

**Bessarabia, the Imperial Context and Religious
Aspect of the Annexation Crisis
– The Biblical Movement (1812-1827) –**

Maria *DANILOV*

*National Museum of Archaeology and History of Moldova,
Chişinău*

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Abstract: Bessarabia, part of the tsarist empire (after the seizure of the territory in 1812), was pushed gradually towards a forced assimilation/integration to Russia's social-political life. The immediate impact of the annexation was marked by the social-political and ecclesiastical crisis of the 19th century's first three decades: migrations of the population, plague and cholera epidemics, shortages and poverty. The phenomenon was later compared to "la Grande Peur" of 1789 during the French Revolution because the local population's fear from the sudden changes were as great as in France. The later development of the province was a tormenting process of adaptation by which the Bessarabian Romanian society tried to conform to the conditions of the foreign social, political, cultural, and ecclesiastical environment of the empire. Political division was followed arbitrarily by an administrative-religious rupture by the creation of a new eparchy in the annexed territory – the Eparchy of Chişinău and Hotin, subordinated canonically/anti-canonically to a foreign Church. Metropolitan Gavriil Bănulescu-Bodoni (1813–1821) who led the newly created eparchy in the annexed territory had to look for a compromise to reconcile the Russian political and ecclesiastical domination with the spiritual life of the Bessarabian people. The scholarly activity of the Metropolitan Gavriil Bănulescu-Bodoni was situated "between tradition and the tsarist policy". Against the background of these phenomena of social and political crisis in the new province incorporated into the Russian Empire, the *Bessarabian Branch* of the Bible Society was initiated in 1817. The *Bessarabian Branch* of the Russian Bible Society was created and the distribution of the books of the Holy Scripture with missionary aims was made in accordance with a model directed by the Bible Committee of Saint Petersburg, which means that it followed a structure identical with the central one which, in turn, functioned according to a foreign model (the *British and Foreign Bible Society*).

E-mail: danilovmaria@yahoo.com

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The Russian Empire, which, following the war of 1806–1812, obtained almost half of Moldavia, committed an unlawful act, "an unpardonable treachery towards the Turks" in the South-Eastern region of Europe. The territorial loss unbalanced the economical, political, and cultural life of both the Principality of Moldavia and the

territory between the Prut and the Dniester, included in the Russian Empire and renamed Bessarabia. The Austrian agency in Iași reported to Vienna that the news about the loss of the territory produced “great consternation among the Moldavian boyars who foresaw the consequences of this territorial transfer in their complete enormity”.¹ The protests of the local boyars, the memorandum of the National Assembly to Prince Scarlat Calimachi of October 2, 1812 and the many other complaints addressed to the Ottoman Empire could no longer change the state of things. The intentions of “two so powerful emperors, one orthodox, the other pagan, but both equally grasping and disregarding the rights of the small and the weak” could not be hindered through improvised means.²

For a long time, “the Moldavian inhabitants considered the peace concluded at Bucharest temporary, expecting from one day to the other the territory taken by the Russians to be returned and the former borderlines of the country to be restored”.³ The state of uncertainty was increased by the appearance of certain rumours, such as the approach of a plague epidemic from the East (which appeared in the autumn of 1812 at the southern border of the Dniester from the direction of Odessa) and the introduction of serfdom for peasants. Moreover, it was said that foreign landowners with their serfs would be brought from the interior of Russia and settled in Bessarabia to occupy the new province.⁴ Such a state of things was unknown to the Moldavians, since Bessarabian peasants, as a social state, were free. Even the boyars were worried because it was rumoured that they “would be deprived of their rights and subjected to corporal punishment”.⁵

Leon Casso, in 1913, compared the phenomenon with the “Grande Peur” of the French Revolution in 1789,⁶ since the local population’s fear of the sudden changes was as great as in the French case: “the eyewitness Archpriest Kunitski⁷ left a harrowing description about the exodus of panic stricken peasants. A century later a painful impression of the sentiment of hopelessness which overcame thousands of peaceful inhabitants still lingered”. Among other things, continues L. Casso “in the history of other peoples as well such situations of herd behaviour have occurred [...]

¹ Dinu Poștarencu, *Anexarea Basarabiei* (The annexation of Bessarabia) (Chișinău: Prut Internațional, 2006), 21.

² *Ibid.*, 22.

³ Manolache Draghici, *Istoria Moldovei pe timp de 500 de ani. Până la zilele noastre* (The history of Moldavia in the course of 500 years. Up to our days), volume II (Iași: 1857), 93.

⁴ Л.А. Кассо, *Россия на Дунае и образование Бессарабской области* (Russia on the Danube and the Formation of the Bessarabian Oblast) (Москва: 1913), 203.

⁵ Л.А. Кассо, *Россия на Дунае...*, 208.

⁶ Mary Kilbourne Matossian, *Poisons of the Past: Molds, Epidemics, and History* (New Haven: Yale, 1989) 7. [“Grande peur de 1789” – Selon Mary Matossian, l’ergot de seigle – présent en grande quantité dans la farine de l’époque et présentant des caractéristiques hallucinatoires – aurait fait partie des causes de la Grande Peur].

⁷ The archpriest Petre Kunitski (1774–1837) was born in Ukraine. He was ordained by Metropolitan Gavriil Bănulescu-Bodoni. When the Exarchate of Moldavia and Walachia was created in 1808, he was summoned to Iași where he was named Rector of Socola Seminary. He also occupied the office of – the first – Rector of the seminar in Chișinău (1813–1821).

and which have driven them to extreme outbursts. Such situations are called by the French *la Grande Peur*”.¹

Even the Russians coming from beyond the Dniester fled with the Romanians to Moldova on the right bank of the Prut. Archpriest Fjodor Maleavinski in his report addressed to the Dicastery on 9 November 1812 declared that the inhabitants of the village Șaba (Cetatea Albă County) fled, “only three-four families [...], the church and the priest remaining in the village”.² Regarding the emigration tendency of the natives, Metropolitan Gavriil Bănulescu-Bodoni informed Prince Alexander Golitsyn, Chief Procurator of the Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church (1803–1824) that “when the French had penetrated to the heart of Russia and the Turks were on the banks of the Danube and the Prut [...], almost the entire population from this province became worried and were ready to leave for Moldavia beyond the Prut, for Turkey, beyond the Danube, so that they could not be stopped even by the force of arms”.³ The representative of the imperial power, Governor I. M. Harting (1813–1817) instead of quieting the population’s discontent, contributed to its aggravation by his attempts to Russify the province, by reducing the natives’ numbers and influence in the administration, and eradicating old laws and autochthonous customs.

The unrest was increased by the fact that imperial officials, immediately after the annexation of Bessarabia, began to form large colonies of foreign settlers in this territory. Nevertheless, the Russian attempts to transform Bessarabia into a region attractive for foreigners, especially the peoples of South-eastern Europe, did not yield the expected results. Count Ioan Capodistria (head of the imperial chancery) in a communication addressed to General A. N. Bahmetev, appointed governor in 1816, confessed that “the political goal of the Russian Empire – immediately after the peace treaty with the Sublime Porte was signed – was to turn this province into a refuge for all who were persecuted by the Ottomans. But exactly the opposite happened: instead of attracting foreigners, the imperial administration caused mass emigration among the natives.”⁴

On the basis of the reports sent by the county subprefects to the Department in Chișinău regarding the inhabitants’ flight, it was established that 820 persons moved over the Prut in 1812–1814. Other statistics state that only from Hotin region – until the beginning of 1816 – 3,353 inhabitants fled, from Codru region 290

¹ Л.А. Кассо, *Россия на Дунае...*, 203–204.

² Ștefan Ciobanu, *Cultura românească în Basarabia sub stăpânirea rusă* (The Romanian culture in Bessarabia under the Russian rule) (Chișinău: Editura enciclopedică Gheorghe Asachi, 1992) 10.

