

## CANON AND CANONICITY IN THE BIBLES OF SAMUIL MICU AND ANDREI ȘAGUNA: RESEMBLANCES, DIFFERENCES AND CONTROVERSIES

### **Abstract**

The present study aims to carry out an analysis of the relation between the Bibles of Samuil Micu and Andrei Șaguna from an isagogic perspective, with a particular focus on the canon and canonicity of the books of the Holy Scripture. We believe that, through such an analysis, we can observe what they have in common, but also what differentiates the two Transylvanian editions of the Holy Scripture so that we can help those interested in understanding the reasons behind the current controversies as to the relation between them. Although these controversies refer to the biblical text of the two Scriptural editions, the fact that the attitude towards it was caused by denominational factors, whose doctrinal background is represented by two different traditions of understanding the biblical canon, has been overlooked. This is why we find that the evaluation of how the two Romanian editions of the Holy Scripture (the Bible of Samuil Micu, 1795, and the Bible of Andrei Șaguna, 1856-1858) relate to the canonical tradition of each Church and cultivate their isagogics is fundamental for the establishment and understanding of the relation between them.



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### **Introduction**

After the publication of the Bible of Bucharest in 1688, as the first complete translation of the Scriptural text, the Bible of Samuil Micu of 1795 is considered a reference point for the Romanian translations of the Bible. Eugen Munteanu called it “the mother of Romanian Bibles” (Munteanu 2008, 514). All subsequent editions up until 1914 borrowed

the text of the Bible of Samuil Micu, the one who had managed to provide, through his translation, a coherent Romanian biblical text, and updated it to some extent. This is what happened with the Saint Petersburg edition (1819) or with the Buzău edition of 1854-1856, which, unlike the edition printed in Russia, also took the isagogics of the Bible of Samuil Micu, this being one of the factors which triggered the publication, soon afterwards, of the Bible of Andrei Șaguna, in Sibiu, between 1856 and 1858. The Șaguna's edition adopted the exact text and biblical canon of the Saint Petersburg Bible.

The fact that the introduction of the Sibiu edition does not mention anything about the 1795 Blaj edition triggered a reaction from Ioan Chindriș, who, in his introductory study to the jubilee edition of the Blaj Bible (2000) called "The Centuries of the Blaj Bible", labelled this act as "the all-time greatest literary theft of our culture" (Chindriș 2000, 67). This opinion was received as such and it also started to spread progressively, especially in the fields of philological research. This has led to a genuine interest in the research on the relation between the Bibles of Samuil Micu and Andrei Șaguna, which is now only incidentally tackled in the area of theological studies, as, for instance, in Emanuel Conțac's recent study (2011). Other more or less recent studies (Basarab 1972, Tofană 2003, Schneider 2008, Basarab 2008) do not tackle the relation between the two editions directly but deal with each Bible separately, both at an isagogic and ecclesiological level, also bearing in mind the historical, cultural and denominational context in Transylvania. As such, we believe the subject we have chosen is of interest both for ecclesiastical and for cultural and scientific environments in Romania and beyond, as they offer the possibility to understand the reasons which have structurally led to how the Greek Catholic and the Orthodox Church of Transylvania relate to the text and the biblical canon. We can thus observe the resemblances and the differences between them and, of course, what has triggered the controversial aspects of the relation between the two Transylvanian editions of the Holy Scripture, the one from 1795 and the one from 1856-1858, respectively.

In terms of methodology, we shall present the general aspects related to canon and canonicity in the two Bibles separately, to be able to draw relevant conclusions concerning the relation between them, focusing, especially on the controversial textual aspect.

### **The Biblical Canon in the Translation of Samuil Micu – 1795**

The Greek-Catholic United Church took the first steps to translate and print the Bible in Romanian under the shepherding of Bishop Petru Pavel Aron. With the help of

the educated monks and cantors from the Holy Trinity monastery of Blaj, he managed, in a relatively short period, to translate the entire Scripture in 1760. The source he used was the Vulgate, which shows the translators' desire to abide by the spirit of the Western, Roman-Catholic tradition. However, this would be the very reason why Petru Pavel Aron's translation would become outdated, the Greek-Catholic Church being forced to discontinue its printing, in the context of tribulations caused amongst Romanians in Transylvania by Sofronie's uprising.

