

THE TRUTH BETWEEN THE LINES¹

Roxana Vieru

Lecturer, PhD, „Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University of Iași

Abstract: Europe is a melting pot of cultures due to globalization. I like to think that we are more open-minded now than people were centuries ago, so we are ready to adapt to diversity and change of different kinds. But let's have a close look to what happened in the past; and for that, we have texts as witnesses. Reading between the lines, we can draw some conclusions on how willing people were to tolerate (if not to accept) others' opinions, beliefs (either religious, cultural or scientific) and aspirations. In the marginal texts or in the prefaces there are some things hidden from the intolerants' eyes that we can now discover after careful analyses. We can see the truth beneath as we examine some Romanian texts written by "marginal" communities.

Keywords: Bible, Calvinism, Orthodoxy, religio recepta, translation

Preliminaries: The first texts written in Romanian that survived up to now are no older than 500 years.² Among these texts, the most extensive and important are the ones based on religious topics, such as the *Psalter* or the *Four Gospels*. Only a couple of them have prefaces (called *Predoslovii*), where a reader can discover information about the translator, the place where and the time when the work was done, the person who paid for the making of the book etc. Of the ones having these chapters, most lack data about the sources, either because they seemed irrelevant to the audience or because the authors avoided to reveal them. And reason good enough for this silence is the fact that these translations came out in an area inhabited by a population for the most part Orthodox and in a time when the disclosure of God's word in Latin and the vernacular languages was considered heresy since the Orthodox church specifically stated that the sacred languages were Old Slavic and Greek. What's left of these texts contains vague references to the source-language, but does not indicate which were the exact editions used for the translation.

In my dissertation I will focus on *Palia* from Orăștie (1582) (= *PO*), the translation of the first two books of the *Old Testament*, and *The New Testament* from Bălgrad (1648) (= *NTB*), the first translation into Romanian of the *New Testament* in its entirety.

¹ The ideas presented in this article were debated in SIEF Congress, 2019, Santiago de Compostela, Spain. The participation in the Congress and the article itself are part of a national project. This project is funded by the Ministry of Research and Innovation within Program 1 / Development of the national RD system, Subprogram 1.2 / Institutional Performance / RDI excellence funding projects, Contract no. 34PFE/19.10.2018 [= Acest proiect este finanțat de Ministerul Cercetării și Inovării prin Programul 1 – Dezvoltarea sistemului național de cercetare-dezvoltare, Subprogram 1.2 – Performanță instituțională – Proiecte de finanțare a excelenței în CDI, Contract nr. 34PFE/19.10.2018.]

² There are assumptions, though, that some of these are copies of lost originals which may have been created the previous century/centuries. Beside these, it is speculated that some documents were written in Romanian only to be conveyed to some other language; but the initial papers did not withstand hard times. One of the cases is the oath written in 1485 in the name of Stephen the Great and addressed to the Polish king Cazimir; the only material evidence we have is the Latin version.

Translators' pretenses: At the beginning of the former we find out that the authors were Mihai Tordaș, Ștefan Herce, Zacan Efrem, Moise Peștișel and Achirie³, that the most important person who paid for the accomplishment of the book dedicated to Sigismund Bathóry⁴ was Geszti Ferenc⁵ and that the typographers were Șerban and Marien⁶. The most significant fact for our discussion that we read in the introduction is that *Palia* represents a translation from Hebrew, Greek and Serbian⁷.

In the preface of the latter it is stated that, for the book dedicated to Gheorghe Rácóczi, the team of translators coordinated by Simion Ștefan used as many texts as they could find, namely Greek, Latin and Old Slavic sources.

Since the two texts belong to the Transylvanian area, where Romanians lived together with population of Hungarian, Saxonian and Székely origin that embraced different branches of Protestantism (immediately after their outburst, as a result of the Reformation), the source-texts are called into question.

