

THE LEXICAL MEANING OF THE WORDS REFERRING TO ETERNITY (DERIVATIVES OF THE WORD *VEAC*): AN INTERDISCIPLINARY AND TRANSDISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVE

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Zusammenfassung: Die vorliegende Arbeit ist der dritte Teil einer lexikalischen Studie über die Bedeutung der adverbialen Wendungen *în veci(e)/pe veci(e)* [ewiglich/für alle Zeiten], wie sie in den Grabinschriften des Fröhlichen Friedhofs in Săpânța verwendet werden. Die Semantik, die diese Adverbiale in den Epitaphien von Săpânța haben, wird parallel zu der Semantik analysiert, die sie in der Bibel haben; die Ergebnisse unserer Analyse werden anschließend der semantischen Beschreibung gegenübergestellt, die die rumänischen Wörterbücher für diese Lexeme bereitstellen. Der Vergleich führt zu einer These zum aktuellen Stand der rumänischen lexikographischen Beschreibung, die den semantischen Widerspruch zwischen kirchlichem und biblischem Gebrauch hinsichtlich der Ableitungen des Substantivs *veac* [Zeitalter] nicht erfasst. Die Evidenz, dass die lexikografischen Arbeiten auf den gegenwärtigen Forschungsstand aktualisiert werden müssen, gibt Anlass zu einer Untersuchung und Reflexion aus inter- und transdisziplinärer Perspektive.

Schlüsselwörter: *în veci(e)* [= ewiglich], *pe veci(e)* [= für alle Zeiten], *veșnic* [= ewig], *în vecii vecilor* [= für immer und ewig], *în veci de veci* [= von Ewigkeit zu Ewigkeit], lexikalische Bedeutung, kirchliche Sprache, biblische Sprache, DLR, variable Semantik, semantische Merkmale [+ begrenzt/unbegrenzt].

1. Argument

The present paper is the third part of a study of the lexicon from the inscribed epitaphs on the crosses at Săpânța. In the first part of our study (Timofte, 2021: 85-92), we analyzed the lexical meaning specific to the adverbial phrases *în veci(e)/ pe veci(e)*, used recurrently in the verses from the Merry Cemetery in Maramureș. This analysis revealed that the adverbial periphrases under discussion are used with variable temporal meaning: [+ limited/ finite] and [+ unlimited/ infinite]. The presence of these two semantic features in the derivatives of the word *veac* is, as we demonstrated in the second part of the study

(Timofte, 2021: 85-92), specific to the religious style of the biblical variant. With the finding of a surprising concordance between the "merry" epitaphs and the sacred text regarding the semantic variabilities of the temporal phrases in question, we highlighted the need to update the definitions in the Romanian dictionary entries for the derivatives of the noun *veac* (*pe veci, în veci, în vecii vecilor, veșnic* etc.). More precisely, we showed inductively, that for the definitions of the religious style words, DLR does not take into consideration the variants or sublanguages of this style. Consequently, DLR definitions with regard to the derivatives of the noun *veac* are incomplete, i.e. recording only the semantics specific to the ecclesiastic-religious language, with the invariable meaning [+infinite/ unlimited time]. The infinite meaning is illustrated with *pedeapsa veșnică* (= "the eternal punishment") of the flames of hell. We have shown, therefore, on the basis of the examples cited in DLR, that it is necessary for the dictionary definitions to be appended with the *variable* meaning of the biblical-religious language: a) [+infinite sense/ unlimited time]; and b) [+ finite sense/ limited time]; for the latter, the appropriate illustration also integrates the scriptural references to the flames of hell.

The present paper, which represents the third part of the study on the lexicon of the Maramureș epitaphs, continues the discussion from the second part, presenting additional arguments – both linguistic and from an interdisciplinary perspective—in favor of the conclusions formulated at the end of the previous paper. The factual material that supports the argumentation is, from a thematic point of view, in relation to the example proposed by DLR for the illustration of absolute time, specifically, *flăcările veșnice ale iadului* (= "the everlasting flames of hell").

2. Lexicographic research – interdisciplinary profile – transdisciplinary consequences

The finite meaning of the adjective *veșnic* with reference to the fire of hell is used consistently throughout the Scriptures, so an orderly and objective study clearly shows that the idea of an eternally burning hell is not biblical. At this point in the discussion, it is necessary to present a thesis and motive.

