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FROM TRANSLATION TO PROVERB: *CINE SAPĂ GROAPA ALTUIA CADE SINGUR ÎN EA / WHOEVER DIGS A PIT FOR OTHERS SHALL FALL INTO IT*

Abstract: This research examines the genesis of a well-known Romanian proverb from both philological and translation studies perspectives: *Cine sapă groapa altuia cade singur în ea / Whoever digs a pit for others will fall into it*. The aim of the research is to determine in which historical period of the cultural development of the Romanian literary language it is possible to ascertain the existence of a popular proverb with an existence independent of the biblical prototype from which it originates. The primary methodology is drawn from diachronic linguistics, more precisely the comparative-historical method, supplemented by linguistic and stylistic textual analysis. By studying both concordances and divergences, it is possible to identify and interpret an important moment in the cultural context of the 17th century. This is the period in which the translators of biblical and popular literature of the time became aware of the emergence of a proverb that follows a different cultural trajectory from that of the biblical translations. Furthermore, the research argues in favour of the idea that proverbs are not fixed-form constructions, but miniature texts of wisdom, whose form and meaning vary from one era to another.

Keywords: proverbs, Romanian language and culture, wisdom literature, Bible translation, biblicalisms.

1. Preliminaries

Proverbs are miniature texts of wisdom (Permyakov 1979: 9-10) that succinctly convey reflections on human nature and the way people view the world. The discursive tradition of proverbs coincides with the dawn of writing. Thanks to scholars such as Samuel Noah Kramer (1956), Edmund Gordon (1968) and Bendt Alster (1997), it is now known that the clay tablets excavated from the sands of ancient Sumer contain a wealth of information about the wisdom literature of the Mesopotamian civilizations. This body of literary texts originally contained five types of evidence: a) proverbs, b) miniature essays, c) instructions and precepts, d) didactic fragments concerning schools and scribes, and e) disputes and debates (Kramer 1951:28). The repertoire was later expanded to include fables, folktales, riddles, parables, or satires (Murphy 1981: 9).

Sumerian proverbs outline the ancient ways of life (Alster 1997/ I: xix). These millennia-old wisdom texts have easily recognizable characteristics: lapidary form, terseness of expression, generic use of the grammatical person, symmetry (parallelism), and figurative meaning usually conveyed through metaphor, irony, simile, hyperbole, metonymy and synecdoche (Gordon 1968: 10-20). Over time, some of this treasure trove of wisdom was incorporated into the books of the Bible (Murphy 1981: 3). Through cultural transfer, some of the world's oldest proverbs found their way into the Christian tradition.

For Christian peoples, the Holy Scriptures serve as a significant repository of proverbs, alongside other sources such as i) borrowings from one nation to another, ii) the legacy of Greek and Roman antiquity; and iii) the cultural heritage of medieval Latin (Mieder 2004: 10-13). The total number of biblical proverbs is estimated at three hundred and five hundred units that are known to and regularly used by the general public (Mieder 1990: 2). The collections of proverbs, maxims and adages of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance combined the language and tenets of the Bible with those of classical antiquity, contributing to the proliferation of phrases, quotations and texts that eventually emerged from the collective consciousness of the people as idioms, sayings, proverbs and other forms of expression.

The study of the relationship between the proverbs of the Bible and the folk proverbs of various peoples has gained enduring support from the international scientific community, as evidenced by the contributions of Crystal (2010), Dundes (1999), Mieder (1990), and Taylor (1962), among others. In Romanian culture, this field of research has only recently emerged as a research topic. However, notable contributions to paremiology and phraseological lexicography have been made by Negreanu (1983), Tabarcea (1982: 141-153), Toma (2011) and Zanne (1895-1903/ 2019).

In numerous vernacular languages, the translation of the Bible has contributed to the development of a rich reservoir of linguistic resources, including words of wit, idioms, sayings, and proverbs. This centuries-long activity has had a multitude of consequences, including those pertaining to ideology, culture, and language. Consequently, the objective is to identify and analyse the pathways followed by various proverbial units during their journey from the Holy Scriptures to the mind and language of the people. This process often results in the loss of awareness that a certain string of words or linguistic sequence is of biblical origin. An in-depth study of the process would improve our understanding of:

- a) the importance of translations for the spread of what Mokienko (2011: 92) referred to as “biblicisms” in most European cultures;
- b) the linguistic and stylistic adaptations to the semiotic profiles of the languages into which such translations were made;
- c) the impact of the old Romanian writings on the mentality of different generations of speakers;
- d) the description of the mechanisms that led to the transformation of the textual and stylistic identity of specific biblical passages into linguistic forms commonly present in the vernacular;
- e) the dynamic equilibrium between tradition and innovation, that is between conventional norms and creative use of language, with reference to the adaptation of biblical excerpts into the proverbs of the people;

f) the grammatical and semantic variation of proverbial units with biblical prototypes.

