

THE BOOKS PRINTED IN BUCHAREST (1745-1747) BY SYLVESTER OF ANTIOCH AS PART OF THE SYRIAN-ROMANIAN CULTURAL RELATIONS

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Abstract: Anyone studies the history of the Syrian-Romanian cultural relations will feel the huge generosity of the Romanian leaders and people they gave to the Syrians who visited the Romanian principalities seeking this support. The first printer press enters the Arab world was the one brought from Bucharest to Aleppo in Syria (1706). The first books in Arabic types printed by Syrian people were books printed in Bucharest. Sylvester of Antioch, as all Syrian religious men who proceeded him in visiting the Romanian principalities, received the full support from Prince Mavrocordatos. Sylvester could print, in Bucharest, five Christian books in Arabic type letters. Sylvester took another printer press with him from Bucharest to Aleppo. These five books were the last ones that printed in Bucharest, but previous to them there were 14 books as a result of joint Syrian-Romanian efforts.

Keywords: Printing, book, cultural relations, Sylvester of Antioch, Syria, Romania

Introduction:

The Syrian relations with the Romanian principalities belong to hundred of years ago; in 1584 a very prominent Syrian Patriarch, Yuakim Daou (Yuwākim ibn Daw'ū), visited the Romanian principalities. In the period 1652-1659 another prominent Syrian Patriarch, Macarios Ibn Zaim, visited the Romanian Principalities accompanied by his son Paul Ibn Zaim (Paul of Alep). Paul of Alep wrote a very important book about the places his father and him visited in Wallachia, Moldavia, Iasi and many other places. The book contained important information about the political situation that era, about the social statue, the connection between people of these areas with the church. This book considered by many as one of the most important books in the Christian history.

In 1701 another prominent Syrian Patriarch, Patriarch Athanasius III Dabbas¹ (1647–1724), also visited the Romanian Principalities. He also seek support for his church. He got full support from Prince Constantin Brancoveanu. Dabbas was Metropolitan of Aleppo and Patriarch of Antioch from 1686 until 1694. With the support of Prince Brancoveanu Dabbas could print two books in Arabic type letters in Bucharest in 1701 and 1702, then he took the printer press with him from Bucharest to Aleppo to be the first printer press enters the Arab world.

In that printer press Dabbas could print 11 books in Arabic in Aleppo during the period 1706 and 1711. Two of them were reprinted.

After Dabbas came Sylvester of Antioch, Dabbas' nephew, who could print five books in Arabic types in Bucharest. Full details of these books will be studied in this research.

¹ According to Abdulrahman Farfor printing started in Iran 1636, then Aleppo 1706, Turkey 1723, Shower (Lebanon 1734), Egypt 1798, Iraq 1816, Palestine 1846, Morocco 1864, Yemen 1877, Hijaz 1882. FARFOR, Abdulrahman, *Fi Nawader El-kotob El-Arabiya fi Bedayat El-tiba'a* (Rare Arabic books at the beginning of printing), in *Nadwet Tarikh El-tiba'a El-arabiya hata Entihaa al Qurn al-tase' 'Ashar* (Symposium on the History of Arabic Printing Until the End of the 19th Century). Abu Dhabi: Juma Al-Majid Center for Culture and Heritage, 22-23 Oct. 1995, the Introduction.

Patriarch Sylvester of Antioch (1724–1766)

As mentioned above Sylvester was the nephew of the Syrian Patriarch Athanasius III Dabbās, on his sister's side. Before he became Patriarch of Antioch he accompanied his uncle Patriarch Dabbas to Wallachia and Moldavia. He visited Wallachia again after he became Patriarch where he printed five books in Arabic type letters.

When he was 28 years old he was designated by Patriarch Dabbas to be his successor. He was summoned from Mount Athos to Damascus, elected by the local community, and confirmed by a Synod called at Constantinople in July 1724. Sylvester grown up under the care of his uncle Dabbas. He was born in Cyprus around 1680 (and died on 13 Mar. 1766) of Greek parents (Giorgios and Fotini).² Sylvester was a Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch (1724–1766), the first one after the Catholic schism³.

