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Prefaces of the 18th-Century Christian Arabic Books Printed in Khinshāra: Structural and Thematic Features

An important stage in the history of Arabic printing in the East is connected to the activities of the Monastery of Saint John the Baptist in the Khinshāra village (Lebanon), widely known as al-Shuwayr Monastery. It was the center of the Shuwayrite order, one of the two monastic Basilian orders of the Greek Catholic community, established between 1705 and 1710. The monasteries on Mount Lebanon, situated outside the control of the Ottoman administration, attracted part of the urban Greek Catholic intellectual elite, allowing them to express themselves freely.¹

Among these settlers was the talented engraver and typographer ‘Abdallāh Zākhir. When in Aleppo, he presumably directed the work of the first Arabic press founded by Athanasios III Dabbās, the former patriarch of Antioch, where he had an opportunity to learn the technique of printing. The press functioned between 1706 and 1711. Later, ‘Abdallāh Zākhir converted to Catholicism under the influence of the Jesuit missionaries in the East. He left Aleppo in 1722 to start his activities in Lebanon as a pro-Catholic polemicist. Due to his close cooperation with Pierre Fromage, the superior of the Jesuit Order of the East, it became possible to open a press at the monastery in Khinshāra. It required large expenses and six years of preparing the typographic material (1728–1733).² Thus, ‘Abdallāh Zākhir became the founder of book printing in Lebanon, and the Greek Catholic Monastery of Saint John the Baptist became widely known for its printing press.³

Data on the number of employees of the Khinshāra press is available to us: Zākhir was assisted by his disciple Suleymān Qaṭṭān and several monks; after

1 K. A. Panchenko, *Ближневосточное православие под османским владычеством: первые три столетия. 1516–1831*, Moscow, 2012, p. 457.

2 I. Feodorov, *Arabic Printing for the Christians in Ottoman Lands. The East-European Connection*, Berlin/Boston, 2023, p. 226.

3 A. Krymskii, *История новой арабской литературы: XIX – начало XX века*, Moscow, 1971, p. 132.

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his death, three monks were directly involved in the printing of books, two were engaged in the preparation of fonts, one was learning to cast type.⁴ Comte de Volney, who was hosted at the Khinshāra monastery while visiting Mount Lebanon, mentions four persons who worked at the press during his visit there (out of the total number of monks, 40–45), while another four persons worked on the binding.⁵

The Arabic printing press founded by ‘Abdallāh Zākhir in 1731 functioned until the end of the 19th century, being thus, according to de Volney, “the only one which has succeeded in the Turkish empire”.⁶ Indeed, it was the Arabic press with the longest activity in the Middle East, considering that it functioned for 165 years.⁷

1 The Object of this Study

The Khinshāra monastery press produced 33 titles over the entire period of its activity.⁸ As a result of the research of the TYPARABIC project team, we know that during the 18th century the press produced 22 book titles. Taking into consideration that the project aims at studying the Arabic books produced in the 18th century, we shall discuss here only the editions produced during that period. The list of their abridged titles can be presented as follows:⁹

1. *Mizān al-zamān (The Balance of Time)*, 1733–1734¹⁰
2. *Psalter*, 1735, 1740, 1764
3. *Ta’ammulāt rūḥiya (Spiritual Meditations)*, 1736
4. *al-Murshid al-masīḥī (The Christian Guide)*, 1738
5. *Iḥtiqār abāṭil al-‘ālam (Contempt for the Vanities of the World)*, part I, 1739
6. *Iḥtiqār abāṭil al-‘ālam (Contempt for the Vanities of the World)*, part IV, 1740
7. *Murshid al-khāṭi’ (The Sinner’s Guide)*, 1747, 1794
8. *Tafsīr sab’at mazmūrāt (Interpretation of Seven Psalms)*, 1753

4 J. Nasrallah, *L’imprimerie au Liban*, Harissa, 1949, p. 35–36.

5 M. C.-F. Volney, *Travels through Egypt and Syria, in the Years 1783, 1784, and 1785*, Vol. II, New York, 1798, p. 124.

6 Volney, *Travels through Egypt and Syria*, p. 117.

7 Feodorov, *Arabic Printing for the Christians in Ottoman Lands*, p. 218.

8 Feodorov, *Arabic Printing for the Christians in Ottoman Lands*, p. 210.

9 In this paper, for the sake of convenience, only the abridged titles of the books are provided. The full titles will be published in the catalog of the Arabic Christian books included in the TYPARABIC project corpus, which is being prepared under the supervision of Archim. Policarp Chițulescu (EAPE-8, forthcoming with De Gruyter).

