

Preface

Before the dramatic events that have led, starting in the first decade of this century, to a continuous flow of migration from the Middle East¹ to Europe, which included a multitude of Arab Christians, juxtaposing the words ‘Arab’ and ‘Christian’ more often than not surprised the wide public, which was (and still is) overwhelmed by the tendency of all media to vaguely identify ‘Arabs’ with ‘Muslims’. Many Europeans are still surprised to find out that both Arab Muslims and Arab Christians address, in their prayers, ‘*Allāh*’ (‘God the One’, in Arabic), while a significant number of the ‘Most beautiful names of ‘*Allāh*’ (99, in Islamic theology) have common forms in both religions.² Starting with the exodus of the Christians from Syria and Lebanon, where they were caught between two fires in a war that is not theirs, the migratory waves of the past decade have brought to the attention of the press and its worldwide audience the life and beliefs of many confessional communities living in the region known as ‘the Levant’. They became more interesting especially for the Europeans, who are increasingly worried by this unexpected transfer of populations.³

1 The expression ‘Middle East’ refers, here and below, to the lands of Western Asia and the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea, including Asia Minor and Egypt. The continental Middle East encompasses Eastern Syria, Southern Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Persia/Iran, while the Mediterranean East includes the Syrian, Lebanese, Palestinian, Egyptian, and Asia Minor coasts. Daniel Stolzenberg recently argued that what is generally called ‘Moyen-Orient’ (Middle East) coincided, in the 17th century, with the domain of the *linguae orientales*, i.e., primarily: Hebrew, Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Syriac, and Ethiopian; see Daniel Stolzenberg, “Les ‘langues orientales’ et les racines de l’orientalisme académique: une enquête préliminaire”, *Dix-septième siècle*, 67, 2015, 3 (268), p. 409–426. The parallel expression ‘Near East’ (‘Proche-Orient’), generally used by French authors to designate the territories subjected to the Ottoman Empire, received so many definitions in the European historiography that it has become useless. We prefer the older term ‘Levant’ (borrowed from French) to refer to the countries along the Eastern Mediterranean coast.

2 One example is the insertion of some of the ‘Most Beautiful Names’ attributed by the Muslims to ‘*Allāh*’ in the Arabic version of Dimitrie Cantemir’s *Divan* prepared by the Antiochian metropolitan (and patriarch) Athanasios Dabbās in 1704–1705; see Ioana Feodorov (with Yulia Petrova), *Dimitrie Cantemir, Salvation of the Sage and Ruin of the Sinful World*, Arabic manuscript edition, English translation and notes, Leiden, 2016, p. 95–96.

3 The increasing number of books, articles, exhibitions, and media events that focus on the Eastern Christians is proof enough. As far as book production goes, I mention only a few of the recent titles that concern them: Marie-Hélène Blanchet and Frédéric Gabriel (eds.), *Réduire le schisme? Ecclésiologies et politiques de l’Union entre Orient et Occident (XIII^e-XVIII^e siècle)*, Leuven and Paris, 2013; Henri de Saint-Bon, *Le Christianisme oriental dans tous ses états*, Lagord and Mesnil-Saint-Loup (Aube), 2014; Hasan Çolak, *The Orthodox Church in the Early Modern Middle East: Relations between the Ottoman Central Administration and the Patriarchates of Antioch*,

Arabs acknowledged the message of Christ in the early days of His preaching. In one of the most famous passages of the New Testament, the Arabs are mentioned among the ethnic groups who heard the Apostles at Pentecost speaking in their language: “...Cretans and Arabs, we hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God” (Acts 2: 11). The Holy Apostle Paul relates his sojourn in the Roman Provincia Arabia or Arabia Petraea (southern Jordan) among the Nabateans who were to join the first Christians:

But when God, who had set me apart right from my mother’s womb and called me through His grace, was pleased to reveal His Son in me so that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went away to Arabia, and returned once more to Damascus.⁴

Spreading in the 2nd century to the nomadic tribes in the Roman province of Arabia and later to the large cities (al-Ḥīra, Petra, Palmyra), Christianity had reached, at the dawn of Islam, the region of Yemen: archaeological traces prove the existence of a church in its capital, San’ā. The Yemeni city of Nağrān, a Christian center since the 4th century, is mentioned in the Muslims’ holy scripture, following the discussions about Christ’s teachings that took place between its messengers and the Prophet Muḥammad. Muslim poets of the 9th–12th centuries retained in their verses their impressions of monasteries they had visited in Iraq, North Arabia, and Egypt.⁵

In the 17th century, in the large monasteries of the Kesruwān region (in modern-day Lebanon), several languages were taught. The old convent of Balamand, named Belmont by the Cistercian monks who founded it (as well as by the Crusaders), opened an excellent school of Byzantine-style icon painting. Just as the Muslims had composed Arabic grammars based on Qur’ānic texts, in the first half of the 18th century the Maronite monk Gabriel (Ġibrā’īl) Farḥāt composed

Jerusalem and Alexandria, Ankara, 2015; Constantin A. Panchenko, *Arab Orthodox Christians under the Ottomans 1516–1831*, English translation by Brittany Pheiffer Noble and Samuel Noble, Jordanville and New York, 2016; “Saint-Siège, puissances occidentales, états nationaux et minorités chrétiennes au Proche-Orient (XIX^e-XX^e siècles)”, *Relations internationales*, Special issue, 173, 2018; Bernard Heyberger and Lucette Valensi (eds.), “De la mosaïque confessionnelle à la disparition des minorités religieuses dans l’Islam méditerranéen (XIX^e-XXI^e siècles)”, *Cahiers de la Méditerranée*, 2022, 105.