Sylvester travelled to Romania principalities in Spring 1730 till 1748⁴ to seek support and money for his church, and he was hosted at the same place Macrios Ibn Zaim was hosted in; St Sabbas Monastery in Iași⁵. In the Romanian principalities he built the monastery of St. Esperidon for the Antiochian throne. And he reestablished an Arabic printing press in Bucharest, which was made by his predecessor Athanasius Dabbas in Bucharest, in the city of Iasi. He printed five books in Arabic type letters during the period 1745-1747. These five books are:

- 1- **The book of Al-Qondaq (Service of Divine Liturgy)**: It was printed in Arabic on 19 July 1745. Prince Ioan Mavrocordatos, the son of the late Nicolae⁶ Prince of Baghdan⁷ (Moldavia)⁸, supported Sylveste in printing this book in the city of Iasi. Its pages were not numbered. It was printed with the same letters of the book printed by the printer of Dabbas, with black and red ink. Nowadays, there's a copy of this book in the monastery Patriarchal of St. Takla in Maaloula (near Damascus in Syria). On this copy it was written that "this copy was done in the days of the Bishop Gregory Quba, Bishop of Hauran in 1762, in the days of Sylvester Patriarch of Antioch." Another copy of the book has the handwriting of Joannicios the Damascene, son of Khouri Ni'mat Allah in 1784. This copy has an introduction by the patriarch Sylvester shows that he corrected mistakes committed by Athanasius III Dabbas and retranslated the book in 17449.
- 2- **The Psalms** printed in Arabic letters in Bucharest in 1747 with an introduction indicating that he has printed many books using this printer press¹⁰. A copy of this book is at the Monastery of the Prophet Patriarch Elias Choya in Dhoûr ech Choueïr, Mont-Liban.

2 FEODOROV, Ioana. New Data on the Early Arabic Printing in the Levant and its Connections to the Romanian Presses. In: *Revue des etudes sud-est europeennes*, 2018, 1-4, 56, p. 198.

3 Sylvester of Antioch. *Wikipedia: the free encyclopedia*. [viewed 12 January 2019]. Available from: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sylvester_of_Antioch

⁴ FEODOROV, Ioana. *Ibidem*. P. 198.

5 FEODOROV, Ioana. New Data on the Early Arabic Printing in the Levant and its Connections to the Romanian Presses. *Op. cit.*, p. 198.

6 Nicolae Mavrocordat: 3 May 1680 – 3 September 1730.

7 The province of Baghdan is an Ottoman province that lasted between 1514-1859, which included an important part of present-day Moldova. Emerging Romania annexated this territory in 1859. 'iiqlim albaghdan (Al-Baghdadi Region). [viewed 14 January 2019]. Available from: ar.wikipedia.org/wiki/البيدان .

8 JOSEPH Zeitoun mentioned the support Sylvester received from John (Ioannes) Mavrocordatos (1712-1747), Prince of Moldavia between 1743 and 1747, but Ioana Feodorov (ref. 74)) mentioned that Sylvester received support from Ioannes' brother Prince Constantin, Prince of Wallachia.

9 ZEITOUN, Joseph. *Op. cit.*

10 *Ibidem*.

