

IOAN CHIRILĂ
STELIAN PAȘCA-TUȘA
ELENA ONEȚIU

RECONSTITUTION OF MELCHIZEDEK'S HISTORY IN
RABBINIC AND CHRISTIAN TRADITIONS

Ioan Chirilă

Babes-Bolyai University, Faculty of Orthodox Theology, Cluj, Romania

Email: ioanchirila62@gmail.com

Stelian Pașca-Tușa

Babes-Bolyai University, Faculty of Orthodox Theology, Cluj, Romania

Email: stelianpascatusa@gmail.com

Elena Onețiu

Babes-Bolyai University, Faculty of Orthodox Theology, Cluj, Romania

Email: elena.onetiu@yahoo.com

Abstract: Melchizedek's meeting with Abraham in the King's Valley (Genesis 14) would mark the history of the chosen people. As king of Salem and priest of the Almighty God, Melchizedek meets the patriarch with bread and wine and then blesses him in the name of the God they both served. Assuming this liturgical ritual Abraham offers Melchizedek a tenth of everything, by this acknowledging and accepting his sacerdotal service. Even though at a first sight their gestures are somewhat natural, we will understand going through our study that the attitude of each character implies a deeper significance. This is emphasized firstly in psalms, in the context of several Messianic sentences, which refer to an eternal priesthood that finds its origins not in the service of Aaron, but in that of Melchizedek. This text would generate and fundament later the Pauline discourse on the priesthood of Jesus Christ and implicitly of the Christians. The resemblance of Melchizedek with Jesus Christ is maximized by Saint Apostle Paul who states that the king of Salem was "without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life" (Hebrews 7:3). Who is, in fact, this mysterious character? Why did the Hebrew want to identify him with a known biblical character? What are the reasons that determined the Christian authors to recompose the history of this character? These are just a few of the questions we intend to answer through the research that we are about to present.

Key words: MCVRO, Melchizedek, Abraham, history, Jesus Christ, priest, Fathers, rabbis, tradition

1. Introduction

Our research wishes to bring to light one of our recent concerns through which we intend to valorize the Jewish exegetical literature. Considering the direction taken by biblical interpretation today, we deemed advisable to turn our attention to the biblical exegesis that is part of a tradition which is similar to the one we call normative (the patristic tradition). Nevertheless, when we interpret a biblical text, we cannot discard the fact that the first recipients were the Jewish and, thus it is only natural to see their position as regards the respective text. Even though the opinions of the rabbis were not always in agreement with the patristic ones (because of various contexts that favored polemics) we think that the Orthodox theology is more interested today in the common point with the other religions than in those that generate disagreements and disputes (Matsoukas 2006, 46). Hence, our study offers the reader the possibility to enjoy a cultural dialogue with emphasis on these interpretative traditions and not on their polemic character.

This study was motivated by the wish to offer the readers of old Romanian books the possibility to understand the biblical and historical context which generated the work that is today part of the patrimony of the Central University Library "Lucian Blaga" in Cluj Napoca. The text of this work can be consulted with Cyrillic letters in the digital library of BCU Cluj, in the collection *Old and Rare Books*, the sub-collection Project MCVRO, file BCUCUJ_FCS_BRV814.pdf. The book was digitized and transliterated into Latin within the framework of a research project, developed between 2014 and 2017, which was coordinated by Rev. Prof. Ioan Chirilă, PhD. This project brought together for collaboration several specialists from the Faculties of Orthodox Theology and Letters in Babeş-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca and a team from the Central University Library "Lucian Blaga", in the same city, for the use of the old Romanian book collection. The complete title of this project, also known by the acronym MCVRO, is "The Identification and Correlation between Concepts in Old Romanian Books and Manuscripts, using a Computer Application, to Stimulate Social Dynamics through the Appraisal of the Cultural Production".