⁴ *Galatians* 1: 15-17.

⁵ Gérard Troupeau, “Les couvents chrétiens dans la littérature arabe”, *La Nouvelle Revue du Caire*, 1975, 1, p. 265–279; Al-Shābushtī, *The Book of Monasteries*, edited and translated by Hilary Kilpatrick, New York, 2023.

an Arabic grammar, *Baḥṭ al-maṭālib*, that contains examples and exercises based on excerpts from the New Testament, for the benefit of the Arabic-speaking Christians.⁶

Two major dimensions define the Christian churches of the Middle East: on the one hand, their theological dimension, which relies on their agreement or disagreement with the acts of the Council of Chalcedon (451) concerning the two natures of Christ and their hypostatic union; on the other hand, their cultural and linguistic dimension – Greek, Syriac, Coptic, Arabic, Armenian, Georgian, Syro-Malabar, etc.⁷

Of the Arabic-speaking Christians, those attached to the Church of Antioch and All the East were the ones that Romanians were connected to most closely in the 16th–18th centuries, i.e., before and after 1724, the year that a Greek Catholic community separated from the church's main body – the modern-day Melkite Greek Catholic Church of Antioch and All the East. Having gradually adopted the Byzantine rite since the late 10th century,⁸ the Church of Antioch dates, like the other four with which it shares this ancient glory – Jerusalem, Alexandria, Constantinople, and Rome⁹ –, from Apostolic times, as it was founded by the Holy Apostle Paul during his first journey in Syria. In Antioch, the word *masīḥī* ('Christian') was uttered for the first time, as a nickname for those who followed Christ, God's Anointed Son. Numerous references to this city appear in several Books of the New Testament. Antioch and the Northern Syrian lands were also visited by the Holy Apostles Peter, Barnabas, and Paul.¹⁰ Because of their attachment to the Byzantine rite, the Antiochian believers are often named in the Arabic literature *Rūm* (as in *Romeioi*, sometimes read as 'Greek').¹¹ Among other explanations, the term is connected to *al-Rūm*, the Arabic name of Byzantium, the 'Second Rome'.

⁶ This book was printed in Malta in 1836.

⁷ Samir Khalil Samir, "Le christianisme du Proche-Orient, modèle d'une diversité conviviale?" in Blandine Chélini-Pont and Raphaël Liogier (ed.), *Géopolitique du christianisme*, Paris, 2003, p. 135–146.

⁸ Syrian Christians had followed the rite of their own Church, known in theological literature as the 'Antiochian rite'.

⁹ In addition to the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, the Greek Orthodox Eastern Patriarchates are Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem. In this book I do not include in the concept of 'Eastern Churches' the Greek Orthodox Churches of Eastern Europe, as is often the case with Western European encyclopedias.

¹⁰ *Galatians* 2: 11ff.; *Acts of the Apostles* 11: 22 and 11: 25.

¹¹ See Samir Khalil Samir, S. J., "Quelques notes sur les termes RŪM et RŪMĪ dans la tradition arabe. Étude de sémantique historique", in *La nozione di 'romano' tra cittadinanza e universalità*, Rome, 1984, p. 461–478.

Today, the medieval model of living together shared by both the Arab Christians and the Muslim majority population of the Eastern Mediterranean coast is a renewed topic of interest for experts in geo-political history. Long before its promotion by the Latin missionaries sent from Rome, the Christian – Muslim dialogue was effectually lived, on a daily basis, within the multi-confessional society of the Middle East.¹² Christians proved to be helpful for the Muslim authorities during the rule of the Umayyad and the Abbasid caliphs, as well as later for the Ottoman Sultans and governors. At the same time, the European kings and princes who fostered dreams of expansion considered them ‘ambassadors’ of the Western interests, consequently luring them into their strategies focused on the conquest of Eastern lands and markets. Rational, educated, and culturally refined, the Arab Christians formed the elite of the imperial *divans*: they were the viziers, treasurers, doctors, astronomers, writers and poets, interpreters or scribes of many languages. They were in the vanguard of the translation movement that allowed Greek philosophy, Indian science, and Persian poetry to reach Western European scholarly circles.

The Ottoman Sultan Selim I (1512–1522), who was fearful of the Ši‘is’ activity within his vast empire, launched in 1514 a *blitz-krieg* against Shah Ismail of Persia, occupying the south of Anatolia, Armenia, Diyarbakır, Mardin, Kurdistan, and northern Mesopotamia, including the city of Mosul. After a rapid shaping of Ottoman government in the newly occupied territories, Selim proceeded to attack the Mamluks of Egypt, who ruled over vast lands from northern Syria to southern Palestine and a wide stretch of land encompassing the holy cities of Islam, Mecca and Medina, which had encouraged the Mamluk ruler to take the title of ‘Guardian of the Holy Places’. On August 24, 1516, Selim I defeated the Mamluk armies at Marğ Dābiq and occupied the territories of present-day Syria and Lebanon, while in November 1516 he occupied Gaza and the whole of Palestine.¹³ In 1660, in order to better control the Maronite upper clergy and the Druze emirs of the Ma’n family who governed Mount Lebanon with a desire for autonomy,¹⁴ the Sublime Porte

12 Mostly encouraged by the Greek Orthodox, according to Anton Wessels, in *Arab and Christian? Christians in the Middle East*, Kampen, 1995, p. 5.