Thesis. We showed in the previous article (Timofte, 2021: 85-92) how the concept of the never-ending flames of hell is not biblical. However, in DLR, we find catalogues where the temporal meaning is [+ unlimited] with regard to the flames of judgment. The updating of this meaning concerns the religious style (cf.: „*în limbaj religios*” = “in ecclesiastic language”), and the exemplification of this is made precisely through the text of Holy Scripture: „Duceți-vă de la Mine blăstemaților în focul veacului, unde e gătit diavolului și îngerilor lui, că ați făcut voie lui” (= “Depart from me, you cursed, into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels, because you have done his will.”) How can the semantic contradiction between these uses – ecclesiastical and biblical – be explained?

Motive. The history of philosophy (Necula, 2007: 8-13) tells us that this conception of hell that burns endlessly comes from Greek culture: the concept of *hades*, which to the Greeks originally meant “grave/ place of the dead,” later underwent a semantic transformation, as it was considered that, in some cases, punishment even after death is deserved. A few Christian church fathers later adopted this conception, which especially enjoyed adherents within the church of the Middle Ages, the latter also adding other dimensions, such as purgatory. Consequently, within Christianity the idea that there existed a deep place where unrepentant sinners would be tormented became continually

widespread. This conception, perpetuated even today by different Christian churches, is in obvious contradiction to the teachings of the Scriptures. Indeed, the Bible does speak of some *flăcări veșnice* (= “eternal flames”), but the fire of hell from a biblical perspective has two characteristics: it is *eschatologic*¹ (and not immediately after a person’s death) and *temporary* (not perpetual). It is necessary, then, that the definition of terms in DLR effect a dissociation between the meanings within the religious style, as shown previously (Timofte, 2021: 85-92): i.e., to differentiate the meaning of the *ecclesiastic-religious language* vs. the *meaning of the biblical-religious language*. The two meanings are contradictory with regard to *veșnicia flăcărilor iadului* (= “the eternity of the flames of hell”) – which corresponds to the differences between *popular*² (folk) Christianity and *authentic*³ Christianity.

It is important to remember – in the discussion concerning *popular faith* vs. *biblical faith* – how the hybridization of Scriptural concepts occurred, even in the culture of “the chosen people”, in close relation to the semantic deviation of the *sheol* lexeme – a historical fact of the Hebrew language. More precisely (Necula, 2007: 8-13), in the second century BC, in the translation of the Old Testament (Septuagint) from Hebrew into Greek, the Hebrew word *sheol* (= lit. „mormint”/“grave” (Harris, 1961: 129-135); = translated as „Locuința morților”/“Abode of the dead”), used the Greek *hades*. This translation raises an issue:

- To the Jews, *sheol* simply meant “grave” – a place in the ground (Psalm 90:3; Ezekiel 31:14), for unconscious rest (Job 3:17-19), the land of darkness and chaos (Job 10:21-22), the place of worms (Job 17:13-16) and of silence (Psalm 115:17);
- To the Greeks, *hades* meant something completely different: a subterranean place holding the disembodied souls which yet possessed the characteristics of living people (!?).

Initially, the Jews who were scattered among Greeks retained the semantic distinction: they said *hades*, but they understood *sheol*. For example:

- The evangelist Luke (Greek) translates Psalm 16:10 („căci nu-mi vei lăsa sufletul meu în *șeol*” / “for you will not leave my soul in the Sheol”) with the words „căci nu-mi vei lăsa sufletul în *hades*” / “for you will not leave my soul in hades” (Acts 2:27); this example clarifies the way in which he used the word *hades* – specifically, with the understanding of the Hebrew *sheol*;
- Additionally, tombstones were found in Asia Minor on which *hades* was inscribed, meaning, as in Hebrew, “grave.”

However, over time and despite the best efforts of dedicated teachers, the importation of another philosophy regarding death could not be avoided. Consequent to borrowing the word form, a semantic deviation was produced (toward the Greek meaning), such that the two concepts became mixed in the thinking and popular faith of

¹ *Eschatology* is a compound word (cf. gr. *eschatos* = « last » + *logos* = « word »). The eschatological fire is the fire at the end of the world, it coincides with the Day of Judgment and is nothing but complete annihilation (see further, *passim*).

