STYLISTIC ASPECTS OF THE TEXT OF THE DIDACHE. SERMON ON THE ASSUMPTION OF THE THEOTOKOS

Mariana Vârlan

Lecturer, PhD., "Valahia" University, Târgoviște

Abstract: The present communication demonstrates the special artistic value of Anthim the Iberian's writings and the ability of this modern writer to use a particularly beautiful Romanian language, learnt in his adoptive country and mastered the way a native speaker would. The stylistical analyisis of two of his sermons, dedicated to the Lord's Mother, highlights that Metropolitan Anthim can be considered "a forerunner of the poetical prose in the Romanian literature", able to construct true lyrical works meant to move but also to instruct, morally, the public or the audience. Founder of the Romanian literary language, the Metropolitan Anthim the Iberian depicted, with artistry, events and realities of the times that he lived, using words understood by all the people, from the most simple to the most erudite.

Keywords: stylistic resources, figures of speech, didaches

1. **Introduction**:

By his sermons[1], drafted between 1709 and 1716, the erudite Anthim spoke, with clarity and naturalness, in the Byzantine style of oratory, vivid words calling the people's language and speaking to it - in Bucharest or in Târgoviște - "from soul to soul".

Using a rich vocabulary and a morphological structure very similar to that of the spoken language, building large complex sentences, aided by a special culture and with an exceptional oratorical talent, the writer-hierarch Anthim merged into his *Didaches*, in a harmonized manner, religious texts and lay sources, finding the "balance between tradition and innovation", and, at the same time, amazing us with his extraordinary capacity to know and improve the Romanian language.

2. **Problem Statement**

Observing the canon of eloquence, by their three parts - introduction, composition and conclusion – *The Didaches* are designed "to strengthen the dogmatic conscience of the believers listening to him, but also to eulogize the Christian moral virtues" [2]: faith, hope and love. The truths of faith, which, on the one hand, emphasize the beauty of the divinity, and, on the other hand, condemn human vices, are stylistically adorned with repetitions, interrogations, personifications, comparisons, metaphorical expressions, epithets, hyperbolas, inversions and ellipses.

BDD-A25641 © 2017 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 23:00:11 UTC)

A few of these stylistic riches are the subject of our study, as we bring to the fore two homilies [3], spoken on the occasion of the celebration dedicated to *The Dormition of our Most Holy Lady, the Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary*.

3. Research Questions

The question from which we proceed is: "Can a work, written in the eighteenth century, capture the attention of today's readers in such a way as not to be boring by the difficulty of understanding it and by the monotony of its composition?" The answer we are trying to give relies on concrete facts, leading us to new investigations in the laboratory of the old Romanian literary language, using current methods.

4. Purpose of the Study

Starting from the premise that "the old literature, in order to be understood, must first be loved", we ought to analyze the expressive features of Anthim's work, by means of the two sermons dedicated to the Theotokos, where we find, together, rigor, consistency and unitary character. The beauty of the presentation and the artistic harmony greet us on every page. Anthim's speech charms the auditor through naturalness and artistry, thus going beyond the dry and monotonous content of earlier religious writings.

5. Research Methods

The linguistic and stylistic analysis highlights expressive particularities, worthy of notice, of Antim's sermon. Through *mise en relief* procedures, Anthim builds a picturesque, spontaneous and very lively speech.

6. Findings

Met twice in the *Didaches* - in the form of a homily and a teaching [4] - his sermon begins, as the others, with a calm content, meant to capture the attention and maintain the interest and curiosity throughout the discourse. The exordium is worthy of a Metropolitan like Saint Anthim. Both in the first, in the homily, and in the second, namely in the teaching, he considers himself unworthy, amateur and neophyte in front of the great mysteries having to do with the greatness, goodness and beauty of the Most Holy Lady and Ever-Virgin Mary. Therefore, the beginning of the sermons largely contains typical behaviors, namely expressions highlighting the modesty and humility of the one who wishes to caress and quench the thirst of the listeners' souls by offering elevated moral models and landmarks: "my words are not worthy", "my non-rhetoric words", "my mind affected by the cloud of ignorance and even more darkened by the calculation of her divine and most brilliant gifts" ("vorba mea nu iaste vrédnică", "vorbele méle céle neritoricite", "mintea mea turburată de norul neștiinții și mai vârtos întunecată de socoteala dumnezeeștilor și prealuminatelor ei daruri"). The use of the words of the Scripture convinces and attracts, the preacher being aware that he is speaking in the name of Christ and with His power [5].