The book our research is focused on is a translation after a work attributed by tradition to Saint Athanasius the Great: *The Story of Melchizedek*. Even though the author of the translation, most probably a monk by the name of Athanasius (he reveals his name in the form of a riddle at the end of the document) does not mention the title of the work, its content enables us to identify rather easily the patristic writing that it translates for the first time into Romanian (Moldavian) from Greek, in 1812. The title with which the translation can be identified in the online library of BCU Cluj-Napoca is: *Cătră Preasfințitul și de Dumnezeu mai întâi ales Mitropolit al Prea Sfintei și de Dumnezeu întăritei Mitropolii a Moldaviei Chirio*

Chirio Veniamin afieroseaște pre acestii istorii tălmăcire ce iaste de pe grece pe moldovenie (To the Holy and God Chosen Metropolitan of the Holy and Stronghold Metropolitan Church of Moldavia, His Eminence Veniamin we dedicate this translation from Greek into Moldavian).

This paper is meant to be a fictitious reconstruction of the life of Melchizedek, a biblical character on which the Bible provides little information. Taking into account the fact that Saint Apostle Paul gives Melchizedek a mysterious aura through the description he makes in the Epistle to Hebrews, many interpreters have tried to reconstruct the history of Melchizedek's life. Our paper describes several episodes from Melchizedek's youth and launches the hypothesis of a previous meeting between him and patriarch Abraham. To the latter, God reveals the reason for which Melchizedek will be considered "without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life" (Hebr. 7:3). This reconstruction of Melchizedek's life is accomplished through the midrashic technique, a literary device through which the rabbis completed or explained certain texts from the Holy Scripture which, in their opinion, needed supplementary clarifications.

In this study we want to emphasize firstly the manner in which Melchizedek is perceived both in the Old Testament and in the Pauline writing that we have already mentioned. Then, we will describe the way the rabbis and the Fathers of the Church related to this character and the reasons for the appearance of a literature (in the Jewish and Christian tradition) focused on the reconstruction of the biography of the mysterious king of Salem. This research is necessary in the case of a work such as *Story of Melchizedek* to help the reader understand correctly such type of writings.

2. The manner in which Melchizedek is perceived in the texts of the Holy Scripture

Besides the text in the book of Genesis, Melchizedek is also mentioned in the Book of Psalms (110:4) and in the Epistle to Hebrews (5:6,10; 6:20; 7:1,6,10-11,15,17). If the psalms refer to a priestly eternal order according to the pattern of the order of Melchizedek, in the Pauline epistle the author's attention focuses on emphasizing the relationship type-archetype between Melchizedek (and his priesthood) and the eternal bishopric of Jesus Christ (Tofană 1997, 50-60; Cârstoiu 1987, 37-45). We will first underline the manner in which the text of the Holy Scripture sketches the personality of our character, and then we will present as we emphasized in the introduction, the manner in which it is understood in the Christian and Jewish tradition.

2.1. Melchizedek – king of Salem and priest of God Most High (Gen. 14:18-20)

The royal status and the sacerdotal service of this mysterious character drew the attention of the exegetes. Even his name (Hebr. *Malkî-šedeq*) became the subject of many discussions. Some considered that this name is either descriptive or theophoric. For the first situation the translation is: *king of righteousness*, and in the second case: *My King is Righteous* (Hamilton 1990, 408; Wenham, 2002, 316). Saint Paul chooses the first translation *basileus dikeosinis*, that he associates with that of *king of peace* (*basileus irinis*) translating the term *Salim*, which transfers the Hebrew *šālēm*, by *peace* (Hebr. 7:2). The correlation of the two features of Melchizedek that the Apostle underlines, will determine Saint John Chrysostom to state that even his name refers to the person of our Saviour: “But who is King of righteousness, save our Lord Jesus Christ? [...] For He has made us righteous, and has made peace for things in Heaven and things on earth. What man is King of Righteousness and of Peace? None, save only our Lord Jesus Christ” (Sf. Ioan Gură de Aur, 1923, 176). It is interesting to mention in this context the fact that in the rabbinic tradition, the name Melchizedek is perceived rather as a title and not as a proper name (according to *Genesis Raba* 43:6).

