

THE ROMANIAN CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE SYRIAN-ROMANIAN CULTURAL RELATIONS THROUGH THE BOOKS PRINTED BY THE SYRIAN PATRIARCH ATHANASIOS III DABBAS (1701-1711)

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*Abstract:*The Romanian contributions to the Syrian-Romanian cultural relations are huge; the first printing press entered the Christian and the Islamic worlds in all Arab countries was the one taken from Bucharest by the Syrian Patriarch Athanasios III Dabbas to Syria in 1706. Prince of Wallachia, Constantin Brancoveanu, gave no conditional support to Dabbas; he provided Dabbas with money, a qualified assistant, locations for setting the printing press, all issues needed to print books and also he gifted him the printing press! The prince, also, allowed Dabbas to take to Syria the copies of the two books printed in Snagov and Bucharest (1701-1702). Dabbas printed in Syria with this printing press eleven books in Arabic in the period 1706-1711, all of these books were Christian ones.

Keywords: Printing Press, Cultural relations, Dabbas, Brancoveanu, Syria, Romania

Introduction:

Although Patriarch Athanasios III Dabbas was not the first Syrian Patriarch to visit the Romanian principalities, yet his trip had special importance for the cultural relations between Syria and the Romanian principalities.

The special importance of this trip comes from the fruitful results out of it. These results were two books with Arabic letter types printed in the Romanian principalities, and eleven books with Arabic letter types printed in Syria (Aleppo) by the first printing press entered the Islamic and the Christian worlds not only in Syria, but also in all the Arab countries. It was the printing press brought by Dabbas in 1705 from the Romanian principalities.

These books wouldn't have been printed without the full support of the prince of Wallachia, Constantin Brancoveanu provided to the Syrian Patriarch. Brancoveanu offered Patriarch Dabbas money, a printing press, a very qualified craftsman and all issues needed for printing Arabic books in addition to the two locations where this printing press was set. These offers reflect not only the open-mind of the prince, but also his friendliness and generosity. The Syrian Patriarch wouldn't be able to print books with Arabic letter types and take these books back to Syria, and, also, taking the printing press itself, without the approval and support of the people around him. This, also, reflects the friendly atmosphere he worked in, and reflects the friendliness of the people of Romanian principalities towards the foreigners in general, and the Syrian Patriarch in particular.

This paper was divided into two periods; 1701-1705 where Dabbas printed two books, in Snagov and Bucharest, and the period 1706-1711 where Dabbas printed in Aleppo eleven books by the printing press mentioned above. All these books were Christian ones in Arabic letter types.

I. The Period 1701 – 1705:

Athanasius III Dabbas (1647–1724), was a prolific writer and publisher who was born in Damascus. He was Metropolitan of Aleppo and Patriarch of Antioch from 1686 until 1694. He travelled to Walachia in 1701 and built a strong relationship with its wealthy and open-minded Prince Constantin Brancoveanu (1654 – August 15, 1714), a great patron of culture and Prince of Wallachia between 1688 and 1714.

Brancoveanu generously gave his full support to the Syrian -Romanian cultural relations through supporting the projects of this Syrian cleric. One of these projects was a printing press with Arabic letter types on the Romanian soil. This was the first printing press with Arabic letters in the Romanian principalities.

This printing press with Arabic letters printed two books in Arabic in Snagov 1701, and in Bucharest 1702, then when Dabbas went back home (Syria, Aleppo) he took the printing press with him, as mentioned before, to be the first printing press enters the Islamic and the Christian worlds not only in Syria but also in all the Arab world¹! Many historians considered entering printing press to the Arab world (which that time was under the Ottoman occupation) as a sign of a shift towards the beginning of the Enlighten era in it.

Constantin Brancoveanu appointed Antim the Iberian who was a very skilled “master of drawing and engraving person”² to help Dabbas in his project. Both Dabbas and Antim set the first printing press in the Romanian principalities, it was set at the Monastery of Snagov, in 1701 CE where Dabbas and Antim could print a Christian book in Arabic letter types, a *Book of Liturgies* (*Kitāb Al-Qaddāsāt al-talātat al-'ilāhiyyat ma'a ba'd ihtiyāgāt'āhar darūriyyat li-l-salawāt al-'urtūduksiyya*) of 252 pages, with parallel Greek and Arabic texts. That book was followed with another one, a *Book of Hours* of 731 pp., in June 1702 at the princely press of Bucharest. According to Wahid Qaddorah both books were printed in Bucharest³, but this is not accurate.

Antim crafted the Arabic letters using the same technique documented for his Greek and Cyrillic types⁴. Both Antim and Dabbas started printing their first book with Arabic letters.

III.1 The Period 1706 – 1711:

Dabbas left Bucharest in 1705 back home taking with him the printing press. After arriving Syria, he set it up at the Metropolitan of Aleppo residence to be-as we mentioned before- the first printing press with Arabic letters not only in Syria but also in the whole Arab world⁵, (The first printing press entered Turkey was in 1723⁶).

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.