³ А. Стадницкий, *Гавриил Банулеско-Бодони, экзарх молдо-влахийский (1808-1812 гг.), Митрополит Кишиневский* [Gavriil Bănulescu-Bodoni, Exarch of Moldo-Walachia (1808–1812), Metropolitan of Chișinău] (Кишинев: 1894), 276.

⁴ *Устройство задунайских переселенцев в Бессарабии и деятельность А.П. Юшневского. История Молдавии. Документы и материалы* (The establishment of Transdanubian settlers in Bessarabia and the activity of A. P. Yushnevsky. The history of Moldova. Documents and materials) (Кишинев: 1957), 207.

families, from Hotârnîceni region 906 persons.¹ The peasants' flight continued until the middle of the century. In order to prevent migration over the Prut, imperial officials closed almost hermetically the region of Bessarabia in the period after 1812 between two cordons:

1. The “sanitary-custom” cordon at the Dniester set up in 1793 (after the annexation of a vast territory on the left side of the Dniester to Russia consequently to the peace of Iași in 1791), which continued to function after 1812 as well despite the political disputes between local and Saint Petersburg administrative circles. It was annulled by the ukase of the Senate on September 26, 1830.²

2. After 1812 the boundaries of the Empire spread to the rivers Prut and Danube as well as to the north-western shore of the Black Sea, this segment becoming the second frontier cordon. In April 1818 the lists enumerating the personnel of the custom houses which activated on the basis of the Quarantine Regulation (of 1796) were officially confirmed.³

3. Beginning with the year 1818 any crossing of the border at the Prut was recorded at the customs houses grouped in two main districts: 1. Sculeni – having a status of central quarantine; Novoselița [Noua Suliță] – central quarantine; Leova – special quarantine; Lipcani – quarantine post; 2. Ismail – central quarantine; Reni – special quarantine; Akkerman – quarantine post.⁴ Border restrictions were extremely strict, especially in the case of the 10–16 days long quarantine regime.

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Under the above mentioned conditions the most stable institution of the country was the Orthodox Church led by Metropolitan Gavriil Bănulescu-Bodoni to whom Alexander I himself wrote on April 1, 1816 that he had been informed on his intentions which had not been realized: “*finding myself in the midst of this situation, I set up first of all a provisional administration in Bessarabia, setting at the base of this rule her old customs and privileges [...]. I wanted first of all to ascertain from proofs and I waited for time and the circumstances as well as the true notifications to show me for all what consequences are to be expected from this attempt*”.⁵ In

¹ П. СВИНИН, *Описание Бессарабской области. Записки Общества Истории и Древностей*, Том VI (The description of the Bessarabian Oblast. Proceedings of the Society of History and Antiquities, Volume VI) (Одесса: 1867), 211.

² Valentin Tomuleț, “Considerații privind regimul vamal al Basarabiei în perioada 1812–1830” (Considerations regarding the customs system of Bessarabia in the period 1812–1830), *Tyragetia* [Yearbook], vol. VI–VII, 1996–1997 (Chișinău: 1998), 210.

³ Valentin Tomuleț, “Controverse privind suprimarea cordonului vamal de la Nistru, 1812–1830” (Controversies regarding the suppression of the customs cordon at the Dniester, 1812–1830), *Tyragetia* [Yearbook], vol. VI–VII, 1996–1997 (Chișinău: 1998), 216.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 212.

⁵ “aflându-mă în această plină socoteală am așăzat eu întâias [i]dată o vremelnică ocîrmuire în Basarabia, puind temeiu acestii ocîrmuiri cele de mult a ei obiceiuri și pronomii [...]. Eu am vrut mai înainte a fi încredințat din dovezi și am așteptat ca vremea și stările împrejur, precum și cele adevărate înștiințări, pentru toate se-mi arate mie ce urmări se cade a se aștepta de la această cercare”. Alexander I, *Circulară către Mitropolitul Gavriil de numirea*

order to calm the population, in 1816, the Metropolitan sent a circular to the eparchy, in which he urged the clerics and all Christians “not to believe that in Bessarabia serfdom will be introduced [... and], that on account of the high imperial grace you have a government from your nation and in your language”.¹ A consequence of the panic that overwhelmed the population was that imperial authorities had to postpone the oath of allegiance of the entire people to the Emperor of Russia.²

The consequences of the annexation crisis, however, were felt within church institutions as well. Trying to organize the printing of religious books in Romanian language in the newly founded eparchy of Chişinău and Hotin (August 21, 1813), Metropolitan Gavriil Bănulescu-Bodoni (1813–1821) had, first of all, to subordinate his publishing activity to the synodal ukase of May 4, 1814 which imposed extremely strict restrictions: the books published in the Pastoral Printing House of Bessarabia were to reproduce only editions issued formerly in the synodal printing houses of the Russian Orthodox Church (“In the Exarchal Printing House ecclesiastical books in the Moldavian language, which shall be translated from Slavonic from the same synodal books, shall also be printed” / Ukase of the Holy Synod, May 4, 1814).³

The local church in this Romanian province had, on the other hand, an age-old tradition of liturgical practice and it could not be suddenly terminated by the synodal ukase of a foreign Church. Romanian liturgical books were in the past (as well as in the present) different from Slavonic ones (synodal editions).⁴ Evidently, Metropolitan Gavriil Bănulescu-Bodoni was fully aware of the radical changes that would have happened in the spiritual life of Bessarabia had these demands of the Russian Synod been respected exactly and immediately. Preparing for printing the first religious book published in the “Exarchal Printing House”⁵ in Chişinău – the 1815 edition of the *Missal* –, Metropolitan Gavriil Bănulescu-Bodoni, being

unui împuternicit în Basarabia (Circular to Metropolitan Gavriil on naming a representative in Bessarabia), 1 April (Sankt Peterburg: 1816 [in folio]; see the collection *Documente vechi* (Old documents), The National Archaeological and Historical Museum of Moldavia, Chişinău (FB- 6734-1).

¹ Ciobanu, *Cultura românească...*, 11.

² *Pastorală pentru depunerea jurământului către Scaunul Împărătesc de către toți locuitorii, iscăbind și tablele ce se vor arăta* (Pastoral letter for the taking of the oath to the Imperial Throne by all inhabitants, signing also the tables which will be shown) (Chişinău: Tipografia Exarhicească); see the collection *Documente vechi*, The National Archaeological and Historical Museum of Moldavia, Chişinău (F/N).

³ “În Tipografia Exarhală se vor tipări cărți bisericești și în limba moldovenească, ce vor fi traduse din slavonește după aceleași cărți sinodale”. ANRM (National Archives of the Republic of Moldova), F. 205, inv. 1, f. 7–9.

⁴ Maria Danilov, *Cenzura sinodală și cartea religioasă în Basarabia. 1812–1918* (Între tradiție și politica țaristă) [Synodal censorship and religious books in Bessarabia (Between tradition and Tsarist policy)], (Chişinău: 2007), 49–54. See, for example, *Apostol, Evanghelie and Trebnic*.

⁵ ANRM, F.205, inv. 1, d. 404, f. 4–9. The synodal ukase regarding the founding of the printing house was sanctioned on May 4, 1814.

perfectly aware of the changes in the structure of the book, “considered as a necessity to show mainly to the priests who celebrate in Romanian that finding in this Liturgy some words otherwise translated than they were in those printed in Romanian before, not to be surprised by this, nor consider it an error [...]”.¹ And as an argument of the changes, Exarch Gavriil Bănulescu-Bodoni exemplified the differences between the texts from the Slavonic and Romanian version as well as from the Greek.² Thus, finally, the *Missal* (1815) was an edition partly elaborated on the basis of some text versions “printed before” (Romanian editions), up to the year 1812, to which “improvements and additions” were added after the synodal editions (from Moscow) and those of Kiev (the synaxarion of saints for 12 months). Therefore it was necessary for the Metropolitan to search, each time a new edition was issued,³ some kind of compromise to reconcile the Russian political and ecclesiastical domination with the Bessarabians’ spiritual life. Metropolitan Gavriil Bănulescu-Bodoni’s scholarly activity evolved – in our opinion – between tradition and the tsarist policy.