Melchizedek was king of Salem, a Canaanite settlement which is identified by most of the interpreters with Jerusalem. To this contributed greatly the psalmic writings which, with the help of a synonymic parallelism, underline the identity between the two fortresses: “His tent is in Salem (*šālēm*), his dwelling place in Zion (*šiyōn*)” (Ps. 76:3). In Midrash we are presented how Salem came to be called Jerusalem. In *Genesis Raba* (56:10) the mountain to which Abraham wanted to take Isaac to sacrifice to the Lord was the very place King Melchizedek had come from. After his faith was put to trial, Abraham called the place *Ire* from *YHWH yir’eh* – “The Lord Will Provide” (Gen. 22:14). In order to record the presence of the two righteous men in the same place, the Lord named that hill Jerusalem, combining the name given by Abraham with the existing one (Grypeou and Spurling 2013, 210). We underline the fact that the author of the midrash identifies mount Moriah with mount Zion on which Jerusalem would later be built. The Hebrew historian Josephus Flavius states that the name of Salem was changed to Jerusalem by Melchizedek himself, the Canaanite ruler who was the first priest of God and the first founder of the sanctuary (Flavius 2002, 492). Most of the Christian authors accept this tradition recorded first by Josephus Flavius and identify Salem with Jerusalem (Theophilus of Antioch, *Contra Iudeos* II:31; St. Jerome, *Epistole* 73:7; Procopius of Gaza, *Comentariu la Facere*, in PG 87:333; St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Glafire la Facere*, in PG 69:81 etc.).

The sacerdotal service of Melchizedek is the point around which gravitates the entire problematic generated by the sudden appearance of

this mysterious character. The fact that he is the first priest of the God whom the descendants of Abraham serve and that due to him we are able to talk about a legitimate priesthood before the Levitical priesthood (Grypeou and Spurling 2013, 200; McNamara, 2000, 1-31), determines us to pay more attention to the biblical texts and to the manner in which they were perceived by the two religions of the Scripture to observe the role that Melchizedek has within their history. Hence, it is said about Melchizedek who was the king of Salem that he also had a sacerdotal function. The consolidation of the political power through a priestly service was often practiced in the ancient Orient (Skinner, 1910, 267). This is why our attention will not be focused on this direction, but rather on a more significant aspect: Melchizedek served to God the Most High, the Creator of heaven and earth, who had called Abraham from Harran (Gen. 12:1-3). The name *Elion* ('elyôn) appears in this context as an attribute of El. The Most High, (God) the most high, the Highest, The One Who lives up high (in mountains or in heaven), the Sublime "expresses height, prominence, the sublimity of the true God before other gods. The name also occurs in the patriarchal epoch, but it was especially used in psalms and in the exilic and post-exilic writings, when there was a need to emphasize Yahwe's philosophical sublimity and transcendence" (Prilipceanu, 2014, 279).

In other words, between the two there already existed an intimate relationship conferred by their God, which they felt as soon as they saw each other. The only difference between them was that Melchizedek had been invested with a public priestly service that was not limited to the liturgical frames implied by a familiar *sacerdotium*, as was the case of Abraham. For this reason, Abraham offered a tenth of all his belongings to Melchizedek, because he had acknowledged and accepted the superiority of his service. To this respect, according to Saint Cyril of Alexandria, "we don't say that Melchizedek was superior in nature, but in priesthood. This is why Abraham did not hold back, but acknowledged what he had superior, honoring him with the gifts of tenth" (Sf. Chirilă al Alexandriei 1992, 71).

