A LEGEND CIRCULATING THROUGH TIME AND SPACE: *BARLAAM AND JOSAPHAT*

MARIA STANCIU ISTRATE[1]

Abstract. The paper analyses one of the most popular narratives of European Middle Age, the shortened name of which is *Barlaam and Josaphat*. Having appeared in India, as a legend about *The Life of Buddha*, the writing went through several religions and cultural environments, changing gradually and eventually becoming a Christian narrative.

Whether from Greek, Latin or from Slavonic, the hagiographical legend was translated into almost all European literatures. On the Romanian territory, the legend entered during the 15th century, through manuscripts written in Slavonic, accessible only to cultivated people. The first Romanian translation, which appeared around the middle of the 17th century, is based upon a Slavonic original.

A special place is occupied in the paper by the influence the life of the two hermits had on other fields of culture. The iconographical or architectural representations, the group of paintings at the Neamț Monastery are proofs of the resounding success of the narrative. The main contribution to this was brought especially by the parables through which Barlaam convinces Josaphat to adhere to Christianity. Some of the parables were capitalized on either independently, or were included in the structure of writings that became famous in Middle Age literature, authored by Boccacio or Shakespeare.

Key words: Barlaam and Josaphat, Middle Ages, mediaeval Literature, Buddhism, Christianity, Slavonic translation, Romanian translation, Udrişte Năsturel.

1. The first translation into Romanian of the novel *Barlaam and Josaphat*, which had a profound impact on almost all European literatures, appeared midway through the 17th century, at a time when writings with religious topics were prevalent in Romania's cultural life. The influence this novel exerted on European culture made the German Byzantine expert Karl Krumbracher consider it 'the most renowned and accomplished spiritual novel of the Middle Ages' (ap. Cartojan (1929: 232).

2. Most of the versions of the novel relate how astrologists had forewarned the Indian Emperor Avenir that the only son he would have would convert to Christianity. In some versions, the forewarning is announced after the Emperor's son is born, during the celebration the Emperor holds in honor of the newly-born Josaphat. In order to prevent the

[1] Institute of Linguistics of the Romanian Academy, maria.istrate@lingv.ro

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fulfilment of the astrologists' prophecy, Avenir shuts his son in a palace, hires only young servants and orders everybody to avoid letting the child find out anything about pain and death. The prince eventually escapes the father's chains of vigilance and his courtiers, and finds out about the inherent sufferings one faces in life after he meets a leper, a blind man, an old man, and last of all, sees a funeral procession. He thus understands that health may be shattered by disease and often unexpectedly so; that youth is one day replaced by old age and life ends with death. All this makes him excessively sad, and more than anything he is frightened by the thought of death, the ephemeral character of life, and the lack of certainty that there will be a future life in another world.

In these circumstances, he gets to know Barlaam, one of the several hermits who travelled through India at the time. The latter introduces Josaphat to the teachings of Christ. In the Romanian version, the anchorite Barlaam, who is at the same time a priest, finds out through divine revelation about the anxieties of the Emperor's son and decides to save him. He leaves the desert and comes to India on a raft. He dresses as a merchant and shows up at the palace. Here he tells one of the prince's teachers that he wants to give the prince a precious stone, an absolutely unique gem, one which can shine the light of wisdom on even the most ignorant, making deaf people hear, giving speech to the mute or making sick people healthy again. Thus managing to get close to Josaphat, Barlaam reveals to the prince the vanity of this world, 'in which some people depart and others are born', and speaks to him about the redemption that the Christian faith brings to the eternal soul, 'because death is but a separation of the soul from the body'. Convinced by Barlaam's teachings, which are accompanied by eloquent and beautiful parables, Josaphat feels a sweet light in his heart and asks the anchorite to baptize him and to give him the Eucharist.

On hearing the news about the transformation that his son's soul goes through, Avenir does his best to make the child return to the pagan faith. By divine inspiration, Josaphat manages to avoid all the traps set by his father's wizards, meant to persuade him of the superiority of worshipping idols. Furthermore, in the thick of the debates, the wizards themselves are convinced by the truths of the Christian teaching, abandon their faith in idols and convert to Christianity.

