

From Eastern Europe to the Christian Near East: The Transfer of Iconographic Elements in Printed Books, 16th to 18th Centuries*

ALINA KONDRATIUK**

This paper examines the iconographic and decorative features of early modern books printed for Arabic-speaking Christian communities, drawing on research conducted within the TYPARABIC project. It highlights Romania's central role in shaping the visual language of Arabic printing and situates this activity within wider European artistic networks. The study shows how engravers combined Western and Eastern models, creatively adapting rather than directly copying their sources. Particular attention is given to recurring motifs, such as title-page ornaments, heraldic imagery, illustrations, headpieces and tailpieces, which reveal complex patterns of transmission across regions and confessions. The material demonstrates the mobility of visual models between Europe and the Arab Christian East and underscores the need for further iconographic research on this interconnected artistic landscape.

Keywords: *Arab Christians, Athanasius III Dabbās, Sylvester of Antioch, Romanian Principalities, printing, book decoration, early modern iconography*

1. Towards a Meta-Narrative of Arabic Printing: Romanian Contributions and European Contexts

This research brings together iconographic studies of the early modern book for Arab Christians that my colleagues and I have conducted within the TYPARABIC project since 2021. I aim to show Romania's contribution to the development of Arabic printing in the Christian East, and at the same time to place the activity of early modern printing presses that served Arabic-speaking Christian communities within a broader European context. I will discuss how iconographic models moved from West

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** Alina Kondratiuk, PhD, Senior Researcher in the ERC-funded TYPARABIC project, Institute for Southeast European Studies, Romanian Academy, Calea 13 Septembrie 13, Bucharest, 050731, Romania, alina.kondratjuk@gmail.com.

to East, how artistic influences circulated, and how the Romanian Principalities acted as an intermediary in this wider process of transmission.

Printing in Arabic type was one of the main goals of the Christian Arabs of the Ottoman provinces since the first half of the 17th century.¹ This became especially clear from the second half of the 17th century, when several patriarchs of the Antiochian Church made it a priority within their broader mission to support the spiritual and social development of their communities.² However, they did not have the means to achieve this on their own, so they sought external patronage. Their first and most substantial support came from the rulers of the Romanian Principalities, who helped them initiate printing, organise it and further develop it.³ The earliest Arabic-type books in Eastern Europe were produced in Wallachia – in Snagov and Bucharest – before this printing activity expanded in their homeland, in Aleppo and Beirut.⁴

Throughout the eighteenth century, the interaction between printing presses producing books for Arab Christians in Greater Syria and those in the Romanian Principalities remained close. These issues have been examined in detail in the foundational monograph by Dr Ioana Feodorov.⁵

The issues of ornamentation and the borrowing of iconographic motifs were also raised in the publications of other members of the TYPARABIC project team, in particular, Charbel Nassif,⁶ Oana Iacobovschi,⁷ and myself.⁸ Summarizing the studies mentioned above, I aim to highlight the art-historical dimension of this topic and to outline a broader metatext.

¹ Ioana Feodorov, “Christian Arabic Books Printed in the 18th Century as the Focus of Recent Research,” *ARAM*, 35 (2023): 417.

² Idem, “Beginnings of Arabic Printing in Ottoman Syria (1706–1711). The Romanians’ Part in Athanasios Dabbās’s Achievements,” *ARAM* 25, no. 1–2 (2013): 231.

³ *Ibidem*, 238–39.

⁴ *Ibidem*; idem, *Arabic Printing for the Christians in Ottoman Lands. The East-European Connection* (Berlin-Boston: De Gruyter, 2023), esp. 151–54.

⁵ Idem, *Arabic Printing*, 143–62, 227–43, 263–308.

⁶ Charbel Nassif, “Les gravures des livres imprimés au XVIII^e siècle au Monastère Saint-Jean-Baptiste à Khenchara – Mont-Liban,” *Collectanea Christiana Orientalia* 21 (2024): 63–96. Dr Nassif analysed the activity of the St John’s Monastery printing press in Khinshāra (Basilian Choueirite Order, Dayr al-Shuwayr, Lebanon), which produced books for the Melkite Greek Catholic community.

⁷ Oana Iacobovschi, “Woodcut Tailpieces of the First Arabic Books Printed by Athanasios Dabbās in Aleppo,” in *Icons, Ornaments, and Other Charms of Christian Arabic Books: Second Volume of Collected Works of the TYPARABIC Project*, eds. Oana Iacobovschi, Samuel Noble and Ioana Feodorov (Berlin-Boston: De Gruyter, 2024), 389–422, in open access at <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111068787-015>.

⁸ Alina Kondratiuk, “Patriarchs’ and Bishops’ Emblems in Printed Books. The Journey of Prototypes from the West to the East,” in *Icons, Ornaments, and Other Charms*, 459–92, in open access at <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111068787-017>.

Although this essay does not address all visual elements included in the TYPARABIC project database, it seeks to demonstrate the potential for further iconographic research in this field. To this end, I systematise the iconographic elements of book design to illustrate the interactions among Romanian, Western European, and, particularly, Italian printing presses of the early modern period.

