

Dictionarium Valachico-Latinum, the first original bilingual lexicon in Romanian

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Abstract

Dictionarium Valachico-Latinum, a text written in the Banat–Hunedoara area in the mid-17th century, holds a special place among the old Romanian lexicographic works. This first original dictionary of the Romanian language, most probably conceived for the presentation of a representative corpus of the Romanian language vocabulary through Latin equivalents, was the first such work to use the Latin model of organization and presentation of selected words. Following the same Latin model, the author of the text, who proved to have a very good command of the Romanian language, both in its literary and spoken version, created graphemes for rendering sounds specific to the Romanian language and recommended forms and spellings, as an incipient form of establishing literary norms and as a way of lexicographic organization.

1. Preliminary considerations

Quite sadly, the old Romanian lexicographic works¹ are little known, even to specialists. I refer here not only to the filed lexical inventory (although it is neither completely filed, nor in accordance to the best sources) for the historical dictionaries of our language, but rather to the works proper from which this inventory was extracted and especially to the relation these first lexicons had with the cultural environment of their time. The very fact that a word or a meaning is included in a lexicographic work provides significant information about the cultural level of either its author or the model, and therefore certain forms or spellings can suggest or argument the attitude these ancient authors, translators or copyists had with regard to our language of culture or even the literary norm of the time.

This International Workshop of Lexicography, attended by linguists from different countries and belonging to different cultures from Central and South-Eastern Europe, is particularly welcome in such context. The research to be presented here along with the discussions that will follow will certainly contribute to a better understanding and illustration of the encounter and oscillation between the Eastern and Western cultural models, between Slavonic and Latin sources or sometimes the interference of the two models in our old lexicons, which is specific to the Romanian space.

In this respect, we shall select the most significant data on the time-frame, structure and characteristics of the first known original bilingual lexicon of the old Romanian language, entitled by its author *Dictionarium Valachico-Latinum*². Until the end of the 18th century, this lexicon that was commonly named *Anonymus Caransebesiensis*³, was actually the only lexicon based on the Romanian language that we know of.

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¹For their presentation, see Seche (1966, p. 7–33) and the more recent work of Jordan (1978, p. 13–17).

²The information presented below is to be found, in greater detail, in Chivu (2008).

³The name, given by Crețu (1898), who elaborated the first complete edition of the text, replaced the older name, *Anonymus Lugoshiensis*, given to the lexicon by Hasdeu (1891), who discovered and was the first scholar to study the manuscript.

2. Brief philological considerations

The manuscript that *Dictionarium Valachico-Latinum* belongs to was discovered 150 years ago by Bogdan Petriceicu Hasdeu among the resources of the Library of the University of Budapest⁴. According to the catalogue of this vast library (*Catalogus 1889*, p. 194), its collections include, in section H.3, a *Dictionarium Valachico-Latino-Hungarico*, a misleading title, since the first part of the indicated miscellany (pages 1–173) comprises, as clearly specified on the first page of the lexicon that makes the object of our analysis, only two columns; the first is dedicated to the Romanian title-forms and the second to their Latin equivalents⁵. The Hungarian additions, which could justify the (so-called) trilingual character of the text, are quite disparate and scarce and cannot be organized into a third column in the lexicon⁶, being certainly introduced by a subsequent owner of the miscellany and dating from the beginning of the 18th century. This is when the pages these additions were written on, following their selection from various Latin sources, were added as *Connotationes ex adagiis* (p. 174–354) to the Romanian-Latin lexicon (which had existed as an independent text for a long time⁷). On two of the last pages of this new component of the manuscript recorded at the Library of the University of Budapest under section H.3 (p. 349–352), an anonymous owner, most probably a catholic priest, made notes for an *Itinerarium* during a visit to some localities in Southern Transylvania in 1742.

Dictionarium Valachico-Latinum, rightfully regarded by Bogdan Petriceicu Hasdeu as “the oldest dictionary of the Romanian language”, is thus an extended bilingual lexicon based on the Romanian language (containing 5292 entries), followed by a brief Latin–Romanian glossary, organized according to topics such as *Frumenti et leguminum species*, *Os, oris* and *Colores*, both lexicographic works being written by the same author.

The author of this *Dictionarium*, an intellectual who had a solid experience in writing Romanian texts (as indicated by his fluent and confident writing), had a very good command of the Latin language. (The Latin equivalents identify not only common words of general usage, but also lexemes carrying special meanings and having special usage, occasionally even familiar or argotic elements, regionalisms or less commonly used names of plants.) This author operated numerous changes in the initially transcribed version, correcting several title-words, adding articles on the right side of the page, eliminating a series of repeated entries, changing the place of other entries to re-establish the alphabetical order, completing or replacing a series of Latin glossaries. All these elements indicate that a revision was performed by the author of the lexicon himself. This is also the case of extended groups of title-forms, which suggests the hypothesis that certain forms initially omitted were subsequently introduced not from a preliminary edition, which was less carefully reproduced, but from sets of files arranged in alphabetical order.

