

Reconsidering the Birthplace of the Oldest Romanian Translation of the Psalter: Moldavia or Mount Athos?*

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The Hurmuzaki Psalter occupies a central position among the earliest extant Romanian translations of the Psalter (15th-16th centuries) due to its archaic character and its role in shaping later versions. Yet, the origin of the earliest Romanian translation and the dating of the manuscript remain disputed. Recent studies place both of these in the 15th century, either in Moldavia or within the Athonite milieu, in connection with Moldavian or Aromanian monks. This study critically reassesses these hypotheses by correlating historical, codicological and philological evidence to reconsider the context of production and transmission. It concludes that none of the proposed theories is fully convincing and that the question of origin and dating remains open.

Keywords: *Romanian Biblical Translations, Slavonic-Romanian Tradition, Rhotacism, Textual Transmission, Vernacularisation*

Introduction

Recently, the Romanian tradition of the Psalter has attracted sustained interest from Romanian philologists and historians.¹ Within the tradition of 16th-century Romanian Psalters, the *Hurmuzaki Psalter* occupies a central place, both through its archaic character and its belonging to the group of rhotacizing texts,² as well as through its role in establishing

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¹ See especially the recent research conducted within the roPSALT project (PN-III-P4-ID-PCE-2020-2939). For further details, visit: <https://scriptadacoromanica.ro/bin/view/roPsalt/>.

² Rhotacism is a phonetic process involving the change of intervocalic /n/ to /r/ in Romanian words of Latin origin. To the group of rhotacizing Psalters, dated in the 16th century, also belong the *Psalter of Schei* (ms. *Bucharest, BAR rom. 449*) and the *Psalter of Voroneț* (ms. *Bucharest, BAR rom. 693*). These two copies were produced in Moldavia; see: Ion Gheție, "Hîrtia sileziană și textele rotacizante," *Limba română* 22, no. 6 (1972):

the lineage of the other known versions. It is considered a revision of the primitive Romanian translation, produced on the basis of a bilingual Psalter, compiled at a date that is difficult to determine³ and whose Slavonic text belongs to the second recension, closely related to the *Belgrade Psalter*.⁴ In the process of copying, it appears that the scribe compared the Romanian text with a control Slavonic version belonging to the Athonite recension.⁵ This revised form enjoyed a relatively wide circulation until the 17th century.⁶ The surviving manuscript, however, has a rather modest appearance, marked by numerous scribal errors and corrections.⁷

The problem of the origin and dating of the primitive translation remains open, and the analysis of dialectal features has generated divergent hypotheses. While the views of Ion Gheție and Alexandru Mareș – which dominated Romanian philology in the second half of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st – placed the origin of the rhotacizing Psalter translations at the beginning of the 16th century, in the Banat-Hunedoara region (southwestern Romania),⁸ more recent philological and historical studies have attempted to date both the translation and the copying of the *Hurmuzaki Psalter* to the 15th century, either in Moldavia⁹ or within the

319–20; Alexandru Mareș, “O nouă psaltire slavo-română manuscrisă din secolul al XVI-lea,” in *Studii de limbă literară și filologie*, vol. 2 (București: Editura Academiei Republicii Socialiste România, 1972), 297–98.

³ Gheție, “Cea mai veche atestare a cuvântului *săpun* și raportul dintre psaltirile românești din secolul al XVI-lea,” *Limba română* 19, no. 3 (1970): 250; Gheție and Mirela Teodorescu, *Psaltirea Hurmuzaki. Studiu filologic, studiu lingvistic și ediție* (București: Editura Academiei Române, 2005), 13–19.

⁴ Iosif Camară, “Cele mai vechi Psaltiri românești și redacțiile Psaltirii,” *Caietele Sextil Pușcariu* 5 (2021): 69–78; for the redactions of the Slavonic Psalter, see: Catherine M. MacRobert, “The Textual Tradition of the Church Slavonic Psalter up to the Fifteenth Century,” in *Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Jože Krašovec (Ljubljana: Slovenska akademija znanosti in umetnosti / Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 921–42.

⁵ Camară, “Izvodul bilingv al Psaltirii Hurmuzaki,” *Limba română* 71, no. 1–2 (2022): 39–54.

⁶ Gheție, “Psaltirea Hurmuzachi și filiația psaltirilor românești din secolele al XVI-lea și al XVII-lea,” *Limba română* 27, no. 1 (1978): 51–57; Gheție and Teodorescu, *Psaltirea Hurmuzaki*, 22.

⁷ Ion Aurel Candrea, *Psaltirea Scheiană comparată cu celelalte psaltiri din sec. XVI și XVII traduse din slavonește* (București: Atelierele Grafice Soccec&Co., 1916), XLVIII et passim; Alexandru Rosetti, “Observații asupra textului și limbii Psaltirii Hurmuzaki,” *Studii și Cercetări Lingvistice* 32, no. 5 (1981): 523.

⁸ Gheție, “Banatul și textele rotacizante,” *Limba română* 31, no. 3 (1982): 239; Gheție and Mareș, *Originile scrisului în limba română* (București: Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1985), 300 et passim; Gheție and Teodorescu, *Psaltirea Hurmuzaki*, 20–21.

⁹ Ana Dumitran, “The Context of the First Romanian Translations Revisited,” *Annales Universitatis Apulensis. Series Historica* 26 (2022): 125–66.

Athonite monastic milieu, in connection with Moldavian or Aromanian monks.¹⁰

The present study aims to offer a critical reassessment of these recent proposals, testing the validity of their arguments and re-examining the hypotheses concerning the localization of the primitive translation and the copying of the *Hurmuzaki Psalter*. Methodologically, the analysis correlates historical data with codicological arguments and philological observations in order to reconsider the context in which this early translation was produced and transmitted.

Dating the *Hurmuzaki Psalter* – Filigree Analysis

The analysis of the watermarks in the *Hurmuzaki Psalter* naturally imposes itself as a starting point for this discussion, given the considerable weight this criterion has acquired in Romanian scholarly research, as well as the significant number of hypotheses formulated on its basis. However, it must be stated from the onset that the examination of this material does not lead to conclusive results regarding the dating or localization of the manuscript. On the contrary, the difficulties of precise identification of the watermarks and the often-speculative character of the proposed correlations place the analysis within a limited interpretative framework. Consequently, the study of the watermarks is undertaken here more as a necessary stage from a historiographical and methodological perspective than as a decisive instrument for clarifying questions of chronology and provenance.

Several scholars have attempted to date the *Hurmuzaki Psalter* based on its watermarks, but their conclusions differ. Candrea identified an “anchor”-type watermark and dated the manuscript to 1500–1520, also considering it the translator’s autograph.¹¹ Panaiteescu corrected the inaccuracies in Candrea’s reproduction of the watermark, arguing that the watermark corresponds to a Briquet model from 1501 and, applying the usual 15-year usage span of paper,¹² narrowed the dating to 1500–1515.¹³

¹⁰ Camară, “Originea celui mai vechi text românesc,” in *Receptarea Sfintei Scripturi: între filologie, hermeneutică și traductologie. Lucrările Simpozionului Internațional Explorări în tradiția biblică românească și europeană, ediția a XII-a, Iași, 18-20 mai 2023*, eds. Anca-Diana Bibiri et alii (Iași: Editura Universității „Alexandru Ioan Cuza”, 2023), 111–40.

¹¹ Candrea, *Psaltirea Scheiană*, XCIII–XCIV.

¹² Charles-Moïse Briquet, *Les filigranes: Dictionnaire historique des marques du papier dès leur apparition vers 1282 jusqu’en 1600*, vol. 1 (Paris: A. Jullien, 1907), XIX.