As a last resort, Avenir decides to hand over the kingdom to his son in order to corrupt him. Josaphat accepts, but then orders that the altars of the idols be destroyed and afterwards dedicates himself to works of charity. In the end, convinced by his son, the Emperor too changes his faith and chooses to go to the desert, where he lives as an anchorite until the end of his life.

Soon after that, Josaphat renounces his crown and leaves the city to live the life of a recluse. He meets Barlaam and lives near him until the latter's death. He dies after several years of living in complete isolation.

3. At first, the two men were believed to be real. However, research carried out in the latter half of the 19th century proved that the story is a Christian adaptation of the legend of Buddha.

Alongside Buddhist religion, Buddhist literature, whether philosophical or mythological, also became popular from the Far East to the Middle East. As a consequence, a series of Buddhist legends entered the literature of several peoples. Amongst these legends ranks the story of Buddha, who after a long journey through time and space, metamorphosised from the Indian sage into the Christian prince Josaphat (see Amita Bhose, http://amitabhose.net/Articol.asp?ID=65).

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The similarities between the lives of the two princes, Buddha and Josaphat, are conspicuous. Both of them abandon worldly pleasures; many of their teachings are similar, while some of the parables in each narrative are valid for both.

The introduction of Balauhar into the Persian version of the narrative, a name that in later writings turned to Barlaam, was owed to a Christian. Barlaam's role is to initiate the young prince, then to baptize him and give him the Eucharist.

Specialists agree that Barlaam's appearance did not initially occur in the Indian versions, but only when the legend from India reached Persia (Jacobs, 1896: X; Lang, 1966: 11–12). More precisely, the novel about Barlaam and Josaphat is not a translation made directly from an Indian original, but represents the result of a prolonged migration of the story of Buddha's life and his teachings through a multitude of cultural environments and religions, before it became a Christian writing. A crucial role was played by the Manicheans from central Asia and the Arab writers in the time of Harun-al-Rashid (Lang 1966: 11). In the 6th centuries, the prototype of the legend was translated from Persian into Syrian.

A very important link in the passage of the legend from the East to the West could be traced, according to David Marshall Lang, in the literature of mediaeval Georgia, a Christian kingdom from the Caucasus, which since the 4th century had served as a bulwark of Christian faith among non-believers. At the same time, the Georgian Christian church was the first to include Iodasaph (in reality, Buddha) among the saints, celebrating him in hymns as early as the 10th and 11th centuries (Lang, 1966: 11).

The chronology of the first Christian versions and the relationships of affiliation between them are still subjects of research surrounded by controversy. The name of Josaphat was mentioned for the first time in a Greek version. The transformation of the anthroponyms obviously occurred in succession. The versions in Arabic served to establish the stages of the transformation of Sanskrit anthroponyms into the corresponding Greek ones. Bodhisattva, 'the embodiment of wisdom' in Sanskrit, became Budhasaf in Arabic, after that Yudasaf and, finally, Ioasaf in Greek. The mentor of the prince has the name of Bilawhar in Arabic, Balahvar in Georgian, and Varlaam in Greek (see Amita Bhose, http://amitabhose.net/Articol.asp?ID=65).

It is not in our intention to insist on the affiliation between the legend's first versions. For a more general perspective on the variants and the circulation of this legend in different literatures, we will mention the genealogy made up by Joseph Jacobs (Jacobs, 1896: 10. Such an arrangement is also met in Hayes, 1931: 12–13). According to him, in 1896 there existed 60 translations and approximately 100 variants of the legend.

4. The versions circulating in the Byzantine Empire in approximately 140 manuscripts are derived from a source dated in 1021. Around 60% of the manuscripts are attributed to a monk called John, from the monastery of Sabas in Jerusalem, who is usually identified as John of Damascus. This origin was contested by Hermann Zotenberg in a study published in 1886: 35–62. Some researchers consider the basic form to be a translation of the Georgian epos *Balavariani* (see *supra*), made by the monk Eutimiu of Athos, which was enriched in Greek by quotations and examples from biblical and patristic writings. This presupposition was contested by H. Zotenberg (1886: 62), Ivan Franko (1897: 159–201), and E. Kuhn (1893: 8–40).

