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**PATRISTIC TRANSLATIONS AND THEIR ROLE IN  
PRESERVING AND DEVELOPING THE EASTERN  
SPIRITUALITY IN THE COUNTRY OF MOLDAVIA**

**SUMMARY**

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The Romanian space has seen some very early Christian effervescence that has individualized it among all the peoples of Europe and beyond.. Even if the already consecrated expression "the Romanian people is the only Christian born nation" seems to be emphatic, it reflects a historical truth that very few people choose to challenge or question. In this context, the question that becomes more and more often: "what was the contribution of the Church to the cultural development of the Romanian people?" is superfluous because one of the apostolic principles of Christian preaching was that of enculturation of the Gospel

The transmission of the doctrines of faith has always been made through the elements already devoted to the national spirit, and the most well-known case is the missionary activity of Saints Cyril and Methodius in the Slavic world. In the beginning, it was attempted to attract a people into the sphere of influence of the Byzantine Empire, in order to gradually trigger a Christian missionary activity, taking into account its specific ethnic and cultural features. Even if no one could foresee the end result of such an approach, the initiative was an absolutely normal one in the known historical context in which Byzantium represented the most evolved society in all its aspects, which undoubtedly represented the source of inspiration for the great Western empires seeking their identity. Thus, a Christian world was born, the preserver of treasures of immense value for the culture and spirituality of any society, regardless of leadership or political, social or even religious interests.

**My PhD thesis project** aims to analyse the beginnings of patristic translations in the Romanian space, more precisely on the territory of the feudal state of Moldova during the first phase and the beginning of the second. Therefore, in the following lines, I will refer strictly to this geographic space, trying to make an identification and description of the works and copyist schools in this historic province, in more detail or in summary, depending on the number of documents discovered and the information contained therein.

**My work consists of three major parts**, each of them analysing different aspects of the translation activity of spiritual and cultural works, and the importance of the Slavonic patristic literature in the Romanian monastic space. I will insist especially on the scriptures from the Neamț Monastery and the old monastic hearths in the Upper Land of Moldavia, because the translations have been made there, and the teachings contained in them have acquired life, turned into authentic Christian living.

**The first part of the paper** is dedicated to the beginnings of Slavic-Romanian patristic translations in Moldavia. Here are presented the historical context in which the medieval state of Moldavia was formed, as well as the conditions in which the Moldovan Metropolitan Church was recognized and, of course, several aspects of the life and activity of the Metropolitans from the 16th to the 18th centuries, *Teoctist II* (1508 – 1528), *Teofan I* (1530-1546), *Grigorie Roșca* (1546 – 1551), *Grigorie II de la Neamț* (1552 – 1564), *Gheorghe Movilă* (1588 – 1591; 1595 – 1600; 1601-1605), *Anastasiu Crimca* (1608-1629), *Varlaam* (1632-1653), *Dosoftei* (1671-1686), *Iacob Putneanul* (1750-1760), *Gavriil* (1760-1786), without whom it would not have been possible for the scholarly activity to flourish and for the patristic and cultic literature to appear.

An important place within this part is, as it was naturally, devoted to the situation of monasticism and theological heights in the Romanian space, with an extremely important role in the preparation of the clergy and ministers of the chancellery and of the ministry. These schools were organized in such a way as to meet the higher culture needs required by the training of staff for education, worship and state administration.

A special chapter is dedicated to the presentation of the Scriptorium from Neamț, as well as of those who worked for it, together with the most important patristic manuscripts kept from them.

**The second part of the paper** presents the patristic translations from Putna and the other monasteries in Bucovina. The scriptures from Putna, Voroneț, Moldovița and Dragomirna are unique in the Romanian space through the beauty of the language and the richness of the content.

The patristic manuscripts from Putna, which represent the point of interest of our approach, can be divided into several categories, namely: sbornics, leavtices codices. In the writing of our presentation we will divide them according to their character.

From the rich production of Putna scriptorium, much was meant for this monastery, but

there is also a significant number of manuscripts that have been copied here for other places of worship. Throughout the ages, on different ways and for various reasons, many of these manuscripts have changed their owner, reaching public libraries or private collections in the country and, above all, outside the country.

The oldest manuscripts copied by the Putna monks to the other churches date back, of course, during the reign of Stephen the Great.

