

**ON THE HEXAEMERAL REPRESENTATION OF THE WORLD:
HOMILIAE IN HEXAEMERON OF BASIL OF CAESAREA
IN THE ROMANIAN MANUSCRIPT TRADITION
OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY***

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1. In the early Christian cultural and literary system the natural world was represented as a creation of God. Any attempt to investigate it meant to reveal the work of the Creator thus glorifying Him. At the same time, the contemplation of the display of the creation's magnificence has opened the path not only to the explanation of theological truths, but also to the formulation of the Christian ethical principles. In this way, for example, the characteristics and habits of the animals of waters and of those living on earth, of the reptiles and of the flying birds gave an opportunity to discuss about the human action and behaviour in regard to God and to fellow men.

2. The hexaemeron is one of the literary forms in which the early Christian authors have developed their exegetical narrative on the biblical history of the world creation in six days¹. The hexaemeral tradition of organizing the knowledge about the world with the purpose to articulate a theological conscience according to the Old Testament started in the Jewish hellenist realm of thought together with the interpretation in allegorical terms of the Pentateuch by Philo of Alexandria. This tradition was taken over by Christian authors such as Theophilus of Antioch and Origen. Furthermore, through the *homiliae in hexaemeron* by Basil the Great, this

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¹ R. Peppermüller, "Hexaemeron", in: *Lexikon des Mittelalters*, volume 4, Munich – Zürich, 1989, col. 2199–2200; J.C.M. van Winden, "Hexaemeron", in: *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*, XIV, 1988, col. 1250–1269; idem, "Hexaemeron", in: *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, third edition, volume 5, Freiburg – Basel – Rome – Vienna, 1996, p. 78–79. On the meaning of number "six" in the exegesis of the Old Testament, see the article "Sechs" in: H. Meyer – R. Suntrup, *Lexikon der mittelalterlichen Zahlenbedeutungen* (Münstersche Mittelalter-Schriften, 56), Munich, 1987, col. 448–450, 453–454.

way of glorifying the splendor of cosmos (and at the same time of the transmission of knowledge) was taken over in the Christian West by Ambrose of Milan and in the Slavic East by John Exarchus².

Having employed the allegorical method, the Christian commentators used the concept of the six days of creation for the explanation and defense of the central doctrines of faith: Holy Trinity, Jesus Christ, the Son of God and Man, and the salvation plan. In Christian perspective, these truths were present at the beginning of creation, but they could not be discovered and known directly. This approach reflects the conception according to which nature, being the creation of God, speaks about the Creator and his plan of salvation for the humans³.

3. Though having the purpose of presenting the theology of creation outside any scientific system, however, the hexaemeron are an example of scientific thought of the first Christian centuries⁴. In fact, they were a form of the systematization of knowledge. The concept of the six days of creation had a formative influence towards the compilatory system of encyclopaedical type, which became very popular among the medieval authors, having been revigorated by the representatives of the so-called Chartres school in the twelfth century⁵.

4. The first complete Christian commentary on the biblical cycle of creation belonged to Basil the Great, Bishop of Caesarea. His homilies – a narrative developed in a simple form, based on faith and natural science – knew a wide reception in the Middle Ages. The commentary on the six days of creation (Genesis

² See G.M. Prokhorov, “Shestodnev”, in: *Slovar’ knizhnikov i knizhnosti Drevnei Rusi: XI – pervaja polovina XIV v.*, Leningrad, 1987, p. 478–483; M. Ionova, “Ioan Ekzarh”, in: D. Petkanova, I. Dobrev, A. Miltenova (eds), *Starobulgarska literatura: Entsiklopedichen rechnik*, second edition, Veliko Turnovo, 2003, p. 229–230; M. Ionova, “Shestodnev”, *ibidem*, p. 564–565.

³ Cf. C. Meier, *Argumentationsformen kritischer Reflexion zwischen Naturwissenschaft und Allegorese*, in: “Frühmittelalterliche Studien”, 12 (1978) 117.

⁴ See J. Zahlten, *Creatio mundi. Darstellung der sechs Schöpfungstage und naturwissenschaftliches Weltbild im Mittelalter* (Stuttgarter Beiträge zur Geschichte und Politik, 13), Stuttgart, 1979, p. 86–101.

⁵ See C. Meier, “Organisation of Knowledge and Encyclopaedic Ordo. Functions and Purposes of a Universal Literary Genre”, in: P. Binkley (ed.), *Pre-modern Encyclopaedic Texts. Proceedings of the Second COMERS Congress, Groningen, 1–4 July 1996*, Leiden – New York – Cologne, 1997, p. 107 (this paper has been republished in “Synthesis”, XXVII–XXVIII, 2000–2001, 15–33); *idem*, “Enzyklopädischer Ordo und soziale Gebrauchsraum. Modelle der Funktionalität einer universaler Literaturform”, in: C. Meier (ed.), *Die Enzyklopädie im Wandel vom Hochmittelalter bis zur frühen Neuzeit. Akten des Kolloquiums des Projekts D im Sonderforschungsbereich 231 (29.11–1.12.1996)* (Münstersche Mittelalter-Schriften, 78), Munich, 2002, p. 514–516.

