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ROMULUS BULGARICUS: THE CLASSICAL DIGITAL DATABASE PROJECT IN BULGARIAN WEBSPACE

Abstract. We describe the work on Romulus Bulgaricus project, its aims, its achievements and the future perspective of its development in the context of digital preservation of cultural heritage.

Keywords: digitization, Classics, Latin, Bulgarian reception.

1. Romulus Bulgaricus project: description, aims, work stages

The idea for the project presented here has emerged naturally in accordance with the latest trends in the development of both humanities and education. As traditional as it may seem, the field of studies named Classical Philology or Classics cannot stay far from the development of modern theories – linguistic, literary and cultural. Further-more, the evolution and survival of this field is in constant connexion with the survival of ancient texts and their position within the framework of modern theories and computer technologies, i.e. their availability in electronic form for both students and researchers. Until the 1990s written texts, not only ancient ones (though ancient texts have been an object of philological and other kind of studies for a longer period of time and in a more traditional way) were part of a specific context – that of printed matter. In recent years, it has become clear that ancient texts could not ignore the new context of post-modernity, namely electronic media. This fact breathes new life into ancient texts and makes them a new and unfamiliar subject for study and research.

That is why the Department of Classics at the University of Sofia with the cooperation of the University's Science Research Fund and Open Society Foundation started this pioneering project in the field that involves the digitization of philological resources. The Romulus Bulgaricus project aims to create a digital database of literary Latin texts and their Bulgarian translations, as well as various Latin language tools. Work on the project started in 1996. Many lecturers, professors and students from the Department were involved, as well as other people, including computer specialists.

As its name clearly indicates, the Romulus Bulgaricus project was conceived as a technical aid intended for a specific public, namely the academic and scholarly community in Bulgaria. Therefore, it has some specific needs to meet and goals to achieve.

Given the relatively short tradition of Classical Studies in Bulgaria (the first Bulgarian University being established a few decades after the Liberation from Ottoman Suppression in 1878, and a special Department of Classics being created in 1921),

Bulgarian scholars have always felt a certain lack of language resources for the study of Latin and Greek. The only up-to-date Latin-Bulgarian dictionary and Latin grammar are not accessible enough for all who wish to study the language for the purposes of philology, literature, art, philosophy, etc. The insufficiency of Latin text sources is also significant.

The presentation of Latin texts and their translations will also provide sources for research in other scholarly disciplines from literary criticism to law. Thus, the Romulus Bulgaricus project will encourage an interdisciplinary approach in the humanities and will provide new opportunities for researchers in various fields. Electronic texts are easily searchable, and digital resources are more suitable for certain purposes than traditional printed text corpora. So this project will enhance research not only in the field of Classics but in other fields as well. The fact that some Latin texts could be accompanied by several Bulgarian translations provides opportunities for research in fields such as Translation throty, and Bulgarian and Latin linguistics. It will also help historians of Bulgarian culture to trace the reception of Latin literature in Bulgaria and the response of the reading public from the end of XIX century until present day.
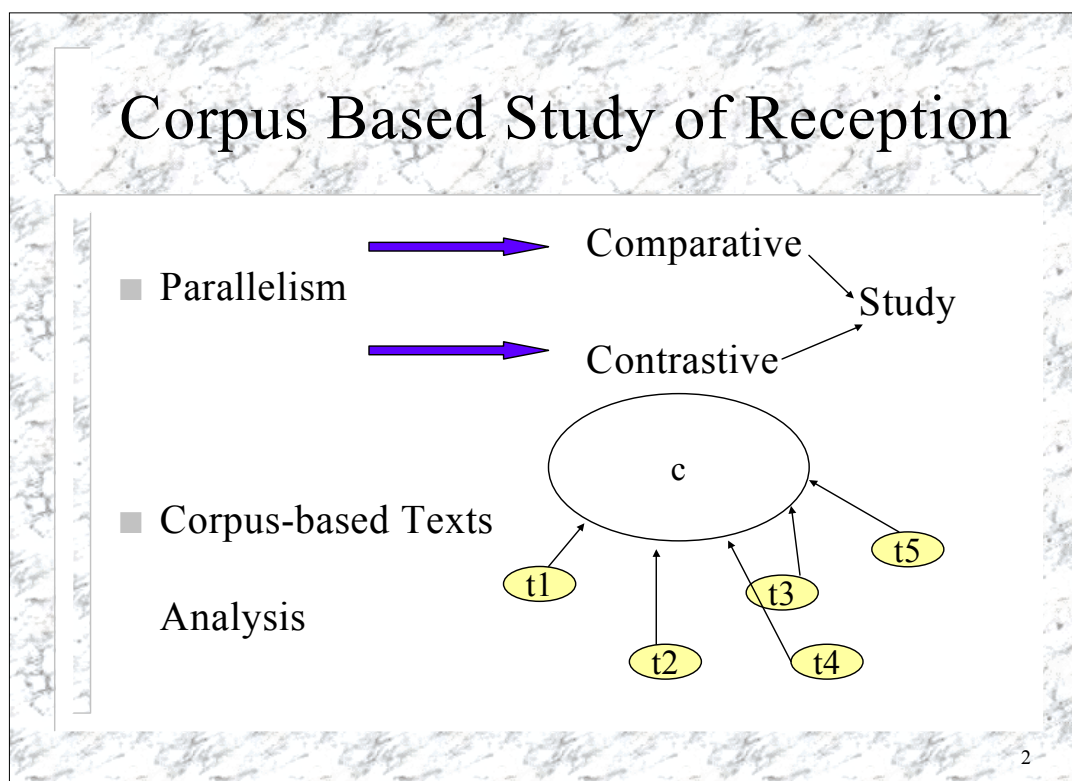