¹³ Petre P. Panaiteescu, “Începuturile scrisului în limba română,” *Studii și materiale de istorie medie* 4 (1960): 74–75.

Gheție, however, pointed out that this principle had been misapplied: the 15-year range should extend both before and after the reference date, yielding a broader interval of 1486–1516. He also questioned the identification itself, noting that the differences in design prevent a positive match with Briquet's model.¹⁴

Mareș notes the existence of two variants of an “anchor”-type watermark on ff. 96–125, and a “ship”-type present on ff. 1–95, likewise in two distinct variants – a detail previously unnoticed. The reproduction of these watermarks, however, proved difficult due to their low visibility, which hindered precise comparison.¹⁵ None of the four variants could be identified by Mareș in catalogues of watermarks.

With regard to the “anchor”-type watermarks (see *Table 1*), Mareș remarked that their attestations are predominantly Italian, leading him to hypothesize a provenance from a paper mill located in northeastern or eastern Italy.¹⁶ Taking into account the concentration of similar variants in the interval 1501–1506 in Piccard's repertory (nos. 331–336), he applies a ten-year margin of uncertainty and proposes for the copying of the *Hurmuzaki Psalter* a chronological framework between 1491 and 1516.¹⁷

Indeed, the “anchor” watermarks in the *Hurmuzaki Psalter* exhibit a morphological similarity to the model identified by Piccard in a document issued at Steinfeld in 1504, held in the *Maximiliana XII/112* collection of the Tiroler Landesarchiv.¹⁸ The dimensions and general structure of the design indicate a typological resemblance, although there is no strict graphic identity.

Another point of comparison is watermark no. 436 from Charles-Moïse Briquet's repertoire, attested in a Venetian document from 1501.¹⁹ The size differences are minor and may suggest either a very closely related variant of the same anchor type or the use of kindred moulds originating from the same workshop or a similar production environment. In high-output mills, paper was produced simultaneously on multiple moulds, and the watermark on each evolved independently due to specific

¹⁴ Gheție, “Maramureșul anilor 1500 – patrie a textelor rotacizante?”, *Limba română* 17, no. 3 (1968): 256.

¹⁵ Mareș, “Considerații pe marginea datării Psaltirii Hurmuzaki,” in *Scriere și cultură românească veche*, ed. Alexandru Mareș (București: Editura Academiei Române, 2005), 311.

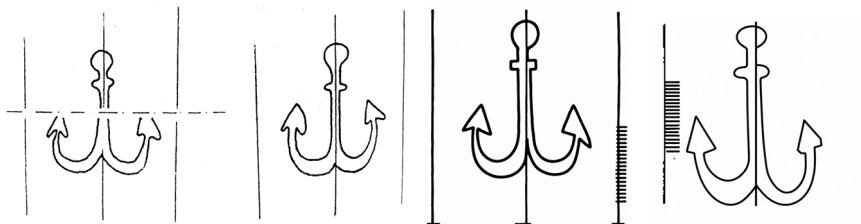
¹⁶ *Ibidem*, 314.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, 314–15.

¹⁸ Wasserzeichen-Informationssystem, “Watermark AT3800-PO-118764,” <https://www.wasserzeichen-online.de/?ref=AT3800-PO-118764>, accessed March 10, 2026.

¹⁹ Briquet, “Watermark No. 436,” *Briquet Online*, <https://briquet-online.at/loadRepW-mark.php?refnr=436>, accessed March 10, 2026.

Reconsidering the Birthplace of the Oldest Romanian Translation of the Psalter wear. Consequently, distinct variants of the same type can emerge without necessarily reflecting a chronological sequence. The differences between them represent a technical dynamic of the manufacturing process rather than a definitive temporal staging.



“Anchors” in the *Hurmuzaki Psalter* (Mareş, “Considerații,” 312)

Ta Piccard,
bl Innsbruck,
1 *Maximiliana*
XII/112

Briquet, no. 436

In the absence of reliable data regarding the period of operation of the manufactory that produced the paper, the mere dating of a manuscript containing the respective watermark offers limited support for establishing the chronology of a manuscript. Likewise, if the duration and sequence of use of a particular type of watermark within the activity of the respective workshop are unknown, the dating of a manuscript containing that watermark cannot, by itself, constitute a satisfactory criterion for dating another manuscript that presents the same mark.

Although the dating proposed by Mareş is based primarily on the “anchor” watermarks, he also takes into consideration the “ship” watermarks (see *Table 2*). Based on the identified analogies, he links them – at least in terms of their area of origin and chronology – with similar models found in three manuscripts (one Greek and two Italian), dated between 1460 and 1468,²⁰ featuring watermarks recorded by Likhachev, no. 386 (also included by Briquet, no. 11959),²¹ Piccard, no. VII.88,²² and Zonghi, no. 1026.²³

²⁰ Mareş, “Considerații,” 313.

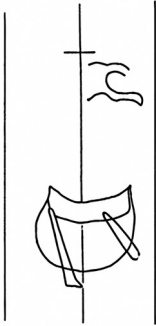
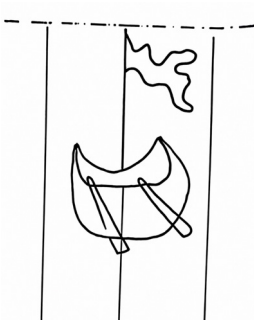
²¹ Briquet, “Watermark No. 11959,” *Briquet Online*, <https://briquet-online.at/loadRep-Wmark.php?refnr=11959>, accessed March 10, 2026.

²² Wasserzeichen des Mittelalters, “Watermark PPO 6-7-88,” <https://wzma.at/loadRep-Wmark.php?rep=PPO&refnr=6-7-88>, accessed March 10, 2026.

²³ Fondazione Fedrigoni Fabriano, “The Catalogue: Corpus Chartariorum Fabrianense,” <https://fondazionefedrigoni.it/en/the-catalogue>, accessed March 10, 2026.

Camară discusses nine additional manuscripts in which watermarks similar to the Likhachev 386 / Briquet 11959 model have been identified. Among these, four can be dated to the 1460–1464 period, three within the broader 1451–1475 timeframe, and one is generally attributed to the 15th century.²⁴ To this group, a variant noted in an incunabulum printed in Rome in 1473, preserved at the *Istituto Centrale per la Patologia degli Archivi e del Libro*, under shelfmark II, icpl.cci.II.167.a, can be added (see *Table 3*).²⁵

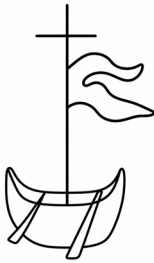
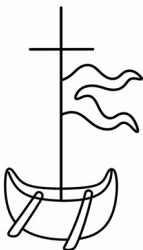
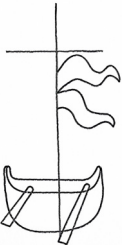
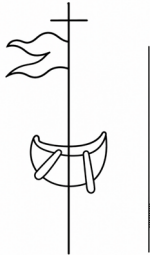
Table 2:

	
<i>Hurmuzaki</i>	<i>Hurmuzaki</i>
<i>Psalter</i> , type A	<i>Psalter</i> , type B
(Mareş, “Con- siderații,” 321)	(Mareş, “Con- siderații,” 312)

²⁴ Camară, “Data alcătuirii celui mai vechi text românesc. Filigranul de tip corabie din Psaltirea Hurmuzaki,” in *Zamfirei Mihail: Omagiu*, eds. Lia Brad Chisacof, Simona Nicolae and Cătălina Vătăşescu (Cluj-Napoca: Scriptor & Mega, 2024), 156–61.