Against the background of these phenomena of social-political and ecclesiastical crisis manifested in the new province incorporated into the Russian Empire, the *Bessarabian Branch* of the Bible Society was born in 1817. Before, however, going into details regarding the activity of the branch organization, we consider necessary to outline the image of the Bible movement extant in the Russian Empire.

The appearance of Bible societies in continental Europe took place during the 17th century (1600–1680). In the Russian Empire this religious movement appeared much later, only at the beginning of the 19th century, during the age of Tsar Alexander I (1801–1825), more exactly in the second period of his reign, which radically differed from the first one. It was the age of the triumph over Napoleon and also of a new policy both in the field of foreign and domestic affairs as a consequence of the creation of the Holy Alliance and the Congress of Vienna.

The imperial context

The existence of a *Bible Society* was sanctioned by the Imperial Ukase of December 6, 1812, issued on the basis of the report presented to the Tsar by Prince Alexander Golitsyn. Tsar Alexander I himself became the member of this society which conferred to it from the beginning a general interest in the political life of Russia. The newly created society, as the report stated, “had to be directed to a single aim –

¹ “socotit drept aceia de trebuință a arăta mai ales preoților carii slujesc în limba rumânească, că aflând în această Liturghie oare-și care cuvinte într-alt chip tălmăcite, nu precum se află în cele mai dinainte rumânești tipărite, să nu se mire de aceasta, nici să socotească de greșală [...]”. *Liturghie* (Liturgy) (Chișinău: Tipogr. Exarhicească, 1815), 1–2.

² *Liturghie...*, 1–5; А. Стадницкий, *Гавриил Банулеско-Бодони...*, 346–347.

³ See for example other books edited by Metropolitan Gavriil Bănulescu-Bodoni (published in the Exarchal Printing House of Chișinău): *Ceasoslov* (Book of hours), 1817; *Psaltire* (Psalter), 1818; *Minei de Obște* (Common Menaion), 1819; *Molitvenic* (Prayer book), 1820; *Evangelhie* (Gospel book), 1820; *Apostol* (Apostolos/The epistles), 1820.

to publish the holy books: the *Old* and the *New Testament* in foreign languages”.¹ We shall see that in general the plan of the Society approved by Tsar Alexander I was an exact copy of the British model – *British and Foreign Bible Society* (1804).² In the 14 articles of the “project”, the elaborators did not even dare to speak directly about a biblical/missionary activity in the midst of Russian Empire’s allogeneic population. Nevertheless, we should mention something else as well: this foreign initiative – the founding of a *Bible Society* in Russia – found a quite fertile ground in the vast Russian Empire.

On January 11, 1813, in Prince Alexander Golitsyn’s house the founding meeting of the *Bible Society* of Petersburg took place and the Leading Committee was elected. According to the statutory regulation, clerics and lay people of any rank, genre, denomination, etc. were accepted into the Committee. At first mainly laypersons³ were elected to the Bible Committee (with the exception of Pastor Pitte), namely: president – Prince Alexander Golitsyn, Head of the Foreign Denominations Department; vice-presidents: V. Kociubei, A. Razumovski, M. Donaurov, oberhofmeister R. Koshelev, O. Kozodavlev, K. Gablits; directors: general-superintendent Reinbot, Pastor Pitte, Prince P. Mescerski, K. Liveni, Baron B. Fitingof, N. Fuse, N. Jukovski, S. Djunkovskij, A. Lenivtsev, S. Uvarov; secretaries: V. Popov and A. Turghenev; cashier: Ia. Shmidt.⁴ In the first work session the newly elected committee fixed as the main task of the Society to obtain the money necessary/sufficient to publish religious books, the ultimate aim of the movement being “to ensure Bibles to all the inhabitants of the state who do not have the possibility to procure them”. To this end other measures were also decreed:

1. To reduce the price of the books of the *New* and *Old Testament* in Slavonic language published by the Holy Synod.
2. To publish and reproduce religious books in other languages for the Christians of different denominations in the Empire: Germans, Poles, Finns, Swiss, Latvians, Romanians, Armenians, Greeks, etc.
3. To ensure Bibles to the categories of poor citizens who had no possibility to purchase religious books, especially among those who suffered in the “latest war”, after the year 1812, etc.
4. To ensure religious books to the majority of the multiethnic population of the Russian Empire including “Mahomedans” and other categories of “unbelievers”.⁵

¹ А. Н. Пыпин, *Религиозные движения при Александр I при Александре I* (Religious movements under Alexander I) (Петроград, 1916), 21–22.

² Bible societies had already existed in Germany, Switzerland, Finland, and in many American cities.

³ Their number was prevalent, in fact, among the full members of the Petersburg Society.

⁴ А. Н. Пыпин, *Религиозные движения...*, 28. The Tsar became the honorary member of the *Bible Society* and donated 25,000 roubles for this cause and a yearly fee of 10,000 roubles.

⁵ *О цели Библикаго Овцества и средствах к достижению оной* (On the purpose of the Bible Society and the means to achieve it) (СПб: 1814), 3–17.



Octavian Cosman, *In the Shadow of the Cross*,
200X100 cm, oil on canvas, ceramics, 1997

In 1813, the Society had already six newly created branches. Before the editorial activity began, the Society procured *Bibles* (in different languages) published abroad, the books being distributed to the branch organizations. With the aim of starting a publishing activity of its own, the Petersburg *Bible Society* received important aid from similar foreign organizations, first of all from the British Society:¹ in 1813, 500 pounds; in 1814, 2,200 pounds.² The first books printed by the Society were: the *Bible* in Finnish, then in German, the *New Testament* in Armenian.³ Polish, French, and Slavonic editions followed.⁴ Altogether, the number of copies printed of the *New Testament* editions reached 600,000, and in Latvian and Estonian languages 22,500.⁵

The Russian translation of the Bible and the theologians' protests

The idea to translate the *Bible* in Russian probably occurred at the stage when changes took place in the composition of the Society's Committee during the year 1814.⁶ We must observe that this idea was promoted by the Society (in the person of its leader, Prince Alexander Golitsyn) with great precaution.⁷ This “*secret thought*” of Prince Golitsyn was, otherwise, a real revolution for the ecclesiastical mentality of imperial orthodoxy in the age. Although, regarded from the perspective of the *Russian Bible Society*'s missionary activity, the idea appears as a natural result. How could otherwise the fact be explained or interpreted that the Society assuming the responsibility for ensuring religious books – “in their own languages” – to all foreigners in the empire, to Germans and French, to Latvians and Tartars, to Armenians and Romanians had no intention to declare that Russians too needed a *Bible* “in their own language” as well as other peoples?⁸ How did, however, things evolve?

The President of the Society, Prince Alexander Golitsyn seized a very opportune moment, the return of the Tsar to Saint Petersburg after the conclusion of the Congress of Vienna (1814–1815) at the end of the year 1815. He presented the monarch with a copy of each edition published in different languages by the Society. The Tsar was very pleased with the publishing activity of the Society and ordered the President to propose to the Holy Synod “*that His Majesty wishes sincerely that*

¹ By its fiftieth anniversary, in 1854, the *British and Foreign Bible Society* had published *Bibles* in 148 languages in 46,000,000 copies.

² А. Н. Пыпин, *Религиозные движения...*, 31.

³ *New Testament* (Saint Petersburg, 1814), published in the printing office of Armenian Hierodeacon Iosif Ioannesov.

⁴ The Moscow Branch – led by N. Bantysh-Kamenski – printed the *New Testament* based on the synodal edition of 1778.

⁵ The *Bible Society* in 1816 was given by Alexander I a block specially furnished as a printing office, book stores, and a shop for sale.

⁶ *Второй отчет Российскаго Библейскаго Комитета* (The second report of the Russian Bible Committee) (Санктпетербург, 1815), 7.

⁷ The first attempt to translate the biblical text we have information on was made at the end of the 17th century based on the Polish edition of the *Bible* (1663); however, this version was not sanctioned by the Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church, Joachim (1620–1690).

