STUDIES

THE "LINES TO THE DIVINE DAVID" AND THE FIRST PRINTED ROMANIAN BIBLE (1688)

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ABSTRACT "Lines to the divine David", a ten-line epigram appended to the first printed Romanian Bible (1688), have engaged the attention of Romanian scholars since the early 1960s. Initially the poem was believed to be an original composition of Radu Greceanu, one of the revisers of that edition; recent scholarship, however, traces it to a period from before the appearance of the Frankfurt Septuagint in 1597. The present study shows that this poem is a translation of certain Greek verses commonly ascribed to the 10th-century Ioannes Geometres, which were appended to numerous manuscripts of the Psalter as well as to printed editions of the Psalter and the complete Greek Bible.

KEYWORDS Bucharest Bible, David, Orpheus, Psalter, Lines to the divine David

Many Romanian scholars have been intrigued by the inclusion in the Bucharest Bible (1688) of a poem titled "Lines

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to the divine David" (*Stihurile la dumnezăiescul David*). At the end of an article published in 1963, Gabriel Ţepelea[1] came to the conclusion that this was the first poem written in ancient meter in the entire Romanian literature. The presumed author, according to Ţepelea, was none other than Radu Greceanu, a member of the editorial team who put the final touches on the text of the Bible (the printing of which had been financed by prince Şerban Cantacuzino). A few months later, in the same year, Virgil Cândea[2] brought important corrections to Ţepelea's article, showing that the poem dated from before the time of the Frankfurt Septuagint (1597). However, not even Cândea managed to clarify the authorship of the poem. In the present article I will sum up Ţepelea's argument, analyzing the corrections and details brought about by Cândea. Finally, I will present new information about the circulation of the poem in other manuscripts or editions of the Greek Old Testament.

Before summing up Ţepelea's contribution, it is perhaps useful to transcribe the poem as it appears in the Bible of Bucharest[3] and in ms. 45 [4], between Ps. 76 and Ps. 77[5].

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[1] G. Ţepelea, „Versuri în metru antic în Biblia de la Bucureşti (1688)", în *Limba română*, anul XII, 1963, nr. 1, p. 81-85.

[2] V. Cândea, „O epigramă grecească tradusă de spătarul Nicolae Milescu", în *Limba română*, anul XII, 1963, nr. 3, p. 292-295.

[3] *Biblia, adecă Dumnezeiasca Scriptură a celei vechi şi a celei noao lége* (...), Bucureşti, 1688.

[4] Library of the Romanian Academy, the branch in Cluj, Romanian MS. 45, which contains a complete translation of the Old Testament, done by Nicolae Milescu and revised by an anonymous Moldavian scholar (probably Dosoftei) in the second half of the 17th century.

[5] I have made use of the interpretative transcription published in the critical edition of the first Romanian Bible: *Monumenta linguae Dacoromanorum. Biblia 1688, Pars XI. Liber Psalmorum*, Iaşi, Editura Univ. „Al. I. Cuza", 2003, p. 266-267.

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Biblia 1688, p. 406, col. I	*Ms. 45. f. 237^{v}-238^{r}*
Cathisma 11	**Cathisma 10**
Stihuri la dumnezăiescul David	**Stihuri la dumnedzăiescul David**
Taci Orfef, leapădă, Ermí, lăuta.	Taci Orfev, lapădă, Ermí, alăuta.
Cel cu trei picioare den Delfis, încă apune-te spre uitare.	Cu trei picioare de la Delfi apune la uitare încă
Că David noao, a duhului lovind lăută,	Că David noao, a duhului lovind alăuta,
Ivêşte ascunsele tainilor lui Dumnezău.	Ivêşte ascunsele de a lui Dumnedzău taine.
Mulțime de vechi, istorêşte minuni,	Mulțime a vechi istorêşte minuni,
Pornêşte spre laudă celui ce au zidit lumea,	Pornêşte spre laudă celuia ce au zidit lumea.
Mîntuind pre toți; tăinuiêşte şi scrie.	Mîntuind pre toți; tăinuiêşti şi scrie.
Pre cei ce greşesc spre-ntoarcere-i aduce.	Pre păcătoşi cătră-ntoarcere aduce.
Cu multe ş-alte şi a judecătoriului arătînd lêge,	Cu multe ş-alte şi a județ zicînd lêge,
A curăți învață sufleteştile greşale.	A curăți învață ce-s sufleteşti greşale.

