

# Is the Grabe Septuagint the Preferred Bible on Mount Athos?

## Background: Grabe's Septuagint and the 1850 Athens Edition

John Ernest Grabe (1666–1711) produced a four-volume edition of the Septuagint (Greek Old Testament) in Oxford (1707–1720) based on the **Codex Alexandrinus** <sup>1</sup>. This **"Grabe's edition"** incorporated special critical symbols (Origen's textual marks) and became one of the important printed texts of the Septuagint in the 18th–19th centuries <sup>1</sup>. Grabe's text was reprinted several times in later years – notably **in Moscow in 1821 (with the Russian Holy Synod's blessing) and in Athens from 1843–1850** <sup>1</sup>. The **Athens 1850 edition** was essentially a Greek reprint of Grabe's Septuagint intended for the use of the Greek Church. In fact, the 1821 Moscow edition (funded by Greek Orthodox faithful) and the subsequent Athens print became widely used standard texts in the Greek-speaking Orthodox world <sup>2</sup>. These editions were essentially the **Codex Alexandrinus-based Septuagint text** as published by Grabe, without the later critical revisions that modern scholars (like Alfred Rahlfs or the Göttingen editors) would introduce.

## Reports of Athonite Usage of Grabe's Edition

Several modern commentators claim that **Mount Athos** – the autonomous Orthodox monastic community in Greece – still **prefers this traditional Grabe-based Septuagint text** (specifically the 19th-century Athens or Moscow reprints). For example, one academically oriented forum contributor states:

- **Church of Greece vs. Athos Text:** The Church of Greece today uses an **"Apostoliki Diakonia"** edition of the Septuagint based on a critical eclectic text (Rahlfs' edition, primarily Vaticanus/Sinaiticus/Alexandrinus, with adjustments from the Lucianic recension and patristic quotations) <sup>3</sup>. By contrast, **"on Mount Athos, they use something similar to the Moscow edition of 1821 which is simply a reprint of John Grabe's 1720 Septuagint based on Codex Alexandrinus."** <sup>4</sup> In other words, Athos reportedly sticks with the older text-tradition rather than the modern critical editions.

This claim aligns with the historical pattern: the Grabe/Alexandrinus text **was indeed the de facto Old Testament text in Greek Orthodoxy through the 19th and early 20th century**, until newer critical editions emerged. The 1821 Moscow reprint (of Grabe's LXX) *"received wide circulation in Greece"* despite its lack of critical apparatus <sup>2</sup>. It is therefore plausible that the conservative monastic communities of Athos never felt the need to adopt newer revisions and continued using the familiar Athens 1850 (Grabe-based) Bible for liturgical reading and study. This would mean that **the Grabe/Alexandrinus text remains the primary Greek Septuagint text for Athonite monks**, whereas Orthodox elsewhere in Greece might use the revised church editions (Apostoliki Diakonia or "Zoe" Brotherhood texts) <sup>3</sup>.

## Considerations and Other Practices on Athos

It is important to qualify **what "preferred edition across all practices" means**, given Mount Athos's diversity and strict traditionalism. Mount Athos is not a single monastery but a community of twenty

monasteries, including Greek as well as Slavic and other ethnic Orthodox monks. **Not all Athonite monks use Greek texts in their daily practice:**

- **Slavonic Scriptures:** Several Athonite monasteries are historically Slavic. For instance, **St. Panteleimon (Rossikon)** is the Russian monastery on Athos, and its liturgical languages are **Greek and Church Slavonic** <sup>5</sup>. In such monasteries, the **Church Slavonic Bible (based on the Slavonic translation of the Septuagint)** is used for readings, rather than a Greek printed edition. (The standard Slavonic Bible, the 1751 Elizabeth Bible and its successors, was itself corrected in part using Grabe's Greek text <sup>6</sup>, but it is a **different edition/language** altogether.) Similarly, the Bulgarian and Serbian Athonite houses traditionally use Slavonic liturgy, and Romanian sketes might use Church Slavonic or Romanian Bible translations. These communities **do not exclusively use the Greek 1850 Athens Bible** in their services – their primary scriptures are in their own liturgical languages. This is direct evidence of alternative editions in use on Athos (e.g. Slavonic Bible), meaning the Grabe edition cannot be the sole Bible **“across all practices.”**
- **Modern Greek Editions:** Even within Greek-speaking Athos, one might ask if any modern printed editions have made inroads. The Greek Church's official Septuagint text (as published in 1980 and later by Apostoliki Diakonia) is readily available <sup>7</sup>, but Athonite monks are generally conservative about liturgical texts. There is **no indication** that Athos has adopted the Apostoliki Diakonia (Rahlfs-based) Septuagint for worship – on the contrary, as noted, reports insist they stick to the text inherited from older generations. We did not find evidence of Athonite approval of newer critical editions. Thus, among Greek monks on Athos, the **“Athens 1850”** reprint (or its equivalent) likely remains the standard Old Testament text for readings (e.g. in the **Prophetologion** for Vespers/Matins lessons or private study). Athonite scribes and publishers have historically copied and printed traditional texts, so it stands to reason they would keep using the 1850 Greek Bible rather than a 20th-century edited text.

