

The 14th World Congress of Syriac Studies (*Symposium Syriacum*)
and the 12th Conference of Christian Arabic Studies
Bucharest | August 3–7, 2026

THEMATIC PANEL

The *Bible* and Its *Readers*
in *Eastern Christianity*

*Authors, Knowledge, and Biblical Authority
from a Cross-Cultural Perspective*

August 7, 2026 | 8.30–11.40 AM
Room 3, Palace of the Parliament
Calea 13 Septembrie 1–3, 050711
Bucharest, Romania

Convenors


OCTAVIAN-ADRIAN NEGOIȚĂ
Institute for the History of Religions
Romanian Academy

SIMONA NICOLAE
Institute of South-East European Studies
Romanian Academy
&
University of Bucharest



Miniature of monk Anastasios Gordios (18th c.)
© Athens, National Library of Greece [EBE] MS 2188, fol. 130v.

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THIS PANEL EXAMINES THE DIVERSE WAYS in which the Bible was interpreted and deployed within the literary, theological and artistic cultures of Eastern Christianity from the medieval to the early modern period. Bringing together case studies from Armenian, Greek, Arabic, and Slavonic traditions, the panel emphasizes the Bible as a site of continual negotiation, where questions of authority, hermeneutics, and cultural identity were worked out through processes of translation, commentary, and citation. By foregrounding the philological and exegetical practices of different Eastern Christian communities, the panel explores how biblical authority was mediated through specific intellectual traditions. Through comparative lenses, the panel interrogates how Eastern Christian authors mobilized the Bible not only as a repository of divine revelation, but as a flexible discursive resource for constructing theological argumentation, negotiating cultural boundaries, and asserting communal authority. By situating these practices within their cross-cultural contexts, the panel seeks to illuminate the dynamics of textual transmission and hermeneutical appropriation that shaped the reception of Scriptures across Eastern Christianity. As such, it opens space for dialogue between traditionally separate fields of Armenian, Byzantine, Arabic, and Slavonic studies, and proposes a broader framework for understanding how the Scriptures functioned as a transregional medium of intellectual and theological exchange.

PROGRAM

- 8.30–8.50 **CHARBEL NASSIF** | CEDRAC—Université Saint-Joseph de Beyrouth
La réception et la traduction arabe des commentaires bibliques du jésuite Cornelius a Lapide (1567–1637) dans le Proche-Orient chrétien (XVIII^e–XIX^e siècles)
- 8.50–9.10 **ANNA OHANJANYAN** | Mashtots Institute of Ancient Manuscripts Matenadaran, Yerevan
“The Root of the Godless”: Armenian Biblical Polemics against Catholicism
- 9.10–9.30 **OCTAVIAN-ADRIAN NEGOIȚĂ** | Institute for the History of Religions, Romanian Academy
The Athonite Monk Pachomios Rousanos (1508–1553) and the Bible
- 9.30–11.00 **BREAK**
- 11.00–11.20 **ZOFIA ALEKSANDRA BRZozowska** | Institute of East European Studies, University of Łódź
Old Testament Sapiential Books in the Literature of Medieval Novgorod the Great: From Selectivity to the Reception of the Entire Biblical Text
- 11.20–11.40 **SIMONA NICOLAE** | Institute for South-East European Studies & University of Bucharest
Les ‘exempla’ bibliques dans les discours de l’empereur Manuel II Paléologue: De Solon aux Apôtres
- 11.40–12.00 **DAVID-LINUS NEAGU** | Institute for South-East European Studies, Romanian Academy
“... the Holy Spirit Came on Them as He Had Come on Us at the Beginning”: Armenians’ Use of the Bible to Reject the Primacy of the Holy See in the 12th–13th Centuries

ABSTRACTS

CHARBEL NASSIF | CEDRAC—Université Saint-Joseph de Beyrouth


*La réception et la traduction arabe des commentaires bibliques
du jésuite Cornelius a Lapide (1567–1637) dans le Proche-Orient chrétien
(XVIII^e–XIX^e siècles)*

