

TEO, ISSN 2247-4382
70 (1), pp. 46-66, 2017

An Overview of Romanian Sermon from the Beginnings to the 20th Century

Nicușor Beldiman

Nicușor Beldiman

University of Bucharest

E-mail: prnbeldiman@gmail.com

Abstract

The present article provides an overview of Romanian sermon throughout the history – from the first preachers of the Gospel to a golden modern age (19th-early 20th century), aiming to trace the evolution of homiletic-missionary activity over the centuries, by capturing the major themes approached, the techniques used and the progress acquired in the field of the homiletic language.

From the Holy Apostles Andrew and Philip, and Saint Nicetas of Remesiana who preached during the first Christian centuries on the present-day territory of Romania, to illustrious names such as Gregory Tsamblak (Grigorie Tamblac), 16th-century Holy Voivode Neagoe Basarab and Deacon Coresi, 17th-century Metropolitan Varlaam of Moldavia and Holy Martyr Hierarch Antim Ivireanul (Anthemius of Iberia), the Transylvanians Samuil Micu (1754-1806) and Petru Maior (1760-1821), archimandrite Eufrosin Poteca (1786-1858), 19th-century Metropolitan Andrei Saguna, or great preachers such as Fr. Zaharia Boiu, the present article traces the chronological evolution of Romanian homiletic discourse. We note its characteristic originality, rich dogmatic and ethical contents, and the range of homiletic genres (exegetic homilies, thematic sermons, pareneses and panegyrics). The same concern for preaching existed in all three Romanian principalities, which shared the aims of defending the ancestral faith and developing language and culture.

Keywords

Sermon, homiletic genres, sermon contents, great preachers, historical evolution of preaching

An Overview of Romanian Sermon from the Beginnings to the 20th Century...

We set on the path opened by the first preachers of the Gospel, from the dawn of Christianity and up to a time of apogee represented by the great preachers of our Church in the modern age, towards the threshold of the 20th century, in an attempt to trace the evolution of sermon over these centuries, as well as the missionary-preaching activity, by capturing the major themes approached, the techniques used and the progress acquired in the field of the homiletic language.

I. The Holy Apostles Andrew and Philip

The traces of the passing of the Saint Apostle Andrew, the First Called – *Romania's Patron Saint* – can still be found today in Dobrogea, known as Scythia Minor (Pontic Dacia), a former Roman province. He preached the Gospel on this land at the dawn of Christianity, as did all the other Apostles, who “commenced the process of converting nations by means of the word, bearing in mind both the example and the command of their Teacher, to preach to the entire world”¹. Therefore, as the History of the Romanian Church tells us, among the nations to whom the Gospel was preached by Saint Apostle Andrew “there were also the Scythes”², i.e. the Getae-Dacian-Roman inhabitants of Scythia Minor, our ancestors. Also in the time of the apostles, we mention another Christian missionary - Saint Phillip who, according to more recent research, was the second apostle that blessed the land of Romania by his preaching, together with the Holy Apostle Andrew, the Word of the Gospel of Our Savior Christ³.

II. Saint Nicetas of Remesiana

Later on, in late 3rd century and early 4th century, researchers in the field mention another preacher, a bishop of Dacian and Roman origin, St. Nicetas

¹ Rev. Nicolae Petrescu, *Homiletics. Manual pentru Seminarile teologice (Homiletics. Coursebook for the Theological Seminars)*, EIBMBOR, Bucharest, 1977, p. 41.

² Rev. Prof. dr. Mircea Păcurariu, *Istoria Bisericii Ortodoxe Române (History of the Romanian Orthodox Church)*, vol. I, EIBMBOR, Bucharest, 1992, p. 63.

³ Prof. dr. Emilian Popescu, *Sfântul Apostol Filip – misionar pe pământ românesc (Saint Apostle Philip – a missionary on the Romanian land)*, in “Logos”, *Renașterea*, Cluj, 2001, p. 398.

of Remesiana, a town situated in the Dacia Mediterranea province, on the route connecting Western Europe and Constantinople, part of the Thessaloniki Metropolitan Church. While testimony about the activity of this man of the Church devoted to the word of God was left by priest Gennadius of Marseille, in his work entitled *Liber de viris illustribus*, Cassiodorus in *De institutione divinarum litterarum*, and the bishop of Rome, Innocent I, in his *Epistle XVI* and *XVII* followed, much later, by data synthesized by the scholar A. Burn in an *Introduction* that precedes the complete works of St Nicetas, the works that actually made known to the world his life and endeavors are poems XVII and XXVII, composed by Saint Paulinus of Nola, constituting the main external source. These poems were dedicated to the saint after the two visits to Nola, at the invitation of his friend, “to express his love full of veneration towards a dear friend”⁴, to honor him in a very special way. From the verses of Saint Paulinus we learn that Saint Nicetas carried out his missionary activity in Dacia, where “the barbarians learn, with your help, to praise Christ in chants with a Roman heart”⁵. At the same time, by undertaking the task of Romanizing, through sermons delivered in the Latin language, the tribes of Scythes, Getaes and Dacians, we consider that he accomplished a cultural and spiritual revival among those for whom he became a true “parent”, because “to your sermon the Scythe subdues”, “Getaes run to you as do both kinds of Dacians”⁶.

The worthy of remembrance rev. professor Ioan G. Coman, states the following in connection to the spiritual bond that Saint Nicetas had with the Dacian-Romans of that time:

“Romanian Orthodoxy, through its contemporary Dacian-Roman forefathers and through the generations that followed to this day, received the unwavering theological faith and doctrine from Saint Nicetas The clarity of the theological thinking of the Romanian people is owed, mostly, to Saint Nicetas. The gentleness of the Romanian Orthodox liturgies and homilies ... is likely to be inherited from him as well”⁷.

⁴ Rev. prof. dr. Ștefan Alexe, *Sfântul Niceta de Remesiana și ecumenicitatea patristică din secolele IV și V (Saint Niceta de Remesiana and the patristic ecumenicity in the 4th and 5th centuries)*, in „Studii Teologice”, Year XXI (1969), no. 7-8, p. 16.

⁵ Sfântul Paulin de Nola (St Paulinus of Nola), *Carmen XVII*, V 110-128, G. Hertel, in CSEL, part I, 1894, pp. 86-87.

