DESTINÉES EUROPÉENNES

IS THE SPLIT BETWEEN *LITERAL* AND *FREE* TRANSLATION OUT OF DATE? A CASE STUDY: CANTEMIR'S TRANSLATION FROM *STIMULI VIRTUTUM, FRAENA PECCATORUM* (I)

OANA UŢĂ BĂRBULESCU
University of Bucharest
o_barbulescu@yahoo.com

Rezumat:
Această lucrare tratează aspectele centrale ale traducerii *Stimuli virtutum, fraena peccatorum* de către Dimitrie Cantemir. Având în vedere relaţia specială dintre versiunea originală şi versiunea traducerii, trebuie reexaminate, punându-se sub semnul întrebării, conceptele de traducere literară *vs* literală.
Cuvinte cheie :
Fidelitatea faţă de traducere, *verbum e verbo translation, sensum pro sensu translation*.

Abstract:
This paper is concerned with the central issues of Cantemir's translation from *Stimuli virtutum, fraena peccatorum*: translatability and fidelity.
Taking into account the special relation between the original version and the Romanian text, the concepts of free and literal translation become questionable and need to be reexamined.
Key-words:
Faithfulness, *verbum e verbo translation, sensum pro sensu translation*.

1. The framework of a theoretical pattern – whereby the quality of a text's translation from a language into another can be coherently determined – represents the main purpose of translation studies. In the course of time, there have been suggested several models by which relevant information on the quality of a translation could be achieved. Many of the theoretical

BDD-A4051 © 2011 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-15 02:42:46 UTC)

patterns presented in translation studies attach importance to the opposition *literal/ free*, an opposition by means of which the concept of *faithfulness* is defined (*faithfulness* being subordinate to the opposition *literal/ free*).

In the paragraphs to follow, we will try to establish whether the opposition *literal/ free* (which, to the present day, is considered to be strategic in the evaluation of a translated text) is functional in the case of a translation which has its origin at the end of the 17th century. Furthermore, we will apply a complex pattern of evaluation with respect to Cantemir's translation from *Stimuli virtutum, fraena peccatorum*, and we will suggest new directions of investigating the texts which have been translated until 1780. We have decided that the theoretical framework of the new pattern should involve text linguistics in particular. We believe that the problem of translation entirely deals with text linguistics, because when "we are translating something, we must ask ourselves what could be said and how something could be said in the same circumstances, but in another language or in another linguistic community, which is characterised by cultural traditions different from ours" (Coşeriu 2000: 244).

2. The first attempts of theorising translation methods are based on the opposition between two types of rendering a text, namely, "verbum e verbo" and "sensum pro sensu", respectively. At first, the dichotomy is present in the works of ancient (classical) authors, reappears at the Christian writers (Hieronymus etc.) and becomes a clearly acknowledged "topos" in the forewords of texts translated during the Middle Ages[1]. The ancient opposition has a long tradition in the history of translation[2], as it is brought into present every time a translator refers to the difficulty of rendering a work from a language with a rich literary tradition into another language which is poorer by far.

[1] Copeland 1991: 9 – "The Middle Ages inherited from Latin antiquity not only some commonplaces of translation theory, but also the academic framework for that theory. [...] The familiar precepts about translation, which the Middle Ages borrowed from antiquity, center on the idea that translation may be literal (word for word) or loose (sense for sense); we find variations on this standard theme throughout medieval translators' prologues."

[2] Stanton 1997: 36 – "The most famous legacy of ancient Rome to subsequent translation theory is the distinction between word-for-word (or "literal") translation and sense-for-sense (or "loose"), which first comes up in Roman times, was cited in the Middle Ages, and is still with us today". See also Copeland 1997: 173 – "The classical models of translation derived from Cicero and Horace had, and still have, a very long legacy, not only theoretical but also political."

BDD-A4051 © 2011 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-15 02:42:46 UTC)

Consequently, the disjunction between "verbum e verbo" translation and "sensum pro sensu" translation has been replaced with the disjunction between a *literal* rendition and a *free* one (Knox 1949: 118). The opposition *literal/ free* has become one of the "common places"[3] of modern translation studies.

To a greater extent, the pattern proposed by Knox depends upon the opposition *form / contents*: a *literal* translation obeys the form of the source-text, whereas the *free* translation is assumed to render the contents of the original text[4]. The faithfulness of the translation as compared to the original is manifested either at the formal level or at the contents level (the faithfulness related to the form of the original text frequently limits the faithfulness regarding the contents, and, in some cases, totally excludes it).

