

## 7 Conclusions

### Arabic Presses of the East, the Fruit of Mixed Feelings

As I explained above, Western historiography of the early Arabic printing mentions only as a minor episode, and not entirely clear, the joint work of Antim the Iberain and Athanasios Dabbās that allowed the printing of two books in Wallachia with Arabic type and Arabic texts and twelve titles afterwards in Aleppo. However important for the history of printing in general, and that of printing in the Middle East in particular, this topic was not researched much before the year 2000. The main reason for this neglect was the seemingly small impact that printing Arabic liturgical, theological, and polemical books for the Arabic-speaking Christians had in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, if considered in the greater picture of the cultural evolution of the Middle East under Ottoman rule. The Arabic presses of the 18<sup>th</sup> century did not appear to bring about a ‘cultural revolution’. This is the conclusion of a recent account of the beginnings of Arabic printing in the East presented very briefly by Geoffrey Roper in his contribution to *The Book. A Global History*, edited by Michael F. Suarez, S. J., and H. R. Woudhuysen: “Their output was too small and intermittent to bring about any revolutionary change in book culture [...]”<sup>1</sup>

However, the effort to bring modernity to the Eastern coast of the Mediterranean on the eve of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the correct understanding of the benefits of knowledge dissemination and learning improvement by means of the printed book should be appreciated for their real value in the history of civilization. They brought together Greek and Arab patriarchs, bishops, priests and monks of several Churches of the Middle East, princes and upper clergy of the Romanian Principalities, commanders of Ukraine, not to mention the innumerable printers, typographers, engravers, and binders of various nations who contributed, knowingly or unknowingly, to this joint effort.

The patronage work of the prince of Wallachia Constantin Brâncoveanu had significant consequences for the Arabic-speaking Christians in later centuries. The books that Athanasios Dabbās printed were reedited several times and laid the foundations for other versions published up to the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The first editions of Aleppo were repeatedly used in revising the liturgical texts they contained. The Psalter of Aleppo was reprinted in several editions, as there

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<sup>1</sup> Geoffrey Roper, “The Muslim World”, in Michael F. Suarez, S. J., and H. R. Woudhuysen (eds.), *The Book. A Global History*, Oxford, 2013, p. 543. Printing in Arabic in the 18<sup>th</sup>-century East (the Romanian Principalities, Syria and Istanbul) is addressed on p. 540–543.

was a high demand for it in the Arabic-speaking communities of the Middle East, both Orthodox and Catholic-inclined. A copy of the Horologion once preserved in Istanbul was in the possession of the Maronite bishop Gabriel Farḥāt, according to a handwritten note inside. The copy of the Oktoechos of 1711 held by the B.A.R. was once in the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Greek Catholics of Aleppo. Al-Ma'lūf states that he found three copies of the Book of the Divine Liturgies printed by the Patriarch Sylvester in monasteries of Syria, a Psalter printed in Beirut at the Patriarchal Monastery of Mār Elias Šuwayya (Lebanon), and, in Damascus, two copies of the *al-'Aṣā' al-Rabbānī* (*The Holy Supper*) of Eustratios Argentis published in 1747 in Iași (Moldavia). Other copies, now in libraries and collections across Europe and the United States, were brought from the Middle East by diplomats and traveling scholars, especially in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Athanasios Dabbās's printed books had a wide circulation after 1724, in both Greek Orthodox and in Greek Catholic communities, despite the tensions generated by the Western missionaries' efforts to attach the Christians of the Ottoman Empire to the Latin Church. It was noted that his entire editorial program comprised liturgical books that observed the Byzantine tradition and did not reflect any polemical intention. In the Gospel printed in 1706, he addressed the readers with a conciliatory expression: "To the devout brethren who are priests and lay-people living in the Arab lands." There is no proof that any of the books printed in his workshop was ever used as an instrument in the anti-Catholic or anti-Protestant disputes.<sup>2</sup> The only exception, for which he should not be held accountable, is the Patriarch Chrysanthos Notaras's assertion in the foreword to the *Sermons of Athanasios* (*Mawā'iz 'Aṭanāsiyūs*, Aleppo, 1711) that the "enemies of the faith" (probably, the Jesuit missionaries) were spreading in the Middle East "false and dishonest beliefs".<sup>3</sup> After 1724, as a consequence of the division in the Church of Antioch, the Patriarch Sylvester's activities as head of the Greek Orthodox Church of Antioch were deeply marked by his anti-Latin views, revealed, among other things, in the editorial program that he conceived for the presses where he published Arabic books.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Nasrallah, "Les imprimeries melchites au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle", p. 231, n. 4; Gdoura, *Le début de l'imprimerie arabe à Istanbul et en Syrie*, p. 146.