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5. In Latin there exist several translations of the novel from Greek. The first Latin translation was made circa 1048/49 and is based upon the 1021 Greek version. Its author is still unknown[2]. Other Latin versions, whose affiliation is hard to trace due to the abbreviations and text interpretations, appear in the 12th century and they represent the basis of all the Western versions of the legend. Very many of these mention John of Damascus as their author. Among them is the variant made circa 1240–1260 by Vincent de Beauvais (1184/1194–1264), included in the second part of his writing entitled *Speculum historiale*, and attributed to John of Damascus. The Dominican Jacobus de Voragine (1230–1298) recounts, at his turn, the deeds of Barlaam and Josaphat in the collection of hagiographies entitled *Legenda aurea*, compiled around 1263–1273[3].

The best Latin translation is Jacob Billius', printed both in the editions of the writings of John of Damascus and published in Paris in 1577 and 1603, as well as separately[4].

Due to the Latin translations, the history of Barlaam and Josaphat gained great importance in mediaeval Christianity, at a time when the two were considered to have Christianized India. Simultaneously, the link made between the name of the legend and the name of John of Damascus strengthened the impression that the writing was factual, so much so that at the date the two were eventually sanctified, few scholars doubted their real existence.

Barlaam and Josaphat were treated as saints in the *Legenda Aurea* and likewise in the *Catalogue of Saints*, by Peter de Natalibus. They were seen as such throughout the Middle Ages, although it appears their canonization was completed only in the time of Gregory XIIIth, when this pope approved a revised edition of *Martirologium Romanum*, through a licence dated in 14th January 1584 or, according to Cosquin, 1583. Their day was fixed on the 27th of November. Nobody inquired as to who the two were or when they lived. Since their names resembled old Jewish names, it is likely that the readers of the legend believed they were natives of Palestine and reached India for its evangelization, which was initiated by the Apostle Thomas. Their relics were said to be invested with healing powers. Thus, in 1571, the Doge of Venice, Luigi Mocenigo, showed to King Sebastian of Portugal a fragment thought to have been part of the spine of Saint Josaphat (Lang 1966: 9; Hayes 1931: 7). On 6th August 1672, the relics of Saint Josaphat were carried with great pomp through the streets of Antwerp to the monastery of Saint Salvador, where it is supposed they still exist today. Later on it was proved that they actually belonged to Saint Salvator from Antwerp (Lang 1966: 9).

6. Almost all the translations from Latin[5] were made before the end of the 15th century (Budge 1923: XXVII). Among the French mediaeval versions, the most widespread was the one made in verses, translated from Latin by Guy de Cambray between 1209 and 1220. The same year of 1220 marks the appearance of the German translation in verses, accomplished by Rudolph von Ems. There also exist versions in the following languages:

[2] For hypotheses concerning the author of the translation, see Mazilu 1981: 32.

[3] In connection with the circulation of the narrative together with the most important religious writings of the Middle Age, see Mazilu 1981: 7.

[4] *S. I. Damasceni historia de vitis et rebus gestis SS. Barlaam eremitae et Josaphat Indiae regis*, Jacobo Billio Prunaeo, S. Michaelis in eremo Coenobiarcha interprete, Colonia, 1593, edited once more in 1643, ap. Kuhn 1893: 56 and the following.

[5] For a detailed presentation of the versions translated from Latin, see Mazilu 1981: 34–44.