1, 1–25) is to be found in a liturgical cycle from Monday to Friday held by Basil, probably, in the last year of his life (378)⁶.

4.1. In his exegesis, Basil did not refer to the part of the Genesis in which there is presented the creation of man. But the Greek manuscript tradition of his homilies includes some apokryphal texts or narratives ascribed to Gregory of Nyssa which cover the aforementioned theme of the first book of Pentateuch⁷. Thus, there are identified three categories of manuscripts containing the *Hexaemeron* of Basil the Great: i) *the short corpus* is constituted of the nine homilies on *Hexaemeron*, an anonymous homily *De hominis structura* and the apokryphal homily *De paradiso*; ii) *the expanded corpus* (with the most extended circulation) contains nine homilies on *Hexaemeron* by Basil and two writings by Gregory of Nyssa *De hominis opificio* and the *apologia in hexaemeron*; iii) *the long corpus* includes nine homilies on *Hexaemeron*, two anonymous homilies *De hominis structura*, the apokryphal homily *De paradiso* and the two texts by Gregory of Nyssa *De hominis opificio* and the *apologia in hexaemeron*⁸.

4.2. Basil's hermeneutic account of the *incipit mundi* in six days aims at the complete building of the Church. For showing the glory of the Creator, the author does not classify and systematize the profane knowledge. In spite of this, the *Hexaemeron* of Basil the Great constitutes a model of scientific thought of the late antiquity. This approach continues the line of the pre-Nicene Christian theology descending from Saint Justin Martyr and Philosopher, Athenagoras, Clement of

⁶ For the description of Basil's homilies, see: Basile de Césarée, *Homélie sur "l'Hexaéméron"* (Sources chrétiennes, 26), edited by S. Giet, Paris, 1950, p. 5–6; J. Bernardi, *La prédication des pères cappadociens. Le prédicateur et son auditoire*, Paris, 1968, p. 47–48; E. Amand de Mendieta, *Les neuf Homélie de Basile de Césarée sur l'«Hexaéméron»*. *Recherches sur le genre littéraire, le but et l'élaboration de ces homélie*, in: "Byzantion", 48 (1978) 2, 337–368; E. Amand de Mendieta – S.Y. Rudberg, *Vorwort*, in: Basilius of Caesarea, *Homilien zum Hexaemeron* (Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten Jahrhunderte, NS, 2), edited by E. Amand de Mendieta – S.Y. Rudberg, Berlin, 1997, p. XIII.

⁷ See M. Alexandre, "La théorie de l'exégèse dans le *De hominis opificio* et l'*In Hexaemeron*", in: *Écriture et culture philosophique dans la pensée de Grégoire de Nysse. Actes du Colloque de Chevetogne (22–26 septembre 1969)*. *Organisé par la Centre de Recherche sur l'Hellenisme tardif de la Sorbonne*, edited by M. Harl, Leiden, 1971, p. 87–110; E. Amand de Mendieta, "Les deux homélie sur la création de l'homme que les manuscrits attribuent à Basile de Césarée ou à Grégoire de Nysse", in: *Zetesis* (Festschrift E. de Strycker), Antwerpen – Utrecht, 1973, p. 695–716.

⁸ Cf. Basilius von Caesarea, *Homilien zum Hexaemeron* (as in note 6), p. IX. See the other studies on the manuscript tradition in the Greek language of the homilies on *Hexaemeron* by Basil the Great: Basile de Césarée, *La tradition manuscrite directe des Neuf Homélie sur «l'Hexaéméron»* (Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur, 123), edited by E. Amand de Mendieta – S.Y. Rudberg, Berlin, 1980; P.J. Fedwick, *Bibliotheca Basiliana Vniuersalis. A Study of the Manuscript Tradition of the Works of Basil of Caesarea*, second volume, *The Homiliae Morales. "Hexaemeron"*. *Di Litteris, with Additional Coverage of the Letters. Corpus Christianorum*, Turnhout, 1996.

Alexandria, culminating in the thought of Basil himself and the other two Cappadocian theologians, Gregory of Nazianz and Gregory of Nyssa, who considered the classical philosophy as a typological prefiguration of the Incarnation⁹.

In the development of his narrative Basil makes use of rhetorical means, but he withdraws from the allegorical method of interpretation, considering the latter to be extravagant, though as a young man he was educated in the Alexandrian tradition of the plurisemantic intertextual explanation of the sacred texts¹⁰. The author's choice for the literal exegesis of the sacred text is shown in the homilies 2:5, 3:9 and 9:1 of the *Hexaemeron*.

5. The eighteenth-century Romanian manuscript version of Basil's *Hexaemeron* is preserved in the following library collections: Romanian Academy Library – manuscripts **896** (1789), **1084** (fragments from the end of the eighteenth century), **1936** (end of the eighteenth century), **2047** (around 1800), **3094** (1782)¹¹; Library of the Neamț Bishopric – **4** (before 1786); Library of the Neamț Monastery – **198** (beginning of the nineteenth century) and Iași University Library – **VI-3** and **7** (1802). The book was printed in Bucharest, in 1826, by the metropolitan of Wallachia, Grigore.