⁶ Sfântul Paulin de Nola, *Carmen*, pp. 92-93.

⁷ Rev. prof. dr. Ioan G. Coman, *Profilul misionar și litarar al Sfântului Niceta de Reme-*

An Overview of Romanian Sermon from the Beginnings to the 20th Century...

The conclusions that can be reached are concisely formulated by the scholar Vasile Pârvan: he preached Christian teachings “on both banks of the Danube, as apostle of the Dacian-Romans living on the right and left sides of the Danube”⁸.

As for the sermons in the Latin language of this passionate missionary Nicetas, they are remarkable by their plainness, because he preached Christianity in a way that was understood by everyone, with clarity, with a rich and diverse lexis that included a series of Latin Christian terms which were preserved in our lexical heritage, even in our main lexical corpus of terms, demonstrating his extensive theological information.

III. Grigorie Țamblac

As a name that stands out in the history of the 15th century homiletics, we mention Grigorie Țamblac, a priest of the Constantinople Patriarchate, who visited Moldavia twice and was active on this territory for a long period of time. He was equally claimed as their own by the Russians, the Serbs, the Bulgarians or the Romanians, but memory, his merits and his efforts bestow upon him the aura of “a scholar of European stature.., with an adventurous and tumultuous life that led him to many lands and involved him in historical events”⁹.

In Moldavia he arrived in 1401 as an envoy of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, during the reign of the enlightened voivode Alexander the Good, when some dissensions occurred between the Patriarch and the Metropolitan of Moldavia as a result of the fact that Joseph, one of the first metropolitan bishops of this country was not acknowledged. The delegation that included Grigorie Țamblac brought with it the mission of reconciliation.

siana (The missionary and literary profile of Saint Nicetas of Remesiana), in “Scriitori bisericești din epoca străromână (Religious writers of the old Romanian period)”, Bucharest, 1979, p. 174.

⁸ Vasile Pârvan, *Contribuții epigrafice la istoria creștinismului daco-roman (Epigraphic contributions to the history of the Dacian-Roman Christianity)*, Bucharest, 1911, p. 165.

⁹ Deacon dr. Vasile Demciuc, *Mitropolitul Grigorie Țamblac, un adevărat „ambasador” al Ortodoxiei (The Metropolitan Bishop Grigorie Tamblac, a true ambassador of Orthodoxy)*, in the journal „Lumina de Duminică” (Sunday Light), no. 45 (159), year IV – national issue, Sunday 9 November 2008, p. 5.

Regarding his religious life, Țamblac started it as a monk in Constantinople, then, in 1402 he received the title of “presbyter of the Great Church of Moldavia”¹⁰, where he worked as a monastic and preacher in Suceava. In this capacity, the hieromonk delivered a sermon on December 20th, 1401, at the metropolitan church in Suceava. This speech does not constitute a first step in the history of the Romanian sermon but rather the first testimony in the homiletic literature that has been preserved until today, about all the good fruits yielded by a religious life lived fervently in our Church at the time¹¹. Other words of wisdom followed, which the bishop Melchisedec Ștefănescu claims, were uttered in the Romanian language, otherwise the Romanian people in Suceava would not have understood the speech¹². We mention here several eulogies in praise of the saints: *Cuvânt de laudă la Sfântul Gheorghe (A Word of Praise for Saint George)*; *Cuvânt de laudă la Sfinții Apostoli Petru și Pavel (A Word of Praise for the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul)*; *Cuvânt de laudă la Profetul Ilie (A Word of Praise for the Prophet Elijah)*, while among those delivered on the commemoration of some events in the Savior’s life, we will enumerate: *La Duminica Floriilor (On Palm Sunday)*; *La Vinerea Mare (On Great Friday)*, *La Joia Mare (On Great Thursday)*, the latter approaching matters referring to the teaching of faith, the asceticism or Christian ethics: *Despre milostenie și săraci; Despre viața călugărilor (On almsgiving and the poor. On monastic life)*. All these have in common the defense of Christian faith. While the theme approached is the same, the contents have a moralizing or apologetic nature. In addition to these sermons, he also wrote *Mucenicia Sfântului și Slăvitului Ioan cel Nou de la Suceava, care s-a martirizat în Cetatea Albă (The Martyrdom of the Holy and Great John the New of Suceava who was martyred in Cetatea Albă)*, as well as *Povestirea despre Sfânta Paraschiva, cum s-a adus în slăvita țară sârbească (The Story of Saint Paraskevi’s journey to the glorious Serbian country)*.

Whether he was a metropolitan or not – a matter debated also by George Aramă, a professor at the “Veniamin” Seminary, who supports the opinion referring to Grigorie Țamblac, that “the tradition preserved

¹⁰ Bishop Melchisedec Ștefănescu, *Viața și scrierile lui Grigore Țamblac (Life and works of Grigorie Tamblac)*, Bucharest, 1883, p. 7.

¹¹ Rev. dr. Gabriel Popescu, *Predică și predicator în Biserica Ortodoxă Română (Sermon and preacher in the Romanian Orthodox Church)*, in “Biserica Ortodoxă Română”, Year LXXXV (1971), no. 1-2, p. 97.

¹² Bishop Melchisedec Ștefănescu, *Viața și scrierile lui Grigore Țamblac*, p. 8.

An Overview of Romanian Sermon from the Beginnings to the 20th Century...

in Moldavia does not confirm the postulate accepted so far, namely that he was a metropolitan of Moldavia¹³ – this preacher was a scholar who considered Orthodoxy as a homeland, and the Orthodox culture as one culture, and in time, he became a “legend” in the Romanian culture as Dan Zamfirescu remarked¹⁴.

