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# **PHD THESIS**

## **ABSTRACT**

### **UNIVERSAL VALUES IN THE WORKS OF HOLY SAINT DIONYSIUS EXIGUUS IN THE LATEST RESEARCH**

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## ABSTRACT

Every nation keeps as values an invaluable treasure of those creative, powerful, first-order personalities who have enriched the heritage of national culture. Moreover, for a people, which is Christian Orthodox par excellence, these values outweigh, in importance, the character of a contribution to universal cultural progress. If these values are promoted by spiritual men, they accomplish, through their creation, man's purpose to glorify God. These personalities can rightly be considered the perfectionists of our national-spiritual formation.

In a travel journal, the French author Gustave Le Cler noted: *“God must have had a hidden plan for this people, which the Western powers found at the edge of the Danube, and that they adopted as Moses by the Pharaoh’s daughter”*.

This people chosen by God have cast out valuable personalities that cannot be briefly mentioned. Such a personality who proved in his life faith, science, sacrifice, and the greatest exaltation to God and in front of whom we bow our knees with humility is the Holy Apostle Dionysius Exiguus.

The life of St Dionysius Exiguus was guided by three great virtues: the Orthodox faith, kept with holiness until the end of life, the humility of his heart, and the love for God and for one’s neighbor.

Through the life entirely given to Christ, he advocated an ecumenical preservation of dogmatic, canonical union and the unity of the cult throughout the entire Christendom. Through his journeys, contacts, long-lasting residence and the founding of monasteries, works, translations of canons, and drafting of canonical collections, Dionysius Exiguus connected three continents: Europe, Asia and Africa, overcoming regional influences, of civil administration or of Greek-Roman culture. Moreover, he sowed everywhere the good seed of understanding and fellowship. Through his practical and theological works, he created the consciousness of the European unity, so severely threatened by invasions. What makes Dionysius Exiguus’ ecumenical works extremely precious is his profoundly missionary spirit, which manifests everywhere he finds himself. Being a man of vocation, full of dynamism, he imprinted a living fire to the Christian ecumenism. For him, its fundamental feature was the relentless defense or promotion of the Orthodox faith and scientific research on it.

Theological writings, personal works, or translations are, for the most part, thorough and science-built apologies to the smallest detail against heresies.

Christology and ecclesiology are cornerstones for the ecumenism of the canonist of “Scythian” (Dobrogean) origin. The unity of the Church, the unity of all Christians, and

especially the unity of the Churches is only possible under the conditions of an adequate understanding of the canons. The biographers and researchers of his works noticed that one of Dionysius' most important works was undoubtedly *the translation of the Greek canons*, from the Apostolic to the Chalcedonian (451). A brilliant interpreter of Scripture, Dionysius kept the vote of silence all his life. A holy life of an illustrious scholar led Cassiodorus, his co-worker, to invoke his name before God after the former's passing away. These gifts endowed him, during his lifetime, with a Benedictine scientific work in the field of church law as well.

Through Dionysius Exiguus, the canonical legacy of the Church of the first five centuries was transmitted to the Western Middle Ages in particular and to European culture in general: "*European culture has its beginnings and development in the ideology of the canons established by the Church Fathers in the Synodal meetings of Nicaea in 325 until the eighth century*". A well-known astronomer, he founded *the Christian era* (Dionysian, according to his name), instead of the pagan era, beginning the calendar and counting of the years "*from the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ, and not from Emperor Diocletian, as before, so that the beginning of our hope is better known to all, and that the cause of the redemption of the human race, that is, the Passion of our Savior, should be made clearer*". He wrote two remarkable works: "*The Book of the Holy Easter*" and "*The Easter Arguments*". The Christian era established (in 525) by Dionysius the Humble came into force in Rome in 527, and until the beginning of the second millennium was adopted in the entire Christian world.