²⁵ Istituto Centrale per la Patologia degli Archivi e del Libro, “Documento 341,” *Corpus Chartarum Italicarum*, <https://cci-icpal.cultura.gov.it/ro/it/documenti/detail/341.html>, accessed March 10, 2026.

Table 3:

				
Likhachev, no. 386 = Briquet, no. 11959	Likhachev, no. 387	Piccard, no. VII.88	Zonghi, no. 1026	ICPAL, cci.II.167.a

Given that these variants share the same defining elements – the “ship”-type, the presence of the flag and the oars – and the manner of execution is similar and relatively distinct, it can be presumed that they originate from the same production centre. The difficulty, however, lies in the fact that the mill in question has not been identified with certainty, nor has its exact period of operation been documented.

Zonghi maintained that the paper featuring the “ship” watermark recorded under no. 1026 originated from a mill in Fabriano, an opinion adopted by Camară, who considers that most of the *Hurmuzaki Psalter* was written on paper produced in Fabriano, in a workshop active until the third quarter of the 15th century.²⁶ After this stock was exhausted, the scribe supposedly continued copying on another type of paper, differing in origin and chronology. This latter paper bears an “anchor” watermark, documented between 1501 and 1506.

In this interpretation, an unusual situation arises: the use of paper presumed to be from Fabriano approximately three decades after its production period, whereas the average duration for paper circulation and consumption is typically estimated at about 10–15 years. However, this estimate primarily reflects Western realities and lacks comparable documentation for the Carpatho-Danubian region, where the dynamics of paper circulation remain insufficiently studied, and this interval may be considerably extended.

Camară attempts to lower the *ante quem* limit for the dating of the *Hurmuzaki Psalter*, proposing the interval 1491–1504. By analysing the

²⁶ Camară, “Data alcătuirii,” 160, 162.

“anchor” type watermark variants similar to those in the *Hurmuzaki Psalter* and recorded in catalogues, he notes that between 1501 and 1504, the type experienced a relatively stable phase, characterized by a limited number of variants, whereas after 1504–1505, a more pronounced diversification is noted. Since the watermarks in the *Hurmuzaki Psalter* are closer to the forms considered early, and no other variants were subsequently attested in the Romanian territories, Camară concludes that it belongs to the initial phase of the type. This results in the preference for the year 1504 as the latest chronological point. The argument continues by referencing the rest of the manuscript, which was largely copied on paper that the author considers older, based on “ship”-type watermarks dated between 1460 and the third quarter of the 15th century. Camară assesses that it would be unlikely for such an old stock of paper to have been used after 1504, which reinforces the choice for this chronological threshold.²⁷

However, the increase in the number of variants of the “anchor”-type watermark does not imply that the earlier form disappears or ceases to circulate in parallel. The fact that the watermark in the *Hurmuzaki Psalter* is not identical to the variants dated to 1505–1506 does not prove that it is earlier than them; it may equally represent a parallel variant or a form that circulated simultaneously, or even later, but has not yet been recorded. The same argument applies to the “ship”-type watermark in the *Hurmuzaki Psalter*, which could likewise be a later variant of those already attested, since we have no reliable information about the activity of the paper mill that produced it and no certainty regarding the manufacturing provenance of the paper stock used.

Camară discusses several variants of the “ship” watermark, which he considers “old” types.²⁸ Three of them appear in two Serbian manuscripts dated to 1430–1440 (ms. *Pljevlja 111*)²⁹ and 1440–1450 (ms. *Dečani 64*),³⁰ while another is found in an English manuscript dated to the 15th century (ms. *Holm. X90 – Norfolk*).³¹ Camară disputes Brodin’s

²⁷ *Ibidem*, 162–64.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, 155–56.

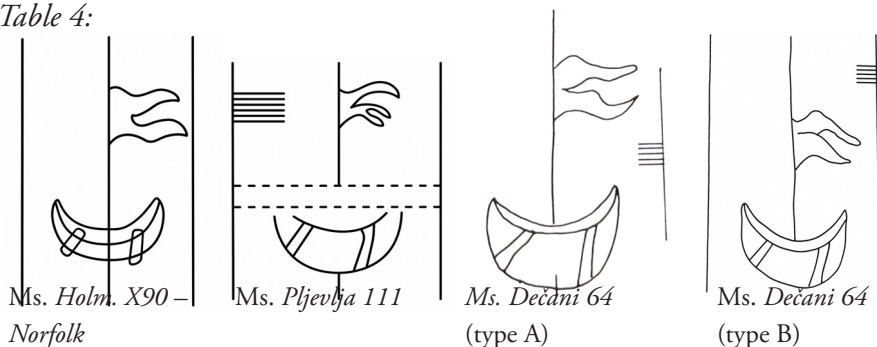
²⁹ Радоман Станковић, *Рукописне књиге Манастира Свете Тројице код Пљеваља: водени знаци и датирање* (Београд: Народна библиотека Србије, 2003), 33–34, 155.

³⁰ Мирослава Гроздановић-Пајић, Станковић, *Рукописне књиге манастира Високи Дечани*, vol. 2 (Београд: Народна библиотека Србије, 1995), 24, 118.

³¹ Gösta Brodin, *Agnus castus: a Middle English Herbal Reconstructed from Various Manuscripts* (Uppsala: Lundequistska Bokhandeln / Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950), 35.

identification of this watermark with the model recorded by Briquet, no. 11959,³² and dates it – albeit without strong supporting arguments – before 1450, considering it similar to the Serbian variants, although the differences are significant. Variations in the position of the oars and the flag, as well as dimensional discrepancies, place the analysis within an interpretative framework marked by a high degree of uncertainty (see *Table 4*).

Table 4:



It cannot be excluded that the circulation of the “ship” watermark variants found in the *Hurmuzaki Psalter* occurred closer to the beginning of the 16th century, but not earlier either. Consequently, the late use of paper bearing a “ship”-type watermark, even at the beginning of the 16th century, remains entirely possible.

At the current stage of research, the importance of watermarks should not be overstated. The data they provide are, in most cases, relative and indicative in nature, acquiring almost absolute value only in exceptional, well-documented situations. Even when the place and approximate period of paper production can be established with a high degree of probability, this does not automatically imply precise knowledge of the moment or context in which the paper was actually used. A chronological gap between production and use of the material support may exist, and it is often difficult to quantify.

Under these circumstances, the most cautious dating places the copying of the *Hurmuzaki Psalter* in a transitional interval between the late 15th and early 16th centuries, without imposing overly rigid limits, given the inherent uncertainties. Any attempt at a more precise dating must be supported by additional palaeographic, linguistic, or historical arguments, and not rely exclusively on comparisons with watermark repertories.

³² *Ibidem*, 34.

Localization of the Primitive Translation and Copying of the *Hurmuzaki Psalter*

Attempts to localise the translation have relied primarily on the analysis of dialectal features. The heterogeneous character of the language – which combines Moldavian, Banat, Maramureș, and southern-Danubian traits – has generated divergent hypotheses. As already noted, the hypothesis of a Banat-Hunedoara origin dominated Romanian philological research until recently. The reassessment of the *Hurmuzaki Psalter* as a possible pre-16th-century text has led scholars to reexamine the phonetic, morphological, and lexical arguments on the basis of which the linguistic area of the first translator was localized in Banat-Hunedoara, and exclusively there, while also emphasizing the need to identify the historical and cultural contexts that could have fostered such initiatives.