<sup>3</sup> Foreword, p. 6. Here, Chrysantos Notaras states, in reference to the books printed at the request of his uncle Patriarch Dositheos of Jerusalem: "These works serve as weapons that can defeat any attack against Orthodoxy, for it can be threatened by teachers who claim they are grace-bearing prophets [...]"

<sup>4</sup> BRV IV, p. 61–67; HMLÉM IV.2, p. 85–88; Dabbās and Raššū, *Tārīḥ al-ṭibā'a al-'arabiyya fī al-Mašriq*, p. 121–125.

I have also discussed the fact that the Arabic-language texts printed by Antim the Iberian with Athanasios Dabbās and, later, by the Patriarch Sylvester, helped again by Moldavians and Wallachians, had a different destination than those printed in Western Europe. The typographers who worked in Rome, Venice, London, Paris, etc., produced books destined either for the missionary work in the Arabic-speaking communities, or to be sold as any common merchandise on the Eastern markets. Some became rarities intended for the Western European scholars interested in Oriental languages. On the contrary, the books that the Orthodox printed in Arabic were presented for free to the clergy and monastic communities, to be used for the very purposes they had been created: prayer and celebration of the Divine Liturgy. Thus, Constantin Brâncoveanu and Antim the Iberian contributed beyond their expectations to the spiritual advancement of the Arabic-speaking Christians, the modernization of their society, and an education towards their assuming an Arab identity.

It is worth remembering the acts of patronage of the princes of Moldavia and Wallachia who were natives of the Phanar quarter of Istanbul.<sup>5</sup> Constantin Mavrocordat set out for himself to build a “New Hellada” in the lands of the Gets, i.e., a country of elevated culture.<sup>6</sup> The generous acts that the bishops of the Romanian Principalities performed for the Eastern Churches confirms the validity of Marcu Beza’s remarks in 1947:

It is therefore a belatedly erroneous idea still persisting among British historians that the Phanariot epoch was one of ignorance and spoliation. The Ghicas, the Mavrocordatos, the Mavroghenis, the Sutzos, were all enlightened Princes, who cared much indeed for the welfare of the Rumanian provinces. In special Nicolas Mavrocordatos had founded at his own monastery of Vacaresti one of the greatest libraries in Europe, containing rare manuscripts such as the *Demonstratio Evangelica* by Eusebius; Johannes Lydus’ *De Magistratibus Respublicae Romanae*, unique, now at the National Library of Paris; *The Psalms of David*, dating from the eleventh century, in white parchment with golden initial

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5 Significantly, Michel Blivit commented on the importance of the Phanar quarter for the Orthodox Christians: “Mais c’est bien sur aussi la présence continue à Istanbul, dans le quartier du Phanar, du patriarcat œcuménique dont dépend une grande partie de la *diaspora* orthodoxe (Europe, Amérique etc.) qui fonde l’attachement des chrétiens de rite byzantin envers la grande mégalopole de la Corne d’Or (environ 15 millions d’habitants aujourd’hui!) et qui justifie amplement un dense et enrichissant voyage ‘vers la ville’, *Is-tin-boli– Istanbul*” (citing, for this etymology, Aristeidēs Pasadaïos, *O Patriarchikos oikos tou oikumenikou thronou*, Thessaloniki, 1976), cf. Michel Balivet, “Le pèlerinage de Byzance-Istanbul”, in idem, *Autour des Ottomans. Français, Mameluks, Grecs (XIV<sup>e</sup>–XIX<sup>e</sup> siècles)*, Istanbul, 2011, p. 40.

6 Erbiceanu, *Cronicari greci*, p. 319; Florin Constantiniu, “O nouă Heladă în Țara geților: cultura în timpul lui Constantin Mavrocordat”, in *Constantin Mavrocordat, reformatorul*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Bucharest, 2015, p. 133–146.

letters and minutely painted headpieces, in my possession. It was partly during the reign of the Phanariots that the seeds of the later movements of Balkan liberation were sown in the Danubian provinces.<sup>7</sup>