10 For a detailed discussion of this book, see Joseph Moukarzel’s chapter in the present volume.

9. *Mukhtaṣar al-ta'lim al-masīhī (Brief Catechism)*, 1756
10. Acts and Epistles, 1758, 1779
11. *Murshid al-kāhin (The Priest's Guide)*, 1760
12. Horologion, 1763, 1779
13. *al-Burhān al-ṣarīḥ (The Clear Evidence)*, 1764
14. Octoechos, 1767
15. *Īdāḥ al-ta'lim al-masīhī (Clarification of the Christian Teaching)*, 1768
16. *Ta'ammulāt jahannam al-murī'a (Meditations on the Horrendous Hell)*, 1769
17. *Qūt al-nafs (Food for the Soul)*, 1772
18. *Kitāb al-nubuwwāt al-kanā'isī (Prophetologion)*, 1775
19. Gospel, 1776
20. *Al-majma' al-lubnānī (The Lebanese Council)*, 1788
21. *Manshūr Aghābiyūs al-baṭriyark (Encyclical of the Patriarch Agapios)*, 1796
22. *Qatf al-azhār (Chosen Flowers)*, 1797

Of these, six titles were followed by reprints in the 18th and 19th centuries (Psalter, Acts and Epistles, Horologion, *The Sinner's Guide*), or in the 19th century (Gospel Book, Prophetologion). The first seven books were printed in the period when the press was headed by 'Abdallāh Zākhir himself (1734–1748).

As known, most of the editions of the Khinshāra press are Arabic translations of works by European Catholic authors, namely catechisms, didactic books, and polemical works. This choice reflected the intellectual tastes of the Greek Catholic community in the period following the schism of the Antiochian Church (1724). Among the 18th-century printed books of Khinshāra there were only three works written originally in Arabic: a) *al-Burhān al-ṣarīḥ*, authored by 'Abdallāh Zākhir; b) *al-Majma' al-lubnānī*, comprising the teachings of the Maronite Church and its canons; c) *Manshūr Aghābiyūs al-baṭriyark*, an encyclical of the Greek Catholic patriarch to his flock. As for the liturgical books, they make up six titles in the list. Unlike the Orthodox books printed by Athanasios Dabbās that were meant to be distributed among the clergy for free, the books produced at Khinshāra were intended for sale.¹¹

Due to the great demand for liturgical books, almost all of them were reprinted. The Psalter was especially popular among the Arab Christians of different denominations, as it was used in teaching children Arabic: therefore, it was reprinted in fifteen successive editions by the end of the 19th century.¹² Among the books of a non-liturgical nature, only *The Sinner's Guide* was reprinted (1794, 1836). The lack

11 Feodorov, *Arabic Printing for the Christians in Ottoman Lands*, p. 225–226.

12 Feodorov, *Arabic Printing for the Christians in Ottoman Lands*, p. 215.

of reprints of translated books of this kind was explained by their low popularity among the population, as witnessed by count de Volney. He was unflattering about the subject of these books, which did not attract the Arabic-speaking Christians.¹³ The British traveler William George Browne, who visited the Khinshāra monastery in 1797, noted: “Paper being dear, and no demand for books, the press is stopped”.¹⁴ Therefore, the main income of the monastery in the 18th century was not due to the sale of books, as one might suppose, but from land cultivation and pilgrims’ donations.¹⁵

All the above books begin with a preface, except for two (*Brief Catechism* and *Encyclical of the Patriarch Agapios*). Studying the prefaces of the 18th century printed Arabic books as a separate object of research, I noticed a typological similarity of most of these texts. Several features differentiate them both from the prefaces of the books printed by Athanasios Dabbās in Wallachia and Aleppo and from the 1745–1752 books printed by the efforts of Patriarch Sylvester of Antioch and his disciples in Iași, Bucharest, and Beirut. We shall consider in some detail the main structural, thematic, and stylistic features of the prefaces of the Khinshāra press, indicating, where necessary, their characteristic differences from the prefaces of Arabic Orthodox books of the 18th century.

2 Structural Particularities of the Khinshāra Books

The books published at the Khinshāra monastery are characterized by the following features:

1. No dedications are found in them, unlike in Athanasios Dabbās’s books, some of which have special dedications to the benefactor, such as the dedication in verse to the hetman Ivan Mazepa in the Gospel of 1706, or the prefaces dedicated to the Wallachian prince Constantin Brâncoveanu: *Liturgikon* (1701), *Horologion* (1702), *Psalter* (1706).¹⁶ Thus, the Khinshāra books do not provide any information on the sponsors. In some of them it is mentioned that the work was done “by the efforts and at the expense of the monks” (*bi-‘amal al-ruhbān al-madhkūrīn wa-maṣrafi-him*, in *Īdāḥ al-ta’līm al-masīḥī*, p. IV).