At the end of these 10 lines we read: "Lui Dumnezeu slavă"[6] (ms. 45: "Lui Dumnedzău mărire") and "A armoniei sfinte, ca miêrea de dulce cîntările lui David". Evidently, the two sentences do not belong to the poem: the first is a doxological formula which occurs quite often in Biblical or liturgical manuscripts and the second seems to be an epigraph to the Psalter, inserted, in this case, in the middle, rather than at the beginning, as expected.

Gabriel Țepelea, being mistaken by the layout of the Bucharest Bible, thought that what lay before him was "a poem of 16 lines, in ancient meter[7]". However, the metric pattern which he reconstructs is valid only for verses 1-10, which should have

[6] "Glory to God."

[7] G. Țepelea, *art. cit.*, p. 82. Yet, as he tabulates the lines of the poem (together with the doxological formula, the epigraph and the title of Ps. 77), the author counts only 14 verses.

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given him a clue that the "verses" at the end of the poem are not in fact part of it. After carefully analyzing the meter, Ţepelea considers that "the author of the poem had a sound classical culture[8]". The Romanian scholar notes that the verses do not occur in Coresi's Psalter (1570), nor in the Bălgrad Psalter (1651), nor do they appear in modern versions such as Radu-Galaction (1938). The comparison with other foreign versions[9] does not seem to be very helpful, as one is confronted with two hypotheses: 1) the poem was taken from a Greek edition of the Bible or 2) the poem is the original work of one of the translators of the Bucharest Bible.

Ţepelea claims that the Library of the Romanian Academy does not have the edition which served as *Vorlage* for the first Romanian Bible (*i.e.* the Frankfurt Septuagint), the result being that he could not make a comparison with the original. Nevertheless, as Virgil Cândea was to prove in his article, and as I have personally verified recently, the Library of the Romanian Academy in fact contains a copy of the Frankfurt Septuagint (1597). The poem can be found in the middle of the book of Psalms, between Ps. 76 and Ps. 77. The same is true of the Greek Bible printed in Venice in 1687.

Without having made a comparison with the *Vorlage*, Ţepelea eliminates from the outset the possibility that the poem could have been in the Greek text used by N. Milescu: "We find it hard to believe that in the time of the Reformation a scholar or an editor would have fancied writing such lines alluding to deities

[8] Ţepelea, *art. cit.*, p. 83.

[9] The author, *art. cit.*, p. 83, mentions: *Biblia ad vetustissima exemplaria*, Venetiis, 1578, *Bibliorum sacrorum cum glosa ordinaria*, Venetiis, 1603, *La Bible*, traduction de la Vulgate, Paris, 1834-35; the Hungarian editions of Heltai Gaspar and the edition of Caroli Gaspar and Molnar Albert, Amstelodam, 1645.

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from the Greek mythology. [...] A Bible printed by the Catholic Church, which would have needed to face the assault of the Reformation, would have hardly inserted an original poem in the Bible, and the Lutherans would not print the Bible in Greek, but in the national language (German)."[10]

The explanation propounded by Țepelea is unsustainable on closer scrutiny. Although the Reformers heavily promoted the translation of the Bible into the vernacular languages of the time (from Hebrew and Greek), they also upheld the importance of studying the Septuagint, which they knew to have been the Bible of the Early Church.[11]

Not being aware of the larger frame of mind of the Reformers and relying on flimsy arguments, G. Țepelea inclines to the second hypothesis: "we are dealing with an original poem written by one of the translators, namely Radu Greceanu

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[10] Țepelea, *art. cit.*, p. 84.

