in and out of the canon. Almost certainly, these reasons would be related to the paths of Georgian Church history. In addition to shedding light on the question at hand (i.e., that of Georgian history of biblical canon), this latter case scenario (the ecclesiastical decision of including the book into the Bible) would also elucidate the patterns by which biblical books appear and disappear from Orthodox biblical canons at large.

These invaluable leads have been provided by Anna Kharanauli, professor of Old Georgian language and textual criticism and a specialist in the early Georgian Bible translation from the Septuagint.⁹ It followed from her correspondence that it was the idea of the coordinator of the 1989 edition, Fr. Peter (Baramidze), to include the translation into the Bible, and Patriarch Ilia II gave his blessing.¹⁰ This biblical edition had a note in the

⁹ I owe this invaluable contact to the mediation of a renowned Orthodox Russian theologian residing in Georgia, Archimandrite Rafail (Karelin).

¹⁰ Anna Kharanauli, in correspondence with the author, October 10, 2019.

preface about the non-canonical status of 4 Maccabees.¹¹ The following explanation for that unique late inclusion has been given: during Soviet times, this was the only opportunity to publish the Bible. Therefore, they tried to publish everything that was ever connected to the Bible in the Georgian tradition:

“they tried to publish everything that has ever been connected to the Bible in the Georgian tradition. The second(ary) reason was: in that historical context, the story of 4 Maccabees - i.e., the faithfulness to the faith of the Fathers and the heroism - seemed very relevant.”¹²

To shed light on the historical, theological, and cultural phenomenon of the life of biblical books, this scenario of 4 Maccabees entering the Georgian Bible needs to be put into the context of the book's rare presence in other traditions. We will consider its former presence in the Romanian Orthodox Bible, which yields valuable insight into the application of the criteria of canonicity for biblical books at large. 4 Maccabees is no longer printed in the Romanian Bible. 4 Maccabees came into the Romanian Bible via the Alexandrian codex tradition. Eugen

¹¹ Here, a small digression on the following topic would be appropriate: how “canonical” has the book become (if it did become somewhat “canonical”) as a result of its inclusion into the edition of the Bible, and, thus, how strictly canonically necessary was that note in the edition about the non-canonicity of the book? What is the exact implication of that remark? This question should be brought up because, this is essentially the meta-theme of the paper, if we were to abstract ourselves from the historical details. “Canonicity” here has to be distinguished from the canonicity of the canons of the Ecumenical Councils. Aside from these rather strictly defined axioms, the notion of “canonicity” is fairly local. It is determined by each local tradition—with the capital or lower-case letter—individually and is subject to modification within the framework of these traditions.

¹² The translator of the 4 Maccabees from Greek is Irina Garakanidze, author of the dissertation “Interpretations of Pythagorean Fragments on the Basis of Philological Analysis” (Tbilisi, 1984).

Munteanu's "A Brief History of the Romanian Biblical Tradition" yields the following chronology:

- Old Milescu's Bible, 1688 (BB): 4 Maccabees is present
- Second complete edition, Blaj Bible (Samuil Micu), 1795: 4 Maccabees is retained
- Petersburg Bible (1819): 4 Maccabees is taken out
- 5-volume Filotei's Bible, 1853–1856: 4 Maccabees is still retained, despite its deletion from the previous Petersburg edition¹³

To place the Romanian 4 Maccabees in its biblical context, the gist of the bibliographical history demonstrates that the first two translations made after the Greek Septuagint have an almost identical plan (Pentateuch - historical books - didactic-poetic books - prophetic books):

1. The Bible of Bucharest (1688, reed. 1988) contains the OT translated after The Septuagint of Frankfurt (ed., 1597) by Nicolae Milescu. In addition to the main preference, Milescu and his reviewers appealed (for the clarification of the obscure passages) to the only full version of the Bible in Slavonic (printed at Ostrog, Ukraine in 1581), as well as the Vulgate of Anders (1565) and to other Western editions of the Septuagint, such as R. Daniel's edition (London, 1653; Cambridge, 1665).
2. The Bible of Blaj (1795, reed. 2000) contains the OT translated after the Septuagint of Franeker (1709) by the hieromonk Samuil Micu.