¹³ Volney, *Travels through Egypt and Syria*, p. 119–120.

¹⁴ W. G. Browne, *Travels in Africa, Egypt, and Syria, from the Year 1792 to 1798*, London, 1799, p. 408.

¹⁵ Volney, *Travels through Egypt and Syria*, p. 124–125.

¹⁶ See Y. Petrova, “The Prefaces of the Christian Arabic Books Printed in Wallachia and Syria in the Early 18th Century”, in R. Dipratu, S. Noble (eds.), *Arabic-Type Books Printed in Wallachia, Istanbul, and Beyond. First Volume of Collected Works of the TYPARABIC Project*, Berlin/Boston, 2024, p. 267–290.

2. A standard editorial note was added to each book, stating that it had been printed *bi-idhn al-ru'asā'*, “with the leave of the Superiors” (Lat. *cum permissu superiorum*), a phrase used in the Latin Church for books issued with authority. In the first four editions, this editorial note is present as a separate afterword, but from 1739 on, the Khinshāra typographers preferred to introduce this phrase as the last paragraph of the preface, as follows (*Īdāḥ al-ta'lim al-masīḥī*, p. IV):

وقد كان ذلك اعني طبع هذا الكتاب باذن الروسا وحثهم في دير القديس مار يوحنا النبي الصابغ الملقب بالشويز من معاملة كسروان، بعمل الرهبان المذكورين ومصرفهم، في سنة الف وسبعماية وثمان وستين للتجسد الالهى، ولله تعالى الحمد والمجد الى الابد وفي كل وقتٍ وحين. امين.

The printing of this book was achieved with the Superiors' approval and their encouragement at the monastery of the Holy Prophet John the Baptist named al-Shuwayr, which is in the Kesruwān district, by the efforts and at the expense of the aforementioned monks, in the year one thousand seven hundred sixty-eight of the Incarnation of the Lord. To God the Most-High be praise and glory forever and ever. Amen.

3. Each book has a table of contents (*fihris*), very detailed in most cases, which takes up several pages. For example, the contents of the *Christian Guide* are divided into such units as *maqāla* (“article”), *faṣl* (“section”), then *juz'* (“part”). The *Clarification of the Christian Teaching* presents its contents classified as *juz'* (“part”), *faṣl* (“section”), and *qaḍīya* (“statement”). Such a rubricating became the mandatory element of the Khinshāra editions. In this innovation one can note the influence of the European tradition of compendia, characteristic of Catholic church books. For comparison, among the Orthodox books, a simple *fihris* is found only in *Chosen Pearls from the Homilies of Saint John Chrysostom*¹⁷ (1707) and *The Rule of Justice* (1746). Nevertheless, in the liturgical books of Khinshāra no table of contents is found.
4. An interesting case is the presence of a thematic alphabetical index (*fihris mā taḍammana-hu hādhā al-kitāb min al-ma'ānī al-jalīla wa-l-fawā'id al-jazīla*) in the *Interpretation of Seven Psalms* (p. 290–308). It includes 49 lemmata for theological concepts like *Allāh* (“God”), *īmān* (“faith”), *tawba* (“repentance”), *khalāṣ* (“salvation”), *Rūḥ Qudus* (“Holy Spirit”), *maṭhar* (“purgatory”), *ni'ma* (“grace”), etc. Clarification is provided with a reference to the relevant pages of the book. There follows (p. 309–311) a list of the biblical quotations that were mentioned

¹⁷ It is not excluded that the book of homilies of Patriarch Athanasios of Jerusalem (Aleppo, 1711) had a Contents section as well (unfortunately, only a defective copy missing the initial and final pages was accessible to us so far).

and commented (*fihris al-shahādāt al-mūrada min al-asfār al-muqaddasa al-mufasssara*), with a reference to the page number in the book.

5. In several of the Khinshāra editions there is a full-page image of a characteristic cross that was named by some researchers a “trademark” of Zākhir’s press;¹⁸ it is placed after the list of contents. However, it was not as frequently used as one might expect, since it is found only in seven books among the 18th century ones, starting from the first (*Mizān al-zamān*), and it appeared irregularly, with certain differences between its earlier, more simple forms, and the later ones, which were artistically more complex.

