BIBLICAL LEXICOLOGY REGARDING SOME NAMES OF SKINS IN *EXODUS*

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the *zoo-chromatic* dilemma issued in the *Exodus*, regarding the quality of the skins that covered the Tabernacle. Depending on the translation sources, the Romanian translators interpreted this term as referring to an animal or to a certain color. The translators proposed some specific animal names or color names, filtering the biblical sources though their own interpretation. We intend to find the origins of these points of view and the changing perspectives from the 16th century *Palia de la Orăştie*, the first translation in the Romanian language of the *Book of Exodus*, to the contemporary versions.

Key words: *Holy Bible*, *Romanian versions*, *colours*, *translation*, *lexicology*

Résumé

Le but de la présente étude est celui d'analyser le dilemme *zoo-cromatique* au sujet de la qualité des peaux de bêtes employées à couvrir la tente où siégeait l'Autel de la Profession de la Foi, dilemme que nous retrouvons dans le *Livre de L'Exode*. Les traducteurs Roumains, en fondant leurs démarches sur les sources mêmes du texte qu'ils avaient à traduire, ont interprété lesdits termes en tant que références soit à un certain animal, soit à une certaine couleur. De par leurs divers choix, les traducteurs ont filtré les sources bibliques par leurs propres interprétations respectives au sujet de cette question. Ainsi en sont-ils venus à proposer les diverses dénominations d'animaux ou de couleurs. Notre but est celui d'identifier les origines de chacun de ces points de vue et d'expliquer les changements de perspective survenus avec le temps écoulé. Nous prenons comme point initial la *Palia de la Orăştie* du XVIème siècle, où se trouve la toute première traduction en roumain du *Livre de L'Exode*, pour en arriver aux versions qui nous sont contemporaines.

Mots-clés: *La Sainte Écriture*, *versions en roumain*, *couleur*, *traduction*, *lexicologie*

The *Book of Exodus* contains a detailed description of the Ark of the Covenant, the Tabernacle, offerings, in terms of shapes, colors, layout, use circumscribed to their sacred value highlighted by the word of God to Moses on Mount Sinai. Regarding the structure of the Tabernacle, both the exterior and interior objects are specified in detail, except for the roof, for which the Bible states the need to be covered with two "roofs", *i.e*. two layers of different colored skins.

In Biblical Hebrew, the words that refer to painted and dyed materials are monolexemes. Some of them do not refer to a color itself, but in some cases retain a reference to a particular color, originated from a certain term whose meaning aimed a

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color in Hebrew or in a language related to it, but does not have such a meaning, in the biblical Hebrew[1].