2.1. Eternal priesthood according to the pattern of the order of Melchizedek (Ps. 110:4)

Melchizedek's appearance in the context of a royal crowning psalm is extremely surprising. After the Lord (Yahwe) invests His king (whom He names 'Ādōn – "Lord, Master"; Greek *Kirios*) in Zion and affirms his paternity in a mysterious way (*like dew from the morning's womb* – v. 3) (Bulai 2005, 413), as part of an oath, he offers the king a sacerdotal status according to an order that does not have its origins in the Levitical priesthood (Dahood 2008, 116). The king-priest that assumes the priesthood of Melchizedek is a Messianic character that would unite in him the two dignities. The one who was about to assume and fulfil this

text is Jesus Christ (Mk. 12:35-37; cf. Hebr. 7:3). In the economy of our research it is important to underline the fact that priesthood in the order of Melchizedek is eternal and that this messianic king will be priest for eternity (Allen 2002, 116). Rashi's interpretation is also notable because he states that this psalm refers to the episode from Genesis 14. In his opinion, Abraham and his descendants will inherit the priesthood of Melchizedek whom he identifies with Shem, the son of Noah (Gruber 2004, 646). This perspective will be debated subsequently when we also indicate the reasons for which the Jewish tradition supports the identity between Melchizedek and Shem.

2. Melchizedek is without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life (Hebrews 7:1-10)

Reassessing the episode of the meeting between Abraham and Melchizedek from a typological perspective, Saint Paul states that the king of Salem is a character wrapped in mystery because he has no father or mother, neither does he belong to a certain ancestry and additionally, he doesn't have beginning or end and his priesthood was eternal. It is important to mention the fact that the author of the Syrian translation (*Peshito*) interferes with the text for a clarification: "...whose father or mother are not mentioned in genealogies" (Cockerill 1979, 44). These features offer Melchizedek the possibility to resemble more the Son of God. It is necessary to mention from the beginning that the intention of the Apostle is not to offer Melchizedek the features of a heavenly creature, but keep him wrapped in mystery, in atemporality, which justifies the eternity of his priesthood. Had Saint Paul not taken into consideration this perspective, the resemblance of Melchizedek with our Saviour would not have been appropriate. Jesus Christ was born from the Father (without mother) and from mother (without father) and he is descendant from the ancestry of King David, being the *son* of Abraham (Mat 1:1). Hence, the Apostle did not refer here to the earthly life of the Son of God, but to the eternal life. This perspective was assumed by the patristic tradition which suggested a spiritual interpretation for this verse. According to Saint Maximus the Confessor, the wonderful Melchizedek "had transcended time and nature, and was worthy to be likened to the Son of God. For, as far as is possible, he had become such by grace and habit, as the Giver of grace is himself believed to be by essence" (Sf. Maxim Mărturisitorul 1983, 137-8). In other words, the pure life and the priestly service opened Melchizedek the possibility (by grace) to detach from all earthly things and to surpass the limits imposed by time through a continuous contemplation of the divinity. With his mind Melchizedek went over time and century, without dissolving the frames of his material life, and through the feature of his resemblance with the Son, he managed to remain priest and to serve God eternally.

It is interesting to note the fact that within this relationship *type-archetype*, it is not the type that determines the features of the archetype, but Melchizedek is the one described in such a manner so as to correspond to the features of our Lord Jesus Christ (Bruce 1990, 158). In Saint Maximus' opinion the virtues of Melchizedek were the ones to determine such a profound resemblance with his Prototype: "For every saint who began to possess a certain good, according to this good he is also declared image (*typos*) of God who gave it. To this respect, this great Melchizedek, for the divine virtue imprinted in him, became worthy of the image (*typos*) of Lord Christ and of his unspoken mysteries. For he gathers all the saints as archetype and causes the good that is shown in each of them, but especially he who bears within him, more than others, the signs of Christ" (Sf. Maxim Mărturisitorul 1983, 142). Hence, Melchizedek is presented as priest and maintains this quality until his exit from the episode described in the book of Genesis, and the Son of God, who is before all the ages and comes from eternity, perpetuates His priesthood/bishopric into eternity (Tofană 2000, 266-70).