Irrespective of its name, the interpretation pattern governed by the opposition *literal / free* is a thoroughly descriptive one. The description of the form in which a translation is presented is preferable to the functional perspective on the target language and on the process dealing with the rendition of a source-text into another idiom.

3. In the first book of *Divanul...*, Cantemir refers to an opuscule of Christian ethics, entitled *Strămurarea a bunătăţilor şi frâul păcatelor* (CD, 44v). On the basis of the note[5] in *Divanul...*, it can be established that Cantemir's afore-mentioned study is the short ethics treatise *Stimuli virtutum, fraena peccatorum*[6], written by Andreas Wissowatius in Latin.

---

[3] Hatim, Munday 2004: 132 – "the debate on whether translation should be literal or free continued to dominate (some would say 'plague') translation theory until well into the twentieth century". See also Steiner 1998: 251-264.

[4] Hatim, Munday 2004: 11 – "The split between form and content is linked in many ways to the major polar split which has marked the history of western translation theory for two thousand years, between two ways of translating: 'literal' and 'free'".

[5] „Ce de vréme ce această trecătoare lume iaste lumea chivernisélii (că de nu să va chivernisi, cineva nu va precopsi) şi de va putea cineva cu întriagă înţelepciune şi cu bună socotială, în lume fiind, pe lume să chivernisască şi sufletul nebetejit şi neîntinat săşi păzască, frumos şi minunat lucru ar fi, de vréme ce şi oamenilor, şi lui Dumnădzău ar fi plăcut. Şi acela oare cine ar fi? Ar fi acela carile, acélea ale lui Andrei Vissovaţius 70 şi 7 de ponturi, ce arată, pre carile *Strămurarea a bunătăţilor şi frâul păcatelor* le numéşte, adecă îndemnare spre bunătăţi şi opriala spre păcate." (CD, 44r-44v)

[6] Wissowatius' moral treatise, *Stimuli virtutum, fraena peccatorum*, was first published in Amsterdam in 1682 („apud Henricum Janssonium"). The book printed posthumously in 1682 was called *Stimuli virtutum, fraena peccatorum ut et alia eiusdem generis opuscula*

BDD-A4051 © 2011 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-15 02:42:46 UTC)

Among the works written in Latin that Cantemir uses in his first Romanian book, *Divanul sau gâlceava înţeleptului cu lumea sau giudeţul sufletului cu trupul*, the one belonging to Andreas Wissowatius holds a very important place, since the third chapter of the 1698 printed work is based on *Stimuli virtutum, fraena peccatorum*.

The translation of "The Third Book" after Wissowatius' opuscule was considered to be "careful", because it "accurately follows" the original[7]. The faithfulness of the translation with reference to the Latin original work has been explained as a reflex of the literal manner adopted by Cantemir in rendering Wissowatius' text in Romanian (Moldovanu 1969: 53 – "Cantemir's translation manner is often literal, going so far as to do violence to the linguistic standard." See also a subtler opinion in Moldovanu 2002[8], who admits that the faithfulness regarding the original is shown in many levels of the text; thus, this faithfulness cannot always be the reflex of a literal manner of translation).

3.1. The faithfulness concerning the original of a translation which was thought to be literal should be understood *cum grano salis*, due to the fact that some fragments in Cantemir's text closely follow the Latin pattern, while others represent a rather personal interpretation of the original.

Therefore, the excerpt from *Stimuli virtutum, fraena peccatorum*: "Non abs re olim lacones, filiis suis teneris ebrietatem reddere abominandam volentes, helotas servos ebrios, cum actionibus indecoris ob oculos ponere solebant." (WSV, 435) is rendered by Cantemir in "The Third Book" as "Nu întru deşert şi fără ispravă odănăoară laconii, fiilor săi celor tineri, din necinstita beţie a-i întoarce vrând, pe hiloţi robii îmbătându-i, cu fapte necinsteşe înnaintea ochilor lor a-i pune obiciuiţi era." (CD, 112v). The Romanian version follows the Latin text, the faithfulness related the original text being delivered not only at the lexical level – as Cantemir retains a few words found at Wissowatius (*laconi, hiloţi*), but also at the word order level (the permissiveness of the Romanian vocabulary and the relatively free word order in Romanian justify the absorption of some lexical units from the original text and the arrangement of different constituents in a complex sentence after a foreign pattern).

---

posthuma. Stimuli virtutum… was published together with other works written in Latin: *De hominis vera beatitate consectanda* and *Pietatis sectandae rationis*.

[7] Cândea 1969: LXVII; see also the remarks at XXXVIII.

[8] Moldovanu 2002: 91.