The Banat-Hunedoara hypothesis: Methodological Reconsiderations

The classical hypothesis of a primitive translation in the Banat area (southwestern Romania) is supported both by the presence of a specific dialectal layer and by a cultural context favourable to the circulation of Reformation ideas.³³ According to the theory advanced by Ion Gheție and Alexandru Mareș, this constitutes a defining indicator for the geographical localization of the translation in Banat-Hunedoara and for its chronological placement in the 16th century.

However, the translation of biblical texts into the vernacular should not be linked exclusively to the Reformation, as such initiatives were already present in the Catholic world prior to it. Thus, it cannot be entirely excluded that the rhotacizing Psalters may have originated in southwestern Romania under the influence of the Franciscans, whose presence in the region was significant.³⁴

From a historical-linguistic perspective as well, Old Romanian can be described only in terms of two major linguistic areas: a northern one, extending from Banat and Transylvania to Moldavia, and a southern one, confined to Ungro-Vlachia (Wallachia), in fact within an even more restricted area. The other regional distinctions should be understood more

³³ Gheție, “Contribuții la localizarea psaltirilor românești din secolul al XVI-lea,” in *Cele mai vechi texte românești. Contribuții filologice și lingvistice*, ed. Ion Gheție (București: Editura Universității, 1982), 147–81; Gheție and Mareș, *Originile*, 296–304.

³⁴ See: Vladimir Âgrigoroaei, “Les peintures de Strei et l’Union des deux Églises,” *Museikon* 2 (2018): 37–78; idem, “‘Pauper Paulus’ și mănăstirea tainică de la Sântămărie Orlea: scenele pictate în secolul al XV-lea sub tribuna de vest,” *Ars Transsilvaniae* 24 (2014): 183–228.

Reconsidering the Birthplace of the Oldest Romanian Translation of the Psalter rigorously as dialects or subdialects, defined by zones of interference and transition.³⁵

Moreover, in the work of these major scholars of Romanian philology, the term “Banat-Hunedoara” does not designate a rigorously defined geographical space, but rather functions as a conventional label, applied inconsistently to different regions – whether Țara Zarandului and the Metaliferi Mountains, the Mureș corridor, or Țara Hațegului.³⁶ This terminological instability produces a veritable geographical “amalgam,” lacking historical coherence. The difficulty stems largely from the uncritical projection onto medieval realities of data derived from modern dialectology. Such a method ignores the mobile and permeable character of premodern linguistic areas, where zones of interference play an essential role. Consequently, approaches that operate with rigid and dichotomous delimitations fail to capture the complexity of these transitional spaces, artificially reducing a much more fluid reality.

In this context, any attempt to identify supposed “Maramureș” or “Transylvania” features in early texts is, in fact, based on an anachronistic conjecture, since it relies on linguistic evidence from the 18th and 19th centuries to interpret phenomena presumed to belong to the 15th century – otherwise unattested – and reflected in 16th-century copies such as the rhotacizing Psalters.

A further hypothesis suggests that the translation was originally produced in Moldavia, later migrated and was copied in the Banat-Hunedoara region, and subsequently returned to the Moldavian milieu in the form of a revised copy.³⁷ In this perspective, the text stands as evidence of intense circulation among different cultural centres, reflecting a complex process of linguistic adaptation and stratification. This theory, however, has not gained significant acceptance among scholars.

The main methodological challenge is that dialects and regional varieties are not fixed or stable – they are constantly shifting, evolving, and influencing one another over time. Because of this, projecting later dialect boundaries back onto earlier stages of the language can easily lead to forced or misleading conclusions that are not firmly supported by historical evidence.

³⁵ Gheție and Mareș, *Graiurile dacoromâne în secolul al XVI-lea* (București: Editura Academiei, 1974), 337.

³⁶ Agrigoroaiei, “Umbra lui Dobre la Leșnic. Despre un comanditar fictiv, despre picturi inspirate de apocrife și nu în ultimul rând despre primele atestări endogene ale limbii române,” *Apulum* 52 (2015): 200.

³⁷ Gheție and Teodorescu, *Psaltirea Hurmuzaki*, 20–21.

In this context, a strictly dialectal interpretation can be set aside in favour of the concept of *scripta*.³⁸ A *scripta* does not directly reflect a local spoken variety, but rather constitutes a composite written form, shaped by the interaction between a regional oral substrate, cultural models, prestige norms, and the choices of the scribe.

Applied to the *Hurmuzaki Psalter*, this perspective calls for caution: features identified as pertaining to “Maramureș” or “Banat” do not necessarily point to a clearly delimited linguistic reality, but may instead result from successive layers of interference, mediated through cultural and scribal practices. The text thus reflects a multilayered linguistic configuration.³⁹

An essential element for understanding 16th-century Romanian is the absence of a stable standardisation, which means that it was at an early stage in which several linguistic centres of crystallisation were still present. Since we have no direct information about the dialectal realities of the 15th century,⁴⁰ the phonetic, morphological, and lexical features identified by some scholars as Banat-Hunedoara traits could just as well have existed prior to the 16th century anywhere within the northern Romanian-speaking area.

From this perspective, any attempt to localize the *Hurmuzaki Psalter* on strictly linguistic grounds becomes problematic. At the same time, this understanding does not undermine the validity of Gheție and Mareș’s hypothesis. It is plausible that a *scripta* model emerged from the western or southwestern part of the Daco-Romanian area; however, the mere existence of such a model does not imply that all *scripta*-type features identified in the *Hurmuzaki Psalter* can automatically be attributed to that region of origin. A further issue remains, namely that the transmission of the rhotacizing Psalters is attested only within the Moldavian milieu.

³⁸ For this, see: Louis Remacle, *Le Problème de l’ancien wallon* (Liège: Bibliothèque de la Faculté de philosophie et lettres de l’Université de Liège, 1948), 24–26; Hans Goebel, “Regards dialectométriques sur les données de l’Atlas linguistique de la France: Relations quantitatives et structures de profondeur,” *Estudis Romànics* 25 (2003): 60–61; see also: Harald Völker, “Skripta und Variation: Untersuchungen zur Negation und zur Substantivflexion in altfranzösischen Urkunden der Grafschaft Luxemburg (1237–1281)” (PhD diss., University of Trier, 2003), 9–79.

³⁹ A further deepening of research in this direction has been undertaken by the scholars involved in the roPSALT project: the reader is invited to follow the project’s forthcoming publications. My sincere thanks to V. Agrigoroaei and Ana-Maria Gînsac for their valuable discussions and for sharing preliminary materials.

⁴⁰ Gheție, *Baza dialectală a românei literare* (București: Editura Academiei Republicii Socialiste România, 1975), 239; Dumitran, “The Context,” 165.

The Hypothesis of the Florentine Unionist Context in Moldavia and Its Limits

Recently, Ana Dumitran, approaching the issue from the perspective of a historian seeking cultural explanations, has placed the initiative of translating the Psalter in Moldavia in the context of the disputes generated by the Florentine Union. The civil wars in Moldavia in the mid-15th century had a strong confessional dimension,⁴¹ with the alternation of pro- and anti-Union rulers and metropolitans indicating a deep ideological unrest. After the failure of the unionist attempts and Moldavia's return under the authority of the Ecumenical Patriarchate (with Rome's acknowledgement, in 1481, of the Moldavians' "return to schism"⁴²), a programme of affirmation of Moldavian Orthodoxy gradually took shape. Slavic ecclesiastical literature brought by South-Danubian refugees played a major role,⁴³ although its accessibility remained limited.