As I mentioned before, the outcomes of the TYPARABIC project team's research will be published in a comprehensive catalogue in 2024, under the direction of Archimandrite Polycarp Chițulescu, director of the Library of the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church in Bucharest. Alongside a descriptive record of Christian books printed in the 18<sup>th</sup> century in Arabic, with Arabic type, in the Romanian Principalities and the Middle East, the contributors to this catalogue will consider the copy-specifics, as defined by Paul Needham in his study "Copy-Specifics in the Printing Shop" (Berlin and New York, 2010): "binding, rubrication (or lack of it), coloring of woodcuts (or lack of it), ownership marks of all kinds, readers' marks, emendations, and annotations".<sup>8</sup>

The elements of book art present in the Arabic printed texts, from Snagov to Beirut, are currently being inventoried and studied by a group of art historians in the TYPARABIC team. The undeniable influence of artistic models specific to the Eastern European presses – principally Ukraine and Serbia – is the first direction of this investigation. A second direction of research is connected to the Western-printed Arabic books of the 16<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup> centuries, where the printers of Eastern Europe, but also those of Ținșăra, looked for models. So far, an evident transfer of ornamental motifs from Italy to Moldavia and Wallachia by way of Poland and Ukraine has been documented. The similarities in visual art features that connect the Arabic books in the TYPARABIC project corpus and those printed in Rome, Venice, or Paris are only one of the fascinating themes surveyed by the art historians of the project team.

The circulation of the books presented above and their presence in libraries and collections worldwide is difficult to ascertain. Catalogues published in the past 30 years in Lebanon, for the most part, revealed their presence in libraries that belong to the various Churches and monastic communities. Beside the copies recorded by al-Ma'lūf in his article published in 1911, the available data mostly comes from catalogues where books are described but their location is not indicated, or the copies they surveyed are no longer available. The Romanian historian Virgil Căndea recorded a few copies in Syria and Lebanon during his trips there in 1968–1990, when he surveyed the collections of monasteries such as Dayr Šārūbīm and the Our Lady of Šaydnāyā, Saint John the Baptist in Ținșăra, Saint

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<sup>7</sup> Beza, *Heritage of Byzantium*, p. 99.

<sup>8</sup> Needham, "Copy-Specifics in the Printing Shop", p. 9.

John the Baptist in Aleppo, Saint Thekla in Ma'lūla, Saint Elian and Saint George in Homs, etc. I have published the outcomes of his research in libraries worldwide in the new series of the work that he initiated, *Romanian Traces Abroad. Romanian Creations and Sources about the Romanians in Foreign Collections (Mărturii românești peste hotare. Creații românești și izvoare despre români în colecții din străinătate)*.<sup>9</sup> He located such books in libraries in France, Lebanon, Great Britain, Syria, the United States of America, the Vatican, etc. Other historians have recorded a few copies held in collections of London (John-Paul Ghobrial) and Lebanon (Carsten Walbiner).<sup>10</sup> One of the tasks of the members of the TYPARABIC project core team which I am heading in Bucharest is to locate more copies and make a comprehensive inventory of the 18<sup>th</sup>-century books included in the corpus that we are surveying, where forty-six titles are now recorded. We are conducting a 'copy census' starting from the established list of titles of Arabic books printed in 1701-1799 in Eastern presses, and following a similar methodology as the one brilliantly defined by David Pearson in his essay published in 2010, where he also explains the undisputable benefits of this approach:

I am talking about the copy census, based on the principle of tracking down as many surviving copies of one particular book as possible, recording their copy-specific features, and analyzing the evidence that emerges to show how that particular book has been owned, circulated, bound, annotated and regarded over time. However much specialists in the field of book history may need little convincing of the importance of copy-specific information and the uniqueness of individual copies of books, we all have a job to do in steering the perception of our professional colleagues, our paymasters and the public at large away from the idea that the only value of books lies in their textual content, and anything else is mere frippery. [...] I want to think not only about the copy census as a tool, but also about the implications its increasing adoption might have for the way we catalogue and digitize our books.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Virgil Căndea, *Mărturii românești peste hotare. Creații românești și izvoare despre români în colecții din străinătate*, New Series, coord. Ioana Feodorov (with Andrei Timotin), t. I–IV, Bucharest, 2010–2012, t. V–VI.2, Bucharest and Brăila, 2014–2018.

<sup>10</sup> Carsten-Michael Walbiner, "Die Bibliothek des Dair Mār Yūḥannā aš-Šuwayr/Libanon", in Peter Bruns and Heinz Otto Luthé, *Orientalia Christiana. Festschrift für Hubert Kaufhold zum 70. Geburtstag*, Wiesbaden, 2013, p. 521–535.

<sup>11</sup> David Pearson, "The Importance of the Copy Census as a Methodology in Book History", in Wagner and Reed (eds.), *Early Printed Books as Material Objects*, p. 321–328.