The content of the sermon that we have chosen to analyze stylistically is focused on the person of the Ever-Virgin Mary, the praises and glory that she deserves generating a true literary masterpiece. By this "prose poem" the author "sovereignly dominates the stylistic resources of the Romanian language" [6], using an expressive material, meant to dynamize the message and impregnate it with lyrical overtones. An eminent artist of the word, endowed with a "prodigious imagination" [7], Anthim establishes a transparent link between idea and image to enhance the understanding of the idea and facilitate its penetration in the mind and soul of the one who listens.

BDD-A25641 © 2017 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 23:00:11 UTC)

This *laudatio* dedicated to the Mother of God respects the pattern of the scientific texts. By it, the Metropolitan refers to some themes related to her status and prestige. By explanations and arguments, Anthim proves a real interest for the numerical symbolism, interpreting, so that anyone may understand, the Hebrew form of the biblical name of the Virgin Mary, hiding, under the sounding apparel of the words[8], truths of faith concerning the Holy Trinity, the Savior's natures and the Christian mysteries:

"*by her name **Mariam**… we understand that she encompasses **three** things in her: **first,** because this name has **three** syllables, one understands that she gave birth to **one** hypostasis **of the Holy Trinity**, God's Son and Word; **second,** since each syllable has **two** letters, one understands **the two natures** of Christ, namely the divine and the human nature; **third,** because there are **6** letters in all in this name, by them we understand **the 6 Mysteries,** great and beyond nature, namely the Annunciation, the Birth, the Baptism, the Death on the Cross, the Resurrection and the Ascension. With the Annunciation, the mystery hidden for ages has been revealed, with the Birth, the heavens have been reconciled with the earth, namely God with man; with the Baptism, we have put on the apparel of incorruptness; with the Death, we have been given life; with the Resurrection, we have been given the joy and with the Ascension [we have been given] the place at the right side of God, the Father*." [9]

This motivation of the linguistic sign, bearing a coded message, is considered an artistic procedure, endowing the portrait with an encomiastic content [10].

The mystery of ***the Holy Trinity*** is interpreted, next, by means of the words spoken by the Archangel Gabriel at the Annunciation, in an admiring tone that livens up the presentation. "Rejoice, full of grace, the Lord is with you!" becomes a leitmotif of the homily. Decoding this formula, Anthim highlights meanings woven mysteriously in his mind:

"*For in the word that says: **rejoice** one can understand **the Son** for He is all the joy of the world; in the world that says: **full of grace**, one can understand **the Holy Spirit**, by Whom all the gifts are given, and in the word that says: **The Lord is with you**, one can understand **the Father**, for He is the Lord of all things, seen and unseen*." [11]

Anthim's encomium is signaled by "a lexical-grammatical procedure of warning: two lexical pairs, with repeated occurrence, in identical or modified grammatical forms, appear as linguistic signals of the eulogy: *I wonder* (verb) / *wonder* (noun) and *I praise* (verb) / *praise* (noun) (*mă minunez / minune* ; *laud / laudă*).Under the tutelage of these terms with multiple occurrences in the same piece of text, a subtle rhetoric of insistence and emphasis is developed, bringing to light the dominant emotional aspect of the orator, which, in principle, is also transferred to the public.

The special role of the encomium sequences is to maintain the persuasiveness of emotional type [12], to settle the attention, enthusiastically and ardently affirming the perfect qualities of the Ever-Virgin Mary. Full of affection are also the rhetorical interrogatives specific of the announced eulogy: "*Who is this [Lady] coming up from the desert, namely from earth to heaven? Who is this [Lady] springing up as the dawn, beautiful like the Moon and exquisite like the Sun? Who is this [Lady] ascending from the earth to heaven, whitened, flourished, with no trace of blasphemy in her?*"

Comparison, with Anthim, has minimal dimensions and is characterized by transparency and wideness! Organized in a ternary system, with the Sun, with the Moon, with daybreak[13], the comparisons create, intuitively, by explanations and descriptive associations, a portrait worthy of enormous veneration, increasing the expressiveness of the text:

"She is exquisite, indeed, *as the Sun*, because she is crowned with all the rays of the divine gifts and shines more brightly among the other lights of the sky."