Since the Septuagint of Frankfurt (1597) was a Protestant edition, it strictly separated OT books only in the Greek canon of the Septuagint, not in the Hebrew canon, in a section of the

¹³ E. Munteanu, "A Brief History of the Romanian Biblical Tradition," *Biblicum Jassyense: Romanian Review for Biblical Philology and Hermeneutics* 3 (2012), 15–53.

"Apocrypha," which separates the OT (39 books) from the NT (27 books) and contains in disarray the following: Psalm 151, Tobit, Judith, Baruch, the Epistle of Jeremiah, The Song of the Three Young Men, 3 Ezra, The Wisdom of Solomon, The Wisdom of Sirah, The Story of Susanna, Bel, and the Dragon, 1–3 Maccabees, and "Josephus" (meaning 4 Maccabees), to which Samuel Micu adds the Prayer of Manasseh.¹⁴ With the single exception of the book of "Josephus" (4 Maccabees), a book published only in the editions of 1688, 1795, and 1854–56, all the Romanian Bibles published between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries retain the Protestant-inspired pattern: OT, Apocrypha, NT. It seems that the unique prestige of the Bible of Bucharest (1688) has thus determined the disposition of the OT books in all its Orthodox editions (including the Greek Catholic edition of Blaj, 1795) until today. Their publishers/com-pilers/makers do not seem to have noticed the "Protestant origin" of the OT book division.

According to Munteanu, the first Romanian Bible, Milescu's text of the OT in the Bible of Bucharest follows the complete Slavonic version of the Bible published at Ostrog (Ukraine) in 1581; in regard to 4 Maccabees, this statement is not true since 4 Maccabees is absent from the Ostrog Bible.¹⁵ This first Romanian Bible, the Bible of Bucharest, appeared as the fruit of the efforts of the intellectual milieu to a great extent created and supported by Prince Serban Cantacuzino.¹⁶ This may help explain, at least historically, the fact that through the Protestant-inspired division of the OT, his edition explicitly contradicted the Confession

¹⁴ Mihai Ciurea, in correspondence with the author, August 13, 2020.

¹⁵ Munteanu, "A Brief History," 33.

¹⁶ For Cantacuzino's role on the Romanization of Romanian society, see P. Sugar, *Southeastern Europe under Ottoman Rule, 1354–1804* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1977; rep. 1983).

of Anti-Protestant Faith of the Patriarch Dositei of Jerusalem ("The Shield of the Orthodoxy"), approved by the Synod of Jerusalem (1672).

The late-seventeenth-century Romanian biblical landscape was thus dominated more by the principles of a critical and comparative interpretation of the biblical text rather than by referencing by the previous translators to the traditional Slavonic text. Miles-cu's successors took over and perfected his version, and this practice could be said to have become a brand name of sorts for the OT approach in the Romanian biblical tradition: the presence of all the deuterocanonical or apocryphal books, except 4 Maccabees ("The Treaty on Dominant Reason"), which was later maintained only by Samuil Micu in 1795 and by Philotei, in 1854–56. The second complete edition by Samuil Bicu (1795) clarifies some obscure passages and replaces regionalisms, but otherwise keeps the number and succession of the biblical books, including the Apocrypha, and 4 Maccabees among them (calling it the "Treaty on Dominant Reason"). The book is taken out from the Petersburg Bible, the third traditional edition of 1819 - "a commission from the Russian Biblical Society for the benefit of the Romanians living in Bessarabia. It is almost a perfect reproduction of the Blaj Bible (1795)," and it follows the Alexandrian canon; yet, 4 Maccabees is taken out.¹⁷ This must have been caused by the allegiance to the "Russian canon," which never included 4 Maccabees. In everything else, the Petersburg Bible adhered to "the Alexandrian canon" of the Bible of Blaj.

¹⁷ Munteanu, "A Brief History," 38. The reason that 4 Maccabees was excluded is unrelated to the Romanian tradition proper. This book was absent from the Slavonic text of the Bible used in Russia and was consequently not on the list of the "biblical" books of the Russian Biblical Society that had prepared the edition. The logic behind the exclusion, as before, has to do with the *local* tradition of canonicity.

