BIBLICAL REPRESENTATIONS IN THE PRINTED WORKS OF BRANCOVEANU'S AGE

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Abstract:During the reign of Constantin Brâncoveanu, an impressive number of works were printed; they were intended to cover as broad a range as possible from various areas of the religious or public life of his age. It should be noted that their illustrations stand out through an elegant page layout, numerous title sheets, frontispieces, vignettes, flamboyant initial letters, engravings, which come to enrich the remarkable graphic aspect of prints in those times. Title sheets are in the form of a plate, and representations of Jesus, of the Virgin Mary and of the four Evangelists are frequent, usually placed in ornamental medallions. Full-page engravings of saints or religious images and frontispieces with scene in which Jesus, the Saint Virgin and other biblical figures appear are also to be noted.

Keywords: Brâncoveanu, printing, printing art, engraving, frontispiece.

Constantin Brâncoveanu's reign was an age of full cultural and artistic glory, an age in which books in various languages were printed, many churches and monasteries were built, schools were founded, several Orthodox religious establishments that were under the Ottoman domination were supported financially. The verses on the heraldry dedicated to him emphasised all these aspects which recommend him as a Humanist prince. The important role he played in publishing them is pointed out in the prefaces or the titles of works which mention that many of them were printed "by the will", "at the order" or "on the expense" of the voivode.

During his reign five printing works functioned in Wallachia: Bucharest, Snagov, Buzău, Rîmnic and Tîrgovişte. The writings issued by these offices are real works of art. The illuminated manuscripts began to gradually disappear, with but a few last manifestations as art. As regards the printing art, it was to be taken to the highest level by Antim Ivireanul, Mitrofan (Buzău), Ioanichie Bakov (Buzău), Gh. Radovici (Tîrgovişte) etc.

The text in the pages of these printings is airy, complying with the typographic principle which states that the space between lines should not be larger than the size of the letters. Most have the text printed in red and black, enclosed in typographic compositions, with a touch of elegance provided by the flamboyant initials. To all these elements, which turn the books printed in the five offices into genuine works of arts, we should add the illustration, which stands out through an elegant page layout. Many title sheets, frontispieces, vignettes, flamboyant initials and engravings come to enrich the graphic aspects of prints.

Title sheets in this period are rich in biblical representations. Thus, in the case of the **Evangheliarul greco roman** (i.e. 'the Greek-Romanian Gospel') (Bucharest, 1693), the title sheet is in the form of a plate, with representations of three Brancovenesque columns, with accolade arches, with leafed spires twisted in torsades and chapiters made of half-palmettes. In the central part, in a hexagonal medallion, Christ Pantocrator[1] appears at the top and the Evangelists are in the four corners. At the bottom, the Holy Emperor Constantine and Empress Helena are represented holding the cross. Although the engraving is not signed, the author is apparently the printer himself, i.e. Antim Ivireanul. Another work, the**Evanghelia** ('Gospel') (Snagov, 1697), has a frontispiece in the upper part (Deisis), in which Jesus, the

[1] An icon painted in Orthodox churches on the nave arch, which depicts Jesus Christ as an emperor of the world.

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Saint Virgin Mary and Saint John are represented in three round medallions. At the bottom of the title sheet, there is a phytomorphic vignette made of spires which end in acanthus flower and sunflower.

Title sheets of works printed at the **Buzău**office are generally elegant and decorative, adapted to the text, with engravings or frontispieces which suggest, as much as possible, the content. Thus, the title sheet of the **Minei** ('Menaion') for September (1698) presents, in the upper part, a frontispiece taken from the **Evanghelia greco-română**, namely a *Deisis* in which Jesus Christ appears in a round medallion, having the Virgin Mary on his left and Saint John on his right, sitting on flower calyces. At the bottom, there is a phytomorphic vignette. The title sheet of the **Octoih (**'Oktoih'**)** (1700) is in the form of a plate, with columns around which grapevine wreathes and chapiters from acanthus leaf. In the upper part, in the centre, Saints Constantine and Helena are depicted holding the *Cross*, while on either side stand Mary and Saint John separated by columns with spires in torsade. At the bottom there are two vignettes, one with the motif of the flower pot, acanthus flowers and sunflowers, the other including the emblem of Wallachia, in a floral frame, all surmounted by the princely crown. The title is printed in red, under an arcade, with two winged heads on either side of it. The engraving is attributed to Ursu Grozavu.[2] The title sheet of the **Triod (**'Triodion'**)** (Buzău, 1700) is architectural, coffered, with Brancovenesque columns, with saints and biblical scenes depicted in coffers. In the upper part, in an oval scroll, the *Saint Cross* is engraved, while the Virgin Mary and Saint John stand on the sides. In upper coffers, Saint Archangel Michael and Saint Archangel Gabriel are represented. On the left of the plate there are Saint Apostle Peter and Saint Nicholas, while Saint Apostle Paul and Saint Gregory the Decapolite are on the right side. At the bottom, Saints Constantine and Helena are between Saint Elijah and The Great Martyr Saint Catherine, while Saint George and Saint Demetrios appear in the corners. It is assumed that the engraving was made by Ioanichie Bakov.

