

***Topoi, Models, and Western Influences Reflected in the Most Representative Romanian Versions of the Bible and Early Romanian Homiletic Literature***

**Abstract**

The thesis submitted for habilitation in the field of Philology, *Topoi, Models, and Western Influences Reflected in the Most Representative Romanian Versions of the Bible and Early Romanian Homiletic Literature*, describes my professional journey as well as my scholarly contribution to the field.

My first significant academic endeavour was my doctoral thesis, supervised by Professor Mihail Cozma Dinu at the Doctoral School of the Faculty of Letters, University of Bucharest. I based my research on the premise that any version of the Bible is inevitably influenced by the theological assumptions of the translators or their cultural mindsets. When translators integrate these presuppositions and mindsets into the biblical text, they inevitably bring it in line with a particular dogma, generating in turn a new link in the long chain of “reception history”.

To test my working hypothesis, I selected a corpus of biblical translations, from the Coresi version to the 21<sup>st</sup> century versions, and a series of biblical expressions likely to generate rival hermeneutical perspectives. After analysing diachronically the translation solutions excerpted from forty Romanian versions of the New Testament, I classified them into macro-categories that reveal the influence of cultural mindsets or ecclesiological, Mariological, soteriological, or eschatological presuppositions. My research further indicated that the presence of such dogmatic considerations is less marked in those versions produced by committees of translators with solid philological training who rely in their work on the accumulated expertise of specialists in the field.

Chapter 2 of the habilitation thesis is dedicated to the reception, both in Romanian and international contexts, of the research included in my doctoral thesis, initially published by Logos (Cluj-Napoca) and reprinted, in a revised version, by Alexandru Ioan Cuza University Press in the “Fontes Traditionis” collection (2015). A third updated edition, with numerous illustrations, was published by Ratio & Revelatio (2024).

My research into over 40 editions of the New Testament directed my attention to the first complete edition of the New Testament, published in Alba Iulia in 1648. Convinced that this version is also indebted to specific models and Western influences, I re-examined the long anonymous prefaces and concluded that they contain a series of Reformed features that had escaped the attention of Romanian scholars. The detailed description of these influences can be found in Chapter 3 of this thesis.

The most salient Reformed notion is the metaphor describing faith as “the hand of the soul,” which appears in two slightly different forms, indicating the importance of this idea for the editors of the 1648 New Testament. Notably, my research demonstrated that this metaphor can be found in the *Confession of Faith* of Cyril Lucaris, was condemned as heretical by the Synod of Jerusalem. As it is well known, the synod adopted the *Confession of Faith* of Dositheus of Jerusalem.

Reformed eschatological elements found in the preface to the *Second Epistle to the Thessalonians* have also been largely overlooked by Romanian scholars. The anonymous Romanian scholar focuses on the term “apostasy” (*rumpere*) and, rather than following the interpretation of the patristic authors, adopts the perspective of the 16<sup>th</sup>-century Calvinist Reformation. The same critical reflex is found in the isagogic text accompanying the *Epistle to the Hebrews*. As I have shown in a long chapter, the anonymous author of the text uses a wide range of arguments to defend the Pauline authorship of the epistle. His strenuous attempt to establish a specific connection between the Apostle Paul and the *Epistle to the Hebrews* is fuelled by the “certainty” typical of Reformed confessional documents, for which debates regarding the authorship of the *Epistle to the Hebrews* are no longer acceptable. However, a close reading of the preface also revealed that the Romanian author was not entirely consistent, as he could make contradictory statements regarding the epistle’s recipients.

The Western, Reformed influence I detected in the prefaces of the Alba Iulia New Testament strengthened my conviction that this investigative approach should also be used for Romanian books printed in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, most of whom were produced under the aegis of the Protestant Reformation. Informed by this perspective, I undertook a laborious analysis of the sermons in Coresi’s first Postil (*Tâlcuț evanğheliilor*).

Scholars have long noticed that the first Romanian collection of homilies, authored by an anonymous Romanian preacher and printed in 1567 by Coresi contained various Reformed theological elements. The author emphasizes the importance of justification and correct faith

and criticizes the cult of saints, the veneration of holy relics, the mass for the dead, and the corruption of the papacy and high clergy, which indicate that he had a Reformed background.

However, the book also contains patristic quotations and references, which some Romanian scholars have interpreted as evidence that the author also harboured Eastern Orthodox views. Some scholars even suggested that the Protestant magistrates of Brașov (Kronstadt) used their civil authority to impose their theological views on the Eastern Orthodox priests who ministered in the vicinity of the city, asking them to modify an Eastern Orthodox Postil by including snippets of Reformed theology. Thus, the final version of Coresi's Homiliary seemed to be a theological mixture resulting from heated negotiations between the Protestant magistrates and the Wallachian priests ministering on the outskirts of Brașov. This view (evinced by a rich imagination) is flawed, as have demonstrated in various papers.

