NOTES

A HISTORICAL NOTE ON THE ROMANIAN ORTHODOX SPELLING OF THE NAME OF JESUS: 'IISUS', NOT 'ISUS'

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In Chapter 6 of his informative and illuminating *Lexicologie biblică românească*, Professor Eugen Munteanu of the University of Iaşi asks why the name of Jesus Christ is not spelled in a unique manner in Romanian[1]. Historical explanations and suggestions are offered in order to draw a picture of this confessionally coloured issue of orthography. Professor Munteanu argues in the end that the Romanian spelling should be either the Orthodox-traditional 'Iisus Hristos' or the linguistically adequate 'Isus Cristos'. Hybrids should not be tolerated.

[1] Eugen Munteanu, *Lexicologie biblică românească* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2008), ch. 6: *Inconsecvență ortografică cu motivație confesională: I(i)sus H(ch)ristos*, pp. 487-505.

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The present brief note hopes to add, from the perspective of history of culture, to the argument 'from tradition' in support of the use of the spelling 'Iisus' and not 'Isus' in a Romanian culture that has been impregnated for centuries with the Orthodox faith of the Byzantine tradition. I would like to suggest here that the use of the spelling 'Iisus' (iota=i + eta=i) from the seventeenth century onwards – although evident since the nineteenth century only – has been the understandable choice for the Orthodox learned in the Romanian lands, not only because of the direct influence of Greek prelates and other erudite figures of the time on the Romanian ecclesiastical culture, but also, possibly, because of the influence of the contemporary developments in Ukraine and especially in Muscovy. While familiar to cultural or church historians, this element of detail is likely to be less known to Biblical linguists, who may wonder why is that the contemporary Orthodox, even when the choice for 'Isus' would seem to be preferable linguistically, insist on using the rather artificial spelling and pronunciation 'I-i-sus'.

One need not address here the religious and social complexities of the seventeenth century in the East – an age of the Orthodox "Confessions" – as they are well known. To refer strictly to the issue at hand, the Romanian principalities had seen the arrival of many Greek erudite prelates (e.g. in 1638 the visit of Patriarch Metrophanes Critopoulos of Alexandria, in 1653-1654 and 1656-1658 the visit of Patriarch Makarios of Antioch etc.) and professors (e.g. Paisios Ligarides and Ignatios Petridis to Târgovişte, 1646) that were to lay an impression on the manner the local intellectual and religious figures were building up their own religious literature (liturgical, Biblical etc.) For the Bible of 1688, to refer to one momentous occasion, the likes of Germanos Nissis and Dositheus of Jerusalem could have offered guidance on the levelling up of any discrepancies from

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the Greek manner of printing the anthroponyms in the Holy Scriptures (a possible 'Isus/Iisus' issue included)[2].

In addition, one has to look farther north and east for a possible influence on the decision of how to write as an Orthodox the name *Iesous* in Romanian. The Kiev of Metropolitan Peter Mogila's time provides a first station: I point here to his attempt to realign the Slavonic liturgical books to the contemporary Greek editions, which display the use of 'Iisus,' e. g. in the famous *Trebnik* of 1646[3]. Since to say that the activity of printing in the Romanian principalities of that time owed very much to Kiev cannot ever be an overstatement (Câmpulung 1635, Govora 1637, Iaşi 1640), I believe it to be perfectly plausible that the Kievan books and the Kievan printing specialists who

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[2] Unfortunately, our search for the spelling of Jesus cannot be but retrospective: we have no general testimony of the spelling preference for the printings of the 17th and the 18th centuries, as the Cyrillic abbreviation **Ic** was the standard. Yet, the use of 'Iisus' for Jesus/Joshua Navi in the *Bible of 1688* (the same as in the case of *Ms 45*) can be considered indirect evidence for how the name Jesus Christ were to be spelled by the editors had it not been abbreviated. That 'Isus' is likely to have been the early standard in the Romanian lands can be seen from the very rare places where one can find it spelled in full, such as in the sixteen-century *Codex Sturdzanus* (see E. Munteanu, *Lexicologie*, 498). For the printings of the 17th century, I found the name 'Isus Navi' in the *Synaxarion* in Slavonic that is included with the first Romanian *New Testament of Bălgrad, 1648* (1 September, ed. Bucharest 1888, 581) and in *Ms 4389* (a translation made with an eye on the Greek original but owing greatly to the Slavonic Bible and thus possibly less affected by the Greek "ways"). While in these cases the spelling 'Isus' in 'Isus Navi' should not necessarily imply that the same spelling would have been the preference of the translators for the fully spelled theonym Jesus (as it was not in some later cases, e.g. the *Bible of 1914*), the likelihood is high. In the 18th century, the *Triodion* of Râmnic (1777; 1782) displays a curious lack of uniformity, as it uses both 'Iisus' and 'Isus' (see E. Munteanu, *Lexicologie*, 498).