Reasons for mistrust: A linguist analysing a translation of a text on religious topics first searches for information about the personal profiles of the ones that contributed to its emergence. The main questions one must find answers to are: "What are the religious orientations of the author, of the funder and of the ruler of the country to whom the book was dedicated? How is the author connected to the political life of the community in which he was born and raised (a pertinent question for the debate since religion always played the role of an instrument for the political class of any population in the world)? What is the cultural training of the translator (meaning: what are the languages he knew and what were the civilisations and cultures with which he was familiar)?" Then one should ask oneself: "What is the intended addressee of that text?". Only by doing so can one discover the life of that text and understand some options.

Among the names that are connected to our texts, some cast doubt on the sources. To start with, Sigismund Bathóry was a Catholic and Geszty Ferenc – a Calvinist. Then about Șerban, the typographer of *Palia*, we know that he was Coresi's son and so we cannot but suspect that he was not unfamiliar to the Protestant circles since the father himself (though an Orthodox deacon) was often paid by Lutheran Germans living in the Transylvanian towns to take some manuscripts, revise them in form and "spirit" (content) and print them (for instance, his first book was a *Catechism* whose model was Luther's *Small Catechism* or a Hungarian version of it). And yet, alongside these names, there's Simion Ștefan's – the

³ „Tordași Mihai, ales piscopol românilor în Ardeal, și cu Herce Ștefan, propoveduitorul Evangheliei lu Hristos în orașul Căvăran Șebeșului, Zacan Efrem, dascalul de dascălie a Șebeșului și cu Peștișel Moisi, propoveduitorul Evangheliei în orașul Logojuului, și cu Achirie, potropopol varmigiei Henedoriei” (PO) [= Mihai Tordași, the elected bishop for the Romanians living in Transylvania, and Ștefan Herce who preaches Christ's Gospel in the town of Caransebeș, Zacan Efrem, the Psalm reader in Sebeș, and Peștișel Moisi, the Gospel preacher in the town of Lugoș, and Achirie, the archpriest in the county of Hunedoara].

⁴ „Batăr Jigmon, voivodă Ardealului” (PO) [= Sigismund Bathory, the prince of Transylvania].

⁵ „Ghesti Freanți, alesu hotnogiul Ardelului și Țării Ungurești, ... le-au scris în cheltuală multă” (PO) [= Geszty Ferenc, the elected governor of Transylvania and Hungary ... spent a lot of money for the printing of the book].

⁶ „Șerban diiacu, meșterul mare a tiparelor, și cu Marien diiac” (PO) [= Șerban the deacon, the great master of printing craftsmanship, and Marien the deacon].

⁷ „scoasem den limbă jidovească și grecească și sârbească pre limbă românească” (PO) [= we translated from Hebrew, and Greek, and Serbian, to Romanian]. Most likely, the "Serbian" text the translators referred to is the Ostrog *Bible*, from 1581.

Orthodox metropolitan (bishop). How could they have come to a consensus on religious matters?

Laying open the truth – providing evidence against statements in the prefaces:

1. As Romanian scholars did not have too much practice in translating during the 16th century, we expect *PO* to betray its authors more easily than *NTB*. And so it is, indeed.
 - 1.1 By comparing these texts with some others written in the same period (especially with private, original ones), we can easily notice the occurrence of some unusual long structures, sometimes redundant, other times explanatory for a concept that wasn't lexicalized in Romanian. It has been demonstrated, conclusively enough, that the *Old Testament* translated in Banat (*PO*) followed mainly Gáspár Heltai's *Pentateuh* (a Protestant fragment of the *Bible*), and a subsidiary text, a version of *Vulgata*. As we know that Hungarian is an agglutinative language, the first thought that comes to mind is that the Romanian weirdly long structures of the above-mentioned kind that occur in *PO* might be mere reflections of the ones found in the main source. In the Romanian text, such structures are absurd.
 - 1.1.1 In *Genesis 14.6* we found the structure *câmp șes*, in which the two words have the same semantic content. The corresponding fragment in Heltai's text is *lapatz mezeyeig*, where *lap* means "plain" and it is a synonym of *mező*; but *lapos*, used as a determiner, means „flat”. So, a natural Romanian equivalent of the structure would have been "flat land" (*teren plat*) or simply "plain" (*câmp*); instead, *PO*'s authors, who lacked the exercise of translation, chose to stay too close to Hungarian to the point where one fragment can be considered the mirror of the other.
 - 1.1.2 A similar case is in paragraph 9.7 from *Genesis*: *rodiți-vă și și vă înmulțiți și viați spre pământ, cum să fiți mulți pre el*, with two partially synonym verbs in initial position, a perfect copy of *gyümöchezzetec es sokassodgyatoc es éllyetec a földén, hogy sokan legyetec rayta* ("reproduce and become more and live on Earth, so as to be numerous there"). The Latin fragment is shorter, thus simpler and more logical: *Vos autem crescite et multiplicamini et ingredimini super terram* ("then you grow up and procreate and live on Earth").
 - 1.1.3 In *Genesis 21.19*, *izvor de fântână* (literally "the spring of a fountain") depicts the two fragments of the compound Hungarian word *kutfeig*, with *kut* "fountain" and *fej* "an end, a starting point". Authors's option *capul izvorului* ("the beginning of the spring") (*Genesis 14.7*), chosen to express the same idea found in Heltai's text, is difficult to understand. *Vulgata* conveys the meaning by means of simple words, *fontem* and *puteum*.
 - 1.2 We often discovered periphrastic constructions, the perfect equivalents of the Hungarian ones, in those situations in which translators couldn't find or (better) think of simple words in their own language: *văzătorul de vise* (*Genesis 37.19*) (Hung. *alom lato* – Lat. *somniator*), *loc de lăcuită* (*Genesis 47.11*) (Hung. *lako helt* – Lat. *possessionem*), *tăiatul împregiur* (*Exodus 4.26*) (Hung. *környülmetelkedesert* – Lat. *circumcisionem*).
 - 1.3 There are fragments in which *PO*'s authors gave a certain meaning to a word (a meaning that wasn't known in Romanian) as a semantic calque of a polysemic Hungarian word. Such is the case with *coaste*, whose meaning in Romanian is "ribs", used in *Exodus 25.14*

(„belciugele den *coastele* ladițeei”) to convey the meaning “side”. In Hungarian, *oldal* can refer to either of the meanings.

- 1.4 *PO*’s authors were sometimes confronted with situations in which they had to find a solution to express notions either connected to the Jewish realities or to things (like gemstones) with which ordinary people of those times were not familiarized (since they didn’t know the referents, they lacked the linguistic material that should have reflected them). In such situations, they made use of words either met solely in the Hungarian version (such as *efod* – Hung. *Ephod* – in *Exodus 28.4*, *Exodus 28.15*, *Exodus 29.5*, meaning “a Jewish priest’s garment”, for which the Latin text has *superumeralis*; the Greek equivalent is *ἐπωμίδα*, while the Hebrew version contains *תֵּבֵן*) or discovered in the two sources, but for which they chose the Hungarian phonetic forms: a) Rom. *gomerul* (*Exodus 16.36*) – Hung. *Gomer* – Lat. *Gomor*, Rom. *amatie* (*Exodus 28.19*) – Hung. *Amatistes* – Lat. *Amethystus* (the equivalents in Greek and Slavonian texts resemble the Latin words, therefore it’s not possible to have the Romanian fragments from some biblical version other than Hungarian), b) Rom. *crijolită* (*Exodus 28.20*) – Hung. *Crisolitus* (thus pronounced with *ş*, whose loud consonant pair is *j*) – Lat. *Chrysolitus*, Rom. *şardie* (*Exodus 28.17*) – Hung. *Sardonix* (pronounced with initial *ş*) – Lat. *Sardius* (no other Romanian text has such forms, but with *s*; the words found in Greek and Slavonian texts have *s* in initial position, as well).
2. Unlike the book from the 16th century, Simion Ştefan’s translation is more accurate. He already had models of translations and he tried to pay more attention to the form. In the preface he even declares his conviction that such a text should be understood by every Romanian, regardless of the social class and the area of origin. So, we expect to find less hints here that could make us track the text back to the sources.

And yet there are some.