NÉ EN 1567, Cornelius a Lapide entra dans la Compagnie de Jésus en 1592 à Tournai. Appelé à Rome en 1616 pour occuper la chaire d'exégèse biblique au Collège romain, il se consacra, à partir de 1623, à la rédaction de ses vastes *Commentaires sur l'Écriture sainte*. Fondés sur une érudition philologique solide et nourris de la tradition patristique, ces ouvrages marquèrent durablement l'exégèse catholique post-tridentine. Leur diffusion en Europe, à travers de nombreuses éditions imprimées, fut considérable. L'influence de Cornelius a Lapide ne se limita toutefois pas à l'Occident latin. À partir du XVIII^e siècle, ses *Commentaires* connurent une réception remarquable dans les milieux chrétiens arabophones du Proche-Orient, notamment au sein des communautés melkite, maronite et syriaque catholique. Plusieurs traducteurs—Rūfā'īl al-Ṭūḥī (1695–1787), Yūsuf al-Bānī (actif entre 1713 et 1731), Yūsuf Ġirġīs al-'Askarī et Girmānūs al-Šamāli (1828–1895)—contribuèrent ainsi à la diffusion d'une culture théologique issue de la Contre-Réforme dans l'espace oriental. Ces entreprises traductrices témoignent d'un vaste effort de réception et d'appropriation du savoir théologique occidental dans le Proche-Orient arabe. Les manuscrits conservés dans de nombreuses bibliothèques orientales révèlent l'ampleur de cette diffusion. Plusieurs de ces traductions furent d'ailleurs imprimées au XIX^e siècle. L'étude de cette réception ouvre des perspectives inédites sur les transferts intellectuels et spirituels entre l'Europe catholique post-tridentine et les Églises orientales arabophones. Elle illustre la manière dont l'exégèse jésuite fut adaptée, traduite et intégrée dans les contextes linguistiques et théologiques du Levant, marquant durablement la formation biblique et pastorale de ses élites ecclésiastiques.

ANNA OHANJANYAN | Mashtots Institute of Ancient Manuscripts
Matenadaran, Yerevan

"The Root of the Godless": Armenian Biblical Polemics against Catholicism

THE CONVERSION TO CATHOLICISM among Eastern Christians of the Ottoman Empire (*raya*), or even pro-Catholic dispositions in the late seventeenth century, was greatly frowned upon. It was branded as apostasy, albeit expressed in more moderate terms than conversion to Islam, and was harshly criticized by conservative circles, especially theologians and even the lay literati of the Eastern and Oriental Christian Churches. This notion of apostasy was grounded in biblical verses, chiefly Matthew 7:26–27 (cf. Luke 6:49), that of "building a house on sand." This expression was commonly employed by polemicists of the Church of the East (Nestorians), such as Israel of Alqosh, and was likewise popular among Armenians, who frequently quoted it. Moreover, Armenians applied another



biblical verse to “apostasy” toward Catholicism, namely Sirach 40:15: “the root of the godless is on bare rock.” Other biblical verses were also introduced into circulation. Drawing upon the unpublished polemical oeuvre of the Armenian lay intellectual Eremia Chelebi, the present paper examines and analyzes the biblical material applied to the notion of “apostasy,” the epithets derived from these verses, and their circulation among Eastern Christian communities. Furthermore, it seeks to identify intercommunal similarities in the use of these verses and to shed light on the intricate relations among Eastern Christian communities.

OCTAVIAN-ADRIAN NEGOIȚĂ | Institute for the History of Religions
Romanian Academy

The Athonite Monk Pachomios Rousanos (1508–1553) and the Bible

THIS PRESENTATION EXAMINES THE CENTRALITY OF HOLY SCRIPTURE in the thought and writings of the Athonite monk Pachomios Rousanos (1508–1553), a leading figure of the early modern Orthodox intellectual tradition. Rousanos’s theological corpus is characterized by a sustained and systematic use of biblical quotations, which he integrates not merely as illustrative material but as the foundational framework for doctrinal exposition. His works demonstrate a consistent effort to anchor every theological argument within the textual authority of the Bible, reflecting his conviction that Scripture constitutes the primary and normative source for correct theological reasoning. For Rousanos, the Bible served a dual function: it was the definitive reference point for scholars engaged in theological debate, and it operated as the essential instructional guide for the spiritual formation of the Orthodox faithful. He viewed Scripture as a comprehensive manual that could shape moral life, cultivate piety, and preserve doctrinal integrity within the wider community. His pedagogical emphasis on direct acquaintance with biblical texts underscores his belief that scriptural literacy was indispensable for maintaining the continuity of an Orthodox tradition in a period marked by confessional contestation and intellectual transformation. Rousanos’s scriptural orientation, however, led to significant polemical engagement, most notably with the Cretan scholar Ioannikios Kartanos, who advocated for the vernacularization of Scripture in order to facilitate widespread lay comprehension, a position that Rousanos regarded with caution. Although he affirmed the necessity of scriptural knowledge for all believers, he maintained that the sacred text required careful mediation within the ecclesial and patristic framework. Their disagreement highlights broader tensions within sixteenth-century Orthodoxy concerning authority, interpretation, and accessibility of the biblical word. By situating Rousanos’s use of Scripture within these debates, the presentation contributes to a clearer understanding of his theological method and his role in shaping early modern Orthodox attitudes toward the Bible.



