

ABOUT THE TYPOGRAPHICAL ACTIVITY OF MIHAIL ȘTEFAN (STEPANESHVILI). CONSIDERATIONS AND ASSESSMENTS

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Abstract. Mihail Ștefan (c. 1650–c. 1720), an outstanding printer, engraver, translator, scholar, and theologian, enriched the Romanian Principalities with a number of landmark printed works and provided Georgia with the first books ever printed on its soil. In both countries, the Romanian printer made significant contributions to the promotion and development of their cultural and spiritual heritage.

Through the books he printed—embellished with remarkable engraved title pages and illustrations of exceptional artistic quality—Mihail Ștefan contributed not only to the enrichment of the cultural heritage of both Romania and Georgia, but also to the continuation and advancement of the Romanian printing tradition. By the time he arrived in Tbilisi (Kartli) in 1708, this tradition had already been established in his native Wallachia for nearly two centuries.

His knowledge of Romanian, Church Slavonic, and Greek enabled **Mihail Ștefan** to become thoroughly acquainted not only with the themes of medieval religious literature and the books printed in these three languages on Romanian soil up to his own time, but also with the principal theological works of Byzantine origin.

Having learned the craft of printing at Târgoviște, the typographer Mihail Ștefan subsequently worked in the princely printing houses of Bucharest and Snagov, as well as in the printing house of the Metropolitanate of Bucharest and in the printing house of the Metropolitanate of Bălgrad, in Transylvania, with the blessing of Metropolitan Teodosie of Wallachia. He then continued his activity in the printing house of the Bishopric of Râmnic, where Antimoz Iverieli served as bishop between 1705 and 1708, and subsequently in Georgia.

In Tbilisi, Georgia, Mihai/Mihail Ungrovlăhitul (Mihail of Ungro-Wallachia) established the first printing house in the country, where he printed the first books produced on Georgian soil, thereby laying the foundations for enduring cultural relations between Romania and Georgia, two nations united since that time by their common Christian cultural and spiritual values.

Keywords: religious literature; printing house; books printed; spiritual heritage.

Introduction. In the Romanian consciousness of the medieval period, printing was regarded as “a treasure more precious than all earthly treasures. For gold, silver, and precious stones” (Bianu, Hodoș, 1903: 105), wrote Prince Matei Basarab of Wallachia in the Preface to the Church Slavonic Psalter printed in 1637, “are earthly treasures; they adorn only the transitory course of time, whereas this treasure adorns the souls of men” (Bianu, Hodoș, 1903: 105).

Accordingly, among the Romanians the printed book came to be perceived as one of these precious treasures of the human soul. Through his printed works, Mihail Ștefan likewise enriched and ennobled the spiritual life of both the Romanian and the Georgian peoples.

Only fifty years after the appearance of printing — invented by Gutenberg — the “first book” (**Simonescu, Buluță**, 1981: 6) was printed on the territory of our country, namely the *Liturgier* of the Hieromonk Macarie, printed in 1508 at Târgoviște, the residence of the rulers of Wallachia between 1396 and 1714. Târgoviște thus became the “first Romanian printing centre” (Nițulescu, 2009: 8), where, through the books printed there, the foundations were laid not only for that Romanian cultural “Renaissance,” but also for the creation of a prestigious school “of Romanian master printers who also worked in Transylvania” (Nițulescu, 2009: 8).

One of these master printers was Mihail Ștefan (c. 1650–c. 1720), who, in 1699, printed at Bălgrad (Alba Iulia) two books in Romanian: the *Bucoavna* (*Primer*), regarded as “the oldest Romanian schoolbook” (Nițulescu, 2009: 111), and the *Chiriadodromion*, “a new edition of the *Cazania* printed by Varlaam at Iași in 1643” (Nițulescu, 2009: 111).

Both books were printed by Mihail Ștefan in Transylvania, where other “branches of the Romanian nation” (Iorga, 1914: 8) lived, at the expense of Prince Constantin Brâncoveanu of Wallachia. At that time, the Romanians of Transylvania were under Habsburg rule and were in danger of losing not only their ancestral Orthodox faith but also their Romanian ethnic identity as a result of the expansionist and proselytising policies promoted by the temporary rulers of that ancient Romanian land, who belonged to the Calvinist, Lutheran, and Roman Catholic confessions.

Romanian culture, disseminated through the printed book—which, during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, was almost exclusively religious in character—distinguished itself “through its openness and generosity” (**Simonescu, Buluță**, 1981: 6) and “spread the light of printing as far as Georgia and Syria through the work of such printers as Anthim the Iberian and Mihai, son of Ștefan” (**Simonescu, Buluță**, 1981: 6).

From the *Liturgikon* printed by the Hieromonk Macarie in 1508, the first printed book produced in the Romanian lands, to the Gospel Book (*Tetraevangelion*) printed in Georgia by the hypodeacon Mihail Ștefan in 1709, more than two centuries had elapsed during which the Romanians continued to accumulate these treasures of the mind and the soul, namely books.

The earliest document attesting the triumph of the Romanian written language over Greek and Church Slavonic in the Romanian lands is Neacșu's Letter from Câmpulung (Wallachia), addressed to the mayor of Brașov, Johannes (Hans) Benkner, on 29–30 June 1521, although it was still written in the Cyrillic alphabet.

Twenty-three years later, the first book in the Romanian language printed on Romanian soil appeared, namely the *Romanian Catechism* (Bianu, Hodoș, 1903: 20), published in 1544 by the Romanian printer Filip Moldoveanul (c. 1500–1554/1555) in Sibiu. In the municipal records of Sibiu (Transylvania), where the book was printed, he is identified as “Filipp Pictor” (“Philip the Painter”). He had studied Latin theology and had acquired the craft of printing within the academic milieu of Kraków.

This *Romanian Catechism*, regarded as “the first book printed in the Romanian language throughout the entire Romanian cultural area” (**Eșanu, Eșanu V.**, 2019: 7), was followed, in 1546, by the *Gospel Book* printed in Church Slavonic, likewise produced by Filip Moldoveanul. This edition contains several engravings, which testify to his remarkable skill as an engraver. Indeed, the engraved portraits of the Four Evangelists demonstrate that Filip Moldoveanul was also an accomplished artist, whose engravings were unique among the books printed during the sixteenth century, both in Romanian and in Church Slavonic (**Demény**, 1969: 229-241).

The Lutheran Saxon priest Adalbertus Wvurmloch of Bistrița (Transylvania) wrote, in a letter sent in 1546 to the Lutheran pastor J. Hesus of Breslau, that in Transylvania there existed *quaedam gens non solum moribus et lingua, sed in religione a nobis diversa, quam walachos nominamus* (“a people differing from us not only in customs and language, but also in religion, whom we call Wallachians”) (Bianu, Hodoș, 1903: 22). It was precisely for this Romanian population that, in 1561, the deacon Coresi, a printer from Wallachia (Ungro-Wallachia), printed at Sibiu a *Tetraevangelion* in the Romanian language.

From Coresi's *Tetraevangelion*, printed in Romanian in 1561 for the Romanians of Transylvania, to which the Saxon Lutheran priest explicitly referred, to the *Tetraevangelion* printed in Georgian by our compatriot Mihail Ștefan at Tbilisi in 1709, 148 years had passed, during which Romanian printing achieved recognition and prestige beyond the borders of the Romanian lands through the books issued from its presses.

It is also worth noting that Coresi's *Tetraevangelion*, printed at Brașov in 1561, bears the coat of arms of Wallachia, displaying the great eagle as a clear indication of the printer's homeland. By contrast, the books printed by Mihail Ștefan in Georgia bear only the coat of arms of the Principality of Kartli, thereby affirming the identity of the country in which the Romanian printer produced the first books ever printed on Georgian soil.