IV. The Holy Voivode Neagoe Basarab

Let us cross borders and advance in time, to reach the territory of Wallachia in the years 1512-1521, when ruler was the Holy Voivode Neagoe, a descendant of the Bassarab family sprung of “holy descent”, who, together with the Mușatin family are thus depicted by M. Eminescu, our greatest poet: “settlers of homeland, law and tradition makers”¹⁵. It is to him that we owe the most important work of Romanian literature written in Slavonic, during his last years of ruling. Despite countless controversies regarding the authenticity of *Învățăturilor lui Neagoe Basarab către fiul său Theodosie (The Teachings of Neagoe Basarab for his son, Theodosius)*¹⁶, considered to be authored by the enlightened voivode (N. Bălcescu, B. P. Hașdeu, Sextil Pușcariu, Vasile Grecu, G. Călinescu, Ion C. Chițimia, Al. Piru, etc.), or by a monk of the Curtea de Argeș Monastery, who compiled it one century later after the death of the ruler. We consider that Metropolitan Antonie Plamadeala, worthy of our remembrance is the one who best summarizes the arguments in favor of the authenticity, when he explains why it is not acceptable to ascribe the authorship of the *The Teachings* to a monk, as fervent admirer of the Wallachian ruler as he may be:

¹³ George Aramă, *Grigorie Țamblac n-a fost mitropolit al Moldovei și Sucevei nici înainte de sinodul Florenței și nici după aceea (Grigorie Tamblac was not a metropolitan of Moldavia and Suceava, either before the Florence Council or afterwards)*, Iași, 1892, p. 22.

¹⁴ Dan Zamfirescu, *Grigorie Țamblac. Legenda lui în cultura română (Grigorie Tamblac, His Legend in Romanian Culture)*, in “Manuscriptum”, no. 4, 1986, p. 26.

¹⁵ Mihai Eminescu, *Scrisoarea III*, in “Poezii”, Tedit FZH, Collection “Maeștrii literaturii române”, p. 273.

¹⁶ We are in the possession of the latest issue which reproduces the *Romanian Version from Curtea de Argeș*, 17th century, with critical apparatus updated, authored by prof. Dan Zamfirescu, Editura Eparhiei Argeșului și Muscelului, Curtea de Argeș, 2009.

“He allows his own manuscript to bear, for eternity, the name of Neagoe as author, when Neagoe was no longer, and therefore needed no such false honor as this, and when to him [...], however loyal we may assume he had been, such act of devotion would have served no other purpose than to confer legitimacy to a useless mystification for him and for Neagoe. And for posterity”¹⁷.

The manuscript is didactic and constitutes a guidebook but at the same time a testament, aimed to educate the king-to-be. Therefore, the first Romanian teaching book is a political and religious one, including elements of military treatise but remaining, in essence a guidebook on how a good king should conduct himself and rule. Whereas the first part constitutes an anthology of comments, “a compilation of religious texts, that can be identified in the Bible, in the religious books of the Orthodox Church, in the nation’s books and in various religious Byzantine writers”¹⁸, the second part, much more valuable, is organized into 13 chapters that approach 13 topics: the conduct to be adopted by the future king, not yet of age, towards the noblemen and towards the people, how to receive emissaries, love for God, fair trial, avoiding wars by giving up pride and defending peace. A documentary value is conferred by the details on the organization of the army, the military tactics in early 16th century and by its strong philosophical character, by the lyrical passages on the subject of man’s fate, leading us to perceive the force of Christian humanity, of the good that forever prevails through our love for our Holy Lord. This king with his good faith in God thus revealed the secret of his accomplishments – his personality characterized by moral balance.

What stands out as particularly interesting in this second part of “our first dogmatic, moral and Christian spirituality treatise” is the presence in the contents of the *Teachings* of the first sermon in the Romanian language known and preserved in our homiletic literature: *The letter of Neagoe Woiwode to Bishop Macarius and to other abbots and hieromonks and priests and to the entire clergy when they reinterred, at the Arges Monastery, the remains of his mother, Lady Neaga, and of the young princes,*

¹⁷ Metropolitan Antonie Plămădeală, *Dascăli de cuget și simțire românească (Teachers of Romanian spirit and thought)*, Bucharest, 1981, p. 16.

¹⁸ Dan Zamfirescu, *Învățăturile lui Neagoe Basarab. Problema autenticității (The Teachings of Neagoe Basarab. The issue of its authenticity)*, in “Romanoslavica”, year IX, 1963, p. 349.

An Overview of Romanian Sermon from the Beginnings to the 20th Century...

*Petru Voivode and Ioan Voivode and of Lady Anghelina. With thoughts and teachings on humbleness.*¹⁹ The obituary evinces, from beginning to end, the deep pain for the loss of his son and the profound sorrow that he could not be present at his mother's funeral, because he was traveling or maybe because he was ill, or leading a military campaign as a king. With its undertones of folklore lamentation, we discover in each paragraph the son's and father's mourning, who loses, one by one, those he holds dear. At first, he addresses those present at the funeral ceremony: bishop Macarius, priests, abbots of the holy monasteries, "noblemen, laypeople, rich and poor, men and women", whom he asks for forgiveness because with "bitter pain and fervor" he humbly wishes to honor "the remains" of his mother, seeking forgiveness from her for not having found, throughout his entire life, the chance to show his filial love.

The manner in which he addresses her: "O, mother of mine and sweetness of my heart and servant of my God!" suggests the tenderness of his feelings, comparable to the way he begins his weeping at his dead son's feet: "Oh, son of mine, Peter!"; "O, my child!". Crying out in pain, mourning for the one for whom "my eyes have become burnt and charred by the sorrow for your withered blossom", he realizes, powerlessly, that "the crown and diadems" with which he will be placed in his tomb are worthless, since "my pillar of strength is withered". In pathetic accents he expresses his hope that all is but an illusion: "Wake up my child, wake up, for the bones of your grandmother have come to you to find rest!" At such dramatic moments he finds comfort in his belief that God will have mercy on him.

We notice lyrical tones in the presentation of the profound restlessness of his soul, by the repetition of invocations in the addressed monologue, the common comparisons: "I was in your eyes brighter than the rays of the sun", ample enumerations, phrases, also of great amplitude, exclamatory structures praising divinity, depreciative epithets: "listen to me, the wretched one". But the spiritual peace and calmness will be difficult to attain. With his "love for culture and his artistic refinement"²⁰, with his grace

¹⁹ *Învățăturile lui Neagoe Basarab către fiul său Theodosie (Teachings of Neagoe Basarab to his son, Teodosie)*, Editura Eparhiei Argeșului și Muscelului, Curtea de Argeș, 2009, pp. 153-163.