² Popular Christianity is based on the church tradition (a tradition with which Jesus Christ was largely at odds, which made him the target of attacks inside the church, and which ultimately led to crucifixion).

³ The authenticity of *Christianity* is defined by/ proven by fidelity to the teaching of *Christ*, as it is revealed in the *Word of God*, called the Bible or Holy Scripture.

both Jews and Christians (cf. erroneous translation of *hades* as „iad”/“hell”). This explains why the Incarnate Word, which honoured the traditions of the Abrahamic people, nevertheless opposed with indignation the custom: “Why do you also transgress the *commandment of God* because of *your tradition*?” (Matthew 15: 3) This is not a total opposition to custom or tradition – as, in principle, tradition is a positive thing, a symbol of the identity of the individual or the group – but opposition only to tradition which conflicts with the written Word of God.

The mixing of pure, biblical faith, with the influence of Greek culture was a protracted process, with implications on all levels of the Jewish ethnic identity.⁴ Subtle transformations at first led in time to huge cultural leaps, so that the ideas of popular faith became the dominant or even exclusive description in religious and lexicographical works. This proven as well by the definitions in the Romanian lexicographical works DLR (1997; 2002), MDA2 (2010), DLRLC (1955-1957) etc., which do not report the semantic contradiction between the ecclesiastic and biblical use with regard to *veșnicia flăcărilor iadului* (= “the everlasting flames of hell”).

Note 1. In addition to the linguistic, historical, exegetical, and logical arguments presented in the second part of our study (Timofte, 2021: 85-92), we note that the *character of God* is another key to correctly understanding the meaning of the lexemes pertaining to eternity and having the fire of hell as their reference. For the One whose anger “lasts but a moment” and whose favor “lasts a lifetime” (Psalm 30:5), the death of the sinner is not a reason for satisfaction. The contradiction between the picture of a God who is love (1 John 4:8) and the idea of endless torment is beyond words. Thus, as we have shown to this point, there is no argument in the Bible in favor of the idea that there would exist a place of endless torture either now or in the future. The fire of hell is eternal in its effect, not in duration. This distinction makes the strange work of annihilation performed by a understandable merciful God: for final judgment means not only destruction (the punitive aspect), but also prepares the way for the creation of a new world (the regenerative aspect), without suffering (2 Peter 3:10; Revelation 21:1-5).

Dictionary definitions and several controversial biblical passages. It is true that there are several passages in the Bible that seem to describe the torments of hell as having an unlimited duration. If this were accurate, the idea of updating the dictionary definitions in the manner we have shown above would not be appropriate. However, as we will further show, this is only an *apparent* situation, a confusion which only the absence of research can attribute to biblical Christianity. The fact that the finitude of the torments of hell is the sole perspective used consistently⁵ throughout Scripture is proven unequivocally by a careful, analytical study of the passages of the Holy Scriptures in context. For clarification, we will consider three controversial scriptural passages (noted by A., B., C., below) frequently used to erroneously oppose the Bible perspective, instead upholding the view belonging to popular/hybrid Christianity.

Passage A.

➤ Revelation 14:10-11: „Va fi chinuit în foc și în pucioasă, înaintea sfinților îngeri și înaintea Mielului. Și fumul chinului lor se suie în sus în vecii vecilor. Și nici ziua, nici noaptea n-au odihnă cei ce se închină fiarei și icoanei ei și oricine primește semnul numelui

⁴ See also note 13.

⁵ For the internal consistency of the Bible as proof of the authenticity of Holy Scripture, see (Timofte, 2016: 99-110).

ei.”/ “He shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night, who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name.”

The exegetical research of the book of *Revelation* has shown that this book is composed with 73% of its content drawn from the Old Testament: quotes, paraphrases, allusions, symbols. The texts quoted above are taken from Isaiah 34:8-10, the passage that we discussed in part two of our study (Timofte, 2021: 85-92, e.g. (2)b). We reiterate the idea that the correct interpretation of the Scriptures can be made only from the immediate context as well as the broader context, which correspond to the teachings in the entirety of the Holy Scriptures.

For the broader context, we refer to the previous paper (Timofte, 2021: 85-92, comment from section 2), where we explained the meaning of the words in the original text: Heb. *‘olam*, respectively Gr. *aionios*. The description of judgment upon Edom (Isaiah 34:9-10) explains the meaning of the periphrasis „în vecii vecilor” in Revelation 14:10-11: Edom was destroyed, yet its “burning” does not continue presently. *Distrușerea veșnică* (= “eternal destruction”) has a limited, temporal meaning: until destruction is complete.