⁸ А. Н. Пыпин, *Религиозные движения...*, 39.

Russians may read the word of the Lord in their Russian language rather than in the Slavonic dialect in which Holy books are printed".¹

In the meeting held on February 28, 1816, the Holy Synod listened to the President's report in which the issue of the Russian Bible translation was presented as a complaint by the monarch. However, it is important to specify that the translation of the Bible in Russian was entrusted to other theological institutions, namely the Committee of Pastoral Schools. This was equivalent to a refusal from the part of the Synod to assume responsibilities in the realization of this both cultural and spiritual act. Thus, in the editions printed by the Society only the names of those theologians would appear who were also members of the *Bible Society*, however, without the blessing of the Holy Synod. This was a great risk assumed by the President of the *Russian Bible Society* in realizing the missionary aim in Orthodox Russia, and the consequences were soon to appear. Protests by the trends hostile to the Bible Society started immediately, since the translation of religious books in the Russian language was interpreted by a great part of the Russian clergy as a flagrant deviation from Eastern Orthodoxy. In their opinion, exactly this would have been the real aim of the *Bible Society*. Among Alexander Golitsyn's opponents, appeared in the foreground influential persons from the Tsar's entourage: Seraphim, Metropolitan of Novgorod and Saint Petersburg (who became President of the Society after Alexander Golitsyn's dismissal in 1824); Count Alexey Andreyevich Arakcheyev, Admiral Alexander Semyonovich Shishkov (who obtained the post of Minister of Public Education after Golitsyn's dismissal).²

The (sixth) *Report* for the year 1818 mentioned the four *Gospels* with parallel – Slavonic-Russian – text printed by the Society. In 1819 two editions were issued in 10,000 copies each. *The Gospel* was sold at a price of 5 roubles. In the materials published in the *Report* for the year 1821 we may also observe that the translation of the books of the *Old Testament* was made by the theologians of the Pastoral Academy in Moscow and Kiev. In 1822, the Russian *Psalter* was published. In 1823, the Committee of Petersburg announced that the printing of the *New Testament* in the "Russian dialect" was finished. The bilingual Slavonic-Russian edition appeared in 1821.³

Following some permanent political intrigues directed against it, the situation of the Bible Society aggravated much in the mid 1820s. Prince Alexander Golitsyn had to resign from the functions he had accumulated, that of Minister of Public Education and Chief Procurator of the Holy Synod (15 May 1824), then also from the presidency of the Bible Society (17 May 1824). By a rescript of Tsar Nicolas I, of 12 April 1826 the Russian Bible Society was dissolved. On the basis of

¹ И.Чистовичъ, *История перевода Библии на русский язык, ч. Первая* (The history of Russian Bible translation, Part 1) (Санктпетербург: 1872–753), 38.

² А. Н. Пыпин, *Религиозные движения...*, 83–155.

³ The translation of the biblical text from Slavonic in Russian started by the Bible Society in 1816 was continued later by former members of this organization: Filaret, the Metropolitan of Moscow and Professor Gherasim Pavski. The complete Russian edition of the *Bible* was published only in 1876.

another imperial rescript – of 15 July 1826 – the Society’s entire property (estimated to 2 million roubles) was transferred to the management of the Holy Synod.¹

What was the significance, in fact, of a missionary society of such dimensions in the Russian Empire? In the course of nine years (1812–1821) the Bible Society published: 129 editions in 29 languages (Slavonic, Russian, Yiddish, Ancient and Modern Greek, German, French, Polish, Finnish, Estonian, Latvian, Georgian, Armenian, Turkish-Armenian, Karelian, Chuvash, Cheremis/Mari, Samoyedic, Mordvinian, Bulgarian, Romanian, Persian, Zyrian, Kalmyk, Mongol-Buryat, Tatar-Turkish, the Tatar dialect of Orenburg, and the Tatar-Jewish dialect) in 685,000 copies. Besides issuing the above mentioned editions (in 29 languages), the Society was also preoccupied with the distribution of books in 14 languages brought from abroad: English, Dutch, Swiss, Danish, Jewish-German, Jewish-Polish, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, etc. In the festive meeting of the Russian Bible Society in 1822 (the 10th anniversary of the missionary activity), Prince Alexander Golitsyn emphasized with satisfaction the exceptional merits of publishing the first complete edition of the *New Testament* and of the *Psalter* in Russian language.²

If initially the Society respected the British model, later on it strayed from it more and more. The effect of opposition circles marked the activity of the Petersburg Bible Society since the first years. In his report presented in the general assembly of 1815, the President of the Society, Prince Golitsyn stated among other things that: “*it is incredible, however, that in our Society there are still clergymen who do not understand the simplicity of our cause and do not consider the salvational role of the dissemination of holy books among the people, instead seeing in this only hidden goals.*”³ Religious propaganda outside the official church was something unconceivable in Orthodox Russia where this was experienced for the first time. In 1824, Prince Alexander Golitsyn having been dismissed, Metropolitan Seraphim triumphantly declared: “The Bible will be printed once again by the Synod”.⁴

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But what materials do the local, Bessarabian archives contain regarding religious life at the beginning of the 19th century? Sources are dispersed in several collections and inventories: the collections of the Pastoral Dicastery,⁵ the Pastoral Consistory,⁶ the Governor’s civil/military Chancellery,⁷ of *Sculeni* custom house,¹ etc. The most

¹ А. Н. Пыпин, *Религиозные движения...*, 82.

² *Ibid.*, 68.

³ “incredibil, însă în Societatea noastră sunt încă fețe bisericești care nu pricep simplitatea cauzei noastre, nici nu gândesc asupra rolului salvator al răspândirii cărților sfinte în mijlocul poporului, ci văd în aceasta doar scopuri ascunse”. *Ibid.*, 38.

⁴ Чистовичъ И., *История перевода Библии...*, 1875, 74.

⁵ ANRM, F. 205, inv. 1, d. 1628, f.144; *ibid.*: d. 2876, 323 f.; d. 6184, 6 f.; d. 6008, 8 f.

⁶ ANRM, F. 208, inv. 2, d. 3360; *idem*: inv. 3, d. 120, 16 f.; inv. 3, d. 103, 23 f.; inv. 5, d. 639, f.14.

⁷ ANRM, F. 2, inv. 1, d. 570, f. 4; *ibid.*: F. 2, inv. 1, d. 696, 16 f.; F. 2, inv.1, d. 7815, f. 12.

consistent information regarding the discussed subject can be found in the files of the Pastoral Dicastery. It must also be mentioned that the data offered by this collection, especially those related to the history of the Bessarabian Branch, were in part valorized in the 19th century.² Some reference data were recorded in the works of A. Stadnitzki, Ștefan Ciobanu, Nicolae Popovschi, and Alexandru Boldur.³ The “Bible subject” resurfaced in Bessarabian historical literature in the last decade of the 20th century.

The history of the Russian Bible Society’s Bessarabian Branch remains an insufficiently researched problem in Bessarabian historiography. The discussed subject is only one of the many aspects of this phenomenon related to the ecclesiastical history of the province in the tsarist period (the first three decades of the 19th century). It is to be remembered that the problem of the Russian Bible Society in general and, respectively, the missionary aspects related to it remained for a long time neglected in Russian historiography as well. Issues related to the history of the Russian Bible Society could not be completely avoided as the era of Tsar Alexander I raised an increased interest from the part of Russian historians – during the entire 19th century. As historian A. N. Pypine recorded in a communication to the British Bible Society, the archives of the Russian Bible Society – after its activity ceased (1826) – remained inaccessible to private individuals. Therefore he had “to confine himself to published sources: the Reports of the Society (in any case, very rare and which could be found integrally only in the collection of the Imperial Academy in Saint Petersburg), the News on the Bible Society (on the Committee meetings) published in the press of the age, the memoirs of some personalities involved in the activity of the Society”.⁴ Moreover, A. Pypine asked those of the Foreign Society to give him some information from the British archives,⁵ assuming that they possess “interesting data which could throw more light on the causes of the Russian missionary movement’s downfall”.⁶

Local specificities

Bessarabia was “much more realistic than the centre. She did not let herself allured by mysticism or by masonry”, sustained Alexandru Boldur.⁷ The founding meeting of the Russian Bible Society’s Bessarabian Branch took place on September 27,

¹ ANRM, F. 195, inv. 1, d. 321, f. 2.