²⁰ Alexandru Piru, *Literatura română veche (Old Romanian Literature)*, second edition, Bucharest, 1962, p. 39.

and writing talent in the compiling of the *Teachings*, “the first masterpiece to combine composition and lay poetical inspiration”²¹, of great originality, Neagoe Basarab’s creation will endure in time.

V. Deacon Coresi

Coresi’s *Homilies* are the most important in the homiletic literature of Romanian Orthodoxy due to the prestige and wide circulation that most of them enjoyed. The oldest homilies preserved in the Romanian language date back to the 16th century. They were translated from the Slavonic language by anonymous priests or monks and circulated in various parts of the country, in the form of transcribed manuscripts, some of which have been preserved up to this day in different codices, together with other religious writings. We believe it is only natural that we insist on the books printed in the Romanian language due to which the tireless deacon Coresi enjoys the appreciation of all philologists and historians of Romanian literature: “a pioneer”,²² “a founder standing out among the other founders of the Romanian language and literature and culture”²³, “an initiator of the Romanian printed book”²⁴, “father of the Romanian literary language”²⁵, one of the “illustrious pioneers who elevated the Romanian language to the rank of culture”²⁶, “deacon Coresi was aware of the importance of his work ... what he sought to do was turn his books into an instrument for spreading the Romanian language, so that it may be understood by all: this illustrates the existence of a preoccupation with the literary language”²⁷.

²¹ Alexandru Piru, *Literatura română veche*, p. 39.

²² Antonie Plămădeală, *Dascăli de cuget și simțire românească*, p. 21.

²³ Metropolitan dr. Antonie Plămădeală, *Clerici ortodocși de limbă și cultură românească (Orthodox clergymen, in Romanian language and culture)*, Bucharest, 1977, p. 11.

²⁴ Nicolae Cartoian, *Istoria literaturii românești vechi (History of Old Romanian Literature)*, vol. I, Bucharest, 1940, p. 56.

²⁵ Dan Simonescu, *Problema originii limbii literaturii române în cărțile bisericești (The matter of the language of Romanian literature in religious books)*, in “Studii Teologice” Year XIII (1961), no. 9-10, p. 553.

²⁶ Stela Toma, *Coresi, Psaltirea slavo-română (1577) în comparație cu Psaltirile coresiene din 1570 și din 1589 (Slavonic-Romanian Psalm Books (1577) compared to the Coresian Psalm Books of 1570 and 1589)*, Ed. Academiei R.S. România, Bucharest, 1976, p. 7.

²⁷ Al. Rosetti, Mihai Pop, I. Pervian, Al. Piru, *Istoria literaturii române (History of Ro-*

An Overview of Romanian Sermon from the Beginnings to the 20th Century...

Through the efforts of deacon Coresi two collections of homilies saw the light of day: the first was published in 1564 and entitled *Tâlcul Evangheliilor (The Exegesis of the Gospels)*, a translation into Romanian of the work of Petrus Melius Juhasz from 1563. Only two copies are still extant, with missing pages. The book constitutes an in-folio volume, without numbered pages and consists of two parts: the first part comprises speeches for the entire year, starting from Easter Sunday, explaining the texts of the Gospel parables; the second part comprises “the Romanian service book”²⁸.

In order to illustrate the evolution of the sermon in the Romanian language we shall present a series of arguments on the last book published by the deacon from Targoviste in Brasov between December 14th, 1580 and June 28th, 1581. This is the book entitled *Evanghelia cu învățătură (Gospel with Teachings)* or *The Second Homily*, abbreviated titles, Coresi giving it an explanatory title: *The Book which is entitled Gospel with Teachings, selected from all four evangelists and from several godly scriptures, and given to the Church of God, to be read on all Sundays as well as on the occasion of holy days and saints' day, to serve as teachings for the Christians, guiding them to the righteousness of the soul and body.*

Evanghelia cu învățătură (The Gospel with Teachings) comprises “the text of the evangelical parable from all-year-round Sundays and certain holidays, with the respective comments”²⁹. Moreover, the prayer *Our Father*; then the *Creed* and the *Ten Commandments* were added at the end of the book, prayers that are so necessary to believers at any given time. The book was printed in Latin letters in 1914 in Bucharest, through the efforts of the philologists Sextil Pușcariu and Alexie Procopovici. The volume begins with the Gospel on the Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee and ends the cycle of the liturgical year with the XXXII Sunday following the Pentecost. However, as often mentioned, the sermon for the Sunday of Orthodoxy is missing. Other evangelical parables are also omitted from five Sundays of the church year. Additionally, Coresi included a sermon on the Holy Communion, one on Lazarus' Sunday, other thematic sermons

manian Literature) vol. I, Bucharest, 1962, p. 290.

²⁸ I. Bianu, N. Hodoș, *Bibliografia românească veche (Old Romanian Bibliography), 1508-1830*, t. I, Bucharest, 1903, p. 51.

²⁹ Rev. Silviu Hărăguș, *O carte de doctrină și pietate ortodoxă: Evanghelia cu învățătură (A book of doctrine and Orthodox piety. The Gospel with teachings) (1581)*, in „Biserica Ortodoxă Română”, Year LXXXVII (1969), no. 7-8, p. 744.

about the Holy Sacrament on Easter Monday and on the Day of the Lord's Ascension.

Translators have kept a series of suggestive comparisons, such as: "our life comes and goes like the leaves and the flowers", our "holy language", "the language of the old homilies". According to Alexe Mateevici, it is the living, popular, simple language, "a language vigorous and flexible"³⁰, though still interspersed with terms of Slavonic origin, which lends it that archaic character. Yet the tendency to modernize the language by adapting it to its speech and time can be felt everywhere³¹.

VI. The Holy Metropolitan Varlaam of Moldavia

The great figures of the 17th century have kept alive the idea of continuing to impose the Romanian language as the only language of cultural life in the Romanian Provinces. In the first half of this Late Renaissance Century of humanism, Moldavia benefitted, in circumstances that were favorable to the development of the Romanian culture, language and literature, from an advantageous cooperation between the king and the metropolitan, between the Church and the State. The period in which the Saint Metropolitan Bishop Varlaam of Moldavia carried out his activity, between the years 1632-1653, is closely connected to the flourishing reign of Vasile Lupu (1634-1653), "an educated man and a good Christian, who insisted on bringing works of art and establishing cultural institutions in his city of Iasi, that would carry on his name into eternity, while in the field of ideas he supported the Church and the literary activity"³².