3 The Structure and Content of the Prefaces

Most prefaces under discussion have a similar structure. They start with a typical introductory paragraph praising God, composed in non-metric rhyme, following the traditional Christian *basmala*.¹⁹ The incipit is “Praise be to God who...” (*al-ḥamdu li-llāh allādhi...*), followed by the author’s contemplation of God’s providence, His creation of the world and humankind, His wisdom in ruling the universe, etc., as can be seen in the preface of *Mizān al-zamān* (p. I):

الحمد لله الذى منح الانسان ميزان الحكم العقلى لادراك صحة الاوزان، وامده بنور المعرفة والبرهان الجلى ليميز ما بين عظمة الامور الابدية وخساسة اشيا هذا الزمان، حمداً يعصمنا من الضلالة والزيغان، فيما يتردد ما بين مريح وخسران ورجحان ونقصان، ويرفعنا باعتبار الامور الابدية عن حضيض الاشيا الزمنية الي اوج الجنان، ويكسوننا رداء المحبة من تحت نطاق الرجاء بنور الايمان امين.

Praise be to God who granted man the scales of mental judgment to comprehend the true meanings, and endowed him with the light of knowledge and clear evidence to discern the greatness of what is eternal and the nothingness of the works of this age. May He keep us from going astray and deviating [from the right path], and from swinging between gain and loss, excess and want, and may He raise us, who seek the eternal, from the abyss of earthly worries to the summit of paradise, and may He clothe us in the garment of love, girded with hope and illuminated by faith. Amen.

As already mentioned, the prefaces we have surveyed do not include dedications addressed to persons. A special case is the prayer to St Anthony of Padua, to whom the translator of part IV of the book *Contempt for the Vanities of the World* dedicated his work: *ṣalwa yuqaddimu bi-hā al-mutarjim hādihā al-kitāb li-l-qiddīs Anṭūniyūs*

¹⁸ Feodorov, *Arabic Printing for the Christians in Ottoman Lands*, p. 225.

¹⁹ “In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, one God” (*Bi-smi l-Āb wa-l-Ibn wa-l-Rūḥ al-Qudus al-Ilāh al-wāḥid*).

al-Bāduwānī, “a prayer with which the translator presents this book to Saint Anthony of Padua” (p. V–VI).

In most prefaces, the didactic genre, close to a sermon, dominates. First, the author discusses the usefulness of a particular book, or the virtues that may be acquired through reading it, then he addresses the reader with pious edifications. Thus, in arguing for the importance of the Psalter, the author of the preface lists the themes it contains, which, according to him, summarize the entire content of the Bible, as follows (p. 3–4):

- Events from the past (*al-umūr al-māḍiya*);
- Divine prophecies (*al-nubuwwāt al-ilāhiya*);
- Moral instruction (*al-taʿālīm al-adabiya wa-l-ḥikam al-mufida*);
- Thanksgiving and supplicatory prayers (*al-tasābih al-shukrīya wa-l-ibtihālāt al-khushūʿiya*).

In the preface to Part I of *Contempt for the Vanities of the World*, the author declares:

ان هذا الكتاب الجليل هو اعظم كتاب للمفيد وللمستفيد، فللمفيد لانه يجد به موادًا كثيرة في كل معني يخص الوعظ والتعليم والتهديب والتقويم، وللمستفيد لانه به يعلم ما يجب عليه الزهد به او العمل به للخلاص والسلوك في السبيل المستقيم

This noble book is the most necessary thing both for the preacher and the reader; for the preacher – because he will find in it many topics relating to preaching, teaching, education, and correction, and for the reader – because it will help him learn what he should renounce or should pursue to attain salvation, and how to walk on the right path.

We have noticed that enumerations, classifications, and summaries of the contents are characteristic features of many prefaces of the Khinshāra editions, which brings them closer to the scholastic tradition. The authors of prefaces make extensive use of logical argumentation methods to present certain aspects of the Christian doctrine and to explain the benefits of a particular book. Efforts of systematizing are evident in many prefaces. Such an approach is not found in the books printed by Athanasios Dabbās and Patriarch Sylvester of Antioch. For example, in the didactic preface to the *Taʿammulāt rūḥiya*, the author details the methodology of meditation, supporting it with quotations from the Bible. He lists the six stages of mental prayer (according to the Catholic tradition) and provides a systematic explanation for each of them, as follows (p. 11):

The first part is preparation (*al-istiʿdād*)

The second part is reading (*al-qirāʾa*)

The third part is contemplation (*al-taʿammul*)

The fourth part is gratitude (*al-shukr*)

The fifth part is offering (*al-taqdima*)

The sixth part is supplication (*al-ṭilba*)