ZOFIA ALEKSANDRA BRZOWSKA | Institute of East European Studies
University of Łódź


*Old Testament Sapiential Books in the Literature of Medieval Novgorod the Great:
From Selectivity to the Reception of the Entire Biblical Text*

CHURCH SLAVONIC LITERATURE, which emerged in the second half of the ninth century, was characterized by a selectivity in the adaptation of the biblical text. Until the end of the fifteenth century, Orthodox Slavs—both those living on the Balkan Peninsula (Bulgarians, Serbs) and those in Eastern Europe—did not have a complete translation of all the books included in the canon of the Old and New Testaments (both canonical and deuterocanonical), comparable to the Greek Septuagint or the Latin Vulgate. At the dawn of Church Slavonic writing (during the Christianization mission in Great Moravia and in later decades in Bulgaria), only part of the books were translated from Byzantine Greek. The remaining ones were known only in fragmentary form. This selectivity is particularly evident with regard to the Old Testament. Some books, including the deuterocanonical *Book of Wisdom* [*Wisdom of Solomon*], were known in the *Slavia Orthodoxa* area only through fragments included in so-called *paremijniki*—i.e., liturgical books containing readings from the Old Testament—as well as in other collections. The first complete translation of the Bible into Church Slavonic was completed in 1499 in Novgorod the Great, at the initiative of Archbishop Gennadius. Books previously unknown to the Slavs in their entirety, including the *Book of Wisdom*, were then translated into Church Slavonic from the Latin Vulgate. It is significant that the need for such a translation arose precisely in Novgorod the Great, where Sophia—the Divine Wisdom described in the Sapiential Books—was surrounded by extraordinary veneration. Interestingly, this occurred in the fifteenth century, when the inhabitants of Novgorod the Great, in the process of defining their identity, developed notions of Divine Wisdom as the patroness of their city (during the fifteenth century, icons depicting the personified Sophia, characteristic of Novgorod the Great, began to appear). The aim of this paper is to attempt to answer the question of to what extent the execution of a complete translation of the Bible into Church Slavonic may have been connected with the cultural specificity of Novgorod the Great.

SIMONA NICOLAE | Institute for South-East European Studies
& University of Bucharest

*Les 'exempla' bibliques dans les discours de l'empereur Manuel II Paléologue:
De Solon aux Apôtres*

CONÇUS COMME DE VÉRITABLES DISCOURS PERFORMATIFS, les sept textes moraux de Manuel II se présentent en effet comme un ouvrage discursif complexe, ouvrant un dialogue aux multiples facettes. Ils s'adressent au fils du basileus, ou au lecteur d'antan comme d'aujourd'hui, mais ils dialoguent également avec les auteurs, les personnages et les textes classiques. Dans notre intervention, nous nous proposons de sonder les contextes, les choix et les moyens rhétoriques qui réalisent ce tissu d'exempla bibliques, tout en cherchant à en dégager leur signification morale, leur fonction paideutique et catéchétique, ainsi que la dimension politique qui les traverse.



DAVID-LINUS NEAGU | Institute for South-East European Studies
Romanian Academy

“... *the Holy Spirit Came on Them as He Had Come on Us at the Beginning*”:
*Armenians’ Use of the Bible to Reject the Primacy of the Holy See
in the 12th–13th Centuries*

ONE OF THE MAIN POINTS OF CONTENTION between Armenians and Catholics in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries was the primacy of the Holy See. In the letters which the Roman pontiffs sent to the Armenian *catholicoi*, the doctrine of the Petrine supremacy occupies the most important place, as Rome hoped to convince the Armenians to accept its authority over their church. Initially, due to political factors, the Armenian king Lewon I (1198–1219) and the *catholicoi* Grigor VI Apirat (1194–1203) and Hovhannes VI Ssets‘i (1203–1221) acknowledged Rome’s primacy. However, gradually, the Armenians started to reject the popes’ claim to exert authority over them. The present paper analyzes how Armenians articulated a response rejecting Rome’s primacy and how they used various Biblical texts as arguments. Chronologically, this study will start in the second half of the twelfth century, when Nerses Lambronats‘i, the archbishop of Tarsus, translated Nilos Doxopatres’s *Treatise on the five patriarchs* and used it to counter Rome’s primacy, until 1261, when Mkhit‘ar Skewrats‘i rejected the authority of the Holy See in a public debate against Thomas Agni de Lentini, the papal legate in the East.