As with other monasteries, the first books were brought to Voroneț by the first founders, either boyars or rulers, and later by high clergymen, but also by people with a more modest material situation. Some books have also reached the monastery through various foreign peasants. Analysing the history of Voroneț's library, Andrei and Valentina Eșanu come to the conclusion that the "Pavecernic" of the 14th century and the "Sbornic" (Miscelaneu) copied in 1359 at the expense of Metropolitan Gherman in the then capital of Bulgaria, Tarnovo, reached Voroneț from the first decades of existence of this monastic settlement, being brought by some Bulgarian monk escaping from the Ottoman conquests in the south of the Danube. Of the books handed over to the Voroneț monastery by the rulers of Moldova, only a few were preserved, such as the "Tetraevangheliar" from 1490, donated by Ștefan cel Mare și Sfânt. Gradually, Voroneț monastery became a scriptorium, in which books were copied, both for own needs and for different partners. It is claimed that such a scout center, both Slavonic and Romanian, was formed in Voroneț during the Metropolitans Teofan I (1530-1546) and Grigorie Roșea (1546-1550) ". Among the first books copied here are known: a "Praxiu" of 1543 made at the expense of Metropolitan Teofan and a "Tetraevanghel" of 1550 at the command of Grigorie Roșea, both made by deacon Mihail in Voronet. The copy workshop activated in the 17th century when "*the monk Teufil from the Voroneț monastery*" made in 1614 the calligraphy of another "Tetraevanghel" "*with the support and command*" of Anastasie Crimca, Metropolitan of Moldova (1608-1617). Numerous manuscripts are kept today in Dragomirna or Moldovița.

The Slavo-Romanian manuscripts and the notes on them described in the present paper bring us in a new light the significance of Moldovita monastery, as one of the largest cultural centres, not only at the beginning of the Romanian culture in Slavonic language but also a few centuries later. For the history of Romanian culture in Slavonic, the Moldovita monastery is to be considered the centre where the Slavonic-Romanian literature was born. The extensive study of its manuscripts, especially those brought from Constantinople, will fully confirm its role.

But the significance of Moldovita Monastery does not stop there. The same manuscripts contributed most to the knowledge of the latest edition of the Bulgarian literature, drawn up by the school of Patriarch Eftimie, whose products will replace all books of religious worship and religion in Bulgaria, Serbia, Russia and the Romanian Countries, starting with the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

Moreover, by comparison with the other manuscripts of the southern and eastern Slavs of the period, Moldovita's manuscripts will show us in the most clear way that the Romanians were the only heirs of the latest edition of the Bulgarian literature, written in the Medio-Bulgarian edition, in the new spelling of Patriarch Eftimie, prepared by him and his school for the Bulgarians, at Studion monastery in Constantinople, which remained unknown to them, being finalized only after the fall of Bulgaria under the Turks (1393) and acquired by Alexander the Good for the needs of the Church of Moldova, organized by him.

In Dragomirna monastery scriptorium, especially thanks to Metropolitan Anastasie, we witness the development of miniature art; the native elements are introduced, and the style and techniques used give the manuscripts here a touch of individuality in relation to all the other Romanian manuscripts. Some of these, however, lacking colophons or donation notes, are part of the so-called *Parisinus graecus 74* group, known to specialists worldwide by the beauty of iconographic cycles, but also by the pure style of the Slavonic language used. *Tetraevanghels of Sucevița 23 and 24*, the *Tetraevanghel from Lvov* and *Elisavetgrad* have a distinct note, which is imposed on both the miniaturists and the philologists.

**The third part of the paper** presents the Paisian monastic centers from the point of view of the traductological activities.

N / A. Ursu, analysing the rich translation activity of the Holy Fathers from Greek into Romanian and Slavonic carried out by Saint Paisie and his people, remarked that "the Romanian scholars of Paisianism have given too little relief to the Romanian school of translators from Dragomirna, Secu and Neamt as well and the impressive volume of the translations carried out at these monasteries, which are of particular importance both for the history of Romanian theological preoccupations and for the history of the Romanian literary language and of the Romanian culture as a whole".

The first information about Transylvanian translation centres is found in the preface of the paper *The Lives of the Saints on September*, signed by the abbot of Neamț and Secu monasteries,

printed in Neamt in 1807. It mentions: "Our venerable Father Paisie, coming from the holy mountain of Athos, with some of the parents (...) first wished that the monastic preacher enriched him with the word of God and fulfils all of the above shown. That not only his sacredness should be able to interpret the word of God, but also his disciples had set some precepts to preach to others to learn grammar and other eminent teachings so that they could interpret the words and teachings of the holy fathers, what has been done. So after the books of the holy Fathers of the monastic life have been interpreted, he did not stop here, but he made his disciples dare to interpret other scriptures and interpretations of the holy old and new scriptures,. And he who was scholar and knew the language of Slovenia, he would begin to interpret and from the language that would be needed. "