Regarding the immediate context interpretation, the reader will observe that it is „smoke” of their torment that rises forever, and not the torment. Dissociation is important, as appropriating the images of the Old Testament (Psalm 37:20; Psalm 68: 2; Malachi 4: 1), the context supports, in fact, an eternal annihilation, and not an endless life in torment. Revelation 20:14 provides an additional clarification, where the eschatological fire is identified with the death from which there is no resurrection: “Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death.” Thus, the fire of hell from a biblical perspective coincides with the final death/ annihilation.

The analysis of passage A. in *Revelation* leads to the conclusion that the temporal lexemes referring to eternity in the context of the flames of hell have a finite meaning in biblical language. Thus, the dictionary definitions only consider the pre-Christian dogma appropriated by the ecclesial language and consequently need updating.

Passage B.

➤ Mark 9: 43-48 - the repetitive structure: „în gheenă, în focul care nu se stinge, unde viermele lor nu moare și focul nu se stinge (...) în focul gheenei unde viermele lor nu moare și focul nu se stinge”/ “hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched, where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched (...) hell, into the fire where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.”

The contextual exegetical interpretation of this passage identifies in chapters 7 and 19 of Jeremiah the “translation” for Mark 9. The two chapters of the book of Jeremiah speak of a valley⁶ east of Jerusalem where garbage and dead animals were thrown, where fire was always smoldering and the worms were sleeping. That valley, which was the landfill of Jerusalem, was called “Ge Ben-Hinnom” in Aramaic⁷ and meant “Valley of the Sons of Hinnom.” The abbreviation of this name was *GeHinnom* = “Hinnom Valley” (Șăineanu, 1929; Scriban, 1939). The Greek translators of the Septuagint did not translate

⁶ <http://dictionarbiblic.blogspot.com/2011/11/valea-hinom.html>.

⁷ Aramaic is the dialect resulting from the hybridization of the biblical Hebrew language with the Neo-Babylonian language. Aramaic became the everyday language of the Jews of Palestine in the time of Jesus.

this name, but rendered it in the form *GeHenna*, hence the Romanian *ghenă*, a kind of garbage pit.

How did Gehenna become the place of final judgment? In the Bible, Gehenna is not a place of eternal torment, but only a place of decay and destruction, a garbage pit (see the significant detail: worms together with smoldering fire, as a typical landfill, not hell, because the worms could not exist in the flames). In GeHinnom/ Hinnom Valley, idolatrous Israelites burned their children as a sacrifice to Moloch (cf. 2 Chronicles 28:3; 33:1.6), as required by the pagan ritual in which they took part. As a result, the prophet Jeremiah pronounces “a word from the Lord,” predicting that because of this sin, the Valley of Ben Hinnom (that is, Gehenna) will be called the Valley of the Slaughter (Jeremiah 19: 6-7). The new name refers to a time when the dead bodies of apostate Israelites would fill this valley to the brim, so that the unburied would be „food for the birds of the heaven” (Jeremiah 7: 32-33; 19: 6; Isaiah 30:33). Of course, this prophecy created an association in the minds of the Israelites between Gehenna and the place of the judgment of the wicked. Later, the rabbinic tradition considered this place a destination for burning carcasses and garbage. Thus Gehenna became a symbol of the final judgment, a metaphor with which the Jews were familiar and which Jesus borrowed from Isaiah 66:24. Therefore, the phrases „focul care nu se stinge”/ “fire that never goes out”, and „focul gheenei”/ “fire of ghenna” have a finite duration in meaning, as is the case with all contexts in which Scripture speaks of the flames of hell. However, the finite meaning specific to the biblical language is not yet registered in the Romanian lexicographical works.

Passage C.

➤ Luke 16: 19-31 – the parable of the unmerciful rich man and poor Lazarus.

For a correct interpretation of any text – including the sacred one – the reader must ask into what genre the analysed passage falls: historical report, narrative, prophecy, parable/ fable?⁸ The proper determination of this premise is an elementary, but essential, rule of analysis, because it determines the entire course of interpretation. In other words:

- If the passage from Luke 16 is a *revelation*, then the passage reveals a *de facto reality* regarding the present or future condemnation of the sinner; so that, as a revelation, the story even reveals the state of man in death;
- If it is only a *parable*, then the reader is faced with a fictional story that aims not to describe hell, but to illustrate a certain morality⁹, for which the whole picture is an *imaginary construction*.