² A. A. Балцатеску, “Бессарабское Отделение Российского Библиейского Общества”, in *Кишиневские Епархиальные Ведомости* (The Bessarabian Branch of the Russian Bible Society), no. 7–8 (Кишинев: 1872), 210–215, 239–346.

³ А. Стадницкий, *Гавриил Бэнулеско-Бодони екзархь молдовлахийский и митрополит Кишиневский* (Кишинев: 1894), 355–360; Ciobanu, *Cultura românească...*, 43–45; Nicolae Popovschi, *Istoria Bisericii din Basarabia sub ruși* (The history of the Church in Bessarabia under the Russians) (Chișinău: Tipografia Eparhială, 1931), 7–72. Alexandru Boldur, *Istoria Basarabiei* (The history of Bessarabia) (București: Editura Victor Frunză, 1992), 312–315.

⁴ А. Н. Пыпин, *Религиозные движения ...*, 461.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 462. See Professor A. Pypine’s communication of February 3, 1869 to the *British and Foreign Bible Society*.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 462.

⁷ Boldur, *Istoria Basarabiei...*, 312.

1817,¹ when the Committee was elected. This was formed by both clergymen and laypeople. Gavriil Bănulescu-Bodoni was elected as its vice president. The immediate task of the Committee was to organize the distribution of religious books from the central store of the Branch. Before, however, we outline where the books published by the Bible Society were distributed, we shall try to clarify some aspects related to the activity of Metropolitan Gavriil Bănulescu-Bodoni regarding the publication of the *Bible* (1819) in Romanian language in Saint Petersburg. The historian of the Bessarabian Church “under the Russians”, Nicolae Popovschi observed among other things that “the translation of the Bible in Romanian undertaken by the Russian Bible Society led to the founding of the Bessarabian Branch”.²

A great part of the document collection regarding the history of the printing of the *Bible* known to be in the local archives of the Pastoral Consistory in Chişinău in the second half of the 19th century, today cannot be consulted because of the simple motive that the documents are missing.³ The references made by Russian historians on the Romanian *Bible* of 1819 based on information collected from synodal sources are few.⁴ But only a research in the synodal archives could in the future throw more light on the context in which the text of the Holy Scripture was censored and could reveal at which stage of the publication the fragment of the text “*The Book of Joseph Maccabeus*”⁵ (“a lui Iosip Macavei carte”) was exactly omitted from the content of the Romanian *Bible* of 1819 published in Saint Petersburg.⁶ Another question, no less important for the history of the 1819 *Bible* is: why was the complete *Bible* edition printed in Nicolae Greci’s⁷ private printing house and not in the synodal office?

On the basis of certain factors which directly influenced the printing of the *Bible* in the ecclesiastical circles of both Chişinău and Saint Petersburg, we could outline the history of the book’s printing which happened in two stages at least:

- August 11, 1815–December 18, 1817. In this stage the printing of the *New Testament* (1817) and the proofreading of the first two books from the *Old Testament* were finished.⁸ The printing of the book was ensured by Metropolitan Gavriil Bănulescu-Bodoni’s direct interventions, the texts being sent for correcting from Saint Petersburg to Chişinău and back. The initiative to send the printed pages of the biblical text to Chişinău to be corrected by “an ecclesiastical person” (“o faţă duhovnicească”) belonged to Prince Alexander Golitsyn, President of the *Bible Society* in Saint Petersburg.⁹

¹ A. Балцатеску, *Бессарабское Отделение ...*, 210.

² Popovschi, *Istoria Bisericii din Basarabia sub ruşi...*, 72.

³ A. Балцатеску, А., *Бессарабское Отделение...*, 210–215.

⁴ А. Н. Пыпин, *Религиозные движения...*, 42.

⁵ Danilov, *Cenzura sinodală și cartea religioasă...*, 56.

⁶ *Biblia* (Sankt Peterburg: Tipografia Nicolae Greci, 1819), 1249; 303.

⁷ Nicolae Greci (1787–1867), renowned publisher in Saint Petersburg.

⁸ *Noul Testament* (Sankt Petersburg: Tipogr. Sf. Sinod, 1817), 274.

⁹ ANRM, F. 205, inv. 1, d. 1628, f. 1–44.

- December 18, 1817–August 15, 1819. In the second stage printing was supervised only by the entourage of ecclesiastical functionaries in Saint Petersburg and of the Moldavian Hegumen Varlaam Cuza. In the case of “*some essential differences*” (between the versions of synodal texts and those in the Romanian original) Bishop Filaret Drozdov, Rector of the Theological Academy in Saint Petersburg was consulted.

In the case of the second stage, established as between December 18, 1817 and August 15, 1819, it is most difficult to reconstruct from the documents the events related to the publication of the Romanian Bible of 1819. In this stage a fragment (*The Book of Joseph Maccabeus*) was omitted from the text of the Old Testament by the synodal censorship of Petersburg. This moment was insufficiently known and appreciated in the specialized literature of the age, figuring only as some purely bibliographic information mentioned at the very end of the 19th century, more precisely in 1900.¹

The most important body of documents from the history of the printing of the Romanian Bible is the correspondence between the President of the *Russian Bible Society*, Prince Alexander Golitsyn and Exarch Gavriil Bănulescu-Bodoni. Before the foundation of the *Chişinău Branch of the Bible Society* (on September 27, 1817), the Committee of Petersburg appealed to Exarch Gavriil to send them a Romanian Bible which would serve them as a model for a new edition under the aegis of the Bible Society. It is also known that the Society received for this (for the printing of the *Bible* in the languages of the people who lived in the tsarist empire) special sums of money through English missionaries – a subvention of 300 pounds. Metropolitan Gavriil Bănulescu-Bodoni sent to Petersburg “*two Bibles – one from 1688, from Bucharest and the one printed in Transylvania in Blaj in 1795.*” The Metropolitan considered that the Bible of 1688 “*is a ponderous, obscure translation*”, while the Transylvanian one was “*a translation after the edition of the 70 old sages from the East and it is clearer. In it the new, more intelligible language is used*”.²

On January 26, 1816, the President of the Bible Committee, Prince Alexander Golitsyn in the address sent to Exarch Gavriil Bănulescu-Bodoni in Chişinău communicated, among other things, that taking into account the Metropolitan’s judgement, he “*would settle on the Blaj Bible*” and he would start the printing of the *New Testament* (separate editions) as soon as possible. The Exarch was also informed on the decision of the Committee regarding the correcting of the book which would be “*supervised by Prince Ypsilanti and Counsellor Matei Krupenski*”, familiar with the “Moldavian” language.³ In this address we can also observe another important fact: the President of the Bible Committee asked Exarch Gavriil “*to entrust a clergyman from the eparchy, familiar with the Moldavian*

¹ Virgil Căndea, *Raţiunea Dominantă. Contribuţii la istoria umanismului românesc* (The dominant reason. Contributions to the history of Romanian Humanism) (Cluj-Napoca: 1979), 172. The fragment of the text “*The Book of Joseph Maccabeus*” was included in the *Bible* of Blaj, 1795, p. 833.

² A. Балцатеску, *Бессарабское Отделение ...*, 213.

³ *Ibid.*, 213.

language with correcting the pages he will send to Chişinău. In cases where more serious mistakes occur which could change the meaning of the word or would differ much from the original of the text, they will have to be corrected and only after that sent to Saint Petersburg”.¹ The first printed sheets from the text of the *New Testament* were also annexed to the address. We should remember two facts from the cited document:

1. The printing of the *Bible* (starting from the Society’s principles of activity) had to be sanctioned by certain persons from church hierarchy, which made the President of the Committee search for a certain person who could carry out the proofreading.
2. The initiative to send the printed pages of the biblical text to Chişinău in order to be corrected by an ecclesiastical person (“o faţă duhovnicească”) belonged to Alexander Golitsyn. Therefore, Exarch Gavriil Bănulescu-Bodoni assumed a great responsibility in the publication of a new complete Bible edition in Romanian.