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I have strived to present in this book convincing proof, based on documents and reliable testimonies contemporary to the events, that contradict several myths or *idées reçues* and correct a few errors, some a century old, which, repeated again and again in works composed by authoritative historians of book printing, were credited in time with the force of undisputable truths. I review below the main facts that I considered during my research of the topics discussed above, to help formulate the salient points that the reader may take with him.

The books that Antim the Iberian printed in Arabic were neither the first Arabic-text nor the first Arabic-type books ever printed anywhere in the world. A vast typographic activity in Arabic had already occurred in Western Europe by 1701, when the Greek and Arabic Book of the Divine Liturgies was printed in Snagov. From 1514 to the last decade of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, in Italy, France, England, the Netherlands, and Germany 220 books were printed containing whole or partial texts in Arabic, with Arabic type.

As far as current research allows us to grasp, the first printed books in the Middle East were not in the Arabic language, nor in Arabic type. They were Hebrew religious books printed by the Jews who settled in the city of Safed, in the north of present-day Israel, who printed after 1576, for a short while, in Hebrew type.

Antim the Iberian did not work alone, relying only on his knowledge of Ottoman Turkish. He worked together with Athanasios Dabbās, the metropolitan of Aleppo at the time, a former and future patriarch of the Church of Antioch. Dabbās was accompanied to Wallachia by Arab apprentices who worked side by side with the Wallachians in Antim's workshops, assimilating enough of their knowledge to continue printing in Aleppo after 1705.

The typographic implements that Athanasios Dabbās received from Antim the Iberian were not used for all the books printed in Aleppo and other presses of present-day Syria and Lebanon. Most of the Arabic types of the Aleppo books look different than those manufactured by Antim the Iberian for the two Wallachian books.

As an apprentice in Athanasios Dabbās's workshop, 'Abdallāh Zāḥir did not cast the first set of Arabic types to be manufactured in the Ottoman Empire without having ever seen such typographic implements, by simply looking at the printed books brought from Europe. The Arabic type, ornamental woodcuts, and typographic tools created by Antim the Iberian and presented to Dabbās when he left Bucharest were there before his eyes. It is only in this way that he was able to copy them and, probably with expertise gleaned from people who effectively worked at the press of Bucharest, he could manufacture new type for the Aleppo press, relying on Wallachian models.

The printers of Ḥinšāra, and especially the founder of the press there, ‘Abdallāh Zāḥir, did not “invent” printing in Arabic type and create from zero all the tools, type, implements, and visual art elements for the books they printed after 1733. A great deal of the typographic material was directly connected to Italian presses and models that they had access to owing to their strong ties to the Church of Rome, through the Jesuit missionaries who assisted them.

Ibrahim Müteferrika was not the first typographer to print books in Arabic type inside the borders of the Ottoman Empire. He started working in 1727, after the Aleppo press, where eleven Arabic books were printed, had already stopped functioning. Müteferrika’s books comprised Ottoman Turkish works (with some passages in Arabic), always of a secular character, as required in the approval that he received from the Sublime Porte. Since at the time Ottoman Turkish was written in Arabic script, the type used for his books is, indeed, Arabic.

The Arabic type that the Patriarch Sylvester of Antioch used in Iași did not originate at the presses of Antim the Iberian. The patriarch may have brought them from Istanbul or obtained them by asking a Syrian goldsmith to manufacture type modelled on Dabbās’s books, which is, still, highly improbable, considering the difficulty of the task.

At the Monastery of Saint Spyridon in Bucharest, a *metochion* of the Patriarchate of Antioch after 1746, a group of Syrian monks headed by Yūsuf Mark manufactured Arabic type. There is enough proof to support the idea that this type was transferred to Damascus and then Beirut, where it was used in producing, in 1750–1753, an uncertain number of liturgical books under the auspices of the Patriarch Sylvester.

Thus, from my research of several decades that I have summed up in this book I can draw a few conclusions:

1. Antim the Iberian cut punches and cast a complete set of Arabic types, carved woodblocks with images of saints and Arabic words, separate or combined for titles. He printed with them the first two books with Arabic text (and a Greek parallel version) that were produced in Eastern Europe, outside the traditional area covered by the presses that printed in the Arabic language and script in Western Europe. He revealed an extraordinary craftsmanship in the arts of engraving and typography, by printing bilingual books – in languages belonging to different families – with a contrary direction of the text flow, different position of the catchwords, etc.
2. The special relationship that was established between Antim the Iberian and Athanasios Dabbās allowed the printing of Arabic books in Ottoman Syria, where the Sultan’s laws reigned. Far from the empire’s capital, Dabbās had the audacity to print liturgical books for the Arabic-speaking Christians, taking advantage of the favorable circumstances in the city of Aleppo.