In recent decades, scholars and scientists have approached the study of proverbs from a variety of different but neighbouring perspectives. These include ethnology and folklore (Dundes 1999, Krikmann 2009, Mieder 1993), pragmatics (Colston 2015; Norrick 1985), psychology (Honeck 1997), rhetoric (Bland 1997: 1-21; Winton 1990), and semiotics (Permyakov 1979, Grzybek 1987). From a linguistic perspective, the analysis of proverbs has been conducted from one of the two fundamental perspectives: the synchronic (descriptive) perspective or the diachronic (evolutionary) perspective. The approach is usually either static or dynamic. The static approach views proverbs as clichés, stereotypes, or fixed-form units of the discourse level of language (Permyakov 1979: 10, Schapira 1999). The dynamic approach, on the other hand, studies proverbs as speech acts (Jesenšek 2014: 135) or texts (Norrick 1985) and views proverbs as instances of language in the making. More recently, researchers have turned to the cognitive framework to gain insights into the interpretation of proverbs as generic-level metaphors (Gibbs 2001; Lakoff 1993: 233-235), conceptual blends (Andersson 2013) or mental models (Shore 1996: 362-363).

The richness of this intellectual landscape illustrates the inherent difficulty of defining proverbs in a way that aligns with their communicative properties. It is therefore important to show that the construction of proverb corpora based on the matrices of sacred or other religious texts requires a high degree of philological expertise. For example, Romanian idioms or expressions such as (a trăi) *ca-n sânul lui Avram*, meaning “to live happily”, and referred to in Luke 16:22, (a trimite /a purta/ a duce pe cineva) *de la Ana la Caiafa*, which translates to “here and there”, according to John 18:13-28, or the admonition *Ce ție nu-ți place altuia nu face* / *Do not do to others what you would not like to be done to you*, as found in Matthew 7:12 and Luke 6:31, are considered to have biblical origin by the Romanian writer and scholar George Coșbuc (1903, in Chivu 2007/II: 908). However, not all units correspond to the defining characteristics of proverbs. Similarly, David Crystal examines the cultural heritage of

the English idioms *an eye for an eye*, with reference to Exodus 21:24 and Matthew 5:38 (Crystal 2010: 58-59), and *the blind leading the blind*, with reference to Matthew 15:14 and Luke 6:39 (Crystal 2010: 136-137), whereas Wolfgang Mieder identifies similar sequences as proverbs: *An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth* (Mieder 1990: 41), and *When the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch* (Mieder 1990: 64). Furthermore, reference works such as Tilley (1950: 54 B452) attest only to the latter proverb in English literature of the 16th and the 17th centuries. This detail suggests that the Old Testament law of retribution must have captured public attention no earlier than the 18th century. This assumption is also supported by the 16th-century collection of the Erasmian *Adages*, which includes the Latin *Caecus caeco dux/ The blind leading the blind* expression (Barker 2001: 112), but it does not make any reference to the idiom “*an eye for an eye*”. In short, many examples do not correspond to the theoretically-acknowledged features of proverbs, and the appeal to taxonomic precision does not seem to hinder researchers in their efforts to identify the biblical origin of various language elements.

With regard to the knowledge of biblical verses, paragraphs, quotes, sayings, or scenes, there are two fundamental approaches to the study of Scripture. The first is an unmediated contact with the religious texts, and the second is indirect, through cultural borrowings. Direct contact with the religious texts can be achieved through a variety of activities, including attending the liturgy, listening to sermons, reading the Bible and prayer books such as the Psalter, and, last but not least, familiarising oneself with Christian literature on the lives of the saints, the wisdom of the Church Fathers, and related topics. In addition, the pervasive dissemination of diverse forms of religious folklore, including legends, apocrypha, and superstitions, influenced the collective understanding of the tenets of the faith even before the protracted efforts to translate the sacred texts. As Dundes (1999: 10) notes, “orally transmitted folklore such as proverbs and legends can survive relatively intact for centuries with no help from written sources. In modern times, we tend to rely heavily upon print or other means of recording data, and we fail to realize that hu-

mankind throughout most of its collective history has depended almost exclusively upon orally transmitted knowledge”.

There are a variety of sequencing options for the transfer of biblical language and style into the vernacular, ranging from individual words to complete miniature texts. As Földes (1990: 59) and Toma (2012) posit, the clippings can be either:

- a) words and biblical terms: Rom. *iudă* “traitor”; Rom. *caiafă* “hypocrite”;
- b) compounds and collocations: Rom. *alfa și omega* “the beginning”, with reference to Apocalypse 22:13, Rom. *fiică a Evei* “daughter of Eve, woman”; Rom. *fiul omenesc / fiul omului* “son of man, Jesus Christ”; Rom. *înger păzitor* “guardian angel”; Rom. *vițel de aur* “the golden calf, the adoration of riches”;
- c) idioms and expressions: Rom. *pâinea (cea) de toate zilele* “daily bread”; Rom. *a se spăla pe mâini de ceva* “to get rid of something”, with reference to Matthew 27:24;
- d) paraphrases: Rom. *a da cezarului ce-i al cezarului* / Engl. *render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's*, with reference to Matthew 22:21, Mark 12:17, Luke 20:25;
- e) proverbs: Rom. *Cine ridică sabia de sabie va pieri* / Engl. *He who lives by the sword dies by the sword* (Mieder 1990: 53), with reference to Matthew 26:52;
- f) *twists and antiproverbs*: Rom. *Cine nu caută nu găsește / Nu cauți, nu găsești*, referenced in Matthew 7:7 and Luke 11:9, in relation to Rom. *Caută și vei afla* / Engl. *Seek, and you shall find* (Mieder 1990: 34).