The fourth edition, the five-volume Buzău Bible, is published by Philotei, Bishop of Buzău (1854–56), and this is almost a verbatim copy of the Blaj Bible. Philotei's text observes the Alexandrian canon, including all the deuterocanonical books of the Old Testament *and* 4 Maccabees.¹⁸ The publisher explains the presence of the book by his respect toward local tradition. Here is the quote that perhaps serves as an explanation par excellence for keeping a non-canonical work in the Bible:

This book is not known by the Holy Fathers as Godly, neither does it feature in Greek editions,¹⁹ and therefore we have not translated it anew in this edition, but rather left it as it was in the Old Romanian Bible and only put it here because it was in that book; otherwise it cannot belong with the Holy Scripture;²⁰ and therefore in this new print we have left it untouched, so as we can all remember the ancient way of speaking Romanian.²¹

Two reasons for keeping 4 Maccabees emerge here. The first and primary reason (the text was "left it as it was ... and only put it here because it was in that book [the Old Romanian Bible]") was the respect for the biblical local tradition as it was, giving patristic consideration a relatively secondary place. The secondary reason ("so we can all remember the ancient way of speaking Romanian") was purely cultural, emphasizing both the language and the literary tradition (the way of speaking

¹⁸ This is not too surprising, since this is just the replication of a traditional edition. More surprising is the fact that the publisher deems it necessary to justify himself because of that decision—obviously under the influence of "external" notions about the "canonicity" of one or another tradition.

¹⁹ A key consideration: the publisher feels obliged to justify himself for the lack of correspondence to current rules of propriety!

²⁰ An implicit sly look at Milescu and other impious publishers for daring to place such a book into the biblical canon?

²¹ Munteanu, "A Brief History," 39.

Romanian in that particular text). In other words, the editor justifies the maintenance of the entire “Alexandrian canon” of the Bible of Blaj by general cultural arguments and by respect for the local tradition (i.e., for the sake of the past and of the old Romanian language, not necessarily because it would find its place between the books of Holy Scripture). This was the farewell of 4 Maccabees in the Romanian tradition.

Finally, the Bible of Șaguna (1856-58) gives up 4 Maccabees, because (disregarding the use of the full text of the Bible of Blaj) the Orthodox editor does not recognize it; he even skips it in the introduction, despite a very thorough mentioning of all the other previous Romanian editions, and assumes it through the St. Petersburg edition (1819). The appeal made by the Orthodox Metropolitan Andrei Șaguna to the Bible of Bucharest, the first complete Romanian edition of the Bible (as stated in the introduction, “The language of the Bible for a people can only be done once”) has a double purpose, according to Mihai Ciurea. On the one hand, it aims to conceal the Bible of Blaj, the real source. On the other, it aims to differentiate its readership from the Greek Catholics, who at that time presented (in Șaguna’s opinion) a danger to the Transylvanian Orthodox believers, including all kinds of theological complications. For this reason, the at that time so-called “Russian canon” clearly got preference over the “Greek” one. Șaguna, being a greatly influential figure among the Romanian Orthodox people, perpetuated this direction that the canon of the Romanian Bibles would be following vis-à-vis 4 Maccabees.²²

²² See Mihai Ciurea’s enlightened discussion in “The Most Important Romanian Versions of the Bible,” *Numarul* 11 (2010), 63–84, <http://npissh.ro/ro/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2015/12/The-most-Important-Romanian.pdf>.

The “collection” of biblical canon histories regarding 4 Maccabees is miniscule, but enlightening regarding the problematic of this book per se and the issue of biblical canon as a living organism. More interesting facts have come up in the course of this research. Correspondence with Alexey Somov, the consultant of translation projects from the Institute of Translation of the Bible in Moscow, yielded the following insights:

Sometimes these decisions are being made in completely unexpected ways. For example, 4 Maccabees was about to be included in the edition of a full Azerbaijan Bible that is now being prepared for print. Yet, as a consultant, I deemed this unnecessary, since then, we would be having problems with the official recognition of this Bible in the Local Orthodox and Catholic communities. Otherwise, however, the translation has been made, it’s kept “in a locked drawer.”²³

This case is quite different from both the Georgian and the Romanian scenarios. In the case of the Azerbaijan Bible, the local Church tradition is lacking, and the translation is “forced” to be functioning within the framework of other traditions (here, of the Russian and Roman-Catholic ones). Thus, it becomes impossible to change the non-existent tradition (unlike in the Georgian and Romanian situations). The decision not to include the book is the only possible one (even if one thinks about the translation for church use only, aside from the academic purposes). Perhaps the translation could be printed as an appendix to the text, but this is a rather unconventional (and perhaps inappropriate) solution for a Church Bible.