I. On the Prefaces and Epilogues of the Books Printed by Mihail Ștefan

The books printed by Mihail Ștefan both in the Romanian Lands (Wallachia and Transylvania) and in Georgia were accompanied by prefaces and epilogues written and signed by the printer himself. These texts portray the Romanian printer not only as a promoter of printing and Romanian book culture, but also as the printer of the first books produced in the Georgian alphabet at Tbilisi, where he established the first printing house on Georgian soil. Through this achievement, together with Antimoz Iverieli, he laid the foundations of official cultural and spiritual relations between the two countries, Romania and Georgia (Dură, 2017: 191-200).

His poetic compositions in verse—which continued a literary tradition already established in the odes and epigrams of distinguished seventeenth-century scholars from the Romanian Lands, such as Udriște Năsturel, Varlaam, and Dosoftei—his political verses dedicated to Constantin Brâncoveanu, Prince of Wallachia, and to Prince Vakhtang VI of Kartli, who would later reign as king (1716–1724), his introductory verses dedicated to the Holy Trinity and to saints of the Eastern Church, together with the engravings and ornamental title pages accompanying them, define Mihail Ștefan as both a consummate master printer and a poet belonging to the tradition of medieval versifiers.

It is therefore no coincidence that Mihail Ștefan (Mikheil Stepaneshvili), or Iștvanovici, as some historians and philologists prefer to refer to the founder of Georgian printing, was also the printer of Shota Rustaveli's monumental masterpiece *The Knight in the Panther's Skin*, published in 1712.

Indeed, among the thirteen books printed by Mihail Ștefan at Tbilisi between 1709 and 1713 was also Shota Rustaveli's (Georgian Encyclopedia) work. The last book printed entirely by Mihail Ștefan on Georgian soil was, however, the *Euchologion*, or *Prayer Book* (*Εὐχολόγιον / Kurtkhevani*), printed in the spring of 1713, before the exile of Prince Vakhtang VI to Persia. The final stage of printing Rustaveli's masterpiece, *The Knight in the Panther's Skin*, and its release from the press were carried out by one of Mihail Ștefan's Georgian apprentices, whom he had instructed and trained in the art of printing.

Thus, the claim made by some Georgian scholars that “**Ishtvanovich remained in Georgia from 1708 to 1711**” (Kavtaria, 2025: 322) is not supported by the historical evidence. Although the historian Nino Kavtaria acknowledges that “**in the colophons of the Tbilisi books**” (Kavtaria, 2025: 324) we find the statement that these books were printed by Stepaneshvili, and that the Preface to the Gospel Book (*Tetraevangelion*) printed

in Tbilisi in 1709 specifies that it was produced **“by the hands of the typographer Mihail, son of Stepane [Stepaneshvili] from Ungro-Wallachia”** (Kavtaria, 2025: 323), the Georgian historian nevertheless maintains that Mihail Ștefan bore the name **“Ishtvanovich in Wallachia”** (Kavtaria, 2025: 324). It is true that he also bore this name; however, he was equally, and indeed more frequently, known and identified by the name **Mihail Ștefan**, as he was called by his Romanian contemporaries.

It is therefore not surprising that some Georgian historians have even asserted that the poems appended to his books were **“probably composed in Tbilisi”** (Kavtaria, 2025: 325), although the very same poems are found in the books printed by Mihail Ștefan in Wallachia.

The fact that some books printed by Mihail, the son of Ștefan from Ungro-Wallachia, lack decorative elements (Kavtaria, 2025: 329), such as the Psalter of 1709, may also be explained by the circumstance that the *editio princeps* has not survived, and that only copies of later impressions have been preserved. That Mihail Ștefan adorned his printed books with engravings, headpieces, and other ornamental elements is conclusively demonstrated by another work printed in the same year, namely the **Apostolos** (τὸ Ἀπόστολος βιβλίον), which contains **“the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles included in the New Testament, from which the liturgical pericopes are read before the Gospel during the celebration of the Divine Liturgy”** (Braniște, Braniște Ec., 2001: 44).

This book contains numerous engravings, including: **“1) Pentecost (p. 4) (Fig. 9); 2) the portrait of the Holy Apostle Paul (p. 78), next to which appears the inscription ‘By the hand of the sinful archdeacon Markoz’ (Khelita chem tsodvili mtavardiakon Markozisata); 3) the Holy Apostle James (p. 249); 4) the Holy Apostle Peter (p. 259); 5) the Holy Apostle John (p. 275); 6) the Holy Apostle Jude (p. 287); 7) the portrait of King Vakhtang (p. 422), which is identical to the one printed in the Gospel”** (Kavtaria, 2025: 329), among others.

With regard to their artistic style, these engravings reflect both Romanian and Georgian medieval artistic traditions, thereby providing art historians with a fertile field for comparative study. Indeed, Georgian scholars have also observed that „the typographer’s colophon in the Liturgikon is followed by a Greek inscription. It is assumed that the Greek font was brought from Wallachia by Ishtvanovich. This edition of the Liturgikon is also interesting in that it contains a Romanian poem presumably composed by Ishtvanovich and printed in Mkhedruli type” (Kavtaria, 2025: 330).

The same Georgian scholars have also observed that „the engravings of the Liturgikon still bear a great resemblance to the compositions contained in the books printed in Wallachia (in particular, the *Crucifixion* and *Christ Blessing*). The image of the *Crucifixion* (Fig. 11) is an exact copy of the engraving included in the Euchologion printed in 1706 at Râmnic (Fig. 12)” (Kavtaria, 2025: 330).

We should also note that the **Horologion** (τὸ Ὡρολόγιον)—corresponding to the **Breviarium** in the Roman Catholic tradition—was printed by Mihail Ștefan in Tbilisi in 1710 and contains the services of the Seven Canonical Hours: (1) Vespers, (2) Compline, (3) the Midnight Office, (4) Matins, (5) the First Hour, (6) the Third and Sixth Hours, and (7) the Ninth Hour.

The **Horologion** printed in Tbilisi contains twenty-one engravings (the Holy Trinity, the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, etc.). It also includes a portrait of Prince Vakhtang VI (Kavtaria, 2025: 331), which, in all probability, was engraved by local craftsmen, since Georgia possessed „various fields of fine arts, including miniature and fresco, is attested in the 17th and 18th centuries in Kartli” (Kavtaria, 2025: 331).

It has also been observed that, in the Psalter printed by Mihail Ștefan in 1711, **“the Psalms are preceded by a poem in Greek dedicated to the biblical King David”** (Kavtaria, 2025: 332), and that the illustrations of the Psalter include two portraits, that of the Prophet David and that of King Vakhtang.

As for the portrait of the Prophet David, it is in fact a reproduction of the one featured in the Psalter printed at the Princely Printing House in Bucharest in 1694 by **“Anthim the Iberian, the printer”** (Bianu, Hodoș, 1903: 337). Ioan Bianu and Nerva Hodoș pointed out that **“the engraver of the 1694 edition,”** namely Antimoz Iverieli, **“used as his model an earlier drawing dating from the time of Matei Basarab. This engraving was also reproduced in the Greek Anthologion printed by Antimoz Iverieli at Snagov in 1697”** (Bianu, Hodoș, 1903: 337) published by **“Ἀνθίμου ἱερομονάχου τοῦ ἐξ Ἰβηρίας”** (Anthim, the hieromonk from Iberia) (Bianu, Hodoș, 1903: 349).

