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## Preface

The second volume of collected works of the TYPARABIC project, the fourth in the series *Early Arabic Printing in the East (EAPE)* published by De Gruyter, aims to encompass many of the themes and sub-themes that the project has ambitiously proposed to cover in its five-year lifetime, from 2021 to 2026. Divided into five Parts, it contains the enlarged papers from two conferences convened by the project team: “*Spread the Word. Books Printed for the Arabic-Speaking Christians in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century*”, held on June 22 and 23, 2023, at the Forschungsbibliothek Gotha (Germany), and “*Towards a Printed-Book Culture in Eastern Europe and the Ottoman Levant*”, held on March 19 and 20, 2024, at the Library of the Holy Synod in Bucharest (Romania).

Of the twenty-one authors, seven are members of the TYPARABIC project, two are researchers with its host institution, the Institute of South-East European Studies of the Romanian Academy in Bucharest, and twelve are affiliated with various universities and institutes in Europe and the Middle East (Romania, Italy, Germany, the United Kingdom, Lebanon, and Georgia). This demonstrates the wide cultural and geographical reach of the themes that the project team is investigating.

It seemed important for the general background of the project to discuss the situation of *The Arabic-Speaking Christians in the Age of Printing* in the first Part of this volume, with contributions ranging from the social circumstances of Christians living in the Ottoman Empire, either Greek Orthodox or Melkite Greek Catholic, to the first attempts at printing in Arabic for the Christian faithful. The four papers grouped in Chapter 1 deal with the history of the monastery of Balamand (Souad Slim), a center of spiritual life in Lebanon, the views on the Council of Florence expressed in the works of Patriarch Makarios III Ibn al-Zaʿīm (Bishara Ebeid), Athanasios Dabbās’s links with the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge – the SPCK (Simon Mills), and the Catholic texts printed by the monastic community of Dayr al-Shuwayr (Aurélien Girard).

In order to accurately reflect the broad scope of the project’s aims, the boundaries of time and space have been expanded in Part 2, *The Avatars of Printing for a Middle Eastern Readership*, to include the fields of Catholic, Armenian, and Turkish printing with Arabic type. This section looks at the first presses in Italy to have printed for an Arabic-speaking readership (Antonella Ghersetti), the first Arabic

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book printed in Lebanon in 1734 (Joseph Moukarzel), and the features of the opening texts in the books printed at Khinshāra (Yulia Petrova). In addition, the lives and works of two outstanding figures of the culture(s) of the Ottoman Empire are examined: Oskan Erevants'i (David Neagu) and Ibrahim Müteferrika (Radu Dipratu). These contributions show that all the major "agents of change" who worked for the writing and printing of books in one or another of the Eastern peoples' languages were moved by the same passion for the cultural and social progress of the confessional families to which they belonged.

The research that required the practical study of an Arabic book corpus would not have stood a chance had it not been for the zealous collectors and emissaries of European rulers who scoured the Middle East for manuscripts, books, and artefacts now proudly held by many libraries on our continent. Their journeys and explorations from Germany to Transylvania in Romania and Tbilisi in Georgia, alongside their outcomes, are explored in Part 3, *Collectors and Collections of Oriental Books from the West to the East*. Here, the reader learns about German travelers who returned home with treasure troves of Oriental items (Feras Krimsti), the scholarly study of Oriental languages and the largest collection of Arabic manuscripts in Transylvania (Mircea-Gheorghe Abrudan and Nicholas Bishara), and the exceptional collections of early Georgian printed books at the Korneli Kekelidze Georgian National Centre of Manuscripts in Tbilisi (Nino Kavtaria).

In Part 4, *Artistic Encounters in the Iconography and the Printed Books of the East*, the art historian's perspective takes the lead: four texts are dedicated to the links between the Romanian and the Arab Christian cultures, as reflected in Sofian Boghiu's ecclesiastical paintings in Lebanon (Nada Hélou), the elements of book art in the Arabic works printed by Athanasios Dabbās in Aleppo (Oana Iacubovschi), the influence of Ukrainian presses on the typographers of the Romanian Principalities (Anca Elisabeta Tatay and Cornel Tatai-Baltă), and the sources of church leaders' insignia in printed books, concluding with preliminary remarks on an emblem in the first Arabic printed Akathistos, supposedly created for the Patriarch Sylvester of Antioch (Alina Kondratiuk).