"She is exquisite and beautiful *like the Moon*, because the light of her holiness outshines the light of the other stars and, for her great and wonderful brightness, she is honored by all the mysterious chains of stars, like a queen."

BDD-A25641 © 2017 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 23:00:11 UTC)

"She is exquisite *like the dawn*, because she chased away the night and all the darkness of sin and has brought into the world the life-bearing day." [14]

Most comparisons have a persuasive role, supporting the stylistic substance, giving elegance to the expression and stability to the religious language: "more honored in heaven than the Cherubim", "more honored beyond comparison than the Seraphim", "more honored and happier than an empress of the world", "taller than the skies", "cleaner than the Sun".

Metaphors organized as well in a ternary manner emphasize the force of the discourse by artistic symbolization and sensitization: "she is spring", "she is cypress", "she is lily"; "she is cloud", "she is Ever-Virgin", "she is a locked garden". In another excerpt, the author of nuances the portrait of the Ever-Virgin Mary, calling her "sky", "the image of God", "the Lady of the angels", concluding that all these "cannot be enough" to portray the greatness of the Theotokos.

Another figure of speech strengthening the artistic value of this homily is the *anaphora*, defined as the repetition of a word or group of words at the beginning of successive sentence fragments, meant to create by repetition a symmetry specific of syntactic parallelism [15]. This symmetry "gives a sense of balance, as fundamental element of beauty, and as the expression of the constant, strong relations between the syntax elements and the figures of speech, determining the enthusiastic expression." [16]

"She is exquisite, for she is spring…"

"She is exquisite, for she is cypress…"

"She is exquisite, for she is lily…"

"She is exquisite, for she is cloud…"

"She is exquisite, for she is virgin before birth, virgin in birth and virgin after birth and she is unfathomable depth of goodness and living icon of the heavenly beauties…"

This pattern of organization will represent a model in both folklore and classical poetry, thus Saint Anthim the Iberian succeeds in "partly opening the gates of Romanian literature in a modern sense."

These repetitions specific of the inner architecture are associated to biblical proper names, which gives the text a special sonority and a vibration, but also an unexpected game of cadences. Met relatively frequently in his sermons, the stylistic alternations reveal an author "who has not only the intuition of rhythms, but also the artistic awareness of their value".

"SHE was seen by Moses in Mount Sinai as a bush, burning, yet not consumed"

"SHE was seen by Aaron as a flowery rod full of fruit"

"SHE was seen by Jacob as a ladder set up on the earth and the top of it reached to heaven and the angels of God ascending and descending on it"

"SHE was seen by Ezekiel as a locked door, which no one has ever passed through"

"SHE was seen by Gideon as fleece, by Habakkuk as a shadowy forest, by Daniel as a mountain and by Solomon as a bed".

The listing of the biblical names in this Akathist hymn is no less expressive. Of course, its main purpose is to highlight, through the symbol, the virtues of the Theotokos.

The repetition with emphatic role highlights the sincere testimony of the orator and his exaltation in front of the miracle:

"Today, heavens open their bosoms…"

"Today, all the heavenly powers marvel."

The figures of speech with epithet value increase the poetic character and the harmony of the structure: "the great and wonderful glow", "birds with sweeter voices", "flowers with many more scents" ("marea și minunata strălucire", "păsări mai cu dulce glasuri", "flori mai cu multe mirosuri"). These artistic images - visual and auditory - beautify the lyrical portrait of the Theotokos.

BDD-A25641 © 2017 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 23:00:11 UTC)

The antithesis in the homily enlivens the presentation by the literary character of the typical oppositions of the field of religion: nouns - *heaven/earth* (*cer/pământ*), *sorrow/joy* (*întristare/bucurie*), substantivized adjectives - *the corruptible/the immortal and eternal* (*cele stricăcioase/cele nemuritoare și veșnice*), substantivized adverbs - *the things of the earth/the things from above* (*cele de jos/ cele de sus*).