13 He would subsequently conquer Cairo, on 22 January 1517, thus ending the Mamluk rule of Egypt. From the ashes of the Mamluk caliphate rose, in 1517, the next caliphate, governed again by non-Arabs: the Ottoman Turks.

14 On the Ma’n emirs who ruled Mount Lebanon, see Massoud Daher, “The Lebanese Leadership at the Beginning of the Ottoman Period: A Case Study of the Ma’n emirs” (transl. by W. Matt Malczycki), in Peter Sluglett with Stefan Weber (eds.), *Syria and Bilad al-Sham under Ottoman Rule. Essays in Honour of Abdul-Karim Rafeq*, Leiden and Boston, 2010, p. 323–345.

established a new *eyalet*, with Sidon as capital. This became the main entry point for missionaries sent by the Latin Church to the Levant.

Organized on clearly defined legal foundations designed to protect the Muslim majority and limit the rights of the other religious communities, the Ottoman administration formulated the general regulations of social life without requiring a change in the rulers of the numerous provinces that were recently conquered. By choosing to rule the non-Muslim communities based on the system of *millets*, communities defined by their confessional attachment,¹⁵ the Sublime Porte followed a “supple and realist” policy where local powers enjoyed a certain degree of autonomy.¹⁶ In recent years, there has been a shift in the mainstream opinion that the Ottomans persecuted, as a rule, the minorities of their vast empire, and especially the Christians. As noted by André Raymond,

For a long period, Ottoman historiography was distorted by stereotypes hostile to the ‘Turkish’ administration, described as irksome and authoritarian particularly towards minorities: it has now become altogether hackneyed to note that it was characterized by what was, all in all, a very liberal treatment of minority communities. In doing so the Ottomans were probably moved by a concern for convenience (the relative autonomy granted to the communities/millet, allowed for an easier administration) and efficiency (the Christians were active economic actors), more than by principles (although the Ottomans considered the Christian communities with great understanding for those times).¹⁷

That being said, it is a fact that in a vast majority, the Arabic-speaking Christians of the Middle East have lived, since the 7th century and up to this day, in territories under Muslim rule, i.e., inside the borders of *Dār al-ʿislām*, the ‘House of Islam’. For the Christian populations, unsettled times followed the Ottoman conquest of the Levant in the early 16th century. The governors that the Sublime Porte appointed sometimes conducted persecutions in the lands inhabited by the faithful of the Churches of Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem, which the empire had engulfed. Christians found themselves living in dedicated neighborhoods of the great cities (in Aleppo, Damascus, and Mosul),¹⁸ or they were driven out to Mount

¹⁵ A system applied before the Ottoman conquest, as Benjamin Braude argues in his introduction to *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire: Abridged Edition*, Boulder, CO, 2014, p. 15. See also “Foundation Myths of the Millet System”, in *ibid.*, p. 65–86 (a reedited article first published in 1982).

¹⁶ Sami Kuri, S. J., *Monumenta Proximi-Orientis*, I. *Palestine – Liban – Syrie – Mésopotamie (1523–1583)*, Rome, 1989, p. 43.

¹⁷ André Raymond, *Arab Cities in the Ottoman Period*. Cairo, Syria and the Maghreb, Abingdon and New York, NY, 2002, p. 89.

¹⁸ Here is how Albert Hourani describes the situation: “Thus in the district around Alexandretta and Antioch, eight distinct communities lived side by side, each in its own village or quarters of

Lebanon and the Kurdistan Mountains. Among other things, church-building was forbidden, repairing them was only possible with the governor's approval, at great cost. Visiting the Holy Land in 1726, Vassili Grigorovitch-Barski found this situation in Jaffa:

[...] je me rendis dans une autre église située à un croisement, en dehors de la ville [...]. Or, entends bien, bon lecteur, je te le dis en vérité : nulle part ailleurs je n'ai vu une église aussi pauvre, misérable et indigente que celle-là. Je ne parle pas du fait qu'elle n'avait aucune décoration à l'intérieur : ni icône ni encensoir, rien ; le plus affligeant est qu'elle n'avait ni toit, ni porte ni fenêtre. Que lui restait-il donc ? Rien que trois murs de pierre, et encore, ils n'étaient pas entiers. [...] À l'intérieur, un mur de pierre aussi ancien que l'église tenait lieu d'iconostase. En un mot, elle ressemble à une grotte vide dans laquelle on vient célébrer la sainte liturgie [...]. Je demandai pourquoi les chrétiens ne la restaurent pas ou n'en construisent pas de nouvelle. On me répondit que les musulmans qui dominaient ici ne le permettraient pas, dût-on leur adresser des prières par milliers, avec des dons en or et en argent. Je fus rempli de compassion pour leur asservissement et je louai en pensée la fermeté de leur foi dans une telle adversité.¹⁹

Under Muslim rule, the Eastern Christian communities lived in the dire circumstances proper to minorities subjected to a discriminatory legal system and overwhelming fiscal regulations.²⁰ Arabic-speaking Christians were faced with various obstacles in their social and spiritual progress and the preservation of their cultural identity.