3.1. Restructuring the history of Melchizedek

The Pauline interpretation of the episode Abraham-Melchizedek (Gen. 14) generated discussions and polemics between Christians and the Jewish. The mysterious king of Salem would become a stumbling rock for the latter because, according to the Pauline discourse, he was greater than their father Abraham. Moreover, his sacerdotal status would put to difficulty the Aaronic priesthood enacted later on by Moses. Hence, it was necessary that they reacted and defended their privileged status before Christians who assumed the service of this priest that resembled their eternal Bishop. We will further present firstly the manner in which the Jewish refer to Melchizedek, underlining the main directions promoted by their rabbinic tradition.

3.2. The perspective of the rabbinic tradition

Taking into account the fact that the text of the Old Testament (Gen. 14:18-40), to which Saint Apostle Paul refers in his Epistle to Hebrews, does not suggest the atemporality of the character, the Jewish struggled to identify Melchizedek with one of the known biblical characters in order to weaken the Pauline logic which, as we have already emphasized, undermined the authority of the Jewish priesthood. It seems that the most appropriate person that the rabbis identified was Shem, the son of Noah. In this situation, the priesthood of Melchizedek/Shem would have ceased being a problem for the Hebrews. Abraham was a descendant from the tribe of Shem, hence, his priesthood would have been transmitted naturally to his descendants, just like later on Moses legislated for the Aaronic priesthood. The first testimony for this identification dates from the 2nd century and can be found in *Talmud Balvi: Nedarim*: "R Zachariah

said in the name of R. Ismael: the Holy Disciple (bless Him!) thought of bringing priesthood into the world through Shem, as it is written: *he was priest of God Most High* (Gen. 14:18)" (BT Ned 32b). This perspective was assumed in several rabbinic writings. A similar testimony can be found in *Targum Neofiti* Gen 14:18 (3rd-4th century), where it is stated that the king of righteousness, also known as Shem, the son of Noah, served as priest of the Most High (*Genesis Rabba* 44:7; *Leviticus Rabba* 25:6 (5th century) or *Numbers Rabba* 4:8).

To argument this position, the rabbis made a calculus from which resulted the fact that Shem lived another 35 years after the death of Abraham. In this situation the two might have met and, subsequently, Melchizedek was just a name that indicated Shem's royal status and virtuosity (*Malki-tedeq* – king of righteousness). It is important to mention the fact that in the rabbinic thinking Melchizedek/Shem was part of a special category of righteous people who were born circumcised (*Genesis Rabba* 43:6). The same writing presents the manner in which Abraham receives priesthood from Melchizedek/Shem. Because he hurried to bless Abraham before God did, (Gen. 14:19), priesthood was taken from him and offered to Abraham. This context calls on the text of the psalm that refers to the eternity of the priesthood in the order of Melchizedek and is applied to Abraham. Thus, the Lord invokes the oath and makes Abraham "priest forever" (Ps 110:4). According to *Genesis Rabba* 55:7, Abraham had, after this episode, a sacerdotal state. When he was forced to sacrifice Isaac, he invoked the fact that he was not a priest. But God reminded him the text of Psalm 110 and replied that he was part of the eternal priesthood. Hence, this correlation of texts is meant to identify the Jewish priesthood and to offer through Abraham the status of eternal priesthood "in the order of Melchizedek/Shem" (Berenbaum and Skolnik 2007, 11-2).

In a fragment from Qumran (*11QMelch*), Melchizedek is presented as an apocalyptic figure (an angel), who fulfills God's righteousness. The text will also influence the gnostics' view on this character. It is important to note that this writing does not refer to Melchizedek's sacerdotal status, neither does it take into account the perspective described in Hebrews 7:3 (Lane 2002, 155).