The first layer of skins covering the tent was certainly made of rams' skins dyed red. *The Septuagint* uses the perfect participle ἠρυθροδανωμένα, "reddened", in agreement with the center of the nominal group δέρματα κριών ἠρυθροδανωμένα (Ex. 25, 5). In *Vetus Italica*[2] and Hieronymus' *Vulgate*, the term was translated by *rubricatas* (< Lat. *rubrica* < Lat. *ruber, -bra, -brum*, "red with an orange hew"[3], preserved in the *Vulgata Clementina* and *Nova Vulgata*. The Romanian versions issued in the 17th century preserve the literal translation, by the sources: *piei de berbèce ruşite* (Ms. 45, Ms. 4389), *piei de berbèce roşite* (BB). The preferred option of the translators of these three versions turned to the derivative adjective *ruşite*, to which was added a phonetic variant, only one occurrence, *roşiite* (Ms. 45, *Ex*. 35, 23 [22]) and an occurrence of the non-derivative adjective: *piei roşii de berbece* (Ms. 4389, *Ex*. 35, 7). *Vulgata* of Blaj (1760-1761) uses only the variant *roşite*; about the name of the animal, the translators oscillated between the inherited noun *berbeci* and the neologism *areți* (< lat. *ares, -etis*), reissued by Heliade in his translation published in 1858. The versions from 1795 and 1856 (Şaguna) oscillated between the phonetic variants *roşite* and *ruşite*[4]. Heliade, even if he affirmed that he used the *Septuagint* as a source, makes an unsuccessful attempt to impose the Latinism *rubricat*, taken from the *Vulgate*: *pelli de arieți rubricate* (*roşite*) (*Ex*. 25, 5; 35, 7; 35, 23; 39). The translation issued in 1874 uses the variant *roşițe*: *acoperiměntulŭ de peĭ de berbece roşițe* (*Ex*. 25, 5); the first Synodal translation in Romanian (1914) and the translation issued in 1921 opted only for *roşite*. The first translator to introduce the periphrasis with the verb *a vopsi* "to dye" was Dumitru Cornilescu: *piei de berbeci vopsite în roş* (*Ex*. 25, 5; 35, 7); *piei de berbeci văpsite în roş* (*Ex*. 26, 14; 39, 34). Gala Galaction and Vasile Radu's translation had a strong impact on the versions issued after the Second World War. Their option for *piei de berbec vopsite roşu* (1939, *Ex*. 25, 5) was maintained in the versions issued in 1944 (with the variant *roş*), 1968, 1988, 2008; also their proposal *un* (*alt*) *acoperiş de piei roşii de berbec* (1939, *Ex*. 26, 14)[5]. For the verse *Ex*. 39, 34, the solution proposed in the 1944 Bible is still in use today: *piei roşii de berbece*: *piei roşii de berbec* (1968, 1988, 2088). *The Septuagint* (2004) and *Anania Bible* (2001) use *passim* the prepositional form: *piei de berbec vopsite în roşu*, an echo of Dumitru Cornilescu's variant.

The names of colors are used not only to describe the properties of an object, they also have a symbolic value, like the names of animals, so that translators' oscillation between a color and a name of an animal could affect the symbolism of the biblical text itself (Marina Gehta 2012: 38)[6].

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[1] Cf. Brenner 1982, p. 46.

[2] In *Vetus Italica*, *Ex*. 25, 5, the translator(s) opted for the adjective *ruber, rubra, rubrum*: *pelles rubras agnorum*. In the subsequent contexts, the derivative adjective *rubricatus,-a,-um* was used, from where it was taken by Saint Jerome.

[3] *Cf*. Oxford Latin Dictionary, 1968, p. 1664.

[4] The single option of the metropolitan Andrei Saguna, for the adjective *vinete* could be considered a *lapsus calami*, under the influence of the adjective from the same verse: *acoperemânturile pielei cei vânete de berbec şi acoperemânturile de piele vânătă* (Saguna's version of the Holy Bible, 1856, *Ex*. 39, p. 92).

[5] With the variant *berbece*, in the 1944 *Bible*.

[6] Cf. Gehta 2012, p. 38.

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The second layer of the skin which enveloped the Tabernacle was always problematic for the translators, because of the semantic obscurity in the *Septuagint*, which does not indicate the name of the animal, but only the color of these skins: δέρματα ὑακίνθινα (Ex. 25, 5).

The appropriate Hebrew term is *takash* that also occurs in *Numeri* (4, 6; 4, 8; 4, 10; 4, 11; 4, 12; 4, 14; 4, 25) and *Ezechiel* (16, 10).

Gerald Massey[7], writes a short history of the semantic interpretations of the term *takash*, arguing the idea that it cannot refer to an animal:

The particular idea expressed by the word Thachash has never been determined. It is the name given to the skins used for the exterior covering of the Tabernacle. The same thing is named in the Bull Inscription of Khorsabad. (...) *According to Rashi, the Takash* (*sic!*) *may be a badger, a sea-dog or dolphin*; *the Talmud says a marten, others identify the name with the colour rather than the animal. The Arabian Jews call the red-dyes hide of the ram Thachash, and this is the sense corroborated by Egyptian when we find the word down to Tesh. Tesh is blood red. It is applied to the Red Nile, the Red Crown, and to the planet Mars, Tesht. Tesh-tesh is an epithet of Osiris in his inert feminine form, and red phase, the great mistery. Tesh means to separate, leave, be left destitute, set apart. Teshru is the red calf, red land, a red bird. Tesh, earlier Takash, means red, blood* (*hence the dyed ram skins*) *and may of course be applied to anything of that colour*; *it does not otherwise represent an animal, and cannot represent the grey badger*.