3. The printing of liturgical books in Arabic in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century was naturally followed by a standardization relying on texts that had been revised by great medieval scholars who improved the versions that circulated widely in old manuscripts, which conserved the liturgical tradition of the Church of Antioch.
4. Antim the Iberian wished to assist the Syrian Christians also because they were attached to the Church of Antioch, like his Georgian brethren, whose national Church was, in Antiquity and the early Middle Ages, under the jurisdiction of this Church.
5. Dabbās's printing work marked the transfer of the European technology of the press in time and space: his apprentice 'Abdallāh Zāḥir opened a second press for Arabic books on Mount Lebanon, at the Monastery of Saint John the Baptist in Ḥinšāra, pursuing there his own earlier activity in Aleppo but following a different editorial program, adapted to the requirements of the Greek Catholic community that he was serving and the Jesuit missionaries who helped him succeed in his projects.
6. All the typographic activities connected to the Arabic book-printing that developed after 1735 in Ḥinšāra and Beirut were possible due to the visionary beginnings laid out by Antim the Iberian with Athanasios Dabbās and carried out with the financial support of Constantin Brâncoveanu, the prince of Wallachia. I cited before a letter that Antim the Iberian wrote to Brâncoveanu in 1712, when his enemies' conspiracies had created a rift between them. For Antim, the thoughts he shared with the prince sounded like a meditation on the meaning of his life: "And what I worked over the seven years that I resided there [at the Snagov monastery], not so much with the press income as with the sweat of my brow, these are witnesses before all."<sup>12</sup> Thus, for the scholar and bishop, the heritage that he would leave after a life's tireless work was made of the liturgical books that witnessed about him "before all," meaning by this his contemporaries, but also before the Supreme Judge (Fig. 61).

It is clear, from the previous pages, that I have addressed the topic of Arabic printing in Eastern Europe and Ottoman Syria in the 18<sup>th</sup> century with the tools of a philologist whose focus is the culture of the Arabic-speaking Christians. To reach a comprehensive description of the books that I have mentioned, an entire team of specialists would be needed – historians of early printing and arts of the book, historians of all the regions where printing in Arabic took place, experts in the theology of liturgical texts and book iconography, etc. Only through a large-scale

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<sup>12</sup> Cazacu, *Cine l-a ucis pe Antim Ivireanul?*, p. 47–48.



cooperation would these complicated matters be clarified, allowing the modern researcher of book-printing to ascertain the essential role that Antim the Iberian played in the transfer of the printing expertise and technologies to the Arab East.

The fate of the information contained in this book depends on the interest that other researchers, with additional competencies, will show in treading further on the many paths that my work has opened and solve some other queries that still await a solution. As Rachid Haddad best expressed it: “Telle est, en effet, la curieuse destinée des écrits historiques qu’à peine parus, ils doivent être sans cesse complétés par des recherches ultérieures.”<sup>13</sup>

As I mentioned before, in 2019, aiming to increase the odds of securing far-reaching outcomes and obtaining a comprehensive and detailed catalogue of the Arabic books printed in the 18<sup>th</sup> century in presses of Eastern Europe and the Middle East, I proposed a project to the European Research Council in the section of Social Sciences and Humanities. The TYPARABIC project will allow our international team to publish by 2025, over five years, six books that will contain the outcomes of our research. Among them, the comprehensive catalogue of the Christian books printed in the Romanian Principalities and Greater Syria will disseminate information on the content and form of various Arabic texts whose research is likely to continue. It is our hope that the evolution and avatars of the liturgical books of the Arabic-speaking Christians will consequently attract, from worldwide academia, the same amount of attention as the early versions of the Arabic Bible.

The Core Team I assembled consists today of 17 researchers (including me, the Principal Investigator), seven Romanian and ten foreign (Lebanon, Turkey, Bulgaria, Ukraine, Belgium, and France). I feel blessed to be able to work together with them and look forward to the next volumes that they will author for the EAPE series of De Gruyter. The fact that I succeeded in bringing together a group of acknowledged researchers who are interested in further surveying the topics that I address in this volume is, for me, proof enough that my book will have a happy fate.

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<sup>13</sup> Haddad, “La correspondance de Ṭrābulṣī”, p. 260.