The last Part is devoted to the *Patrons of Printing in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries: The Phanariot Princes and Their Like*, proposing a 21<sup>st</sup>-century assessment of the overlooked role played by the Phanariot rulers, descendants of noble Greek families in Istanbul, in the promotion of printing and the dissemination of Greek culture in the Romanian Principalities (Daniela Lupu, Andreea-Mihaela Badea, and Ștefan Petrescu). This Part is introduced by a historical account of Serbian printing at home and in the neighboring territory of Wallachia in the 16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries, highlighting its contribution to laying the foundations for the advance of Phanariot-era presses in the Romanian Principalities (Mihail-George Hâncu).

The link between these wide-ranging themes is ensured by their focus on printing as a human activity dedicated to the progress of learning and the dissemination of knowledge, whether in the East or the West, with a great interest in Arabic printing and especially in the books printed in the East: the Romanian Principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia, Ottoman Syria, the Holy Land, and Georgia. It is striking that *Orthodoxy* linked many of the typographers, editors, and patrons of printing in the 16<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Nevertheless, like the TYPARABIC project itself, several authors complete the picture with insights into the printing of Arabic books in Italy for the Greek Catholic readership on the eastern Mediterranean coast and the influences of Catholic book art on the decoration of books printed in the East.

Another feature of this collection of essays is that several commentaries complement each other, while looking at the same printing press or book output from different perspectives and using different sources (e.g., the chapters signed by Aurélien Girard, Joseph Moukarzel, Yulia Petrova, and Feras Krimsti). In other cases, a contribution to this volume echoes a theme discussed in EAPE-2, the first volume of collected works of the TYPARABIC project (this is the case of the chapters signed by Antonella Ghersetti and Radu Dipratu, among others).

What is striking about this cluster of diverse themes is their ability to “fall into place” like pieces of a large puzzle, inviting each other to form a harmonious image. Today, the picture of Arabic printing in the East, which was still struggling to become as commonplace as in Western Europe three centuries after Gutenberg’s invention, is closer to becoming complete. The TYPARABIC team’s following two conferences, in 2025 and 2026, will deal with complementary topics that have either been considered since the project’s inception, or have emerged from the team members’ encounters with their guests, who are represented in the two volumes of collected works in the *EAPE* series.

Many of the contributors to this volume recall in their essays the schism of 1724 in the Church of Antioch, a frequent theme of conferences and publications this year, which marked the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of that momentous event. Printing in Arabic played an important role in the discussion of dogmas and rituals and in the dialogue (and polemics) between the Greek Orthodox and the Melkite Greek Catholics, confirming the usefulness and value of the TYPARABIC team’s research on the first century of printing with Arabic type, and for the Arabic-speaking Christians in the Ottoman Empire.

Before the TYPARABIC project comes to an end in June 2026, there is still time to add the final pieces to the puzzle and gain a comprehensive picture of this crucial moment in the formation of an Arabic-language print culture. Given the significant role that printing played in the emergence of national consciousness in the multi-ethnic Ottoman Empire, like in many societies around the world, the

outcomes of this cluster of rigorous and in-depth studies are likely to shed new light on the progress towards modernity in Middle-Eastern societies.

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As a few sources are cited repeatedly by many of the authors in this volume, we have compiled a list of abbreviations used in all the footnotes, to avoid redundancy, while the full titles of these sources are still given in the bibliography at the end of each text.

The authors and the editors wish to express their deep gratitude to all the organizations and individuals who have kindly allowed them to reproduce the many illustrations in this volume, which support the authors' comments and greatly enhance its aesthetics. Above all, we are grateful for the excellent cooperation that the Institute of South-East European Studies and the TYPARABIC project have enjoyed with the Library of the Romanian Academy in Bucharest and the Cluj-Napoca Branch, which has enabled many of the authors of contributions to this volume to reproduce illustrations that are crucial to the presentation of their research. Thus, all illustrations marked "B.A.R." are published with the permission of the Library of the Romanian Academy.

Last but not least, the editors would like to thank Eva Frantz, Teodor Borșa, and their colleagues at De Gruyter, who patiently guided the progress of this volume to completion.