[3] Reprinted Kiev, 1996. See e.g. the **Iic.** abbreviation in the introduction: http://www.liturgy.ru/grafics/pmogila1/page.php?p=10&cd=&k=(accessed: 17-03-2010)

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activated in Wallachia and Moldavia could have contributed to to instituting/consolidating the practice of writing 'Iisus' for Iesous in Romanian.

Less known than these possible influences on the decision to spell 'Iisus' and not 'Isus' is the possible influence of the religious landscape in Muscovy. I consider here the attempt of reforming the Russian liturgical books, with help from Kiev and in consultation with Near Eastern churchmen [4]. In this reform associated chiefly with Patriarch Nikon (1605-1681), the traditional way of writing the name of Jesus ('Isus') was a distinct detail to point to, as it was insisted, from 1655 already, that the name should be spelled 'Iisus' according to the Greek spelling of the theonym[5]. This was no mere trifle: to hold onto the old practice would bring about charges of heresy and call for anathemas. In an eschatological age (around the year 1666), a large number

[4] For a good overview of the religious affairs of Russia during the century in question, see Paul Bushkovitch, *Religion and Society in Russia. The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 58-73. A useful chronology of the events can be found in Nickolas Lupinin, *Religious Revolt in the XVIIth Century: The Schism of the Russian* Church (Princeton: The Kingston Press, 1984), 203-208. See also chs. 2, 'Correction of books' and 3, 'Patriarch Nikon' of Georges Florovsky's seminal *Ways of Russian Theology*, Part One, trans. Robert L. Nichols (Collected Works, Volume Five, n.p., Nordland Publishing Company, 1979), 88-97 and also, in Romanian, the historical study of Alexandr Varona, *Tragedia schismei ruse: reforma patriarhului Nikon și începuturile staroverilor* (Bucharest: Kriterion, 2002), esp. 89-110. For general considerations on the 'Greek Project' where the Russian Tsar was to be the protector of the entire Orthodox world and on how the liturgical reform falls within this framework, see Serge A. Zenkovsky, "The Russian Church Schism: Its Background and Repercussions", in *Russian Review* 16: 4 (Oct. 1957), 37-58.

[5] Peter Hauptmann, *Altrussicher Glaube. Der Kampf des Protopopes Avvakum gegen die Kirchenreformen des 17. Jahrhunderts* (Götingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1963), 61 and 86. Also, for instance, a popular name such as 'Nikola' was to be replaced with 'Nikolai'.

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of opponents to the reform created a strong-minded Old Believer 'Counter-Reformation' that opposed the renunciation of the good ways of their Russian ancestors (in reference to the Stoglav Council of 1551 deciding on, e.g., the practice of crossing oneself with two fingers as opposed to three, of using in services a double Hallelujah as opposed to a triple one etc.) and, at the same time, the embracing of the manners of the Greeks (largely seen in Russia as compromised or blatantly heretical after the fifteenth-century Union of Florence)[6]. Displaying a rigid Manichaeism, the Old Believers/Ritualists insisted on the spelling with one 'i', as the one with two 'i's was perceived as an ungodly change and an affirmation of the Antichrist (I + Isus = someone different than Jesus). This insistence is present even today, as the Old Ritualists (the Lipovans in Romania included) continue to preserve the spelling 'Isus' as a sacred duty[7].

It is plausible, in my opinion, that the Russian disputes in general and the issue in question could have become known at the time in the Romanian principalities as well. General links to Muscovy are documented by visits such as by Metropolitans Ilie Iorest in 1645 or Sava Brancovici in 1668. However, what is more interesting here for us to mention is, for instance, the heated dispute on the Russian ritual that Arsenii Sukhanov, a Russian hieromonk on a patriarchal mission to collect Greek manuscripts to help with the revision of the books, had in Iaşi in 1650 with a few Greek prelates from the entourage of Patriarch Paisios of Jerusalem[8]. Also, we know that

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[6] For an atmosphere charged with eschatological expectations and Nikon as an agent of the Antichrist, see Léon Poliakov, *L'épopée des vieux-croyants. Une histoire de la Russie authentique* (Paris: Perrin, 1991), 48-60.

