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## ‘Crying’ and ‘Children’ in Translations of the one Fragment of the Book of Proverbs: Possible Interpretation or the Digression from the Original?

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**Abstract.** Relevance of the problem. The subject matter related to the rendering of the Holy Writ is relevant, which is backed up in recent decades with the emerging of a large number of the Bible translations into different languages, as well as with the presence of certain fragments in the original that allow for the ambiguous interpretation. The material for the research is a fragment from the Book of Proverbs (*yassēr binḳā kī yēš tiqwā wə'el hāmītō 'al tiššā' napšekā*) (19: 18) (“Punish your son while there is hope, and do not be indignant with his cry”) in a number of the Bible translations (the Synodal translation, the King James Bible, etc.) into various languages, as well as an analysis of comments on them related to different historical periods. Scientific novelty. The paper proves the groundlessness of the statement about the interpolation of the lexeme “cry”, supposedly contained in the Russian Synodal Bible, caused by subjective reasons, and also considers the validity / wrongfulness of replacing the word “son” in it with the inclusive form “children” based on Jewish written sources. The method of the research. The article uses the method of comparative study of various translations of this fragment, identifying its interpretations contained in them and correlating them with the exegetics available in the Jewish tradition. General results: 1) The coincidence of rendering this fragment with that which we find in the King James Bible, while being different from its representation in a number of translations into other languages, allows us to put forward a hypothesis about its possible influence on the Russian text. 2) The availability of such interpretation among some interpreters, both ancient and modern, indicates in this case the absence of any deliberate distortion of the original in the Synodal translation. 3) The use of inclusive and gender-neutral forms for male people in relation to this fragment instead of those presented in the original should be qualified as a deviation from the original, since according to the norms of Biblical Hebrew, such use is permissible only when the word “son” is used in the plural form (*bānīm*), while in the singular it is not used in a similar sense.

**Key words:** original, version, Synodal Translation, King James Bible, cry, killing, comment

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## «Крик» и «Дети» в переводах одного фрагмента Притчей Соломона: допустимая интерпретация или отход от оригинала?

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**Аннотация.** Актуальность проблемы: тематика, относящаяся к передаче Священного Писания, является актуальной, что определяется появлением в последние десятилетия большого количества переводов Библии на разные языки, а также наличием в оригинале фрагментов, допускающих неоднозначную интерпретацию. Материалом исследования является фрагмент из Притчей Соломона (*yassēr binḳā kī yēš tiqwā wə'el hāmīṭō 'al tiššā' napšeqā*) (19: 18) («Наказывай сына своего, доколе есть надежда, и не возмущайся криком его») в ряде переводов Библии (Синодальный перевод, Библия короля Якова и др.) на различные языки, а также анализ комментариев к ним, относящихся к различным историческим эпохам. Научная новизна: в работе доказывается необоснованность утверждения о якобы содержащейся в русском Синодальном переводе интерполяции лексемы «крик», вызванной субъективными причинами, а также рассматривается с опорой на иудейские письменные источники правомерность / неправомерность замены в ней слова «сын» инклюзивной формой «дети». Метод исследования: применяется метод сопоставительного изучения различных переводов данного фрагмента, выявления содержащихся в них его интерпретаций и соотнесения их с толкованиями, имеющимися в иудейской традиции. Основные выводы: 1) совпадение передачи данного фрагмента с той, которую находим в английской Библии короля Иакова, при отличии от его репрезентации в ряде переводов на другие языки, позволяет выдвинуть гипотезу о возможном ее влиянии на русский текст; 2) наличие подобной интерпретации у некоторых толкователей, как древних, так и современных, свидетельствует об отсутствии в данном случае какого-либо сознательного искажения оригинала в Синодальном переводе; 3) использование вместо

представленных в оригинале слов, относящихся к людям мужского пола, инклюзивных и гендерно-нейтральных форм применительно к данному фрагменту должно квалифицироваться как отклонение от подлинника, поскольку по нормам библейского иврита такое употребление допустимо только при использовании слова «сын» в форме множественного числа (*bānīm*), тогда как в единственном числе оно в подобном значении не употребляется.