The context of the fragment is represented by chapters 15 and 16 of Luke, which consecutively unfold a cycle of five parables, the last being the one we have in discussion here.

Once this premise is established, the reader will understand, as we said, that the defining feature of the parable is the transmission of a certain morality, and the images that make up the picture as a whole are fictitious, not true: in the Bible, we also find a parable in which trees speak (Judges 9: 7-15; 2 Kings 14: 9); however, no one will use this parable to prove that trees speak. Likewise, reading the fable *Corbul și vulpea* (= “*The Raven and the*

⁸ The *fable* is another kind of *proverb* or *parable* – see (Păun, 2002: 145, 351, 337), entries for the synonym *fabulă/ fable* = „*țilc*”/“*allegory*”; *pildă/ proverb* = „*țilc*”/“*allegory*”; „*parabola*”/“*parable*” = „*pildă, țilc*”/“*parable, allegory*”.

⁹ “The parable = short fictional story, meant to illustrate a principle or a moral or spiritual attitude” (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, 1999).

Fox”), no one will conclude that a raven is a bird that has the special ability to communicate with a species of mammal, called a fox. Unfortunately, those who interpret this parable as a *revelation* do not realize that accepting the parable *ad literam* in all its details is absurd and in opposition to the overall teaching of the Scriptures. Here are some content arguments that point to the inadequacy of the literal interpretation of the parable. To each comment, we will add a secondary commentary showing what the Bible has to say about that issue – that is, how the fantastic elements in the parable are in opposition to the teachings of the Scriptures:

- That heaven is called “Abraham’s bosom” (not “the Father’s bosom”, not “Christ’s bosom”). “Abraham’s bosom” is a phrase taken from Jewish folklore.

o The Bible says that *Abraham is not in heaven*: Isaiah affirms “Abraham does not know us.” (Isaiah 63:16; cf. and Ecclesiastes 9:5,6,10). Abraham did not receive what was promised to him, “that they should not be made perfect apart from us.” (Hebrews 11: 13,39,40). The fact that God is called “the God of Abraham” is only by virtue of the resurrection (Luke 20:37);

- In the parable, people go to heaven according to the logic of compensation¹⁰, an aspect that corresponds exactly to the mentality of the Pharisees of that time: if life treats you badly here it will be fine for you there and vice versa;

o The scriptural criterion by which men enter heaven is the *criterion of righteousness and faith*.

- The idea of a real hell in the present, in which the disembodied souls of unbelievers are tormented, is interwoven with details that outline the material dimension: the rich man has eyes, a tongue, a spirit does not have such things. Lazarus also has hands, fingers...

o The Bible says that the *dead, good and bad alike, are sleeping*: “The small and great are there, and the servant is free from his master.” (Job 3: 18-19); the rich and the poor “they lie down alike in the dust, and worms cover them.” (Job 21:26);

- The idea that both categories of people (righteous and sinners) receive their reward at death is in opposition to the teachings of Christ;

o The Bible says that the *reward (either good or bad) will be given only at the resurrection*, an event that will take place at His second coming: “The Son of man

¹⁰ Lazarus is a beggar...it is unknown how sinful (*cf.* “I was young and now I am old, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken, or their children begging bread.” – Ps. 37: 25). The silent argument is against him. As for the rich man, he does not seem to have been so ruthless, because he endured the beggar’s presence, so he still felt sorry for him. Then, the criterion for their placement (heaven vs. hell) is stated in v. 25: “Remember that in your life you received the good things, while Lazarus received bad things. Now he is comforted here, and you are in agony ...”

will come in the glory of His Father... and then He will reward each according to his works.” (Matthew 16:27; cf. and Matthew 25: 31-41; Revelation 22:12);

- Heaven and hell are presented as two neighboring rooms, so close that it is possible to communicate freely between the tenants (contrary to the concept: heaven, up vs. hell, down); hell is an antechamber of torture placed on the edge of heaven, from where you can see/hear your loved ones, possibly screaming, shouting curses. Can the righteous sing with a joyful heart in such circumstances? An absurd picture!