In summary, **the evidence supporting the claim** is that **Athonite Greek monks do favor the Grabe/Alexandrinus Septuagint text**, as attested by informed sources <sup>4</sup> and by the historical usage of that edition in Greek Orthodoxy <sup>2</sup>. This text was literally printed **“for the Greeks”** and became entrenched <sup>2</sup> – Mount Athos, as a guardian of Orthodox tradition, would be inclined to preserve it. **However, evidence against the claim's universality** is the pluralistic reality of Athos: non-Greek monks use their own approved scriptures (Slavonic or others), and even Greek Athonite practice, while centered on the traditional LXX, is not explicitly documented as *exclusively* the 1850 Athens print in every context (though it likely is by default).

## Conclusion

Considering the research, the claim that the **Grabe Septuagint (Athens 1850 reprint) is the primary edition used by the monks of Mount Athos** is **partially true but overstated**. It is **very likely true for the Greek monks of Athos** that their Old Testament text of choice is the classic Grabe-based Septuagint – they have maintained the **Codex Alexandrinus-derived text** instead of adopting newer critical editions <sup>4</sup> <sup>2</sup>. **Yet it is not the sole Bible across all of Athos's multi-ethnic community:** Slavic monasteries use Slavonic translations, which counts as an alternative in use <sup>5</sup>. Because the claim does not account for these exceptions, we cannot say it is entirely true in an unqualified sense. **On balance, the proposition is somewhat likely to be true** – Mount Athos strongly favors the 1850 Athens (Grabe) Septuagint in Greek

contexts, but it is **not an exclusive practice in every corner of Athonite life** given the linguistic and textual diversity on the Holy Mountain.

**Sources:** Historical and scholarly references on Septuagint editions <sup>1</sup> <sup>2</sup> ; discussion by an Orthodox biblical studies forum member <sup>3</sup> <sup>4</sup> ; OrthodoxWiki and ecclesiastical sources on Athos monastery practices <sup>5</sup> .

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<sup>1</sup> БИБЛИЯ. II. РУКОПИСИ И ИЗДАНИЯ ЕВРЕЙСКОГО И ГРЕЧЕСКОГО ТЕКСТА

<https://www.pravenc.ru/text/209477.html>

<sup>2</sup> <sup>6</sup> Книга Иова - профессор Павел Александрович Юнгеров - читать, скачать

[https://azbyka.ru/otechnik/Pavel\\_Yungerov/kniga-iova/](https://azbyka.ru/otechnik/Pavel_Yungerov/kniga-iova/)

<sup>3</sup> <sup>4</sup> What source material does the Greek Orthodox church use for it's Septuagint? : r/AcademicBiblical

[https://www.reddit.com/r/AcademicBiblical/comments/6z58wy/what\\_source\\_material\\_does\\_the\\_greek\\_orthodox/](https://www.reddit.com/r/AcademicBiblical/comments/6z58wy/what_source_material_does_the_greek_orthodox/)

<sup>5</sup> St. Panteleimon's Monastery (Athos) - OrthodoxWiki

[https://orthodoxwiki.org/St.\\_Panteleimon%27s\\_Monastery\\_\(Athos\)](https://orthodoxwiki.org/St._Panteleimon%27s_Monastery_(Athos))

<sup>7</sup> Η ΠΑΛΑΙΑ ΔΙΑΘΗΚΗ ΚΑΤΑ ΤΟΥΣ ΕΒΔΟΜΗΚΟΝΤΑ Παλαιά Διαθήκη

[https://www.osotir.org/product/i-palea-diathiki-kata-tous-evdomikonta/?srsltid=AfmBOoretZ-5xCwlgOxD\\_ouWlaQdAR8ts1bWnpnnH6rJ\\_sM9fo\\_cYYcu](https://www.osotir.org/product/i-palea-diathiki-kata-tous-evdomikonta/?srsltid=AfmBOoretZ-5xCwlgOxD_ouWlaQdAR8ts1bWnpnnH6rJ_sM9fo_cYYcu)