In a climate of confessional competition, the translation of fundamental biblical texts into the vernacular could have served as an effective instrument of religious persuasion for both sides. Ana Dumitran looks to the Polish-Ruthenian space, in close proximity to Moldavia, for a comparable case in which the Catholic milieu promoted familiarity with sacred, biblical and liturgical texts in connection with the Florentine Union. For example, there exists a Ruthenian version of the *Song of Songs*, translated from a Czech Bible of the third recension. The manuscript preserving this translation also contains a rendering of a bull issued by Pope Eugenius IV at the Council of Florence, and the *Song of Songs* is followed by a Marian liturgy in Ruthenian, translated by the scribes of Glagolitic texts in Kleparz.⁴⁴ Such a model, she suggests, may have had a counterpart in the Romanian environment, particularly in areas of coexistence where the

⁴¹ Dan Ioan Mureșan, "Teotist I și ungerea domnească a lui Ștefan cel Mare," in *Românii în Europa medievală (între Orientul bizantin și Occidentul latin)*. *Studii în onoarea profesorului Victor Spinei*, eds. Dumitru Țeicu and Ionel Căndea (Brăila: Muzeul Brăilei, Editura Istros, 2008), 303–416.

⁴² Dan Ioan Mureșan, "Girolamo Lando, titolare du patriarcat de Constantinople (1474–1497), et son rôle dans la politique orientale du Saint-Siège," *Annuario dell'Istituto Romeno di Cultura e Ricerca Umanistica di Venezia* 8 (2006): 238.

⁴³ П. Бойчева, "Към въпроса за участието на среднобългарската литература в църковнополитическия живот на Молдова през XV–XVI в.," in *Българите в северното причерноморие*, vol. I (Велико Търново: БТУ, 1992), 82; Milena Davidović, "The Influence of Serbian Literacy in Wallachia and Moldavia in the 14th and the 15th Century," *Byzantine Heritages in South-Eastern Europe in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Period* 4, no. 11 (2022): 91–101.

⁴⁴ Francis J. Thomson, "The Slavonic Translation of the Old Testament," in *The Interpretation of the Bible. The International Symposium in Slovenia. Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, ed. Jože Krašovec (Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 881.

Romanian population is not known to have been openly opposed to the Union.⁴⁵ Dumitran further assumes that the anti-Union Orthodox side may likewise have initiated a comparable translation effort, aimed at consolidating its own position. The interweaving of the Romanian text with the Slavonic one would thus point to a deliberate project of legitimization, but also to a transitional stage in the development of the text.⁴⁶

Viewed from this broader perspective, Moldavia's proximity to Polish Catholicism – supported by strong political and dynastic ties, where the tradition of translating the Psalter is likely attested as early as the 13th century⁴⁷ – offered a precedent and a possible model of reference for the vernacular translation of sacred texts in the region.

In the same direction, the only documentary testimony that may help orient research into the origins of some of the earliest Romanian biblical translations in Moldavia is also relevant. In a letter dated March 11, 1532, written by Nicholas Plufger of Kraków, mention is made of a wealthy and learned man (“doctor”) from Moldavia, knowledgeable in Latin and Polish, who had arrived in Wittenberg to hear Martin Luther and intended to publish, in Romanian, German, and Polish, the texts of the four Gospels and the Pauline Epistles.⁴⁸ Somewhat surprisingly, this information was overlooked by Gheție and Mareș, who maintained that the protograph of the Slavonic-Romanian Tetraevangelion originated in the Banat-Hunedoara region.⁴⁹ Yet, the reference is significant, as it points to the existence, in early 16th-century Moldavia (probably rooted in the 15th century), of an intellectual milieu capable of initiating and sustaining biblical translation projects of a certain complexity. At the same time, it allows for the hypothesis of a local tradition of translating sacred texts. Not least, the document suggests that Moldavia was integrated into the broader circulation of European ideas and cultural practices that encouraged the vernacularisation of the biblical text.

The advantage of locating the primitive translation of the Psalter in Moldavia lies in its ability to explain why this region represents the clearly

⁴⁵ Dumitran, “The Context,” 152–53.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, 150, 163.

⁴⁷ Agrigoroaei, “The First Psalters in Old French and Their 12th Century Context,” in *Actes du colloque international, juin 2018, Alba Iulia, Roumanie*, 31–32.

⁴⁸ Władysław Pociecha (ed.), *Acta Tomiciana: Epistolae, legationes, responsa, actiones, res gestae Sigismundi I, regis Poloniae*, vol. 14 (Poznań: Poznańskie Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Nauk, 1952), 203; Șerban Papacostea, “Moldova în epoca Reformei. Contribuții la istoria societății moldovenești în veacul al XVI-lea,” *Studii* 11, no. 4 (1958): 62–63; Daniel Benga, *Marii reformatori luterani și Biserica Ortodoxă. Contribuții la tipologia relațiilor luterano-ortodoxe din secolul al XVI-lea* (București: Editura Sofia, 2003), 87.

⁴⁹ Gheție and Mareș, *Originile scrisului în limba română*, 339–42.

attested area of preservation for the rhotacizing Psalters (the *Hurmuzaki Psalter*, the *Psalter of Schei* and the *Psalter of Voroneț*). However, this raises the question of how such a hypothesis can be reconciled with the well-known conservatism of the Moldavian ecclesiastical milieu and with the lack of interest shown by the Church hierarchy in printing liturgical translations in the following centuries. Although in Moldavia the Slavonic-Romanian Psalter was printed only in 1680, by Metropolitan Dosoftei, the manuscript tradition of the primitive version continued until the early 18th century, without significant contamination from the printed editions produced in Brașov, or from the Alba Iulia translation of 1651.⁵⁰ This fidelity cannot be explained by mere inertia; rather, it suggests the conscious adoption of a version regarded as normative. If the translation emerged in the context of the conflicts surrounding the Florentine Union, its persistence may be interpreted as an expression of an awareness of cultural authorship and of its role in affirming Moldavian Orthodox identity.⁵¹ The conservatism of the Slavonic ecclesiastical tradition in the 16th and 17th centuries can, in turn, be explained by a marked increase in caution toward translating texts that might be used in public liturgy, particularly in light of the influence of the Protestant Reformation.

The vulnerability of the theory linking the primitive Romanian translation of the Psalter to the internal tensions in Moldavia generated by the Florentine Union lies in the absence of any concrete documentary evidence indicating that the translation of biblical texts into Romanian was promoted as a pastoral instrument in this context. Consequently, the connection remains inferential and, at the current stage of research, cannot be regarded as a decisive explanation for the origin of the Romanian Psalter translation.

The Athonite Hypothesis: Arguments and Reassessments

Shortly after Ana Dumitran's theory was proposed, Camară advanced an alternative hypothesis regarding the localization of the primitive translation and the copying of the *Hurmuzaki Psalter*, though he appears to have overlooked the earlier proposal, with which he does not critically engage.

⁵⁰ Mariana Combiescu, "Psaltirea de la Mehădia," *Limba română* 17, no. 3 (1968): 259–68; Alexandra Roman, "Psaltirile românești din secolele al XVII-lea și al XVIII-lea. Probleme de filiație," *Limba română* 23, no. 3 (1974): 233–42; Gheorghe Chivu, "Psaltirea – de la litera la spiritul textului sacru. Considerații asupra unui manuscris moldovenesc de la mijlocul secolului al XVII-lea," *Text și discurs religios* 1 (2009): 37–43.

⁵¹ Dumitran, "The Context," 159–60.