o The Bible says that *the consuming fire does not exist now, but only after the return of Christ*: “when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven..., in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power.” (2 Thessalonians 1: 7-9);

o This portrayal in the parable is completely foreign to the teachings of the Bible. The images in this parable can be understood by reference to the mentality of those who listened to Jesus (the Jews of that time). The historical testimonies that reveal what the Jews believed at that time are recorded in the apocryphal¹¹ books: 2 Ezra 4:41 (“Hades has two rooms, one for the good, one for the wicked...”); 4 Maccabees 13:17 (“The righteous are received into Hades by Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob”); statements from the Babylonian Talmud – cf. Talmud Ketuboth, 104: “Angels take the righteous to their proper place.” Talmud Kidušin, 72: “Here, they are sitting in Abraham’s lap...”. Talubud Erubim: “The wicked are tormented in the other room...” Midrash (collection of rabbinic comments and stories) in Ecclesiastes 7:14: “The good and the bad can see and even communicate with one another...”. In addition to these testimonies, there is another, more eloquent than all: *Josephus’ speech to the Greeks on Hades* (Whiston: p. 1902), signed by the historian and Pharisee Josephus Flavius¹² – the coordinates from the parable of Jesus are found there in entirety.

¹¹ The apocryphal books (14 apocryphal books added to the books of the Old Testament in the Catholic and Orthodox Bibles) are not a source of truth but are a testimony to the mentality of the time. Apocryphal in Greek means “obscure”, or “hidden”. The name comes from the fact that these books were kept in the “dark” rooms behind the synagogue. They had no liturgical utility. They were written by the Jews scattered among the pagans, between the centuries IV and II BC. They were never considered inspired. Neither Jews nor Christians included them in the number of canonical or normative books. Sometimes on holidays they would be read. In these books a lot of historical, geographical etc. errors have been identified, but more serious is that the Apocrypha propagate pagan ideas, which frontally contradict the biblical teaching. Some of these books are fairy tales, others are stories in which magical formulas are used, others are collections of popular wisdom, and others are historical books. *Biblia* 1688) separates them from the canonical books and introduces them under the names „*ApocriŃa – Ascunsele ceale ce-s la Jidovi*”.

¹² The Jewish writer Josephus Flavius was contemporary with the apostles Paul and John. In the quoted work, he makes a complete exposition of the Jewish belief of his time regarding hell, in words and images strikingly similar to the story in the Jewish tradition that Jesus Christ uses.

Why though, does Jesus use these fantasies¹³ of Jewish folklore? The answer to this question must be sought in the “morality of the fable”. As any parable/fable articulates its moral at the end, in the case of this parable the message is expressed at the end, in verse 29: “They have Moses and the prophets; let them listen to them!”¹⁴ The message is so important that Jesus Christ repeats it a second time, in verse 31: “If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead”. In other words, not tradition, but... back to God’s inspired Word!¹⁵ Relating the fantastic parable to the theme of “punishment”, the Savior’s teaching is radical: Holy Scripture is the highest authority in matters of faith and doctrine. Jesus recommends it to his listeners as the sure guide for salvation (see also Matthew 5: 17-19; Luke 24:25.27.44; John 5:39.45.47). Accordingly, adhering to the teachings of the Holy Scripture means identifying the concept of *hell* with the eschatological/ final fire, which is temporary and effects destruction. Jesus does not identify the wicked as eternal, but rather with the fire. According to the Scriptures, God promised eternal life only to the righteous. The payment for sin is death, not eternal life in hell (Romans 6:23). It is not the punishment that is eternal, but the penalty. The biblical view described thus far necessitates updating the lexical descriptions in the Romanian lexicographical works in the sense already mentioned: regarding the eternal (= „*veșnic*”) fire of hell, as with all derivatives of the word *veac*, the semantic description must take into account not only the meaning associated with pre-Christian dogma appropriated by ecclesiastic language, but also the opposing biblical conception, which supports the finitude of the torments of hell.