**Ключевые слова:** оригинал, версия, Синодальный перевод, Библия короля Иакова, крик, умерщвление, комментарий

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## Introduction

The range of problems connected with interlanguage Bible transfer which was traditionally at the top of the ladder both in translation theory and practice (with the exception of the “official atheism” in this country) have started to attract more and more attention during the latest years. The clear evidence of this could be made by the emerging of a number of studies, while among the works in Russian one can specially distinguish this one [1].

Without concentrating on the detailed analysis of the reasons of the phenomenon mentioned above, we have to remark the following. Firstly, in the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century — the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century additional stimula were gained by the work on creating new versions of the Holy Writ in those languages which have already possessed them, and simultaneously one can observe the intensification of the activity to translate the Bible into the idioms the bearers of which haven’t got them earlier, including the peoples belonging to some other cultural and religious areas. Secondly, the activity mentioned has obtained the ability to spread over the vast ex-USSR territory as well as in many languages, represented in the Russian Federation. Thirdly, this period used to be characterized by the elaboration of quite a number of theoretical translation conceptions (e.g., theory of dynamic/formal equivalence, scopos-theory, and others), and their provisions were immediately reflected on the strategies and solutions proposed in those theoretical versions. Fourthly, in some instances, they have to solve the traditional translation task: to render in the other language the so-called “dark” or ambiguous, equivocal (and sometimes “poly-edged”) passages, which were already discussed as the problematic

ones by W. von Humboldt [2]. One of such passages is considered a maxim of the Bible Book of Solomon's Proverbs (19: 18), which in the Masoretic texts resounds as following: *yassēr binḳā kī yēš tiqwā wə'el hāmîṭô 'al tiśśā' napšekā*. The article submitted is devoted to its translation in different translation versions of the Old Testament.

### **Where does 'Crying' come from in the Synodical Translation**

In Synodical translation, this lesson is presented as follows: “Chastise your son while there's hope, and let not thy soul spare for his *crying*”.

A.S. Desnitskij, a well-known Russian biblical scholar, comments this lesson like that: “Where from did translators find this very ‘*crying*’? Most likely, they relied on their own pedagogical practice of whipping rods, but not from Hebrew or Greek or Slavonic traditions, which is true” [3]. Here comes the literary translation of the quoted lesson he suggested: “Chasten your son, wherefore there's hope, and don't strive to mortify him by your sole”, — and it doesn't contain any *crying*. As to the Slavonic text, so, as the author remarks, to understand its second piece («Наказуй сына твоего, тако бо будет благонадежен: в досаждение же не вземлися душею твоею» — lit.: “Chastise your son, so that he would be trustworthy: in molestation, don't isolate the sole of yours”) is a little bit sophisticated, and the Greek text which was initial and original for the former, differs from the Hebrew text in the corresponding phrase (εἰς δὲ ὄβριον μὴ ἐπαίρου) “the most important for the Greeks notion of ὄβρις meaning ‘overwhelming pride, arrogance, extolling’, which draw enagement upon a man” [3].

In this case, the great interest is caused by comparison of the two English translations of the Septuagint (LXX), made correspondingly by L. Brenton in the 40s of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and a group of authors in the beginning of our century (the Book of Proverbs translated by G. Cook). The first translation reads, “Chasten thy son, for so he shall be hopeful; and be not exalted in thy soul to haughtiness” [4]. And the second one is, “Discipline your son, for thus he will be hopeful, but do not be roused in your soul to hubris” [5], i.e., the key word of the Greek version was rendered by the translator using the existing borrowing in English. As to A.S. Desnitskij, he explains the sense of such rendering like this: “So to say, pedagogical efforts shouldn't be a reason of one's own pride — and modern psychologists would explain it in detail how it works when parents realize their long-standing ambitions via children” [3]. He doesn't specially discuss the reasons of such divergence, but just mentions the two textual traditions. Their existence itself is used to be explained by the fact that “the Hebrew original of the Greek Bible differed from the text which was later established as the canonic one in the Jewish tradition” [6. P. 57] (though it's hard to tell if this circumstance definitely refers to the given passage).