3.3. The patristic perspective

The perspective on Melchizedek in the patristic tradition was influenced mostly by the *dialogue* with the Jewish. The fathers noticed the intention of the rabbis to legitimate their priesthood and, as such, rejected their attempts to minimize the importance that Melchizedek received in Christianity through the Pauline interpretation of the episode from the King Valley and of the text of the psalm. But not all the Christian authors rejected the rabbinic perspectives. For example, the Syrian fathers assumed the identification of Melchizedek with Shem. Saint Ephrem the Syrian states in his commentary to Genesis that: "Melchizedek is Shem

who became king because of his greatness; he was the father of fourteen tribes. Additionally, he was priest. He received this service from Noah, his father, due to his right to succession. Shem lived not only to the time of Abraham, as the Scripture says, but to the time of Jacob and Esau, the grandsons of Abraham" (St. Ephrem the Syrian 1994, 186). We understand from the words of Saint Ephrem that he assimilates the rabbinic explanation regarding the time in which Shem lived. Moreover, he promotes the idea that priesthood is transmitted from father to son. This perspective is reflected also in the *Apostolic Constitutions* (document of Syrian origin – 4th century) in which there are mentioned the priests ordained by God from the beginning of the world: Abel, Seth, Enosh, Enoch, Noah, Melchizedek, Job, Abraham and the rest of the patriarchs, Moses, Aaron, Eleazar, Phinehas and Samuel (Donaldson 1997, 482). Even though he does not identify Melchizedek with Shem, the author of this work situates him right after Noah.

Mentioning the rabbinic perspective regarding the identity between Melchizedek and Shem, Saint Jerome states that this vision comes from an ancient Jewish tradition. He also mentions the fact that the rabbis insist on this direction, most probably to legitimate their ancestry in Noah. Although he does not agree with this interpretation, Saint Jerome accepts the Jewish calculus regarding Shem's life and states that Melchizedek was human and not the Holy Spirit as some believed. In fact, this matter constituted the object of his letter to Evangelus (Letter 73) (Jerome 1997, 154). Epiphanius of Salamis manifests a rather vehement attitude against Christians who accepted the rabbinic perspective. To support his position, bishop Epiphanius proves to his readers that Shem did not live until the time of patriarch Abraham according to his calculations based on the text of the Septuagint. He also mentions that the tradition of the identification of Melchizedek with Shem is of Samaritan origin (Epiphanius of Salamis 2013, 139). Epiphanius also mentions a Jewish explanation regarding the problem of the lack of genealogy presented by Saint Paul in his epistle. They state that Melchizedek was the son of a prostitute who gave birth to him after a relationship with a stranger. It is obvious that through this position, the denigration of our Savior was intended. This perspective is also mentioned in *Homily on Melchizedek*, a writing attributed to Saint John Chrysostom. Among the Christian fathers that rejected the identification of Melchizedek with Shem we also mention Procopius of Gaza (*Comentariu la Facere*, in PG 87,333) and Marcus Eremita (*De Melchisedech*, in PG 65,1121B).

The attempt to reconstruct the history of Melchizedek in the patristic literature was also influenced, as we mentioned before, by the exaggerated interpretations that appeared amongst the Christians influenced by the gnostic circles or by the sect of Melchizedekians from Egypt. They stated, interpreting the text from Hebrews 7, that Melchizedek was not human, but rather an angel or even the Holy Spirit. Renowned names from the

patristic tradition stood against these devious approaches. Saint Cyril of Alexandria dedicates to this issue the entire text regarding Abraham and Melchizedek in his work *Glaphyra*. Within his ample demonstration, the hierarch from Alexandria concludes by saying: "But I think that they think right, who believe that Melchizedek was a man that ruled over the city of Salem. And Paul with his fine mind for spiritual understandings presented him as image of Christ. Those who stood against him say that Melchizedek was not human, but rather the Holy Spirit or otherwise any other power from above, with a serving mission. Since some like to think so, we tell them that they are wrong in two ways: they lower the divine and unspoken nature of the Spirit to an improper state, and rise the born creation, in a cackling manner, to a glory which is above it" (Sf. Chirilă al Alexandriei 1992, 62).