To distill and take these three samples of 4 Maccabees from periods spanning from the seventeenth through the twenty-first

²³ Alexy Somov, in correspondence with the author, September 20, 2019.

century provides the following conclusions.²⁴ The Georgian model speaks of keeping a book for the sake of the biblical and cultural traditions, as well as of forming a metaphorical response to the circumstances of oppression. The Romanian model is an example of the emphasis on linguistic and cultural values and that of observing the dominant master's ways (the "Russian canon" - ironic, with respect to the content of the book under question). The Azerbaijani model, in a completely unprecedented (but most likely a promising new way, given the activity of the modern-day Bible translation projects) is a book grown "artificially" and entering a company of similarly "artificially grown Bibles," either living in a non-endemic tradition or locked in a table drawer until better times.²⁵

"The Georgian model" gives rise to another issue with regard to the hierarchal decision to publish everything that has ever been connected to the Bible in the Georgian tradition: Church biblical tradition does not boil down to *biblical editions* (this must be an important lesson in consideration of the question of biblical canonicity at large). Its primary significance is in the liturgical usage and, contingent upon that, in its usage according to the patristic Tradition of which hagiography is a part. In this sense, even if 4 Maccabees was never part of the Georgian editions of the Bible, it was always part of the Georgian *Church Tradition*

²⁴ For an overview of the fluidity and flexibility of the canon, see Einar Thomassen, ed., *Canon and Canonicity: The Formation and Use of Scripture* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press and University of Copenhagen, 2010), with its discussion of biblical canon's functioning as "norms and lists," or as "prescriptive" vs. "descriptive" entities accordingly.

²⁵ Curiously, the essential, content-related patristic criteria for including or excluding a book do not appear to be a consideration—at least not in the textual history of this book

(and not just a cultural tradition).²⁶ Concerning the Romanian tradition, it appears that it was indeed reduced to the editions of the Bible. In this regard, the presence of the book was indeed more culturally - than ecclesiastically significant. Yet, of course, the respect for tradition properly stays important for all Orthodox nations.

With this comparison in mind, the history of 4 Maccabees in the Georgian Bible again comes into focus with its underlying, essential motifs for the inclusion of this book, translated for the first time from the Greek around 1989, having a strong connection to the existence/dominance of the USSR and the reception of the regime by the faithful. In the enterprise of the canonical inclusion of the book, the faithful are represented by the figure of Patriarch Ilia II, whereas the attitude toward the regime is reflected in his blessing to publish the book. 4 Maccabees is now not only given the chance to exist as a non-canonical book being part of the Bible that has not had a chance to be published, but the book's particulars and distinctive features are an oblique answer and a denunciation of persecutions imposed by the dominant master. Indeed, the special relevance of 4 Maccabees comes through as, apart from the fierce battles fought by the Jews, one can find stories about spiritual strength and sacrifices for religion in the books of 4 Maccabees. The book, as is well known, appears Hellenized in language, techniques, and philosophical discourse, but the idea of the story is to define oppression as a Hellenizer that tries to divert the Jews. As Bragin'skaya, points out, analyzing the characters' speeches invented by the author:

²⁶ The same paradigmatic thinking seems to be true of the Russian tradition, but since this article deals specifically with the biblical life of 4 Maccabees, that topic goes beyond the limits of the paper.

In the speeches which pious Jews could not have made, the author creates a parody to Hellenic eloquence, whereas the models of behavior of the Hellenistic philosopher turn out to be a fainthearted and cowardly behavior... Into the mother's encomium, once again is included the polemic with the Stoic teaching about Nature. Torah is a better teacher of virtues than Nature is.²⁷

4 Maccabees contains not only the literal description of battles but also stories of spiritual fortitude and legends about the self-sacrifice of the defenders of Mosaic Law.²⁸ Even the lengthy theoretical reasoning is less Stoic than it seems; this book's emphasis is different from Epictetes's or Seneca's and from the whole Stoic idea of obliteration of passions.²⁹ In 4 Maccabees, we

²⁷ Nina V. Braginskaya, *The Books of Maccabees* (Moscow: Bridges of the Culture/Gesharim, 2014), p. 402. (My translation from the original Russian – A.R.). DeSilva concurs with latter point: "The martyr's choice, then to die for the Torah rather than accept assimilation into the dominant culture represents a choice in which all the virtues prized by that dominant culture are combined": *4 Maccabees: The Introduction and Commentary to the Apocrypha*, Septuagint Commentary Series (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2006), p. 86. See an elaboration of this discussion in D.A. deSilva's "Using the Master's Tools to Shore up Another's House: A Postcolonial Analysis of 4 Maccabees," *JBL* 126/1 (2007), pp. 99–127.