Unlike his predecessors, Samuil Micu, the erudite monk from Blaj, had a better understanding of the spirit of biblical tradition among the Romanians – even those united with Rome – and initiated a personal project of translating the Bible based on the Septuagint. As I. Chindriș (2000, 57) observed, his project targeted all Romanians, having a national, trans-denominational character, to follow and fulfil the same functions as the Bible of Bucharest (1688).

Samuil Micu translated the entire Holy Scripture between 1783 and 1790, the main source he used being the Septuagint, the Franeker edition of renowned scholar Lambert Bos. In parallel, he used the Bible of Bucharest to bring the Romanian Scriptural text in line with the literary standards of his time. Although Samuil Micu was aware of Bishop Petru Pavel Aron's Romanian translation of the Scripture, which was based on the Vulgate, he chose to completely ignore it. He chose the Septuagint and not the Vulgate as his source, in the spirit of the Eastern Church, possibly understanding much better than his predecessors that the Greek-Catholic Church could not give up on a biblical tradition well established among the Romanians of Transylvania by replacing it with one which was not in line with its liturgical and cultic specificity, which is defining for the United Church.

As to the canon followed by Samuil Micu in the Bible printed in 1795, it is difficult to tell which standards he intended to use. The reason is that, through the translation based on the Septuagint, but with an introductory critical apparatus rather specific to the Vulgate, the two great biblical traditions, the Eastern (Orthodox) and the Western (Roman-Catholic), seem not only to meet but also to come into confrontation with each other.

This is because the isagogics (the introductory notes on the Holy Scripture) were not made and added to the final text of the Bible by Samuil Micu, but by the censorship committee, led by Bishop Ion Bob. That committee, consisting of Gherman Peterlaki, Dimitrie Căian and Vasile Filipan – strongly contested by Petru Maior (Chindriș 2000,

61) – managed to overlook the translator's intentions and to apply Western isagogics to a biblical text which falls within the Eastern tradition.

Thus, in the *Commentary on the Books Called Apocryphal* of the Blaj edition, the books of the Holy Scripture are classified as protocanonical, “meaning the first canonical ones”, and deuterocanonical, “the second canonical ones” (the Bible of Blaj 1795, Jubilee edition 2000), following the Roman-Catholic model. The former is found in the Jewish canon and are not contested, whereas the deuterocanonical ones are not found in the Jewish canon. The reason was that, in the past, there had been voices in the Church contesting their canonicity, but this was no longer valid at that time: “In former times, there was doubt in the Church, but now there is none left, even if they are introduced in the Bible using the name apocryphal; for many Holy Fathers bring testimony from these books as from the Holy Scripture” (The Bible of Blaj 2000). Therefore, once this doubt has been overcome, even deuterocanonical books are like the canonical ones. They are the following: Tobit, Judith, Letter of Jeremiah, Baruch, Wisdom of Solomon, Wisdom of Sirach, Susanna and the Elders, Bel and the Dragon, the Song of the Three Holy Children, 1 and 2 Maccabees and the Prayer of Manasseh. The books 3 Esdras, 3 and 4 Maccabees and Psalm 151 are also mentioned among the apocryphal ones, with the following specification: “Even now there is doubt and, even if they are introduced in the Bible, they are not part of the Holy Scripture, neither are they godly (canonical)” (The Bible of Blaj 2000). The Fourth Book of the Maccabees is also labelled to be apocryphal and kept just like the aforementioned ones (3 Esdras, 3-4 Maccabees and Psalm 151), to remain as close as possible to the text of the Septuagint, which it follows, but also to that of the old 1688 Romanian edition. The Prayer of Manasseh is now introduced in the Romanian translations of the Holy Scripture, being labelled as deuterocanonical, just like in the Roman-Catholic editions.

