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# **BIBLICAL PRINTS FROM ALBA IULIA**

## **LINGUISTIC CREATIVITY AND FIDELITY**

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### **Abstract**

In Alba Iulia typography was printed the New Testament (1648) and the Psalter (1651), two biblical texts, in Romanian language. These sacred texts, used in Christian worship, contain excerpts from Old and New Testament, with fidelity on Hebrew and Greek sources. In comparative view, both books were originally translated in Romanian, avoiding the same linguistic expressions. The article compares Psalm 117 (LXX) with Luke's Gospel quotations of Mary song 'Magnificat' founded in the Third Gospel and Nine's hymn from Moses Song founded at Psalter addenda. In this sense Alba Iulia prints expressed theological and cultural maturity, in a time of multi confessional and national turmoil.

*Keywords:* biblical prints, New Testament, Magnificat, Psalter, multiconfessional

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### **1. Introduction**

As a matter of course, Alba Iulia had the print and translation leader role in Transilvania. Alba Iulia was also called in documents as Balgrad which was the slave name of the city. That was also the political and economic capital of the province and the centre of the Orthodox Metropolitan. One after another, from the Balgrad realms (or from the surroundings: Sebes and Vint) appeared many cultural books in the Romanian language some of them pioneering the domain: the New Testament – 1648, the Psalter - 1651, Ceaslov - 1687, the Liturgy of Saint John - 1687, Molifelnic - 1689, Kiriakodromion - 1699, Bukoavna - 1699 [1].

The political leaders of the 17<sup>th</sup> century in Ardeal, insisted that the Orthodox Romanian people to receive protestant Calvinistic confession especially through the prince Gheorghe Racoczy II (1630-1648). The above mentioned purpose had to be achieved through peaceful ways investing in publishing religious confessional books. After the Calvinistic Catechism (1640) it followed that the New Testament from Balgrad (1648) too to nuance the differences between the two confessions [2]. But the cultural effect overtook the

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confessional purpose because the biblical print became a pioneering work at the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century [3].

## **2. The sources of Balgrad New Testament**

The two happy circumstances that lead to printing of the New Testament from 1648 had been the Calvinistic ambition of Gheorghe Racoczy and the existence of a Romanian translation of the New Testament done by the monk Silvestru. Between these circumstances was the person of the metropolitan Simeon Stefan (1643-1656) who correct the translation according to the Greek original, the Slavon text and the 'Vulgata' of Ieronim, annotating the parting in chapters and the verses.

Specifications on the New Testament translation provenience we found in the title of the paper and also in the forewords. In the enunciation of the title the translator shows that the New Testament 'is translated very carefully from Greek and Slave source in the Romanian language' and in the introductory word addressed to prince Gheorghe Racoczy of the Ardeal, the metropolitan mentioned beside the two sources the Latin source: 'And he charged me - wrote Simion Stefan - to search through my priests some scholar priests and wise men who know how to translate the Testament of our Lord Jesus Christ from Greek, Slave and Latin and seeing the charge of your highness I did it.' [4]

The introduction to Racoczy it is followed by another foreword 'To the readers' in which the translators discusses in five points the following:

1. who started the translation and from which sources;
2. the parting of the book in chapters which all have a resume and verses;
3. the need of introducing neologisms;
4. the attempt of the authors to write in the meaning of all Romanian people because they were convinced that 'the words are like money';
5. the invitation for the readers not to 'judge until they would read the sources'.

In general the language of the New Testament is unitary. The phonetic alternate are only few [5]. The grammar is the one that used in the most of the Romanian scripts from the first part of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The vocabulary is not charged with Slave words as in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The new word appears only where it is strictly necessary. It is not insignificant the fact that all the neologisms considered less knew are explained on the border of the book. The merit of Simeon Stefan is that he contributed through the vocabulary and the style of this translation to the affirmation of all Romanian people origin unity and to the development of the old Romanian literal language. Even though the translators made conscious effort to enrich the language through neologisms and to employ the words on every man's understanding they were not able to detach themselves always from the local spelling and from the Transilvania and Banat vocabulary [6].