In 2023, I demonstrated that the so-called encomium of the cross (which some scholars considered a marker of Eastern Orthodoxy) was based on Wolfgang Musculus' *Commentary on Matthew*. This discovery, subsequently published in *Limba română*, sparked my interest in Musculus' writings. Consequently, I began examining other passages in his commentary to find similarities with other sermons in Coresi's first Postil, especially in connection with the works of John Chrysostom. As it turned out, Chrysostom is the Church Father most frequently mentioned in Coresi's first Postil. His hermeneutical authority is invoked in five homilies, as follows: Homily 14 (Mat. 8:28-9:1), Homily 21 (Mat. 19:16-26), Homily 44 (Cheesefare Sunday, Mat. 6:14-21), Homily 50 (Palm Sunday, John 12:1-18), and Homily 63 (Transfiguration Sunday, Mat. 17:1-9). While the author typically references John Chrysostom as a source of authority, in one case (Homily 14), his interpretation is mentioned, weighed, and found wanting. As my research has demonstrated, the Romanian homilist used Musculus' *Commentary on Matthew* as an intermediary source for all the patristic references.

The fifth chapter of the dissertation focused on identifying the models and sources used by the protopope Ioan Zoba. As a case in point, I focused on *The Golden Casket* (1683), a church postil containing a funeral homily indebted to David Pareus' *Commentary on Genesis* (Frankfurt, 1609). Far from being an original work, Zoba's sermon included exegetical and theological observations made by the Heidelberg-based Reformed scholar, whose works were hugely influential among the Hungarian religious intelligentsia. The last section of the paper probed the influence that 4 Maccabees might have had on Zoba's notion of *στοργή*.

My analysis indicated that Ioan Zoba, once dismissed by Nicolae Iorga as “a priest slightly more erudite than others”, turns out, on closer inspection, to have been a significant figure, not only in the ecclesiastical circles of Transylvania but also in the field of book translation and printing. Among the books he helped produce, the most unusual remains arguably *A Brief Pathway Leading to Good Works*, printed in Alba Iulia in 1685, “for the betterment of the Romanian nation”. It has been common knowledge that the Transylvanian priest based his translation on a Hungarian booklet published by István Matkó in 1666, but that is only half the story. In the preface of his translation, Matkó confessed that his source and model had been a book published in England by an author whose name he did not disclose. Scholars intrigued by the tantalizing clues left in the preface advanced various names of Puritan divines whose works were similar to that of Matkó: Lewis Bayly, Alfred Dent, Robert Hill and John Downname. Mihai Gherman’s suggestion that Robert Hill should be a safe bet has received preliminary confirmation in a review which I published in *Biblicum Jassyense*. After supplementary research, we now know that Matkó translated and adapted into Hungarian a booklet which was initially published by Hill under the title *A Christian Directed* (1606), later changed to *A Direction to Live Well* (1609) or *A Direction to a Christian Life, both in our generall and particular callings* (1613). The book’s seventh edition was published in 1617 and the eighth in 1629.

Although there is slight textual variation between these editions, a careful comparison of the biblical references appended by the author indicates that mistakes did creep in, some of them adopted unwittingly by Matkó in his version. Unlike Zoba, who quoted the biblical witness in many instances, the Hungarian translator did not check the references and thus failed to note that many were invalid. Using biblical references as a touchstone, we can identify the precise edition Matkó must have used. Since the printing mistakes become more numerous in the seventh edition (1617), it is relevant for our research to focus on this particular edition and the next one, published in 1629. When we compare the two editions (1617 and 1629), we discover that printing mistakes occur only in the former one.

Chapter seven of the present thesis surveys the new insights I have brought to the study of the history of the Bible translations authored by Dumitru Cornilescu, whose first version was published in 1921 by the Romanian Evangelical Society, founded by Princess Ralu Callimachi. Although her role has typically been placed solely in the realm of patronage, a close analysis of relevant documents (letters from the British and Foreign Bible Society archive, articles from the interwar church press, Princess Callimachi’s correspondence,

interviews given by Cornilescu etc.) suggests that Princess Callimachi played a larger role in the creation of the Cornilescu version, beyond the financial support she provided to the translator. The princess's interest in printing the Bible dates back to the last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century when she printed a pocket edition of the New Testament, using the text approved by the Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church. Her desire to publish devotional tracts and pamphlets also motivated her to publish a Romanian version of John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*.

In the final chapters of the thesis, I presented my own contribution as a Bible translator and commentator. The major projects I have participated in include

- *Monumenta Linguae Dacoromanorum*, coordinated by Professor Eugen Munteanu;
- the “Bible according to the Hebrew text” (four volumes published by Humanitas) and
- The revision of the Dumitru Cornilescu edition (EDCR), which is 50% complete.

As a biblical scholar specializing in New Testament studies, I have been commissioned to check the scientific accuracy of the New Testament version translated by Cristian Bădiliță.

In the final part of the habilitation thesis, I summarised my career development plan. One of my scholarly goals is to publish a volume containing the documents from the BFBS archive that pertain to the activity of Benjamin Barker in the Romanian Principalities. Moreover, since the extensive archive of BFBS contains numerous documents referring to the first Protestant Bibles published in the Romanian context, I intend to edit these documents in a separate volume. In the long term, another important scholarly goal is to produce a detailed commentary on Paul's *First Epistle to the Corinthians*.