The Homily of 1643 is metaphorically described as "a unique monument of our literature, equally part of the Church's Orthodox spirituality and of the lay literary heritage"³³. The work, was printed in Iași and its full

³⁰ Rev. prof. dr. Spiridon Căndea, *Diaconul Coresi, simplu tipograf sau și traducător al cărților tipărite de el ? (Deacon Coresi, a mere publisher or also a translator ?)*, in "Mitropolia Ardealului", Year VII (1962), no. 3-6, p. 340.

³¹ Pandele Olteanu, *Contribuții la problema începuturilor și promovării scrisului românesc (Contributions to the matter of the beginnings and promotion of Romanian writing)*, in "Limbă și literatură", Year XVI (1964), no. 2, p. 200.

³² Stela Toma, *Cazania lui Varlaam după 350 ani (Homily of Varlaam after 350 years) (1646-1993)*, in "Studii Teologice", Year LXXII (1993), no. 1-2, p. 48.

³³ Rev. prof. dr. Vasile Gordon, *Repere importante ale prediciei în Biserica noastră, de la*

An Overview of Romanian Sermon from the Beginnings to the 20th Century...

title was *A Romanian Book of Teachings for the all-year-round Sundays and for the great feasts and the saints' days, translated from several scriptures in the Slavonic language into the Romanian language by Varlaam, Metropolitan of Moldavia. Printed by the princely press at the Three Holy Hierarchs Monastery in Iași, in the year of the Lord 1643*³⁴.

The book has two parts: the first part comprises 54 homilies on the Sundays of all three liturgical periods, Triodion, Pentecostarion and Octoechos, and the second part 22 homilies for various feast days.

It has a markedly didactic character: the author follows, with each "teaching", a certain structure, a "very logical and clear distribution"³⁵, a persuasive purpose: first, an introduction referring to the significance of the respective day, then the enunciation of the topic followed by the presentation of the evangelical parable and its elaboration through the technique of comparison, demonstration and exemplification, the conclusive ending containing a moralizing teaching to be observed by the audience, advice on how to give up vices, a life lived in sin, exhortations to do good deeds, as proof of our love for our fellow people.

Ion D. Popa appreciates that this "Book of Teachings includes all the homiletic genres known in the history of Romanian sermon"³⁶: the exegetic homily (the first homily), the themed sermon (seventh homily), and the panegyric, especially in the second part of the *Homily*³⁷.

Let us note a few aspects related to the language used by Varlaam, "the people's language which he had learned in the Putna Mountains and later, as a monk, in the vicinity of the Secu monastery"³⁸, a careful yet expressive form of phrasing. The style is common yet it has beautiful literary qualities. It is also plain, clear, and descriptive, sometimes with powerful

începuturi, până în secolul al XX-lea – Studiu cu exemplificări (Important landmarks in the homiletic art of our Church from the beginning until the 20th century), in "Biserica Ortodoxă Română", Year CXIX (2001), no. 1-6, p. 198.

³⁴ Metropolitan Varlaam, *Cazania (Book of Sermons) 1643*, Editura pentru literatură și artă, Bucharest, 1943, p. 1.

³⁵ Atanasie Popa, *Care este contribuția lui Varlaam la Cazania sa din 1643 (Which is Varlaam's contribution to his Book of Sermons of 1643)*, in "Mitropolia Moldovei și a Sucevei", Year XLVIII (1972), no. 3-4, p. 173.

³⁶ Ion D. Popa, *Valoarea omiletică a Cazaniei lui Varlaam (The homiletic value of Varlaam's Book of Sermons)*, in "Biserica Ortodoxă Română", Year XXXIX (1971), nr. 5-6, p. 560.

³⁷ p. 351-498.

³⁸ Ion D. Popa, *Valoarea omiletică a Cazaniei lui Varlaam*, p. 111.

accents of the sublime. The author uses many suggestive images, descriptions of nature, figures of speech and literary devices, for the purpose of expressing ideas and make his teachings understood. For example, the action of the Holy Spirit on the believers is compared to that of the rain that fertilizes the earth; the Old Testament is compared to the peasants who plough the land preparing it for the sower; the Savior's arrival is compared to the arrival of spring.

VII. The Holy Martyr Hierarch Antim Ivireanul (Anthimus of Iberia)

No other century produced together such superior spirits as the 17th century. If we were to mention only Ion Neculce, the metropolitan Dosoftei, Swordbearer Milescu, followed by Dimitrie Cantemir, in Moldavia, it would suffice to ensure the glory of a century"³⁹. Here we would also include the name of the Logothetes Udriște Năsturel, of the High Steward Constantin Cantacuzino, of Radu and Șerban Greceanu brothers, of the chronicler Radu Popescu and of the Holy Martyr Hierarch Anthimus of Iberia, in Wallachia.

The valuable and original creation of Anthimus of Iberia is represented by *Didaches*, which, despite his passion for printing, were never published but came to us through three manuscripts which saw the light of day after his tragic death. As was the case later with the works of other scholars such as Dimitrie Cantemir, this represented a frustrating impediment in the spreading and, especially, in the overwhelming influence that he may have had on our church and lay literature in the linguistic field, in the expression of the language, in the realm of statistics. Edited by professor Ion Bianu, after a manuscript discovered by bishop Melchisedec Ștefănescu in 1871, by professor Constantin Erbiceanu, after a copy discovered in the previous year in the library of Căldărușani monastery, by the bishop of Roman, Melchisedec Ștefănescu, by dr. I. Cornoi, Nicolae Iorga, Petre V. Haneș and Gabriel Ștrempel, their successive publishing and republishing reveals the researcher's preoccupation with the work of the hierarch who contin-

³⁹ Ion Dianu, *Mitropolitul Varlaam ctitor de scriere și carte românească (Metropolitan Varlaam, founder of Romanian writing and books)*, in "Glasul Bisericii", Year XL (1981), no. 1-2, p. 88.