"Today SHE is moving from earth to heaven; she leaves sadness behind and goes to joy, she leaves the thing of the earth and receives the things of heaven; she leaves the corruptible things and wins the immortal and eternal things"

Anthim, the man with a name meaning *flower*, manages, due to his rhetoric refinement and ardent zeal, to stylize and harmonize these notional oppositions by adding to them a vivid scent that persists to this day.

7. Conclusions:

Through the stylistic procedures used in his *Didaches*, Anthim proves to be a master of the nuances of the Romanian language, "which he considered able to express feelings equal in height to those of the Greek language" [17].

The whole homily dedicated to the Most Holy Mother of God, this "new Akathist hymn", has the appearance of a prayer uttered from the depths of the soul on behalf of all those listening, the people of those times, as well as the people of today.

BIBLOGRAPHY

[1] It is about the 28 sermons (discourses, homilies, teaching) spoken by the Metropolitan Anthim the Iberian on the occasion of the main religious celebrations of the Orthodox Church: *Cuvânt de învățătură la Dumineca Florilor, Cuvânt de învățătură la Dumineca Lăsatului sec de brânză, Cuvânt de învățătură la Nașterea Domnului nostru Iisus Hristos, Cuvânt de învățătură la Adormirea preasfintei stăpânei noastre Născătoarei de Dumnezeu și pururi Fecioarei Maria* etc.

[2] MIHAIL DIACONESCU. (2013). *Teologia ortodoxă și arta cuvântului. Introducere în teoria literaturii. II. Genul epic. Genul liric*, Iași: Doxologia, p. 202.

[3] According to V. Gordon's opinion, the term de *homily* originally means *conversation, dialogue*. See VASILE GORDON, *Introducere în omiletică*, București, Editura Universității din București, 2001, p. 13. By *homily* we can also understand "*the sermon,* spoken in church, in the presence of a public, usually heterogeneous, with the intention of instructing, educating, moving the public and offering it models and high moral landmarks", see Maria Cătănescu, *Retorica elogiului în Didahiile lui Antim Ivireanul*, accessed on-line (09.10.2016) on http://www.cntdr.ro/sites/default/files/cs2013/cs2013a17.pdf.

[4] DAN HORIA MAZILU. (2004). *Recitind literatura română veche. Compendiu*, București: Editura Ager, p. 164.

[5] VASILE GORDON. (2001). *Predica ocazională* (*Pareneza*), București: Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, p.156.

[6] Mihail Diaconescu, *op. cit.*, p. 202.

[7] EUGEN NEGRICI (1977). *Antim Ivireanul. Logos și personalitate*, București: Editura DU Style, p. 29.

BDD-A25641 © 2017 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 23:00:11 UTC)

[8] See Gheorghe Chivu, *Didahiile lui Antim Ivireanul și înnoirea limbajului predicii românești*, accessed on-line (10.10.2016) on www.limbaromana.md/index.php?go=articole&n=379.
[9] The fragments were taken from *Antim Ivireanu. Didahii* (1998). Chișinău: Editura Litera, p. 22.
[10] Eugen Negrici, *op. cit*., p. 101.
[11] *Antim Ivireanu. Didahii*, p. 22.
[12] MARIA CĂTĂNESCU, *Retorica elogiului în Didahiile lui Antim Ivireanul*, consulted on-line (09.10.2016) pe adresa http://www.cntdr.ro/sites/default/files/cs2013/cs2013a17.pdf.
[13] Met in Anthim's sermons as well as in the sermons of the two coryphaei of the Church, the Apostles Peter and Paul. Peter is compared with the day star – the Sun and Paul with the night star – the Moon. Also, the Sun and the Moon appear as ornaments of certain manuscripts.
[14] *Antim Ivireanu. Didahii*. *op. cit*., p. 23.
[15] The definition was taken from *Dicționar de științe ale limbii* (2001). București: Editura Nemira, s.v. *anaforă*.
[16] Mihail Diaconescu, *op. cit*., p. 202.
[17] GABRIEL ȘTREMPEL. (1997). *Antim Ivireanul*, București: Editura Academiei Române, p. 171.

BDD-A25641 © 2017 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 23:00:11 UTC)