As a church father and writer, he transmitted, but at the same time created, a genuine Orthodox theology. His undoubted merit lies firstly in the translation into Latin of the fundamental theological works of the Greek patristic works demanded by certain events or contemporaries. In his *Prefaces*, he presents not only the contents of the theological parts he translates, but also rephrases in his own language some dogmatic teachings.

The venerable Dacian-Roman theologian also wrote a *floralegium* of dogmatic patristic texts, extracted from several Holy Fathers of the East, West and Africa, entitled "*Exempla Sanctorum Patrum*". Through his Dacian-Roman origins and formation, and through his writings and translations from Greek into Latin, Dionysius "*has laid a true bridge between the East and the West, bringing closer the two Christian Roman legacies*".

For the holiness of his life, for his profound Orthodox thought and writings, the Holy Dionysius the Little, called "the Roman", is honored both in the East and in the West, as a perfect monk, philologist and founder of *the Christian era*, an ascetic and renowned theologian. As we have already mentioned, three great virtues adorned his life: the Orthodox faith, the humility of the heart, and the love for God and men, qualities specific to the

Romanian people throughout the ages. Making the journey of this life, the Dionysius the Humble gave his soul peacefully in the hand of Christ in 545, being counted among the Holy Fathers.

The doctoral thesis *Universal Values in the Works of Holy St. Dionysius Exiguus in the Latest Research* aims to present in a synthetic form the patristic and ecumenical personality of St. Dionysius Exiguus, highlighting the originality of Saint Dionysius Exiguus, which he proved in the translation and editing of the Canonical Collections, works which have remained until today fundamental sources of Western ecclesiastical law, but also the saint as the father of “our age”, inextricably connected to the historical act of the salvation of the human race, that is, the birth of Christ the Savior.

The present paper aims to bring clarifications, starting from a deeper analysis of direct and indirect sources, as well as the latest theses or hypotheses elaborated on the origins of Dionysius and his biography.

Although he has played a very important role in the history of Christian Western and Eastern civilization, studies on Dionysius Exiguus are not very numerous. This has led me to approach this subject from the perspective of six major directions: the historiography on the Scythian origins of St. Dionysius Exiguus, the personality of Saint Dionysius, Dionysius as writer, translator, canonist, theologian, Dionysius Exiguus - the father of “the Christian era”, the relevance of St. Dionysius Exiguus for contemporary Orthodox theology, as well as the research of some places of worship dedicated to Saint Dionysius Exiguus in the Romanian space.

In the elaboration of this research, we have used a series of sources that brought to light both the image of the great patristic author and the dimensions of his various works. Among these sources, I will specifically stop the Collection of Latin volumes collected by the French Catholic priest and editor Jean Paul Migne, known as *Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Latinae*, which contains the original translations of patristic authors. The Latin Patrology is among the great contributions of the 19th century to patristic study. Migne's collections established the first contact of many theologians with the original texts of the Fathers and Church Writers.

The first patristic testimony of the origin of Saint Dionysius Exiguus is from *Marcus Aurelius Cassiodorus*, Prime Minister of the Gothic King of Italy, Theodoric. From the biographical portrait he depicts in the work *De institutione divinarum litterarum*, chap. 23, found in J. P. Migne, *Patrologiae cursus completus. Series Latin*, Paris, 1865, col. 1137 B C, we find out the following: “*Fuit enim nostris temporibus et Dionysius monachus, Scytia*

*natione, sed moribus omnino Romanus ...*". From Cassiodorus's statement, we find out that Saint Dionysius was of Scythian origin, which is unquestionable by most historians.

Another testimony of the origin of Saint Dionysius is in his preface when he translated from Greek into Latin two epistles written by St. Cyril of Alexandria addressed to Bishop Succesus. The information provided to us is very valuable in the process of completing his biographical portrait. Here is a short fragment of this epistle: "*Dionysius Exiguus, to the beloved brothers John and Leontie*."

*For the ignorant, it may seem new that Scythia, which proves to be frightening both by frosts and barbarians, has always fathered men who are full of ardor and wonderful by the goodness of morals. We know it is so not only from the knowledge of the places where we were born, but also from the experience of life lived in those lands*".