In the meantime, in Europe, a major revolution had occurred in mentalities as well as in social life: Johannes Gutenberg's printing press led to a rapid transition from a type of culture that was based on oral and manuscript transmission to one relying on the printed book.²¹ According to Francis Robinson, "it is hardly surprising that Francis Bacon named printing, along with gunpowder and the

the town. In such districts, the members of different groups often achieved a social and economic symbiosis which lasted for generations, and reduced to a minimum the tension of difference". See Albert Hourani, *A Vision of History. Near Eastern and Other Essays*, Beirut, 1961, p. 78.

¹⁹ Vassili Grigorovitch-Barski, *Pérégrinations (1723-1747)*, translated from Russian by Myriam Odaysky, Geneva, 2019, p. 190–191.

²⁰ For a reminder of Volney's list of the "discriminatory measures that the *dhimmi* were traditionally subjected to in Muslim countries", see Raymond, *Arab Cities in the Ottoman Period*, p. 90–91.

²¹ Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early Modern Europe*, t. II, Cambridge, 1979, p. 459.

compass, as one of the three things that had changed ‘the appearance and state of the whole world’.”²²

It is worth mentioning that Gutenberg’s effort to produce a functional press with everything that was necessary to operate it was not foreign to financial and commercial concerns. His was a time when manuscript copyists were a guild, if not a caste indeed. As Harold A. Innis explains:

The monopoly built up by guilds of copyists and others concerned with the making of manuscripts had its effects in high prices which in turn invited attempts to produce at lower costs. It was significant that these attempts were made in territory marginal to France in which copyists’ guilds held a strong monopoly, and that they were concerned with the production of an imitation of manuscripts such as Bibles, i.e., Latin Vulgate, which commanded, partly as a result of size, very high prices. In 1470 it was estimated in Paris that a printed Bible cost about one-fifth that of a manuscript Bible. The size of the scriptures had an important effect in hastening the introduction of the parchment codex and in turn the introduction of printing. The feudal divisions of Germany provided an escape from the more rigid central control in France.²³

For the Muslim populations of the Middle East, this new perspective in the communication of secular sciences and theological knowledge required a longer period of time, since in education and culture the spoken word had more credibility and reliability than the written one, which, moreover, could become distorted if recopied *ad infinitum*, version after version.²⁴ As Francis Robinson remarked: “The problem was that printing attacked the very heart of Islamic systems for the transmission of knowledge; it attacked what was understood to make knowledge trustworthy, what gave it value, what gave it authority.”²⁵

In the Middle East, adopting printing had even more serious effects than in Europe, where machines were more common. In 1997, Dagmar Glass notes that no study is available yet of “Arabic printing as a factor of change”,²⁶ which would

22 Francis Bacon, Aphorism 129 in *Novum Organum*, cited by Francis Robinson, “Technology and Religious Change: Islam and the Impact of Print”, *Modern Asian Studies*, 27, 1993, 1, p. 231.

23 Harold A. Innis, *Empire and Communications*, Lanham and Boulder, 2007, p. 164.

24 For comments on this topic, classical and modern, see Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man*, Toronto, 1962; George Steiner, *Language and Silence*, London, 1967; Stephan Füssel, *Gutenberg and the Impact of Printing*, translated from German by Douglas Martin, London and New York, 2005.

25 Robinson, “Technology and Religious Change”, p. 236–237. The author examines the transmission of knowledge in the Islamic society from its beginnings to the 20th century, granting more space to the Koranic message.

26 Dagmar Glass, *Malta, Beirut, Leipzig and Beirut Again. Eli Smith, the American Syria Mission and the Spread of Arabic Typography*, Beirut, 1998, p. 3.

clarify the fundamental role that printing played in the onset and progress of the Arab Renaissance (*Nahḍa*).²⁷ In the meantime, Hala Auji dedicated an excellent – even if brief – commentary on “Arabic Printing and the *nahḍa*” in the introduction to her book published in 2016,²⁸ where she focused on the activities of the American press in Beirut in the 19th-century.

Any discussion about printing in Arabic type needs to proceed from the fact that in the 11th century the Turks adopted the Arabic script that was considered by many at the time, just as today, a sacred script, able to reflect in a form accessible to the faithful the words of God (*ʿAllāh*) as revealed to the Prophet Muḥammad and contained in the holy book of the Qurʾān.²⁹ A branch of this population founded a state entity with an exceptionally long lifespan, the Ottoman Empire (ca. 1299–1923).³⁰ The capacity to reproduce on a large scale the foundational texts of Islam – and other theological and spiritual works – created in Ottoman society a long-term discord that was officially resolved only in 1727, two and a half centuries after Gutenberg had developed the first printing press. Moreover, the history of Turkish book-printing went through two stages, relying on the alphabet that books were printed in: the Arabic alphabet from 1727 to Mustafa Kemal Atatürk’s reform, which went into effect on January 1, 1929, and, since that date – the Latin alphabet, in a version adapted to the phonetic system of Turkish.³¹

The need for access to the revolutionary technology of printing was one of the first reasons that led the leaders of Eastern Churches to head for the West, more

27 A social and cultural revival movement born in the 1820’s in the Levant (modern-day Syria and Lebanon), as an outcome of the increasingly frequent and eventful contacts of the local populations with the cultures of Western Europe. Protestant missions made a major contribution to its development: the English Church Missionary Society of London, the London Missionary Society, the American Presbyterians, etc. See Part 1: “What Is the Renaissance?”, in El-Ariss (ed.), Edwards and Ziajka Stanton (assist. eds.), *The Arab Renaissance: A Bilingual Anthology of the Nahda*, p. 1–67.