An Overview of Romanian Sermon from the Beginnings to the 20th Century...

ued and even perfected the good tradition of the old nomocanons and of its predecessors to educate and guide the clergymen⁴⁰.

The published volumes contain 28 sermons delivered by Anthimus, “for all Sundays, starting with the Sunday of the Pharisee and for all holidays of the year, be they greater or lesser”⁴¹ namely: *five on Palm Sunday, three on the Transfiguration, two on Saints Constantine and Helena, two on the Dormition of the Mother of God, two on the Nativity of the Lord, two on Saint Demetrios, two on Saint Nicholas, two on Cheesefare* and one for each of the following: *the Epiphany, the Presentation of the Lord, the Entry of Theotokos into the Temple, the Holy Archangels, the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul, the Sunday of the Publican and Pharisee, and Exhortations for Repentance.*

At the same time, other nine occasional speeches were discovered in “the very original Didaches, as penned by the scholar metropolitan”⁴²: a sermon on his anointment as metropolitan bishop – *This I have said and metropolitan bishop they made me* -, three funeral speeches, followed by a speech at the memorial service, but also other two speeches on the occasion of the Confession, together with the two replies in his defense sent in January and February to the reigning prince Constantin Brâncoveanu, when, as result of the envy of certain clergymen and laymen, such serious accusations were brought against him that he was expressly required to resign, because he had fallen, for this reason, in the disgrace of the prince.

We can ascertain that the metropolitan left posterity all types of sermons: exegetic and thematic or synthetic homilies, admonitions, panegyrics. The sources used are often recorded and show the extensive culture of the prelate, of both religious and lay nature. Thus, he quotes not only from the Holy Scripture, but he also presents passages from the Holy Fathers called “godly teachers”, as well as Saint John Chrysostom, the greatest religious orator of the patristic era, whom he sometimes names “Saint Zlataust”, or “the one with the tongue and heart of gold”, sometimes “the great Zlataust”, Saint Basil the Great, Saint Gregory the Theologian, Ephraim the Syrian, also named “the harp of the Holy Spirit”, Dionysius

⁴⁰ Rev. Stelian Izvoranu, *Antim Ivireanul și locul lui în cultura poporului român (Anthimus of Iberia and his place in the culture of the Romanian people)*, in “Biserica Ortodoxă Română”, Year LXXXIV (1966), no. 9-10, p. 981.

⁴¹ Title of the volume published by Bishop Melchisedec Ștefănescu, Bucharest, 1889.

⁴² Constantin Erbiceanu, the *Preface* of his edition, p. III-IV.

the Areopagite, Saint John of Damascus and, finally, Saint Teophylact of Bulgaria. In addition to these, we mention the popular books: *the Physiologist*, *Alexandria* and, of course, the liturgical books. But the great metropolitan constantly appealed to the realities of life, to the moral sense of those he shepherded, to the needs and aspirations of the people.

As for the language of the sermons and, particularly, the syntax level, “the phrase used by Anthimus of Iberia is sometimes short and paratactic, with a rhythmic sequence of sounds, sometimes smooth, sometimes plain, serene and restrained, sometimes complex, ample, full of warmth”⁴³. The style of the speeches is oral, natural, varied, nuanced, and straightforward. The author avoids exaggerations and grandiloquence, he makes his point without useless paraphrasing, demonstrating a superior sense of language and a remarkable literary talent. Moreover, we can only remark the popular, materialized, colorful nature of the style of Saint Hierarch Anthimus’ sermons. The comparison, the interrogation, the metaphor, the dialogue, the antithesis, the description, the irony and the repetition are skillfully used to evidence the style, to confer nuances, to make it more interesting and attractive. As an illustrative material, the Iberian preacher uses biblical and lay stories.

Professor Eugen Negrici dedicated a comprehensive volume to the rhetoric art of Anthimus⁴⁴, studying with particular interest and competence the aspects of the eloquence of the Wallachian metropolitan and implicitly, the beginnings of the oratorical genre in the Romanian literature. He starts by showing that the Iberian hierarch

“employs in his creation the entire range of homiletic rules, leaving no room for improvisation. In terms of composition, the sermon is well-thought, with a clear structure, and in its complete plainness and vigor, it reveals a great talent for writing. It constitutes a revolution in the literary realm as well, promoting the idea of audience. The style of the homily thus abandons the boundaries imposed by stereotypes and centers on the preacher-author relations. At a closer look, the creation of the metropolitan is a truncated dialogue in which one of the interlocutors anticipates the objects and takes upon himself to provide the answers”⁴⁵.

⁴³ Alexandru Rosetti, Boris Cazacu, *Istoria limbii române literare (History of Romanian literary language)*, vol. I, Bucharest, 1961, p. 168.

⁴⁴ *Antim. Logos și personalitate (Anthimus. Logos and personality)*, Bucharest, 1971.

⁴⁵ Eugen Negrici, *Antim. Logos și personalitate*, Bucharest, 1971, p. 84.

VIII. Samuil Micu

Located beyond the Carpathian Arch, the third Romanian province – Transylvania, received different political, social, cultural and religious influences. The mentors of the Transylvanian School (Scoala Ardeleana), historians and philologists driven by patriotism, who considered history to be a fundamental subject for the Romanian nation, were Samuil Micu (1745-1806), Gheorghe Șincai (1745-1816), Petru Maior (1761-1821) and the writer Ion Budai-Deleanu (1760-1820), preceded by the bishop Inochentie Micu, a scholar who was concerned with the acquiring of rights for the Romanians. Using historical, philological and democratic arguments they “strengthened the awareness of the Latin origin of the Romanian people in the collective consciousness”⁴⁶, emphasizing the common ethnic origins and the unity in origins and language of the Romanians in Transylvania with those from across the mountains, the Latin character of the Romanian language, contributing also to the formation of our literary language.