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Spanish (14th century), Portuguese, Catalan, Italian, Norse (first half of the 13th century), Swedish (15th century), Hungarian (16th century), Czech (15th century), and Polish (16th century). The first Anglo-Normand version appeared around 1200, made by Chardry in verses. Entitled *Josaphaz*, Chardry's variant is a summary of the Latin narrative[6]. In English literature, there are both variants in verses and translations in prose. The earliest extant copy is a variant in verses that belongs to the 16th century and is based on two manuscripts from the 14th century (Mazilu 1981: 37). The oldest variant in prose is represented by William Caxton's translation of the Latin version from the *Legenda aurea*, printed at Westminster in 1483. But the most widely spread English version was printed in 1672 and is entitled *The History of the Five Philosophers*. This version's original is a collection of *Lives* published around 1600 in Italy. The popularity of this version led to its subsequent reprinting in 1711, 1725, and 1732. The last time it was published, *The History of the Five Philosophers* appeared as an appendix in Macdonald's work, entitled *Story of Barlaam and Joasaph. Buddhism and Christianity*, published in Calcutta in 1895.

A complete translation of the Greek version into English was made by Woodward and Mattingly and printed in 1914 in a bilingual edition. The Greek text was established by J. F. Boissonade (Woodward and Mattingly 1914).

7. In Eastern Europe the novel spread through translations made from Slavonic originals. The date of the first Slavonic translation is still a controversial issue. Some specialists consider that the first translation from Greek was made in south Slavonic, sometime between the 11th and the 13th century. According to another hypothesis, there existed two independent Bulgarian translations, which appeared in the 14th century. Finally, I. Lebedev believes that the first translation from Greek was made into Russian Slavonic between the 11th and 12th century (Petkanova 2003: 86). It must be noted that all Slavonic manuscripts mention John of Damascus as the author.

In the 17th century there appeared two editions of the novel: the first, in 1637, at the monastery of Kutein in Belorussia, the second in 1681 in Moscow. The researchers established that the Kutein printing was based on several versions. The basic text was not that of the Slavonic and Greek versions, as the title would seem to indicate[7]. These were mentioned merely to ensure the dogmatic level of the study. In fact, the basic text of the translation was the Latin version of Jacob Billius. It is mentioned in the preface that the edition used was the one published in Paris. In certain passages, the Slavonic and, probably, the Greek versions (Abramovici 1927: 15, ap. Mazilu 1981: 56–57), were used. The other edition, published in Moscow, is, however closely linked to the south-Slavonic translation.

[6] *Chardry Josaphaz*, *Set dormanz*, *und Petit plet; Dichtungen in der anglo-normannischen Mundart des XIII. Jahrhunderts. Zum ersten Mal vollständig mit Einleitung*, *Anmerkungen*, *und Glossar*, ed. de John Koch, Leipzig, 1879, reprinted Wiesbaden 1968.

[7] The title of the Kutein edition is the following: **Гїсториꙗ албо Правдивое въписанїе свѧт Іоанна Дамаскина, о житїи свѣтых преподобных ѡтецъ Варлаама и Осафа и о Ѩвернению Індіѧнъ. Старанем и коштом. Іноковъ Обще жителного Монастыра Коутеенского Ново с Грецкого Словенского на Роускїи ꙗзыкъ преложена. В типографїи тоеи ж҃ Обители. Рокоу .** 1637, **Іюлꙗ** 22 **днѧ** = *History or the true description of saint John Damascene's of the life of the saints and holy fathers Barlaam and Oasaf (?) and of the return of the Indians [to the true faith]. Due to the efforts and expenses paid by the monks of the cenobite monastery in Kutein again* ***from Greek and Slavic*** *into Russian translated*. Made in the printing works of the same place of worship, the year of 1637, on the 22nd day of July.

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D. H. Mazilu notes that the folkloric creation of the Slav peoples from the east enriched the novel with a song that only appears in the versions from this area. We refer here to the text entitled *Song of St Josaphat's Entering the Desert* (Mazilu 1981: 56–57) which, as will be seen further, had a special resonance in Romanian folk literature.

8. On the Romanian territory, *The Life of Saints Barlaam and Josaphat* initially entered through the Slavonic language and the first manuscripts containing it belong to the final period of the Middle Ages. The oldest among these is a codex written in Middle Bulgarian at the beginning of the 15th century, which was kept for a time at the Neamț Monastery and is at present at the Library of the Romanian Academy in Bucharest (Slavic manuscript 132). A second manuscript (Slavic manuscript 158), also dating from the 15th century, was preserved for a while in the same monastery, and now it can be found at the Academy Library. Emil Turdeanu also mentions a 16th-century copy, written in Middle Bulgarian too and decorated with scenes illustrating the life of the two saints. He goes on to state that there exists another Slavic manuscript from the 16th century of which only 8 pages are left today (Turdeanu 1985: 329). Neither of these last two manuscripts exists in Romania.