### **3. Alba Iulia Psalter – literary aspects**

The Psalter from Balgrad “contains the singing of the blessed prophet and emperor David with the songs of Moses and also with the resume and accomplishment of all psalms which were carefully translated from the source in the Romanian language...with the whole cost of his highness Gheorghe Racoczy in Ardeal in the city of Balgrad” being printed in 1651 on 25<sup>th</sup> of December. In the meaning of the fidelity to the Hebrew text, the Psalter of Balgrad has the title ‘Sefer tehilim’. As with the translation of the New Testament from 1648, the Psalter has two introductions which are dedicated to Gheorghe Racoczy II (1648-1660) and to the readers. The first one contains the principles of the Christian annunciation in the native language overtaking the barriers of the ‘sacred’ languages. The second introduction enumerated the ways of doing the translation, the parting of the text and why are added titles in the beginning of each psalm.

- a) We suppose that existed a primary version of the Romanian translation of the Psalms even before the date of printing the New Testament from 1648 which was restyling the text from one the occidental edition as *Vetus Latina* (in one of the numerous humanistic editions that reproduced this version according to the *Bible Polyglotta Complutensis*) but also as the new Latin translation of the Hebrew text. Both Latin translations of the Psalms are presenting various differences. Between the first edition in Latin of the Septuagintei from 1517 and up to the print of the New Testament from Alba Iulia in 1648 we observe denomination of *Nova* which suggests a successive series of versions in Latin more faithful to the original form of the Psalms [7].

The improvement of the critical apparatus of the biblical edition is subordinated to the idea of giving back the purity of the holy message. This idea is retrieved in the print of the New Testament in 1648 and in the translation print of the Psalms in 1651. Even though the resumes which were written in front of the chapters that appears also in the New Testament and in the Psalms were representing a newness in printing of some biblical text translations, through moderation by which this innovation has been approved by the ecclesiastic Orthodox environments. The Slave titles of the biblical books and the Psalms numbering according the type used in Septuaginta show the wish of not contradicting the tradition [8].

- b) The use of the Septuaginta as a translation source is confirmed by the intern textual proves.
- c) As for using a possible Slave type we have some unclear proves. The formal elements (the Slave title of the book as most of the Psalms titles and the marginal sending of the biblical books but also the closing formula of the book and other few usual formulas that appears in resumes and introductions) are indicating the using of a Slave source in the Psalms Book in 1651. The mentioning of a Slave Bible in the Introduction to the readers of the New Testament from 1648 (“...we considered also the Slave source

which is translated in the Slave language from the Greek language and it is printed in the country of Mosc”) can be considered an indirect prove of using a Slave printed edition in the case of the Psalms. It is accredited the supposing of using as a Slave source of the Bible from Ostrog from 1581, because it has graphic marked the verses of the Psalms even though it does not contain also the numbering of the verses besides the Slave titles and sending.

- d) We have to mention that the most important result of the philological effort is the text of the Romanian translation of the Psalms. This text has two valuable characteristics: the fidelity to the Hebrew original and the clarity of the Romanian text.

In the case of the New Testament and of the Psalms from 1651, because we are speaking about translations Romanian, the report to the original versions is looking for the correct and nuanced transposition of these texts in the Romanian language. The affirmation is confirmed by the marginal glosses which are inscribing the variant propounded by *Septuaginta*. We rarely find in these texts the reproducing of the *Septuaginta*'s word and the marginal pointing out of the Romanian equivalent of the word that exist in the Hebrew text [9].

The text of the Psalms Book from 1651 printed in Alba Iulia keeps the methodology applied in the translation and printing of the New Testament from 1648 (the sending system, glosses, resumes) assuming the critical apparatus through the references to the versions of the Hebrew text of the Psalms in comparison with *Septuaginta* and *Vulgata*. The Psalms Book is radical distancing from what was already realized until then in the cultural post-Byzantine environment by marking the words which were missing from the Hebrew text [5, p. 101].

Among the elements that suggest the authors of the Psalms we find mentioned the name of the prince Gheorghe Racoczy who was the first sponsor but also the metropolitan Simion Stefan who was canonized as saint by the Orthodox Church in 2011 in capacity of a representing of the Metropolitan of Balgrad who printed the book. On the page 294v, in the end of the Psalms at the bottom of the page are imprinted the primers ‘M.S.’. The M.S. is thanking to God for finishing the work. The historian Nicolae Iorga excludes the possibility that the abbreviation concern with The Monk Silvestru (who died in 1645) but either with the Metropolitan Stefan because it was not a custom to minimize the effort of the initiator of the project [10].