- 3- **The writings** of the two complexes that gathered in Constantinople on the subject of Catholicism in Syria-in Arabic letters-, one of them in late 1723 Christian headed by Patriarch Jeremiah III, and the second in 1727 a Christian headed by Patriarch Paisios. Five Arabic articles were printed with these group of writings, including the response to the five cases that were newly appeared by the Latins. Also, a constitution was printed within the orders of the Church of the Eastern Apostolic God in 1747, all in one volume¹¹. Ioana Feodorov called this book as *The Holy Synods of 1723 and 1727*¹².
- 4- **The Lord's Supper** (Al-'Ašā ar-Rabbānī) by Eustratios (Afstrati) Argentis, the physician of the island of Saks (Khio). This book was printed in Arabic letters after being translated from Greek into Arabic by Patriarch Sylvester. It was carefully printed in Iasi (completed printed on February 25, 1747) under a great supervision of Prince Ioan, (a Roman prince during the time of the presidency of the priesthood of Bishop Nikoforos Blubo). It was printed by Deacon Gerges Halabi and Mikhail al-Raheb, two assistants of Patriarch Sylvester. This book documents the entry of Patriarch Sylvester to that country in 1745, and it documents the Patriarch Sylvester's printing of the ecclesiastical books, and the Latins' confronting him, and he effortlessly managed to print the book Nectarius¹³.
- 5- **Justice and the Transfer of Truth**¹⁴ (**Qadā al-haqq wa-naql as-sidq**) written by Nektarius Patriarch of Jerusalem in response to the Latins, and it was printed in Arabic letters in Iasi in 1746 by the deacon George al-Halabi, and the aforementioned monk Michael al-Raheb. A copy of this book is in the Patriarchal Library in Damascus, Syria¹⁵.

The Romanian Press brought by Sylvester to Aleppo, then to Beirut (about 1750):

Sylvester came back to Syria in 1747. After that date the printing press that he was working on in Iasi stopped completely. He brought a printing press from Bucharest to Aleppo, then he moved it to Beirut to print anti-Catholic books. He installed the printing press in the residence of the Greek-Orthodox Bishopric and Diocese council. This printing press printed the Psalter and Kitab al-Sawai¹⁶.

It's worth mentioning that there's a belief the first printing press brought by Athanasius III Dabbas from Bucharest were taken by the Maronite Monk Abdallah Za'kher, assistant of Dabbas, to Lebanon "Dayr al-Showyer".

Conclusion:

During the period mentioned in the introduction (166 years from 1584 till 1750) the joint Syrian-Romanian efforts could result in 19 books; Two of them were the first books with Arabic types printed by Syrians (there were some books with Arabic types –as this report showed- printed earlier than these two. Other eleven books-all in Arabic type letters-are the first books printed inside the Arab world during the period (1706-1711) by the printer press brought to Aleppo in Syria (in 1705) from Bucharest. Of course, before these 11 books

11 *Ibidem*.

12 FEODOROV, Ioana. New Data on the Early Arabic Printing in the Levant and its Connections to the Romanian Presses. *Op. cit.*, p. 200.

13 ZEITOUN, Joseph. *Op. cit.*

14 Ioana Feodorov translated it as: The Rule of Justice and the Diffusion of Truth, and she said that sometimes it's translated as The Arbiter of Truth and Justice. FEODOROV, Ioana. New Data on the Early Arabic Printing in the Levant and its Connections to the Romanian Presses. *Op. cit.*, p. 199

15 ZEITOUN, Joseph. *Op. cit.*

16 Ioana Feodorov mentioned that a second edition of the Psalter, a Book of Hours and a Book of Mass might be printed by this printing press. FEODOROV, Ioana *The Romanian Contribution to Arabic Printing. Op cit.*, p. 47.

there was a very important book *The Macarios' Travels* - written by Archdeacon Paul of Aleppo, son of a prominent Syrian Patriarch (Macarios Ibn Zaim).

The five books printed by Patriarch Sylvester were printed in Bucharest in Arabic (1745-1747) after about 43 years of printing the first two books mentioned above were, also, of the first books printed in Arabic types.

All these books were religious ones written or translated by Syrian religious people. Sylvester of Antioch was the last Patriarch to print books in the Romanian Principalities. Even Yūsef Mark,¹⁷ who was brought by Sylvester to get training on printing, didn't print any book in spite of the fact that he stayed in Bucharest three years (from 1747 till 1750).

The importance of the five books printed by Sylvester of Antioch is that they were continuation of previous efforts by Dabbas to preserve the Christian identity of the Syrian community they were serving.

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17 He was born in Lebanon, and died around 1773. Feodorov, Ioana, Ibidem. P. 203.