All this evidence indicates that Mihail Ștefan transferred into the books he printed in Tbilisi part of the artistic heritage of the books printed in the Romanian Principalities during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, which were adorned not only with images of Saints but also with portraits of the Princes. Thus, through his work as an engraver, Mihail Ștefan succeeded in creating a link between the two engraving traditions, those of Wallachia and Kartli.

In 1713, a Euchologion came off the presses of Mihail Ștefan’s printing house in Tbilisi. Following his sudden departure from Georgia in the spring of that year, however, the book was issued under the name of one of his disciples. Therefore, a genuine *restitutio in integrum* of Mihail Ștefan’s contribution to the printing of the first books in the Georgian language is required. Such a reassessment must also acknowledge that he not only established the printing house and pioneered book printing in Georgia, but also founded a school of printers, whose direct disciples continued printing books in that same press until 1723.

The **Euchologion**, or **Book of Needs (Molitfelnic)**, is a liturgical book containing the services of the Holy Mysteries (Sacraments), the rites of blessings and other sacred offices (*ierurgies*), as well as, in most editions, the Prayers of Saint Basil the Great. It was compiled gradually, **“beginning in the fourth century and continuing until about the ninth century. It is based on the manuscript texts attributed to Saint James, Saint Mark, and the (abridged) liturgy contained in the Apostolic Constitutions ... as well as the liturgies of Saint Basil the Great, Saint John Chrysostom, and Saint Gregory the Dialogist (fourth–sixth centuries)”** (Braniște, Braniște Ec., 2001: 309).

The Romanian Metropolitan **Petru Movilă of Kiev** printed a Church Slavonic **Book of Needs** in 1646, entitled **Trebnik**, which is **“the richest in the variety of its services and prayers”** (Braniște, Braniște Ec., 2001: 309). For this reason, it became a primary documentary source in the specialized literature of Southeastern Europe.

In 1706, Mihail Ștefan printed a **Book of Needs** at the printing house of the Bishopric of Râmnic **“in our Romanian language”** (*Predoslovia la Molitfelnic*) (Bianu, Hodoș, 1903: 542), at the expense of **“Kyr Anthim the Iberian, Bishop of Râmnic”** (Bianu, Hodoș, 1903: 541). From the title page we also learn that the **Book of Needs** was compiled **“according to the Greek order”** (Bianu, Hodoș, 1903: 541), that is, according to the Greek Euchologia that were in use in Wallachia at that time.

Both the title of the work and its preface, signed by the hypodeacon Mihail Ștefan, reveal that the **“printer”** Mihail Ștefan possessed a solid knowledge not only of the Greek language but also of the history of printing in the Romanian lands.

As may also be seen from the prefaces and colophons printed at the Râmnic press, Mihail Ștefan (Ishtvanovich / Stepaneshvili) was not **“an apprentice of Anthim”** (Georgian Encyclopedia) but rather one of Anthim the Iberian’s collaborators. Both of them, however, had been disciples of Bishop Mitrofan, **“the maker of printing types”** (Bianu, Hodoș, 1903: 245). It was through Anthim, nevertheless, that Mihail Ștefan became acquainted with the Georgian alphabet and culture.

As also attested by several distinguished Georgian scholars, the books printed by Mihail Ștefan in Georgia were accompanied by **“illustrations (engravings). Every aspect of the technical execution – good**

paper, excellent binding, and decoration – is a masterpiece of the art of that time” (Georgian Encyclopedia). Some of these illustrations had been brought by Mihail Ștefan from Bucharest to serve as models for the books he was to print in Tbilisi.

This fact, however, does not exclude the use of engraving models derived from numerous centuries-old Georgian manuscripts, which were skilfully made available to him by the learned hieromonk Nikoloz, the editor of the Romanian printer’s books.

In the present study, we have also sought to highlight the contribution of Antimoz Iverieli and Mihail Ștefan to the establishment of the cultural and spiritual relations between our Churches and countries. For this reason, they may rightly be regarded as the principal founding fathers of these relations, together with the two princes, Constantin Brâncoveanu and Vakhtang VI.

II. Who is Mihail Ștefan (Mikheil Stepaneshvili)?!

Mihail Ștefan (Mikheil Stepaneshvili) was the person that, beyond of his reach activity in the field of printing books in the two Romanian Principalities, Wallachia and Transylvania, he was the first one that installed the first Printing press on Georgian soil, and printed Georgian books, contributing thus not only to the promotion of the Georgian language and culture (sacred and secular) beyond the frontiers of the Kingdom of Kartli, but also to the promotion of the cultural and spiritual relations between Georgia and Romania.

The prefaces and colophons of his printed works attest to several onomastic variants of his name, namely: **Mihai Ștefanovici; Mihai Iștvanovici**, hypodeacon; **Mihai Ungrovlahul, the son of Ștefan; Mihail Stepaneshvili**; or **Stepanidze** (Pavel, 2021: 93).

Over the years, Romanian biographers have maintained that Mihail Ștefan was **“the one from Ungro-Wallachia”**. More recently, however, some scholars—either because they themselves are of Transylvanian origin or because they have displayed a confessional partisanship—have been inclined to regard him as **a printer of Transylvanian origin** (Pavel, 2021: 94) that is, a Romanian from Transylvania, although they have produced no documentary evidence whatsoever in support of this claim. Moreover, Mihail Ștefan himself stated, both in the books printed in Wallachia and Transylvania and in those printed in Tbilisi (Georgia), that he was **“from Ungro-Wallachia,”** that is, a Vlach (Romanian) from Ungro-Wallachia (Wallachia).

According to some historians of Romanian literature, Mihail Ștefan was the son of the Vlach Ștefan of Ohrid, a printer who published books **“between 1638 and 1651 at Govora, Câmpulung, and Bălgrad (Alba Iulia)”** (Pavel, 2021: 95). In their opinion, this would explain both **“the addition of the patronymic suffix -ovici to the Hungarianized form of his father’s name”** (Pavel, 2021: 95) and Mihail Ștefan’s typographical activity at Târgoviște, Bucharest, Snagov, and Bălgrad (Alba Iulia).

As for the printer Ștefan of Ohrid, the **Church Slavonic Psalter with the Horologion and Paschalion**, printed at the Princely Printing House of Govora Monastery (Vâlcea) in 1638 **“by the command and at the expense of Prince Matei Basarab of Ungro-Wallachia”** (Bianu, Hodoș, 1903: 533), states that its printer was **“the most sinful among hieromonks, Ștefan of Ohrid”** (Bianu, Hodoș, 1903: 106).

From the information preserved in the title, the preface and the epilogue of this book, it is evident that the printer, Ștefan of Ohrid, had an excellent command of the Romanian language. This leads us to believe that he was one of the Vlachs living in the Ohrid region who had taken refuge with his family in Wallachia because of the Ottoman occupation. Nevertheless, one question remains unanswered. Since the printer Ștefan was a hieromonk—that is, a monk who was also an ordained priest—it would normally be assumed that he had no children, unless he entered monastic life at a later stage, after the death of his wife, having withdrawn to a monastery thereafter.

From the preface to this Psalter, signed by Prince Matei Basarab, it is evident that this Church Slavonic book was intended “for the Orthodox and pious people of our homeland and for other peoples related to us in faith and sharing the same renowned Slavonic dialect as their language” (Bianu, Hodoș, 1903: 534). It was printed by “the least among monks, Meletie the Macedonian, abbot of the coenobitic Monastery of Govora” (Bianu, Hodoș, 1903: 535). The Psalter was therefore a book intended for all those who could read Church Slavonic, thus transcending ethnic boundaries.