28 Hala Auji, *Printing Arab Modernity. Book Culture and the American Press in Nineteenth-Century Beirut*, Leiden and Boston, 2016, p. 3–6.

29 Jacques Berque, “The Koranic Text: from Revelation to Compilation”, in Georges N. Atiyeh (ed.), *The Book in the Islamic World. The Written Word and Communication in the Middle East*, Albany, NY, 1995, p. 17–29; Sinan Kunalalp, “Les livres et l’imprimerie à Istanbul au XVIII^e siècle”, in *Turquie: Livres d’hier, livres d’aujourd’hui*, texts collected by Paul Dumont, Strasbourg and Istanbul, 1992, p. 1.

30 The Empire was founded around 1299 by Osman I (1258–1326), chieftain of the Oghuz Turks. The word ‘Ottoman’ comes from this Sultan’s Turkish name: عثمان بن أرطغرل, ‘Oṭmān (with variants recorded in the European chronicles: Otman, Otoman) bin Ertuğrul.

31 Christoph K. Neumann, “Book and newspaper printing in Turkish, 18th–20th century”, in Eva Hanebutt-Benz, Dagmar Glass and Geoffrey Roper (eds.), *Middle Eastern Languages and the Print Revolution. A Cross-Cultural Encounter*, Westhofen, 2002, p. 227.

frequently starting in the beginning of the 16th century. Christians in present-day Syria and Lebanon endeavored to open printing workshops where they would publish Arabic books for the clergy altar servants and the public, irrespective of their confession: they were Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholic, Maronites, and others. The inspiring words of the erudite Greek Catholic scholar Joseph Nasrallah, an expert in the history of the Christian Near East, reflect with clarity the spirit that drove these long-lasting efforts.

L'introduction de la typographie a répondu au besoin d'un peuple de pouvoir chanter plus facilement les louanges de son Dieu, de renouveler les sources de ses aspirations religieuses et d'apprendre aisément les éléments des connaissances humaines. Une fois établie dans le pays, l'Imprimerie a facilité l'usage du Livre: elle l'a diffusé et par la même a été une source du Renouveau intellectuel. Cercle vicieux, circuit fermé! L'aurore de la renaissance au Liban appelle l'introduction de l'Imprimerie, et celle-ci devient un facteur puissant dans l'épanouissement de la renaissance.

It is worth noting that Nasrallah writes several words with a capital letter: *Imprimerie* ('printing'), *Livre* ('book'), and *Renouveau intellectuel* ('intellectual renewal').

Arabic printing was initiated in Eastern Europe and the Middle East with the joint work of Antim the Iberian, a great scholar and prodigious printer, future metropolitan of Ungro-Wallachia, with Athanasios III Dabbās, at the time metropolitan of Aleppo, in between two periods of patriarchal office. Two Greek and Arabic books were printed in 1701 (Snagov) and 1702 (Bucharest) at the request of Dabbās, this being the first step towards the accomplishment of an age-long aspiration of the upper clergy of the Church of Antioch: putting in the hands of the Arabic-speaking priests of their parishes ecclesiastical books in Arabic printed from versions that had been prepared or revised by great scholars of their churches, especially the deacon 'Abdallāh ibn al-Faḍl and the bishop Meletios Karma.

The task of pursuing this project was assumed by Athanasios Dabbās, who received as a gift from the prince Constantin Brâncoveanu, upon his departure from Bucharest in 1704, the printing implements and Arabic type created by Antim the Iberian. He resumed in Aleppo, at a press that he founded at the metropolitan residence, the work he had begun in Wallachia. Dabbās secured the help of the patriarch of the time, Cyril V, to whom he had relinquished the throne temporarily to avoid a division in the Church of Antioch, where the European schism had not occurred. After 1711, the year the Aleppo workshop stopped, for unclear reasons, part of the type and tools used in Dabbās's workshop were apparently transferred to the Greek Catholic Monastery of Saint John the Baptist (Mār Yūḥannā) in the village of Ḥinšāra, near the town of Ḍūr al-Šuwayr (Matn district, Mount Lebanon), mostly named 'the Ḥinšāra (or Khenchara) press'.

The next episode recorded in the history of Romanian – Arab relations through printing was the activity of the Patriarch Sylvester of Antioch in Iași, when sojourning in Moldavia after 1735. Following the same path as his illustrious predecessor Athanasios Dabbās, Sylvester appealed after 1730 to the princes of Moldavia and Wallachia whose families originated in the Phanar quarter of Istanbul (Tk. *Fener*), especially Ioan and Constantin Mavrocordat.³² The Syrian patriarch printed in Iași, at the Monastery of the Three Hierarchs, several books in Arabic, with Arabic type. As before in Wallachia, the printed books of the Moldavian capital were achieved with Romanian workmanship and mastery. After he received the Monastery of Saint Spyridon in Bucharest as a metochion of the Patriarchate of Antioch, with all its assets, in 1746, the Patriarch Sylvester took residence there, pursuing the activities he had started in Iași by having Syrian disciples cut and cast Arabic type in their new monastic home in Bucharest.

