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O I P O S D R U



ACADEMIA ROMÂNĂ



Maria STANCIU ISTRATE

Reflexe ale medievalității europene în cultura română veche

Varlaam și Ioasaf
în cea mai veche versiune
a traducerii lui Udriște Năsturel



Editura Muzeului Național al Literaturii Române



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CULTURA ROMÂNĂ VECHIE. VARLAAM ȘI IOASAF
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UDRIȘTE NĂSTUREL**



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LUI UDRIȘTE NĂSTUREL**

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ADDENDA

Abstract

The main objective of the project entitled *Reflexes of the European Medieval Period in Old Romanian Culture. 'Barlaam and Joasaph' in the Oldest Version of Udriște Năsturel's Translation* was the editing and studying of the Romanian manuscript 588, kept in the Library of the Romanian Academy in Bucharest.

The manuscript contains the earliest version of the apologetic novel entitled *Barlaam and Joasaph*, translated into Romanian by Deputy Voivode Udriște Năsturel of Fierești in the time of great cultural effervescence of Voivode Matei Basarab.

Dating over a thousand years before, the legend of the Indian prince Joasaph and of the hermit Barlaam reached its climax in the medieval period, when it became well-known in almost all European literatures. Since then it has sparked a constant interest, materialized through the numerous studies dedicated to it. Although it has long been subject of intense study, the exegesis of the legend of Joasaph, believed to have been the Indian prince Buddha, is far from being completed.

The chronology of the first Christian versions and the relationships of affiliation between them are still subjects of research surrounded by controversy. The name of Josaphat was mentioned for the first time in a Greek version.

Whether from Greek, Latin or from Slavonic, the hagiographical legend was translated in to almost all European literatures.

Due to the Latin translations, the history of Barlaam and Josaphat gained great importance in mediaeval Christianity, at a time when the two were considered to have Christianized India. Simultaneously, the link made between the name of the legend and the name of John of Damascus

strengthened the impression that the writing was factual, so much so that at the date the two were eventually sanctified, few scholars doubted their real existence.

Almost all the translations from Latin were made before the end of the 15th century. Among the French mediaeval versions, the most widespread was the one made in verses, translated from Latin by Guy de Cambrai between 1209 and 1220. The same year of 1220 marks the appearance of the German translation in verses, accomplished by Rudolph von Ems. There also exist versions in Spanish (14th century), Portuguese, Catalan, Italian, Norse (first half of the 13th century), Swedish (15th century), Hungarian (16th century), Czech (15th century), and Polish (16th century). The first Anglo-Norman version appeared around 1200, made by Chardry in verses. Entitled *Josaphaz*, Chardry's variant is a summary of the Latin narrative (Koch, 1879). In English literature, there are both variants in verses and translations in prose. The earliest extant copy is a variant in verses that belongs to the 16th century and is based on two manuscripts from the 14th century.

In Eastern Europe the novel spread through translations made from Slavonic originals. The date of the first Slavonic translation is still a controversial issue. Some specialists consider that the first translation from Greek was made in south Slavonic, sometime between the 11th and the 13th century. According to another hypothesis, there existed two independent Bulgarian translations, which appeared in the 14th century. Finally, I. Lebedev believes that the first translation from Greek was made into Russian Slavonic between the 11th and 12th century. It must be noted that all Slavonic manuscripts mention John of Damascus as the author.

On the Romanian territory, *The Life of Saints Barlaam and Josaphat* initially entered through the Slavonic language and the first manuscripts containing it belong to the final period of the Middle Ages. The oldest among these is a codex written in Middle Bulgarian at the beginning of the 15th century, which was kept for a time at the Neamț Monastery and is at present at the Library of the Romanian Academy in Bucharest.

Before they were translated into Romanian, certain parables from the novel had been introduced in two other writings belonging to old Romanian culture. Thus, the parable of the unicorn appears in *The Life of*

Patriarch Nifon, written by Gavril, Head of the Athos Priest Community. *The Teachings of Neagoe Basarab to His Son, Teodosie*, written in Slavonic, includes, besides the parable of the unicorn, five more parables.

The Life of Saints Barlaam and Josaphat was adopted in Romania after the western world had experienced the Renaissance. Midway through the 17th century, in 1648, the Romanian scholar Udriște Năsturel, from southern Wallachia, makes the first and most accomplished translation of the novel.