As for the printer of this book, Meletie the Macedonian of Govora, the claim has also been advanced that he was “the presumed father of Ștefan” (Pavel, 2021: 95), whose son was the printer Mihai. Hence the conclusion reached by some historians that Mihail Ștefan was “a native of Alba Iulia by birth and Serbian by origin” (Pavel, 2021: 95). However, they overlooked what is in fact the essential point, namely that, from an ethnic perspective, both of his presumed fathers, Ștefan and Meletie, were Vlachs, that is, Romanians, originating from Montenegro, who also carried out typographical work at Govora Monastery in Wallachia.

This assertion, however, is supported by no documentary evidence whatsoever and therefore proves to be nothing more than a *pium desiderium* (a pious wish), namely, an attempt to associate Mihail Ștefan of Bălgrad, by any possible means, with the Serbian ethnic community.

It therefore remains for scholars of early Romanian literature to determine which of these two hieromonks—Ștefan of Ohrid or Meletie the Macedonian—was the printer of the Govora Psalter of 1638 and, *ipso facto*, the presumed father of Mihail Ștefan. Regardless, however, of which of the two was his father, Mihail Ștefan himself was a Vlach (Romanian), even if his family originated from the Vlach communities of the Ohrid region (Macedonia).

The same contemporary historians of Romanian literature maintain that Mihail Ștefan began his apprenticeship in Wallachia alongside Antimoz Iverieli, whom he followed to Snagov Monastery in 1694, where “in 1696” (Pavel, 2021: 96), he printed the book entitled *The Order of the Service of Saints Constantine and Helena*. Mihail Ștefan had, however, mastered the craft of printing before Anthim arrived in Wallachia, that is, before 1690. Nor can the claim be considered credible that, in 1694, Anthim the Iberian brought Mihail Ștefan to Snagov Monastery without any prior knowledge of the printing craft and taught him there from the beginning.

Indeed, however gifted Mihail Ștefan may have been, it is hardly conceivable that within only one or two years he could have printed this book in Church Slavonic, “with the approval of the most illustrious and exalted Lord of all Wallachia, Ioan Constandin B. Basarab Voievod” (Bianu, Hodoș, 1903: 341), while the head of the Church in Wallachia at that time was “His Most Holy Kyr Teodosie, Metropolitan of the Land and Exarch of the Regions” (Bianu, Hodoș, 1903: 341).

It is also worth noting that the preface to the book *The Order of the Service of Saints Constantine and Helena*—which in fact consists of words of gratitude addressed to Prince Constantin Brâncoveanu—is signed by “your Highness’s humble and devoted servant Mihai” (Bianu, Hodoș, 1903: 341-342), through which he dedicated “this little book” (Bianu, Hodoș, 1903: 342) to him. As may readily be observed, no mention is made of the hieromonk Anthim, abbot of Snagov Monastery; instead, reference is made only to Metropolitan Teodosie, who is said to have composed the liturgical service entitled *Paraklesis* and ordered that it be inserted at the end of the book so that it might “be chanted on the feast day of the Saints wherever the church bears the dedication” (Bianu, Hodoș, 1903: 343) of Saints Constantine and Helena.

It may well have been precisely the fact that this book was printed with the approval of the Prince of the country and with the blessing of Metropolitan Teodosie that prompted Mihail Ștefan to speak of “the care of my honorable spiritual father and gracious teacher, Anthim the Iberian” (Bianu, Hodoș, 1903: 342), the abbot of Snagov Monastery and the head of the princely printing house in that ancient monastic foundation.

It is not known, however, whether this “servant of His Highness, the printer Mihai,” who printed *The Order of the Service of Saints Constantine and Helena* in Church Slavonic “with the approval of the most illustrious and exalted Lord of all Wallachia, Ioan Konstantind B. Basarab Voievod” (Bianu, Hodoș, 1903: 341), and with the blessing of “His Most Holy Teodosie, Metropolitan of the Land” (Bianu, Hodoș, 1903: 341), was in fact one and the same person as the printer Mihail Ștefan, who signed his printed works with both his given name and surname, and not merely with his given name (Mihai).

This question therefore remains to be clarified, and only when reliable documentary evidence has been discovered will it be possible to determine whether that “humble and devoted servant Mihai” was indeed the same person as Mihail Ștefan. Until then, the two Mihai’s cannot be identified as one and the same individual, namely Mihail Ștefan, who had already proved himself at that time to be a skilled master printer, and the novice Mihai, who was still serving his apprenticeship under Abbot Anthim at Snagov.

As for the Psalter printed by Anthim the Iberian in 1694, it was not “a new translation”; consequently, “Anthim was content merely to revise an older text and to add several prayers” (Bianu, Hodoș, 1903: 337; Picot, 1889: 531 n. 3) which had themselves already been circulating in Liturgicons and Euchologia since the time of the Metropolitans Teofil (1636–1648) and Ștefan (1648–1653) of Wallachia. Consequently, the 1694 Psalter printed by Anthim of Iberia was not a translation but merely a reprinting of earlier editions.

It should also be noted that, in 1694, Anthim the Iberian was still in Bucharest and that it was only in 1696 that he began his typographical activity at the Princely Printing House of Snagov Monastery. Consequently, it would not have been possible for the printer Mihail Ștefan to have printed *The Order of the Service of Saints Constantine and Helena* immediately after being brought to Snagov by the hieromonk Anthim, that is in 1696.

That Mihail Ștefan was already an experienced master printer, well established within his craft, is confirmed by the fact that in 1699 he printed two books at Bălgrad (Alba Iulia), the *Bucoavna* and the *Chiriadromion* (Cazania), and subsequently, at the printing house of the Bishopric of Râmnic—where Antimoz Iverieli was bishop—he printed “between 1706 and 1707 seven books, two of which were in Greek” (Pavel, 2018: 472).

This also explains why Mihail Ștefan was recommended both by Bishop Anthim of Râmnic—who, in the spring of 1708, was enthroned as Metropolitan of Wallachia—and by Prince Constantin Brâncoveanu, who, being well acquainted with and appreciative of Mihail Ștefan’s skill and dedication in printing Romanian, Greek, and Church Slavonic books, ordered him to go to Georgia to print the first books in the Georgian language, in response to the explicit request of Prince Vakhtang VI of Kartli.

In the autumn of 1708, Mihail Ștefan arrived—via Bucharest, Bulgaria, and Turkey—in Tbilisi (Tiflis), where, in 1709, he printed the first book on Georgian soil, namely a Gospel Book (*Tetraevangelion*).

From Mihail Ștefan’s own accounts in the Prefaces and Epilogues of the books he printed in Tbilisi, we know that he arrived there “with type and other things necessary for a printing house” (*The Georgian Gospel Book* of 1709) (Pavel, 2018: 472), which he had brought with him from Bucharest, accompanied by some of his Romanian apprentices. We do not know whether these apprentices returned to their homeland or left together with their master, Mihai, for Alba Iulia, especially in view of the fact that, by 1712-1713, the good relations between Metropolitan Antimoz Iverieli and Prince Constantin Brâncoveanu had been strained by the metropolitan's open support for the national party, which favored an alliance with Moscow rather than Vienna against Ottoman expansion.

As regards the printing of the books in Georgian language, Mihail Ștefan was able to bring his meritorious contribution to its promotion by his printing books due certainly to the help of some Georgian scholars, pointed out just by the Prince Vakhtang VI Bagrationi of Kartli, like hieromonk *Nikoloz Orbeliani*, who chose

for his printing books the best manuscripts written in Kartvelian language, and others eminent Georgians writers (theologians, philologists, historians etc.).