After the date mentioned above – 26 January 1816 – the information offered by different authors on the history of the Bible were dispersed. Certain data, repeated by several authors are given as fragments, being parts taken and moved sometimes from the context of the cited document. In some cases they are superposed causing even certain misunderstandings. This happened, we believe, because the cited data could no longer be verified from the sources. We observe that Ştefan Ciobanu, referring to the address of 26 January 1816, stated that Prince Golitsyn “asked for a clergyman to be sent to him and for the Metropolitan himself to take on the cares of the proofreading and correcting”.² This request by Prince Golitsyn was written somewhat later in June 1816. In the address of January 26 the Exarch was requested (we repeat) “to entrust an ecclesiastical person” from the eparchy who would be able to correct the printed sheets sent to Chişinău. However, the Exarch “having none in the eparchy familiar with grammar and orthography undertook alone the proofreading of the text [...]”.³ What happened then? Correcting the first printed sheets of the *New Testament* text, Metropolitan Gavriil Bănulescu-Bodoni discovered several printing errors: “In chapter 3, verse 11 [*The Gospel of Matthew*], a word was omitted; In chapter 13, verse 35 almost half of the text was omitted”. On June 23, 1816, Exarch Gavriil Bănulescu-Bodoni sent a special address to the President of the Bible Committee in Petersburg: “For ensuring the supervision of the printing of the Holy Scripture, paper and letters must be sent to Chişinău to continue the typesetting of the book in the Exarchal Printing House”.⁴ The Metropolitan had assumed thus the mission to supervise personally the printing of the complete *Bible*.

¹ Ibid.

² Ciobanu, *Cultura românească...*, 43.

³ А. Балцатеску, *Бессарабское Отделение...*, 213; Ciobanu, *Cultura românească...*, 43.

⁴ С. Петровски, *Екзарх молдо-влахийский и митрополит Киевский и Кишиневский Гавриил Банулеску-Бодони* (The Exarch of Moldo-Walachia and Metropolitan of Kiev and Chişinău, Gavriil Bănulescu-Bodoni), in ЗИООИД /Записки Одесского Общества Истории и Древностей/, том. 19-й, (Одесса: 1896), 92–94.

Gavriil Bănulescu-Bodoni's initiatives did not suit everyone in the entourage of the Bible Society in Saint Petersburg. The President of the Bible Committee tried nevertheless to settle the delicate situation which occurred related to the printing of the Romanian *Bible*, explaining to Metropolitan Bănulescu-Bodoni: "*The Committee would be exposed to some great difficulties if it sent the material necessary for printing the book to Chişinău [...], and the costs of publishing the Bible would increase much*".¹ Anticipating the event, we shall state that the *Bible* issued in Romanian by the Bible Society was really expensive. A copy of the *Bible* was offered for sale in Chişinău for 12 roubles 50 kopecks, while the Russian *Bible* was sold for a price of only 6 roubles, or the German one for 10 roubles, etc.² But let us return to the events. The Committee, however, found a way out and Alexander Golitsyn asked Metropolitan Bănulescu-Bodoni (in the above mentioned address) to continue to supervise the biblical text in order that in the future "*all mistakes to be avoided and the corrected printed sheets will serve as the original for the typesetting*". He was also requested to find an ecclesiastical person who would be sent to Petersburg in order to supervise the printing there too, so as to avoid thus "*all errors*". The Committee also took on "*the adequate maintenance of the person sent, allocating for this aim 25,000 roubles*".³ We mention, in the context, that due to the lack of a priest ("duhovnic") who could have supervised the biblical text in Petersburg, proofreading was carried out only by laypersons: Prince Alexander Ypsilanti and Counsellor Matei Krupenski. Probably, after June 23, 1816, the relationship between Exarch Gavriil and Prince Golitsyn became much more strained. Since it was refused "*to continue the printing of the Bible in Chişinău*", it seems that the Bishop, offended, delayed to seek a clergyman to be sent to Saint Petersburg. As A. Stadnitzki also stated, "*Gavriil, fulfilling the last request*" of Prince Golitsyn, nevertheless, sent a clergyman to Saint Petersburg. This happened only on February 15, 1817 (after a delay of almost six months). The Hegumen of Dobrovăţ Monastery (Moldavia), Varlaam Cuza, a later prelate, set out for Saint Petersburg.⁴

We ought to emphasize the fact that the President of the Bible Committee in Saint Petersburg was in a great hurry to publish the Romanian version of the *Bible*. He had his reasons. The editions of the Holy Scripture issued in the languages spoken by the nations living in the empire were prepared in parallel. In the first nine years of its publishing activity (1812–1821), the *Russian Bible Society* issued books of the Holy Scripture in more than 26 languages. Or: 104 editions in 507,600 copies.⁵

¹ A. Балцатеску, *Бессарабское Отделение ...*, 215.

² ANRM, F. 205, inv. 1, d. 1628, f. 17.

³ A. Балцатеску, *Бессарабское Отделение ...*, 215.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 216.

⁵ In 1821 the *Russian Bible Society* also prepared for publication biblical books in other eight languages, issuing 111,000 copies. Another six editions (in five languages) were submitted for typesetting, 30,000 copies being planned. Thus a total number of 129 editions in 29 languages and 675,600 copies were issued. Among the editions published in the languages of other peoples in the empire there was also the edition "*in Moldavian language*".

In his address which arrived in Chişinău on June 21, 1817 (no. 271), Alexander Golitsyn emphasized: “*The Russian Bible Society, rejoicing at the success of Varlaam’s undertaking in the publication of the Moldavian Bible decided to shorten the time for revising and correcting the text which will be published here and to send to Your All Holiness the corrected parts [...]*.” He also added: “*Only after the corrected parts have been seen and sanctioned by Your All Holiness, they will be sent to be printed*”.¹ A natural question occurs here: why Prince Golitsyn, having rejected the Exarch’s initiative to continue to correct and print the books in the Exarchal Printing House in Chişinău (address of June 23, 1816), exactly a year later, on June 21, 1817, proposed to Exarch Gavriil again to “send the sheets” to be seen and corrected?

It is important to remember Alexander Golitsyn’s reasoning in the mentioned address: “*According to the Rules of the Bible Society, which cannot publish the books of the Holy Scripture in another language without being sanctioned by a hierarch of the respective church, we need the Consent of Your All Holiness [...]*”.² Or, the President of the Committee was obliged to respect this principle when the Russian Bible Society published the Holy Books (new editions of the Bible). How did things evolve in the end? Was this principle faithfully respected? Was the Holy Scripture published with “the blessing” of the hierarch of the Bessarabian Church?