Fig. 1. Application of parallel corpora
in the study of cultural and literary reception

Once completed, the project will be made available via the World Wide Web on the web-server of Sofia University, the Faculty of Classic and Modern Philology page (http://www.fcml.uni-sofia.bg/). This will give classical and other scholars from around the country, and perhaps around the world, the opportunity to make use of the materials

provided and to do their own research based on them. Thus, the Romulus Bulgaricus project will enhance scholarly dialogue and collaboration.

Project activities comprise several separate stages, in accordance with the original aims.

The first phase consists of collecting and selecting material, i.e. texts, on which essential work will be based. Latin texts were selected according to the availability of Bulgarian translations of them. And the Bulgarian translations selected were those dating from the Liberation from Ottoman Suppression in 1878 until the start of the project in 1996. This decision was made partly because translations from Latin dating before that period are isolated cases, and partly because only after the Liberation are we dealing with works written wholly according to the modern Bulgarian literary and linguistic norm and which can be considered a product of modern Bulgarian culture.

The older and already copyright-free texts were provided through the courtesy of the Library of Sofia University, which searched its archives in cooperation with the project crew in order to find every translation from Latin dating from the period. The search included translations of whole works as well as of selected passages or individual poems in books, reviews, periodicals and even newspapers.

This first phase of the project was accomplished in 2001.

The second phase of the project included preparing an electronic version of selected Latin texts and their Bulgarian translations in an appropriate format. As far as Latin texts are concerned, mostly all Latin authors' works could be found on the World Wide Web; the project crew purchased some of them from certain web-servers copyright-free for educational purposes. A Latin text collection is also available at the Department of Classics on floppy disks. So there was no need for the digitization of Latin texts: they had simply to be appropriately formatted.

Unlike the Latin originals, the Bulgarian translations had to be retyped and digitized before formatting them to HTML. This great amount of work was accomplished by a crew of 15 people, including students from the Department of Classics and some volunteers. All the appendices to the texts themselves – footnotes, indices, forewords, etc. – were also digitized as they were in the printed editions used for the project.

