

THE TEACHINGS OF NEAGOE BASARAB TO HIS SON THEODOSIE. ABOUT THE PATERNITY OF THE TEXT

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Abstract: *The issue of the authenticity of a text dating from the beginning of the 16th century (the "Homeric question of the Romanian literature") is important because it is the first great book of national spirituality. The book lays today in the area of philological arguments: it is edited and translated the original Slavonic text (more than a third of it has been preserved); there is a scientific edition of the entire manuscript, translated into Romanian a century later. Determining the author regards the evolution of the Romanian spirituality, while identifying the translator contributes to a more realistic edification of the evolution of the literary language norms.*

Keywords: *manuscript, authenticity, editing, facsimile, copy*

1. The Reconstruction and Editing of the Work

Neagoe Basarab's contestable status as the author of *Neagoe Basarab's Teachings to His Son Theodosie* and the transfer of the work to the pseudo-epigraphic area (Pseudo-Neagoe) has long been due to the inexistence of a critical edition to establish the manuscripts hierarchy and the textual order of some incomplete fragments or copies, in the original Slavonic version and in the later Greek and Romanian translations. The qualities will be fulfilled after four and a half centuries by the eighth edition, called the Minerva Editon, published in 1970/1971 as *Neagoe Basarab's Teachings to His Son Theodosie. Text chosen and set by Florica Moisil and Dan Zamfirescu. With a new translation of the Slavonic original by G. Mihaila. Introductory Study by Dan Zamfirescu and G. Mihaila.*

1.1. Of all nine Romanian manuscripts, the most important one is mss.109, found in the library of the Cluj-Napoca branch of the Academy, and copied, according to the notes from page 35 made by Mainea, the Metropolitan's singer, in 1635. This was the date until which (ad quem) the Romanian translation was surely made. The manuscript was identified in the library of Stephen Cantacuzino, the successor of Constantin Cantacuzino's steward. It had six missing leaves, which were completed with those of the second important manuscript (3488 from the second half of the eighteenth century), with small differences from the first, both of them being very faithful to the Slavonic manuscript.

In the critical edition, mss.109 was preferred, firstly, because it was previously written, and secondly, because the copist's name and the date were clearly specified.

Other manuscripts written by Sava Popovici and later by his son Daniil Popovici in the following century presented numerous imperfections related to transcription and interpolation (important omissions, numerous quotations from the Bible) (Zamfirescu, 1973:367). However, different variants, resulting from the combination of partial copies,

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until the reconstruction of the critical edition, were mostly used by historians (Nicolae Balcescu) or invoked in the strategy of imposing some controversial issues (I. Chitimia).

Similar to that published in 1970, the latest edition of the Romanian translation, having attached to it the italic marking of the intertextual passages, was issued at Roza Vanturilor Publishing House in 2010.

Now, the specialists have all the preserved versions of the work, rigorously restored by philologists, so that they can support their argumentations.

1.2. Spiridon Lampros's discovery of the Greek manuscript 221 at the Dionysius monastery at Mount Athos in 1895 made it possible to relaunch (unsuccessfully, though) the "homeric problem of Romanian literature" by its later supporter, Leandros Vranoussis. The text was edited in 1942, with the translation into Romanian, by Vasile Grecu.

The manuscripts found at Mount Athos, among which there are also some fragments from the second part of the *Teachings*, were written by the great Retor of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, who lived until 1530. The discovery of these autographs by Manuil of Corinth did not solve the issue of paternity, but only that of dating, as being the period contemporary with Neagoe, in the first half of the 16th century.

The author of the *Teachings* could not be the Great Retor, because, by comparing the Greek manuscript with the Slavic and the Romanian ones, the researchers clearly established (still valid today) that the Greek manuscript was a translation of the Slavonic manuscript, the one established as the original of the work.

1.3. The Slavonic manuscript was discovered at the National Cyril and Methodius library in Sofia by the Slavic P.A. Lavrov who first published it in 1904.

P.P. Panaitescu re-edited the text in 1959, adding another 13 pages later discovered (a total of 111 pages, one third of the entire text).

The last edition, with all the pages arranged with the help of the Romanian manuscript, appeared under the exceptional care of Gheorghe Mihaila (facsimiles, transcription and translation) in 1996 at Roza Vanturilor Publishing House in Bucharest, with two introductory studies signed by Dan Zamfirescu and the academician G. Mihaila.