In accordance with the hypothesis proposed by Nida (1975: 24), it can be argued that the Bible occupies a unique position within the cultural history of humanity. It is probably the most translated book, with over 1,100 languages into which the Bible has been translated, including 210 languages that have produced a translation of the entire Bible. This rich tradition, which has spanned millennia, commenced in the mid-third century BC with the translation of the Hebrew Old Testament into Greek and continues to the present day. By the middle of the 16th century, when the oldest Romanian translations of the Psalter were is-

sued, there were only 33 languages in which the Bible was available in translation (Nida 1975: 24). Towards the end of the 17th century, in 1688, the inaugural Romanian edition of the Bible was completed. By the end of the 18th century, new translations were printed, in 1760 and 1795. The Romanian editorial milestones demonstrate the challenges inherent in tracing the historical development of biblical textual sequences that have become proverbial prototypes of common usage. Nevertheless, the limitations of this study do not preclude the examination of select folk proverbs and their Biblical roots. This analysis aims to illustrate the intricate cultural connections, multifaceted overlaps, and the profound richness of meaning that underpin the history of proverbs.

2. *Cine sapă groapa altuia cade singur în ea / Whoever digs a pit for others shall fall into it*

2.1. The religious translation reflex

In most oral and written European cultures, the proverb is well-known, ranking ninth in popularity¹ (Paczolay 1997: 77-82). The

¹ The proverb is considered the most prominent in the Finnic common repertoire (Krikmann 2007: 58). The popularity of the Romanian proverb has yet to be rigorously assessed. A pilot proficiency test conducted during the 2009-2010 academic year, with the participation of 50 students, aged between 18 and 30 years, revealed that the proverb *Cine sapă groapa altuia cade singur în ea* is particularly familiar. Specifically, the respondents were requested to compile a list of proverbs that they could readily recall within a limited time frame (approximately 15 minutes). A total of 91 proverbs were recorded with 354 occurrences across the 50 lists. The text *Cine sapă groapa altuia cade singur în ea* was the third most frequently occurring proverb, as determined by the number of times it was listed in the proficiency tests. The 15 most commonly known Romanian proverbs among the participants in the experimental proficiency test, in the descending order of frequency, were as follows: 1. *Buturuga mică răstoarnă carul mare / Little strokes fell great oaks*; 2. *Cine se scoală de dimineată departe ajunge / The early bird catches the worm*; 3. *Cine sapă groapa altuia cade singur în ea / Whoever digs a pit for others shall fall into it*; 4. *Prietenul la nevoie se cunoaște / A friend in need is a friend indeed*; 5. *Ai carte, ai parte / Knowledge is power*; 6. *Nu lăsa pe mâine ce poți face azi / Never put off until tomorrow what you can do today*; 7. *Lupul își schimbă părul, dar năravul ba / The wolf may lose his teeth but never his nature*; 8. *Ulciorul nu merge de multe ori la apă / The pitcher goes so long to the water until it breaks*; 9. *Meseria e brățară de aur / A handful of*

proverb owes its vitality to the Bible. It is used in several² books of the Scripture, and features in narrative and declarative speech acts:

- (a) Ps 7:15: *Groapă a săpat și a adâncit-o, și va cădea în groapa pe care a făcut-o.* (B 1997) / Engl. He made a pit and dug it out and has fallen into the ditch which he made;
- (b) Pv 26:27: *Cine sapă groapa (altuia) cade singur în ea, (și cel ce rostogolește o piatră se rostogolește (tot) peste el).* (B 1997) / Engl. Whoever digs a pit will fall into it, (and he who rolls a stone, will have it roll back on him);
- (c) Eccl 10:8: *Cel ce sapă o groapă poate să cadă în ea (și cel ce dărimă un zid poate fi mușcat de șarpe)* (B 1997) / Engl. He who digs a pit may fall into it; (whoever breaks through a wall will be bitten by a snake);
- (d) Sir 27:26: *Cel ce sapă groapa altuia va cădea el în ea, (și cel ce întinde cursă prinde-se-va în ea)* (B 1997) / Engl. Whoever digs a pit falls into it, (and whoever lays a snare is caught in it).

The earliest known religious writings in Romanian date back to the first decades of the 16th century. In consideration of the distinctive cultural characteristics of the linguistic milieu, the instances of the aforementioned proverbial sequences are relatively scarce in the initial Romanian translations of the Psalter:

trade, a handful of gold; 10. Ce ție nu-ți place altuia nu(-i) face / Do not do to others what you would not like to be done to you; 11. Așchia nu sare departe de trunchi / The apple doesn't fall far from the tree; 12. Ochii care nu se văd se uită / Out of sight, out of mind; 13. Vorba dulce mult aduce / Kind words are sweet to the soul; 14. Apa trece, pietrele rămân / Water flows, rocks remain; 15. Minciuna are picioare scurte / A lie has no legs. Out of these 15 well-known Romanian proverbs, Paczolay (1997) mentions 7 texts: Cine sapă groapa altuia cade singur în ea; Prietenul la nevoie se cunoaște; Nu lăsa pe mâine ce poți face azi; Lupul își schimbă părul, dar năravul ba; Ulciorul nu merge de multe ori la apă; Ce ție nu-ți place altuia nu(-i) face; Ochii care nu se văd se uită.

² We concentrated our attention on four instances documented in the Bible, although the idea expressed by the proverb can also be identified in other sections of the sacred text, such as Psalms 9:15: "The nations have fallen into the pit they dug; their feet are caught in the net they have hidden".