First, following Densușianu,⁵² Camară highlights that the *Hurmuzaki Psalter* exhibits a number of linguistic features characteristic of the southern Danubian Aromanian dialect. These include distinctive orthographic forms, specific phonetic developments, vowel syncope, genitive constructions unusual for Daco-Romanian, Latin lexical relics and terms with clear correspondences in Aromanian.⁵³

Camară also argues that the *Hurmuzaki Psalter* contains indications pointing to a Greek model or to a Hellenophone cultural environment in which the translation or copying were carried out. These include graphic features influenced by Greek scribal practice, as well as translation choices that reflect direct contact with a Greek source text. In his view, these elements suggest either the use of a Greek original or the intervention of a translator familiar with both Slavonic and Greek. Taken together, this evidence points to a context of textual transmission marked by Slavonic-Greek interference, characteristic of major monastic centres in Southeastern Europe.⁵⁴ Regarding the Hungarian-derived terms present in the *Hurmuzaki Psalter*, but absent from the South Danubian dialects, Camară considers them to represent a later lexical layer, superimposed on an already established substratum of Latin and Slavic elements.⁵⁵

Building on Mareș's observation that the writing support of the *Hurmuzaki Psalter* – defined through the watermarks discussed above – finds no parallels in other 16th-century manuscripts or documents from the Romanian Principalities, Camară broadens the investigation to the wider Balkan area. Within this framework, he identifies a “ship”-type watermark which, although not identical to that of the *Hurmuzaki Psalter* but sharing a number of significant affinities with it, is attested in eight Greek manuscripts (some originating from Mount Athos) and three Serbian ones. He further locates the second type of paper, bearing an “anchor” watermark, in an early 16th-century Slavonic Psalter from the Zographou Monastery (ms. *Sofia*, NBKM 837). This manuscript is particularly important, as it preserves numerous marginal Romanian annotations (in a southern dialect) and shows redactional affinities with both the *Hurmuzaki Psalter* and the *Belgrade Psalter*. On this basis, Camară

⁵² Ovid Densușianu, *Filologia romanică*, vol. 2 (course handout, University of Bucharest, 1931), 189–90.

⁵³ Camară, “Originea,” 122–26.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*, 126–27.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, 125.

argues that these manuscripts likely originated within the same liturgical and scribal milieu.⁵⁶

With regard to the localization of the scriptorium, Camară engages with Alexandru Pascal's hypothesis, which attributes the *Zographou Psalter* to a Wallachian scribe working in Ungro-Vlachia, while also allowing for the possibility that the manuscript was copied directly on Mount Athos. He ultimately opts for the latter scenario. On this basis, Camară extends the argument and concludes that the *Hurmuzaki Psalter* was likewise copied within the Athonite monastic milieu, understood as a space marked by an intense circulation of texts and scribes.⁵⁷

Camară also draws attention to the original binding of the *Hurmuzaki Psalter* – a leather cover decorated with geometric and floral motifs. In particular, he highlights the double outline of the lotus flower, which, he notes, also appears on the covers of a 15th-century manuscript from Neamț Monastery.⁵⁸ In his view, this correspondence would point to a binding executed in the characteristic workshop tradition of Neamț Monastery in that period.⁵⁹

Starting from these material features, Camară proposes the hypothesis that the manuscript was copied at Zographou Monastery, a monastic centre closely connected to Moldavia.⁶⁰ In his view, this work would have been commissioned by the Moldavian ecclesiastical hierarchy, either due to the absence of a local Romanian exemplar or the lack of a sufficiently skilled scribe. The final stage of binding, he suggests, was subsequently carried out at Neamț Monastery. To support this scenario, Camară invokes an analogous case from 1537: a Tetraevangelion commissioned by Bistrița Monastery (Vâlcea, Ungro-Vlachia), which was copied on Mount Athos and then brought back to the Ungro-Vlachian monastery for decoration and binding.⁶¹

Finally, Camară argues that the translation of the Psalter into Romanian within the Athonite milieu was prompted by an initiative of the high Moldavian ecclesiastical hierarchy, reflecting the need to provide

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, 129–30.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, 130.

⁵⁸ Luminița Kövari, "Floarea de lotus – un ornament bizantin al legăturilor vechi românești," *Revista Bibliotecii Academiei Române* 2, no. 2 (2017): 18, fig. 12.

⁵⁹ Camară, "Originea," 131.

⁶⁰ Florin Marinescu and Nikolaos Mertzimekis, "Ștefan cel Mare și Mănăstirea Zografu de la Muntele Athos," in *Ștefan cel Mare și Sfânt. Atlet al credinței creștine* (Suceava: Editura Mușatinii, 2004), 179–86.

⁶¹ Petre P. Panaitescu and Zamfira Mihail, *Catalogul manuscriselor slavo-române și slave din Biblioteca Academiei Române* (București: Editura Academiei Române, 2018), 223–28, no. 744.

a linguistically accessible tool for the many novices entering monasteries during the flourishing of monasticism in the second half of the 15th century. These novices, often unfamiliar with Slavonic, required translations in order to understand the liturgical rite. Among the principal beneficiaries – and possibly promoters – of such a text, he identifies the Aromanians, who, coming from a Greek liturgical environment, settled in significant numbers both on Mount Athos and north of the Danube, where they encountered a Slavonic liturgical context that was unfamiliar to them. In this view, such a background would account for the presence of Aromanian linguistic features in the *Hurmuzaki Psalter*.⁶²

All these considerations lead Camară to conclude that the origins of the translation and circulation of the earliest Romanian text are closely connected to the Athonite cultural milieu – a predominantly Greek-speaking environment in which Romanian scholars from various regions were active, including speakers of the South-Danubian dialects.⁶³

Camară's line of argument ultimately rests on a set of premises treated as self-evident, yet not convincingly demonstrated. These may be summarized as follows: (1) the existence of a South-Danubian lexical layer in the rhotacizing Psalters; (2) the priority of this layer in relation to Hungarian loanwords, regarded as later additions; (3) the impossibility of a Greek influence mediated through Slavonic, despite the well-known dependence of the Slavonic cultural tradition on Greek models, including in matters of script and punctuation; and (4) the assumption that an Aromanian author could have produced such a text only within an Athonite environment, excluding the possibility of a scribal activity in a different setting, such as Moldavia.

The major difficulty of this theoretical construction lies in the interdependence of these premises. Accepting some while rejecting others inevitably generates a range of alternative scenarios, each capable of offering a coherent explanation of the available evidence. Under these conditions, the argument loses much of its probative force, since it no longer leads to a necessary conclusion but remains one among several plausible interpretations.

First, it should be noted that any firm conclusion regarding the absence of certain types of paper from the Romanian lands in the 15th and 16th centuries remains premature, given the still limited and uneven state of filigree research in this area. At present, the lack of documentary proof

⁶² Camară, "Originea," 132–33.

⁶³ *Ibidem*, 134–35.

for a particular watermark cannot be taken as definitive evidence of its non-circulation on the local market; rather, it reflects the fragmentary nature of the extant corpus of manuscripts and documents examined so far. Consequently, drawing precise geographical conclusions on the basis of a material support that remains insufficiently explored is inherently precarious and must remain open to revision in light of future findings.