Prefaces do not contain any significant historical information other than data about the authors and translators of the published books and the context of their publication. Thus, the translator of part IV of the *Contempt for the Vanities of the World*, who names himself “the humble *padre* Alinsū Mikhā’l Kurjāde,²⁰ one of the Franciscan friars of the Province of our Lady, the Holy Virgin Mary, in the Kingdom of Spain”, informs the readers that the book was translated during the period of “persecution of the believers and missionaries in the East” (*ḏīq wa-idṭīhādāt ‘alā al-mu’minīn wa-l-mursalin fi bilād al-Sharq*), when, “because of this, missionaries even ceased to fulfill their mission, i.e., to teach and guide the Christians openly in their homes” (p. II–III).²¹

The longest historical text found in the prefaces is the detailed biography of the Spanish Jesuit scholar Juan Eusebio Nieremberg, author of *Mizān al-zamān*. At the same time, it is surprising to note that ‘Abdallāh Zākhir, the founder of the press, is mentioned by name only in two books (the preface of the *Interpretation of Seven Psalms* and the title page of *al-Burhān al-ṣarīḥ*). Similarly, neither specific persons involved in the Khinshāra press nor the authors of the prefaces are mentioned, and the community is always considered as a whole, as those who worked on the preparation of the books.

The names mentioned in the prefaces of the Khinshāra books can be recorded as follows (numbers correspond to the book titles in the list above):

Tab. 1: Names Mentioned in the Prefaces of the Khinshāra Books

Book number	Author’s Name	Other Names
1	Juan Eusebio Nieremberg	
5	Diego de Estella	Raphael Wantāyūl (<i>translator</i>) ²² Anthony Aṭāyizā (<i>editor</i>) ²³

²⁰ The foreign names of the persons whom we have not identified are mentioned here as transliterated in Arabic in the prefaces of the surveyed books.

²¹ This remark reflects the realities of the 18th century, when the Greek Catholic Church had not yet obtained official recognition in the Ottoman Empire. It may refer to the events of 1726, the peak of Patriarch Sylvester’s confrontation with the pro-Catholic residents of Aleppo, when many of them were arrested and exiled by the Ottoman authorities; cf. Panchenko, *Ближневосточное православие под османским владычеством*, p. 448. The Catholic communities in the Ottoman Empire (Armenian Catholics and Melkites) were granted the status of separate *millets* only in the 1830s. See K. A. Panchenko, S. A. Moiseeva, “Мелькитская католическая церковь”, *Православная энциклопедия*, 44, Moscow, 2016, p. 650.

²² The bursar (*al-wakīl al-‘āmm*) of the Franciscan friars in Jerusalem (p. III).

²³ The bursar (*al-wakīl al-‘āmm*) of the Franciscan friars in Jerusalem (p. IV).

Tab. 1: Names Mentioned in the Prefaces of the Khinshāra Books (continued).

Book number	Author's Name	Other Names
6	Diego de Estella	Alinsū Mīkhā'il Kurjāde (<i>translator</i>) Anthony Aṭāyizā (<i>editor</i>)
7	Paolo Segneri	Pierre Fromage (<i>translator</i>)
8	Pierre Arnoudie	'Abdallāh Zākhir (<i>translator</i>)
11	Paolo Segneri	Pierre Fromage (<i>translator</i>)
13	'Abdallāh Zākhir	
15		Pierre Fromage (<i>translator</i>)
16		Yūsuf bin Jirjis al-Ḥalabī al-Mārūnī (<i>translator</i>) ²⁴
17	Francesco Rainaldi	Mīkhā'il Mizrāq (<i>translator</i>) ²⁵
20		Maronite patriarch Mār Yūsuf (<i>provider of the original text</i>) al-Sheikh Ghandūr (<i>sponsor</i>) ²⁶
22		Emanuel Shammā' (<i>compiler</i>) ²⁷

As can be seen from the names mentioned in the prefaces, the translators were either Catholic missionaries in the Middle East (and, apparently, their translations were revised by Christian Arabs), or Arabic-speaking Greek Catholics or Maronites. Some of them knew European languages, since from the early 18th century the best of the missionary school graduates were educated in Italy.²⁸ On the other hand, concerning the Shuwayrite order, there is proof that a solid knowledge of foreign languages was “a rare thing amongst the members of congregation”.²⁹ As for the authors of the prefaces, their names are not mentioned, and we may suppose that some texts, especially at the initial stage, were composed by the missionaries and revised by native speakers of Arabic (as was the case of Zākhir with the Jesuit missionaries in Aleppo).³⁰ Other texts, especially those written in a rhymed form, must have been composed by Arab authors.

²⁴ A Maronite subdeacon of Aleppo (p. IV).

²⁵ A priest from the Greek Catholic Monastery of the Savior (*Dayr al-Mukhalliṣ*) in Lebanon (p. 7).

²⁶ An honorary consul of Beirut (p. V).

²⁷ A priest from the Greek Catholic Monastery of the Savior (*Dayr al-Mukhalliṣ*) in Lebanon (p. 3).