[11] The assertion that the Reformers were so interested in publishing vernacular versions that they would not publish the Bible in Greek is exaggerated. Typical of all the Reformers is the awareness that the Septuagint was the Bible of the Early Church and that it deserves consideration. Both Luther and Calvin consulted the Septuagint while writing their OT commentaries, realizing that sometimes it obscured the meaning of the Hebrew text. See, for instance Luther's remark on the Greek text of Gen. 4:7: "The translators of the Septuagint likewise appear not to have had adequate knowledge to cope with the vastness of the task they had undertaken" (J. Pelikan *et al.* [eds], *Luther's Works*, vol. 1, Saint Louis, Concordia, 1958, p. 263). Moreover, the text of the Aldine Bible and Erasmus' 5th edition of the NT were reprinted as one book in Basel in 1545. In the preface of this edition, Melanchton wrote that the Septuagint version is rougher (*squalidiorem*) than the original, implying at the same time that it was not translated as conscientiously as it should have been. However, Melanchton advocates the study of the Septuagint, because it can ease the interpretation of the New Testament itself. For further information on this topic, see Basil Hall, "Biblical Scholarship: Editions and Commentaries" in S. L. Greenslade, *The Cambridge History of the Bible: The West from the Reformation to the Present Day*, Cambridge, CUP, 1976, p. 38-93.

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(unless the poem can be attributed to another author, *by way of documents*)."[12] After surveying some "linguistic and stylistic features", the scholar not only "inclines" to the second hypothesis, but reaches full certitude: "the author of the original poem in ancient meter can only be one of the translators, namely Radu Greceanu".[13]

The complex equation, with many unknowns, which Ţepelea uses in order to argue the case for Greceanu's authorship of the "lines to the divine David" is nullified by V. Cândea precisely "by way of documents", namely by bringing to bear the aforementioned editions of the Greek Bible (1597 and 1687). Following the Frankfurt Septuagint, I have transcribed the poem below:

Στίχοι εἰς τὸν θεῖον Δαβίδ.
Σίγησον,᾽Ορφεῦ· ῥίψον᾽Ερμῆ τὴν λῦραν.
Τρίπους ὁ Δελφοῖς δῦνον εἰς λήθην ἔτι.
Δαβὶδ γὰρ ἡμῖν πνεύματος κρούων λύραν,
Τρανεῖ τὰ κρυπτὰ τῶν θεοῦ μυστηρίων,
Πληθὺν παλαιῶν ἱστορεῖ τεραστίων.
Κινεῖ πρὸς ὕμνον τοῦ κτίσαντος τὴν κτίσιν.
Σώζων ἅπαντας, μυσταγωγεῖ καὶ γράφει.
῾Αμαρτάνοντας εἰς ἐπιστροφὴν φέρει.
Πολλοῖς σὺν ἄλλοις καὶ κριτοῦ δηλῶν κρίσιν.
Σμήχειν διδάσκει ψυχικὰς ἁμαρτάδας.

According to Cândea, "this text serves no purpose in this place of the Psalter [...] The interpolation here (between Ps. 76- 77) of the verses and the title is an error which we can explain only by pointing out that Ps. 76 ends the 10th *kathisma* and Ps. 77 begins the 11th *kathisma*; the text is therefore interpolated right

[12] Ţepelea, *art. cit.*, p. 84.
[13] Ţepelea, *art. cit.*, p. 85.

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in the middle of the book, where a careless scribe who copied a manuscript made of two sections inserted the beginning of the whole Psalter."[14] The explanation submitted by Cândea is not entirely impossible, in the case of manuscripts, but does not clarify why such a glaring error (if it was an error) was not eliminated by the editors of the Frankfurt Septuagint or by printers of the Venice Greek Bible (1687).