Another testimony is also a preface to his translation into Latin of the Synodal Epistle of Bishop Cyril. In the fragment presented below the Holy Priest is giving his eulogies to Bishop Peter: "*Dionysius Exiguus, to His Holy Master, Father Bishop Peter*."

*I will not forget your goodness, Holy Father and brilliant adornment of the hierarchs of Christ, and, always having before the eyes of my mind, the sacred endeavors spent with me to guide me when I was little - which can never be forgotten - let me give you my thanks, though I know that I cannot show them to the extent necessary. But because it is often done, desiring what seems to be lacking in the deed, I never cease to show, with the zeal that I can, the longing which I always bear in my soul after Your Holiness*".

These translations are also found in the collection of J. P. Migne, *Patrologiae cursus completus. Series Latin*, vol. LXVII, Paris, 1865, col. 9 D-11 A.

Also, the translations done by Saint Dionysius Exiguus are in the same collection, J. P. Migne, *Patrologiae cursus completus. Latin Series*, Vol. LXVII, Paris, 1865, as well as in *Corpus Christianorum*, Latin series, LXXXV, "Scriptores Illyrici Minores", Turnholt, Brepols, 1972 and *Corpus Scriptorum Eclecticorum Latinorum*, tom XXXV, *Collectio Avellana (Epistulae imperatorum, pontificum, aliorum inde ab a. CCCLXVII usque ad a. DLIII datae. Aullana quae dicitur collectio)*, with comments, critical notes, and indications added by Otto Günter, Pragae-Vindobonae-Lipsiae, 1895 et 1898.

Among the researchers who approached this topic there is Charles Munier, who appreciates that "*given the scarcity of papers on the Scythian monk, there can be no more writing than that by J. Rambaud-Buhot in the article dedicated to Dionysius the Little*".

W. M. Peitz also wrote the volume *Dionysius Exiguus-Studien. Neue Wege der philologischen und historischen. Text und Quellenkritik, "Arbeiten zur Kirchengeschichte"*,



Berlin, 1960, published after the passing away of the author, by MH Foerster, who brings together the latest research by P. Peitz, who intended to prepare a monumental work in six volumes dedicated to Dionysius the Little. Although his grandiose project was not realized, the work remains a reference point for the study of the Dionysian work. Another study dedicated by the personality mentioned above is *Dionysius Exiguus als Kanonist. Neue Lösungen alter Probleme der Forschung*, "Schweizer Rundschau", 45, 1945/1946.

Regarding the Dionysian Romanian biography, we mention the series of articles by P. Gh. Drăgulin: *Prefaces of the Dionysius the Humble or Exiguus to Some Translations in Latin*, in "Mitropolia Olteniei", XXXVIII, Craiova, 1986, no. 2; Idem, *A Valuable Son of the Sixteenth-century Tomis Archbishop, in Rome*, in the "Glasul Bisericii", XLV, Bucharest, 1986, no. 3, (May-June), Idem, Hieromonk Dionysius "Exiguus" or "the little one" (approximately 470-550). Bio-bibliographic endeavor in "Studii Teologice", XXXVII, Bucharest, 1985, no. 7-8; Gh. I. Dragulin and M. Dragulin, *Research on the Work of Dionysius Exiguus and especially on the one not previously known*, in "M.O.", XLI, Craiova, 1989, no. 3, pp. 74-77; Idem, *A Famous Son of the Archbishop of Tomis of the 5th century in Rome*, in "Studii Teologice", XXXVIII, Bucharest, 1986, no. 3; Idem, *The Personality of the Holy Dionysius the Humble and a Way of his Canonization*, in "G.B.", XLIX, Bucharest, 1990, no. 1-2, pp. 97-106; Idem, *The Identity of Dionysius Pseudo-Areopagite with the Hieromonk Dioysius the Humble (Exiguus)*, Craiova, 1991.