2. The Paternity of the Text

A certain inertia can be noticed in some important controversial issues which involves lack of a thorough examination of the problem. Therefore, researchers have recently placed the *Teachings* in the pseudo-epigraphic area, their author being an erudite monk, as P.P. Panaitescu affirmed, from Bistrita monastery (cf. Ursu, 2003:69), contemporary with Neagoe Basarab (the date until which the work was accomplished was year 1530, a date recorded, as seen, on the Greek manuscript).

However, after a rigorous analysis of the text and an accurate emphasis on the intertextual areas, Dan Zamfirescu had reached since 1973, the stage of evidence providing two solutions: the dating of the *Teachings* at the beginning of the XVIth century (which gives them the importance of an epoch-making document, from the historians point of view) and the full assignment of the text, including the selection of the quoted passages, to Neagoe Basarab, as it appeared in the Romanian translation, which turned out to be the complete one.

The rediscussion of certain arguments and counter-arguments invoked by the two couples of combatants, composed of prestigious historians and bizantologists of the Romanian culture, (Nicolae Iorga – Demosthenes Russo, Vasile Grecu – P.P.Panaiteescu) offers today the opportunity to discover the complex personality of the Romanian ruler, as a political man, as a theologian and as an artist.

This would not been possible without the profound study of the text by Dan Zamfirescu, a complex personality (Slavic, Byzantine, Theologian) who tried to analyze the multiple facets of the work. As has been shown, the intertextual areas of the work (the texts written in italics) were marked primarily, focusing on the fragments from the Bible, from the works of theologians and the folk books as well. It was the first endeavour that pointed out the proportion between creation and selection, not only helping the identification of unity in diversity in the text, but also of its nature, possibly according to the canons of originality in the Middle Ages. It has thus been observed that “we are dealing with a work of religious and moral education, a summary of mystic and eastern asceticism, an anthology of pedagogical texts, selected and arranged according to the general purpose of the work (...) and one of the most authentic and valuable literary creations of Romanian culture” (Zamfirescu, 1973:290). The diversity of texts related to different sectors of life gives it a pronounced encyclopaedic character. Examining the discontinuous fragments of the manuscripts of the three variants (Slavonic, Greek and Romanian), many Romanian and foreign researchers, not having the image of the whole, considered the *Teachings* a chaotic mixture of disordered communication, driven by a mosaic technique or random assembling.

This inertia also penetrated into the literary critique of the communist era. Under the banner of modern originality, some important critics ignored this type of text and minimized its qualities, not realizing, as Hasdeu and Noica had done, the geniality of the message.

Most of the controversial issues, as proposed by Dan Zamfirescu and later confirmed by historians and philologists, are to emphasize precisely these traits that give the work the status of masterpiece of Romanian spirituality.

Some Byzantinologists and historians have expected to find in the work a moral and political training textbook for the new ruler. They were confused about what they had found, a concentrated ascetic message, which implied an authoritative hesychastic training of the author, who used eruditely, as arguments of authority, a lot of specific texts. Here are two so-called reasons that break Neagoe from his work.

P.P.Panaiteescu, the famous historian, who continued the demonstrations of his professor Demostene Russo, referred, first of all, to the ruler’s inadequate level of culture, illustrated by the functions of his *cursus honorum*. Considering that a son of a boyar, be it from the Craiovesti family, could not have the culture of a son of a ruler, the historian did not see him able to handle whole libraries of theological texts and to have such a memory as to place them, those with the most appropriate message, as arguments of authority in the demonstration structure.

According to the positions he held before being a ruler (bailiff of hunters, governor), he is supposed to be inclined to a pragmatic life beyond the speculative universe of books. If he had had the science of books, he would have been expected to perform the

office of grammarian or logograph, anticipating the destiny of over a century of Udriste Nasturel.

The historian Aurelian Sacerdoteanu, as a grammarian, found in documents, the name *Neag*, in 1482 (cf. Neagoe, 1971:41). But, he could not be the future ruler, because, if he died at 40, Neagoe was born in 1481 or 1482 (Ciobanu, 1986:41).

Also, his six-year absence (1495-1501) in the documents of the time, allowed historians to believe that he went to study abroad (in Hungary, Constantinople), where he completed his moral, religious and artistic education (Neagoe, 1971:42, and Ciobanu, 1986:46). During this period, he seemed to have known the more important parenetical texts that circulated in the epoch, and he studied them, according to his aspiration, as that of his family, to become a ruler.