This translation from the Greek into Romanian was made, at the initiative of the bishop of Rădăuți, Dositei Herescu, around 1775, at the monastery of Dragomirna in North Moldavia, by the monk Ilarion Bou Rău. It has been assumed that in the middle of the eighteenth century this scholar was a student of the Greek professor Manassis Eliades at the princely Academy in Bucharest (founded in 1694 by

⁹ Y. Courtonne, *Saint Basile et l'hellenisme: Études sur la recontre de la pensée chrétienne avec la sagesse antique dans l'«Hexaméron» de Basile le Grand*, Paris, 1934; E. Amand de Mendieta, "The Official Attitude of Basil of Caesarea as a Christian Bishop towards Greek Philosophy and Science", in: *The Orthodox Churches and the West. Papers Read at the Fourteenth Summer Meeting and the Fifteenth Winter Meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society* (Studies in Church History, 13), edited by D. Baker, Oxford, 1976, p. 25–49; R. Henke, *Basilus und Ambrosius über das Sechstageswerk. Eine vergleichende Studie* (Chrësis. Die Methode der Kirchenväter im Umgang mit der antiken Kultur/Institut für Altertumskunde – Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster, 7), Basel, 2000.

¹⁰ About the diversity of the exegetical methods of the biblical cycle of the world creation (at Basil the Great literal and neo-Alexandrian, and at Ambrose of Milan allegorical), see J.C.M. van Winden, *In the beginning: some observations of the Patristic interpretations of Genesis 1:1*, in: "Vigiliae Christianae", 17 (1963) 105–121. Cf. R. Radice – D. Runia, *Philo of Alexandria. An Annotated Bibliography 1937–1986* (Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae, 8), Leiden – New York – København – Cologne, 1988, p. 146.

¹¹ The fragment from the manuscript **3094** regarding the creation of animals has been edited by M. Anton as "*Hexaemeronul lui Vasile cel Mare în traducere românească* (secolul al XVIII-lea). Crearea animalelor", in: *Texte uitate – texte regăsite*, second volume, Bucharest, 2003, p. 123–182.

Constantin Brâncoveanu) and came to Moldavia from the Râmnic Bishopric¹². Together with other Romanian monks (Macarie, Isaac Dascălul, Ștefan and Gherontie), Ilarion joined the group of the Russian and Ukrainian monks organized by Paisii Velichkovskii at the monasteries Dragomirna, Secu and Neamț. Under the influence of Paisii, the Romanian scholars translated into vernacular the works of the Church Fathers and of the later Eastern Orthodox authors which constituted the Greek *Philokalia* published at Venice in 1793¹³.

For the translation of the *Hexaemeron* of Basil the Great, Ilarion used the Greek-Latin three-volumes edition of the Saint-Maur Benedictine congregation (Paris, 1721–1730)¹⁴. Ilarion translated nine homilies on *Hexaemeron*, an anonymous homily *De hominis structura* and the apokryphal homily *De paradiso*, i.e. the short corpus of Basil's hexaemeral cycle. From the Benedictine edition, the Romanian translator has taken over the commentaries, to which he added his own notes.

¹² Cf. N.A. Ursu, *Școala de traducători români din obștea starețului Paisie de la mănăstirile Dragomirna, Secu și Neamț*, in: "Teologie și viață", IV (LXX) (1994) 11–12, 72; Andrei Timotin, *Traduceri din literatura patristică și filocalică ale dascălului Ilarion*, in: "Limba română", L (2001) 1–2, 113.

On the didactic activity of Manassis Eliades in Wallachia, see A. Camariano-Cioran, *Les Académies princières de Bucarest et de Jassy et leurs professeurs*, Thessaloniki, 1974, p. 397–407.

¹³ Cf. Timotin (as in note 11), p. 111. On the constitution, under the influence of Paisii Velichkovskii, of the so-called "Romanian translation school" see also: Ursu (as in note 11), p. 58–83; N. Iorga, *Istoria literaturii române în secolul al XVIII-lea*, second volume, Bucharest, 1901, p. 393–396; *idem*, *Mănăstirea Neamțului. Viața călugărească și munca pentru cultură*, Vălenii de Munte, 1912, p. 57–61; A. Timotin – E. Timotin, *Preface*, in: *Scrieri eshatologice bizantine: Vedenia Sofianei. Viața lui Anastasie. Vedenia lui chir Daniil* (Cele mai vechi cărți populare în literatura română, 6), edited by A. Timotin – E. Timotin, Bucharest, 2002, p. 104–116.

¹⁴ For the description of the Western editions of the works of Basil of Caesarea from the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries, see D. Amand, *Essai d'une histoire critique des éditions générales grecques et gréco-latines des S. Basile de Césarée*, in: "Révue bénédictine" 52 (1940) 141–161, 53 (1941) 119–151, 54 (1942) 124–144, 56 (1945–1946) 126–173.