Nicolae V. Dura also contributed to the canonical work, the cultural and universal personality of Dionysius Exiguus: *Proto-Romanian Dionysius Exiguus and his Canonical Work. A Canonical Assessment of His Contributions to the Development of Church Law*, in "Ortodoxia", XLI, Bucharest, 1989, no. 4, pp. 37-61; Idem, *A Dacian-Roman, Dionysius Exiguus, the father of Western ecclesiastical law*, in "Studii Teologice", XLIII, Bucharest, 1991, no. 5-6, pp. 84-90; Idem, *Christianism in Pontic Dacia. The 'Scythian Monks' (Daco-Romans) and their Contribution to the Adventism of Ecumenical Unity and the Development of the European Christian Humanist Culture*, in "Revue Roumaine d'Histoire", 2003, no. 1-4, janvier – décembre; Idem, Denis Exiguus (Le Petit) (465-545). *Précisions et correctifs concernant sa vie et son oeuvre*, in "Española de Derecho canonico", 1993; Idem *Canonical Western Collections of the First Millennium*, in "B.O.R.", CXXI, Bucharest, 2003, no. 7-12, pp. 449-468.

Another reason behind the choice of the theme is that the period of the 4th-6th centuries captures a representative moment for the history of patristic literature through the contribution of St. Dionysius Exiguus to the strengthening of canon law.

Regarding the current relevance of this theme, the doctoral work *Universal Values in the Works of Holy St. Dionysius Exiguus in the Latest Research* aims to focus on current and fundamental problems.

In a secularizing and secular contemporary society, in constant transformation, the subject of our research in the area of patristic literature is of utmost actuality. Therefore, emblematic personalities must emerge, so that from their confessional parable, they might refresh our Christian moral and spiritual values, of the same permanent current value.

As to the difficulty of the chosen theme, his chenoitic name and autobiographical brevity, Dionysius Exiguus avoided to draw attention to his person. This complicates research through lack of categorical testimonies.

Therefore, the difficulty of this topic arises precisely from this lack of objective documents regarding the outstanding personality of St. Dionysius Exiguus.

Another important element of difficulty is the access to the studied work, and there is no complete translation of it in Romanian. This constitutes a considerable and lasting effort.

The first chapter of the doctoral thesis, entitled *Historiographic Retrospective on the Scythian Origin of Holy Dionysius Exiguus*, presents, on the one hand, the moral and intellectual portrait depicted in the universal and Romanian historiography on the personality of St. Dionysius Exiguus, and on the other hand, analyzes the controversies regarding the identity of the saint.

Several hypotheses have emerged over history over the identity of Saint Dionysius Exiguus, sometimes confused with other personalities such as Dionysius Pseudo-Areopagite.

The idea first appears with the Belgian scholar Ernst Honigmann and is then taken over by Father Gheorghe Dragulin, being subject to the discussion in his PhD thesis *Dionysius Pseudo-Areopagite's Identity with Hieromonk Dionysius the Little (Exiguus). Orthodox Research of a Controversial Issue of Byzantine and Ancient Romanian Culture*.

In the second chapter of this paper - *Saint Dionysius Exiguus – A Complex Personality of the Christian Church*, I have presented the home of Saint Dionysius Exiguus - Scythia Minor.

Our church is of apostolic origin, founded by the missionary work of St. Apostle Andrew who preached the word of the Gospel in the former Roman province of Scythia Minor, the Danube-Black Sea area, today's Dobrudja. One of the achievements of this province of the Roman Empire is the element of religious reflection or Christian theology that emerged and developed in Scythia Minor.

Enlivened by the genuine spirit of the restoration of ecumenical Christian unity, promoted in the schools of Tomis, characterized by deep and explicit ecumenical openness, Dionysius Exiguus pleaded for an ecumenical preservation of the dogmatic, canonical and unity of the cult demanded by the Ecumenical Councils.