- 2.1 The first thing to notice is the order of the books in the Romanian version of the *New Testament*, with the *Catholic Epistles* following the *Acts*; only afterwards can we find the *Pauline Epistles* and the *Apocalypse*. One of the “authoritative” translations in those times was the *Bible* from Ostrog, which has the same structure as the Romanian one. This leads us to the conclusion that the Slavic version printed in „țara moscului”, about which Simion Ştefan wrote in the preface as one of his sources, was this one.
- 2.2 Then there are the summaries, which are placed at the beginning of the chapters. If one investigates the well-known, wide-spread and prestigious *Bibles* of those times, one can see that between the Romanian version and Theodore Beza’s, published in 1611, there is perfect match. Neither the above-mentioned *Bible*, nor Hieronymus’s *Bible* (indicated in the preface as another one of the biblical texts taken into consideration) has these fragments. Beza’s version seems to be the most important of Simion Ştefan’s sources.
- 2.3 Some of the explanations that one can read by the side of the text itself are abridgements of Beza’s commentaries. One example is the controversial fragment with the *camel* in *Mathew 19.24*: what is there about: “an animal” (Gr. *κάμηλος*) or “a rope, a ship’s thick cable” (Gr. *κάμιλος*)?

2.4 The metropolitan bishop asserted that he followed especially a Greek source and words like *publican* were taken from that text as they were, since Romanian language did not have equivalents for that. But only the Latin versions could have contained *publican*; the Greek equivalent is *τελῶναι* (*Mathew 5.46, Mathew 18.17, Mathew 21.32*) (see the parallel in Beza's text).

Beside many parallels with the translation of Beza, the Protestant theologian, and some with the Orthodox Slavic *Bible*, there are still some fragments left aside.

2.5 For instance, the explanatory fragments are interesting to analyse.

2.5.1 In *Mathew 4.15*, the word *limbilor* (in *Galileea limbilor*) ("of the people") is explained in a marginal note as *ce să zice păgâni lor* "who are called heathen". In Beza's text, the Greek version contains *ἐθνῶν*, in Latin there is *gentium*; but if we search Gáspár Károly's text (the Hungarian "authoritative" version of the *Bible*), we see *Poganyok (Galileaja)* (literally, "heathens' Galileia") (the same word *păgân* is used in *Mathew 18.17* to express Lat. *ethnicus* and Gr. *ε'θνικος* in Beza's book and *Pogány* in Károly's book).

2.5.2 In *Mathew 4.25*, the toponym *Decapolia* (in Beza's text – Latin *Decapoli*, Greek *Δεκαπολεως*) is presented, in a marginal note, as *(noi zicem) 10 orași* „(we say) ten towns”, an accurate translation of the Hungarian corresponding fragment *tíz városbol*.

2.5.3 In *Mathew 25.24*, the adjective *tare* ("hard") (Lat. *durum*, Gr. *σκληρός*) is explained, in a note, as *fără milă* "merciless", a meaning clearly conveyed in Károly's *Bible* by means of the word *kegyetlen*.

2.5.4 In *Mathew 27.6*, *corban* (Latin version *corbanam*, Greek version *κορβανῶν*) is annotated *vistiariia besearicii*, practically a translation of the structure *templom kintse* found in Károly's *Bible* (in modern Hungarian, *kincse* "thesaurus" and "treasury").

2.5.5 In *Marc 2.26* the Romanian preposition *supt* is the equivalent of the Latin *sub* and the meaning is easy to understand by a native Romanian speaker: „cum intra în casa lui Dumnedzeu, *supt* Aviathar, popa cel mare” – „quomodo ingressus sit domum Dei *sub* Abiathar Pontifice maximo”. However, the translators considered that further information was required, so they added a marginal note: „în zilele lui” (“in the time of...”), a meaning inferred from the Hungarian „(az Abiátár fö Pap) *idejében*”.

2.6 As it happened with *PO*, the text printed in Bălgrad also contains (though very few) circumlocutions for some less known notions in the area.

2.6.1 Hydropsy is linguistically expressed as *boala apeii* (literally "a disease involving water"), a perfect translation of Károly's *vizkorságos*.