The autograph manuscript of the translation was lost, and the writing was not printed at a time when, according to tradition, few books were printed other than those used by the church.

Although not printed, the story of the life of the two hermits spread very quickly, being written and rewritten several times and becoming familiar to the public in the other Romanian provinces, Moldavia and Transylvania.

The legend of the two sanctified characters had a powerful impact on other cultural fields. In the 15th century, when only Slavonic versions of the writing circulated on the Romanian territory, the life of the two hermits was represented on the walls of the Neamț Monastery, painted by the decorating artists of ruler Stephen the Great.

There also exist links between the ideational structures of some episodes in the novel and certain motifs in Romanian folklore literature. Thus, the *Parable of the Four Caskets* from *Barlaam and Josaphat* was echoed in the extremely popular tales called *Old Man's Girl and Old Woman's Girl*, recounted by Ion Creangă, or *The Old Man's Well-behaved Girl*, a folk tale collected by Petre Ispirescu.

Many other parables quoted by Barlaam with the aim of converting Josaphat ensured, due to their beauty, the universal perennial character of the legend.

These parables have always been highly successful and held in high esteem. In late mediaeval times on the Romanian territory, some of them delighted the readers' imagination so much that, due to their homogeneous structure, they could be used independently in standard literature, where they became true *nuclei of wisdom*. Certain manuscripts are a proof of this. One such manuscript, copied in 1768 in Transylvania and found for a time in the possession of Moses Gaster, was taken abroad and is presently kept

in the John Rylands University Library in Manchester. This miscellany contains many Romanian writings. Among these can be found *Istoriile Sfântului Varlaam către Ioasaf, fiul lui Avemer, Împăratul Indiei* ("The Histories of Saint Barlaam to Josaphat, Son of Avemer, Emperor of India"). These histories, in other words the parables the title sends to, though unnamed, are simple to identify. They are the following: *The Story of the Unicorn, the Man and His Three Friends, the King for a Year, the Trumpet of Doom, the Four Caskets*, and in a very concentrated form, *the Nightingale and the Fowler*.

The phenomenon was universal, and the same parables were borrowed from the text by all the literatures the text circulated in. For example, *the Parable of the Four Caskets* is often referred to by mediaeval writers. It was used by Boccaccio in the *Decameron*, in the first novel of day 10 and it also inspired Shakespeare in a scene from *Merchant of Venice*.

*

Due to various reasons, the editing of manuscript 588 has constantly been postponed. Either because the manuscript was no longer on the territory of our country or another manuscript was unfortunately chosen to be published instead or because the editorial plan was changed, the earliest copy, descending from the original of Udriște Năsturel's translation has to this day remained covered by the dust of times gone by.

None of the texts published so far comes close enough to the initial writing of the translation that Udriște Năsturel made for the novel bearing the title *Barlaam and Joasaph* in the year of 1648 as the version extant in manuscript 588. Our edition thus answers a need long talked about in Romanian philology.

The work was structured in four sections, entitled: *Introductory Study, Note on the Edition, Barlaam and Joasaphat* (text edition) and *Glossary* respectively. At the end, after the *References* we reproduced a few facsimiles that belong to the versions considered to have been copied by copyist Fota.

The *Introductory Study* comprises useful information concerning the appearance, translation and the dissemination of the legend in various European literatures. The linguistic peculiarities analyzed emphasize the outstanding abilities of translating into Romanian exhibited by scholar Udriște Năsturel.

The methods used in transcribing the texts were detailed in *Note on the Edition*, which comes before the transcribed text. In order to offer an integral image of the narrative writing, the six missing leaves from the beginning of manuscript 588 have been completed by the corresponding leaves from manuscript 2470, since the differences between the two manuscripts are minimal.

The *Glossary* which follows the edition facilitates the modern reader's access to the text, as the terms included here have long sunk into oblivion, while some of them were quite unfamiliar even to Năsturel's contemporaries.

The *References* from the end of the volume comprise titles of certain texts that we studied and which we referred to in our work.

Finally I would like to express my gratitude to the project manager, academician Marius Sala, for his support during the period the research project was carried out and, not least, to Mr. Alexandru Mareş for the invaluable advice he constantly offered to me.

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