Further on we have presented the bio-bibliographic coordinates of St. Dionysius Exiguus, as well as his spiritual, theological and cultural route.

Through his journeys, contacts, long-lasting stays and the founding of monasteries, editing translations, translations of canons and drafting of canonical collections, Dionysius Exiguus connected, as I have already mentioned, three continents: Europe, Asia and Africa, exceeding the influences of civilian administration or of the Greek-Roman culture. Everywhere, he sowed the good seed of understanding and fellowship. Through his writings, he created the conscience of European unity, severely and constantly threatened by invasions.

The ecumenical work of Dionysius Exiguus highlights his deeply missionary spirit, which manifests everywhere he works. Having an ecumenical vocation and being full of dynamism, he imprinted a living fire into Christian ecumenism. Its fundamental feature was the relentless defense or promotion of Orthodox faith and scientific research on it. In general, his personal works or translations are, for the most part, thoroughly elaborated apologies to the smallest detail and directed against heresies.

The third chapter, called *Universal Values in the Works of St. Dionysius Exiguus*, aims to present the great works by Father Dionysius Exiguus.

According to Ambrosius Amelli's remark, "*under his name and modest coat (of Dionysius) there was a great genius, expert in almost all sciences; one of those people we call 'living libraries' or 'walking libraries' (...)*".

A very good connoisseur of the Sacred Scripture, unparalleled in the handling of Greek and Latin, Dionysius Exiguus fluently translated from one into the other. His work consists of a number of patristic translations from Greek into Latin, of which some for the benefit of his brothers, the Scythian monks. These translations are accompanied by personal works in connection with the celebration of the Holy Easter, as well as ten *Prefaces* written by him for the translations done. They contain information of real interest to both those who study his biography and the history of our ancient culture.

As regards the contribution of Dionysius the Humble in the field of patristic literature, several categories of works are distinguished according to their theme and purpose. Thus, he produces a series of translations from Greek into Latin of Eastern patristic writings,

accompanied by personal prefaces, hagiographic writings - biographies, canonical writings and Christian chronology works, presented in the four subchapters.

Chapter IV - *Dionysius Exiguus - Father of the "Christian Era"* includes explanations on calendar and Easter calculations, contributions to the Dionysian Easter cycle, as well as writings of Easter computing and Christian chronology.

A unique contribution to universal history and a reference point in Christian theology is represented by the establishment of the Christian era by the Proto-Romanian erudite theologian Dionysius Exiguus. His infinite glory is also given by the intuition of his Orthodox faith. In his vision, in counting years, in the history of salvation, no historical event, the person of no king or prophet should be taken into account, but the birth of the Son of God for the salvation of mankind.

Dionysius Exiguus's *Chronology* works are based on a perfect knowledge of the Greek writings on this issue. As in his works he used the Synodal texts, so here too, Dionysius relied on the total authority of the Ecumenical Councils and the Holy Fathers as grounds for settling disputes, while being concerned with reconciling all controversy.

In the fifth chapter, called *The Relevance of Dionysius Exiguus for Contemporary Orthodox Theology*, I presented the arguments regarding the canonization of Saint Dionysius Exiguus, the importance of the contribution of Saint Dionysius Exiguus to the life of the Church, as well as a history of his calendar and its relevance in the life of the Church.

Through the canonical action, the Church only establishes, recognizes and declares the holiness of a son of its own, who was given by the Lord with the power of holiness, and as a result, it can be claimed of the canonization that it has an obviously declarative character, not a constitutive one.

By canonization, the Church fulfils not only its formal mission, but actually its three missions of salvation: *the teaching mission* - preserving, deepening and spreading the right faith in the cult of the saints; *the holy mission* - enhancing the sources of salvific grace by recognizing and showing the power of the saints and their work for the salvation of the souls of its faithful; and the *leading mission* - by directing the lives of Christians on the paths of the work shown by the saints on the most righteous ways of salvation.