A.S. Desnitskij's interpretation is acknowledged by some other reliable sources if it is the Latin Vulgate (*Erudi filium tuum, dum spes est; ad interfectionem autem eius ne ponas animam tuam* [7]) or the Luther's Bible («Züchtige deinen Sohn, solange Hoffnung da ist; aber laß deine Seele nicht bewegt werden, ihn zu töten» [8]), while in both cases, the lexemes bearing the meaning of 'murder, mortification' (*interfectio* / *töten*) are pictured.

Some modern translations soothe the stylistics of this lesson. For example, one of the German translation version uses the word *misshandeln* ('ill-treat, abuse'), however, the *nota bene* explains that the Hebrew word is still literary translated as *töten* 'to kill or murder' [9]. To the said above, A.S. Desnitskij adds, "However, there is another one reading concerning hope: you may feel hopeful of something in relation to the son of yours only in the situation when you are educating him". The 1993 modern translation makes it plain with many details, 'Teach the your son and chastise him, if he's wrong. It's the only hope. If you refuse to do so, you help his degradation' [3]. The author himself while stressing his wish "to preserve the ambiguity of the original in relation to 'don't canker, bring ruin'", gives this variation, "Make wiser your son, while there's yet time, and mind: don't canker him" [3].

Anyhow, if to limit oneself to the mentioned versions, the impression might be really formed that *crying* of the quotation we're interested in, poses interpolation of the Synodical translation creators.

However, such solution poses the question — why in this case translators did prefer "personal pedagogical practice of whipping rods" to the authority of those initial texts that they rendered

As was repeatedly pointed out in specialist literature, the Synodical translation was done "from Hebrew under the guidance of the Greek Bible" which gave a reason to M.G. Seleznev to remark, "It's a unique phenomenon in the history of biblical translations, there's no other such example that I've known. As if two imperatives weighed over translators and contradicted each other. One told make a translation from Hebrew, another one told do it as if it resulted in the Greek translation" [10. P.44]. It's highly likely that the creators of the Synodical translation neglected both in course of rendering this lesson, and one might need more reasonable arguments than those given by A.S. Desnitskij. All the more so, the Slavonic version was lain "overboard", and according to M.G. Seleznev, alongside with the mentioned Hebrew-Greek dilemma, "two imperatives weighed over a translator and contradicted each other. Now one tells: write the text in Russian, another one — but in such a way it makes a Slavonic text" [10. P. 45].

Here it's useful to turn to the text of The King James Bible which officially isn't added to the Synodical translation sources. Many researchers noted that the variation proposed by the Synodical translation resembles the corresponding passage of The King Jacob's Bible, 'Chasten thy sonne while there is hope; and let

not thy soule spare for his crying' [11]. *Crying* itself combines the meanings of both *crying* and *moaning*.

To answer the question if the text of The King James Bible made *an instant influence* on the presentation of this verse in the Synodical translation, one could hardly give a definite answer. In our opinion, it's useful to take into consideration the following factors.

Firstly, to the great extent, the work on the Synodical translation represented the continuation of the Russian Biblical Society activity (1812—1826), as a result of it, the first New Testament translation into Russian emerged, and it had undergone a number of publications. In so far as, on the one hand, “the set of participants of the two translations coincided, at least in the name of Metropolitan Filaret who was the principle person both in the Russian Biblical Society <...> and the Holy Synod” [12. P. 11], and, on the other hand, some decisions of the Russian Biblical Society translation “were taken with caution to the English translation of The King James Bible” [12. P. 33], the assumption of such “caution” in course of rendering the passage under discussion doesn't curtail the grounds.