²⁸ Braginskaya concludes concisely, "The author (...) proves the supremacy of the Jewish Wisdom over the Hellenistic ethics as a means of cultivating virtue, whereas his own accomplishments are in the area of theology." *The Books of Maccabees*, p. 410.

²⁹ In Epictetus's thought, passions must be "first weakened and then obliterated." *Discourses* 2.18, 11b–14. Noteworthy also is the number of scholars who called Eleazar presented as a "New Socrates." See the following: Marie-F. Baslez, "The Origin of the Martyrdom Images," in *The Books of the Maccabees: History, Theology, Ideology*, ed. Géza G. Xeravits and József Zsengellér (Leiden: Brill, 2007), pp. 113–30; Gregory E. Sterling, "Mors Philosophi: The Death of Jesus in Luke," *HTR* 94 (2001), pp. 383–402 (esp. 392–93). One of the striking distinctions is Eleazar's sentence namely due to his faithfulness to the Torah and his εὐσέβεια (4 Macc. 5.18, 24, 31, 38; 6.2, 22; 7.1, 3–4, 16); whereas Socrates is put to death because he went against the laws of Athens, his official charges are on impiety (ἀσέβεια) and the beliefs and practices that are in conflict with the laws of the city-state.

discern *mastery* over passions, which is rather an Orthodox understanding, more in line with Christian asceticism; the teaching about passions in 4 Maccabees acquires a patristic accent. Not imperturbability, but obedience to Torah is the goal, and that puts a slightly different emphasis on the concept of mastery over passions: instead of the Stoic enduring, it becomes more akin to the re-directing of passions. Seneca, in his treaty "De constantia sapientis," elaborates this foundational dogma of the Stoic ethics: "The wise man can receive neither injury nor insult." A wise man knows that there is only one sure kind of possession - the possession of virtue - whereas the rest remains at the mercy of the powers that are not subject to us. How can one remain free in the face of violence? The only way is to ignore, to stay imperturbable, serenely calm. Yet, in 4 Maccabees, we have the apology of suffering for the sake of faithfulness to God, rather than the apology of imperturbability. The suffering that is endured with dignity is noble if it is being taken for the sake of faithfulness to God and the Law. This is what Eleazar, the mother and the author of 4 Maccabees calls the brothers to do (6.22; 16.1, 18-19; 18.1). The two main terms used in 4 Maccabees are *καρτερία* (tenacity, endurance, self-mastery, self-control) and *ὑπομονή* (steadfastness).³⁰ Yet, there is no hint at any kind of superhuman absence of invulnerability and absence of trepidation. On the contrary, the author emphasizes (quite graphically) bodily tortures in order to tell about the power of the spirit that rises above the pain. This graphic portrayal, according to David A. deSilva, is

"to allow the audience to understand that there is, in fact, no passion, no pain, no feat that the pious-minded person cannot

³⁰ The verb ὑπομένω is used fifteen times in 4 Maccabees, compared to only twice in 2 Maccabees.

overcome if he or she keeps the eyes fixed on his or her duty to God and on God's promise to the faithful."³¹

The imperturbability of the spirit then, as Reddit aptly notes, is "only the formal and not the crucial focus,"³² the real focus being the obedience to the Torah. The philosophical notion becomes a tool for a point beyond Stoic philosophy.