Vetus Italica and Hieronymus' *Vulgate* preserve the Greek loan-word. In the view of the translators in Latin, the second layer of skins covering the Tabernacle was made of the same material – rams' skin – but of different color:

Facies et operimentum aliud tecto de pellibus arietum rubricatis et super hoc rursum aliud operimentum de janthinis pellibus. (Vulg. Ier., *Ex*. 26, 14)	*Et facies operimentum tabernaculo, pelles arietum rubricatas et operimenta pelles hyacinthina desuper.* (*Vetus Italica*, *Ex*., 26, 14)

Also, the solution chosen by Saint Jerome in the *Exodus* 35, 7 and 35, 23, *pelles arietum rubricatas et ianthinas*, sustains this idea. These solutions were preserved in the *Clementine Vulgate* (1592), but in *Nova Vulgata*, the amended version, published by the Vatican (1979), the translation options turn to Jewish sources: *pelles arietum rubricatas pellesque delphini* (*Ex*. 25, 5; 35, 7; 35, 23); *operimentum aliud pro tabernaculo de pellibus arietum rubricatis et super hoc rursum aliud operimentum de pellibus delphini* (*Ex*. 26, 14), *opertorium de pellibus arietum rubricatis et operimentum de pellibus delphini* (*Ex*. 39, 34).

Origen, in the 9th *Homily* on *Exodus*, keeps the Greek adjective, δέρματα ὑακίνθινα (PG 12, p. 148), but in *Hexapla*, *Exodus* 25, 5 points out the translation solution *phoca*.

Samuel Bochart[8], in his erudite work *Hierozoicon*: *Sive de animalibus S. Scripturae*, demonstrates with linguistic arguments that the Bible talks about a name of a color, but he also exposes the opinions of those considering that the Hebrew word refers to an animal that could be, among others, *phoca vitulina*, *sus marinus* or

[7] Cf. Massey, 2007, p. 51.
[8] Cf. Bochart, 1794, Vol. 2, p. 392.

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delphinus (vol. 2: 392), which could explain the option for *pelles delphini*, of the editors of *Nova Vulgata*.

The semantic ambiguity of the Hebrew term generated variants of translations that oscillated between a color name and a name of animal[9], which also explains the differences emerged in the Romanian biblical translations.

The first translation in Romanian of the *Old Testament* (parts of it) was *Palia de la Orăştie* (1581-1582), which followed the *Pentateuch* translated in Hungarian by Heltai Gáspár and published in 1551, in Cluj, Transylvania, and the Latin *Vulgate* (Pamfil 1968: VII). The solution proposed by the translators of the *Palia – piiale de viedzure* "badger's skins" (Ex. 25, 5; 26, 14; 35, 7; 35, 23) – originates from Pagnino 1528 translation of the *Holy Bible* in Latin. He chose to follow the interpretation given by the Hebrew scholars – the reference to an animal – and translated *takash* as *pelles taxorum*, a solution accepted by Calvin and Calvinist translators, such as those of the Romanian *Palia de la Orăştie*.

The subsequent Romanian versions up to the mid-19th century follow the Greek *Septuagint*, selecting a color name. The semantic difficulties encountered by the translators over the time can be explained by the fact that those terms originate from languages distant in time, from different civilizations[10].

Regarding Slavonic, in the *Ostrog Bible*, δέρματα ὑακίνθινα were translated as "grey skin" (Ishod, 25, 5), hence having in mind the features [+blue] and [+black]. In the Romanian versions previous to the *Bible de la Bucureşti* (1688) the translators used the adjective *verde*, "green".