Samuil Micu (1754-1806), the Transylvanian scholar, the first Romanian historian in this age of transition towards the modern era is considered by Nicolae Iorga “an initiator of Romanian scholarship in Transylvania and he is the first who learned for himself and for others alike”⁴⁷. He is the author of *Propovedaniilor sau învățăturilor la îngropăciunea oamenilor morți* (*Teachings at the burial of the dead*), a work edited in Blaj in 1784, with the blessing of bishop Vasile Moga, remarkable by through the narrative art and the lay stories inserted, for instance the reference to the martyric death of Constantin Brâncoveanu, a folk fairy tale, an excerpt from *Barlaam and Josaphat*, sermons written without “rhetoric mastery”, for all to understand, but in true faith. The contents of the books indicates their type: seven teachings, “Forgiveness for the dead”, “On Passing” belonging to Saint Basil the Great and “Sermon on the departure of the soul” by Cyril of Alexandria.

IX. Petru Maior (1760-1821)

Petru Maior was another leader of the Transylvanian School, had a prodigious activity in the historical or philological field, without neglecting

⁴⁶ Eugen Negrici, *Antim. Logos și personalitate*, p. 83.

⁴⁷ Nicolae Iorga, *Istoria literaturii române în secolul al XVIII-lea (History of Romanian literature in the 18th century)*, Ed. Didactică și Pedagogică, Bucharest, 1969, p. 50.

certain preoccupations of homiletic nature. We consider that among the multiple preoccupations of the professor and archpriest of Maghiareghin, Petru Maior, the preaching activity illustrates his contribution to the development of the homiletic literature and the Transylvanian revival, as the result of more than 20 years of service dedicated to the church of his people. Published while in Buda, in the capacity of “royal reviewer”, his *Propovedaniile la îngropăciunea oamenilor morți* (*Teachings at the burial of the dead*) (1809), *Didahiile, adică învățăături pentru creșterea fiilor la îngropăciunea pruncilor morți* (*Didaches, that is teachings at the burial of infants*) (1809) and *Predichele sau învățăturile la toate duminicile și sărbătorile anului* (*Sermons or teachings on all Sundays and holidays*) (1810), form a large corpus of works. Thus, the volume *Propovedanii* (*Teachings*) consists of 40 speeches and 11 discourses on forgiveness; the *Didaches* consist of 15 speeches, both preceded by an extensive *Foreword*, while the *Predichele* (*Sermons*) include 65 religious speeches. It is worth mentioning that all are written in the Cyrillic script while the 1906 edition of the archpriest El. Dăianu of Cluj is printed in the Latin alphabet, and his initiative brings forth these funeral speeches, so eulogistically presented in the Transylvanian religious media.

X. Eufrosin Poteca

The name of the archimandrite Eufrosin Poteca (1786-1858) has survived the centuries being mentioned as the first monk who “demanded a public education in Wallachia”⁴⁸ and the “first philosophy teacher of the Romanian school”⁴⁹ of Sf. Sava (St Sabbas). His life was full of difficulties that he overcame and accepted as something natural. His humble peasant origin did not prevent him from becoming a famous orator in early 19th century.

The archimandrite Eufrosin Poteca published the volume of sermons *Cuvinte panighirice și moralnice* (*Panegyric and moralizing words*)⁵⁰, which contains *Cuvânt la deschiderea cursurilor de filosofie* (*Speech on the occasion of the inauguration of the philosophy courses*) (1 October 1825), *Cuvânt zis la ziua Nașterii Domnului nostru Iisus Hristos* (*Speech*

⁴⁸ Antonie Plămădeală, *Clerici ortodocși ...*, (Orthodox clergymen), p. 63.

⁴⁹ Antonie Plămădeală, *Clerici ortodocși ...*, p. 64.

⁵⁰ Bucharest, 1826.

An Overview of Romanian Sermon from the Beginnings to the 20th Century... delivered on the day of the Nartivity of our Lord, Jesus Christ) (25 December 1825), Cuvânt zis la ziua Învierii Domnului Iisus Hristos (Speech delivered on the day of the Resurrection of Our Lord, Jesus Christ (18 April 1826). As for the preaching activity, Eufrosin Poteca embraced several homiletic genres – sermons on the occasions of religious holidays and pareneses –, but also religious themes and others extracted from everyday reality, particularly social facts. Returning to the religious and moral themes, the tireless preacher spread Christian teachings, believing that the people can come close to God, our Father and Provider. He argued in favor of the Christians' unity in Christ, of attending the Holy Liturgy, of special moral features and love for the fellow people, on mercy, abandonment of sins and constant praying.

The social themes concern various aspects: love for the homeland that guided him till the end of his days, together with the most advanced ideas in the age regarding social justice, education by schooling and the issue that was boldly approached by him and infuriated the great noblemen, namely the freeing of serfs.

XI. Metropolitan Andrei Şaguna

The entire 19th century is dominated by the personality of the highly esteemed hierarch Andrei Şaguna (1808-1873), who turned the Church into an active social force. Whatever position he took on – vicar, bishop, metropolitan bishop – it was to highlight the condition of the leader of Orthodox Romanians in the century of turmoil in the “estranged Transylvania”. He thus became the symbol of an age and a generation that lived to the fullest and accomplished enormously for the national life of those he shepherded. The homiletic preoccupations are those that make his creation complete. Thus, his *Circulars* “comprise an actual social and teaching work schedule”⁵¹, at the center of which stand, as was only natural, the priests:

“it is from the priest that all good examples must come, his fatherly supervision must guide the entire nation’s steps, keep them safe against temptations and lead them on the path of growth through education and wellbeing”⁵².

⁵¹ Ioan Lupaş, *Mitropolitul Andrei Şaguna. Monografie istorică (Metropolitan Andrei Şaguna, Historical Monograph)*, Sibiu, 1909, p. 49.

⁵² Ioan Lupaş, *Mitropolitul Andrei Şaguna...*, p. 49

For the same purpose of promoting this religious mission, in 1855 he published 58 sermons belonging to the archbishop of Astrakhan, Nikephoros Theotokis - *Chiriadromion adecă Cuvântări bisericesti pentru fiecare duminică a anului (Religious Speeches for the all-year-round Sundays)*, the most important volume of sermons appeared until then, accompanied by an *Adaos (Appendix)*, consisting of 26 personal speeches of Andrei Șaguna delivered on the occasion of the annual feasts.

As for the religious and moral education, his obvious intention was to educate the people through the sermons in accordance with the virtues of Christian faith: God's mercy towards the fallen, redemption of the soul, death of the righteous, the wonders of God, man's superiority in respect of the other beings, the Christian's steadfastness in the Law of God.