Therefore, it is easy to notice the compromise between the text translated by Samuil Micu and the isagogics developed by the censorship committee. This occurred because Samuil Micu wanted his translation to be in direct connection with the Septuagint and with the old Romanian Bible, whose traditions he wanted to continue, while the censorship committee wanted the Bible printed by the United Church to fall within the doctrinal spirit of the Roman-Catholic tradition, which was considered to be topical. In other words, a Western canonical tradition, which was assumed by the Greek-Catholic Church by printing the Bible of Blaj in 1795, was applied to an Eastern textual tradition. From that moment on, the Greek-Catholic Church fully assumed the

biblical canonical norms of the Roman-Catholic Church. Thus, the Bible of Samuil Micu remained connected to the Eastern biblical tradition through the text, but not through the canon.

### **The Bible of Andrei Șaguna (1856-1858)**

The Bible of Andrei Șaguna was printed in Sibiu, between 1856 and 1858, basically immediately after the Bible of Buzău was printed by Bishop Filotei between 1854 and 1856.

The Șaguna edition was intended to be an Orthodox reaction, more specifically a sort of revival and assertion of the authentic canonical Orthodox tradition, severely affected by the partial translation of the Holy Scripture made by Ion Heliade Rădulescu and especially by the Buzău edition. If Ion Heliade Rădulescu's translation was strongly contested because it was outside the authority of the Church (Marcu 1958, 806-810; Munteanu 2008, 449-486; Ciurea 2011, 227-228), the Buzău edition reactivated for the Romanian Orthodox area the isagogics of Western origin of the Bible of Blaj. This was also the reason why, following a very complex and intense exchange of letters, Metropolitan Andrei Șaguna asked Bishop Filotei to withdraw the unsold copies of the fifth volume of the Bible of Buzău, in which the "Commentary on Holy Scripture" from the Bible of Samuil Micu had been included, bidding him replace it with the *Foreword* of the Șaguna edition. This *Foreword* is an extensive introduction to the books of the Holy Scripture, which defends and develops the Orthodox tradition concerning the biblical text and canon.

The text featured in the Bible of Andrei Șaguna is adopted in its entirety by the edition printed in 1819 in Saint Petersburg, which is a small republishing of the Samuil Micu edition, with small alterations, without the Fourth Book of the Maccabees and, of course, without the introductory elements. The originality of the Bible of Andrei Șaguna also resides in the fact that the Scriptural text is accompanied by illustrations, following the German model, which was considered to be a more attractive form for the masses, since it could facilitate the conveying of the Scriptural message.

The contribution concerning the biblical canon is also defining for the Bible of Andrei Șaguna, its *Foreword* being a competent Orthodox reaction to the "Commentary on the Holy Scripture" of the Blaj edition, which was also included in the Buzău edition. In this respect, we can understand why it was necessary to have an extensive introductory apparatus, with clear and concise specifications regarding the canonicity

of the Holy Scripture, accompanied by very solid, patristically well-founded arguments. A clear distinction is made between canonical – inspired – books and the books of the Anagignoskomena, which continue to be called apocryphal and to be considered uninspired, but honoured and used in the Church for “the strengthening of worshippers in their faith”. The latter is not honoured as much as the canonical ones because of the doubts expressed by the Church concerning them, as they are not used “for the strengthening of Christian dogmas” (The Bible of Andrei Șaguna, V).

The criteria according to which these books are “profitable reading” are the following: “1. The lack of inspiration, as they were made up by wise men who used the canonical books for their creation. 2. Christ and His Apostles did not quote from them. 3. Their absence from the Jewish canon. 4. The fact that they comprise events which contradict the teaching revealed in the canonical books determined many of the Church Fathers to display from the very beginning certain doubts concerning them.” (Basarab 1972, 66)

As in the case of the canonical books – inspired by the Holy Spirit – about which an entire series of testimonies from the patristic epoch are brought (the Apostolic Canons, canon 59 of Laodicea, canon 24 of Carthage, Origen, Saint Athanasius, Saint Cyril of Jerusalem, Saint John Damascene and others), Andrei Șaguna also makes brief but enlightening presentations of all the books of the Anagignoskomena, bringing to the attention of the reader numerous patristic testimonies regarding the attitude of the Church towards these books and their place and role in the life of the faithful (Basarab 1972, 67).