Then both kinds of texts had to be formatted as a parallel Latin-Bulgarian corpus (electronic collection of pairs <text, translated text>). First, they were aligned paragraph by paragraph. After that they were presented in parallel windows in the following way:
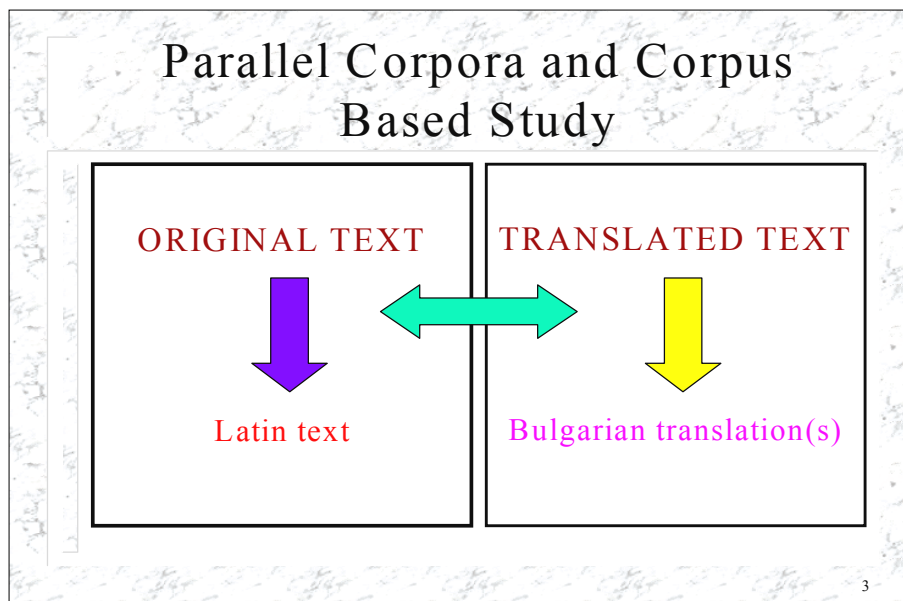
Fig. 2. Parallel text corpora in aligned windows and their possible application

Apart from seeing them that way, the user can choose to view the original or the translation only. We are working on a tool which could present the right window as multi-layered and containing more than one translation. Every new translation opened will form a new layer over the previously opened one in the same window.
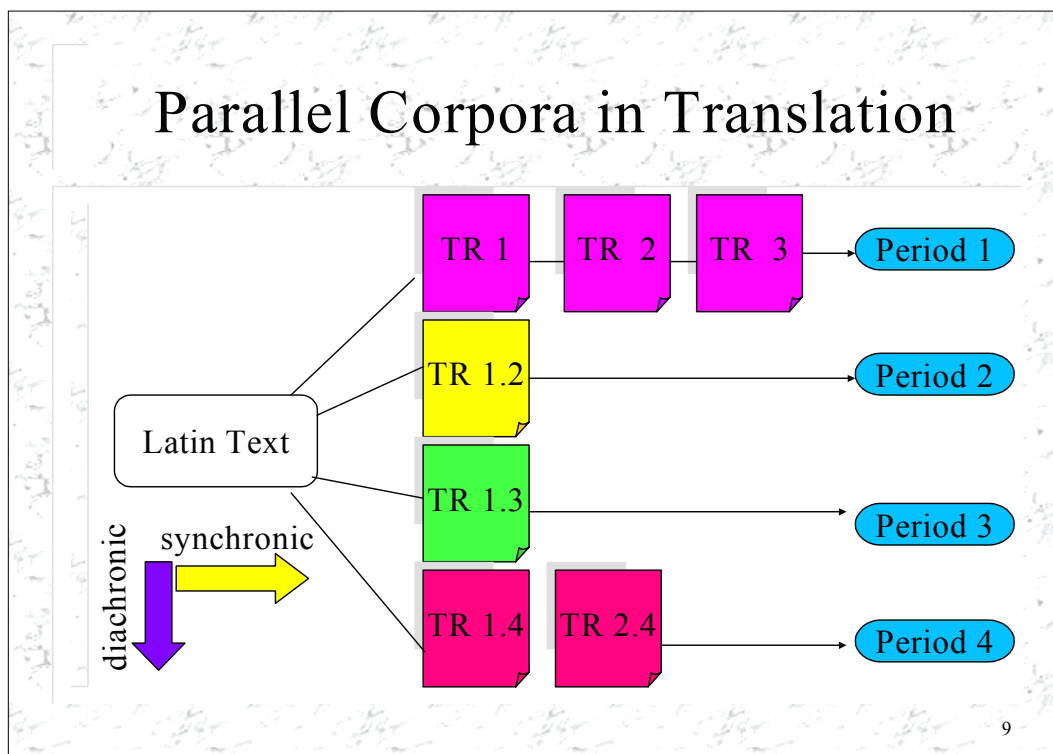