The printer Stefan or Stefan from Ohrida was considered a potential printer of the New Testament and thereby the printer of the Psalms in the context of his arrival to Alba Iulia. He is calling him self for the first time a printer. “Gheorghe Rusu from Sibiel (...) being a printer with the other brothers, with God’s help could print it”. [11] Gheorghe Rusu from Sibiel (today Sibiu) is the attorney of the typographies from Ardeal in prince’s typography and the printing master Martin Maior from Brasov, knew under

some different forms of his name as the printer of the Calvinistic Catechism from 1640, faithful to the Hungarian current, was the representative from the part of the prince. The Psalter from Balgrad - 1651 is a volume in 4 chapters which has a text printed in only one column, in a central border and another one straight in the exterior which contain abbreviations, glosses and marginal sending.

The volume has between 16 and 21 lines on the page. The text is printed with black ink but the first letters and some lines are printed with red ink. For printing were used at list five fonts, some of the titles page fonts and the first text page fonts are having irregular form. In the first line of the title page the title of the Psalter is written Hebrew letters.

A full exemplar is composed by the title page, 18 pages which are numbered followed by 300 pages with biblical text. The exemplars which had been discovered are having the numbering incorrect: after the number 85 follows 88, 87, 86, 89 and in place of the page 231 appears the number 241. After this the numbering is correct.

The text of the Psalter is framed with simple borders. On the exterior part of the pages appear two columns: the first one from the centre contains the numbering of the verses and on the exterior column appear the biblical sending, marginal notes and also elisions from the text which are marked with a starlet in the text and on border.

The aspect of the book is sober without many ornaments proper for the books with reformed influence. Only on the title page and on the first text page of the Psalter there are some primers and words printed with dark red ink. The more complex graphic representations from the Psalter are: the heraldic of the Metropolitan from Balgrad, the Holy Trinity and the heraldic of the Racoczy family identical with the ones that are found in the New Testament. We found only one type ornamental header which can be also discovered in the New Testament. From the big decorative primers in the Psalter are used 9 types among which four are the newly created Z, I, K (in two variants) and T. The primers T, Z, I do not appear at all in the New Testament. From the third type of primers ornamentals (K), only with fitomorphic motifs, on the Psalter pages can be discovered over 22 fonts, while in the New Testament only 16. In order to print the Psalter the masters have used only one type of paper which is considered a manual rag paper. The paper was marked with the sign of the Lancram paper mill in three variants of dimension, identical but with some insignificant differences all of them representing the heraldic of Transilvania that was used in the time of Gheorghe Racoczy I. Regarding the phonetic value of the letters we generally respected the norms proposed by the critical edition of the Psalter from Balgrad (1651) [12] and the definitions from an anterior paper [13].

#### 4. The psalm model used by Saint Luke

From the Old Testament books the Book of Psalms is frequently quoted in Saint Luca's books next to the book of the Prophet Isaiah and the Pentateuch. Besides the 150 canonical Psalms that we know in the Old Testament exist a series of other scripts similar with the literal form of what we call today a psalm [14].

The Hebrew poetry is essentially religious and sometime is redacted under the axiomatic form enriched with a lot of style figures. The poetic structure is simple with a balanced construction each verse being made by at list two members. Unfortunately the translators of the Holy Scripture in Romanian didn't deposed enough effort to separate the poetic text from prose. The theologians discovered a criterion of separation the prose parts from the lyrical texts. The epical texts are marked by some lexical or phonetic singularities like: the decided article 'h', the relative pronoun 'așer' or the grade 'et' which is specific for the indirect complement. The presence of these distinctive marks attests the fact that the text is not a lyrical production.

Any stanza is made from two or more verses. For example in Psalms we find stanzas with 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 or even 10 verses. The psalm 118 (LXX) has stanzas divided in 8 verses (16 verses/stanza). In the Hebrew poetry the stanza offers a complete meaning and the dividing in stanzas of a poem suggest the dividing of the text in logical parts. In the Book of Psalms the stanzas can be descried by using the accents or the indications of some different terms as: sela, -athmah or qinah - pause, the equivalent of 'diafalma' in *Septuaginta* [15].