BDD-A4051 © 2011 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-15 02:42:46 UTC)

The faithfulness as regards the Latin text is also seen in terms of case configuration. As far as grammar is concerned, the faithfulness related to Wissowatius' text is materialised through the appearance of a syntactically unbound dative, "fiilor săi celor tineri" (which constitutes an antipallage). In Wissowatius' text, *filiis teneris* is imposed by *reddere*, translated by Cantemir with "a întoarce" (which is transitive in this context and is associated with the accusative).

Even when Cantemir's translation generally follows the original, there are differences between the two texts, either at the list of terms level or at the grammatical level. In the Romanian version, the adverbial phrase "întru deşert" is doubled by another one, "fără ispravă", although only *abs re* appears in the original. The presence of the second adverbial phrase can be justified from a semantic point of view (Cantemir tries to find the closest equivalent for the meaning of the Latin form) and a stylistic standpoint (the stylistic function of the synonymic repetition "întru deşert" / "fără ispravă" is to intensify through insistence, Toma 1974: 298, who admits that, in Cantemir's text, the synonyms ensure the rhythmical structure as well; see also Niculescu 1980: 99-104). As for the grammatical level, the differences between the two texts are numerous. It can be noticed that *ebrios* is rendered by "îmbătându-i" etc., that is, in the translation, a present participle is preferred to an adjective (the presence of "îmbătând" guarantees a parallel, symmetrical arrangement with the previous participial form "vrând", thus appearing two participial constructions with an unexpressed subject which can be retrieved from the context, i.e., "laconii").

Concerning the semantic and syntactical levels, the Romanian translation distances itself from the original text. The verb *reddere* (the infinitive form of *reddo*) is used by Wissowatius in a causative construction (*reddere* includes in its semantic matrix a primarily causative verb, which has the meanings of "a face să fie, a face să devină"). Cantemir translates *reddere* as "a întoarce", activating another sense of the verb. In his text, an ergative causative construction appears[9] (in the Romanian translation, only the causative "significance" is recovered from the original. Subsequently, the hypothesis[10] proposed by Kelly 1997 is confirmed; this author shows that, in terms of grammar and vocabulary, only the functional equivalence

[9] See Uşurelu 2005: 48-72.

[10] Kelly 1997: 163 – "while formal equivalence is not possible on the levels of vocabulary and grammar, functional equivalence is".

BDD-A4051 © 2011 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-15 02:42:46 UTC)

can be kept, the formal correspondence with the original text being hardly maintained when translated).

Hence, in a translation which is considered to be "literal", the faithfulness towards the original is not absolute[11] (Steiner 1998: 264), but it is manifested in various degrees in accordance with the language level under discussion. In the last resort, this means that the rendering of the Latin text into Romanian does not absolutely / exclusively obey the form of the original and that Cantemir's translation manner is not utterly "verbum e verbo" or "word for word"[12] (Kibler 1997: 257).

3.2. On the other hand, another fragment from *Stimuli virtutum...* could represent an example of "free" translation: "Peccatum a te patratum, si aliis accusantibus conscientia tua attestatur, ne excusa, nec defende, vel extenua; sed confitere, et excute, ac curae habeto ne iterum de eodem sis monendus." (WSV, 455) is rendered as "Păcatul de tine făcut fiind, cătră a cercetărilor sau cătră a certătorilor şi dojenitorilor mărturisiri nu-l ascunde, nu-l feri, nici îl acoperi, ce mai vârtos îl arată şi-l mărturiséşte, şi mărturisindu-l şi ei dojenindu-te şi mustrându-te, în pază săţi fie ca de a doa oară iarăşi pentru acéia greşală a te certa şi a te mustra să nu-ţi fie." (CD, 133v). In relation to Wissowatius' text, Cantemir's translation contains a sequence composed of three present participles, which have a temporal meaning and lack an equivalent in the Latin original. The sequence inserted by Cantemir in his translation repeats terms which are present in the previous sentences: "mărturisire" → "mărturiséşte" → "mărturisind"; "dojenitorilor" → "dojenind". This sequence is an illustration of lexical reiteration, the textual cohesion being thus ensured (the hierarchical arrangement of actions is realised through the use of present participles, their presence being essential for the clarification of the global meaning in the selected excerpt).

Not only the insertion of a new sequence in the Romanian version, but also the removal of some elements of the Latin text represent an evidence that Cantemir's translation distances itself from the original.

[11] Steiner 1998: 264 – "No duplication, even of materials which are conventionally labelled as identical, will turn out a total facsimile. Minute differences and assymmetries persist. [...] What does need clarification [...] is the *degree* of fidelity to be pursued in each case, the tolerance allowed as between different jobs of work."