As for the title sheets of **Rîmnic** prints of this period, one should note the borders used to frame book pages or illustrations. The analyses conducted revealed that in the **Antologhion** (Rîmnic, 1705) and in the **Octoih** (Rîmnic, 1706) these frames were designed with typographic elements on the sides and frontispieces containing the image of Jesus, the Virgin Mary and other saints in medallions. At the bottom side, there is the emblem of Wallachia depicting the double-headed eagle, the princely crown on top of it, the sceptre and the sword in its claws, all within vegetal motifs that are characteristic of the folk art.

As regards the printing office of **Tîrgovişte**, we should mention the work **Serviciul bisericesc** (1709) (i.e. 'the religious service') with the title bordered by a flower frame in which, inside a medallion, there are Jesus Christ (up) and the Mother of God (down).

The **frontispieces** of works printed during the Brancovenesque age also contain biblical scenes just like the title sheets. In **Mărgăritare** (Bucureşti, 1691), a *Deisis* appear, with Jesus having Saint Paul and Saint John on either side. In the space created between the three medallions acanthus flowers, carnations and pomegranate flowers are engraved, being disposed symmetrically with respect to the central medallion. In **Noul Testament** ('the New Testament') (Bucharest, 1703), Jesus is in the centre with sunflower on both sides of the medallion. The**Buzău** printings of this period stand out through the frontispieces with scene. The **Triod** (Buzău, 1700)has a frontispiece with three medallions in the shape of wheat ear wreaths in which Jesus, the Virgin Mary and Saint John are depicted, a frontispiece also to be found in the **Antologhionul** (1705)and the **Octoih** (1706) from Rîmnic. For the **Triod** of Buzău, a new frontispiece "with scene"[3] was created, in which, inside a round medallion, the

[2] Dragoş Morărescu. *Xilografii epocii brâncoveneşti: Ursu Zugravu*. (Xylographs of the Brancoveanu Age). In: "Arta", nr. 2, 1983, passim.
[3] Ana Andreescu. *Arta cărţii (The Art of the book).* Bucharest: Univers Enciclopedic Publishing House, 2002, p. 113.

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Last Supper is engraved showing Jesus in the centre; the laws of perspective are violated for he, as a background figure, is engraved as being larger than the characters in the foreground. Angel heads are engraved on each side of the medallion. In the same work, there is also the frontispiece *The Complaint of Jesus*, a scene inside a round medallion, the engraving being filled with spires and sunflower. The most frequently encountered **Rîmnic** frontispieces are those which contain the image *Deisis* (Jesus with the Mother of God on the left and Saint John on the right) and Jesus in central medallion. At **Tîrgovişte**, frontispieces are sometimes accompanied by small medallions representing Jesus, Saint Paul, the Virgin Mary next to small winged heads.

The flamboyant initials have phytomorphic or anthropomorphic motifs, usually framed rectangularly, generally containing vegetal ornaments of stylised leaves and flowers. The ornaments inside them differ from letter to letter, but there are also different representations within the same letter. In the case of the **Bucharest**printing centre, anthropomorphic engravings also appear. For example, one should note the Cyrillic letter **P** in the Bucharest**Bible** which reproduces the image of Saint Peter. At **Buzău**, initial capital letters with anthropomorphic motifs (Cyrillic **A** with angel, Cyrillic **N** with saint) or with scenes, such as a Cyrillic **F** with the Saints Constantine and Helena, also encountered in the **Octoih** and the **Triod**, are very frequent.