Thus, it is shown that, although in the West, the Wisdom of Solomon was included in the canon through the Council of Carthage, it was rejected by the Eastern Church, with the mention that it was not retained in the Jewish canon. Likewise, the testimonies of Origen, Saint Athanasius, Saint John Damascene, Saint Gregory of Nazianzus, Saint Epiphanius, Saint Jerome and the Council of Laodicea, based on which the Wisdom of Solomon is not considered to be among the books inspired by the Holy Spirit, despite being appreciated for the depth of its reflections, are also mentioned. The same is the case of the Wisdom of Sirach which, though considered to be “praiseworthy, it is not God’s appropriated word”. Moreover, the Councils of Laodicea and Carthage do not retain it as inspired, while the Apostolic Canons prescribe it “only for the moral betterment of the young”. As for the Book of Judith, it is shown that it is not “mentioned” in the Apostolic Canons, nor by the Council of Laodicea, the same mention being made for the Book of Tobit. Furthermore, it is specified that no council considered 2 and 3 Esdras

to be “canonical”. The three books of the Maccabees “are not inspired by the Holy Spirit, for the author himself confessed that with great effort he shortened the five parts written by pagan Jason of Cyrene (2 Macc. 2: 24-27)”. The Book of Baruch is not retained by the Church as inspired, for “many of the fathers have doubts”, but it is mentioned among the canonical books by the Council of Laodicea and by the First Council of Nicaea. Psalm 151 is mentioned among the books/additions which are still called “apocryphal”, yet in the sense of uncanonical / Anagignoskomena, with the remark that the Church Fathers unanimously enumerate only 150 Psalms. Also, the seven chapters and ten verses at the end of chapter ten of the Book of Esther, which is known to be canonical, are mentioned as “apocryphal” (uncanonical / Anagignoskomena). Susannah and Bel and the Dragon are mentioned among the uncanonical additions to the Book of Daniel, which are uncanonical by Saint Jerome. According to Saint Jerome, the Song of the Three Holy Children “is not found with the Jews... but since it does not contain anything against the Gift of the New Law, it can remain untouched” (The Bible of Andrei Șaguna, VI). The *Foreword* does not mention anything about the canonical character of the Prayer of Manasseh or the additions to the Book of Job (Basarab 1972, 66).

Although there is any inconsistency between the 49 books of the Old Testament mentioned in the introduction and the number of books which we find in the content, the Bible of Andrei Șaguna comprises all the books and additions of the Anagignoskomena which have been used by our Church to this day: Tobit, Judith, 3 Esdras, Letter of Jeremiah, Baruch, Wisdom of Solomon, Wisdom of Sirach, the Song of the Three Holy Children, Susannah and the Elders, Bel and the Dragon, 1-3 Maccabees, the Prayer of Manasseh.

Therefore, the Bible of Andrei Șaguna keeps the text and canon of the Bible of Saint Petersburg (1819) as such, while also introducing the Prayer of Manasseh, which was included in the Romanian editions by the Bible of Blaj, and rejecting the Fourth Book of Maccabees.

This textual and canonical standard of Slavic origin, which was brought or, better yet, brought back into the Romanian cultural and ecclesiastical area by the Bible of 1819, would be fully assumed by the Bible of Andrei Șaguna. Although Șaguna attributes great importance to the Bible of Bucharest, as the first complete translation into Romanian, he does not follow it entirely from a canonical point of view, as the edition of Sibiu introduces the Prayer of Manasseh, which does not exist in the Bible of Bucharest, and abandons the Fourth Book of Maccabees, which is present both in the Bible of 1688 and in that of 1795. Thus, although much has been said about the intentions of Metropolitan

Andrei Șaguna concerning the printing of the Bible, we cannot but notice the fact that the great Transylvanian hierarch remained coherent as to his project of developing, protecting and asserting the specificity of the canonical standards of the Orthodox Church in a delicate cultural, ecclesiastical and denominational context.