The biblical songs, as their name are showing, are different parts from some different books of the Old and New Testament that can be found first of all in the Holy Scripture. These are ten. The first eight appertain to the Old Testament and the last two forming a unity belong to the New Testament.

In order to be used in the cult of the Church their text was printed in two liturgical books: the Psalter and the Irmologhion. The Orthodox liturgical Psalter contains always after the end of the Psalms exactly as the Holy Scripture the integral text of the nine songs subscribed under the name of Moses. The songs of Moses are sung only in the Lent in the Services of the Orthodox Church and are combining the innography of the canons (irnoase and troparions) with the scriptural element [16].

The songs of Moses figure in the Psalter ever since the 5<sup>th</sup> century: *Codex Alexandrinus*. The firs two songs from the Pentateuch in the Romanian tradition also gave the name of the whole collection. 'The first Song' derives from The Exodus 15.1-19 and 'The second song' from Deuteronomy 32.1-43. 'The third song' is the prayer of Hannah, the mother of the prophet Samuel, from 1 Samuel 2.1-10. 'The fourth song' is the prayer of the prophet Habakkuk 3.2-19. 'The fifth song' is the prayer of the prophet Isaiah 26.9-20. 'The sixth song' belongs to the prophet Jonah 2.3-10. 'The seventh and the eighth song' contains the prayer and the gratification singing of the three young men extracted from chapter 3 of the prophet Daniel's Book (LXX). The song of the Holy Virgin and

of the prophet Zechariah who was the father of Saint John compose together ‘the ninth song’ and can be found in Luke 1.46-55 and 1.68-80.

#### **4.1. The song of the Holy Virgin (Luke 1.46-55)**

The song of The Holy Virgin it is called also the *Magnificat* after the Latin equivalent of the first word in the text. This procedure of naming the texts is also a biblical, known being the fact that in the Pentateuch the books of Moses, in their Hebrew variant, are called after the first word of the book. Luke could know this song from a direct source – more specific the Virgin Mary, or from an indirect source how it comes out from Luke 2.51: “His mother was keeping in her heart all these words”.

The *Magnificat* is an inspired composition which respects the Hebrew prosody of the Old Testament. An obvious similarity exists between the *Magnificat* and the song of Hannah from 1 Samuel 2.1-10 respective in Psalms 32, 46, 47 (LXX) [17]. In *Magnificat* we encounter prosodic procedures specific to the Hebrew poetry. Thus, in verses 46-47 we found a synonymous parallelism in the couplet and in verses 48-49 the same parallelism in triverse. Beside this type of parallelism we also found an antithetic parallelism in verses 52-53.

From the compositional point of view the song of the Holy Virgin was divided according to the Greek text in two parts on the line of verse 50 and it was observed the fact that we can get couplets or triverses. In the first variant, that would be composed from couplets, the first part would be formed by verses 46b-48a, 48b-50, with 50 respective 65 syllables and verses 51-52 and verses 53-55 with 49 and 68 syllables. The second part would contain verses 51-53 and verse 54, with 69 and 49 syllables [18].

Another division could look like this:

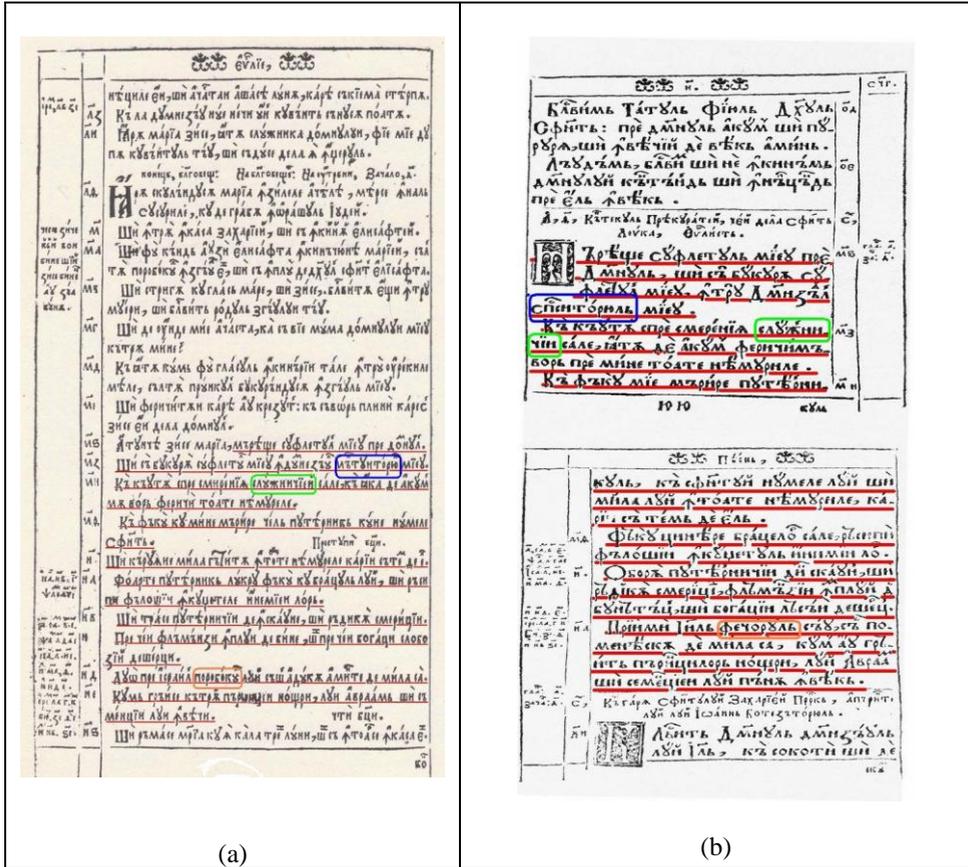
the first part:

- a. verses 46b-48a    11 accents    50 syllables
- b. verses 48b-49a    9 accents    33 syllables
- b'. verses 49b-50a    9 accents    32 syllables

the second part:

- c. verses 51-52        14 accents    49 syllables
- d. verse 53            21 accents    21 syllables
- c'. Verses 54-55       13 accents    47 syllables

Beyond the composition rules of the songs used by Luke, some verses have their root exactly in the texts of the Old Testament. That’s way the verse 48 has a parallel in I Samuel 1.11, the verse 49 has a parallel in the Psalm 110.9 (LXX) or even the Deuteronomy 10.21 and verse 50 has a parallel in the Psalm 102.17 (LXX), etc. [19]. That means that the Holy Virgin who is the author of the song knew the Holly Scripture and this hymn is the result of the divine inspiration. Fitzmyer considers that this hymn does not entirely match with the plan of the Psalms or with the plan of the gratitude Psalms which were written after. *Magnificat* is more a gratitude and appraisal hymn which is approaching to the structure of the victory songs of the Maccabees or some Qumran hymns [20].



**Figure 1.** (a) *Magnificat* in the New Testament, in the Gospel according to Luke, page 66v; (b) *Magnificat* in the Psalter, at the ninth song from the Songs of Moses, page 293r.

**4.2. The song of Zechariah (Luke 1.67-79)**

This hymn has two parts: a blessing to achieve the promises made by the God of Israel (verses 68-75) and the prophecy that refers to John the Baptist (verses 76-79). The song is also called *Benedictus* and it has Judaic-Christian roots. The structure of the hymn looks like a mosaic composed by a lot of phrases from *Septuaginta*. The most important theme of the hymn is the knowledge about Jesus and it refers especially to the messianic role of Jesus. Most of the theologians are wondering if the hymn existed in Hebrew or Aramaic, suggesting the fact that the song derives from a Judaic-Christian community [21]. Each part of the hymn has three verses:

the first part:

- verse 68a            4 accents    14 syllables
- verses 68b-69b    13 accents   41 syllables
- verses 70-71b     13 accents   45 syllables

the second part:  
 verses 72a-73a 13 accents 43 syllables  
 verse 73b 13 accents 43 syllables  
 verses 74-75b 13 accents 42 syllables

Fitzmyer thinks that the verse 68 is a laudation introductive speech and verses 68b-77b compose the body of the hymn while verses 78-79 represent the conclusion of the hymn [20, p. 379]. If we remain to the traditional dividing the song in two parts we observe that the first part is between verses 67-75 and that represents a messianic hymn build according to the model of the Psalms similar as versification to the *Magnificat*. The second part represents the mission which John the Baptist will have in the God's plan of world's salvation.

In Figure 1 is pointed out the text of the song *Magnificat* which is taken from the New Testament and the Psalter from Balgrad.