In the books printed at the five printing centres which functioned during the reign of Constantin Brâncoveanu, many full page **engravings** are to be encountered. Thus, the pages of these works contain a genuine gallery of biblical scenes. In the **Evangheliarul greco-român** (Bucharest, 1693), the four Evangelists were engraved by Antim Ivireanul himself and were to appear also in the Snagov **Evanghelia** ('Gospel') (1697). In point of structure, these engravings are identical: the saint is drawn standing, in the centre of an oval, accompanied by the particular symbol. The enframing of the oval is Baroque and contains chapiters, half-palmettes etc. Outside the oval area, the ornamental elements are different each time. In the **Psaltirea** ('Psalter') (Bucharest, 1694), the Emperor David is represented between two Brancovenesque columns with serrate leaves wreathing around them. Inside the oval, the following text is inscribed: "Mînile meale au făcut organele şi degetele meale ai încheiat Psaltirea" (which roughly translates as 'My hands have made the organs and my fingers have completed the Psalm book'). To the left of the columns, there are the princely doors, coffered, and to the right – a pulpit. The same engraving was to be reproduced in the **Antologhion** (1697) and the **Psaltirea** (1700) of Snagov as well. The most remarkable engravings printed at the **Buzău** printing office are those made by the Ukrainian engraver Ivan Bakov. In his works, the **Molitvenic** (1699) and the **Triod** (1700), very well calculated planes with "a Russian or Italian architectonic decor" are to be noted. Saint John of Damascus is rendered reading a book, sitting in an armchair, slightly turned to the left. Everything is framed by an arch supported by ornamental columns only in the lower side. The engraving is not signed. Another engraving depicts Saints Constantine and Helena. *Vameşul şi fariseul* ('The Publican and the Pharisee') is the first engraving present in the 1700 **Triod**. The decoration is Brancovenesque, with arches, columns, candelabra and windows. There follows a number of engravings illustrating scenes from the life of Jesus Christ, the first ones after those of Coresi in the **Triodul penticostar** of 1558. In the *Crucifixion* scene, many characters appear, among which Joseph, Mary, Mary Magdalene stand out, while, in the centre, the scene of Jesus being pricked with the spear and crucified between the two thieves is depicted. The name of the scene is inscribed in Slavonic on a banderol. The engraving representing *The Raising of Lazarus* is signed by Ioanichie Bakov. Jesus is engraved next to his Apostles, with Mary and Mary Magdalene kneeling in front of them and the crowd attending the resurrection of Lazarus. In the background, the city of Jerusalem appears. *The Entry into Jerusalem* is signed by the same Ioanichie Bakov. Jesus is depicted mounted on a donkey, the inhabitants grouped

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before him at the gate of the city and the apostles which accompany him behind. In the background – the same city of Jerusalem. The engraving with scenes from *The Life of Joseph* has four frames, rendering four moments of his life. The engraving entitled *The Wise Virgins* starts from the strictly religious message of the parable – namely that salvation demands penitence even from those who live a life without sin, therefore it is an obligatory accessory (the oil). Using this example as a pretext, the engraver was concerned with rendering expressions of consternation, disillusion, fury, resignation or indifference on the faces of the mad virgins, depicting the wise ones as having a dignified but bashful attitude. The engraving bears no signature. In another illustration, Mary Magdalene is engraved washing Jesus' feet with tears and wiping them with her own hair. The interior depicted is typically Brancovenesque. Some of the xylographs which appear on the Rîmnic prints were apparently made atRîmnic by various xylographers who would sign using their full names or only initials. The brief period of operation of the printing house during the stay of Ivireanul is very important in terms of the graphic art as well, for the engravings are made in accordance with the style of the epoch dominated by Constantin Brâncoveanu's personality. We should also note the xylograph which represents Saint Nicholas (**Cuvînt panegiric la Sf. Nicolae**, 1706), signed with Greek letters (the author was probably Greek or Macedonean).[4] It appears that, from 1698 to 1701, he worked at Snagov and then atBuzău, which is proved by the xylograph depicting Saint Basil signed by Dimitrios[5] and impressed on the **Liturgy** printed at Buzău in 1702. Dimitrie the engraver may be considered the first of the artists who formed a style in the Rîmnic engraving art based on that practiced in the age of Constantin Brâncoveanu. The most frequent engraving encountered in the Tîrgovişte prints is the *Deisis*, with Jesus represented on the throne, the Virgin Mary on his left, Saint John on the right. Thus, on the back of the title page of the **Învăţătura bisericească** (Tîrgovişte, 1710) and of the **Rugăciuni**…(Tîrgovişte, 1713), there is a *Deisis* depicting Christ on the throne, the Virgin Mary and Saint John in the background. In **Liturghia** (Tîrgovişte, 1713), the illustrator Ursul Zugravul 'the Painter' renders a *Deisis*. The *Table of the Proskomedia* is also engraved.

Vignettes appeared as ornaments at the end of chapters, paragraphs or books. Some of the final vignettes in the **Bucharest**printings represent medallions with the face of Jesus or of the Virgin Mary. In the **Octoih**, there is also a final vignette depicting the Saints Constantine and Helena holding the holy Cross.

As one can note, the disappearance of the illuminated manuscript did not also mean the disappearance of decorations in printed books. More often than not, they were confused with the manuscript books, as they were neatly worked, with classic religious ornaments.

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[5]Ioan Bianu; Nerva Hodoş. *Bibliografia Românească Veche.(*Old Romanian Bibliography*)* Tom I. Bucharest: Stabilimentul Grafic I.V. Socec, 1903, nr. 93, p. 438.

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