Before they were translated into Romanian, certain parables from the novel had been introduced in two other writings belonging to old Romanian culture. Thus, the parable of the unicorn appears in *The Life of Patriarch Nifon*, written in Greek by Gavril, Head of the Athos Priest Community. *The Teachings of Neagoe Basarab to His Son*, *Teodosie*, written in Slavic, includes, besides the parable of the unicorn, five more parables[8].

The Life of Saints Barlaam and Josaphat was adopted in Romania after the western world had experienced the Renaissance. Midway through the 17th century, in 1648, the Romanian scholar Udrişte Năsturel, from southern Wallachia, makes the first and most accomplished translation of the novel.

The experts' opinions concerning the original of the translation varied. N. Iorga (1904: 166), P.P. Panaitescu (1926: 43–45), N. Cartojan (1929: 240) and Emil Turdeanu (1934: 2), initially, claimed that the Belorussian version, edited at the Kutein monastery in 1637, was the origin of the Romanian translation. Emil Turdeanu later changed his opinion in a study published in 1985 (Turdeanu 1985: 335), where he showed the very special character of the Slavonic version from which the translation was made. His conclusion is that Năsturel used a text written in Middle-Bulgarian Slavonic that was related to a manuscript copied at the Monastery of Neamț (Romanian manuscript 132) and to a Russian copy, called Vijazemsk, from the 17th century. This text was rewritten by Năsturel in Russian Slavonic, following the model of the Kutein edition, which resulted in the division of the text in 40 chapters and the inclusion of a summarizing title at the beginning of each chapter. The version thus obtained is kept in its entirety in Romanian manuscript 588 and partially in manuscript 2470 in the Library of the Academy in Bucharest.

The autograph manuscript of the translation was lost, and the writing, in contrast to all other books by Năsturel, was not printed at a time when, according to tradition, few books were printed other than those used by the church.

[8] We refer to *The Parable about the Trumpet of Doom*, *The Parable of the Four Caskets, The Parable of the Nightingale*, *The parable of the Three Friends* and *The Parable of the King for a Year*.

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Although not printed, the story of the life of the two hermits spread very quickly, being written and rewritten several times and becoming familiar to the public in the other Romanian provinces, Moldavia and Transylvania.

Apart from Udrişte Năsturel's translation, there were others. Of these, it is worth mentioning the translation from Italian made by Vlad Boţulescu in 1764, when he was a prisoner in Milan. There exists data concerning the existence of a second translation from Italian, made by Samuil Micu before 1782, from an edition for use in schools, whose author was Leonardo Salviati. A summarizing version, with no parables, obtained from a Russian original, appears in the *Life of the Saints*, a collection printed at the Monastery of Neamţ between 1807 and 1815.

9. The legend of the two sanctified characters had a powerful impact on other cultural fields. In the 15th century, when only Slavonic versions of the writing circulated on the Romanian territory, the life of the two hermits was represented on the walls of the Neamţ Monastery, painted by the decorating artists of ruler Stephen the Great. The group of pictures found here, the only one of its kind (Ştefănescu 1932: 352), comprises 32 suggestive scenes as illustrating the narrative, a possible indicator that certain illuminated Slavonic manuscripts, which are now lost (Turdeanu 1947: 53), circulated in Moldavia at the time. The portraits of the two saints, painted between the 16th and the 17th century, ornament the walls of the Hurezu Monastery, a testimony of the impact the narrative had in the monastic environment.