Beside the Ḥinšāra press at the Monastery of Saint John the Baptist in Ḍūr al-Šuwayr, the activity of the Arab printers in Iași and Bucharest contributed to the founding of the first Orthodox press of Lebanon, in Beirut, at the monastery of Saint George, under the supervision of Yūsuf Mark of Tripoli (Lebanon), one of the most diligent disciples of Patriarch Sylvester, who worked alongside the patriarch in Bucharest.³³ Transferred to Beirut in 1750, the Arabic type prepared at the Monastery of Saint Spyridon in Bucharest continued its adventure in the welcoming milieu of the Arabic-speaking Greek Orthodox. Thus, the Orthodox books printed there, several reprinted from previous editions of Aleppo, can be considered an offspring of the joint work of Antim the Iberian and Athanasios Dabbās half a century earlier, in 1701–1702. This connection between Iași, Bucharest, and Beirut, hypothetical but never verified, is documented by the recent access that I have had to the letters exchanged by the Patriarch Sylvester's secretary Mūsā Ṭrābulṣī during the patriarch's journeys to the Romanian Principalities, which are preserved in a manuscript at the Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate of Damascus. This is a big step towards a deeper understanding of the progress of printing in Syria and Lebanon and its historical ties with the Romanian presses.

³² Ioan N. Mavrocordat, prince of Moldavia (June 1743 – May 1747); Constantin Mavrocordat, his brother, prince of Wallachia (September 1730 – October 1730; October 1731 – April 1733; November 1735 – September 1741; July 1744 – April 1748) and Moldavia (April 1733 – November 1735; September 1741 – June 1743; April 1748 – August 1749).

³³ On the literary works of Yūsuf Mark, see Graf, *GCAL* III, p. 148; *HMLÉM* IV.2, p. 216.

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The present volume is the first in a series dedicated to presenting the outcomes of the research under way within the TYPARABIC project that I am conducting at the Institute for Southeast European Studies of the Romanian Academy in Bucharest. This project has received an Advanced Grant from the European Research Council (ERC) for the period 2021–2026. The Core Team consists of seventeen researchers – myself included – whose work focuses on the export of printing expertise and technology from Eastern Europe, more precisely from Wallachia and Moldavia, to the Arabic-speaking communities of the Ottoman Empire in the 18th century. We are surveying a corpus of Arabic books produced by this transfer, with major consequences for the progress of modernity and the freedom fight in provinces where these presses were founded.

Having studied the Arabic books printed with help from Eastern Europe for more than two decades, I published preliminary lists and descriptions in several academic reviews, along with the history of these books and the salient scholars who contributed to their printing. Some of these articles were the result of conferences that I contributed to, on topics connected to the history of book-printing.³⁴ Noticing that there existed no complete and detailed record of the books

³⁴ Ioana Feodorov, “The Romanian Contribution to Arabic Printing”, in *Impact de l’imprimerie et rayonnement intellectuel des Pays Roumains*, Bucharest, 2009, p. 41–61; Ioana Feodorov, “Notes sur les livres et l’imprimerie chez Paul d’Alep, *Voyage du Patriarche Macaire III d’Antioche aux Pays Roumains, au ‘Pays des Cosaques’ et en Russie*”, in *Actes du Symposium International ‘Le Livre. La Roumanie. L’Europe’*, Bibliothèque Métropolitaine de Bucarest, 4^e édition, 20–23 septembre 2011, t. III, Bucharest, 2012, p. 200–209; Ioana Feodorov, “Tipărituri pentru ortodocșii arabi sub patronajul lui Constantin Brâncoveanu. Noi considerații”, paper presented at the International Colloquium *Epoca lui Constantin Brâncoveanu în context sud-est european: Biserică, societate, geopolitică* at the ‘Andrei Șaguna’ Faculty of Theology, ‘Lucian Blaga’ University, Sibiu, June 12–13, 2014, published in *Epoca lui Constantin Brâncoveanu în context sud-est european: biserică, societate, geopolitică*, Sibiu, 2014, p. 251–272; Ioana Feodorov, “Beginnings of Arabic Printing in Ottoman Syria (1706–1711). The Rumanians’ Part in Athanasius Dabbās’s Achievements”, paper presented at the International Conference of the ARAM Society for Syro-Mesopotamian Studies, The Oriental Institute, University of Oxford, July 15–17, 2013, published in *ARAM*, 25 (2013), 2016, 1 & 2, p. 231–260; Feodorov, Ioana, *Primele cărți arabe tipărite la Beirut și legăturile lor cu tipărițele românești*, in Costin Croitoru (ed.), *Miscellanea historica et archaeologica in honorem Professoris Ionel Cîndea septuagenarii*, Brăila, 2019, p. 179–211. In *RESEE*, I published two articles on these topics in recent years: “New Data on the Early Arabic Printing in the Levant and Its Connections to the Romanian Presses”, *RESEE*, 56, 2018, 1–4, p. 197–233, and “Recent Findings Regarding the Early Arabic Printing in the Eastern Ottoman Provinces”, *RESEE*, 58, 2020, 1–4, p. 91–105. My latest contribution about printing in an academic journal is “The Arabic

that Athanasios Dabbās printed in Aleppo, I published a list that was practically the first record of the Aleppo workshop production.³⁵

To draw up this preliminary catalogue, I consulted all the Arabic books printed in Snagov, Bucharest, and Aleppo that the Library of the Romanian Academy in Bucharest³⁶ holds. I also had access to photocopies or sections from other books held in several European and US libraries, in Russia, Lebanon, and Syria. I have strived to correct, augment, and improve the information that was provided in the sources that I am discussing below. I collected and organized the scattered data that historians of Arabic (or, generally, Oriental) book-printing included in their catalogues since the onset of the 19th century.