²⁸ Panchenko, Moiseeva, “Мелькитская католическая церковь”, p. 651.

²⁹ C. Walbiner, “Monastic Reading and Learning in Eighteenth-Century Bilād al-Šām: Some Evidence from the Monastery of al-Šuwayr (Mount Lebanon)”, *Arabica*, 51, 2004, 4, p. 469, 474.

³⁰ T. Jock, *Jésuites et Chouérites ou la fondation des religieuses basiliennes chouérites de Notre-Dame de l'Annonciation à Zouq-Mikaïl (Liban), 1730–1746*, Central Falls, [1936], p. 351.

Many prefaces of the Khinshāra Monastery books contain panegyric passages that mostly refer to the books themselves, and in some cases to their authors (e.g., biblical characters like the Prophet David, or the author of the original book presented to the reader in Arabic translation, like John Eusebius Nieremberg, or the translators, such as ‘Abdallāh Zākhir). These are typical epithets, like those addressed to the pioneers of the Khinshāra press – Fromage and Zākhir, as follows:

الاب المكرم ورسول بيعة الله المحترم، اعني به البادري بطرس فرماج سليل الرهبنة اليسوعية، المتلالية بسنا مناقبها في سما بيعة الله الكاثوليكية

The venerable father and revered Apostle of the Church of God, namely, *padre* Pierre Fromage, a disciple of the Jesuit Order that shines with the splendor of its dignities on the firmament of the Catholic Church... (*Murshid al-khāṭi*, p. III).

الاب العالم المحقق والرسول اللاهوتي المدقق البادري بطرس ارنودي اليسوعي، و... المعلم الفاضل والفيلسوف الكامل الشماس عبد الله زاهر الحلبي

The learned scholarly father, profound theologian and Apostle, the Jesuit *padre* Pierre Arnūdi [Arnoude] and... the virtuous teacher and consummate philosopher, the deacon ‘Abdallāh Zākhir al-Ḥalabī... (*Tafsīr sab‘at mazmūrāt*, p. 3).

Like in the case of the prefaces to books edited by Athanasios Dabbās, some of those in the Khinshāra editions are composed as a panegyric almost entirely dedicated to the glorification of the respective book (Psalter, *al-Murshid al-masīhī*, *Murshid al-khāṭi*, *Īdāḥ al-ta’līm al-masīhī*, Gospel, etc.).

Each book includes information on the output, sometimes in the form of an afterword, but mostly as a final paragraph of the preface, including a request for prayers for those who have labored over the book (the brethren of the Khinshāra monastery). In some cases, the date of printing differs: the afterword at the end of the book mentions a later date than the paragraph in the preface (e.g., *Mizān al-zamān* indicates the years 1733 and 1734, the Epistles – 1756 and 1758). Obviously, the later date should be considered as the one when printing was completed.

It is worth noting that prefaces in the books printed by the Greek Catholics do not contain elements of polemics against the Orthodox. Even the first books published in the 1730s, a few years after the schism in the Antiochian Church (in 1724), do not include such polemics. This should be compared with the prefaces of the books printed by the Greek Orthodox Patriarch Sylvester of Antioch, which have a strong anti-Catholic character. In some of the Khinshāra prefaces, an exposition of the Christian dogmas from a Catholic point of view was included. Nevertheless, according to Bernard Heyberger, in contrast with the prefaces, many texts in these

books reveal a marked militant Catholic character (“un caractère catholique militant marqué”).³¹

As a rule, in reprints, the preface coincides with that of the first edition, except for a paragraph about the print run of the new edition. However, the ornamental elements used in the design of the reprint sometimes vary.

4 Language and Style

A high proficiency in Classical Arabic was traditionally a strong point of the Shuwayrite brethren. The bar was set high both by ‘Abdallāh Zākhir and his brother Niqūlā al-Šā’igh, abbot of the monastery, who had learned Classical Arabic with Muslim scholars in Aleppo.³² The composition of the monastery library surveyed by Carsten Walbiner testifies to the interest of the Shuwayrites in Arabic philology and their “eagerness to master the Arabic language and to use their mother tongue also as a literary means of expression”.³³ It is not surprising, therefore, that the Khinshāra books demonstrate a high level of philological abilities.

When we compare the presentation of the main part of the prefaces in the Khinshāra books with the earlier editions of Athanasios Dabbās, a clear difference can be noticed. In the latter, an anonymous author of the prefaces of the books printed in Aleppo, introducing Dabbās’s speech, resorted not only to rhyme, but to what is called “a weaving of words”, often very complex. The prefaces of the Khinshāra books, on the contrary, were generally written in a narrative style which demonstrates a clear statement of the author’s thinking and a well-defined line of reasoning. A significant example of such a text is the detailed biography of Juan Nieremberg in the preface to the *Mizān al-zamān*, which can be considered an independent text.