In the case of Saint Dionysius Exiguus (the Humble), the following conditions were accomplished: holiness of life, the Orthodoxy of faith and a diffused local cult on the unique contribution to the heritage of the confession of universal Orthodox faith. Requests in support of the canonization of Saint Dionysius Exiguus began in 1991, and ended in September 8, 2008 by his canonization, his enrolment in the holy calendar being proposed for September 1

of each year, with a black cross. The proposal for the beginning of the canonization and the enrolment procedures in the Orthodox Christian calendar were based on the three conditions mentioned above.

Dionysius Exiguus started in his general efforts from computational concerns in order to determine the date of the feast of the Resurrection and the other celebrations in connection with it.

By placing the birth of Jesus Christ at the beginning of the Christian chronology, the learned monk refused to perpetuate the memory of a persecuting emperor of His disciples, highlighting the birth of the Lord and the hope of salvation. The perspective rewarded mankind with the possibility of harmonizing the aspirations and events of the world at whose centre now there was Christianity. The ancient priest understood that the new era (the Christian) had become a spiritual, social and historical power of first order, and that it constituted a whole whose essence, action and aspiration were no longer to be diverted on roads outside of Christ. The Christian era was giving the Church the awareness of a historical life of its own, which it would be responsible for from there on.

In the last chapter, titled - *Places of Worship Dedicated to Saint Dionysius Exiguus in the Romanian Space*, we made a brief presentation of places of worship in our country and also in the diaspora, dedicated to the Holy Dionysius Exiguus: *The Monastery of Saint Dionysius Exiguus and of Saint Ephraim the New; The Holy Trinity Church - St. Dionysius Exiguus; "Saint Dionysius Exiguus" Hermitage - Bucova, St. Basil the Great Church - St. Dionysius Exiguus - Galati*.

Seen today, from the height of a theological, astronomical and canonical literature of confessional character, Dionysius Exiguus' works remain a common heritage of the Christian Eastern and Western tradition.

I will briefly present next the working methods used in the elaboration of this doctoral thesis.

Regarding the significance of this study, the interest in the study of patristic literature appeared more prominently in our country after 1989 and in the last decades we witnessed a real explosion of works of theological and historical character. For twenty years the contemporary history of our Church has prompted a period of intense search, of various research experiences. The contribution made by this work is to sort out those that we considered more interesting from the point of view of the virtues of the authenticity and objectivity that they generate.

Regarding the religion-history-literature relationship, beyond the existing theories, either of separation or friendship and collaboration, the vision of the theologian writers is integrative from the point of view of Christian science, the object of study of science being the truth of God.

History requires knowledge through the traces left, through documents and testimonies, the need for confrontation of the different types of sources being particularly broad. The historian, theologian and philologist are turning their attention to the people of the past with their own human experience. What history, religion or literary criticism want to explain and understand, ultimately, are people through their actions. The absolute reality of experiencing past human affairs tends to be recovered in an increasingly articulated reconstruction, in more and more orderly analytical syntheses.

That is why the study on St. Dionysius Exiguus comes as a concretization of the interdisciplinary synthesis mentioned above.

In order to conceive the scientific approach, we have started from a series of questions whose answers we hope to find out at the end of the analysis. The study starts from the following questions: *Who was St. Dionysius Exiguus?; How necessary is the study of the life and work of St. Dionysius Exiguus?; What is the contribution of Saint Dionysius Exiguus to the development of patristic literature?; Did Saint Dionysius Exiguus succeed in leaving his mark on universal theology, culture and spirituality?; What is the relationship between Dionysius Exiguus and the Western canonic law? How important is the contribution of St. Dionysius Exiguus in the field of chronology?; Can we speak about St. Dionysius' actuality for contemporary Orthodox theology?*

At the end of the study I hope to have a well-drafted, balanced work with elements of *history, science and theology*. In the specialized bibliography, this work can be used as a study material for those interested in this subject, related to the literary and spiritual patristic contribution of St. Dionysius Exiguus.