In 2016, when the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church decided to celebrate nationwide the church printers and their rich harvest of ecclesiastical books, I authored a book in Romanian where the outcomes of my research were presented to a Romanian readership: *Tipar pentru creștinii arabi. Antim Ivireanul, Atanasie Dabbās și Silvestru al Antiohiei* (Printing for the Arab Christians. Antim the Iberian, Athanasios Dabbās, and Sylvester of Antioch).³⁷

The research that I present in this book is focused on the 18th-century Arabic books printed in the Romanian Principalities and the Middle East. The developments of Arabic printing after 1800, and especially after 1900,³⁸ are not discussed here, unless marginally and in connection with the focus of my survey. The overview of the beginnings of printing with Arabic type in Western

Book of the Divine Liturgies Printed in 1745 in Iași by Patriarch Sylvester of Antioch”, *Scrinium*, 2020, 16, p. 1–19.

35 Ioana Feodorov, *Texte arabe creștine tipărite cu ajutor din Țările Române în secolul al XVIII-lea – Repertoriu comentat / Christian Arabic texts printed with help from the Romanian Principalities in the 18th century – An annotated record*, “Istros”, XX. *In honorem professoris Ionel Căndea*, Brăila, 2014, p. 651–729. I later published a French version of this record, with comments: “Livres arabes chrétiens imprimés par l’aide des Principautés Roumaines au début du XVIII^e siècle. Répertoire commenté”, *Chronos*, 2016, 34, p. 7–49.

36 Below, B.A.R. Bucharest.

37 Ioana Feodorov, *Tipar pentru creștinii arabi. Antim Ivireanul, Atanasie Dabbās și Silvestru al Antiohiei*, foreword by HE Dr Casian Crăciun, Archbishop of the Lower Danube, introduction by Dr Doru Bădără, Brăila, 2016 (356 pp. of text and 43 pp. of illustrations).

38 Such as the Saint Paul Press of Țărișoara (*Imprimerie Saint Paul*), the longest active printing press of Lebanon, endowed with a binding workshop soon after its foundation on May 8, 1910. Very soon, on June 1 of the same year, the first issue of the journal *Al-Masarra* was published. In 1947, when Joseph Nasrallah published his book *L’imprimerie au Liban* (Beirut, 1948), the press was thriving. See this work, p. 85, 88, 90, 96, 104, 110, 114 (with a record of the press sections and endowments on this last page). For a more recent and comprehensive source, see Gūrğ Bālīkī al-Būlusī, “Al-Maṭba’a al-Būlusiyya wa-mağallat ‘Al-Masarra’”. *Al-Maktaba al-Būlusiyya. Mi’at ‘ām fi ḥidmat al-kalima* (1910–2010)”, *Al-Masarra*, 96, 2010, 906, p. 892–970.

and Central Europe is only meant as a historical background and an inventory of issues that challenged the first printers of such material, not an in-depth study of this topic, which has been discussed in countless books and articles over the past two centuries.

Over the past decade, academic institutions and scholars who study the Christian Arabic culture, especially in the West, have turned their attention more often and with more interest to topics connected to printing. Since 2016, large-scale national research projects,³⁹ new books,⁴⁰ conferences,⁴¹ and exhibitions⁴² have complemented the previously published information, motivating me to add to and improve, in the present book, the outcomes and conclusions of my research. Moreover, disseminating the results of my studies in English will undeniably expand their outreach and allow for a larger academic readership to benefit from the information included here, in order to advance their own projects in the field of Arabic book-printing.⁴³

39 Such as the Priority Program *TransOttomanica. Eastern European – Ottoman – Persian Mobility Dynamics* funded by the DFG (German Research Foundation), which started in 2017 and brings together, in its second phase (2021–2023), contributors from ten universities and research institutions in Germany, and the ANR French research program *Des Indes linguistiques. Réceptions européennes des langues extra-européennes, élaboration et circulations des savoirs linguistiques (XVI^e–XIX^e siècle)*. The outcomes of this project have produced academic books and articles that enrich the knowledge of printing history and intellectual communication, such as the collective work edited by Evelin Dierauff, Dennis Dierks, Barbara Henning et al., *Knowledge on the Move in a TransOttoman Perspective. Dynamics of Intellectual Exchange from the Fifteenth to the Early Twentieth Century*, Göttingen, 2021.

40 The latest being Aurélien Girard, Vassa Kontouma and Bernard Heyberger (eds.), *Livres et confessions chrétiennes orientales. Une histoire connectée entre l'Empire Ottoman, le monde slave et l'Occident (XVI^e–XVIII^e siècles)*, Turnhout, 2023.

41 On October 24–27, 2022, a 'Trilaterale Forschungskonferenzen' of the DFG focused on *Chrétiens orientaux et République des Lettres aux 16^e–18^e siècles: correspondances, voyages, controverses (III): Écritures saintes et dévotions*, with a couple of contributions mentioning printing in the Arabic language or type.