Another limitation of this interpretation lies in the fact that Camară isolates the translation of the Psalter from the broader corpus of biblical texts translated into Romanian during the same period, some of which may be connected to Moldavia. For instance, recent research has argued that the Slavonic-Romanian Tetraevangelion printed at Sibiu (Transylvania) between 1551 and 1553 – edited by Filip (Mahler) Moldoveanul (possibly a Saxon from Moldavia⁶⁴) – may have been based on a translation produced in the region of northern Moldavia and Maramureș, i.e., within a multiethnic and multilingual environment, before being transcribed in Banat-Hunedoara.⁶⁵

In the case of the Apostolos translation, the absence of recent studies has left in place the older, more complex theory of a single initial translation produced in the southwestern Romanian area (Banat-Hunedoara), which subsequently circulated widely through a northern Moldavian transmission channel.⁶⁶ As in the case of the Tetraevangelion – and possibly of the Psalter as well – such a trajectory does not exclude the possibility of a reverse circulation.

Another aspect insufficiently considered by Camară is the comparatively strong interest in Moldavia in vernacular translations of apocryphal literature, as highlighted by Mareș.⁶⁷ The Romanian version of *Floarea darurilor*, preserved in ms. *Bucharest, BAR rom. 4620*, can be dated based

⁶⁴ Giuseppe Stabile, “Rumanian Slavia as the Frontier of Orthodoxy. The Case of the Slavo-Romanian Tetraevangelion of Sibiu,” *Studia Ceranea. Journal of the Waldemar Ceran Research Centre for the History and Culture of the Mediterranean Area and South-East Europe* 9 (2019): 69.

⁶⁵ Levente Nagy, “Câteva considerații despre geneza Tetraevangelului bilingv slavo-român de la Sibiu (1551–1553),” *Biblicum Jassyense* 7 (2019–2020): 77, 79.

⁶⁶ Mariana Costinescu, “Versiunile din secolul al XVI-lea ale Apostolului. Probleme de filiație și localizare,” in *Cele mai vechi texte românești: contribuții filologice și lingvistice*, ed. Gheție (București: Editura Universității din București, 1982), 144–45; Gheție, “Considerații filologice și lingvistice asupra Evangheliarului din Petersburg,” *Studii și cercetări lingvistice* 17, no. 1 (1966): 76–77; Gheție, *Baza dialectală*, 220–21; Mareș, “Observații cu privire la Evangheliarul din Petersburg,” *Limba română* 16, no. 1 (1967): 71–72.

⁶⁷ Mareș, *Cărți populare din secolele al XVI-lea – al XVIII-lea. Contribuții filologice* (București: Fundația Națională pentru Știință și Artă, 2006), 277–307.

on a filigree analysis to 1592–1604 and is attributed to the hieromonk Ioan of Putna.⁶⁸ This translation derives from the Italian *Fiore di virtù*, with secondary influences from the Glagolitic or Cyrillic milieu of the South Dalmatian area.⁶⁹

Its association with the Moldavian milieu is further supported by an 18th-century Russian copy, which attributes the translation into the “Bogdanian” language⁷⁰ (i.e., the Moldavian variety) to Gherman the Wallachian, a scholar connected to the court of Stephen the Great.⁷¹ Pandeale Olteanu likewise argues that the version preserved in ms. *Bucharest, BAR rom. 4620* ultimately goes back to Gherman’s translation, thereby placing its origin in Moldavia.⁷² If this testimony is granted historical weight, it becomes reasonable to assume that 15th-century Moldavia possessed the cultural and intellectual resources necessary to support the translation of other devotional texts as well, including the Psalter.

Even if most of the testimonies of apocryphal translations from Moldavia recorded by Mareş date to the 17th century, this can only point to the existence of a cultural milieu already accustomed to such endeavours. Significantly, the main area of diffusion for these translations appears to have been Transylvania. The wide reception of Moldavian translations among Romanian communities in Transylvania suggests the existence of an intense contact zone, marked by direct exchanges of ideas and information.⁷³ This broader geographical area – encompassing historical Maramureş, northern medieval Hungary, the southern regions of the Polish-Lithuanian Kingdom, and northern Moldavia – is defined by Nagy under the general term “Ruthenia.”⁷⁴

The attribution of the binding of the *Hurmuzaki Psalter* to Neamţ Monastery is likewise difficult to verify. In the absence of explicit notes

⁶⁸ *Ibidem*, 139–40.

⁶⁹ Agrigoroaiei, “Le faux problème hussite dans la littérature vieil-roumaine,” in *Receptarea Sfintei Scripturi: între filologie, hermeneutică și traductologie. Lucrările Simpozionului Național „Explorări în tradiția biblică românească și europeană” VII, Iași, 18-20 mai 2017*, eds. Eugen Munteanu et alii (Iași: Editura Universității „Alexandru Ioan Cuza”, 2018), 91–92.

⁷⁰ The term derives from Bogdan I, the founder of the medieval Principality of Moldavia in the 14th century. In certain historical contexts – particularly in foreign sources and in administrative or political documents – the country of Moldavia was referred to as “Bogdania,” meaning “the land of Bogdan.”

⁷¹ Mareş, *Cărți populare*, 141.

⁷² Pandeale Olteanu, *Floarea darurilor sau Fiore di virtù* (Timișoara: Editura Mitropoliei Banatului, 1992), 188–92.

⁷³ Dumitran, “The Context,” 131.

⁷⁴ Nagy Levente, *Reforma la români. Un fenomen de transfer cultural în secolele XVI-XVII* (Oradea: Editura Ratio et Revelatio, 2021), 47–52, 86–91.

concerning the execution of the binding, circulation marks, or other datable elements, the binding cannot be chronologically fixed with certainty. Moreover, no other binding with identical decorative features has so far been identified that would allow the manuscript to be securely assigned to a specific ornamental group produced in the same workshop and period. The recorded similarities concern only general types of decoration – such as the lotus blossom, the eight-petalled rosette, and the triple fillet – motifs that also appear on other bindings, for instance in the Slavonic manuscript *Dragomirna 1816/727*, a 16th-century Menaion from Câmpulung.⁷⁵ This points rather to a style characteristic of the period.⁷⁶ In addition, the structural features of the binding – wooden boards, embroidered headbands, and the method of attaching the text block – suggest affiliation with the broadly diffused Byzantine type of binding, a typological category too widespread to allow for precise localization within a particular workshop. Under these conditions, the mere presence of similar decorative motifs is insufficient to establish the provenance of the binding, since the identification of a common ornamental group requires exact correspondence in form, dimensions, and detail, not simply inclusion within the same class of motifs. At most, one may propose that the binding dates from the 16th century, possibly even the early 17th century, without being able to assert that it is contemporary with the manuscript itself or that it was produced at Neamț.⁷⁷

However, even if we were to accept the hypothesis that the *Hurmuzaki Psalter* was bound at Neamț Monastery – and, by extension, that it was intended for use within this monastic setting – there are no solid grounds for asserting the absence of a local scribe capable of producing such a manuscript, especially given the major cultural importance of the monastery and the well-documented vitality of its scriptorium during this period.⁷⁸

Moreover, the validity of the analogy between the *Hurmuzaki Psalter* and the Tetraevangelion copied on Mount Athos in 1537 for the Bistrița Monastery in Vâlcea must be nuanced in light of the view formulated by Zlatca Iuffu, who argues that the recourse to an Athonite scriptorium was

⁷⁵ Zlatca Iuffu, “Manuscrisele slave din Biblioteca și Muzeul Mănăstirii Dragomirna,” *Romanoslavica* 13 (1966): 191.

⁷⁶ Luminița-Angela Vasilescu, “Ornamente bizantine în legătura românească veche (secolele XV–XVII)” (PhD diss., University of Bucharest, 2018), 159.

⁷⁷ My sincere thanks to Luminița Kövari for the insightful discussion we have had on this subject.