In developing the research theme and its development on several chapters, I pursued the following major objectives: presenting a more detailed historiography of St. Dionysius the Little; highlighting the contribution of St. Dionysius Exiguus to the development of patristic literature; a synthesis of the theological, spiritual, cultural and humanistic concerns of St. Dionysius Exiguus; a systematization of the preoccupations in the field of chronology and its theological foundation; the importance of Saint Dionysius Exiguus for contemporary theology.

Regarding the novelty of the chosen theme, it is difficult to discuss its originality. Being a topic strongly rooted in history because of its cultural load, it is obvious that throughout the analyses and studies on this topic, many study trends have been debated and, no matter what aspect I would like to highlight, it is clear that it has already been analyzed in some form or another. However, when we talk about what this research work would bring as a novelty, we can say that it is highlighted by a personal approach to the documents we have analyzed with great rigor, both theologically and historically.

Although the topic has been debated in various studies and articles, a monograph that objectively treats the contribution of St. Dionysius Exiguus to the development of patristic literature has not been achieved so far. This is why we considered necessary and possible a scientific synthesis based on the accumulations in time to the most recent of the Romanian and foreign, theological, canonical and historical studies.

In my scientific approach, I have called upon some research methods as follows: *the first research method* I used is that of *documentation and bibliographic research*. Through this method I gathered bibliographic materials that are tangential to our theme, thus managing to outline information that shapes the chosen theme explicitly; *the second method* of research used in the study is *comparative*. This method checks the truth value of the same information in different quoted sources; *the third method* of study is the *quantitative one*. This method allows us to gather together a multitude of materials that explicitly or tangentially present concepts similar to ours. This method gives us an advantage for later using the *comparative* method, this bibliographic multitude allowing us to check the quality of the selected materials.

In conclusion, we could state that many contemporary scholars have written about Dionysius the Humble. Here is what one of them said: *“If I were asked for the opinion of Dionysius the Humble, I am convinced that under his name and his modest coat there was a great genius, expert in almost all sciences; one of those people we used to call “living libraries”, so that Cassiodorus said without hesitation, “everything we can look for as the reader with others, we find in his brilliant science”.*

With his death, a man of great culture died, a father of both the Eastern and the Western Christian tradition. He helped to preserve church unity through his works and his translations. He was the bridge between the two Christian worlds.

If we were to attribute some merits to Dionysius Exiguus, firstly he was named *the Father of Western Canonic Law*, because he endowed the Church of Rome with the first canonical, ecumenical collection, but also the father of “our age”, inextricably linked to the historical act of the salvation of the human race, that is, the birth of Christ the Savior.

Through Dionysius Exiguus, the canonical heritage of the Church of the first five centuries was transmitted to the Western Middle Ages in particular and to European culture in general: “European culture has its beginnings and development in the ideology of the canons established by the Church Fathers in the Synodal Synods of Nicaea in the year 325 until the 8th century”.

Through the canonical work of Dionysius Exiguus, the Latin canonical language itself has gained universal acceptance, which was imposed with the conveyance of equivalent terminological notions of Greek language canonical language.

Enlivened by the genuine spirit of the restoration of ecumenical Christian unity, promoted in the Tomis schools, characterized by deep and explicit ecumenical openness, Dionysius Exiguus militated for an ecumenical spirit that preserved the dogmatic, canonical and cult unity demanded by the Ecumenical Councils. Indeed, in these ecclesiastical schools in Dobrudja, he also learned to militate for the ecumenical dialogue, without ignoring from “the rule of faith”.

Knowledgeable of the tradition, history and dialectics of his time, skilful translator of spiritual works much sought in his day and having a broad vision of historical development, Dionysius tried to bring together and unite Christians in the East with those in the West, putting into circulation valuable eastern acquisitions. Also, as a good translator of dogmatic works, of the canons of ecumenical and local synods, and as a skilful teacher, he put the intelligence, discipline and sensitivity of the East at the disposal of the West, in a more direct and complete sense than it had been done by St. Elias, Blessed Jerome, Rufin, and others. We can claim, in conclusion, that Dionysius Exiguus, like Saint John Cassian, was a great Orthodox and he defended the Orthodoxy of the Ecumenical Synods in all circumstances and in all respects.