It is noteworthy to mention Cândea's opinion that this epigram (as he calls it), the author of which is unknown to him, is similar to those of Byzantine authors such as Agathias (6th cent.), Georgios Pisides (7th cent.), Ioannes Kyriotes Geometres (10th cent.), Michael Psellos (11th cent.) and Maximos Planudes (c. 1260-1330). After stating that the epigram does not feature in the anthologies consulted, Cândea writes that the origin of these verses included in the Frankfurt Bible could be illuminated only by researching the history of this version, which is a reprint of the first edition of the Greek Bible[15]. Cândea also mentions that in the 17th century Conrad Rittershuys included this epigram in the scholia to the *Epistles* of Isidoros Pelusiotes (5th cent.[16]).

In the Romanian scholarship new comments on the Byzantine epigram appeared in the late 1970s. N.A. Ursu included the *Στίχοι* in the first volume of Dosoftei's collected works [17], on the grounds that they must have been copy-edited by Dosoftei, along with the whole OT manuscript rendered

[14] Cândea, *art. cit.*, p. 293.

[15] *Πάντα τὰ κατ'ἐξοχὴν καλούμενα βιβλία θείας δηδαλὴ γραφῆς παλαιᾶς τε, καὶ νέας. Sacrae Scripturae Veteris Novaeque omnia.* Venice, Aldus Manutius and Andreas Asolanus, February 1519.

[16] Paris, 1638, commentary to Book V, ep. 286ff.

[17] Dosoftei, *Opere 1. Versuri*, ed. critică de N.A. Ursu, Bucureşti, Minerva, 1978. For the "Lines to the Divine David" in Romanian, see p. 387.

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from Greek into Romanian by N. Milescu, during his stay in Constantinople (1660-1664) as an official representative of the prince Grigore I Ghica. Ursu also contemplates the possibility that the translation was done exclusively by Dosoftei, "since Milescu did not write poetry[18]", and then proceeds to review on the following nine pages Dosoftei's contribution to the revision of the text printed in the Bucharest Bible.

In a book published in 1979, Virgil Cândea revisited the issue on which he had first written sixteen years before. Unmoved by Ursu's arguments, Cândea holds that the lines in honour of David must have already been present in the text underlying ms. 45 and that, consequently, they were originally rendered into Romanian by Milescu himself[19]. Furthermore, the Romanian scholar estimates that the poem does not display the literary mastery shown by Dosoftei in other poetic works and deems it unlikely that the Romanian lines came from Dosoftei's quill. With this, the debate on who should be credited with the first translation of the *Στίχοι* into Romanian has reached a stalemate, but the final outcome of the debate is really beyond the scope of this article.

In what follows I shall explore further the history of David's epigram by relying mainly on a very important book by Rainer Stichel[20] about the history of the Psalter and its religious influence, and on information supplied by Liana Lupaş, curator of the American Bible Society. Stichel writes that the lines, sometimes attributed to the poet Ioannes Geometres (10th century), express a motif widely circulated in the Byzantine period: David

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[18] Dosoftei, *Opere 1. Versuri*, p. 504.

[19] Virgil Cândea, *Raţiunea dominantă. Contribuţii la istoria umanismului românesc*, Cluj-Napoca, Editura Dacia, 1979, p. 221.

[20] Rainer Stichel, *Beiträge zur frühen Geschichte des Psalters und zur Wirkungsgeschichte der Psalmen*, Schöningh: Paderborn, 2007.

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as the "new Orpheus[21]". Stichel also mentions that the Byzantine manuscripts of the Psalter include it at the beginning, while some of them include it in the middle, as is the case with a manuscript at Meteora[22].

According to information supplied by Liana Lupaș, the poem found its way into the Greek Psalter published by Aldus Manutius (c. 1497[23]) between Psalms 76 and 77. A more famous Psalter that reprinted David's epigram was published by the Genovese Agostino Giustiniani (1470-1536). In line with the polyglot character of his Psalter (1516[24]), Giustiniani included two Latin versions, translated by Giacomo de Fornari (Iacobus Furnius) and Battista Cicala[25] respectively. The two Latin poems are introduced by the following text:

> At the beginning of this Psalm, all Greek codices include the poem written above. I wish to include it too in my Octaple and I add two Latin versions: the first is an

[21] Stichel, *op. cit.*, p. 403. For a list of works which mention I. Geometres as author, see n. 1120.