[7] I owe the information on the current practice of the Lipovans to the Rev. Prof. Dragoş Bahrim, who supervised a few years ago a class of such students at the Orthodox Seminary (High School) of Iaşi. I would like to thank him for his assistance.

[8] He had arrived from Moscow in Iaşi in the autumn of 1649 together with Patriarch Paisios. From there he went on to Athos and returned in Russia

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Metropolitan Gedeon of Moldavia (formerly a bishop of Huşi), while sent to Tsar Alexey (1645-1676) on a political mission by Voivode Gheorghe Ştefan (1653-1658), was a participant in the very Moscow synod that included the 'Isus/Iisus' issue, in May 1656[9]. Furthermore, the itinerant Greek Patriarchs themselves or their entourage could have made the debates and decisions of Moscow known in the Romanian principalities. One can easily point out to Paisios of Jerusalem, as we have seen, or to Makarios of Antioch. In addition, Paisios Ligarides, metropolitan of Gaza, active since 1646 in Wallachia, arrived in Moscow in 1662 and became immediately a prominent actor in the disputes there and the planner of the Moscow Council of 1666-1667. A young Dositheus, the future patriarch and an outstandingly active figure in the Romanian lands for several decades, was the representative of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem to the

in December 1650. The debate was spurred by the news that Russian books were being burned in Athos. Following Arsenii's insistence to have a debate on the subject, Paisios convoked four sessions of discussion in Iaşi, on 24 April, 9 May, 3 and 6 June 1650. Among the Greek who actively participated at this debate was Gabriel Vlasios, metropolitan of Arta and Naupaktos, who was later to be sent again to Moscow by Paisios. See Varona, *Tragedia*, 91-92 and 96. This same Gabriel Vlasios had been in Constantinople a professor to Nicolae 'Milescu' Spatharios.

[9] Together with Patriarch Makarios of Antioch, Patriarch Gabriel of Serbia and Metropolitan Gregory of Nicaea, Gedeon was a signatory of a letter to Nikon where they answered the dilemmas around the Old Russian practices. The letter was read at the Synod of 1656, the first synod to reach a decision on the matter. See Melchisedec Ştefănescu, *Lipovenismul adică schismaticii sau rascolnicii şi ereticii ruseşti* (Bucureşti: Imprimeria Naţională Antreprenor C. N. Rădulescu, 1871), 14-15. On the 1656 Council, see Paul Meydendorff, *Russia, Ritual and Reform: the Liturgical Reforms of Nikon in the 17th Century* (Crestwood, NY: Saint Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1987), 61-62. A year before, in March 1655, on the occasion of the festive Eucharist on Orthodox Sunday, in the presence of Makarios of Antioch and Gabriel of Serbia, Nikon had Moldavia and Wallachia included on the list of Orthodox lands where the Russian practice of two-fingered crossing was not being encountered. See *ibid.*, 51-52.

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same council. The printing press that the Russian Patriarch Joachim sent to Metropolitan Dosoftei for the Nicolae Domnesc church in Iaşi, at the request of Nicolae 'Milescu' Spatharios[10], is evidence at least for the knowledge in the Romanian principalities of the Russians' substantial preoccupation with printing and of their authority in the area.

These are some of the elements that allow us to make a conjecture by suggesting the possibility that, as far as in the seventeenth century Orthodoxy meant Greek Orthodoxy (for the Greeks themselves, for the Kievans, for the Russians in Muscovy and indeed for the Moldavians and Wallachians), the Orthodox printings had to be done, more and more, according to the practice of the contemporary Greeks. As the uniquely documented Russian case shows, printing accurately the name of Jesus (i.e. following the Greek spelling of the time) was one of the details to be cautious about.

I believe that, when the name of Jesus became to be spelled in full on a large scale by the Romanian Orthodox, in the 19th century, the practice reflected not only the Grecianizing of the church and society during that period, but was also the result of a gradual adaptation to an adjustment made as early as the 17th century. Inasmuch as the Romanian Orthodoxy, in communion with the other Orthodox Churches, will continue to cherish its (post-)Byzantine legacy, in letter as it were, it will 'traditionally' give preference to 'Iisus', even when a linguist considers 'Isus' a more natural choice for the Romanian language.

[10] Mircea Păcurariu, *Istoria Bisericii Ortodoxe Române*, vol. 2 (Bucharest: Editura Institutului Biblic şi de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, 1992), 102.

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