[12] Kibler 1997: 257 – "Now "faithful" is a tricky term indeed, for these are many levels of fidelity."

BDD-A4051 © 2011 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-15 02:42:46 UTC)

Cantemir abandons the conditional of the Latin text, which provides relevant information for the isotopy of sin justification. In the Romanian version, this isotopy of sin justification moves on the second place, leaving the first place for another that is present as well in Wissowatius' text: the confession of the guilt.

Even though the fragment is more freely translated, it can be remarked the fact that the faithfulness towards the form of the original is revealed at the level of word order. Word order still remains dependent on that of the Latin text (see the isolated construction with an adverbial value which is organised around the present participle, as well as the preposing of complements etc.).

As a result, "The Third Book" of *Divanul...* cannot be interpreted as a completely literal or free adaptation of the original text. When the Romanian version seems to have the appearance of a literal translation, instances of unfaithfulness towards the form of the original emerge (Cantemir cannot always translate "verbum e verbo"); when it seems to be free, it surprises through the concessions made to the form of the Latin text and through the illustrations of unfaithfulness towards its meaning.

4. The division between *literal* and *free* translation that has marked the history of translation for century is questionable, as long as:

a) Cantemir's translation can't be considered entirely a *literal* translation, because there are cases in which the translator doesn't use the strategies centered on adherence to the individual word. At the same time, this translation can't be seen as *free* translation, because there are parts where the translator doesn't seek to capture the broader context of the language, restricting himself to a literal sense. Cantemir's translation shows that notions such as *free* and *literal* translation are relative.

b) When using the distinction between *free* and *literal* translation, one adopts a purely descriptive perspective on translation and draws a list of elements Cantemir has borrowed from the Latin text. In this case, one can't see Cantemir's translation as a text, but as a list of borrowings from the Latin text. When dealing with this XVIIth century translation, the question is not so much of free or literal translation, but of getting the lexis, the grammar etc. of the Romanian language right.

c) The distinction between literal or free translation is no longer a point

BDD-A4051 © 2011 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-15 02:42:46 UTC)

for debate, because this opposition does not shed light on translation and does not clarify a certain process related to translation. We have to look carefully at the demands of the text, trying to understand the process of translation and to discover the function of whatever it is that is involved in translation. In this case, the Romanian translation from *Stimuli virtutum*... can be considered a result of Cantemir's attempt to provide his readers with a new book, a substantially new product read and used by its public.

5. Cantemir's translation implies the transition from Latin to Romanian, as well as from a culture to another, "from a comprehensive view to another one" (Eco 2008: 164; see also Lefevere 1992: XIV).

The difficulty of interpreting a translation as literal or free can be exceeded if it is admitted that translation is "a form of interpretation", which aims, "even taking into account the reader's sensitivity and culture, to rediscover [...] the intention of the text" (Eco 2008: 16). Moreover, the intuition of the mechanism whereby "an apparent unfaithfulness [...] ultimately proves to be an act of faithfulness" (*ibidem*) is no longer blocked by the restrictive conception, according to which a translation is either literal or free.

6. In this paper we have attempted to present Cantemir's translation from Latin not only as a product, but also as a process. To set the scene for this survey, it has been necessary to find answers to the following two questions:

1. Is it true that *literal* translation can be the norm between two closely related languages?
2. Is the use of deep-rooted expressions, such as *literal* vs. *free* translation, unavoidable, or should we regard with justified reserve the *literal* vs. *free* debate?

Cantemir is not a literal translator: such a literal translator would decompose the Latin text into single elements in hopes of finding equivalents in the target language, and would replace each with a corresponding element in Romanian. As translator, Cantemir is not simplistic in his work: he recognizes that the same word needed different approaches. Cantemir appears to have favoured a dynamic equivalence rather than a word-for-word translation (see 3.1.).

In the exemplified translation we show how Cantemir adapted the Latin text to a new audience (see 3.2.). Thus, we can notice a careful,

BDD-A4051 © 2011 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-15 02:42:46 UTC)

critical transformation of Wissowatius's text which provides valuable insight in Cantemir's manner of translation. Such adaptations are of interest because of the things they tell us about the readers/ audience of the time.

These deliberate omissions in the translation of the Latin text are opportune as they avoid unnecessary difficulties and make for greater readability. Cantemir's translation takes into account that his readers would find literal translation too difficult, and so the translator emphasis the general clarity and the overall coherence, matching the complexity of the Latin sentences, producing an easily readable text at the same time.