Secondly, the English version enjoyed the authority even among those who treated in moderation just the idea to translate the Bible into Russian. Thus, M.M. Slavonic language neither in accuracy nor in significance of forms which were absolutely Greek”, and he wrote to his daughter, “Read, go on reading Gospel and the New Testament on the whole in the Slavonic, but not in the Russian language. As to passages or words hard to understand, you'll easily define their sense comparing with the English version” [13].

Anyhow, the presence in The King James Bible of the variation used in the Synodical translation provides for all the reasons to assert that “*crying*” couldn't be solely treated as a result of interpolation of its creators, caused only by subjective reminiscences. However, this doesn't take off the question of what the basis is to bring the lexeme *crying* in the English translation itself. Since in the case the Masoretic text was the initial version, it's reasonable to find out if it provided for the base to such rendering and what were the understanding and commenting of the passage under the study by representatives of the Judaist tradition.

### **Lexeme “crying”: the original version and its interpretations**

Considering the task formulated in the given title seems reasonable to start with the following fact. In mid-70s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Israel there was published the Old Testament translation known as TaNaKh (according to the identification adopted in Judaism). It was carried out by D. Josiphon and designed to the Russian-speaking repatriates. The undertaking had an official character which gets the evidence due to the preface by the Israeli Minister of Religions (we preserve the spelling of the original), “Proceeding from the feeling of historical and national responsibility



and willing to give our brothers-olim TaNaKh in its full swing and beauty, the Ministry of Religions and the Ministry Immigration and of Absorption of the Israeli Government about two years ago have made a decision to publish by Mosad arav Cook the full TaNaKh text with translation into Russian and insofar, it's the first publication of the full TaNaKh translation which corresponds to the original text and its spirit <...>. Before the current text was sent into print it acquired the high evaluation and approval of the TaNaKh scholars among those was now the late Israeli State President rabbi Shneur Zalman Shazar" [14]. At this, one of the task allotted on the translation meant to change the former Russian language versions, and primarily, as it goes without saying, the change of the Synodical translation both according to religious reasons and as well, in virtue of the undesirability to use "the outdated Russian translation difficult to understand for a modern reader" and herein "made by Christians" [14].

Such orientation assumes that any influence of the Synodical translation, especially where it differs from the Masoretic text, could have hardly take place. Nevertheless, the passage we are studying now, was rendered in a such way, "Chastise you son, for there's hope, and don't be embarrassed in your soul by his moaning" [14], which fully correspond to both The King James Bible and to the Synodical translation (with regard of semantic proximity of 'crying' and 'moaning'). As The King James Bible is also a translation – according to the words of the Israeli minister quoted above — and it "was made by Christians", the hypothesis of direct borrowing from it raise doubts.

It's more reasonable and justified to look for the origins of "moaning" / "crying" in the Judaic tradition itself. And the studies of interpretations developed by its representatives during centuries demonstrate the presence of various interpretations of the given passage. The inconsistency mentioned above is governed to the greater extent by consonant character of Hebrew script allowing read differently the graphical word h-m-y-t-w — both as "his moaning", or "his mortification" [15. P. 112—113]. It's worth mentioning that the 10<sup>th</sup> century Karaite grammarian David ben Abraham Alfasi discussing a similar form (*hāmîṭō*) in the Exodus 4:24, interprets it not as "mortification" (according to the traditional understanding), but as "insurgency", "embarrassment" (*aiḥājatūn*) [20], raising it to the stem *h-m* with semantics of 'embarrassment, noise and crying', but not to the stem *m-t* with semantics of death [21. P. 446—447]. The Alfasi interpretation could serve as one more proof to confirm that during centuries in the Jewish tradition there existed two readings of the form *hāmîṭō*.