In fact, so as *Orbeliani*, a very qualified person, revised the Georgian texts printed by Mihail Ștefan, so did the Romanian scholars of the Church for the texts written or printed in Romanian language by Antimoz Iverieli, as, for example, the hieromonk Mitrofan, his famous teacher of the printing skill and fellow labour of the metropolitan Dosoftei of Suceava (1624-1693), a great scholar who also contributed to the promotion of the Romanian language and its introduction in the Church.

As it is known, even his famous Sermons (*Didahii*), that Antimoz delivered every Sunday in his Cathedral of Bucharest, had to be corrected and stylized by some Romanian grammarians, among which one of these were Steward (Stolnic) Cantacuzino, the brothers Șerban și Radu Greceanu, Mihail Ștefan etc.

From cultural point of view, the people of our countries had the possibility to be acquainted with each other before the epoch of Antimoz Iverieli (cca. 1650 - 1716) and Mihail Ștefan (cca. 1650 – cca. 1720) by the agency of the two great spiritual and culture centers of the Eastern Christianity, that is Jerusalem and Mount Athos, where the Georgians (Kvesitadze; Dură, 2017: 9-61) and Romanians people (Kvesitadze; Dură, 2017: 62-164) were among the first nations.

Owing to the prodigious activity of the two scholars' clerics, namely Antimoz Iverieli and Mihail Ștefan, not only the people of our countries managed to know better each other, and consequently to become more familiar with each other's history, culture and spirituality, but also with other people beyond Europe and Caucasian region, namely in Near East (Jerusalem, Antioch and Alexandria).

The fact that the Georgian Antimoz was brought in Romania by the Greek patriarch of Jerusalem of that time, that is the patriarch Dositheos II Notaras (1669 - 1707), to print books in his Greek language for the benefit of all Christian speakers of Greek, who, in that time, they were under the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the four Greek Patriarchates (Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem), as it is also peremptory proved by the books printed by Antimoz in Greek in the Romania printing presses at the end of the seventeenth century and the beginning of the eighteenth century in the Romanian principality (Wallachia / Ungro-Valahia).

According to both literary and historical sources, Greek and Romanian alike, a young man named Andrew was brought to the Romanian lands by Patriarch Dositheos II Notaras of Jerusalem in either 1680 or 1682 in order to learn the art of printing. He was sent to Moldavia, one of the Romanian principalities, where a printing press for Greek books had been established at the Cetățuia Monastery in Iași with the approval and financial support of Prince Gheorghe Duca of Moldavia.

From the information given to us by the greatest typograph of that epoch, the hieromonk Mitrofan, Andrew, the Georgian, is mentioned only once among his apprentices, and with this name, but it is not known when he was out of his apprenticeship. Probably in 1690, since he printed his first book in 1691.

The renowned printer, Hieromonk Mitrofan, a former disciple and close collaborator of Metropolitan Dosoftei of Moldavia — the distinguished scholar, poet, and printer — was consecrated Bishop of Huși in 1683. Nevertheless, he continued to reside and work at the printing house of the Cetățuia Monastery until 1686, or in 1689 / 1690, when he moved to Bucharest.

According to some Romanian historical sources, Antimoz came together with or after his master in Bucharest to continue to learn better the craftsman of printing. According to other sources, Antimoz Iverieli was sent in Bucharest in 1689 / 1690 by the Patriarch Dositheos of Jerusalem to continue his apprenticeship with his master Mitrofan, former Bishop of Huși, since he intended to print books in Greek for his protector, the Greek patriarch.

As we mention above, during his apprenticeship with his master, typographer Mitrofan, at the Cetățuia Monastery (Iași), that is between 1680/1682 – 1686, we find Antimoz mentioned only once under the name Andrew, as the third apprentice of „hieromonk Mitrofan, the maker of printing type” (Bianu, Hodoș, 1903: 245).

According to the same literary sources, Andrew of Iveria was tonsured as a monk in Wallachia under the name **Antim (Antimoz)**, but, in our opinion, he became monk at the Monastery Cetățuia (Iași). In Bucharest, Antimoz subsequently continued the process of replacing Church Slavonic with Greek and Romanian in the liturgical life of the Romanian Church (Mititelu, 2017: 95–113).

This process had been initiated during the tenure of Metropolitans Teofil (1636–1648) and Ștefan of Ungrovlachia (Wallachia) and was later continued by Metropolitan Teodosie of Ungrovlachia (1668–1672; 1679–1708), who either replaced certain Slavonic liturgical texts with Romanian translations or accompanied the Slavonic text with Romanian translations of selected prayers.

In order to eliminate any connection between the Romanians living north of the Danube and the episcopal sees south of the Danube (Dură, 2001-2002: 5-20), which remained in communion with the Apostolic See of Rome until the time of Patriarch Photius (ninth century), the Byzantines promoted a policy of Slavization of the Vlachs on both sides of the Danube. From the perspective of Byzantine imperial policy, this orientation was regarded as a guarantee of keeping the Vlachs within the sphere of influence of the Byzantine Empire and the Church of Constantinople.

From the twelfth to the thirteenth centuries, the Slavonic language was imposed by the Byzantines as a „lingua sacra” throughout the entire south-eastern European area, but, later on the Slavonic liturgical language was about to be replaced by Greek language (the language of the New Testament, excepting the Evangel after Matthew), including in the Rumanian countries (Wallachia and Moldavia).

As a bishop of the eparchy of Râmnic (Vâlcea) (1705-1708), and then, between 1708-1716, as an archbishop of Bucharest and metropolitan of the Romanian Country (Wallachia), Antimoz Ivereli continued the pastoral activity of his predecessor in these two episcopal Sees, namely of Râmnic and of Bucharest (Wallachia), where the Romanian hierarch Teodosie († 1708) had to fight both against the interests the Phanariotes, and to the despotic behavior of some Greek patriarchs (Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem), who, with the support of some Romanian princes, of Greek ethnic origin, have been managed to graecized Romanian Church, and, as a result, to hasten the replacement of the Slavonic language with Greek in the Church.

Mihail Ștefan, the famous typograph and church writer, one of the outstanding close collaborator of Antimoz Ivereli in the printing presses from Râmnic, Bucharest and Snagov, was in fact well known in all the historical Romanian provinces, namely Wallachia, Moldavia and Transylvania, before the arrival of Antimoz on the Romanian soil. But, from Antimoz Ivereli, Mihail Ștefan had to learn not only his first words in Georgian language, but also the characters of the Georgian alphabet, that he needed in his providential activity as a printer and a founder of a printing press in Georgia.

III. About the books printed by Mihail Ștefan in Georgia

Mihail Ștefan (Mikheil Stepaneshvili) – who, unfortunately, for some Georgians and Romanians is still an enigmatic personage – printed in Tiflis (Georgia) eleven books.

In the year 1709, he printed three books, namely: a) „Sakhareba” (Evangelion), that it was in fact an „Tetraevangelion” (the four Gospels); b) „Davitni” (Psalter) and c) „Samotsikulo” (Apostolos). In the year 1710, he printed another three books, *„in which are included also some verses printed in Romanian language” (as the foreigners are desiring to see their homelands ...)* (Bianu, Hodoș, 1903: 484).

In 1710, the first book printed by the Ungro-Wallachian printer Mikheil Stepaneshvili, also known as the Romanian Mihail Ștefan, in Tbilisi, was a *Kondaki* (Λειτουργικόν / Missal), a liturgical book containing “the texts and chants of the Divine Liturgy and of the preparatory services (Vespers and the Midnight Office)” (Braniște, Braniște Ec., 2001: 266).