The style of the Șaguna's sermons is a religious one, resembling the language of the homilies which he so valued, preferring the archaic and popular language to the abundant neologisms and especially to the Latinizing trends imposed by Timotei Cipariu. We believe that the most knowledgeable appreciation is that of the consistorial assessor from Oradea, Gheorghe Tulbure, who stated that the admiration for the metropolitan Andrei Șaguna comes from the fact that he sought to address the believers in a way that would be understood by all, creating a personal style, a harmonious mixture of religious and popular style, using a fatherly language, the concise and clear, sincere and warm language of a parent who offers his words of advice, reprimand, joy and sadness to his sons⁵³, a genuinely "festive" style, of deep reflection and beauty.

XII. Zaharia Boiu

Among the great preachers formed in the late 19th century, through the initiative and actual support of the illustrious metropolitan Andrei Șaguna, we also find the distinguished priest Zaharia Boiu (1834-1903), who brilliantly intertwined his noble activity as a professor with that of teacher of the word of God on the troubled land of Transylvania.

⁵³ Gheorghe Tulbure, *Mitropolitul Andrei Șaguna, opera literară, scrisori pastorale, circulări școlare, diverse (Metropolitan Andrei Șaguna, literary works, pastoral writings, school documents, varia)*, Sibiu, 1938, p. 73.

An Overview of Romanian Sermon from the Beginnings to the 20th Century...

The corollary of all these efforts is represented by his original sermons, published and given to the priests to be used as models. We mention here, with great admiration the following volumes of religious speeches: *Semințe în agrul* (= *ogorul*, n.n.) *lui Hristos* (*Seeds in the field of Christ*): Tome I. *Cuvântări la duminicile de preste an* (*Speeches on all-year-round Sundays*) - 56 sermons (1898); Tome II. *Cuvântări la praznicile și sărbătorile de preste an precum și la casuale bisericesti* (*Speeches on the annual holidays and religious occasions*) – 50 sermons (1898); Tome III. *Cuvântări bisericesti la înmormântări, parastase și alte festivități funebre* (*Religious speeches delivered at funerals, memorial services and other funeral festivities*) – 46 sermons (1899), all published in Sibiu and highly praised in the pages of the publication „Telegraful Român” (The Romanian Telegraph) which invokes the inspiration source – the inexhaustible source of the Holy Scripture, as well as the oratorical qualities of the priest-professor Zaharia Boiu: “well-known in the art of rhetorics, deeply moving the human spirit, a wise evaluator of the matters at stake, a master in the handling of the Romanian language, a distinguished Church orator”⁵⁴, while the volumes of homiletic literature are metaphorically named treasures of his mind and soul, the purpose being the spiritual edification of the Orthodox believers, applicable into practice because “our clergy now has models of speeches that can be successfully applied and exploited”⁵⁵.

The volume *Cuvântări funebre și memorial* (*Funeral and Memorial Speeches*)⁵⁶ comprises also an *Adaos* (*Appendix*) organized into two sections which group together a series of biblical texts necessary for priests when preparing funeral speeches (434 biblical texts), as the author’s intention is to produce a piece of work that fully covers “the church life of a Romanian Orthodox community”⁵⁷.

The trilogy of religious speeches *Semințe din agrul lui Hristos* (*Seeds in the field of Christ*) received an award from the highest cultural institution, the Romanian Academy in 1903, when the author was praised as the “pride of the Romanian preaching from across the Carpathians”⁵⁸.

⁵⁴ “Telegraful Român”, no. 118, 7 November 1903, p. 481, col. 1.

⁵⁵ “Telegraful Român”, no. 32, 31 March 1900, p. 127, col. 3-4.

⁵⁶ Sibiu, 1889.

⁵⁷ Zaharia Boiu, *Semințe din ogrul lui Hristos* (*Seeds in the field of Christ*), Sibiu, 1898, p. VIII.

⁵⁸ Eusebiu Roșca, *Monografia Institutului Seminarului Teologic – Pedagogic Andreian al Arhidiecezei Greco – Ortodoxe Române din Transilvania* (*Monograph of the An-*

Zaharia Boiu remains a prominent figure of the 19th century, due to his dignified stature, the nobility of his soul, his aspirations and all that has been passed on to us from him, because he gave wise advise to all servants of the Holy Church: “by the purpose you serve, priest, speak to the nation of your times”⁵⁹.

Conclusions

In addition to all these personalities, we could further mention other important preachers who left behind written speeches – priest Ioan Zoba of Vinț, the metropolitan Veniamin Costachi, bishop Dionisie Romano, priests Neofit and Filaret Scriban, bishop Melchisedec Ștefănescu, father-professor Vasile Mitrofanovici – but we shall stop here with our attempt to capture the image of the chronological evolution of the homiletic efforts. Characterized by originality derived from literary talent, the religious discourse in this period is equally concerned with form and contents, in harmony and balance. Sermons impress with the richness of their dogmatic and moral contents and have, as major source, the Divine Revelation: the Holy Scripture and the Holy Tradition, standing out through their biblical nature. Among the homiletic genres exemplified by the authors, we mention the exegetic homilies, the thematic sermons and the pareneses and panegyrics. The introductory part is represented by the suggestive biblical text, which quite often doesn't confine itself to just one theme. In approaching these themes, it is obvious that there are many relations to practical life while the ending proposes a carefully selected prayer. The plain, completely unsophisticated language was used to ensure that the path to the heart and understanding of the audience was easier found, but this does not mean that it was entirely deprived of stylistic adornments of unparalleled beauty. It is worth retaining that we were able to ascertain a continuous trend in this respect, because the same preoccupation for the sermon existed in all three provinces, and the aims were common: to defend and promote the ancestral faith, to develop language and culture, but at the same time to preserve awareness of the fact that all Romanians stand united. Thus, through their sermons, they placed an everlasting foundation which shall undoubtedly endure until the end of time.

dreian Theological and Pedagogical Seminary of the Romanian Greek-Orthodox Archdiocese of Transylvania), Sibiu, 1911, p. 97.

⁵⁹ Zaharia Boiu, *Semințe din ogrorul lui Hristos*, p. VIII.