(a) Ps 7:16:

Părau rimă și săpă, și cădzu în groapă ce făcea (PV);
Pîrau rim și săpă și căzu în groapă ce făcea (P 1577);
groapa scurmă și o săpă, și cădzu în groapă ceia ce făcea
(P 1589).

During the 17th and 18th centuries, the considerable efforts devoted to the translation and the objective of producing a comprehensive Romanian translation of the Bible resulted in a notable increase in the number of occurrences:

(a) Ps 7:16:

groapa o scurmă și o săpă, și căzu în groapa ce o făcu (PB³);
groapa o scurmă și o săpă, și cădzu în groapa ceea ce fece
(M);
groapa ce scurmă și săpă, și cădzu în groapa ceea ce fece
(M₁⁴);
groapă scurmă și săpă pre înșă și va cădea în săpătura pre
care o lucră (DP 1680);
Groapă săpă și o adâncă pre ea și va cădea în groapa carea
au făcut (B 1688); cf. Groapă săpă, și o adâncă pre ea, și va
cădea întru borta carea au făcut (MS. 45);
Groapă săpă și o adâncă pre ia, și va cădea în groapa carea
au făcut (P 1694);
Groapă au săpat și o au deșchis pre ia și va cădea în groapa,
carea au făcut (P 1757);
Groapă au deșchis și o au săpat și au căzut în groapa carea
au făcut (B 1760);

³ “The Psalter of Bălgrad (the contemporary Romanian city of Alba Iulia – editors’ note) was translated with greater care, displayed a more evolved literary language than other 16th-century Romanian versions of the Psalter, and seems to have enjoyed great prestige. [...] It is beyond doubt that Milescu made use of this version in his translation of the *Old Testament*” (Ursu 1987: 440).

⁴ “The analysis of the Romanian psalms from the mss. 4818 reveals the following: The copies were written in Transylvania either by a Moldavian or a Transylvanian scribe. The copy was made between 1637 and 1647, with a possible date range of 1640 to 1644. The Romanian translation of the vespers psalms is a copy of a Moldavian version of the Psalter that is closely related to the mss. 540 (M in this study, as noted by the editors)”. See Chivu (1972: 154).

Groapă au săpat și o au deschis pre ea, și va cădea în groapa carea au făcut. (B 1795)⁵.

Sl. роѣъ изры, и ископа и, и впадетс въ ‘мѣ, юже съдѣла (o);

Gr. λάκκον ὄρυξεν καὶ ἀνέσκαψεν αὐτὸν καὶ ἐμπεσεῖται εἰς βόθρον ὃν εἰργάσατο (LXX);

Lat. Lacum aperuit, et effodit eum; et incidit in foveam quam fecit (VUL).

(b) Pv 26:27:

Cela ce sapă groapa aproapelui său într-însa va cădea; (și cel ce tăvălește piatră, preste el se va tăvăli) (B 1688); cf.

Cela ce sapă groapă aproapelui său va cădea întru ea (și cel ce tăvălește piatră, preste el să va tăvăli) (MS. 45);

Cel ce sapă groapă cădea-va într-însa (și cel ce prăvale piatra să va întoarce la el) (B 1760);

Cel ce sapă groapă deaproapelui său va cădea însuși într-însa, (și cel ce prăvălește piatră, preste el să va prăvăli) (B 1795);

Gr. ὁ ὀρύσσων βόθρον τῷ πλησίον ἐμπεσεῖται εἰς αὐτόν (ὁ δὲ κυλίων λίθον ἐφ’ ἑαυτὸν κυλίει) (LXX);

⁵ In order to understand the relations between these texts, the following overview delineates the pivotal points: “During the decade between 1651 and 1660, with the publication of the Bălgrad Psalter and the elaboration of the Moldavian Psalter, a significant advancement was made in the process of improving the translation of the Psalter in Romanian. The second significant advancement in the process occurred during the subsequent decade with the translation of the Old Testament by Nicolae Milescu and his revision of the translation, which was likely conducted by Dosoftei and his followers. In addition, both Milescu and the reviewers of his translation made use of earlier Romanian versions of Psalter, most notably the Moldavian Psalter and the Bălgrad Psalter. [...] Furthermore, Milescu’s translation underwent a new revision and was published in the Bible of 1688. Thereafter, the Psalter was reproduced without changes by Antim Ivireanul, in the 1694 edition, which was issued in Bucharest. From the 1710 edition of Târgoviște onwards, the definitive edition of the Psalter was repeatedly reprinted in the 18th century, exhibiting minor discrepancies from one edition to another. These reprints were produced in Râmnic, Bucharest, Buzău, Iași, Blaj and Sibiu” (Ursu 1987: 441-442).