[22] Stichel, *op. cit.*, p. 404, n. 1121: Meteora, Metamorphosis Cod., 204, s. XVI, fol. 80^{v}-81^{r} (N. A. Bees, *Τὰ χειρόγραφα τῶν Μετεώρων* [...], I, Atena, 1967, p. 228.

[23] This Psalter is only the third ever published, after the ones in Milan (1481) and Venice (1486), respectively. Unfortunately, I have not been able to find out whether the poem was included also in the previous Psalters.

[24] *Psalterium Hebraeum, Graecum, Arabicum, et Chaldaeum, cum tribus Latinis interpretationibus et glossis*, Genova, printed by the milanese Pietro Paolo Porro, 1516.

[25] Giacomo de Fornari was invited to help correct the Greek Text of the Psalter edited by Giustiniani. Baptista Cicala (*professore di lettere umane*) corrected the Latin text. See *Annali della repubblica di Genova, di Monsignor Agostino Giustiniani, illustrati con note del Prof. Cav. G. B. Spotorno, terza edizione Genovese coll'elogio dell'autore ed altre aggiunte*, vol. I, Genova, Presso il Libraio Canepa, 1854, p. XVI.

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> improvisation by Iacobus Furnius, a distinguished jurisconsult and a knower of Greek letters second to none, according to Hermolaus' testimony. He [Furnius] was of the greatest help in correcting the Greek text. The second translation is the poetic improvisation of Baptista Cigala, a good orator and a most learned teacher to whom I am indebted for the help he gave me in correcting the Latin text[26].

Stichel also writes that among other Psalters which include the poem are some pocket-size editions: Mainz (1524)[27] and Anvers (1533)[28].

I mentioned above the Psalter published by Aldus Manutius sometime around 1497. By way of this Psalter, the *Στίχοι* made it into the Aldine Bible (1518/1519), and then into the Greek Old Testament published in Strassburg in 1526. As stated before, the verses can also be found in the Frankfurt Septuagint (1597), and in the Venice Greek Bible (1687). It is therefore obvious that the presence of the *Στίχοι* (in Greek, or in translation) was not something new at the time when the Bucharest Bible (1688) was printed. As a matter of fact, they are included even in modern

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[26] I owe to Ms. Liana Lupaş (American Bible Society) both the transcript of the text in Agostino Giustiniani's Psalter and its translation. The Latin text is as follows: "Haec suprascripta carmina passim habentur in cunctis Graecis codicibus in principio huius Psalmi, quae et ipse etiam nostro octaplo inserere uolui additis duabus Latinis interpretationibus, quarum alteram ex tempore lusit Iacobus Furnius iure consultus insignis et in Graecis litteris etiam Hermolai testimonio nemini secundus, qui in castigatione Graeca mihi maximo adiumento fuit. Alteram uero etiam extemporanee cecinit Baptista Cigala orator et literarii ludi praeceptor doctissimus, quem in correctione Latina adiutorem mihi asciui."

[27] *Ψαλτήριον προφέτου [sic] καὶ βασιλέως τοῦ Δαβίδ* (repr. 1545), fol. 90^{v};

[28] *Ψαλτήριον προφήτου καὶ βασιλέως τοῦ Δαβίδ*, fol. 115^{v};

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versions of the Psalter in English.[29] Below is a fresh translation of the verses, done by Andrew Fincke[30]:

Lines to the divine David

1) Hush, Orpheus! Put down, Hermes, the lyre!

2) Three-legged in Delphi, sink again into oblivion!

3) Because David is playing for us the lyre of the Spirit.

4) He explains the hidden mysteries of God. (LXX Ps. 50:15)

5) He recounts a multitude of ancient miracles. (LXX Ps. 104:5)

6) He moves the creation towards praise of the Creator. (LXX Ps. 148-150)

7) He saves everyone, he initiates into the mysteries, he writes [poetry].