The Song of St Josaphat's Entering the Desert, written in prose in Năsturel's translation and placed at the end of the narrative made such a strong impression among the monks that in the end it was put in verse and on musical notes. The song reminds the reader of Josaphat's decision to leave the imperial palace in order to live in the desert. From the monastic world, the *Song of the Desert* spread among laymen too, who liked it so much that it came to be included by children among Christmas carols. The same song is also found in a Moldavian manuscript from the end of the 18th century, which only goes to show that the subject of contemplation and isolation can indeed stand the test of time.

There also exist links between the ideational structures of some episodes in the novel and certain motifs in Romanian folklore literature. Thus, the *Parable of the Four Caskets* from *Barlaam and Josaphat* was echoed in the extremely popular tales called *Old Man's Girl and Old Woman's Girl*, recounted by Ion Creangă, or *The Old Man's Well-behaved Girl*, a folk tale collected by Petre Ispirescu.

Many other parables quoted by Barlaam with the aim of converting Josaphat ensured, due to their beauty, the universal perennial character of the legend.

Will Hayes noted: 'Nothing makes people so wicked as moral exhortations. The parable was invented so that the moral pill might be administered in the jam of a good story' (Hayes 1931: 16). For Buddha, just as for Jesus, parables were a useful means of teaching people. For the Christian preachers who lived in the Middle Age, the history of Barlaam and Josaphat constituted a priceless source of parables which served to support their moralizing sermons. Alongside the sacred texts, borrowed from the Gospel: *the Parable of the Sower*[9], *the Parable of the Pearl*[10], *the Parable of the Wedding Banquet*, *the*

[9] Cf. Budge 1923: XIX, who considers it of lay inspiration.
[10] *Ibidem.*

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Parable of the Wise Virgins and of the Foolish Virgins, *the Parable of the Prodigal Son and the Parable of the Lost Sheep*, there appear ten other stories of pagan inspiration, which literary history calls, by analogy, parables. With respect to the most widely known Latin version (B.H.L. 979), Jean Sonet (Sonet 1949: 20) quotes them in the order they appear in the novel: *The Trumpet of Doom*, *the Four Caskets*, *the Nightingale and the Fowler*, *the Story of the Unicorn*, *the Man and His Three Friends*, *the King for a Year*, *the Pagan King and His Believing Wazir*, *the Rich Young Man and the Beggar's Daughter*, *the Tame Gazelle*, and *the Seduction* (Sonet 1949: 21)[11].

These parables have always been highly successful and held in high esteem. In late mediaeval times on the Romanian territory, some of them delighted the readers' imagination so much that, due to their homogeneous structure, they could be used independently in standard literature, where they became true *nuclei of wisdom*. Certain manuscripts are a proof of this. One such manuscript, copied in 1768 in Transylvania and found for a time in the possession of Moses Gaster, was taken abroad and is presently kept in the John Rylands University Library in Manchester. This miscellany contains many Romanian writings. Among these can be found *Istoriile Sfântului Varlaam către Ioasaf, fiul lui Avemer, Împăratul Indiei* ("The Histories of Saint Barlaam to Josaphat, Son of Avemer, Emperor of India"). These histories, in other words the parables the title sends to, though unnamed, are simple to identify. They are the following: *The Story of the Unicorn*, *the Man and His Three Friends*, *the King for a Year*, *the Trumpet of Doom*, *the Four Caskets*, and in a very concentrated form, *the Nightingale and the Fowler* where, under the title *Words of Teaching*, there appears only the advice the nightingale gives the fowler who caught her in exchange for her release.

The phenomenon was universal, and the same parables were borrowed from the text by all the literatures the text circulated in. For example, *the Parable of the Four Caskets* is often referred to by mediaeval writers. It was used by Boccaccio in the *Decameron*, in the first novel of day 10 and it also inspired Shakespeare in a scene from *Merchant of Venice*. Jean Sonet claims that the last parable he quotes, namely *Seduction*, also appears in a novel by Boccaccio, entitled *The Sheep of Brother Philippe* (Sonet 1949: 21).

10. I shall finally consider one of the most striking parables, entitled *the Parable of the Unicorn*. The parable echoed not only in the painting and architectural representations we will present as follows. In his *Confessions*, Leo Tolstoi confesses that this parable made him change his outlook on life. Towards the end of his life, like Barlaam, Tolstoi isolated himself from the world and even from his family.