42 In Paris, BULAC organized in 2015, between June 15 and August 7, the exhibition *TYPOGRAPHIAe ARABICAE*. Open to a wide public, it proposed “une histoire de la typographie arabe”, showcasing their collection of Arabic printed books.

43 Hopefully, the 6-volume series of books resulting from the TYPARABIC project research (by 2026) will open new paths for the study of the “rôle joué par le livre dans la construction des cultures confessionnelles dans les Orient chrétiens des Temps modernes”, as the Brepols online announcement states in connection with the forthcoming book *Livres et confessions chrétiennes orientales. Une histoire connectée entre l'Empire Ottoman, le monde slave et l'Occident (XVI^e–XVIII^e siècles)*.

I have found it appropriate to include the biographies of great figures who contributed to the transfer of the printing technology from Eastern Europe to the Middle East and details of the historical circumstances which allowed or aided this transfer. A few legends and improbable explanations given in previously published catalogues and bibliographies have been clarified through the access to Arabic sources, something few authors have previously provided. Additionally, the historical context that I have outlined in my work presented here is a canvas on which the topics assumed by the TYPARABIC project team members, each according to their own competencies, will be revealed.

This book contains, in the closing chapter, a preliminary record of the books that I have studied over a twenty-years period, for the most part prior to the launching of the TYPARABIC project. The outcomes of the teamwork conducted within the European project in progress in Bucharest are programmed to be published in a descriptive record authored by most of the team members together, based on a larger corpus of Arabic printed books.

The reader will learn from this book how much the Christian Arabic-speaking scholars of the 18th century aspired to print and widely distribute books in their communities. It was a time when the benefits of printing were widely acknowledged, even if this came later than in the West. This intellectual awakening and painstaking struggle for levelling the cultural balance with Western European cultures, assisted by educated partners in Eastern Europe, deserves our consideration, at least as a sign of the timeless attraction of the printed page, a vehicle of civilization. The TYPARABIC project and the innovative research that it generates are meant to celebrate the endeavors of a small number of visionary clerics and scholars who saw in the technology of printing a chance for social and spiritual progress for the Christian communities striving to survive in an unfavorable environment. Being able to print and to disseminate knowledge, religious or secular, was an aspiration of all the enlightened minds of the Middle East, often in contact with Europeans for whom these activities had long been common practice. Institutional and private education suffer in the absence of the printed book – a concept that is valid even in our times, when the printed page tends to be sent into oblivion by other knowledge-dissemination media.

Finally, in considering the field of printing for the Arabic-speaking Christians, we need to bear in mind the victims of the appalling earthquake of February 6, 2023, which turned into ruins entire cities and villages across Syria and Turkey. For years to come, ‘Antakya’ (Antioch) and ‘Aleppo’ will bring to mind the devastation that this terrible event meant for the lives of uncountable people. To preserve the memory of those who built civilizations past by shedding light on their efforts to conserve and advance the culture of their peoples and their churches becomes, today, even more necessary. While keeping in mind that this book is not

only about liturgical texts printed in Arabic, I wish to evoke a remarkable passage in Jean Hani's book *La Divine Liturgie* (Paris, 1981), where he was explaining his approach to the Divine Liturgy as particular to the various Eastern Churches.

Ce sera aussi pour nous une occasion de faire connaître ces liturgies, tellement ignorées en Occident, et de rendre hommage, bien modestement, à nos chrétientés orientales, chrétientés vénérables, les plus anciennes, remontant à l'âge apostolique, et chrétientés trop souvent martyres au cours de l'histoire, et aujourd'hui même, tragiquement dans l'indifférence officielle totale des grandes nations et l'indifférence presque totale des chrétiens d'Occident.⁴⁴

As all human endeavor, this book is surely not devoid of imperfections. May all who read it, enthusiasts or critics, find something useful inside. To echo the elegant motto that Pierre Deschamps placed on the title page of his famous *Dictionnaire de géographie ancienne et moderne à l'usage du libraire et de l'amateur de livres* (Paris, 1870): "*Indulgentia dignus est labor arduus.*"⁴⁵ For perfection, I count on those who will continue my quest for a clearer picture of the early development of Arabic printing in the Middle East.

I dedicate my research to the memory of the patriarchs of the Church of Antioch in the first half of the 18th century, who witnessed – and had to deal with – the dramatic escalation of disharmony in this Apostolic Church and endeavored to keep it together: Athanasios Dabbās and Sylvester especially, but also the many bishops, priests, monks, and lay scholars whose work was a long-fought battle for Christian togetherness. This work is a tribute to the promoters of Arabic printing who relentlessly worked towards the accomplishment of a visionary project: that of placing in the hands of Arabic-speaking Christians in the Ottoman provinces books printed closer to home and in a spirit nearer to their traditional theological culture. May they be gratefully remembered, from Snagov and Bucharest to Iași, and from Aleppo to Ḥinšāra and Beirut.

⁴⁴ Jean Hani, *La Divine Liturgie*, Paris, 1981, p. 14.

⁴⁵ Un bibliophile [Pierre Deschamps], *Dictionnaire de géographie ancienne et moderne à l'usage du libraire et de l'amateur de livres*, Paris, 1870 (reprinted Berlin, 1922), p. 1.