Lat. Qui fodit foveam incidet in eam, (et qui volvit lapidem revertetur ad eum) (VUL);

(c) Eccl 10:8:

Cel ce sapă groapă într-însa va cădea (și pre cel ce curățește gardul mușca-l-va pre el șarpe) (B 1688); cf. *Cel ce sapă groapă întru ea va cădea, (și pre cel ce curățește gardul, mușca-l-va pre el șarpe)* (MS. 45);

Cel ce sapă groapă cădea-va într-însa, (și cel ce rășipește gardul mușca-l-va șearpele) (B 1760);

Cel ce sapă groapă el va cădea într-însa, (și cel ce curățește gardul mușca-l-va pre el șearpele) (B 1795);

Gr. ὁ ὀρύσσων βόθρον ἐν αὐτῷ ἐμπεσεῖται (καὶ καθαιροῦντα φραγμόν δήξεται αὐτὸν ὄφις) (LXX);

Lat. Qui fodit foveam incidet in eam, (et qui dissipat sepem mordebit eum coluber) (VUL);

(d) Sir 27:27 (sau 29):

Cel ce sapă groapă într-însa va cădea, (și cel ce întinde cursă întru ea să va prinde) (B 1688); cf. *Cel ce sapă groapă la ea va cădea (și cel ce întinde laț la el să va prinde)* (MS. 45);

Și cel ce sapă groapă va cădea într-însa; (și cel ce pune piatră aproapelui să va lovi de ea; și cel ce întinde cursă altuia va peri într-însa) (B 1760);

Cel ce sapă groapă cădea-va într-însa, (și cel ce întinde cursă prinde-să-va într-însa) (B 1795);

Gr. ὁ ὀρύσσων βόθρον εἰς αὐτὸν ἐμπεσεῖται (καὶ ὁ ἰστῶν παγίδα ἐν αὐτῇ ἀλώσεται) (LXX);

Lat. et qui foveam fodit in illam decidet (et qui statuit lapidem proximo offendet in eo et qui laqueum alio peribit in illo) (VUL).

In general, the Romanian translations are consistent with their foreign counterparts in terms of fidelity to the source text. The discourse structure and grammar of the biblical sequences are consistent with those of the source texts. Similarly, the vocabu-

lary selections of the Romanian translations adhere to the lexical semantics and the synonymic variation (where applicable) of the source language, while also incorporating the synonyms that emerge in Romanian over time⁶.

It would appear that the initial context, (a) *Ps* 7:16, is not an exact reflection of the original text. Nevertheless, irrespective of the source language (Slavonic, Greek, Latin), the biblical verse presents a textual model characterized by variation in expression in two key aspects: (1) the name of what is being dug and (2) the names of the two actions referenced in the opening part of the verse. The early Romanian versions adhere closely to the expressive valences of the original textual model:

- PS: (1) *părău* – *groapă*, (2) *rimă* – *săpă*;
 P 1577: (1) *părău* – *groapă*, (2) *rim* – *săpă*;
 DP 1680: (1) *groapă* – *săpătura*, (2) *scurmă* – *săpă*;
 MS. 45: (1) *groapă* – *borta*, (2) *săpă* – *adâncă*.

In other versions, a pair of distinct lexical elements is retained solely with regard to the names of the actions referred to in the initial part of the verse. This more economical pattern, also documented in the 16th-century Romanian translations, became the dominant approach in 17th-century translation practices and remained so for the remainder of the period under consideration:

- P 1589: (1) *groapa* – *groapă*, (2) *scurmă* – *săpă*;
 PB, M, M₁: (1) *groapă* – *groapa*, (2) *scurmă* – *săpă*;
 B 1688, P 1694: (1) *groapa* – *groapă*, (2) *săpă* – *adâncă*;
 P 1757: (1) *groapă* – *groapa*, (2) *au săpat* – *au deșchis*;
 B 1760: (1) *groapă* – *groapa*, (2) *au deșchis* – *au săpat*.

It can be seen, therefore, that the “innovation” does not deviate from the patterns of the source texts, as it illustrates a Romanian

⁶ In addition to the aforementioned discussion, we wish to draw attention to the situation in *Sir* 27:27/29, the second part of the verse. Here, the Greek term *παγίδα* (*παγίς*, *ἰδος* ἡ), and its Latin correspondent *laqueum* (*laqueus*), are translated by Rom. *cursă* “trap” and Rom. *laț* “snare” in successive versions and editions.

equivalence created within the conceptual and linguistic frame provided by the Slavonic, Greek, or Latin synonyms:

Sl. **рѡѡ** 'λάκκος', 'fovea' (Miklosich), and **ѡѡѡ** 'βόθρος', 'λάκκος', 'fovea' (Miklosich);
 Gr: **λάκκος ѡ** '1. a pond for water-fowl, 2. a pit, reservoir' (Liddell-Scott), and **βόθρος ѡ**, 'any hole or pit dug in the ground' (Liddell-Scott), 'a pit, a ditch' (Thayer, Louw-Nida);
 Latin: **lacus** 'fosse, tombe, sépulcre', and **fovea** 'fosse' (Blaise).

In the context of the syntagmatic structure of the verse, the pairing of nouns referring to (1) what is being dug does not preclude the repetition of the same word with distinct syntactic functions. From a diachronic perspective, it can be concluded that the double use of the Romanian word *groapă* in Ps 7:16, probably arose independently of the linguistic contexts evidenced by other verses. This is because the double use of the word is derived from the suppression of lexical synonymy through the reiteration of the same word. In Prov 26:27, Eccl 10:8, and Sir 27:27, the Romanian translators consistently utilized the same noun, *groapă*, to translate the verses. The formal resemblance of the four biblical loci found in the Romanian translations from the 16th to the 18th century does not support the hypothesis that the suppression of synonymy among words meaning "pit", "ditch", "hole" and the like serves as evidence for the origin of a proverb. Had this been the case, the translators would probably have been inclined to quote the proverb, even if this would have resulted in a deviation from the patterns of the source texts.