### Conclusions

When speaking about the relation between the Bibles of Samuil Micu and Andrei Șaguna, the canonical aspect must be acknowledged as having paramount importance, all the other isagogical and textual aspects being connected to it. Bearing in mind this defining aspect, we believe that Ioan Chindriș's accusation against the Bible of Șaguna of taking over the edition of Blaj without any acknowledgements, which he considers to be the greatest literary theft in the history of national culture, is exaggerated and accompanied by that denominational fervour which we reckon should be discarded by all of us nowadays. Eugen Conțac, a biblical researcher whom we consider, to be honest from a scientific point of view and equidistant as far as a denomination is concerned, demonstrates through synoptic research that Andrei Șaguna used the 1819 edition in particular and not exclusively that of Samuil Micu for the text of the Holy Scripture, as renowned Cluj researcher Ioan Chindriș accuses (Chindriș 2000, 67). According to E. Conțac (2011, 190), the same conclusion had been reached by older biblical researchers such as I. Ianoviciu (Ianoviciu 1878, 205), I. Onciul (Onciul 1889, 335) or V. Tarnavschi (Tarnavschi 1928, 180).

Metropolitan Andrei Șaguna does not wish to enter an open confrontation with the Greek-Catholic Church on the subject of the canon, but he finds himself forced to take a stand on the isagogics it indirectly assumed through the introduction of such isagogics in Bishop Filotei's Orthodox edition of Buzău. Thus, for Andrei Șaguna, the main issue is not that of taking a stand against the biblical canonical standards assumed by the Greek-Orthodox Church through the Bible of Blaj, but that of putting his own Orthodox Church in order concerning the biblical canon at a national level.

Although he could have done it, Andrei Șaguna does not mention the Bible of Samuil Micu among the previous Romanian translations because, "technically" speaking, he was probably not bound by usages to do so. He only mentions the editions belonging to his Church and not those belonging to other Churches, in this case, the Greek-Catholic one. The fact that Andrei Șaguna wishes to avoid a confrontation with the Greek-Catholic Church on the canonical issue is also made clear by his not

mentioning the edition of Blaj; otherwise, he would have been put in the position of making the necessary comments related to the Western isagogics assumed in its pages.

Moreover, we do not consider Andrei Șaguna to be lacking in honesty when claiming that “the languages of the Bible can only be forged once for a people if the great barrier of faithful and well-understood translation has been overcome and if the people have received that language, making it their own; then, those who come afterwards have nothing else to do but to renew it and amend it just as the first translator of the Bible would have renewed and amended it, had he lived until their times” (The Bible of Andrei Șaguna, VI).

As such, given the aforementioned, we believe that a debate on so-called plagiarism (Chindriș 2000, 67) is much exaggerated and remains irrelevant for the true issue of the relation between the Bibles of Samuil Micu and Andrei Șaguna, which is, in essence, a canonical one.

Albeit separated through the canon, the Bibles of Samuil Micu and Andrei Șaguna remain united through text, both fulfilling their mission of bringing God’s word to the Romanian people. Through the canon assumed in the Bible of Blaj, the Greek-Catholics would drift away from the tradition which was well established among Romanians and would challenge and determine the Orthodox people to reassert the specificity of their biblical canon in the Bible of Andrei Șaguna. By using the text of the Blaj edition via the Bible of 1819, Andrei Șaguna managed through his Bible to bring all Romanians in Transylvania together, unintentionally fulfilling Samuil Micu’s wish of having a Bible for all Romanians. Therefore, let us keep in mind that, beyond all our human weaknesses, God works to keep us together and to everyone’s benefit.

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