At the same time, the authors of prefaces followed the tradition of Arabic literature, comprising the introductory paragraph praising God in rhymed structures and using typical stylistic means such as metaphors, epithets, etc. In part, they resorted to rhyme in the main part of the prefaces as well. A characteristic example are the two prefaces to *al-Burhān al-šarīḥ*, a book authored by ‘Abdallāh Zākhir. The first preface, with information on the printed book and the dogmas of the Christian faith, is written as a narrative in prose. The second, praising God and explaining

31 B. Heyberger, *Les chrétiens du Proche-Orient au temps de la Réforme catholique*, Rome, 1994, p. 440.

32 R. el Gemayel, “‘Abd Allāh Zākhir”, in *CMR* 12, p. 101.

33 Walbiner, “Monastic Reading and Learning in Eighteenth-Century Bilād al-Šām”, p. 475.

the motives for writing the book, comprises pairs of sentences given with various rhymed endings (p. 8–9):

وبعدُ فلما سألني من أوجبت عليّ المحبة الإذعان لطاعته، وحملني وجوب الشهادة للحق عليّ امتثال مشورته، بان
اكتب شيئاً يسيراً قريباً للفهم في بيان حقيقة سرى دين المسيح، اعني بهما سر تثليث اقانيم الله وتوحيد جوهره، وسر
تجسد ابنه الوحيد وايضاح مآثره، فاجبته الي ذلك معتمداً علي تنوير ابي الانوار الذي رقي الفهم البشري الي معرفة
اسراره الفايقة، واقتاده الي فهم ذاته بشهادته الامينة الصادقة، مستعصماً بايدو عن الزلل، ومستمناً بارشاده عن
الخطل، وقد قسمت رسالتي هذه الي بحثين تتقدمهما مقدمة وتليهما خاتمة

When He, Whom one must obey in love and Whose commandments one must follow for the sake of witnessing for the truth, commanded me to write something easy to understand, in order to explain the truth of the two mysteries of the faith of Christ, namely, the mystery of the Trinity of the hypostases of God in the unity of His essence and the mystery of the Incarnation of the only-begotten Son of God and His [redemptive] deed, I responded to His command, hoping to be enlightened by the Father of Lights, Who has raised man's mind to the knowledge of His greatest mysteries and made Himself known to him through His trustworthy testimony, keeping him from mistake with His hand and shielding him from error by His guidance. I have divided my treatise in two parts, which are preceded by a preface and followed by a conclusion [...].

In several prefaces, editorial work on the text and its checking against the Greek original are mentioned, without providing specific names of the persons who accomplished this work. The results of the thorough linguistic work are noticeable, since no misprints are found in the texts of the prefaces (compared to Athanasios Dabbās's books).³⁴ The orthography in the printed books improved over time: we can notice how during the 18th century, due to the thorough editorial work, there took place a gradual departure from the features of the manuscript tradition, and the orthographic norm was stabilized. For comparison, both Wallachian editions of Athanasios Dabbās (the 1701 Liturgikon and the 1702 Horologion) totally lack vocalizing, *tanwīn*, and *hamza*; from the editor's afterword in the Liturgikon, composed by Antim the Iberian, it results that their addition presented technical difficulties.³⁵ As for the Aleppo editions, they gradually included *tanwīn*, *shadda*, and some word-final short vowels. For the Khinshāra printers, it seems that vocalization was not a problem from the technical point of view; the short vowels are especially numerous in the Psalter (1740), traditionally used to teach reading. In addition, in the Khinshāra editions the *tā marbūṭa* is most often rendered according to the customary graphic norm (with two dots), and the word "Lord" (*ilāh*) is printed without *alif*, unlike its representation in most Christian Arabic manuscripts.

34 Petrova, "The Prefaces of the Christian Arabic Books Printed in Wallachia and Syria", p. 270.

35 Petrova, "The Prefaces of the Christian Arabic Books Printed in Wallachia and Syria", p. 287.

At the same time, we have noted that the Khinshāra printers deliberately preferred some orthographic features of the manuscript tradition. The preface to the 1740 Psalter (p. 10–11) states that the book retained the weak radical in the jussive form of the deficient verbs, while, according to Arabic grammar, the weak radical is expected to fall out. The editors explained this by the need to facilitate the learning of such forms by children and all those who study Arabic grammar based on the Psalter. We can remark that this approach is consistently present throughout the book. At the same time, the printers accurately omitted the weak third radical in all the cases when a pronoun is attached to the verb. Table 2 reproduces these particularities.