2.2. The literary translation reflex

Towards the end of the 16th century, apart from the translation of the Bible, the translation of the literature from the period contributed to the circulation of what came to be known as popular books. In terms of both form and content, such translations facilitated the creation of sayings and proverbs rooted in the Bible, regardless of whether they made explicit reference to the Scripture. Such texts can be classified within the genre of wisdom literature.

In *Florea darurilor* (*The Flower of Virtue*), a Romanian manuscript (Mss. 4620) of a translation that may have descended from a Slavonic version translated from Greek (Gheție & Mareș 1985: 390), or that may have been translated directly from Greek (Moraru 1996: 60), the linguistic pattern follows the biblical prototype expressed in such loci as *Pv* 26:27, *Eccl* 10:8 and *Sir* 27:27. The authority of King Solomon is invoked to validate the explicit or the implicit attacks on the character of a particular individual:

“Solomon dzise: Cine face groapă să bage altul într-însa, însuș va cădea într-însa”. Și iarăși: “Cine rostogoleaște pietri întorcu-se spr-însul” (FD 1996: 543^r/151).

He (Solomon) also says: “Who digs the grave falls into it and who turns the stone causes it to fall over him” (FFV 1953: 63).

Other filiate versions (Moraru 1996: 46) included in the 17th and 18th century miscellanies, display the same pattern used to convey words of wisdom. The following examples are excerpted from FD 1996, *passim*:

Și cine sapă groapă altuè, e(l) va cădè într-însa (Ms. 3821, *Codex Neogoeanus*, copied by Ion of Sîmpetru in 1620);
 Și ci(n)(e) sapă groapa a(l)tuia apo(i) cade e(l) într-î(n)sa (Ms. 1436, copied by Costea of Șcheii Brașovului in 1693);
 Cine sa(p)(ă) groapa a(l)tuia însuși va cadè într-însa. (Ms. 550).

The ancient verse from the Book of Proverbs is also found in the newer edition of *Florea darurilor* (*The Flower of Virtue*), translated from Greek by a man of the cloth, the hieromonk Filotei Sfetagorețul (Moraru 1996: 69), and printed in Snagov, near Bucharest, in 1700, with the support of the Orthodox Metropolitan Antim Ivireanul: “Solomon au zis: (...) „Cel ce face groapă ca să bage pre altul, cade el într-însa”.

The biblical proverbial wisdom is also woven into the ancient East Christian narrative of Barlaam and Josaphat (Rom. *Istoria sfinților Varlaam și Iosaf de la India*):

“Auzind Nahor cuvintele acestea, cumplit s-a spăimîntat, văzîndu-se căzut în groapa pe care singur și-o săpase. De va întărita pe fiul împăratului, moartea îl așteaptă la sfîrșitul zilei și nimic nu-l poate scăpa” (CP 1998: 117).

“When Nakhor heard these words of Iodasaph’s he realized that he had fallen into the snare which he himself had dug, and perceived the evil fate and perdition which faced him, now that death threatened him from both sides” (BALA-VARIANI 1966: 139).

Another widely-known literary work, entitled *Esopia* (Engl. *Life of Aesop*), was translated in the early 18th century from Greek and Russian sources, the latter following a Latin prototype. In this context, the biblical proverbial verse is referenced:

“Iar ei să apucară de băură încropul și nu vrea să-și bage degetul în gură. Iar domnul lor îi pripi și încă nu apucară să-și bage degetele în gură și îndată începură a vărsa încropul împreună cu smochinele.

Atuncea căzu Esop la picioarele domnului său și să ruga să răsplătească clevetitorilor lui. Și îndată porunci domnul său de-i dezbrăcară cu pieile goale și-i bătură foarte rău. Și să plini atuncea cuvântul *Scripturii*, unde zice că „*cela ce sapă groapa altuia cade el într-însa*” (E⁷, LMR 2003: 789).

“But they hardly finished drinking the hot water that they became nauseous, and, without further ado, they refused the figs.

Then Aesop fell at his lord’s feet and begged him to repay his knaves. And immediately his lord commanded to strip them naked and beat them very badly. And thus the word of *Scripture* came true, where it says that “*whoever digs another’s grave falls into it*” (our translation).

⁷ The text is excerpted from I. C. Chițimia and Dan Simionescu (editors), *Cărțile populare în literatura românească*, vol. 1, Bucharest, Editura pentru Literatură, 1963, p. 117-160. This edition includes a transcription of Petru Bart’s *Viața și pildele preînțeleptului Esop / The Life and Parables of Aesop*, Sibiu, 1795, translated from a Russian version.

The renowned literary work, *The Story of Ahikar* (Rom. *Archirie și Anadan*), has been preserved in fifty-seven manuscripts, dating between 1708 and 1863. These manuscripts were discovered across all Romanian-speaking territories (Georgescu 1997:136). It seems reasonable to posit that the source of the Romanian translation was a Slavonic edition. Furthermore, there is evidence to suggest that copies were widely circulated during the 17th century, and indeed continued to be so thereafter.

Fătul mieu, nici să sapi groapa altuia, că apoi tu ver cădea într-însa (AA 1997: 62^{r/5-6}/158; MS. BAR 577 from 1708⁸; see Georgescu 1997: 125).

Engl.: “Yes, my brethren (...) whoso digs a pit for another shall fall into it himself” (Conybeare et al. 1913: 23).