Fig. 3: The use of different translations in text-based studies

The reader will select which translation to view by clicking on a special button in the upper right part of the window.

The work on Bulgarian texts was done simultaneously with the work on Latin texts and was accomplished in the end of 2001. The work on designing a web-page for the project and disposition of the Latin text vis-à-vis the translation will finish soon and its results are due to be presented in virtual space.

2. A Digital Encyclopaedia of the Ancient World

After accomplishing the work on the bilingual Latin-Bulgarian library, a by-project was started that dealt with the indices, prefaces and footnotes to the Bulgarian editions. Some collaborators of the project crew had to put all the names and specific terms in alphabetical order, edit them and add or remove data so as to create a glossary of terms in relation to the texts existing in the database. The glossary project, which goes under the name of Digital Encyclopaedia of the Ancient World, is due to be completed soon. It is intended to provide a broader context and background against which Latin sources and their translations could be better understood and analyzed. This

will be the first Bulgarian handbook on ancient names, terms and ideas, not only in digital space, but also in the history of Classical Studies in our country as a whole. Intended as the first of many digital study tools, the Encyclopaedia will contain over 1,000 lemmas.

3. Addenda

The digital bilingual library is enriched by some additional materials giving a wider look at the presence of Antiquity in Bulgaria. To the library texts and the Encyclopaedia there is a virtual gallery added of some of the greatest ancient archaeological monuments in Bulgaria. Many of the prefaces and introductions of Bulgarian translations, also due to be presented in the library, reveal not only the particular environment of the text itself, but also the specific Bulgarian place of Latin originals and the specific point of view of the translator with regard to the original. This part of the library will be further enlarged with works of classical students and scholars on ancient literature and culture.

4. Future Development: Grammar and Dictionary

In a future stage of the Romulus Bulgaricus project the parallel corpus of Latin originals and their Bulgarian translations will be linked to a digital Latin grammar which will give the reader an opportunity to check morphological categories and become acquainted with the grammar of the text. This Latin grammar could be provided with tables of lexical units and searching options for different morphological variations. The creation of a digital grammar is of great importance not only in connexion to the aforementioned need for a new and accessible Latin grammar, but also because it will present a new approach to the linguistic facts.

We also intend to link the parallel text corpus to a new digital Latin-Bulgarian dictionary. Here we should consider not building a dictionary in the traditional way. Despite the fact that the so-called "dead" languages do not develop their lexical systems, translation languages – Bulgarian in our case – are constantly changing and this fact influences word significance and relations between significant and signified. This is a change that affects to a great extent the rendering of the "dead" language itself.

5. The Significance of Romulus Bulgaricus project

The implementation of this project and its results will be of great significance to the field of Classics in Bulgaria and also to Translation studies, taking into account that such an approach, i.e. the use of bilingual Latin-Bulgarian corpus and computer aided data deducing, is absolutely new to these disciplines and has not been applied so far. This approach will help us to explore and further present the reception of Latin literature in Bulgaria over a long period of time, outlining the tendencies and traditions in this reception. We should keep in mind that ancient heritage is and will remain undoubtedly an inseparable part of each modern society and culture. In this sense studying translations from Latin into Bulgarian will give a different and a more complete look of

Bulgarian culture and literary tradition from the Liberation from Ottoman Suppression until the present day.