Note 2. A “double-sided” analysis. The discussion of the “finiteness of the eternal flames” of hell cannot ignore the evidence that the teaching of *eternal hell* is derived, secondary. It derives from the conception relating to the *immortal soul*, which is the principal topic of discussion. Without making a detailed analysis of this subject, we will only mention that Greek philosophy (beginning with Socrates, then Plato and Aristotle) claims that man has an immortal soul in his essence, which is enclosed in the cage of a material body. This conception has left a powerful imprint on the Christian dogma concerning the state of man after death. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (1960) comments: “We are always more or less influenced by the Greek, Platonic idea that the

¹³ How exactly did the chosen people come to believe such tall tales? This can only be understood by looking at how their religion has been altered under the extraordinary pressure of Greek culture. With Alexander the Great, Hellenistic culture infused the entire East. Jews spread outside Palestine were the first to surrender. The Apocrypha are written by them and bear the imprint of Hellenism.

The historical framework helps us understand the process of hybridization of Jewish culture. In the 1st century BC, there were about one million Jews in Alexandria. Greek culture recreated their philosophy of life, behavior and even their religious beliefs. The most prominent figure of this period was the philosopher Philo of Alexandria. He contributed most to the merging of Judaism with Hellenism. On the other hand, in Palestine, Hellenistic culture penetrated with the occupation of the Ptolemies (3rd century BC) and continued under the Seleucids (2nd century BC). Those who yielded first were in fact those in the priestly class. Its leaders took their Greek names. They struck bilingual coins, in Greek and Hebrew. In 63 BC, the Romans transformed Judea into a Roman province. As a result, the biblical religion was again subjected to Hellenistic influence. The conservative class of the Pharisees, who had made it their mission to revive the old religious tradition, had also imperceptibly embraced the idea of the immortality of the soul and, implicitly, of prayers for the dead. See also section 2. *Motive* (above).

¹⁴ The phrase “Moses and the prophets” refers to the Old Testament and gives an overview of the canon of the Old Testament in the days of Jesus - see Luke 16:16.

¹⁵ The International Critical Commentary of the Bible on verse 22 reads: “The moral is that happiness or misery after death is determined by conduct before death. But the details of the parable are borrowed from the Jewish popular belief about the condition of the soul in Sheol and should not be understood at all as a confirmation of these popular beliefs.” (Plummer, 1901: 260).

body dies, but the soul is immortal. This idea is totally contrary to the Jewish conception and cannot be found anywhere in the Old Testament” (vol. 2, p. 812, article “Death”). Contrary to pagan tradition, the Holy Scripture presents the human being as a whole, and death is described as the opposite of creation (Genesis 2: 7): the constituent elements (the dust of the earth and the breath of life) are separated, thus ceasing to form a living being (man). Ecclesiastes 12:7). Even faithful believers are in the grave, according to Scripture, and not in Heaven – the apostle Peter said of David that “he did not ascend into heaven” (Acts 2:34). In the biblical view, death-sleep means the cessation of conscious thought (Ecclesiastes 9: 5; Psalm 146: 4); cessation of emotional sentiments (Ecclesiastes 9: 6); cessation of activity of any kind (Ecclesiastes 9: 10.6; Psalm 115: 17); death-sleep presupposes an awakening at the resurrection (John 5: 28-29). Therefore, the biblical teaching about the afterlife is that the dead are not in a state of consciousness and that the soul is not immortal. Accordingly, the Scriptural scholar cannot ignore that the idea of an endlessly burning hell is contradictory to the teaching of the Bible: for this conception implicitly holds that the wicked, burning eternally, are immortal.

Conclusion of section 2. The argumentative addendum to the three parts of the lexical study concerning the epitaphs of the famous “Merry” Cemetery has highlighted the profoundly interdisciplinary character of lexicographic research. Once he has the collection of linguistic material with a view toward the systematic dictionary descriptions and a thorough knowledge of the practical methods of drafting dictionaries, the lexicographer must catalogue the newest lexical evidence which has been presented by linguistic use in each stage of language development, to assess the accuracy of the older linguistic descriptions from previous works, to discern any semantic deficiencies in the definitions in use, in order to provide a permanent update that is as close as possible to the true state of a historic language in the sequence.

This certainly presupposes a complex specialized training on the part of the lexicographer, enabling the use of comparative, contrastive linguistic research together with evaluation of the word meanings and expressions of a language from an interdisciplinary perspective. Our paper shows – by appealing to linguistic, historical, exegetical and logical arguments – that the definitions of lexemes referring to eternity (the derivatives of the word *veac*) in the dictionaries of the Romanian language need an update to the semantic descriptions: introducing the corresponding meaning of the biblical-religious language alongside the ecclesiastic-religious meaning, the two lexical meanings being in opposition.