2.6.2 In *Mathew 24.17*, *pod* ("garret") is explained in a gloss as *casă de sus* ("house from up(stairs)"); in the Hungarian *Bible*, Gáspár Károly wrote: *felső házában*, with *ház* "house" (*házában* "in the house") and *felső* "superior", "somewhere up".

2.6.3 In *Luke 1.15* we discovered the word *sechera* explained in the marginal text as *beătură de beție*, an analytical structure which brings us close to the

Hungarian text, where, to express the same idea, Károly used *részegítő italt*: *italt* refers to the notion of “drink” and *részegítő* means “producing dizziness, intoxicating”.

Conclusion: What do these connections between Romanian and Hungarian texts prove? Why did the authors hide these sources? Simion Ștefan declared the purpose open: he wanted his book to be read by all Romanians, even by those living in Moldavia and Wallachia who were all Orthodox and weren't willing to accept other confessions. In order to have a large circulation, books like *Palia* from Orăștie or *The New Testament* from Bălgrad should have been, in such a case, presented to most of the Romanians as translations from languages accepted by the Orthodox Church. Otherwise, they would have been rejected from the very beginning. Simion Ștefan's statement that he also used a Latin text as a source is curious and quite an act of bravery if we think that those were times when a person like Varlaam, the Moldavian metropolitan bishop, inveighed against the *Catechism* written in 1640 for being Calvinist.

On the one hand, Moldavia and Wallachia were oriented towards and had connections with the Orthodox world. Being continually attacked by the Turks, they sought for help and made alliances with the Slavs. Pretexts for the military deployments came to be the fight between Islamism and Christianity, in general, Orthodoxy, in particular (for this area). Thus, politics took religion as its shield (and its mask after all). No religious compromises were permitted, though in politics Romanians started paying tributes to the Ottoman Empire to maintain a certain state of calm and peace.

On the other hand, in Transylvania, the use of religion in the political struggle was harsher and more emphatic since the implications were greater. The area beyond the Carpathian Curve was, in the centuries we refer to, under Hungarian domination, while, at the same time, Buda and the area around it represented a Turkish pashalik. The Hungarian prince and the noblemen in Transylvania watched the Romanians not to confederate with the population across the mountains and take over their political views, a state of affairs that would have involved their getting along with the Slavs and their acceptance of making some payments to the Turks in exchange for autonomy. The thing to do was to keep the two groups of Romanians apart by means of religion, so they tried to convey the ones in Transylvania to Calvinism. The Hungarians decreed as *religio recepta* only Catholicism, Lutheranism, Calvinism and Unitarianism. Orthodoxy had the status of a tolerate religion. A Romanian who wanted to be at least accepted by the political circles and the highest social classes had to pretend to accept Calvinism.

Given the circumstances, the translators' options are easy to understand. They made a compromise: they were Orthodox Romanians who wanted acceptance from their brothers and declared to have made Orthodox books, but they used Calvinist sources to please their political rulers.

Bibliography

Arvinte, Vasile; Caproșu, Ioan; Gafton, Alexandru; Guia, Sorin, *Palia de la Orăștie (1582)*. Textul, Editura Universității „Alexandru Ioan Cuza”, Iași, 2005

Bibleworks.

Bibliia sir1 cnig0 v vethago niovago yab1ta po2y`cu slovenscu, Ostrog, 1581 –
online version <https://archive.org/details/OstrogBiblija1581/mode/2up>

Hieronymiana *Vulgata*, online version https://www.hs-augsburg.de/~harsch/Chronologia/Lspost04/Hieronymus/hie_vv00.html

Noul Testament sau împăcareaua leagea noao a lui Is. Hs., Domnului nostru,
Belgrad, 1648 – the original printed edition.

Novum Iesu Christi Testamentum Graece & Latine, interpreted by Theodoro Beza,
apud Iohannem Vignon, 1611 (MDCXI)

Palia, Orăștie, 1582 – the original printed edition.

Szent Biblia, translated by Gáspár, Károli, Reichárd Károly Költségével's Betüivel,
Kőszegen, 1840

Different other Greek and Latin versions of the *Bible*