MS 45	Ms 4389	1688
şi piei de berbece ruşite, şi piei verzi (25, 5)	şi piei de berbece ruşite, şi piei verzi (25, 5)	şi piei de berbece roşite, şi piei vinete (25, 5)
şi piei de berbeci ruşite, şi piei verzi (35, 7)	şi piei roşii de berbece, şi piei verzi (35, 7)	şi piei de berbeci ruşite, şi piei vinete (35, 7)
şi la tot ce au aflat vişin la însul şi la tot ce s-au aflat piei de berbece roşiite au adus şi piei verzi (35, 23 [22])	şi la tot cine se afla vişină, şi la tot cine se afla piei de berbece ruşite, şi piei verzi (35, 23 [24])	şi la tot ce s-au aflat mătase la dînsul şi la tot ce s-au aflat piei de berbece ruşite, au adus şi piei vinete (35, 23 [22])

This option – unrepeated in the history of the Romanian biblical translations – could be explained by the fact that the translators saw these skins as untanned[11], which seems unlikely. In Romanian, *verde* ("green") is synonymous *vânăt* ("bluish-grey"/"violet-blue"[12]), which is synonymous with *gri* ("grey"[13]), therefore, the Greek, Slavonic and Romanian versions differ in semic perception[14].

[9] Cf. *Septuaginta*, 2004, p. 255, note 25.5.

[10] Cf. Umberto Eco, *Dire presque la même chose*, Paris, Grasset, 2007, p. 425, *apud* Krisztina Laky, 2012, p. 229.

[11] Cf. CADE: 1413, *piele verde*, "green skin".

[12] Cf. *Dicţionar de sinonime*, 2002, s.v. *verde*, apud *dexonline.ro*

[13] Cf. Cioranescu, 2007, p. 836.

[14] Cf. Baltă 2010, p. 101-102.

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The changing perception of the Romanian translators, from the name of the color, to that of an animal, occurred again, almost 300 years after *Palia de la Orăştie* (1582), in the version published by the British Bible Society. We have consulted the third edition, from 1874, where *verde*, *vânăt* respectively became *viţelŭ de mare* ("sea-calf"): *Şi peĭ de berbece roşite*, *şi peĭ de viţelŭ de mare* (Ex. 25, 5; 35, 7; 35, 23), *Acoperiměntulŭ de peĭ de berbece roşiţe*, *acoperiměntulŭ de peĭ de viţelŭ de mare şi perdeaŭa despărţitóre* (Ex. 39, 35).

The Synodal Bible from 1914 proposed a return to traditional translation: *şi piei de berbece roşite şi piei vinete* (Ex. 25, 5; 35, 7; 35, 23), but the reprinted version of the British Bible Society, Cornilescu's translation and also its successive reissues at short intervals, and especially the version of Gala Galaction and Vasile Radu (1939) impose, in the 20th century, the solution *viţel de mare*, even though not *passim*. Starting with the 1944 Synodal Edition, there are constant oscillations between *viţel de mare* and *vânăt*:

1939	1944	1968	2008
Piei de berbec vopsite roşu şi piei de viţel de mare (25, 5)	Piei de berbece vopsite roş, piei de viţel de mare (25, 5)	Piei de berbec vopsite roşu, piei de viţel de mare (25, 5)	Piei de berbec vopsite roşu, piei de viţel de mare (25, 5)
Şi să mai faci peste cort un alt acoperiş de piei roşii de berbec şi încă un acoperiş, pe deasupra, de piei de viţel de mare (26, 14)	După aceea să faci cortului un acoperiş de piei roşii de berbece şi încă un acoperiş de piei de viţel de mare pe deasupra (26, 14)	După aceea să faci cortului un acoperiş de piei roşii de berbec şi încă un acoperiş de piei de viţel de mare pe deasupra (26, 14)	După aceea să faci cortului un acoperiş de piei roşii de berbec şi încă un acoperiş de piei de viţel de mare pe deasupra (26, 14)
Şi piei de berbec vopsite cu roşu şi piei de viţel de mare (35, 7)	Piei de berbece roşii, piei de viţel de mare (35, 7)	Piei de berbec vopsite roşu, piei de viţel de mare (35, 7)	Piei de berbec vopsite roşu, piei de viţel de mare (35, 7)
Şi toti la care se gasea porfiră violetă, stacojie şi vişinie, ori vison, ori păr de capră ori piei de berbec vopsite roşu, ori piei de vitel de mare, le aduceau. (35, 23)	Fiecare din cei ce aveau mătase violetă, stacojie şi vişinie, in şi păr de capră, piei de berbece roşii şi vinete le aducea (35, 23)	Fiecare din cei ce aveau mătase violetă, stacojie şi vişinie, in şi păr de capră, piei de berbec vopsite roşu şi vinete, le aducea (35, 23)	Fiecare din cei ce aveau mătase violetă, stacojie şi vişinie, in şi păr de capră, piei de berbec vopsite roşu şi vânăt, le aducea (35, 23)
Acoperământul de piei de berbec vopsite roşu, acoperământul de piei de viţel de mare (39, 34)	Acoperişurile cele de piei roşii de berbece şi acoperişurile cele de piei vinete (39, 34)	Acoperişurile cele cu piei roşii de berbec şi acoperişurile cele de piei vinete (39, 34)	Acoperişurile cele cu piei roşii de berbec şi acoperişurile cele de piei vinete (39, 34)

Since antiquity, the sea-calf was synonymous with the seal. Plinius the Elder, in *Naturalis Historia* 9, 19, identified these two marine animals: *vituli marini*, *quos vocant phocas*.

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The Romanian translators from the 19th century ignored completely the solution *pelles delphini*, from Latin sources, and, based on the biblical commentaries, considered that the biblical animal was not the dolphin, but the seal, Romanian *foca*, a noun already mentioned in the Romanian dictionaries of that time. Bobb's dictionary[15] (1822) recorded *vțiel de mare*, *Phoca,-ae*. The *Lexicon from Buda*[16] (1825) separately recorded *vițelu*, and *vițelu de mare*, the last one as "phoca, vitulus marinus". Poyenaru[17] (1841), glossed *veau marin* "*vidră*, *patruped care trăieşte în mare*". Antonescu's *New Dictionary*[18] (1862) registered s.v. focă, *phoque*, *veau marin*. The Latinizing dictionary of Laurian and Massim[19] (1876) explains the noun *focă* ("seal") as "vitellu marinu". Therefore, the Romanian translators were aware of their option, to replace the dolphin, (Rom.) *delfinul*, with the seal (Rom.), *foca* (cf. for example, Thaddeus Mason Harris' demonstration[20] on the subject [1824: 30]).

The Romanian recent translations of the *Holy Bible* returned to the solution proposed in the Greek *Septuagint*: *piei de berbec, vopsite în roşu, şi piei de culoare vineție* (*Sept*. 2004, *Ex*. 25, 5; 35, 7); *învelitoare de piele, piei de berbec vopsite în roşu şi învelitoare din piei de culoare viorie* (*Sept*. 2004, *Ex*. 39, 20); *piei de berbec vopsite'n roşu, piei de culoarea iachintului* (BA 2001, *Ex*. 25, 5; 35, 7), *cu acoperămintele lui cele din piei de berbec vopsite'n şi cu acoperişurile cele din piei de culoarea iachintului* (BA, 2001, *Ex*. 39, 33).

It is obvious that the Romanian translators used mainly the *Septuagint* as the source of the *Holy Bible*. In this particular segment, of the names of the skins covering the Tabernacle, neither the Slavonic nor the Latin versions were accepted to be taken as sources. After *Palia de la Orăştie*, it was no earlier than the 19th century that the Romanian translators took into consideration Hebrew and modern sources that led them to a name of an animal, traditionally the seal or the sea-calf, passing on a secondary plan the spiritual signification of the original term.

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[16] Cf. *The Lexicon from Buda*, 1825, p. 759.
[17] Cf. Poyenaru, 1841, Vol. II, p. 791.
[18] Antonescu, 1862, Vol. II, p. 188.
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[20] Cf. Harris, 1824, p. 30.

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