3. Hermeneutic consequences from a transdisciplinary perspective.

The linguistic research on the lexemes referring to eternity in the epitaphs from Săpînța and in the biblical text occasioned interdisciplinary investigations and reflections. Indeed, how Christian is the popular view of hell? Had it been promoted by monstrous torturers, the idea of endless torment would have been understandable. Undoubtedly, the belief in hell did not lead man to conclusions about his own wickedness, but strangely and at the same time logically, to conclusions about God. This aspect of “Christian” thinking has mutilated Christianity to a degree that even its fiercest opponents could not have done. Its consequences can be traced to transdisciplinarity, as the theory shapes the practice of everyday life, influencing the quality of life and decisions that individuals make: this conception has produced more atheists than have totalitarian political ideologies and paganism. “It is not a pleasant thing to be a Christian!” writes Emil Cioran in *Revelațiile Durerii*. How would he have arrived at this conclusion? The logical deduction of a rational

mind, however, cannot be surprising — whether iconography, various writings, doctrines, or theories, all compete, consciously or not, with the distortion of the image of God's love shown in Christ Jesus on the cross. The effect is most undesirable, but also unavoidable. Charles Darwin says in his autobiography: "Thus, unbelief slowly crept over me, but in the end it was complete... Indeed, I can hardly see how anyone can want Christianity to be true; because, if so, the plain language of the text seems to show that people who do not believe ... will be punished forever. And this is a cursed doctrine" (Martin, 1997: 327). Indeed, what philosophy or religion of the world has invented an unreality that exceeds in monstrosity the "Christian" idea of endless torment? How could the exponent of such a theory not see the grotesque contradiction that the God of love would endlessly torture created beings who did not choose Him? Or to think of Him as a passive spectator or emotionally involved (in case he would have someone there) of these events... Of course, we cannot build doctrines on our emotions, but only on the living Word of God. Yet it is precisely the respect for this Word that compels the believer to identify with what the Word says. Even so, what did the institution of the church intend by popularizing such a concept of extreme cruelty? It's a question that arouses bewilderment and awkward debates: was it an attempt to scare people into producing "holiness on command"? Was it an effort to create desperate despondency in a person with the intent of then selling him indulgences? Was the church itself the victim of its own traditions by refusing to research/re-evaluate because "that's the way we learned it." Whatever the explanation, for the honest researcher, this discussion allows room for several conclusions:

- 1) agedness does not change error into truth;
- 2) only truth can afford to be open to investigation, as a true teaching has nothing to lose by careful research;
- 3) biblical teaching, in its beauty and simplicity, is revealed to the researcher as two faces of the same coin: a) *the soul is not immortal*; according to Scripture, only the righteous will receive immortality upon the return of Jesus Christ in glory (a synchronous event with the first resurrection — 1 Corinthians 15: 50-54). Therefore, "eternal life" (Matthew 25:46) for them is life *without end*; b) the second side of the coin, which derives from the first as a corollary of the correct understanding of the teachings of the Scriptures regarding the "immortality" of the soul, is that *the fire of hell is not eternal*. Since immortality is attributed only to redeemed believers, it follows that the "eternal punishment" of sinners or the "eternal fire" (verse 41) is *limited in time*, as the wicked, who neither have nor receive immortality (Ecclesiastes 9: 5). -6; 2 Thessalonians 2: 9-10), cannot suffer forever because they are mortal. Just as the "eternal fire" that destroyed Sodom (Jude 7), so is the "eternal fire" that will destroy sinners and the devil at the final judgment; it will have a limited duration, but its effects will be eternal;
- 4) the current status of the lexicographic descriptions in the definitions in DLR relating to religious terms are incomplete in that the variations or sublanguages of the functional religious style are not taken into account; the present stage of research requires the updating of the lexical description; more specifically, with regard to the derivations of the noun *veac*, it is necessary that dictionaries also record the semantics specific to the *ecclesiastic-religious* language – in the *invariable* sense [+infinite/ unlimited time], and the *variable* semantic specific to the *biblical-religious* language: a) meaning [+infinite/ unlimited time]; and b) [+ finite meaning/

limited time], for the latter the proper illustration also integrating the scriptural references of the flames of hell.

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