² FEODOROV, Ioana. Early Arabic printing in Aleppo, 1706-1711. WOCMES Congress, Sevilla, 16-20/07/2018. pp. 1-9.

³ QDDORAH, Wahid. *Awael El-matbo'at Al-arabiya fi Turkiya wa Bilad El-sham* (The first Arabic publications in Turkey and the Levant). 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. pp. 120-121.

⁴ FEODOROV, Ioana. Early Arabic printing in Aleppo, 1706-1711. *Op. cit.*, pp. 1-9

⁵ FARFOR, Abdulrahman. *Op. cit.*, the Introduction.

⁶ *Ibidem*.

Eleven books were printed in Aleppo (Syria) between 1706-1711 by this printing press. All of them were religious Christian books; two of them were reprinted, and one of them was selected chapters of the Holy Gospels. According to Qaddorah⁷ this printing press did not print books about modern arts and sciences, but only religious books to affirm the identity of the Christian minority who live in a vast Islamic world. According to him, also, this printing press helped in providing the Christian children with unified religious texts and to eliminate the schism between the Arab Christians, Orthodox and Catholic.

In Aleppo Dabbas finished printing his first book *of the Four Holy and Pure Gospels* in 1706, and this was the first book printed not only in Syria, but also in all the Islamic and Christian worlds in the Arab countries.

Ioana Feodorov published many important studies about the books printed by Dabbas, and about this printing press. According to her, these 11 books were⁸:

1. **Kitāb Al-'Inġil al-šarīf al-tāhir wa-l-misbāh al-munīr al-zāhir, tubi'a hadīt^{an} bi-madīnat alab al-mahmīyat sanat 'alf wa-sab'ami'at wa-sittat masīhiyyat [Book of the Holy and Pure Gospels, or the splendidly shining Lamp, newly printed now in the well-protected city of Aleppo, in the year one thousand seven hundred and six],** Aleppo, 1706 (CRV 154A54). Text printed in Arabic, 243 pages.

2. In 1706 also this printing printed **The Holy Book of the Psalms** composed through the Holy Spirit through the mouth of David the Prophet and the King, and their number is one hundred and fifty: Kitāb al-Zabūr al-Šarīf al-mantūq bi-hi min al-Rūh al-Quds 'alā fam al-Nabiyy wa-l-Malik Dāwūd wa-'iddatu-hu mi'at wa-hamsīnat mazmūran, [...] qad tubi'a hadītan bi-mahrūsāt halab al-mahmīyat fī sanat 'alf wa-sab'ami'at wa-sittat masīhiyya of 284 pages. The version that was published was the translation from Greek into Arabic and adapted by the deacon 'Abdallah Ibn al-Fal (Kitāb Mazāmīr Dāwūd Al-Nabiyy).

3. In 1707: **Kitāb al-durr al-muntahab min maqālāt al-Qiddīs Yūhannā Famm al-Dahab [The Book of the Chosen Pearls, from the homilies of St John Chrysostom],** Aleppo, 1707, 511 pages.

4. In January 1708: **The same book** that printed in 1706 was reprinted again with a different title page, and a new page inserted praising to the financier of printing this book Hatman of the Cossacks, Ivan Mazepa, caused a difference in the page numbering from the 1706 version: [Book of the Holy and Pure Gospels, or the Splendidly Shining Lamp, written by the four holy and divine Evangelists, who are the bearers of good tidings Matthew and Mark, and the precious Luke and John, newly printed now [...] at the expense of the mighty lord Ioan Mazepa the Hatman [...], in the year one thousand seven hundred and eight, the month of January], Aleppo, 1708, 246 pages. (CRV 155A). Kitāb al-'Inġil al-šarīf al-tāhir wa-l-misbāh al-munīr al-lāhir almansūb 'ilā al-'arba' Rusul al-'Inġīliyyīn al-Lāhiyyīn wa-hum Mattī wa-Marqus al-Bašīrāni wa-Lūqā wa-Yūhannā al-Nadīrāni qad tubi'a al-'ān hadītan bi-masraf al-sayyid al-'amġad Yuwānī Māzābah alhatmān [...] wa-dalika fī sana 'alf wa-sab'ami'at wa-tamāniyat masīhiyyat fī šahr kānūn al-tānī. This copy "was undoubtedly sent by the Patriarch to the Voivode [Constantin] Brâncoveanu, as a token of esteem, since the small, smoke seal of Grigorie Brâncoveanu was applied in two places, dated 1762".

5. In 1708 also: [*Holy Book of the Prophecies, newly printed now in the well-protected city of Antioch, in the Christian year one thousand seven hundred and eight, by care of the noble father and revered lord Kyriu Kir Cyril, the righteous Patriarch of Antioch*], Aleppo, 1708, 138 pages. Kitāb al-Nubū'āt al-šarīf, tubi'a hadītan bi-mahrūsāt halab almu hammiyat sanat 'alf wa-sab'ami'at wa-tamāniyat masīhiyyat bihtimām al-'āb al-mufham wa-

7 QDDORAH, Wahid. *Op. cit.*, pp. 120-121.

8 FEODOROV, Ioana. Early Arabic printing in Aleppo, 1706-1711. *Op. cit.*, pp. 1-9.

s-sayyid al-mu‘lam kīryū kīr Kīrillūs almukram al-Batriyark al-‘antākiyy. the book was printed at the expense of Patriarch Cyril Ibn al-Za‘īm.