It is acknowledged that the Romanian translations of the story known as *Archirie și Anadan* include versions with linguistic and stylistic changes adopted under the growing influence of folklore (Chițimia 1972: 409). However, it is important to note that the English renderings of the aforementioned mentioned fragment from older writings in various Eastern languages do not support the existence of a proverbial matrix active in the collective consciousness of the people. Instead, they demonstrate the preservation of the patterns set by the source texts during the act of translation:

Sl.: A eže kto drugu svoemu jamu kopa<eti>, sa<mī> da se vīpadne<tī> vī nju. (*Povest’ ob Akire premudrom* 26^v in Pelusi 1992: 217);

Armenian to English: “and he who digs a pit for others, himself falls into the pit” (Conybeare et al. 1913: 55);

⁸ The Romanian manuscript BAR 577, housed in the Library of the Romanian Academy, contains interlinear comments from an unidentified reviewer from the 18th century. The comments are intended to “improve the text by adding explanations and correcting the fragments deemed erroneous or inadequate from the standpoint of precision and the accuracy of expression” (Georgescu 1997:135). In this context, the proverb is modified as follows: “Nici să sapi groapa altuia, că apoi *bine* tu *poț* cădea într-însa” (MS BAR 577: 62^{r/5-6}) / Engl. transl. “Don’t dig another man’s grave because you might well fall into it”.

Old Turkish to English: “And whoso for another digs, into his pit he falls himself” (Conybeare et al. 1913: 98);

Arabic to English: “For he who digs a pit for his brother shall fall into it; and he who sets up traps shall be caught in them” (Conybeare et al. 1913: 161);

Syriac to English: “Who digs a pit for his neighbour fills it with his (own) stature” (De Blois 1984: 50);

Middle Persian to English: “Whoever digs a pit for his opponents falls in himself” (De Blois 1984:50).

With regard to the translations of the sequences under discussion, three linguistic aspects are noteworthy:

i) The type of discourse most frequently employed is a declarative speech act, as evidenced by the biblical occurrences (b), (c) and (d);

ii) Whether metaphorical or metonymic, the figurative core of the sequence excerpted from various books that illustrate the wisdom literature genre is the Romanian noun *groapă*. This term also serves as the constant marker, as evidenced by the translations of the Scripture;

iii) The syntactic pattern interwoven into the fabric of the literary discourse is similar to that observed in (b) Prov 26:27⁹, a sequence that stands apart from the other biblical loci through the use of Dative, in accordance with the Greek syntax of the Septuagint: *ὁ ὀρύσσων βόθρον τῷ πλησίον ἐμπεσεῖται εἰς αὐτόν ὁ*.

These facts ultimately lead us to infer that the religious and the literary textual patterns that emerge during the process of translation act as the linguistic and cultural precursors that shape and drive the popular wit to create proverbs with a specific grammar and choice of words.

2.3. *The proverb in use: from translation to creativity*

Among the various means of verbal communication within a given language, the presence of a proverb in the collective con-

⁹ Cf. Septuagint 4/1: “Whoever digs his neighbour’s grave falls into it...”; see also the translators’ note: “his neighbour”: own gloss LXX”, p. 492.

sciousness, symbolizing, in concise form, a particular type of real-life experience, enables the use of that paremiological unit in either previously unfamiliar contexts, that is under new circumstances of the verbal exchange, or in familiar contexts adopted and adapted to accommodate the new functions of the respective proverbial use. In the pre-modern Romanian literary tradition, apart from the long-standing tradition of translating the Bible and the neighbouring wisdom literature, the pathway that led to the autonomous use of proverbial texts emerges at the turn of the 17th and the 18th century. This is evidenced in secular writings devoted to local history, as proven by Zanne (2019/I/767: 112-113):

Nicolae Costin: “Șanț sapa și cadă într’însul cel ce l’au făcut”, and “Groapa aș sapat și aș cadut într’nsă”;

Dimitrie Cantemir: “În grópa care singur aș săpat, într’aceiași singur aș cadut”;

Ion Neculce: „Cine sapa grópa altuia cade el într’nsa”.

In all cases, the syntagmatic variation of the proverb in the making indicates the diversity of the primary sources, whether biblical or secular, as well as the scholars’ preferences for a particular biblical book, in a certain edition, which they imitated or adapted to forge the form and the meaning of a given author’s formula of wisdom. This process of variation is particularly evident in the literary works of Metropolitan Dosoftei, especially when compared with his translations of sacred texts. In the works of this major literary precursor, one can discern that in the verse translation of the Psalter, published in 1673, Dosoftei diverges from the canonical structure of the biblical psalms, by creating the following rhyme: “Cine va sapá grópa altuia să’l surpe / Singur va cădea’n rîpă și viêta sa ș’a rumpe” (DP1673) / Engl.: “He who digs a pit for another to fall / He himself goes down and ends his life of all” (our translation). In consideration of the biblical prototypes in Prov 26:27, Eccl 10:8 and Sir 27:27, the poet may be exonerated for the “betrayal” of the source text when rendering the idea in verse. However, the literary experiment was abandoned in 1680, when the Romanian metropolitan translated the psalms in prose and closely adhered to the canonical structure of

the source text: “groapă scurmă și săpă pre înșa și va cădea în săpătura pre care o lucră” (DP 1680). The lyrical style and prose translation choices evident in Dosoftei’s work allow us to posit that the literary freedom of expression may have been influenced by the already crystallized proverbial form present in the popular wit. The absence of formal and semantic constraints inherent to sacred text enables an artistic interpretation that resonates with the collective consciousness of the people. Thus, the secular wisdom literature enriches the common mind of the folk in the creation of paremiological units.