In order to establish the correct interpretation of the text from Hebrews which implies a visible spiritual perspective, many legends occurred in the 5th century regarding the history of Melchizedek. In the apocryphal writing 2 Enoch (68-73) it is stated that Melchizedek was conceived without the contribution of a man and that he was born from the womb of his mother who died as a child at the age of three. It is also said about him that he continues the priestly line of Enoch and Seth (Morfill and Charles 1896, 91-2). The Christian authors wanted to emphasize the fact that Melchizedek was a man, that he had parents and that he is part of a branch coming from the heathen. The most ample attempt to reconstruct the life of Melchizedek was attributed to Saint Athanasius the Great (naturally, to increase his authority) and it is named: *The History of Melchizedek* (PG 28,525). The author states that the father of Melchizedek was named Melhi and was king in the fortress of Salim. Because he could not stand the cruelty of his father, who sacrificed his older brother in an idolatrous feast, Melchizedek left home and lived for seven years on mount Tabor. There he met for the first time with Abraham who was sent in the mountain by God to meet Melchizedek and to receive his blessing. God would later on reveal to Abraham that there are no other members from the family of Melchizedek and this is why it is said of him that he is without father and without mother. The author of the writing reiterates this idea at the end of his work and concludes: "Melchizedek was without father and without mother and without genealogy because nobody knew his parents and his relatives. [...] Melchizedek has no beginning of his day and no end of his life because his birth and death are unknown" (Sf. Atanasie cel Mare 1812, 4). Hence, one may easily guess that the purpose of this writing was to demonstrate that Melchizedek was human, and his resemblance with Jesus Christ was due to significant details from his life.

This direction of interpretation of the history of Melchizedek is meant to respond to those who considered Melchizedek a heavenly creature and to argue the fact that the pattern of Christ's eternal

priesthood cannot be found in the Aaronic priesthood, but in a service previous to the Law which belongs to those who are amongst the heathen (Grypeou and Spurling 2013, 220).

4. Conclusions

Our research offers the reader of the *Story of Melchizedek* the minimum knowledge necessary to understand the reason for which this writing appeared. The erroneous interpretations of those who considered that king Melchizedek was an angel or even the Holy Spirit were counteracted through a complementary literature meant to establish the genealogy of this biblical character of whom Saint Apostle Paul states that he was “without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life” (Hebr. 7:3). The meaning of the Pauline words was a spiritual one, as many Fathers of the Church underline. Unfortunately, the wrong interpretation of those who believed that Melchizedek was a heavenly being determined the appearance of several writings with the purpose to demonstrate the contrary. From our point of view the endeavor of the latter proposes but a pale answer that in the end elucidates the biblical text only at the surface. It would have been better if these writings maintained the interpretation of the fathers who identified the spiritual sense in the Pauline text.

Anyway, the text of this story which is part of our patrimony of Romanian old books, gives us the possibility to see the evolution of certain interreligious disputes or of certain debates within the Christian communities regarding a unique character in the landscape of the Old Testament who prefigures the priestly service of our Savior.

Acknowledgments: This work was supported by UEFISCDI project ID PN-II-PT-PCCA-2013-4-2062, contract no. 311/2014, The Identification and Correlation between Concepts in Old Romanian Books and Manuscripts, using a Computer Application to stimulate Social Dynamics through the Appraisal of the Cultural Production.