They also challenged Neagoe Basarab's good knowledge of the Slavic language, to make him able to use as sources for his own creation, only texts in Slavonic and to master their message so well.

There are three arguments in favor of Neagoe, who seemed to have a special worship for this language, a very strong cult until the time of Matei Basarab and Udriste Nasturel. First, the Slavonic language was the official language of the princely office, which any scholar, prepared for an illustrious career, had to know. Secondly, the Slavonic language had acquired its status of sacred language, so that all theological texts had been transposed in it, thus maintaining a strong focus of culture throughout Oriental Orthodoxy. It enjoyed a great prestige through its Orthodox vocation (in Greek and Latin the texts of other cultures appeared).

Before leaving abroad to study, Neagoe had been educated at the Bistrita monastery, founded by Craiovești in 1488. The ruler's habit of borrowing books from the monastery's library is also recorded (cf. Mihăila, 1971: 71). In Bistrita, Maxim, the former Serbian despot, the uncle of his wife Despina, had settled.

The most important fact, however, is the arrival of hieromonk Macarie, from Montenegro, as an egumen of the Bistrița monastery. He set up a monastic school of Slavonicity and made the first prints of Romanian culture. This school, "led by the Emperor Macarie, had among his pupils the brothers Neagoe and Preda, the sons of Parvan" (Micle, 2008: 92). Macarie's *Liturgist*, the first Slavonic print in Wallachia (1508), was prior to the prints from other countries of Orthodox doctrine (Serbia -1552, Russia-1564) (Manole, 1971: 105).

Macarie's influence on his disciple Neagoe was profound, since he called him "good father and teacher, and before our beloved, God chose you and set you before us as the light of the sun, to show us the divine light "(cf. Neagoe, 1971: 44).

He learned Greek from Nifon, the former patriarch of Constantinople, brought to Wallachia by Radu the Great to organize the church system of the country.

After careful analysis of the cultural level of the era, some historians considered Neagoe "the most literate Romanian prince up to Dimitrie Cantemir" (Ștefănescu, 1965: 124).

In *the Life of Patriarch Nifon*, he was considered the holy son of the Saint, the connection between them being tested during the persecution of the Saint by Radu the Great. Nifon had always remarked himself through an austere life, led to asceticism, very

intransigent with those who violated the norms that provided the way for salvation, to eternal life. He had become a model for Neagoe, for whom the hesychast mentality, so present in his work, had become very strong, especially as his incurable disease made him meditate on the imminence of death and the quality of life beyond.

But, the bizantologist Demostene Russo, and later his disciple, the historian P.P.Panaitelescu questioned precisely this ascetic culture of the ruler (this could possess only an erudite monk, an hesychast) and its usefulness in the messages addressed to the future ruler.

Formed under the direct guidance of three outstanding personalities from the world of Orthodoxy (Maxim, Patriarch Nifon and Hieromonk Macarie, who later became Metropolitan), Neagoe declared all his gratitude to them as their holy son, especially because they initiated him into the deep mysteries of faith.

There is an important contradiction in the demonstration of those who introduced the *Teachings* in the category of pseudo-epigraphs. First of all, it is stated that this work, quite different from the other parenetical texts already known, could not be written by Neagoe at that time, as it did not fit into any literary (cultural) current in our country (cf.Panaitelescu, 1946:6). But, as we have seen before, Neagoe's culture could not be enclosed between the borders of Wallachia. Beyond these, there were several models, recorded by P.P.Panaitelescu himself, who put them down to some famous authors, such as: Vasile Macedonian, Constantin Portfirogenetul, Manuel Paleologul, Vladimir Monomah, etc.

There was not, at the time when Russo and Panaitelescu wrote, a synthesis work on literary trends in the 16th century. But later, at the International Slavonic Congress (1958), the Russian slavist D.S. Lihachov described the 16th –century hesychast movement with his developments in Russia, Bulgaria, Serbia and Wallachia (Zamfirescu, 1973:83-87). This was the second phase of the hesychasm, also presented in the *Life of Saints Varlaam and Ioasaf*, as a development of Orthodox humanism. Accordingly, man can acquire eternal life not only through monkhood, isolation in the wilderness, or loneliness in the hermitages that are remote from human communities but also integrated into the community, enrolling himself in the path of faith through repentance, good deeds and prayer (such a creed is, as a fundamental message, in Antim Ivireanu's *Didahas*). The legacy that the hesychasm left to the future generations referred to the more complex and powerful ways of fulfilling the Decalogue of faith.