After the quasi-philosophical lengthy introduction, the narrative switches to the Seleucids, including the attitude of Antiochus III and his son, Antiochus Epiphanes, toward the Jews: how first the father and then the son fought against them; how they demanded obedience and rejection of Jewish laws; and how they appointed ideologically likeminded High Priests. The martyrdom and praise of Eleazar is followed by the scenes of the children's torture and encouragement of each other (chapters 8 through 13). The second reason given by Kharanauli about the historical context in which the book was finally translated and published, making the book seem especially relevant in Soviet Georgia, leads to the following tentative (prior to a documented history or an interview with the editor-in-chief or the church hierarchy) conclusion. The history of the USSR gave birth to thousands of martyrs, and 4 Maccabees must have seemed particularly pertinent in that period. Moreover, the book may have highlighted something intrinsically "Georgian" for the Georgians from the story of the elder Eleazar, the seven brothers, and their mother, striking a congenial note to the Georgian temperament and the people's endurance of all the yokes, foreign dominions, and tyranny it underwent from the Arabs, Persians, Turks, Mongols,

³¹ D. A. deSilva, *4 Maccabees: Introduction and Commentary on the Greek Text in Codex Sinaiticus*, Septuagint Commentary Series (Leiden: Brill, 2006), p. 216 (on 14.9–10).

³² P.D. Reddit, "The Concept of *Nomos* in Fourth Maccabees," *CBQ* 45 (1983), pp. 249–70.

Lezghians—all precursors to the Soviet era. If Georgians were to remain an identity (as they have) without assimilating under despotic rule, it would have been an identity of tightness akin to the first person plural pronouns used so dramatically in 4 Macc 6 and 17, such as the first Eleazar's exhortation in this series: "Never may we, the children of Abraham, think so basely that out of cowardice we feign a role unbecoming to us!" (6.17). In these speeches, the author, through the mouth of Eleazar, invokes the Jews of the diaspora living amidst the pagans to remain loyal to the way of the Torah and (thereby) their identity:

"The Maccabean martyrs provide the model for honorable and praiseworthy response to the demands and tensions of the encounter with the Greco-Roman world. 4 Maccabees thus challenges those wavering in their commitment to Judaism as a result of the encounter with Greco-Roman society."³³

The main affliction Israel suffers in 4 Maccabees is the occupation by the foreign oppressors, and the despots are never indifferent to the Jews' adherence to Torah. The Hellenizing reforms are introduced in 3.21 and 4.19. Persecution befalls the faithful who follow Kashrut laws and circumcision (4.24–5.3).

In 4 Maccabees, Israel suffers many disasters - especially oppressive occupation by a foreign despot - because her apostate leaders disregard the Torah and introduce Hellenizing reforms (3.21; 4.19–21). In this context, those who continue to practice circumcision and food laws prescribed by Torah are persecuted severely (4.24–5.3). In a similar way, Georgia had undergone numerous attacks with atrocities against the Christians: the demolition of towns and villages; the destruction of crops. Acceptance and subsequent keeping of Christianity by the ruler every time would be invariably dangerous for the country,

³³ D. A. deSilva, *Despising Shame: Honor Discourse and Community Maintenance in the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1995), p. 142.

heralding carnage from the heterodox. Beginning from the first king of Kartli, Mirian, in the fourth century, took on Christianity, thereby facing the prospect of Iran's revenge. Mirian had a choice: either to wipe out all the Christians in the country with St. Nina at the head or to devote himself to Christ and to be ready to drink the cup of death with his people.³⁴ The same dilemma would face the ruler each and every time, up to the nineteenth century: Christianity in Iberia was a question of physical life or death at the threat of external enemy: "deny Christ, and we'll give you life." That is the reason that there are so many martyrs from the royal and hierarchal milieu within the host of the Georgian saints.

A brief list of these witnesses, especially those invested with royal or priestly authority, like priest Eleazar from 4 Maccabees, seems to be appropriate here.

- Holy martyr queen Shushanik (475)
- Holy great martyr queen Ketevan (1624)
- Kartalinian king Luarsab
- Holy martyr king Mirdat
- Holy great martyrs David and Konstantin, the Argvetian princes (740)
- Princes Bidzin, Elizbar, and Shalva, dukes of Ksan;
- Hieromartyr Catholicos Evdemoz (1642)
- Hieromartyr Dositheos, the metropolitan of Tbilisi (1759)
- Hieromartyr Aviv, the Bishop of Nekress (VI)
- Hieromartyr Neophit, the Bishop of Urbnis (VII)
- Hieromartyr Ioann (IX)

³⁴ There is a wonderful legend about the Lord helping Mriain choose the Christian destiny of Kartli: the king prayed to the "God of Nino."