We'd like to remark that the majority of scholiasts starting from the epoch of Middle Ages, inclined to the "mortification" variation (compare the given above literary translation of A.S. Desnitskij). However, already in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, one of the outstanding representatives of Jewish philosophic thought Levi ben Gershon (in the Hebrew tradition known as RaLBaG according to the first letters acronym) suggested an interpretation of "crying of the son

chastised” [16]. The most nonconformist version also belongs to the medieval author — one of the greatest 12<sup>th</sup> century sophists Abraham ben Meir ibn Ezra who understood “mortification” either as killing by the son other people, or as the death of the son caused by other people [17]. However, the tradition representing the corresponding lexeme like “moaning” / “crying” was conserved for the whole time up to our days. It is reflected not only in TaNaKh translation. Besides the mentioned Russian version of D. Josiphon, there could be named already published in our century The Koren Jerusalem Bible, repeating the interpretation of The King James Bible: ‘Chastise thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying’ [18], as well as the works by Jewish poets of the 19—20<sup>th</sup> centuries [19. P. 535—536].

Summing up our study, we’d mention the article of one of the modern Israeli scholars (N. Meshel), who on the basis of the detailed grammatical analysis of the text makes a conclusion assuming the following interpretations:

1. (a) Chastise the son but not overdo it, so that he doesn’t die.  
(b) Don’t let your son die, chastise/discipline him.
2. Chastise your son without paying attention to his moaning / crying [15. P. 112—113]. It’s interesting to remark that the author even implies the conscious language game as to the possibility of such different interpretations [15. P. 114], however this supposition needs further studies.

We’d like to add that the translation with commentaries of M. Fox’s Proverbs which N. Meshel refers to, the acceptability is assigned to the 1 (b) interpretation: ‘Discipline your son, for there is hope, and do not desire to kill him’ [22. P. 656], with the following explanation, ‘If you neglect his discipline, it is as if you are killing him, for he will fall into bad ways and the results of your neglect will be deadly’ (compare the above understanding of this verse in the Modern Russian translation of 1993). The author mentions the interpretation with “crying” / “moaning”: “and do not pay attention to his moaning” (when he is being beaten), however, he doesn’t think it’s approved in linguistic aspect: “However, ‘lift up your soul’ does not mean ‘to pay attention’ ” [22. P. 656—657]. In other contexts, the idiom ‘lift up one’s soul’ is traditionally understood by Jewish commentators as ‘aspire’, ‘hope’, ‘rely (on)’, ‘depend on something’, ‘desire something very much so as to be ready to risk one’s life for this’, which probably made Abraham ibn Erza to interpret Pr. 19: 18 as a story of a son-killer and an outlaw, whose taking the father shouldn’t wish to have [17].

Let’s discuss the translation of the passage studied from the “The Commented Bible” of A.P. Lopukhin, published in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The text of the lesson itself is taken from the Synodical translation, “Chastise your son, while there’s hope, and resent his crying”, – however the commentary is, “According to the spirit of ancients, and the Old Testament, the All-Holy allows bodily punishments, but He cautions parents from abuse and extremes concerning them” [23. C. 476], — rather, closer to the interpretation, “don’t try to mortify



(to kill)”, because the Synodical text, to the contrary, tells about the necessity, while punishing, not to move to pity for the punishable one.

The present article doesn't set a goal to justify greater or lesser proof of any of the discussed interpretations. Still, the given facts conclusively prove that the point of “crying” appearance in the Synodical translation didn't come from “either Hebrew, or Greek, or Slavonic, which is true”, in respect to the first of the named languages one should precise – independently from being borrowed or not from The King James Bible or it was introduced according to the Jewish tradition because among the creators of the Synodical translation there were scholars quite well acquainted with it. It's convincing to give a name of one of the greatest Hebrew scholars of his time D.A. Chwolson. In “The Evidence of Translating the Holy Books of the Old Testament into Russian by Prof. V.A. Levinson and Prof. D.A. Chwolson (from the Masoretic texts)”, which was carried out in the 60s-70s of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, i.e. practically in parallel with the Synodical translation, the passage we're interested in was presented as follows, “Chastise your son, while there's hope, and resent his crying” [26], which essentially coincides with the Synodical translation (the difference between ‘scream’ and ‘crying’ we don't consider to be significant).