The adherents of the theory that the *Teachings* are the creation of an erudite monk (Pseudo-Neagoe) reproached the author with this hesychast attachment, which consisted in being inspired "only by religious literature, that is, from a special part of it, almost only from ascetic works that treat the virtues of monasticism and leaving the empty world" (Panaitelescu, 1946: 22).

It is true that this hesychastic side of the message of the *Teachings* is more pronounced than it happens in other well-known parenetic texts. It is explained primarily by Neagoe's educational training as a disciple of the three theologians, and especially of Nifon, who himself represented the modern hesychast (the ascetic among men).

Neagoe's ascetic vocation is bestowed upon him by Patriarch Nifon (Chihaiia, 1972: 186). It is also known about the aids and payments that the ruler made since the

ascension to the throne to various hermitages and monasteries (Corbenii de Piatra, Cornet, Visina, Codmeana, Cetateni, Namaesti, Bogoslov (Ibidem: 187). The extent of the hesychasm in Wallachia was also demonstrated by the multitude of stone-carved or caves in the Buzau Mountains (Ibidem).

Therefore, the *Teachings*, though directed to Neagoe's sons and eventually to Theodosius as the only one left alive, are conceived as a moral reformation of the whole society, to which he addressed so many times. The broader addressability is stated by the author in the title of Part II: '..... care au învățat pre fiu-său Theodosie: Așijderea și pre alți carii vor fi în urma lui de Dumnezeu unși... Așijderea și pre toți boiarii săi, pre cei mari și pre cei mici.' (INB1, 2010:127). The Message of the *Teachings*, from this point of view, resembled that of Antim Ivirean's *Didahs*, that of showing the ortho of faith, sin-free life, as a way of acquiring eternal life with God. Anticipating, Neagoe used exemplary texts from the patristic authors and from John Chrysostom's *Homilies*.

P.P.Panaiteescu, polarizing the message, concludes: "If Theodosius had followed such advice, he would only abdicate, leave the ruler's palace and go into a cave" (Panaiteescu, 1946: 24). However, at the time Neagoe lived, the Hesychasm had long entered his second phase (model Nifon = the saint among men). Dan Zamfirescu stressed this idea: "Does it mean that the voivode sent his son to the monk? Does it mean then that Chrysostom himself, the patriarch of Constantinople, urged the capital of the empire to take the desert's path with schisms? (Zamfirescu, 1973: 45). The historian now finds a particularity of the texts, stating that even when they advise on practical things (feudalism, war), they remain, paradoxically, only a "religious book". (Panaiteescu, 1946: 23). Later on, in his work *Contributions to the History of Romanian Culture*, he understands the mentality of the epoch, and correctly assesses the value of the political, social, economic, diplomatic and historical ideas of the work, translated into a hesychastic code. Knowing all these issues and their involvement in the leadership strategies represent a feature of Neagoe's consciousness, as well as the understanding of Christian life, that kind of erudition learned from books and acquired as a mentality of existence, especially according to Patriarch Nifon's model. This erudition, considers P.P. Panaiteescu unjustifiably, could not possess Neagoe who signed the book, but only an "erudite monk" who could have penetrated into the profound psychology of the ruler.

But, as mentioned above, the formative character of the *Teachings* lies mainly on this ascetic, spiritual side. This wider addressability, often manifested, has two reasons: not only the ruler had to understand the right way, from his position, but also the ones he was leading, thus diminishing the contradictions between the various forms of manifestation of power. Although this was Neagoe's way of feeling, he chose for his son the most eloquent texts, proven by their persuasive force in the history of humanity: 'And do not think that I am talking absolute nonsense to them, I have learned all these from the Holy Scriptures, and I speak to you in order to be able to use them for research and to correct you' (Ciobanu, 1986:71). Full texts and fragments of texts by John Chrysostom, Ioan Sinaitul (Scararul), Efreim Sirul, Simeon Monahul (the New Theologian), etc. are involved in Neagoe's argumentative strategies, primarily as arguments of authority, due to their persistent and persuasive force, but it seems that the ruler, addressing himself to a larger mass of receptors, has the determination (passion and ambition) to introduce into the public circuit, something

from the vast library of his theologians Maxim, Nifon and Macarie. Thus, he understood that: ‘...the *Teachings* are, from a religious perspective, a valuable treaty of Christian doctrine’ (Zamfirescu, 1973:48).