- Six hundred venerable fathers mortified in David-Garedzhi wilderness who suffered at the hand of the Persian shah Abbas I
- One hundred thousand Tbilisi martyrs were killed by the last ruler of the Khwarezmian Empire, Jalal ad-Din, in 1227
- Nine brothers Kherkheulidze with their mother and sister and nine thousand Georgians with them killed at the Marabdin field (1625)
- The neomartyrs of Iberia who died from the Soviet regime soon after the October revolution: Nazarius, metropolitan of Katais-Gainat; priests German, Ierofey, Simon, Deacon Vissarion

This martyrology is far from full. All of Georgia is suffused with the blood of the martyrs, and the royal or priestly leaders of the people are prevalent.³⁵

Georgia was located at the fatal boundary across which the heterodox world was found, and it became the breakwater against which the waves of Islam would smash. Only through its unbending confession of faith, through its readiness to shed blood for Christianity, with the entire nation, with all their kings, prelates, and princes at the head, was it able to withstand, to keep and to manifest the witnesses of its faith and faithfulness - just like in the story of 4 Maccabees. 17.7 and 17.16 pose the following rhetorical questions:

“If it were possible for us to paint the history of your religion as an artist might, would not those who first beheld it have shuddered as they saw the mother of the seven children enduring their varied

³⁵ The “martyric list” is taken from the lyric description (in Russian) of Olesya Nikolayeva’s *Georgian Rhapsody* (Moscow: Sretensky Monastery, 2016).

tortures to death for the sake of religion? (...) Who did not admire the athletes of the divine legislation? Who were not amazed?"

Just as in 1.11, 6.11, 9.26, and later in 17.23–24 and 18.3, even the despot with his retinue is amazed at the Jews' endurance. This is a great rhetorical encouragement and admonition to the Jews of the diaspora to stay faithful to the Torah under persecution. As the tradition for a small nation of holding steadfast under tyrannical oppression continues into our time, the act of translating and publishing this Hellenistic heroic epic of faith by the Georgian Church became both a monument and an encouragement to its faithful.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Baslez, M-F. "The Origin of the Martyrdom Images," in *The Books of the Maccabees: History, Theology, Ideology*, ed. Géza G. Xeravits and József Zsengellér, pp. 113–30. Leiden: Brill, 2007
- Braginskaya, N.V. *The Books of Maccabees*. Moscow: Bridges of the Culture/Gesharim, 2014.
- Ciurea, M. "The Most Important Romanian Versions of the Bible." *Numarul 11* (2010), pp. 63–84, <http://npissh.ro/ro/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2015/12/The-most-Important-Romanian.pdf>.
- Coogan, M., ed. *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Books of the Bible*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.
- DeSilva, D.A., *4 Maccabees: Introduction and Commentary on the Greek Text in Codex Sinaiticus*, Septuagint Commentary Series. Leiden: Brill, 2006.
- . *4 Maccabees: The Introduction and Commentary to the Apocrypha*, Septuagint Commentary Series. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2006.
- . *Despising Shame: Honor Discourse and Community Maintenance in the Epistle to the Hebrews*. Atlanta: Scholars, 1995.
- . "Using the Master's Tools to Shore up Another's House: A Postcolonial Analysis of 4 Maccabees." *JBL* 126/1 (2007), pp. 99–127.
- Gadiliya, K. "Notes on the History of Georgian Bible Translation." *The Bible Translator* 62/1, pp. 46–54.

Jangulashvili, N. "For Correlation of Maccabees Biblical Books and Georgian Translations of the Hagiographic Composition." *The Kartvelologist: Journal of Georgian Studies* 26 (2017).

Munteanu, E. "A Brief History of the Romanian Biblical Tradition," *Biblicum Jassyense: Romanian Review for Biblical Philology and Hermeneutics* 3 (2012), pp. 15–53.

Nikolayeva, O. *Georgian Rhapsody*. Moscow: Sretensky Monastery, 2016.

Reddit, P. D., "The Concept of *Nomos* in Fourth Maccabees." *CBQ* 45 (1983), pp. 249–70.

Sterling, G.E. "Mors Philosophi: The Death of Jesus in Luke." *HTR* 94 (2001), pp. 383–402.

Sugar, P. *Southeastern Europe under Ottoman Rule, 1354–1804*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1977; rep. 1983.

Thomassen, E., ed., *Canon and Canonicity: The Formation and Use of Scripture*. Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press and University of Copenhagen, 2010.