The second book printed in 1710 was Zhamni (The Book of Hours, Horologion), which, according to the statement of the editor *Nikoloz Orbeliani*, contained „the *Little Hours Prime, Terce, Sext, and None* and the *Menaion in Greek order*”.

The third book printed by Mihail Ștefan in Tbilisi, in 1710, was the *Loțvani* (*Euchologion*). This liturgical book contained „the rites of the Holy Mysteries and various prayers” (Braniște, Braniște Ec., 2001: 309). In Wallachia, the first Church Slavonic *Molitfelnic* (*Euchologion*) was printed in 1635; later, in 1681, Metropolitan Dosoftei of Moldavia printed the first *Molitfelnic* in the Romanian language.

In 1711, Mihail Ștefan printed three books in all, among them *Biblia Tinastarmetkveli Sakkhdraba*, that is, “The Holy Bible,” which, in reality, contained the Book of the Prophets, the Four Gospels, and the Psalter (*Davitni*), that is two books. Hieromonk Nikoloz Orbeliani, their editor, used the texts of old Georgian manuscripts, a fact which proves that the circulation of the biblical text had a long-standing tradition in the geographical area of Georgia.

In the same year (1711), Mihail Ștefan (Stepaneshvili) printed the third book, namely Germanus’ *Guidebook*, entitled *How a Teacher Should Teach a Student* (*Stsavla tu vitar martebz modzgvarsa stsavleba motsapisa*). In his *Guidebook*, the Georgian hieromonk Germanus also stated that “Prince Vakhtang, defender of the faith of his fathers and protector of Christianity, ..., brought a printing press from Wallachia, which was governed by the Gospodar, that is, the voivode/prince Ioan Constantin Basarab Brâncoveanu” (Machaidze, 2009: 67–68).

At the beginning of 1712, Mihail Ștefan printed the famous work of Shota Rustaveli, *Vepkhistqaosani* (*The Knight in the Panther’s Skin*). Mihail Ștefan’s Georgian apprentice, Michael, the son of the court bishop, had only the task of completing and publishing a book that had already been printed by his master before his departure from Georgia.

In 1713, the second edition of the *Euchologion* (*Book of Needs*) came off the presses of Mihail Ștefan’s printing house in Tbilisi. Although, in the spring of that same year, Mihail Ștefan was compelled to leave Tbilisi after his patron, Prince Vakhtang VI, was removed from power by the Persians, it may be stated without hesitation that Mihail Ștefan should also be recognized as the printer of this book, since his Georgian apprentices did no more than bring it off the press, completing the printing that had been begun under his direction.

Testimonies concerning the deportation of Prince Vakhtang VI to Persia are also found in the catalogues of Georgian manuscripts. For example, in one of them, written in prison by the prince himself, it is stated that: „King Vakhtang was summoned from Kartli to Isfahan and came to the Persian king, [who] forced him to renounce the religion of his fathers/fatherland, and this God-loving king did not obey the order of that oppressor, for this he was put in prison, where he began to write this” (Macharashvili, 2023: 682).

Through these thirteen printed books printed in Georgia, the famous Romanian printer managed to put the basis for a common collaboration between Romanians and Georgians in the culture and spiritual field, becoming thus, alongside with Antimoz Iverieli, one of the main Fathers of the cultural and spiritual relation between Georgians and Romanians.

The assemblage and the putting into operation of that printing press, in Tiflis (Georgia), was indeed the exclusive merit of the great master in the typographical art, that is the Romanian Mihail Ștefan, who, by his *first books printed on the Georgian soil, contributed to the promotion of the Georgian language and culture*

not only in the geographical space of Georgia and the Caucasus, but far beyond of this (Jerusalem, Mount Athos etc.).

IV. The Preface and the Epilogue of the *Sakhareba* (the Evangelion), the First Book Printed by Mihail Ștefan in Georgia

In this chapter, we present the results of our examination and evaluation of the text of the Preface and the Colophon of the first book printed in Georgia by the renowned printer Mihail Ștefan, namely the Gospel Book (*Tetraevangelion*), printed in 1709.

As a rule, the text of this book is—or, more precisely, ought to be—identical in all Orthodox Churches. One Gospel Book differs from another only in the notes left on its pages by printers, translators, or editors. For this very reason, in addition to their documentary, scriptural, theological, and literary significance, these notes constitute valuable testimonies concerning the book's provenance, the language in which it was printed, the style of its authors or editors, and other aspects of its historical and cultural context.

More often than not, Gospel Books differ from one another in the texts of their prefaces and epilogues, as is also the case with the Gospel Book printed by Mihail Ștefan in Georgia in 1709, which provides valuable information concerning the genesis of the work, its printer, the spirit of the age in which it was printed, its role and significance within the society of its time, as well as the impact it had upon its readers. Moreover, the Gospel Book printed by Mihail Ștefan in Tbilisi also highlights the Romanian printer's contribution to the promotion and advancement of Christian culture and spirituality through the Holy Book.

The first book printed by Mihail Ștefan in Georgia was the *Sakhareba* (The Evangelion) (Câdea, 1998: 87), or more precisely a *Tetraevangelion*, that is “a liturgical book containing the pericopes or passages from the four Gospels appointed to be read during the Divine Liturgies and other church services” (Branște, Branște Ec., 2001: 159).

In the Romanian lands, the first Cyrillic *Tetraevangelia* (Ostapczuk, 2022: 47-92) were printed during the sixteenth century. The earliest of these was the *Tetraevangelion* printed at Târgoviște in 1512 by the hieromonk Macarie, which has been regarded as “the prototype and model for the subsequent editions of the Cyrillic Gospel Books printed by Romanians and Serbs” (Ostapczuk, 2022: 50).

According to several historians of Romanian printing, Târgoviște, the capital of Wallachia at that time, had become “the third European Cyrillic printing house, preceding those of Prague (1517), Venice (1519), Gorazde in Herzegovina (1519), Vienna (1521), and other Slavic presses” (Păcurariu, 2016: 13).

The *Tetraevangelion* of 1512, as well as of the first two books printed in the Romanian lands in Church Slavonic—the *Liturgicon* of 1508 and the *Octoechos* of 1510—all three books were printed “by the command and at the expense of Lord Io Basarab, the Great Voivode and ruler of all Wallachia and the lands along the Danube” (Bianu, Hodoș, 1903: 17-18).

Authoritative historians categorically maintain that Macarie was “a Vlach” from Zeta (Montenegro), where, after the Ottoman conquest of the country in 1496, “the activity of the printing house of Cetinje also came to an end” (Păcurariu, 2016: 13), a region in which the Vlach, that is, Romanian, population constituted the majority.

The master printers of the printing house at Cetinje, among them the hieromonk Macarie, who belonged to the Vlach Crnojević (Cernoievici) family, maintained family ties with the ruling family of the Wallachian Prince Radu the Great (1495–1507). Romanian historiography attests that Prince Radu the Great “was married to Princess Cătălina of the Vlach Crnojević family, which ruled in Montenegro” (Păcurariu, 2016: 14), and that “between 1505 and 1508 Maxim Branković, known in secular life as Gheorghe, the son of the last Serbian Despot Stefan Branković, occupied the metropolitan see of Wallachia” (Păcurariu, 2016: 14).

Hence, Maxim Branković, “a cousin (or, according to some, the son of the sister) of Đurađ Crnojević, Prince of Montenegro, was the very person who supported the printing activity at Cetinje” (Păcurariu, 2016: 14). Accordingly, “it cannot be ruled out that Maxim Branković himself recommended the hieromonk-printer Macarie to Prince Radu the Great” (Păcurariu, 2016: 14), the man who established the first printing house in Wallachia and the third printing house in Southeastern Europe.