6. In 1708 also: **Chapters from the Holy Gospels, Fusūl min al-‘Inḡīl al-Muqaddas**. It comprises a selection of scriptural texts concerning the feast of the whole year, with explanations on the sections that need to be read on Sundays and feast days.

7. In 1708 also, Book of **the Epistles (or The Apostle)**, containing the Acts of the Holy Apostles and the Epistles of Paul the Apostlem Kitāb al-Rasā‘il al-muštamil ‘alā ‘amal al-Rusul al-Qiddīsīn warasā‘il Būlos al-Rasūl. This book is of 404 pages.

8. In 1709, **Holy Book of Psalms, Kitāb al-Zabūr al-Ilahiyy** was reprinted. (first time it was printed in 1706).

9. In 1711, **Homilies of Athanasius, Mawā‘il ‘Aanāsiyūs** of 421 pages. It comprises sixty-six homilies by Patriarch Athanasius IV of Jerusalem (1460–1468?), translated from Greek into Arabic by Athanasius Dabbās.

9. b) In 1711 also, **Homilies of St John Chrysostom on Easter Feast, Maqālat li-l-Qiddīs Yūhannā Famm al-Dahab fī ‘īd al-Fash**. colligate with the former text.

10. In August 1711, The Book of **Paraklitiki (Octoechos, or Book of prayers)**, or “the Comforter”, comprising eight tones, the Canon of the Paraklisis, the Troparia (gr. exapostelarian) and the Canons for Matins (Orthros), newly printed now in the city of Aleppo, following writings of Syria, with labour and toil, by the righteous Father Kir Athanasius, former Patriarch of Antioch, in the Christian year one thousand and eleven], Kitāb Al-Bāraklītīkī, ‘ayy al-Mu‘azzī al-hāwī ‘alā al-tamāniya ‘alhān wa-qānūnī al bāraklīsī wa-l-iksābūstlāriyāt wa-l-‘iyūtīnā tubī‘a al-‘ān hadīt^{an} bi-madīna Halab min ‘a‘māl Sūriyā bi-sa‘y wa-ḡtīhād al-‘ab al-mukarram Kīr ‘Atānāsiyūs al-batriyark al-‘antākī sābiq^{an} sana ‘alf sab‘ami‘a wa-‘ihdā ‘ašar masīhiyya. The book is divided in two parts, 314 and 492 pages respectively, numbered from 1 to 806, with catchword in the lower left corner. It is a translation from Greek, revised by Athanasius Dabbās.

11. In 1711 also, **Brief Epistle on repentance and confession**, which specifies what the repentant and the confessor have to do, (or) The String of well-knotted pearls of the great mystery of repentance and confession, Risālat waḡīzat tūdiḥu kayfiyyat al-tawbat wa-l-ī‘tirāf [...] wa-fīmā yalzamu al-mu‘tarif wa-l-mu‘arrif [‘aw] silk al-durr al-nalīm fī sirr al-tawbat wa-l-ī‘tirāf al-qawīm, of 170 pages. This is an anthology of texts by unidentified Greek authors, translated and adapted into Arabic. A note in the text states that the author collected these texts from the “teachers’ garden” (bustān al-mu‘allimīn).

Ioana Feodorov mentioned the belief that the copy of Dimitrie Cantemir's Divan translated by the Syrian Patriarch into Arabic in 1704-1705 came from the latter's library. Identified in 1969 by the late Virgil Canea as a previously unknown version of Cantemir's first book (Iasi, 1698)⁹

Conclusion:

Because books are a foundation stone in the cultural relations between Syria and Romania, these books strengthen the spiritual relationship between the communities in the two countries. Additionally, this printing press played an important role in the shift inside the Syrian society, and opened the gate for more books to be printed with the help of Walachia after the death of Athanasius III Dabbas as the five books with Arabic letter types printed in the Romanian principalities by Patriarch Sylvester of Antioch (1724–1766) between 1745-1747.

9 FEODOROV, Ioana. *The Romanian Contribution to Arabic Printing*. Bucuresti: Editura Biblioteca Bucurestilor, 2009, p. 44.

Moreover, the warm welcoming of the Wallachian Prince and people, and the support they gave to the Syrian clerics played a very important role in bringing the two peoples of Syria and Romania closer, and resulted in a strong cultural relation till our days.

The two books printed in the Romanian principalities and the eleven books printed in Syria by the printing press brought to Syria from the Romanian principalities are still till our days in the Syrian libraries. These thirteen books were found in the important search conducted between 1968 and 1980 in Syria by Candea Virgil when he followed the books with Romanian traces in Syria.

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