The translators' activity at the Paisien centres in Dragomirna, Secu and Neamt is presented by the Holy Father Paisie in a letter to Archimandrite Teodosius of Poiana Marului. Here, after describing his impediments and retentions, he supports and motivates the necessity of this work of translation of the works of the Holy Fathers through the need to complete the monastic education of the community entrusted to him: "My work I began with the following: for lexical insufficiency, of my inexperience, I took as a lead for me the translation of the books of the Holy Fathers from ancient Greek into Moldavian, made by our beloved brothers: hieromonk Macarie and teacher Ilarion, scholars and experienced in the translation of books. Part of this translation was made by Brother Macarie, part on the Mount Athos, part in Dragomirna; so too, Father Ilarion was struggling with his translation into our community. Taking their translations, after me, as unquestionably good, I began to straighten the Slavonic books, guiding me for their translation and following the Greek text ... "

From this confession of Saint Paisie, we see that in the Paisian community there were two well-trained monks from the beginning, whose translations have served the abbot as a justification for his work as a translator in Slavonic. Aware of the importance of the correctness of translations of patristic works for the development of monastic life in his community, Father Paisie, they form disciples who continued the translation work after his passing into eternity.

Analysing the letter to Theodosius, we note that Elder Paisie appoints 7 translations and 6 written papers, which he considers to be in conformity with the Greek originals. He added three more works – that of Marcu Pustnicul, Theodor of Edessa and Nichita Stithatul - translated after a Greek manuscript that was brought to the Dragomirna from the Holy Mountain in 1774 by a

Greek monk, Constandie. Regarding the latter he thought he had to check them with their originals again, because - in his opinion - they were not good for copying, and all the more so as to be printed. It was around 1782, after the information in the same letter. Elder Paisie waited for the appearance of the Greek Philosophy, revised by Macarie of Corinth (1731-1805) and Nicodim Aghioritul (1749-1809), which he will translate into Slavonic and which will be edited in 1793 in Moscow under the title Dobrotoljubia - the only work published during his lifetime. We believe that Paisie saw his edited work, although until 1797 Neamț Monastery had received from the editor only the first 3 volumes. Another Slavonic translation, The Book of Issac Sirul, is printed in 1812 at the Neamț Monastery. Several works were published in Russia in the nineteenth century, after the copies of his translations, but most of the manuscripts are known, however, only from the titles given by A.I. Iațimirski.

The Romanian patristic translations from the Paisian school were not made, as can be seen, only to facilitate the work on Slavic translations of the Elder Paisie. The correction of the theological translations of the Greek origin was also quite a problem for the Romanian literature, since the Romanian translations from the sixteenth century until the first half of the 18th century largely used the Slavic texts. Old Slavic translations deficiency has also been reflected in Romanian translations, further increasing the inaccuracies of the original Greek text. At the same time, the Romanian literature of cult felt the necessity of a massive addition to the works of the great theologians of the time, with writings of Christian exegesis, of canon law, of church and universal history, because their number in the Romanian version was, in the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, very low, the translation and printing of liturgical literature has just been finished.

The loss of a significant number of the sources of the Romanian translations and of the oldest copies from them in the fire at the Neamț Monastery, the partial further research of the materials that survived after 1862, but especially the false and hypothetical Slavonic school effect, through which the activity of the Paisian school became permanent and associated - all these made a great literary movement, unparalleled in the history of Romanian culture, which contributed first of all to the prosperity and enrichment of the Romanian theological literature, almost unknown to that time.

**Conclusion:** The Slavonic manuscripts kept in the archives of Moldovan institutions or monasteries, although incompletely researched to this point, are important for the history of



Romanian and Slavonic culture (regardless of the writing or influence suffered) due to the richness of information, the craftsmanship of the miniatures and the preserved fund. In the scriptoria of the Putna, Moldovita, Rădăuți, Sucevita, Dragomirna, Probota, Humor, Voroneț or Râșca monasteries, dozens of manuscripts have been translated and copied, which formed the basis of the creation of the present Romanian language, but also have a special influence on spiritual life in the monastic precincts and their surroundings. Therefore, the importance of identifying patristic translations and spiritual literature in the Moldavian space during the 16th-18th centuries, a period that we limit ourselves to in this work, shows on the one hand the flourishing of the activity of monastic scriptures, on the other hand the wealth of information that they provide us with an understanding of the social, cultural, political and religious events that this Romanian province, full of history has passed through.

It should also be noted that only on the basis of a thorough comparative analysis of all the documentary materials of that period, both of the Romanian and Slavic languages (a special share having the contributions of the Elder Paisie), the reconstitution of the manuscript filiation in both languages, one can identify and present in a correct manner the patristic and cultural literary heritage of Romanian monks and scholars over time.