7. We have challenged taken for granted ideas about translation and reframed the question of whether Cantemir's translation should be described in terms such as literal or free. In a sequel to this paper we will propose a new theoretical model of the translation, using contextual categories such as act of interpretation, transfer of meaning, audience, culture etc., both in the original text and the translation. We will try to answer to the following questions:

1. Is it possible to examine Cantemir's translation using different levels, *id est* levels of equivalence (that means to examine translation at the level of word, grammar, thematic and information structure, cohesion and pragmatics)?
2. What exactly does Cantemir's translation tell us about the selection and the import of cultural goods from the outside world and their transformation?

CORPUS:

CD – *Divanul*, Iaşi, 1698, în Dimitrie Cantemir, *Opere*, Ediţie îngrijită şi studiu introductiv de Virgil Cândea, Bucureşti, Editura pentru literatură, 1969 [textul a fost comparat cu cel din *Opere complete I. Divanul*, Ediţie îngrijită, studiu introductiv şi comentarii de Virgil Cândea. Text grecesc de Maria Marinescu-Himu, Bucureşti, Editura Academiei, 1974].

WSV – Andreas Wissowatius, *Stimuli virtutum, fraena peccatorum, ut alia eiusdem generis opuscula posthuma*, apud Henricum Janssonium, Amstelaedami, 1682 (textul lui Wissowatius a fost reprodus şi în Dimitrie Cantemir, *Opere*, Ediţie îngrijită şi studiu introductiv de Virgil Cândea, Editura pentru literatură, Bucureşti, 1969, p. 423-462. S-a folosit textul latin din ediţia Cândea 1969, dar s-a făcut verificarea cu cel publicat în 1682).

BDD-A4051 © 2011 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-15 02:42:46 UTC)

REFERENCES:

Cândea, V. (1969): „Studiu introductiv", la Dimitrie Cantemir, *Opere. Divanul* – Bucureşti: Editura pentru literatură, p. VII-CX.

Copeland, Rita (1991): *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics and Translation in the Middle Ages. Academic Traditions and Vernacular Texts* – Cambridge-New York-Port Chester-Melbourne-Sydney: Cambridge University Press.

– (1997): "Toward a Social Genealogy of Translation Theory: Classical Property Law and Lollard Property Reform", in Jeanette Beer (ed.), *Translation Theory and Practice in the Middle Ages* – Michigan: Western Michigan University, p. 173-183.

Coşeriu, E. (2000): *Lecţii de lingvistică generală*, Traducere din spaniolă de Eugenia Bojoga – Chişinău: Arc.

Eco, U. (2008): *A spune cam acelaşi lucru. Experienţe de traducere*, În româneşte de Laszlo Alexandru – Iaşi: Polirom.

Hatim B., J. Munday (2004): *Translation. An advanced resource book*, London-New York: Routledge.

Kelly, L.G. (1997): "Medieval Psalm Translation and Literality", in Jeanette Beer (ed.), *Translation Theory and Practice in the Middle Ages* – Michigan: Western Michigan University, p. 161-172.

Kibler, W. (1997): "Translating Chrétien de Troyes: How faithful?", in Jeanette Beer (ed.), *Translation Theory and Practice in the Middle Ages* – Michigan: Western Michigan University, p. 255-269.

Knox, R. 1949: *The Trials of a Translator* – New York: Sheed and Ward.

Lefevere, A. (1992): *Translation. History. Culture. A Sourcebook* – London: Routledge.

Moldovanu, D. (1969): „Stilizarea citatului biblic în *Divanul* lui Dimitrie Cantemir", in *AnL*, XX (1969), Iaşi, p. 49-68.

– (2002): *Dimitrie Cantemir între umanism şi baroc. Tipologia stilului cantemirian din perspectiva figurii dominante* – Iaşi: Editura Universităţii „Al.I. Cuza".

Niculescu, Al. (1980): *Între filologie şi poetică*, Bucureşti: Editura Eminescu.

Stanton, R. (1997): "The (M)other Tongue", in Jeanette Beer (ed.), *Translation Theory and Practice in the Middle Ages* – Michigan: Western Michigan University, p. 33-46.

Steiner, G. (1998): *After Babel* – London: Oxford University Press.

Toma, Stela (1974): „Über den Wortschatz in Cantemirs Roman *Istoria ieroglifică*", in *Dacoromania*, 2, Freiburg-München.

Uşurelu, Camelia (2005): *Categoria factitivului în limba română* – Bucureşti: Editura Universităţii din Bucureşti.

BDD-A4051 © 2011 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-15 02:42:46 UTC)