Naturally, Metropolitan Gavriil Bănulescu-Bodoni continued to correct the biblical text – the first two books of the *Old Testament*, Genesis and Exodus. On October 17, 1817, he sent an address to the President of the Bible Committee: “*In the first part there is a small difference compared to the Greek and Slavonic text and therefore I hoped that in the other books there would be no great difficulties, but, above my expectations, in the second book I met so many obstacles that I have to address Your Excellency with detailed clarifications. Reading the Exodus [...] I saw that the Moldavian translation in many places does not correspond: either to the Greek one or the Slavonic one [...], as compared to the Greek one and to the Slavonic one either entire verses are omitted, or something completely different is translated [...]*”.³

The Metropolitan also indicated that such mistakes had occurred in the other books of the *Old Testament* as well. These being said, Gavriil Bănulescu-Bodoni mentioned that “*Archimandrite Varlaam could not overlook these differences*”. About these he somewhat earlier communicated to the President: “*that the Walachian translation is closer to the Latin and French ones than to the Greek and Slavonic*”, a fact the Metropolitan did not doubt, “*as this Bible is printed in Transylvania by the unionists [Greek Catholics – translator’s note]*”. This was why, explained Bănulescu-Bodoni, “*in such an important thing*”, he would not dare to give his approval, “*because the people not only will not receive this Bible favourably, but they will revolt against him once he ‘gave his blessing’ to such an*

¹ А. Балцатеску, *Бессарабское Отделение ...*, 215.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., 216.

unorthodox Bible".¹ What did Metropolitan Gavriil Bănulescu-Bodoni propose? "Firstly, I think that the Moldavian Bible, namely the Old Testament, should be corrected on the basis of the Slavonic translation published by the Holy Synod of Russia and it should completely conform to this, since the Slavonic edition in the course of several years was revised and compared to several variants of the seventy elders".² Then, to ensure a corrected edition of the *Old Testament* and to continue the printing successfully, he asked the President of the Society to send Hegumen Varlaam to Chişinău in order to "correct the text together". Only after this was carried out, would the corrected books be sent through Hegumen Varlaam to Saint Petersburg "where they will be typeset for publication".³ Hoping that his initiatives regarding the printing would be supported by those in Petersburg, Metropolitan Gavriil Bănulescu-Bodoni retained the corrected parts of the biblical text (the insistence and consistency of the Exarch are known; this being, otherwise, a fact observed in the appreciations of Russian historians).⁴

Prince Alexander Golitsyn seems to have been so much annoyed by the Exarch's insistence that he persisted in giving him even some "teachings" (the address of December 18, 1817): "If the Bible had been in the hands of the Moldavian people at all, what other Bible could it have been than the two known ones? [Bucharest, 1688; Blaj, 1795 – our note, M. D.]".⁵ It is also important to remember that after the date referred to above – 18 December 1817 –, sources on the printing of the Bible "suddenly come to an end" in the archives of Chişinău. The silence of Chişinău archives is, in fact, justified. The state of conflict between the ambitions of Metropolitan Gavriil Bănulescu-Bodoni and of the President of the Russian Bible Society reached its height. The President of the Saint Petersburg Bible Committee did not request the services of the Bessarabian "Exarch" after the mentioned date.

We must remember that, meanwhile, the typesetting of the Romanian *Bible* was suspended. The Synodal Printing House suffered "financial losses". Probably, in this period was the press changed: the Synodal Printing House was exchanged for Nikolai Greci's, a well-known publisher at this time. We may assume even that this influenced later book prices as well. These were, as we have mentioned above, excessively high for the possibilities of those to whom the book of the Holy Scripture was intended.⁶

After 18 December 1817, the final decision of the Bible Committee was made: the *Bible* was to be published directly after the original from Blaj (1795), the proofreading being supervised by Archimandrite Varlaam "and in case of some essential differences Bishop Filaret who knows Hebrew will be consulted... and this must be done as soon as possible for the Moldavian people is completely devoid of spiritual nourishment, which would be much graver [...] than the continuation of

¹ Ibid.

² Ibid., 218.

³ А. Стадницкий, *Гавриил Банулеско-Бодони ...*, 361.

⁴ А. Балцатеску, *Бессарабское Отделение...*, 219.

⁵ А. Стадницкий, *Гавриил Банулеско-Бодони...*, 361.

⁶ ANRM, F. 205, inv. 1, d. 2876, f. 46.

*critical discussions on some inadequate words and senses [...]”*¹ We may observe, in fact, that between 18 December 1817 and 15 August 1819, the proofreading of the biblical text was carried out only in the “entourage” of the Saint Petersburg clergy. This moment delimited an important stage of the publication which could help us in identifying when the last part of the text (*The Book of Joseph Maccabeus* – a text present in the Bible of Blaj, 1795, but missing from the Bible of 1819) was omitted from the content of the Old Testament. Then, it can be assumed that the “watching eye” of Bishop Filaret (Drozdov), Rector of the Theological Academy in Petersburg observed the last book of the *Old Testament* – *The Book of Joseph Maccabeus* – present in the Romanian *Bible* edition of Blaj (1795) after which the text was typeset, as well as its missing from Slavonic synodal editions! This fragment was removed by the synodal censor. The situation being exceedingly delicate, authorities in Petersburg did not dare to intercede with the “Exarch” of Chişinău for obtaining his sanction. Thus, the Romanian *Bible* of 1819 was published only “with the blessing of the Holy Governing Synod of the whole Russia, the godly scripture of the old law and the new in a Romanian translation which first was printed in Transylvania and now it was printed at the expense of the Russian Bible Society [...]” (*The Bible*, 1819, title page). This historic deed recorded on the pages of the book constituted, in fact, the end of this conflict between Gavriil Bănulescu-Bodoni and the President of the Russian Bible Society, Alexander Golitsyn.²

The distribution of the *Bible* and the problem of book collection (administered by the Bessarabian Branch of the Russian Bible Society) after 1826

The collection of documents regarding the activity of the branch organization contains sufficient evidence which lead to the conclusion that the “Bible movement” in Bessarabia was directed, basically, towards the distribution – by selling – of religious books among the adherents of different denominations. Exactly this form of biblical missionary work extended to wide proportions in Bessarabia. At different stages, not only the archpriests of the region/districts, monks from monasteries and small convents, the adherents of different denominations were involved in this movement, but also laypersons from different social categories. Furthermore, this movement at the peripheries of the Empire was supported also with different informative, propaganda materials. After each meeting of the Saint Petersburg *Bible Committee* data (extracts) were sent to the branch organizations regarding the achievements of the missionary activities in other provinces of the Empire. This image of the missionary movement in Bessarabia can be easily drawn on the basis of the official document; because, in general outlines, this local specificity (according to sources) is outlined from an official hierarchical scale. Administrative authorities at different levels intervened directly in the selling of books. This order system was supported by chancery propaganda (completely dissimilar to the British model on the basis of which the *Russian Bible Society* was constituted). Thus, the distribution of the *Bible* was strictly controlled by either local or central (in Saint Petersburg) ecclesiastic and lay authorities.

¹ А. Балцатеску, *Бессарабское Отделение...*, 219–220.

² Danilov, *Cenzura sinodală...*, 67.

How was bookselling carried out? It is certain that the *Bessarabian Branch* of the Russian Bible Society operated according to the central, imperial model: the hierarchic/social scale was strictly respected – synodal/episcopal regulations were made known to all subjects by means of ecclesiastic and lay functionaries. Since the publication of the first holy book editions published by the Saint Petersburg *Bible Society*, these had been sent for distribution to the Eparchy of Chişinău and Hotin. Metropolitan Gavriil Bănulescu-Bodoni, beginning with the year 1815, sent donations to the Bessarabians.¹ Anyway, around 1817, no concrete lists referring to the parishes/churches which lacked *Bibles* or the *New Testament* existed at the Pastoral Consistory in Chişinău or at the Bible Committee.²

This was required from them when the *Bessarabian Branch* was founded. Local sources recorded an overwhelming abundance of such chancery documents. The requests made in the field – by parish priests – offer us surprising information.³ All these data from local archives gathered together would certainly furnish for the future a clearer image on the Bessarabian phenomenon in the period of Tsarist occupation (1812–1918). These local sources should be analyzed in relation to the materials in the imperial archives, to the sources published in Russian historiography in the 19–20th century regarding the biblical issue. We mention only one source, related to the personality of Exarch Gavriil Bănulescu-Bodoni, published in the *Report* of the Petersburg Bible Society (1817): “Metropolitan Gavriil, Exarch of Chişinău and Hotin, Vice President of the Bessarabian Branch, informed us that Bulgarians, our neighbours and of the same faith, have great need of books in their own language, since in Old Slavonic they do not understand them. Therefore he inquired whether the Society disposed of books already translated in Bulgarian, otherwise he would try to find a translator”. The commentaries referring to this subject were the following in official Russian historiography: “*It seems that the Exarch and the Committee at that time were not aware of the fact that this neighbouring people of the same faith is exactly the one to whom the first Slavonic translation of the holy books belonged*”.⁴ The commentaries seem to be superfluous. Nevertheless, let us inquire, what/how much did the academician Al. Pypine know, in 1868, about the personality of the Romanian Exarch of Bessarabia?