Beyond any *captatio benevolentiae*, Neagoe recognized his limits to the impressive patristic tradition: ‘se poate că și noao atâta pricepere ne-au dat Dumnezeu și nu suntu nici eu atîta de harnic să-mi poată da Dumnezeu să vă spui și mai mult’ (INB1, 2010:210).

Historians have noticed that the rule’s ascetic formation manifests itself, not only in the *Teachings*, but also in the way in which the documents are composed. Thus, Manole Neagoe quotes: ‘... ne-au lăsat nouă, celor din urmă întru ajutorul și binefacerea sufletelor noastre, unii cu rugăciune și priveghere și cu post, alții prin milostenie și pocăire...’ (Neagoe, 1971:121).

3. The Paternity Transfer

The comparative vision related to the manuscripts in which the *Teachings* were preserved was also emphasized by some scholars (I.C.Chitimia) who respected the status of author that Neagoe Basarab had (perhaps with the help of some of the ruler’s secretaries). This raised the issue as regards the relationship between Neagoe’s text and that of his collaborators, or between the basic text and his posthumous interpolators. Many of the contradictions revealed by Demostene Russo and P.P.Panaiteescu were attributed to their superficiality.

Quite reasonably, Dan Zamfirescu asks himself, ‘to whom we will apply our analysis: to the writing whose author is Neagoe Basarab or to the final result of a supposed collective labor for three centuries?’ (Zamfirescu, 1973: 195).

In some form or another, the theory about the addition of texts or the multiple authors had even concerned Demostene Russo and the historian P.P.Panaiteescu. Attributing the controversial issues to the interpolators, however, the problem of authenticity has not been solved, because the way to the basic text has not been completed: ‘from the texts known today, however, no one assures us that it is or reproduces the original in its first form’ (Chitia, 1972:121).

The distance between various versions (with text restrictions, additions of passages, internal contradictions) is very high, so it seemed hard to accept the coherence of a single author.

C.Chitimia sometimes states that ‘upon the seed of the *Teachings*, another material has set’ (Ibidem: 136).

In order to solve this hypothesis of the paternity problem, Dan Zamfirescu resorted to a detailed comparison between the Slavonic text of the Sofia manuscript and its Greek and Romanian translations, the latter representing, upon further reconstructions, the full text.

One can notice a very high degree of fidelity between the Slavonic text, which represented about one third of the work, and the Romanian one (manuscript 109). The same can be said about the Greek translation in relation to the basic Slavonic variant.

After a detailed textual analysis, it was concluded that “the Romanian version is, from a textual point of view, a faithful mirror of the original Slavonic version, and, under any circumstances an amplified, interpolated or denatured variant” (Zamfirescu, 1973:211).

4. Conclusions

After analyzing the arguments and counter-arguments, concerning the main controversial issues as to *the Teachings of Neagoe Basarab to his son Theodosius* in the three variants (Slavonic, Greek and Romanian), the paternity of the work is obvious. Written during the life of Neagoe Basarab, the work preserves an important segment of the history of the Romanian people, being used by historians as the first documentary source.

The Romanian manuscript, representing the translation from Slavonic made by Daniil Andrean Panoneanu, in 1635, is the most faithful to the original Slavonic and the best preserved of the work in its entirety. That is why, it can be used as an important source for historians that refers to the events of the first half of the 16th century.

But, it is also a very important documentary source for the historians of the language, as it shows the configuration of the norms of the literary language at the beginning of the 17th century, preserved by the other translations of the famous team of Udriște Năsturel.

Moreover, an outstanding artistic value of this genius creation is highlighted. This value is not so much in the forms of language, in figures and formal processes (the Slavs have confirmed this for Slavonic), but in the amplitude of Neagoe's sensitivity present during his existential adventure and found under the sign of a tragic destiny. It is the same type of sensitivity that once constituted the greatness of Vergilius, and then the greatness of many masterpieces in which similar epical works of the human soul were displayed.

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