⁷⁸ Александр Д. Паскаль, “Писцы и книжники молдавского монастыря Нямц в XV–XVI вв.,” *Кирило-Методиевски студии* 32 (2022): 231–56.

prompted by the absence of a specialist in the Serbian recension within the Ungro-Vlachian monastery.⁷⁹ From this perspective, if the reason for copying at Mount Athos was strictly related to a specific philological specialisation, this particular case – stemming from a different period and a different ecclesiastical context – cannot be used as decisive proof for situating the genesis of the *Hurmuzaki Psalter* within an Athonite environment.

In turn, the hypothesis that the translation of the Psalter was prompted by the growing number of Aromanians in the Athonite monasteries also presents significant weaknesses. First, the production of a Romanian version on Mount Athos for the Aromanians' use is difficult to justify: these communities were already integrated into the Greek liturgical milieu and were familiar with biblical and liturgical texts in Greek.

The theory implicitly assumes the presence of Romanian scribes active in the Athonite environment. While it is true that the presence of Moldavian monks from the monasteries of Bistrița and Neamț is attested in a dependency (*metochion*) of the Zographou Monastery granted to Bistrița⁸⁰ in the second decade of the 15th century, the available evidence does not allow us to determine the specific roles these monks fulfilled within the monastery. It remains unclear whether they included experienced scribes or scholars capable of undertaking a complex translation such as that of the Psalter into Romanian. Moreover, all the manuscripts donated by Stephen the Great to the Zographou Monastery were produced in Moldavia.⁸¹

Nor does the hypothesis of a translation carried out for Moldavia, in response to the presence of a significant number of Aromanian novices in local monasteries, rely on explicit historical evidence. The available documentation does not attest to an Aromanian concentration of such scale as to necessitate a Romanian translation of the Psalter. Moreover, south-Danubian migration to the north of the Danube was markedly multiethnic

⁷⁹ Ioan Iufu, *Manuscrise slavo-române din mănăstirile românești* (București: Editura Universității București, 2016), 58.

⁸⁰ Георги Р. Парпулов and Ралф Клеминсън, “Румънци и славяни на Света гора през 1416 г.,” *Paleobulgarica*/Старобългаристика 2 (2011): 60–61, 63–64; Dan Ioan Mureșan, “Sauver l’heritage d’Eutyme de Târnovo. Le Patriarche Joseph II, la Moldavie et Zographou,” in *Religious Bloom : Bulgaria 13th–15th c. Proceedings of the International Scholars Conference Sofia, 12–13 July 2019*, eds. M. Scarpa, S. Batalova and M.-H. Blanchet (Sofia: Cyrillo-Methodian Research Centre, 2021), 115–17.

⁸¹ See: Valentina Pelin, “Manuscrise din domnia lui Ștefan cel Mare (I),” *Analele Putnei* 3, no. 2 (2007): 105–22; idem, “Manuscrise din domnia lui Ștefan cel Mare (II),” *Analele Putnei* 4, no. 2 (2008): 249–326.

– encompassing Greeks, Albanians, Aromanians, and Orthodox Slavic populations – and unfolded continuously from the second half of the 14th century to the turn of the 18th century. Its peak intensity, however, belongs to the 16th and 17th centuries, thus postdating the translation of the Psalter, if one accepts a 15th-century dating, or one situated at the transition between the 15th and 16th centuries.⁸² From this perspective, any direct correlation between Aromanian migration and the initiative to translate the Psalter remains insufficiently grounded, both chronologically and in terms of the available documentary evidence.

However, it cannot be excluded that the scribe was of Aromanian origin or at least familiar with Greek. If we assume that the translation and copying of the Psalter took place within a monastic community, we must bear in mind that such environments were typically heterogeneous, both ethnically and in terms of geographical background – especially among monks engaged in intellectual and artistic activities. This diversity made it entirely possible for linguistic features drawn from different idioms to converge within the same milieu.

For example, on the basis of certain spellings considered deviant, the copyist of the *Psalter of Voroneț* has been identified as being of Ruthenian origin. Yet, he may well have been responding to a copying initiative promoted by the former Metropolitan of Moldavia Grigore Roșca.⁸³ Similarly, in the case of the *Hurmuzaki* Psalter, it has also been suggested that the copyist may have belonged to a different ethnic background.⁸⁴

Finally, the heterogeneous character of the language of the *Hurmuzaki* Psalter cannot, however, be explained solely by reference to ethnically and geographically diverse monastic milieus. It should also be noted that in Moldavia cultural patronage was largely concentrated within the boyar circles, which tended to favour works aligned with the prestigious models of Balkan or Western culture. Moreover, as already noted, a *scripta* emerges through the deliberate orientation of an author toward a linguistic model perceived as authoritative, shaped by imitation and convergence rather than by mere dialectal coincidence. Such diversity of geographical origin is not specific to monastic communities alone, but is equally

⁸² Lidia Cotovanu, “L’émigration sud-danubienne vers la Valachie et la Moldavie et sa géographie (XVe–XVIIe siècles): La potentialité heuristique d’un sujet peu connu,” *Cahiers balkaniques* 42 (2014), <http://journals.openedition.org/ceb/4772>, accessed March 10, 2026.

⁸³ Mareș, “Copistul Psaltirii Voronețene,” *Limba română* 70, no. 3–4 (2021): 501–7.

⁸⁴ Rosetti, “Observații asupra textului,” 523; see also Ștefan Ciobanu, *Începuturile scrișului în limba românească* (București: Monitorul Oficial și Imprimeriile Statul, 1941), 55–57.

characteristic of princely courts, where individuals from different regions frequently interacted. In these conditions, there are no compelling linguistic grounds for excluding the hypothesis that the rhotacizing Psalters may have been produced in such a context – for instance, at the court of Stephen the Great.

Conclusions

Data resulting from filigree analysis provide only a relative chronological framework, useful for outlining a probable interval for the copying of the *Hurmuzaki Psalter*, but insufficient for establishing with precision either the moment of its transcription or the cultural milieu in which it was produced. Consequently, relying exclusively on material support as a criterion for localization or dating is risky, as it can lead to premature conclusions. At the current stage of research, the dating of the *Hurmuzaki Psalter* should therefore be considered with caution, placing its copying at the transition between the 15th and 16th centuries.

From a philological perspective as well, the mixed character of the dialectal features exhibited by the *Hurmuzaki Psalter* cannot, at present, serve as a decisive argument for its precise localization. A cautious approach remains necessary, one that avoids anachronistic linguistic interpretations.

The hypothesis of an Athonite origin for the primitive translation remains methodologically fragile, given the absence of explicit textual or historical evidence attesting to the existence of a Romanian translation programme at Mount Athos. While the subsequent circulation of copies within the Athonite milieu cannot be excluded, there is no conclusive evidence for locating the act of translation itself in that context. This hypothesis thus appears less plausible than that of an origin within the monastic milieu of the Romanian lands. By extension, the assumption that the *Hurmuzaki Psalter* was copied at the Zographou Monastery rests primarily on indirect arguments – linked to the circulation of paper and to insufficiently demonstrated monastic connections – and is not supported by the modest physical aspect of the manuscript.

Taken as a whole, the historical data indicate that 15th-century Moldavia stood at the intersection of diverse intellectual currents, within which initiatives to translate sacred texts may be understood as part of a broader movement toward the vernacularisation of biblical literature for didactic and devotional purposes. These correlations, however, do not at present provide a proper basis for a secure localisation.

None of the hypotheses advanced so far proves fully convincing, and the arguments invoked remain, to a large extent, open to reinterpretation. A critical reassessment of these theories, in light of the cultural realities of the period, is therefore necessary. Without privileging any single solution, it is reasonable to conclude that the question remains open.