In the intellectual context of the era, his profound personality and his multilateral culture proved, on one hand, the possibility of expressing itself in several languages and, on the other, the approach of different themes - from theology and philosophy to calendar and astronomical calculations - the work of translation, editing, but also his own creation. All, however, demonstrate real virtues of deep thinking and original qualities of composition and style.

Through his work, Dionysius Exiguus brought in contact the Eastern and Western Roman traditions. Moreover, he contributed to the promotion of unity not only among Christians, but also among all people, thus demonstrating the universal value of his patristic personality. The Latin language used, the lexicon, the construction of the sentence, the overall



balance of the text demonstrate the “master experience”, which serves to designate the means by which he knew the superior spiritual men of Minor Scythia, alluding to John Cassian. He shared with the West the teaching of the East in classical Latin, learnt in Minor Scythia and then perfected in the West.

Dionysius the humble, joining John Cassian, is the anticipatory expression of the continuity of the Romanian people itself, who, although Orthodox, speaks a Neo-Latin language, thus inheriting the faith and language of those mentioned above.

Seen today, from the height of canonical literature of confessional character, Dionysius Exiguus’ works remains a common heritage of the Christian East and West.

The deeply spiritual man Dionysius, identifying his life with the divine message of the spreading of the word, brought his contribution to the spirituality of the world through the gifts he considered natural to be known to people.

He translated the works of the Holy Fathers for his contemporaries so that they would remain in the purity of the sources of spirituality, presented and organized the canons of the Christian life established by the Holy Fathers in the first four Ecumenical Councils, and set the beginning of historical time in the most natural way possible, so that every Christian knows the beginning of salvation and the beginning of the chronology. Regardless of how mistaken or unclear it was, intentionally or unknowingly, the Holy Apostle Dionysius Exiguus, by the heritage left to his descendants, proved to be a scholar, and by his lifetime attitude, a saint.

For the genius intuition of the proposal for the Christian era, *“the hardworking and historical canonist appears in the cultured Roman society of the sixth century, the most illustrious promoter of instruction and studies,”* says Italian author Fillipo Ermini.

For an Orthodox Christian people these contributions outweigh the importance of the contribution to universal cultural advancement if they are promoted by spiritual men who fulfil through their creation and the purpose of man - the glorification of God.

This fulfilment is offered by Saint Dionysius the Humble (Exiguus), who through a vast culture and the depth of knowledge proves the universality of the Dacian-Roman spirituality. According to Nestor Vornicescu's appreciation, through his work and through the contacts between Eastern and Western Roman traditions, Saint Dionysius the Humble achieved *a specific osmosis at the highest human level, and a reciprocal transfusion of spiritual elements between the two vast European regions.*

Establishing the link between the Minor Scythian region of Constantinople and Rome, through its numerous translations, Dionysius the Humble consolidated with new elements the connections between the Christian East and West, already promoted from the 4th and 5th centuries by Elias of Pictavium, Jeronim, Rufin and especially by Saint John Cassian, who, through great efforts, endeavored to offer the West parts of the Eastern Patristic thinking and of the Ecumenical Councils' Resolutions up to him, fundamental elements for maintaining and strengthening the unity of the Church.

The Geto-Dacian and Patristic spiritual heritage in the Carpatho-Danubian space, especially on the Lower Danube, is one of the richest and most original in history. In this context, Saint Dionysius Exiguus generated and sustained *an island of Roman spirit in the midst of so many storms and non-Roman groups. He gave the West, through personal works or translations, a varied spirituality, from dogma to ascetic principles and practices and the appraisal of experience of the Christian or our era, adopted today officially by the whole world, linked the East to the West.*

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