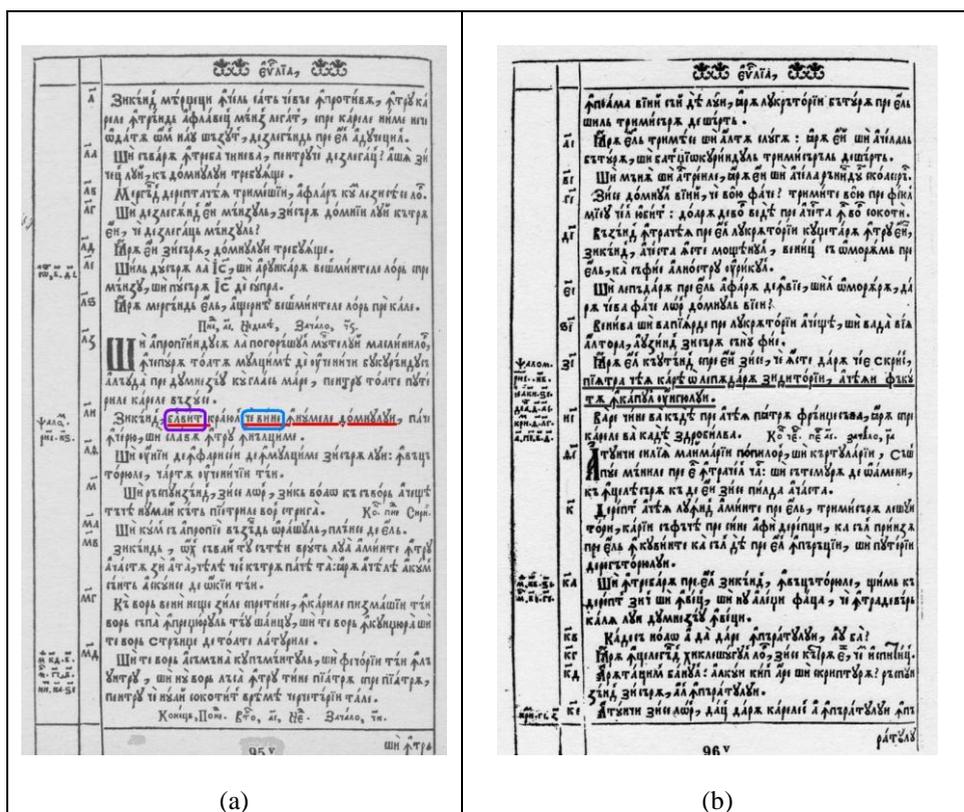


Figure 2. Psalm 117 from the New Testament, Gospel of Luke: (a) 19.38, page 95v; (b) 20.17, page 96v.

## 5. Fidelity and linguistic creativity

For the originality of the translation we selected the terms 'servant' and 'saviour'. The translator oscillated between giving the Greek τῆς δούλης as

,sweeny' in Psalter (Figure 1b, the word marked in green) and the New Testament, closer than ,slave' or ,servant' (Figure 1a, the word marked in green). For Israel, which is named παιδός the Psalter's translator gives the meaning of ,son', ,boy' (Figure 1b, the word marked in orange), more powerful as meaning than ,servant', and the New Testament uses the word ,poroboc' (Figure 1a, the word marked in orange), i.e. innocent child, a baby.

For the Greek τῷ σωτηρί (Saviour) we have the translation 'Spasitoriul' (the one who pays the penalty) in Psalter and 'Saviour' in the New Testament (Figure 1, the word marked with blue). The word 'Spasitoriul' derives by copying from the Slavonic 'spasenie', suggesting the influence of the Slavonic edition of the Bible from Ostrog, but also the fidelity for Orthodoxy, this being taken by the filiation of Slave languages, more influent than Greek at that time.