On February 28, 1827 (after a delay of 10 months) the ukase of the Holy Synod signed by Metropolitan Seraphim (President of the *Russian Bible Society* since 1824) arrived in Chişinău. The ukase had been issued on the basis of the Tsar’s

¹ ANRM, F. 205, inv. 1, d. 1628, f. 4–5.

² Пыпин А. Н., *Религиозные движения...*, 41. In the first years of its activity, the Saint Petersburg *Bible Society* was permanently supported financially by its British counterpart. For the publication of the *New Testament* in Romanian special sums were sent. The sum of 9,500 pounds, which was equivalent to 200,000 roubles, figures in the report for the year 1815.

³ Maria Danilov, “Mişcarea biblică în Basarabia. Aspecte misionare (1817–1829)” [The Bible movement in Bessarabia. Missionary aspects (1817–1829)], *Destin Românesc*, 30 (2001): 47–51.

⁴ Al. Pypine’s study referring to the church movement was first published in the journal *Vestnik Evropy*, no. 8, 9, 11, 12, 1868.

Rescript of April 12, 1826 regarding the “termination of the *Russian Bible Society*’s activity and of all its branches extant in the provinces, the latter being obliged to make a general inventory of the book collection and the money they had”. In order to have accurate records of the book collection and the money, it was absolutely necessary for these data to be selected not only from the Consistory in Chişinău or the Bible Committee of the Branch. It was also necessary to gather precise information regarding the number of books sent to the parishes or held by private individuals and yet unsold. In what follows we shall publish some data selected from the collection of the Pastoral Consistory of Chişinău.

The report of Archpriest Petru Lanckovschi of May 5, 1827, referring to the book records received from Saint Petersburg in the *Bessarabian Branch* for the year 1825¹

Title	No./copies	The price of one copy	Total /sum
Bibles (Romanian)	1,459	10 roubles	14,580
New Testament (Romanian)	3,542	3 roubles	10,626
New Testament (Russian)	403	4 roubles	1,612
Psalter (Russian)	148	1 rouble	148
Psalter (Russian)	311	1.5 roubles	466

Note: the report also shows the books received in 1825 from the Moscow Branch: 216 *Bibles* and 86 *New Testaments*.²

The list of private persons who procured books from the store of the Russian Bible Society’s *Bessarabian Branch*. May 5, 1827³

No.	Name	Title/book	No./copies
1	Metropolitan Dionisie (Bucharest)	New Testament	61
2	Archpriest of Akkerman [Cetatea Albă] Fiodor Maliavinski	Bible	6
3	Father Nicolae	Bible	1
4	college assessor Kotov	Bible	2
		New Testament	91
4	Archpriest Sterikov	Bible	33
5	functionary I. Racul	Bible	61
6	merchant Vasiliy Tchaplyghin	Bible	3
7	Governor Catacazi	Bible	7
8	Archpriest Ion Pintelii	Bible	9
		New Testament	10

¹ ANRM, F. 208, inv. 2, d. 3360, f. 13–26.

² ANRM, F. 208, inv. 2, d. 3360, f. 26.

³ ANRM, F. 208, inv. 2, d. 3360, f. 32.

9	Pastoral Dicastery	Bible	9
		New Testament	10
10	Director Ghildenșan	Bible	5
		New Testament	2
11	Colonel Arvanatachi	Bible	4
12	college secretary Andreevschi	Bible	4
		New Testament	5
13	Archpriest of Briceni	Bible	10
		New Testament	3
14	Hierodeacon Nazaria	Bible	1
15	V. Kuprianov	Bible	1
16	I. Hrisostat	Bible	1
17	merchant Vasile Băcalu	Bible	1
		New Testament	5
18	chancery clerk Druganov	Bible	1
		New Testament	15
16	C. Vladimirov	Bible	1
		New Testament	10

The Archbishop of Chișinău, for years after the activity of the Russian Bible Society terminated, still continued to distribute its books.¹ Archival sources reveal that a significant quantity of undistributed books in Russian/Slavonic remained in the stores of the *Bessarabian Branch*.² The inventoried books of the former collection of the *Bessarabian Branch* continued to be sold at low prices even after almost four decades after its closure (1826).³ This fact demonstrates that most parishes in Bessarabia used Romanian language books.

¹ ANRM, F. 208, inv. 2, d. 3360, f. 452–498. We may take as an example the address of Archbishop Dimitrie Sulima of 5 December 1830 to Chief Procurator of the Holy Synod, Prince Petru Mescerschi, in which he asked, for some local needs, books in Greek: *Bibles* – 65, *New Testament* – 80. As an additional example we refer to the address of Archbishop Dimitrie Sulima of 6 August 1830 to the Holy Synod, in which he asked for the permission to distribute free of charge from the stacks of the library 25 copies of the *New Testament* in Romanian language to the scholarship holders of the Pastoral Seminary; ANRM, F. 208, inv. 3, d. 120, f. 2–3. On the basis of the synodal orders of 18 October 1829 (no. 1226) and 14 August 1835, the books left after the activity of the Russian Bible Society's *Bessarabian Branch* were sold at a low price and the gathered money – 10 kopecks from each rouble – was deposited to the chancery of the Synod.

² ANRM, F. 208, inv. 3, d. 120, f. 13–23. The administrative department of the Holy Synod – the memorandum of March 1, 1848, no. 983 – asked the ecclesiastic authorities of Chișinău to send them urgently 350 copies – *New Testament* in Slavonic – from the local book collection to complete the collection of the Synodal Library. In the Library of the Seminary there were only 50 copies, the rest of the volumes were recovered from the stores. On 6 April the first 28 books were sent, on 10 April another 32 and on 18 May, 162.

³ ANRM, F. 208, inv. 5, d. 639, f. 2. The books of the Holy Scripture continued to be sold at a low price from the library of the Pastoral Seminary in Chișinău. The *report* for the year 1865 mentioned: *Bible* – 69 copies (1 rouble 42 kopecks); *New Testament* – 98 copies (40

Conclusion

The general situation of Bessarabia in the moment of her incorporation in the Russian Empire (in 1812) was deplorable. The immediate impact of this annexation was marked by the social-political and ecclesiastical crisis of the 19th century's first three decades. In this region – contrary to imperial expectations – chaos and disorder ruled, which triggered mass migrations of the population to Moldavia on the right bank of the Prut. The creation of a new ecclesiastical structure in the annexed territory imposed arbitrarily its transfer under the authority of the Russian Orthodox Church, therefore to a tradition foreign to the Romanian Church in Bessarabia.

The intentions of the *Saint Petersburg Bible Society* to publish a Romanian edition of the *Bible* led to the founding of the *Russian Bible Society's Bessarabian Branch* (1817). Moreover, on the basis of the discussed documents it has been stated that the Romanian *Bible* (1819) printed in Saint Petersburg under the aegis of the Bible Society cannot be considered “*a copy of the Blaj Bible, 1795, with small, mostly grammatical corrections*”. Consequently to the restrictions imposed by synodal censorship “*The book of Joseph Maccabeus, that is, for the only preserving thought*” (“A lui Iosip Macavei carte, adică pentru singurul țiitoriu gând”) was omitted from the content; hence the *Bible* of 1819 became a partial copy of the Blaj edition (1795).

The activity of this missionary institution was a phenomenon alien to the religious life of the province. Consequently, this movement took place according to a model directed by the *Saint Petersburg Bible Committee*, which means, it followed a structure identical with the central one. The latter, in turn, functioned in conformity to a foreign model (the *British and Foreign Bible Society*). It was not at all related to the interests of the Eparchy of Chișinău and Hotin in Bessarabia.

Translated by Ágnes Korondi

kopecks). In the stores there were still: *New Testament* – 109 copies; *Bibles* – 2850. Altogether 3925 books.