The watermark analysis of the older part of the miscellany indicates that *Dictionarium Valachico-Latinum* was written around 1650⁸. According to B. P. Hasdeu, who discovered and analyzed the text for the first time, the dictionary dated, as suggested by the language analysis, from the last decades of the 17th century, whereas Grigore Crețu, the author of the first complete edition of the text, placed it, closely following Hasdeu’s arguments, “around 1670”. On the other hand, Tagliavini (1930, p. 10) suggested “the first years of the 18th century”, most probably correlating the period with the elaboration of the so-called *Lexicon Marsilianum*.

A series of linguistic peculiarities (dialectal phonetic particularities specific to the Banat area and

⁴See Hasdeu (1871).

⁵In two of the preliminary versions of the Library Catalogue elaborated in 1850 (*Catalogus manuseriptorum <Bibliotheca Regie Scientiarum Universitatis>, confectus circa annum 1850*), and in 1877 (*Catalogus manuseriptorum que in Regia Scientiarum Universitatis Bibliotheca Archivio Pestini observantur*), the manuscript is mentioned under its correct name, *Dictionarium Valachico-Latinum*.

⁶For further details, see Chivu (2008, p. 8).

⁷This is indicated by the aspect of the first and last pages of the Romanian–Latin lexicon.

⁸For further details, see Chivu (2003, p. 21–27).

words that circulated in the Banat-Hunedoara area), the use of Hungarian orthography for the spelling of Romanian words, as well as the use of separate entries for a series of toponyms specific to the South-Western area of Romania prove that the text was elaborated, as already stated at the beginning of the 20th century, in the Caransebeş area (or, as Bogdan Petriceicu Hasdeu noted, “around” Lugoj).

We are thus entitled to claim that the author of the lexicon, an (at least until today) anonymous scholar (various attempts to identify him with scholars of the time such as Ştefan Fogarasi or Ioan Viski were not successful), identified based on some circumstances, but without convincing arguments by some researchers as Mihail Halici⁹, belonged to the cultural movement of Banat, illustrated during the 17th and 18th centuries by several manuscripts written in the Latin alphabet.

The main model followed by the author of this first original Romanian dictionary was certainly a Latin-based lexicon. First of all, the use of such model is suggested by the way of noting the verbal title-forms (the first person of the present indicative). The same tendency is indicated by the modification of the form, respectively of the order of several entries. Could this lexicographic model possibly be an edition of the well-known *Lexicon Latino-Græco-Hungaricum* elaborated by Albert Szenczi Molnár? Most probably. In the process of elaborating a lexicon based on the Romanian language rather than translating a pre-existing source, the author most likely consulted various other lexicons in circulation at the time. From those lexicons he extracted not only the Latin equivalents of the Romanian headwords, but also Romanian words and forms that around the year 1650 characterized other literary variants than the Banat-Hunedoara one. We refer to entries such as *bostan* ‘pumpkin’, *bute* ‘barrel’, *ciobotar* ‘shoemaker’, *ginere* ‘son-in-law’, *nasture* ‘button’ or *omăt* ‘snow’. Some of these hypothetical sources might even have been written with Cyrillic characters, as suggested by some errors related to the letters (for instance, *r* is replaced by the Latin *p* in *fenap* for *fenar* ‘barn’).

The work as a whole, the significant number of Romanian entries for which no Latin equivalent is indicated, along with the significant number of regionalisms specific to the Banat region clearly indicate that *Dictionarium Valachico-Latinum* is a completely original lexicographic work.

3. The linguistic and cultural relevance of the text

This first vast lexicographic work based on the Romanian language that was elaborated on the Romanian territory, entitled *Dictionarium Valachico-Latinum*, holds thus an important place in the history of our literary writing.

The author of this manuscript elaborated sometimes around the year 1650 (in the same period when Mardarie Cozianul was writing *Lexiconul slavo-românesc și tâlcuirea numelor* [The Slavonic-Romanian Lexicon and the meaning of names] based on Pamvo Berînda’s work), proves to be an excellent connoisseur of both the Latin language (as he occasionally recorded forms, spellings and meanings rarely attested in the Latin texts available at the time) and the Romanian language, both in its elevated, literary form and in the mid-17th century spoken form specific to the Banat area (including familiar or argotic variants).

Among the recorded Romanian words, an extremely rich corpus of regionalisms stands out, as noted even since the manuscript was discovered (in the summer of 1871). Most of these regionalisms originate from Hungarian (*acar* adverb, *băsău*, *celeşag*, *feştic*, *harîng*, *laçşă*, *megheleu*, *nosa*, *ocoş*, *păharsec*, *ratot*, *şod*, *tiucă*, *ţipou*, *vişeu*, and so on) or Serbian (*babiţă*, *coprenă*, *dică*, *faidă*, *gîrclean*, *ialoviţă*, *loveţ*, *mătrac*, *opreg*, *pruglă*, *rîză*, *stăci* verb, *ştim*, *treasc*, *ureznic*, *vircă*, *zglăvoace*, and so on).

Several words are taken from the spoken language of the time, occasionally from its familiar or argotic versions (*foflei*, *răsipilă*, *rumega* ‘to meditate, to consider’, *căcîcea*, *cenuşotcă*, *pişotcă*), whereas certain lexical structures were most likely created by speakers via folk etymology (such as *simţivară* ‘titmouse’).