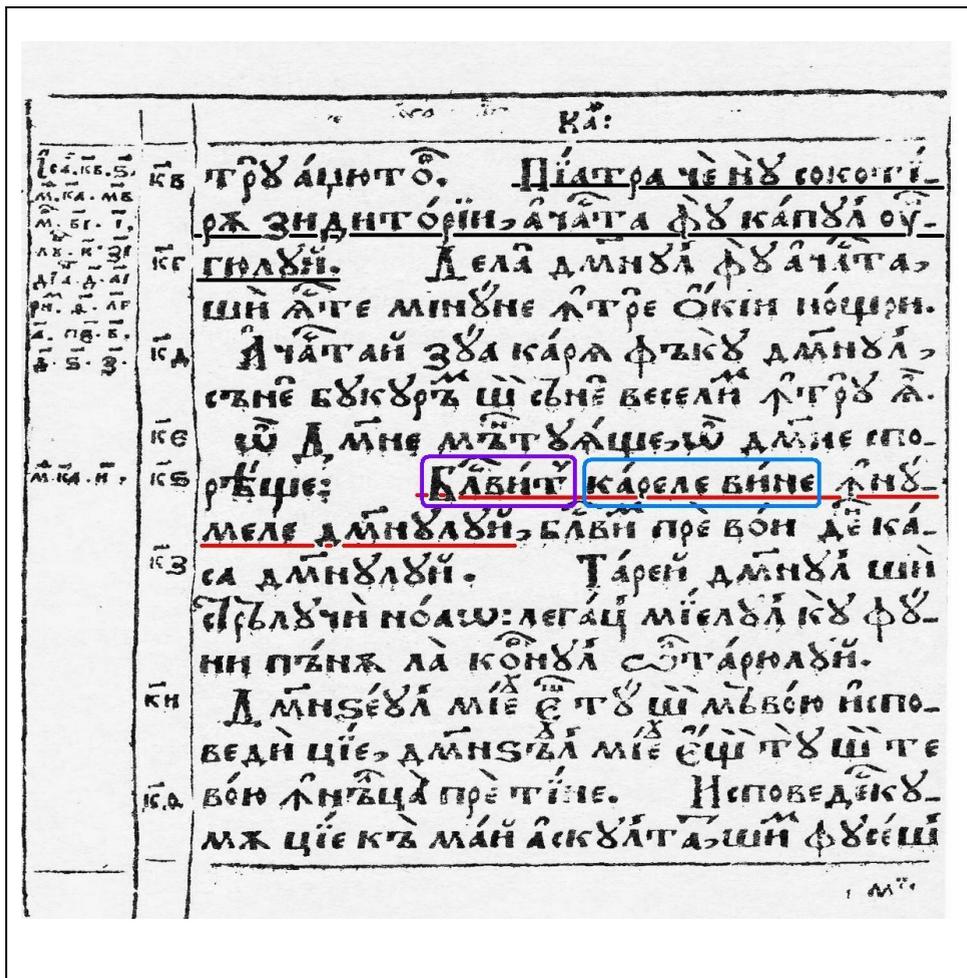


Figure 3. In black Psalm 117.22 and in red Psalm 117.26.

For the term ὁ ἐρχόμενος, the translators of the New testament and of the Psalter keep the Greek meaning, translating the present participle by ‚the one who comes’ (Figures 2b and 3, the word marked in blue)

An original linguistic phenomenon is given by the word εὐλογητός not by the Latin ‚Benedictus’, nor by the Slavonic word ‚slavă’, but by the specific word ‚bslăvit’, which is used with the meaning of ‚blessed’ but also of ‚glorified’ (Figures 2b and 3, the word marked in violet). The translation’s originality doesn’t make concessions to the Latin influence, keeping the fidelity for the Slavonic origin Orthodoxy, given in Romanian terms.

## 6. Conclusions

The popular lexical element, masively present in the New Testament and in the Psalter from Alba Iulia, expressing a popular character of the exposal, augments in the literary language after this date, by the speaking and the sermon of the priest or of the monk who explained and interpreted the message to the believers.

Regarding the literary language, the value of these printings is peerless, think explainable into an epoch full of evolutions, of enrichment and consolidation of the literary language, this fact resulting from numerous phonetic alternations, numerous Slavonic, Greek and Latin terms.

Besides the priceless theological advantages brought to the Church, the biblical printings from Bălgrad put in circulation, in all the lands inhabited by Romanians, a clean, vivid language, understood by everybody, with a rich vocabulary and nice rhythms that bring it near the beauty and expressivity of the popular language. Therewith, these printings will be almost integral found in the final form of the *Bible from Bucharest* from 1688, which had an increased circulation on the territories lived by Romanians, being the ligand of the Romanian language and people.

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