8) He brings sinners to repentance. (LXX Ps. 50:15)

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[29] *The Psalter According to the Seventy of David the Prophet and King*, Holy Transfiguration Monastery, Brookline, Massachusetts, 1974. In the 5th ed. (2008), the verses occur at p. 21, and in the pocket edition of the same Psalter (2007) at p. 7. Kevin P. Edgecomb has graciously sent me the text, which I include below:

Be silent, Orpheus; thy lyre throw aside, O Hermes.
The tripod at Delphi hath sunk into oblivion for evermore.
For us David doth now play the Spirit's lyre,
The hidden things of God's mysteries he revealeth;
A multitude of ancient wonders he narrateth;
Of the Creator of creation, doth he move one to sing.
Saving all those men he initiateth, as he writeth his verses,
Sinners doth he bring to desire repentance.
Among other teachings, to the throng doth he declare the Judge's judgments.
The purging, he doth teach, of soulful sinnings.

[30] The translation was published on http://groups.yahoo.com/group/lxx/message/3401. On 13.11.2009 the author granted me permission to operate a few minor changes in his initial version.

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9) With many other [things he does] he reveals the judgment of the Judge.

10) He teaches [how] to wash away errors of the soul. (LXX Ps. 50:9)

Although the reference to Orpheus might seem inappropriate, it should be pointed out that the Church Fathers regarded Orpheus' myth as proof for the truth of monotheism[31]. Jews, too, seem to have put the pagan poet to good use: the mosaic of a Jewish synagogue in Gaza (dedicated in 508-509 A.D.) displays the image of a David-Orpheus playing the lyre while being surrounded by animals[32]. This representation is also present in a beautiful frontispiece to a famous Psalter now in Paris. The illumination presents the biblical king clothed like a Roman general and having numerous animals in attendance[33]. It is perhaps no exaggeration to say that the Greek hero had a long life both in the Byzantine culture and in the Western one. In the end, although relegated by Dante to the inferno, the poet and singer is not without an honorable company, as he finds himself among other virtuous pagans in the limbo[34].

Returning to the text of the epigram, we can say that it asserts unequivocally David's superiority over the exponents of

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[31] Justin Martyr, *Hortatory Address to the Greeks*, chap. 15; Clement of Alexandria, *Exhortation to the Greeks* [*Protrepticus*] 7.74, Lactantius, *Divine Institutes*, I.5.

[32] A. Negev & Shimon Gibson, *The Archaeological Encyclopedia of the Holy Land,* New York, Continuum, 2001, p. 192. The master-musician of Greek and Roman mythology is depicted as surrounded by animals on mosaics discovered in Woodchester (England), Perugia and Palermo (Italy), Volubilis (Morocco), Zaragoza (Spain), El Djem (Tunisia).

[33] The Paris Psalter (10th century) is housed by the Bibliothèque nationale de France (Greek Ms. 139). Thanks are due to Kevin P. Edgecomb for having brought to my attention this important manuscript.

[34] Dante, *Inferno*, canto IV.140.

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the pagan tradition. The biblical king is more accomplished than the hero-singer of ancient mythology, more talented than even the god who invented the lyre. In addition, he reveals mysteries deeper than the "three-legged" (*i.e.* tripod) in Delphi (a metonymy for the oracle herself). In verses 2-8 one can recognize echoes of David's psalms, among which stands out the penitential psalm (LXX 50; MT 51).

Seen in a larger context, the presence in the Bucharest Bible of these "lines alluding to deities from the Greek mythology"[35] should not come as a surprise. We are dealing here with a motif (David as Orpheus) widely circulated within the Byzantine culture. The "Lines to the divine David", a poem written in Byzantium, introduced in the Greek manuscripts of the Psalter, taken into the Greek editions of the Bible (or Psalter) printed in the West of Europe, have made their way into at least one Romanian manuscript of the Bible (ms. 45) and its printed edition (1688).

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[35] Țepelea, *art. cit.*, p. 84. It should be noted, for the sake of accuracy, that Orpheus is not properly a deity, as G. Țepelea implies in his article.

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