Tab. 2: Weak Radicals in the Jussive Form, Psalter, 1740

Weak radical retained		
Psalms 9, p. 27	ولم ينسى صراخ البائسين	He did not forget the cry of the needy ³⁶
Psalms 50, p. 118	وامحو كل مآثمى	And all my lawless acts blot out
Psalms 50, p. 119	ولتبنى أسوار اورشليم	And let the walls of Jerusalem be built
Psalms 54, p. 123	ولم يخلو من شوارعها الربا	And usury did not leave its streets
Psalms 63, p. 138	نجى نفسي	Deliver my soul
Weak radical omitted		
Psalms 21, p. 51	فلينجّه	Let Him rescue him
Psalms 38, p. 94	من جميع سيّاتي نجني	From all my acts of lawlessness rescue me
Psalms 43, p. 103	ولم ننسك	And we did not forget You
<i>Kathisma</i> 9, p. 155	واعطني	And give me

The above-mentioned linguistic remark from the preface to the Psalter shows that such orthographic norms, typical for Middle Arabic, were quite acceptable for the Arab Christians at the time. It should be noted that the variation of forms, both with the weak third radical and without it (in both the jussive and the imperative mood), is one of the characteristic features of the Arabic (especially Christian Arabic) manuscript tradition. To this day, writing a weak third radical in these forms is a common orthographic mistake.

³⁶ The English translation of the Psalms fragments follows A. Pietersma, in A. Pietersma, B. Wright, *A New English Translation of the Septuagint and the Other Greek Translations Traditionally Included under that Title*, New York/Oxford, 2007.

An important element in the prefaces of the Khinshāra books is the reference to chapters of the Bible provided along with the biblical quotations. The reference is given only to the chapter, without a verse number, since in the 18th century the Arabic editions of biblical texts did not yet use a verse-by-verse breakdown:

لأنه مكتوب (مزمور ١) طوبى للرجل الذى فى ناموس الرب هواه وفى سنته يتلو نهاراً وليلاً

For it is written (Psalm 1): “Happy is the man whose will is in the law of the Lord and on His law he will meditate day and night” (*Ta’ammulāt rūḥīya*, p. 4).

فمن ثم كان الرسول الإلهى يتوسل الى المؤمنين ان يقتنوا به قايلاً، اتضرع اليكم ان تصيروا مقتدين بى (قرنتيه اولى ٤)

That is why the divine Apostle urged the faithful to imitate him saying: “I urge you, then, be imitators of me” (*1 Corinthians* 4) (Acts and Epistles, ed. 1779, p. V).

The presence of references to the Bible chapters demonstrates the editors’ orientation towards the European scholastic tradition with its rich culture of citation. This method may be compared with the way in which biblical quotations were introduced in the editions of Athanasios Dabbās and Patriarch Sylvester; in the former, they followed expressions like “as the Gospel says” (*ḥasaba dhalik al-qawl al-injīlī*), “the divine Apostle says” (*al-rasūl al-ilāhī yaqūl*), “as it is said” (*kamā yuqāl*). Other times, they were simply inserted into the main text, often as an inaccurate paraphrase: for example, in Sylvester’s preface to the 1751 Horologion, for the sake of rhyme, an Islamic expression (*al-Raḥīm al-Raḥmān*) was added to the quotation from the Gospel: *Laysa bi-l-khubzi waḥda-hu yaḥyā al-insān, bal bi-kulli kalimat³⁷ takhruju min fam Allāh al-Raḥīm al-Raḥmān*, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God the Most Merciful”.³⁷ In the prefaces of the Khinshāra books, on the contrary, one can notice that accurate biblical quotations were inserted in the text.

To summarize, from the time of ‘Abdallāh Zākhir onwards, the Khinshāra press followed high standards of book publishing, both in book design and in terms of language. As a result, the late 18th-century books only slightly differ from the modern ones in orthography, and just a few graphic features (in particular, the absence of *hamza*, variations in the form of the final letter *yā’* with and without dots) remind us of the influence of manuscript tradition.

Thus, we may conclude that the activities of the Khinshāra press were an important stage in the development of the art of printing in the Arab world, and the Ottoman Empire in general. The philological work of the Khinshāra monastic community was one of the factors that paved the way for the Arabic literary revival in the 19th century

³⁷ Matthew 4:4.

in the Levant, in which Arab Christians played a major role. Nevertheless, the output of the Khinshāra press remained restricted mostly to the Greek Catholic faithful. That is why the press gradually lost its importance in the 19th century, unable to compete with the more “progressive” presses established in Lebanon with foreign contribution, whose activities were aimed at a wider audience.

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