### **“Son” and “Children”: on the Limits of Inclusive Language in Translation**

As was demonstrated above, the interpretation and translation of the second part of the lesson under investigation made the subject of a quite substantial contradiction. The first part of the study concerning the lexeme ‘son’ (*bēn*), doesn't present linguistically any problems for in general, during centuries it was understood and translated in the similar way. Changes of the kind ‘disciple’ instead of ‘chastise’, as in the given above variation of A.S. Desnitskij, belong to the range of translational variations.

However, the phrase didn't escape the trend to introduce the so-called “inclusive language”, firstly, in the aspect of gender. In translations and interpretations of the Bible the intention to use gender-neutral language is primarily typical to male/female representatives of the so-called “feministic theology”. In respect to the question we're studying, the standpoint of the mentioned trend could be — extremely continuously and simply — phrased as follows. As the Bible is written in the “patriarchal language” there dominate the forms denoting male persons, to which the proponents of the trend named, both male and female, express strong dissent and intend to correct this “flaw”. In particular, they set up a presupposition that *implicitly* in many cases the biblical text means female persons as well which in such cases justifies either adding of corresponding lexemes (adding sisters' to ‘brothers’, or ‘daughters’ to ‘sons’ and the like), or changing them for the words equally referring to each of those (‘people’, ‘neighbors’ and the like). Because in the well-known to us Russian translations the trend under the study haven't spread,

we'd turn to translations into other languages using the “inclusive language” of the kind. We chose the version of *Hoffnung für alle* [9] for an example.

In the original text in the passage studied there occurs only the lexeme ‘son’, and thereat by no means in positive contexts. The principle of the “inclusive language” was used in this version of translation into German, “Erzieh deine Kinder mit Strenge, denn so kannst du Hoffnung für sie haben; lass sie nicht in ihr Verderben laufen”, i.e., ‘son’ was changed for the word with the meaning ‘children’. Identically, in the rest of chapters and verses, the same lexeme is used, sometimes as in the original, source text in singular: *Kind* (lit. ‘child’).

In such a rendering of the lesson, the authors of the mentioned version as well as their colleagues of other translations into different languages made during the latest decades, at the first view, don't cross the limits of acceptable translation variability: to discipline children of both sexes, consequently, this lesson could be spread on either of them. However, this approach seems to disagree either with the context of the time of the original source text, or to its linguistic peculiarities.

Firstly, because the Book of Proverbs addresses to a son (probably, the king's heir), so his lessons, if to take into consideration this context, concerns the way the father should disciple the son exactly. To discipline a daughter in the patriarchal society was mainly her mother's duty. And because their disciplining differed deeply, it was hardly ever recommended to the father to apply to his daughter similar disciplining means.

Secondly, one has to consider proper linguistic reasons. If in the biblical Hebrew the plural form of ‘sons’ (*bānîm*) could be inclusive and understood as ‘children’, the singular form is not approved by the analysis of the Old Testament text corpus” [25. P. 125].

Therefore, proceeding from both proper linguistic reasons and the cultural and historic context reflected in this biblical book, inclusive translation of the word *bēn* should be treated as the deviation from the original text, to the greatest extent changing both the character of the given passage and the general directivity of Proverbs on the whole.

## Conclusion

As the material analyzed in the article shows, in course of treating those or other translational solutions connected with the interpreting of an ancient text (in our case, the biblical text), containing the so-called “dark” or involving different interpretation passages and phrases, thorough and detailed analysis is in great demand – both in proper philological and cultural and historic planes, not only of the passages of the kind themselves, but also the existing commentaries of those ones quite often having a many-century history. It's necessary to take into consideration understanding / understandings of the original (source) text according to the tradition within the frames of which it was created. Insufficient

consideration of the mentioned items, on the one hand, could entail unreasonable acknowledgement of such translations as inaccurate and false though in practice it presents rather acceptable interpretation of the original, and, on the other hand, — it could suggest the translation deviating from the original which is especially crucial in translating sacred texts. The iteration of this or that solution in various translation versions of the original text both within one linguistic tradition and transition into different languages. Such a situation could be explained either by the influence of the former version on the latter one, or by common sources presented in the tradition.

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