2.4. *The proverb in use: from the dictionary of proverbs to proverb play*

Proverb collections, dictionaries, and textbooks, such as those by Botezatu & Hincu (2001: 202) and Gheorghe (1986: 143), include the Romanian proverb *Cine sapă groapa altuia cade el/singur în ea/intr-înșa* / Engl. *Whoever digs a pit for others shall fall into it*. Following the proverbialization process during the 16th to 18th centuries, as evidenced by the use of proverbs in the literary works of the era, including popular books and those of Dimitrie Cantemir, the cultural and linguistic history of the proverb has remained unaltered with regard to the consistent deployment of the lexical core *groapă*, as opposed to other potential synonyms or substitutes that might have prompted the emergence of alternative proverbial expressions. Another biblical verse, Ezekiel 18:2, *Părinții mănâncă aguridă și copiilor li se strepezesc dinții* / Engl. *The parents eat sour grapes and the children’s teeth are set on the edge*, varies over time due to lexical substitution: *Părinții mănâncă mere acre și copiilor li se strepezesc dinții* (Golescu, in Zanne 1900/IV/ 10544: 540), *Unii gustă din lămâie ș-altora li se strepezesc dinții* (Eminescu 1963/VI: 367), *Părinții mănâncă plăcinte și la fii li se strepezesc dinții* (Cristea 1901:206). The string of Romanian lexical substitutes, *mere acre* (Engl. sour apples) - *lămâie* (Engl. lemon) – *plăcinte* (Engl. pies), proves that proverbs are flexible miniature texts with a rich cultural and linguistic evolution.

As a consequence of the loss of its biblical roots, the Romanian proverb *Cine sapă groapa altuia cade el/singur în ea/intr-înșa* continues to enjoy great vitality in contemporary use.

As Zanne (2019/I: 113) indicates, the loss of the proverb's Biblical origin was already underway by the end of the 19th century, and the process continued throughout the 20th century and beyond: "this proverb, so widespread among us, [...], is taken from the Bible". The people's grasp of the Bible is largely superficial, leading to a reliance on literary works and school textbooks as the source of many proverbs. The absence of a connection with the source texts gives rise to the formation of antiproverbial cognates (Milică 2013) that primarily reconfigure the literal and empirical contexts of the proverb:

*Cine sapă groapa altuia departe ajunge*¹⁰ / Engl. lit. Whoever digs a pit for another travels far;

*Cine se scoală de dimineată sapă groapa altuia*¹¹ / Engl. Whoever wakes up early digs a pit for another;

*Cine sapă groapa altuia lucrează pentru primărie*¹² / Engl. Whoever digs a pit for another works for the City Hall;

*Cine sapă groapa altuia trebuie să aibă o calificare*¹³ / Engl. Whoever digs a pit for another must have a degree;

*Cine sapă groapa altuia rămâne fără sapă*¹⁴ / Engl. Whoever digs a pit for another is left without the shovel.

3. Concluding remarks

The aforementioned corpus of textual evidence suggests that the earliest documented instance of the spontaneous use of the Romanian proverb sanctioning perfidy and cunning is found in Dosoftei's *Psalter in Verse*, published in 1673: *Cine va sapă grópa altuia să'l surpe* / *Singur va cădea'n rîpă și viêța sa ș'a rumpe* / Engl. *He who digs a pit for another to fall* / *He himself goes*

¹⁰ <https://rightwords.ro/folclor/cine-sapa-groapa-altuia-departe-ajunge--4068>, retrieved on 27 March 2024.

¹¹ <https://rightwords.ro/citate/cine-se-scoala-de-dimineata-sapa-groapa-altuia--211503>, retrieved on 27 March 2024.

¹² <https://roxanamchirila.com/2015/07/06/cine-sapa-groapa-altuia-lucreaza-pentru-primarie/>, retrieved on 27 March 2024.

¹³ <https://rightwords.ro/citate/cine-sapa-groapa-altuia-trebuie-sa-aiba-o-calificare--211631>, retrieved on 27 March 2024.

¹⁴ <https://www.simonatache.ro/2009/06/11/cine-sapa-groapa-altuia-ramane-fara-sapa/>, retrieved on 28 March 2024.

down and ends his life of all (our translation). In this literary context, the translator deviates from the textual archetype of Ps 7:16, allowing himself to be influenced by the proverbial sayings of the people.

The transfer of biblical parables into common use is a phenomenon observed in both ancient and modern times, and has been facilitated by secular literature. Derived from the sacred context of the Bible and adopted by society, proverbs such as Rom. *Cine sapă groapa altuia cade el/singur în ea/intr-însa* / Engl. *Whoever digs a pit for others shall fall into it* are subject to variation, as is often the case with verbal folklore. Despite their conventional status as fixed sayings, the tendency of oral transmission is to explore different linguistic and logical forms. The more frequently a proverb is used, the more susceptible it is to alteration, irrespective of its provenance. Among the various forms that are deemed acceptable and accepted in general usage, anti-proverbs serve to illustrate that the structure of proverbs is not an immutable and inviolable entity.

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