Scholars specializing in Macarie’s printed works have also observed that their typefaces “do not correspond to those used at Cetinje” (Păcurariu, 2016: 15), since they were produced by “Macarie, assisted by several Romanian monks”, and that the wooden printing blocks used “for the headpieces and initials were likewise carved in Wallachia, taking as their models various Slavo-Romanian manuscripts” (Păcurariu, 2016: 15).

Macarie’s *Liturgicon*, which circulated not only throughout the three Romanian Lands (Wallachia, Moldavia, and Transylvania) but also in the Slavic-speaking countries south of the Danube, remains the first edition of a liturgical book printed on Romanian soil, preceding by twelve years the first edition of the *Liturgicon* in the Greek language, which “appeared only in 1526, in Venice and simultaneously in Rome” (Păcurariu, 2016: 16).

The bibliographers and philologists Ioan Bianu and Nerva Hodoș pointed out that, in Macarie’s *Tetraevangelion*, printed in 1512, the introductory text to the Gospel according to Matthew was in fact a reproduction of the commentary composed on this Gospel by the Greek scholar, Metropolitan Theophylact of Ohrid (Bianu, Hodoș, 1903: 9).

Another distinctive feature of Macarie’s *Tetraevangelion* is “woodcut ornament no. 24 bearing the coat of arms of Wallachia” (Bianu, Hodoș, 1903: 9), which would subsequently reappear—together with the entire ornamental repertoire—in the books printed in Wallachia, including those produced by Antimoz Iverieli and Mihail Ștefan.

In 1561, that is, forty-nine years after the publication of Macarie’s *Tetraevangelion*, the deacon Coresi printed at Brașov the first *Tetraevangelion* in the Romanian language (Bianu, Hodoș, 1903: 45). And, in 1682, while Mihail Ștefan was serving his apprenticeship in the printing houses of Târgoviște and Anthim of Iberia was setting foot on Romanian soil, having been brought to Iași (Cetățuia Monastery) by Patriarch Dositheos of Jerusalem, a Gospel Book (*Tetraevangelion*) in the Romanian language was being printed at the Princely Printing House in Bucharest by “the humblest among hieromonks, Chiriac the Printer” (Bianu, Hodoș, 1903: 251), by the command of, “and entirely at the expense of, the most illustrious and most learned Lord and ruler of all Wallachia, Io Șerban K. Voievod” (Bianu, Hodoș, 1903: 246).

This Romanian *Tetraevangelion* preceded by six years the publication of the Romanian Bible printed in 1688, which crowned the efforts undertaken to print the Holy Scriptures ever since the sixteenth century, more specifically since 1561, when Coresi printed a Gospel Book at Brașov, which it was followed by other liturgical books printed in Romanian, such as the *Didactic Gospel* (*Evanghelia învățătoare*), printed at Govora in 1642, the *New Testament of Bălgrad* (Alba Iulia), printed in Romanian, as well as other Slavo-Romanian editions.

This explains why both Antimoz Iverieli and Mihail Ștefan had at their disposal this rich cultural heritage of the Romanian book, which had initially circulated in manuscript form and was later disseminated through printed editions. Thus, these two leading figures of the cultural and spiritual relations between our countries, Romania and Georgia, continued the work begun centuries earlier by the copyists, translators, and printers of Romanian books.

Their great merit, however, was that they brought the efforts of their predecessors to fruition through works that contributed decisively to the definitive triumph of the Romanian book over the Church Slavonic

one throughout the Romanian Lands. Although the Phanariot period (1711 in Moldavia and 1716 in Wallachia) witnessed the reintroduction of the Greek language not only into the princely chancelleries but also into the Church, it was no longer able to displace Romanian as the official language of either the State or the Church.

At present, just as in the time of Anthim the Iberian and Mihail Ștefan, the *Evangelhion* (Tetraevangelion) contains the texts of pericopes from the four Holy Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John), which are “arranged according to the movable date of Pascha in thirty-six calendrical tables placed at the end of the Gospel Book or *Evangelhion*” (Braniște, Braniște Ec., 2001: 159). These tables explain “how and when the Resurrection Gospels are to be read, together with the tones (that is, the music from the *Octoechos*) and the *voscesne* hymns (the chants and hymns of praise to Christ accompanying the reading of the respective Gospel passage)” (Braniște, Braniște Ec., 2001: 160).

For the present study, we have used one of the two copies of the *Evangelhion* printed by Mihail Ștefan in Tbilisi, which Metropolitan Anthim the Iberian received from Prince Vakhtang VI and which the Primate of the Church of Wallachia presented to Prince Constantin Brâncoveanu.

From the text of the Preface and of the Epilogue of the first book printed in Georgia, that is „Sakhareba”, the reader could retain among other things the fact that this book was for the „first time” printed in Georgia by the „typographer Mihail, son of Stephan, the Ungro-Vlachian” (Bianu, Hodoș, 1903: 543), that is from Wallachia (Romanian country).

Already from the title of the Georgian *Evangelhion*, it was specified that this was “a novelty and the first book printed in the Georgian language” (Bianu, Hodoș, 1903: 543), published at the request of Prince Vakhtang VI and edited by “Nikoloz the monk, son of Orbeli,” while the printer of the book was “Michael, son of Stephen, the Ungro-Wallachian” (Bianu, Hodoș, 1903: 543), that is, the Romanian.

On the verso of the title page, the following lines are found: “Glory to the Holy Trinity! I, Prince Vakhtang, ..., grandson of the renowned and glorious King Vakhtang, son of the most distinguished Levan and governor of Georgia, brought from Ungro-Wallachia a printer and established a printing press as a ransom for the souls of the above-mentioned kings, of my father and mother, for the consolation of my soul and that of my wife Rusidan, ... and for the education of my sons and daughters” (Bianu, Hodoș, 1903: 543). Thus, for Prince Vakhtang, the printing of the Gospel of Christ represented a gift from God, a means for the redemption and forgiveness of the sins of his lineage and family, and also a precious instrument for the Christian religious education of his sons and daughters, and therefore of his entire people.

The fact that, in the homeland of Mihail Ștefan as well, the “divine Gospel” was regarded as “the way and the truth by which we are guided toward the light of life” (Bianu, Hodoș, 1903: 248) and as the book in which “the knowing and practical philosophy is to be found” (Bianu, Hodoș, 1903: 250), is also eloquently attested by the Gospel Book (Tetraevangelion) printed by the hieromonk Chiriacu, the Printer (Bianu, Hodoș, 1903: 251), in 1682 at the princely printing house in Bucharest.

The text of the manuscript of “this sacred and divine book,” that is, the Evangelhion, was selected and proofread “by the Hieromonk Nikoloz Orbeliani,” as he usually did for all the books printed by Mikheil Stepaneshvili in Georgia.

From the Epilogue of this sacred book, that is „The Gospel” printed in „Tiflis” in 1709, we find out that this one was printed by „the humble typographer Ungrovlach Mikheil Stepaneshvili”, as called himself in a monastical spirit both in his native country, and in Georgia, even though, he was not a monk.

With many centuries before, some famous scholars of the first millennium from Mihail Ștefan’s country, such as, for example, the two outstanding personalities of the Christian world of their epoch, the hieromonks John Cassian († 435) (Mititelu, 2018: 316-331) and Dionysius Exiguus († 545) (Dură 1993, 279-290) signed their works with the same appellation, „humilis” (the humble).