After the project material is (hopefully) presented on the website of the Department of Classics, it will contribute to the widening of the Bulgarian presence on the Web and our culture and studies will be more open to national and international co-operation and collaboration at different levels of research, as well as of education. The Internet will be the major device for the dissemination of the results of the project. It will make accessible for both educational and research objectives bilingual material (Latin-Bulgarian) which has not existed until now in Bulgaria and which will replace, in a sense, other bilingual editions we used to employ, for example, the Loeb Classical Library or Budé.

The implementation of the project will also be of great importance for all higher educational institutions where ancient texts are a subject of study: historical, literary, linguistic, cultural, philological, and philosophical and many other kinds, including computer analysis. The project will play a significant role in related disciplines such as Latin Literature and Culture and Translation Studies. Students will receive the opportunity to work on their own and seek equivalents and particularities in given translated texts. The project research will be applied in designing a course syllabus for Latin Translation Studies.
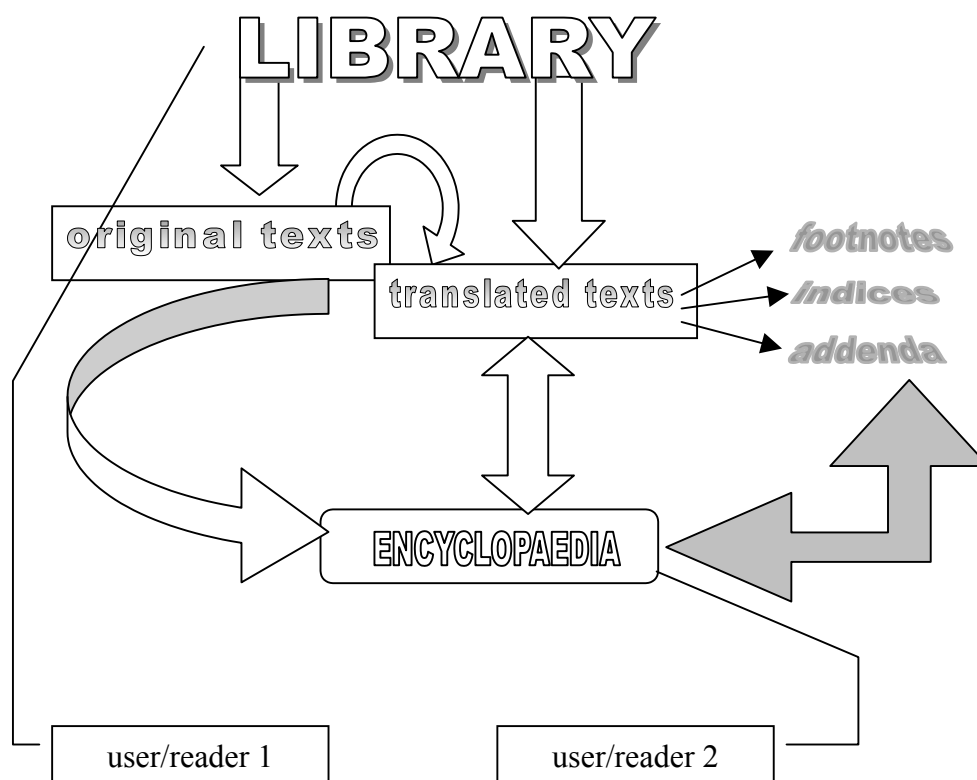

Fig. 4. The whole of *Romulus Bulgaricus* project: possible paths of use

This project has the additional significance of to be the pioneering attempt for application of advanced technologies in the field of higher philological education in Bulgaria. There are no similar projects concerning any other languages. Thus, we are

glad to meet the challenge of treating the most ancient of texts with most modern of instruments.

6. Conclusion

Paradoxical as it may seem, Antiquity is already viewed in the light of modern times. And we could not deny that the view is quite different. Advanced technologies transfer all ancient heritage not only to many more parts of the world, i.e. in space, but also to the future, i.e. in time. As a part of the present we have to be aware of our role in bringing this future closer. Our intentions are to make the world of Classical antiquity – a world dating from centuries ago – perceivable and accessible for modern people to the same extent as their own world is.

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