The original of the parable can be found in the Mahabharata, but there also exist a few Buddhist versions (Hayes 1931: 18).

The narrative course of the parable, as it appears in the Romanian manuscript 588, can be summarized as follows:

There are in this world people who have become estranged from the teachings of God and who completely ignore spiritual life, living only for the pleasures of the flesh. These people may be likened to a man who is running away scared by the horrible roaring

[11] See, also, Budge 1923: XIX, with the differences mentioned. It must be noted that the names have been taken from Budge. See also Hayes 1931: 17 – 21, where the author presents some of the parables in detail.

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and bellowing of a unicorn that is chasing him to tear him apart. Running as fast as he can, the man falls into a great pit. As he is falling, he manages to get hold of the branches of a tree, to which he holds on tightly and plants his feet firmly on a foothold between the branches. Thus he starts to feel a little safer. But when he looks down, he sees two mice at the root of the tree, one white, the other black, engaged in gnawing through the root of the tree to which he is clinging, and just on the point of cutting through it. Casting his eyes down to the bottom of the pit, he sees a frightening dragon, breathing forth flames, yawning horribly and ready to swallow him up. When he strains his glance upon the branch he is hanging on to, he sees four serpents' heads coming out of the wall to which he is clinging. Looking upward, he sees a little honey trickling down from the branches of the tree. That very instant, he forgets about the unicorn, the fierce dragon, the serpents near him and also that the tree which he has grasped is all but cut through. His whole attention is bent upon the sweetness of the honey and the pleasure he might feel tasting it. This is how, Barlaam tells Josaphat, people are seduced by the pleasures of a life of deceits. The unicorn is Death, which pursues the life of all men. The pit is the world, full of all evils and pitfalls that may lead to death. The tree of life, ceaselessly gnawed through by the two mice, is the time each man has to live, which becomes shorter and draws ever closer to the end with each passing hour. The four serpents are the four fleeting and unstable elements of the human body, the disorder of which may destroy the constitution of the body and cause disease. The mad dragon symbolizes the maw of hell, wishing to engulf all those who love temporal pleasures more than the future of happiness. Finally, the trickling honey symbolizes the sweetness of temporal pleasures in this world, which deludes people and stops them from thinking about their salvation.

At the British Library there exists a 15th-century Carthusian religious miscellany, made in Yorkshire. At page 19v the text contains a parallel drawing that illustrates the content of the parable with great accuracy[12]. In Vincent de Beauvais' Latin version, published in *Speculum Historiale*, Barlaam presents Josaphat the meaning of the parable as if through a hologram[13]. Another impressive representation belongs to the Dutch engraver Boetius Adam Bolswert[14]. In a 18th-century Romanian manuscript[15], there appear two variants, entitled *The Story of the World*. The tree of life is replaced in these variants by a wheel, while the unicorn is missing. The same parable can be admired in the Baptistery of Parma, in a bas-relief created by Benedetto Antelami at the end of the 13th century (1296)[16].

11. Although non-existent in reality and sanctified due to ignorance, Barlaam and Josaphat managed, in the course of centuries, to leave their mark on universal culture. Albeit for contemporary readers the theme may seem obsolete and the lexis and syntax of the novel are archaic, its parables express eternal truths, on which contemporary society unfortunately has no time to ponder nowadays.

[12] http://www.english.cam.ac.uk/medieval/zoom.php?id=746

[13] http://thaimangoes.blogspot.com/2009/08/g2.html

[14] http://www.flickriver.com/photos/28433765@N07/3338629238/

[15] Romanian manuscript 3572, dated 1781, from Cozia Monastery, entitled *Învățăturile lui Neagoe Basarab către fiul său Teodosie* (*The Teachings of Neagoe Basarab to His Son*, *Teodosie*). The copyist's name is Sava. The two reproductions can be found on 124v and 325v files.

[16] http://www.bibliotecapleyades.net/ufoart/UFOArt2/arteufo02.htm

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