References:

- Allen, Leslie. 2002. *Word Biblical Commentary. Psalms (101-150)*. Dallas: Word Inc., 2002.
- Berenbaum Michael and Fred Skolnik. 2007. *Encyclopaedia judaica*. Vol. 14. Farmington Hills: Keter Publishing House.
- Bruce, F. F. 1990. *The Epistle to the Hebrews, in The New International Commentary on the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.
- Bulai, Alois, Anton Budău, Iosif Răchiteanu. 2005. *Psalzii. Traducere, note și comentarii*. Iași: Sapientia.
- Cârstoiu, Justinian. 1987. „Melchisedec, preotul – regele din Salem, prefigurarea Mântuitorului Iisus Hristos.” *Mitropolia Moldovei și Sucevei* Issue 6: 37-45.

- Cockerill, G. L. 1979. *The Melchizedek Christology in Heb. 7:1-28*. Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International.
- Dahood, Mitchell. 2008. *Anchor Yale Bible Commentary. Psalms (101-150)*. London: Yale University Press.
- Donaldson, J. 1997. *The Ante-Nicene Fathers. Constitutions of the Holy Apostles*. Vol 7. Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems.
- Epiphanius of Salamis. 2013. *The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis, Books II and III, De fide*. Translated by Frank Williams. Leiden: Brill.
- Flavius, Josephus. 2002. *Istoria războiului iudeilor împotriva romanilor*. Translated by Ion Acsan. București: Hasefer
- Gruber, Mayer. 2004. *Rashi's Commentary on Psalms*. Boston: Leiben, 2004.
- Grypeou, Emmanouela and Helen Spurling. 2013. *The Book of Genesis in Late Antiquity. Encounters between Jewish and Christian Exegesis*. Leiden: Brill.
- Hamilton, V. P. 1990. *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament. The Book of Genesis (1-17)*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.
- Jerome. 2013. *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers Second Series The Letters of St. Jerome*. Vol. 6. Translated by W. H. Fremantle, G. Lewis and W. G. Martley. Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems.
- Lane, W. L. 2002. *Word Biblical Commentary. Hebrews (1-8)*. Dallas: Word, Incorporated.
- Matsoukas, Nikos. 2006. *Teologia dogmatică și simbolică II*. Translated by Nicușor Deciu. București: Bizantină.
- McNamara, M. 2000. „Melchizedek: Gen 14:17-20 in the Targums, in Rabbinic and Early Christian Literature.” *Biblica* Issue 81: 1-31.
- Morfill, William and Robert H. Charles. 1896. *The book of the secrets of Enoch*. Oxford: The Clarendon Press.
- Prilipceanu, Cristian. 2014. *Teologia numelor divine din Vechiul Testament*. Iași: Doxologia, 2014).
- Sf. Atanasie cel Mare. 1812. *Istoria lui Melchisedec*. Translated by Anastasie. Iași.
- Sf. Chiril al Alexandriei. 1992. *Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești. Glafire*. Translated by Dumitru Stăniloae. București: IBMO.
- Sf. Ioan Gură de Aur. 1923. *Comentarii la Epistola către Evrei. Omilia XII*. Translated by Theodosie Athanasie. București: Tipografia cărților bisericești.
- Sf. Maxim Mărturisitorul 1983. *Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești. Ambigua*. Translated by Dumitru Stăniloae. București: IBMO.
- Skinner, J. 1910. *A critical and exegetical commentary on Genesis*. New York: Scribner.
- St. Ephrem the Syrian. *The Fathers of the Church. Commentary on Genesis*. Translated by Edward Mathews and Joseph Amar. Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1994.

Tofană, Stelian. 1997. „Melchisedec – prototip al arhieriei veșnice a lui Iisus Hristos, după Epistola către Evrei 7, 1-10.” *Altarul Banatului* Issue 7-9: 50-60.

Tofană, Stelian. 2000. *Iisus Hristos arhiereu veșnic după Epistola către Evrei*. Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană.

Wenham, G. J. 2002. *Word Biblical Commentary. Genesis (1-15)*. Dallas: Word, Incorporated.