Naturally, the most numerous title-forms are old words, inherited from Latin. In the case of some of these words, the Latin glossaries attest the presence in their local usage of certain inherited meanings thought to have disappeared in the previous century but which remained specific to the Northern part of

⁹See, first of all, the studies compiled in Király (2003, p. 9–130).

Dacoromania, as proven by our old texts (see, in this respect *număra* ‘to read’ and its derivatives *numărător* ‘reader’ and *numărătură* ‘reading’).

Furthermore, many entries represent (in relation to the forms recorded in the historical dictionaries of the Romanian language) the first attestations (*cocoșter*, *glonț* ‘sphere’, *intrupura*, *rit* ‘beak’, *strepede*, *tăfăragă*, *tic* ‘beak’, *toblă*, *urechelniță* ‘insect; instrument for cleaning one’s ears’, *vîntă*, and so forth), which allow tracking back in time the dates known for some forms and lexical variants. Other title-words, such as *crîmpicea* ‘variety of wheat’, *bronț* ‘soft bone’, *lingui* ‘to flatter’, *necît* ‘than’, *păninc* ‘părînc, (variety of) millet’, *scopos* ‘with dignity, appropriately’, *tristeală* ‘sadness’, *ursoanie* ‘she-bear’, *veșt* ‘experienced (man)’, or *zogonitor* ‘banishing’, are missing from the historical dictionaries of our language. This is also the case of many names of plants, especially fruit-trees, an extremely well-represented lexical field¹⁰. (*Dictionarium* records 15 varieties of apple-trees, 13 varieties of pear-trees, and 4 varieties of cherry-trees.)

The influence exercised by the Latin language, truly remarkable in an age in which Romanian writing was dominated by Slavonic models, had an equal impact on establishing the lexical inventory, since the title-forms in *Dictionarium* include, due to the author’s cultural background and certainly under the influence of the elevated spoken language of the time, several neologisms with Latin and/or Greek etymons (*artic*, *lăternă*, *mil* ‘mile, unit for measuring distance’, *mirac*, *mod*, *probă* ‘trial’, *stemă* ‘emblem’, *sumă* ‘sum’, *tipar* ‘print’, *titor* ‘tutor’, *violă* ‘squill’, and so forth), respectively calques of Latin words (*întrîmbla* ‘to mediate’, *întrîmblare* ‘mediation’, *întrîmblator* ‘mediator’, *neștinție* ‘ignorance’).

However, the most significant Latin influences are illustrated by the orthography of the headwords. We refer first of all to several significant deviations from the norms of the Hungarian orthography, dominant within the text (among these, the use of *c* and *ch* instead of *k* or the creation of certain graphemes for rendering sounds specific to the Romanian language: *â* and *ê* for the central vowel, *sh* for [ș], *dsh* for [ğ]). We focus especially on the frequent use of etymology-like spellings that proves, on the one hand, the fact that the anonymous author was well aware of the connection between certain Romanian words and their Latin equivalents (see, for instance, the use of double letters such as *ff* in *afflu*, *mm* in *summă*, or *tt* in *guttă*) and on the other hand that some derivatives or grammatical forms derive from a certain Romanian base word (as in the case of the innovative graphemes *gs*, *ts* or *tz*, used in *zelogsie*, *zelogsit*, through correlation with *zelog*, or in *berbetzie*, *clopotzel*, through correlation with *berbat* and *clopot*).

The linguistic competence of the intellectual who elaborated *Dictionarium Valachico-Latinum* is confirmed once more by his attempt to use the headwords to differentiate between homonyms (see pairs such as *scos* – *scosul*, *trecut* – *trecutul*, where the forms containing the definite article are always adverbs), and especially by the presence in the manuscripts of a series of initial attempts to establish explicit norms of usage, by the correlation of phonetic variants, recorded (naturally) without glosses, with forms regarded as appropriate (some variants with *sv* or *z* are sent through *vide* to forms with *sf*: *svădesc vide sfădesc*, *svîrșesc vide sfîrșesc*, respectively to forms with *dz*: *zac vide dzac*, *zară vide dzară*).

4. Final considerations

Most likely intended for the detailed presentation of the Romanian language vocabulary with the help of the Latin glossary rather than either a didactic purpose (the assimilation of a foreign language of culture, Latin in this specific case, through the Romanian language) or a practical purpose (as an instrument that could facilitate translations from the language of culture of the time into the Romanian language), as most of the old Romanian lexicons based on a Slavonic model, *Dictionarium Valachico-Latinum* holds thus a special place among the oldest Romanian lexicographic works.

The particular character of this first original dictionary of our language is supported by the fact that it was related, for the very first time in an original lexicographic work, to the Latin model (while other Romanian works of the time either used translations or processed Slavonic models) and it created, used or recommended certain forms or spellings in an initial attempt to establish literary norms.

¹⁰For the complete list of names of plants included in *Dictionarium Valachico-Latinum*, see Chivu (2010, p. 333–340).

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