Therefore, it is not surprise that Mihail Ștefan considered himself not only a humbly typographer, but also as „Your servant that works with passionate heart”, that is as a devoted servant to the king Vakhtang VI, for whom he worked indeed with sincere and „passionate heart”.

In the text of Epilogue of the Gospel, „the *humble typographer*”, namely Mikheil Stepaneshvili, addressed to the Georgians readers of that sacred book printed by him, with the following words: „Rejoice all who read this!” The word, „Rejoice”, was not only the expression of the joy for his great cultural achievement, but also a manifestation of his spiritual Christian satisfaction, that made him to be „full of joy” (Acts, 2, 28).

According to the testimony left by Mihail Ștefan in the Epilogue of his first book printed in Georgia, „Prince Vakhtang” was „the one who” had „the idea of founding a printing press ... in ... Georgia”. But he added the precision that, for setting up the printing press, it was he, Mihail Ștefan, who created the tools, the machinery and the letterforms. And, put it in his words, „It is me, your useless servant, who has done and runs all these”.

From the statements of Mikheil Stepaneshvili, we have also to retain the fact that the initiative to get a printing press for Georgia belonged to the prince Vakhtang, but only he, in his quality of the master-typograph, was the person who settled down that printing press, created its tools, the machinery and the letterforms, or, according to the words of Mikheil Stepaneshvili, was the one „who has done and runs all these”. In other words, even if he could have brought with him some Romanian apprentices, still, they were not able to do a such work, that is to create the tools and to assemblage of a Printing press.

In the same Epilogue, Mikheil Stepaneshvili confessed that, „before” his arrival „in Georgia”, he didn't travel in Georgia, and he didn't know the Georgian language. But, here is what he wrote: „I knew neither your country, nor your language”. Then, he stated that his Georgian „apprentices were *inexperienced in my art*”, that is, in his typographical art, in which also he also excelled in his native country.

Finally, from the Epilogue of his first printed book, the „Evangelion”, it has to be also retained the fact that in the time of Mikheil Stepaneshvili, the name Georgia was synonym with „Kartli”.

The truthfulness of the statements of Mikheil Stepaneshvili, from the text of the Preface and the Epilogue of the Gospel, it was certified by the editor of this book, namely by the hieromonk Nikoloz Orbeliani who, in his editorial Note, said - among others things - that he was a „nephew of the pious King Archil and the glorious King Giorgi”, and that he received order from King Vakhtang „... to correct the books”, that is the Georgian manuscripts, since they „were greatly distorted due to the errors of scribes”. Indeed, the hieromonk Nikoloz Orbeliani had to correct the manuscripts of the „Holy Gospel with great difficulty”, since he had to compare the text of the ancient Georgian manuscripts with „the typographic Gospel printed by Greeks”.

From both the statements of the editor, Nikoloz Orbeliani, and those made by Mikheil Stepanishvili, we may therefore infer that King Vakhtang of Kartli (Georgia) brought a printing press to his country from Wallachia, one of the Romanian Principalities. They also indicate that no such printing press had previously existed in Georgia, and that the founder of this printing press on Georgian soil was the famous Romanian printer, as Nikoloz Orbeliani also confirms in his editorial note to the Gospel Book.

Instead of Conclusions. We underline the fact that, only few of the books printed by Mikheil Stepaneshvili in Georgia have a worldly content, since the majority of them have an exclusively ecclesiastical and theological content, hence the lack of an adequate approach to and assessment of their content by the scholars who are familiar not only with the philological approach, but also with medieval Christian culture and spirituality.

Since the content of the printed books of Mikheil Stepaneshvili in Georgia is indeed eminently theological one, about the content of his printing books are therefore qualified to pronounce only the persons who

have an interdisciplinary approach of such subjects, such as the theologians, historians and philologists. Evidently, only these kinds of the scholars who are acquainted with these fields could have a credible competence to make considerations and assessments about the content and the language of such books. Indeed, only those scholars who are acquainted with these fields possess the necessary competence to make credible observations and assessments regarding both the content and language of such books, as the history of the establishment of the printing press in Georgia.

Certainly, this reality does not exclude the possibility that the texts of these books may also be analyzed and assessed by other scholars; however, such work must always be carried out through an interdisciplinary approach. In fact, the lack of concerted work by specialists from different fields of research proves *à l'évidence* that only a common contribution can enable us to achieve holistic scientific results.

It is also true the fact that, until now, some of the Romanians and Georgians who wrote about the content of the books printed in Georgia by Mikheil Stepaneshvili, as well as about his contribution to the promotion of the Georgian language and culture, they did it without to see or to read the documentary sources, that is the Georgian and Romanian, being indebted exclusively to the information put in circulation by the literature of specialty.

In conclusions, we would like to acknowledge the fact that from the text of the books printed in Tbilisi (1709-1711/1712), including the Prefaces and the Epilogues of Mikheil Stepaneshvili and the Notes of their publishers, the hieromonks Orbeliani and Germanus, the reader has the possibility to familiarize not only with the Christian theological thinking of humanist byzantine source, but also with the history of the ancient Georgian language and culture, to which the Romanian Mihail Ștefan brought a real contribution by printing the first books on the Georgian soil.

The Prefaces and Epilogues written and signed by Mikheil Stepaneshvili for his books printed in Georgia also remain clear testimony to his real contribution both to the promotion of the Georgian language and culture and to Orthodox theology of Byzantine origin.

At the same time, Mikheil Stepaneshvili's contribution to the promotion of the Georgian language and culture also remains a historical testimony to the ancient cultural and spiritual relations between our countries, in which our peoples confessed — in their native languages — the same Orthodox apostolic faith (Dură 2006, 15–260) for almost two millennia. Hence, they share a rich cultural and spiritual Christian heritage, which gives the peoples of our countries a legitimate European Christian identity.

Undoubtedly, for a better understanding of Mikheil Stepaneshvili's contribution to the promotion of the Georgian language and culture through the books he printed on Georgian soil, it is certainly necessary to draw upon both Georgian and Romanian documentary sources. Moreover, we need to be well acquainted not only with the history of the languages and cultures of Georgia and Romania, but also with the history of the printing presses of the Orthodox countries of that epoch, since, even at that time, printed books promoted both the culture and the languages of peoples, as well as their cultural and spiritual identity.

According to the documentary information provided by some of the Prefaces and Epilogues of the books printed in Georgia after Mihail Ștefan's departure, in early 1713, his Georgian apprentices continued to work in the same printing press established in Tbilisi, Georgia, by the Romanian Mihail Ștefan (Mikheil Stepaneshvili), until 1722. We may therefore say that, owing to the printing press established by Mihail Ștefan and to the books printed there subsequently, Georgian culture and spirituality continued to be promoted, in their Christian-humanistic character, over the centuries, both in Georgia and abroad.

Last but not least, we must bear in mind the fact that, through their valuable works in the cultural and spiritual fields, both the famous typographer and scholar Antimoz Iverieli, Archbishop and Metropolitan of Ungro-Wallachia, and the hypodeacon Mihail Ștefan (Mikheil Stepaneshvili), a renowned Romanian printer

and a remarkable humanist theologian of his time, remained, for Romania and Georgia, as well as for Europe, the Caucasian region, the Middle East, and the Arab world, great humanist scholars who, through their printed books, promoted both divine and human sciences.

Above all, for us, Romanians and Georgians, Antimoz Iverieli and Mihail Ștefan remain the principal founders of more than “three centuries of fraternal relations” (Beruchashvili, 2023) between our peoples and countries, Georgia and Romania. This legacy obliges our scholars to return *ad fontes* and to keep their memory alive, thus contributing to the promotion of our common cultural and spiritual identity for the benefit of both Georgians and Romanians.

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