2. Early Arabic Printing: Stages, Centres, and Confessional Dynamics

Historians of the book distinguish several separate stages in the development of Arabic printing in Eastern Europe and the Christian Near East.⁹

The initial stage is defined by the collaborative work of Athanasius III Dabbās, Patriarch of Antioch (1685–1694 and 1720–1724), and Antim the Iberian (Rom. *Ivireanul*),¹⁰ a distinguished scholar and printer who later became Metropolitan of Ungro – Wallachia (1708–1716). Although only two editions (in Greek and Arabic) were produced, their significance is difficult to overestimate.¹¹

The second stage comprises the books printed in Aleppo between 1706 and 1711 by Athanasius III Dabbās in Arabic, with Arabic type, using typographic tools brought from Bucharest.¹²

The third stage includes the books printed at the Monastery of Saint Sabbas in Iași, Moldavia (1745–1747), and at the Monastery of Saint Spyridon in Bucharest, Wallachia (1747), by Sylvester I of Cyprus, Patriarch of Antioch and successor to Athanasius III Dabbās. These editions were likewise entirely printed in Arabic.¹³

⁹ See Feodorov, *Arabic Printing*, 143–62, 227–43, 263–308; idem, “Christian Arabic Books,” 415; Nassif, “Les gravures des livres,” 64–66.

¹⁰ Anthim (born Andrei) the Iberian, also known as the Georgian (c. 1650–1716), was not only an excellent editor and printer but also a skilled engraver, capable of designing exotic typefaces and casting sorts for many scripts. See Policarp Chițulescu, coord. ed., *Antim Ivireanul. Opera tipografică* (Bucharest: Institutul Cultural Român, 2016).

¹¹ See Feodorov, “New Data on the Early Arabic Printing in the Levant and Its Connections to the Romanian Presses,” *RESEE* LVI, (2018): 197–98; idem, “Christian Arabic Books,” 417.

¹² Idem, “Beginnings of Arabic Printing,” 231–60; idem, “Recent Findings Regarding the Early Arabic Printing in Eastern Ottoman Provinces,” *RESEE* LVIII (2020): 91–105; idem, *Arabic Printing*, 263–85; idem, “Christian Arabic Books,” 418–19; Chițulescu, “The Last Journey of Patriarch Athanasios III Dabbās to Wallachia and the Editorial Program of the Printing Presses of Aleppo and Bucharest,” *Philobiblon. Transylvanian Journal of Multidisciplinary Research in the Humanities* XXX, no. 1, 2025: 7–20.

¹³ Feodorov, “New Data on the Early Arabic Printing,” 197–233; idem, “The Arabic Book of the Divine Liturgies Printed in 1745 in Iași by Patriarch Sylvester of Antioch,” *Scrinium* 16 (2020): 1–19; idem, “Sylvester of Antioch’s Arabic Books Printed in 1747 at Bucharest. Recent Findings,” *Scrinium* 19 (2023): 5–27; Chițulescu, “Livres

The fourth stage includes the books printed by Patriarch Sylvester of Antioch in Beirut after 1750, also in Arabic.¹⁴

Almost parallel to stages three and four, and starting slightly earlier, the well-known scholar ‘Abdallāh Zākhir¹⁵ established a printing press for Melkite Greek Catholics at the Monastery of Saint John the Baptist in Khinshāra (1733–1899). To date, 33 books produced by this press have been identified, 22 of which date to the eighteenth century. Several titles were reprinted multiple times, as the need arose.¹⁶

It is also important to note that there was a clear difference in content between the books produced through the efforts of Athanasius III Dabbās and Patriarch Sylvester, on the one hand, and the earlier Arabic editions printed in Western Europe, as well as the books issued by the Monastery of Saint John the Baptist in Khinshāra, on the other.

As is well known, Christian Arabic books printed in Italy reached Eastern Christian communities since the sixteenth century.¹⁷ Their contents were reviewed from a dogmatic perspective to ensure conformity with the Catholic creed.¹⁸ By contrast, the printing activity of Dabbās and Sylvester emerged as a response to the spread of Catholicism.¹⁹ I would suggest that, nevertheless, Greek Catholics appreciated the editions of Athanasius III Dabbās and Patriarch Sylvester for the high artistic quality of their print and decoration. It is known that Arabic books produced in Snagov, Bucharest, Iași, and Aleppo also circulated among Greek Catholic communities on Mount Lebanon and were used by Christians of different confessions for more than a century.²⁰

3. Between East and West: Hybrid Aesthetics in Arabic Christian

polémiques imprimés en arabe, en Moldavie et en Valachie, au milieu du XVIIIe siècle”, *Scrinium* 20 (1), (2024): 106–136, <https://doi.org/10.1163/18177565-bja10115>.

¹⁴ Feodorov, *Arabic Printing*, 295–308.

¹⁵ On the biography of ‘Abdallāh Zākhir and the history of his printing press, see, Ronney El Gemayel, “‘Abd Allāh Zākhir,” in *Christian-Muslim Relations. A Bibliographical History*, eds. David Thomas and John Chesworth, vol. 12 (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 101–7.

¹⁶ Feodorov, *Arabic Printing*, 263–85; idem, “Christian Arabic Books,” 419; Nassif, “Les gravures des livres,” 63–96. As Dr Charbel Nassif has noted, the engravers of Shuwayr drew most of their decorative motifs from books previously printed in Aleppo, adapting them for their own editions.

¹⁷ Dmitriy Morozov, “Арабское Евангелие Даниила Апостола (К истории первой арабской типографии на Востоке)”, *Архив русской истории* 2 (1992): 203.

¹⁸ Feodorov, *Arabic Printing*, 97–98; idem, “Christian Arabic Books,” 416–17.

¹⁹ Idem, *Arabic Printing*, 119, 128; Nassif, “Les gravures des livres,” 64–65.

²⁰ Feodorov, *Arabic Printing*, 309–10; Nassif, “Les gravures des livres,” 79.

Printing

The ornamentation and design of books printed for Christian Arabs constitute a vivid and compelling chapter in the history of book design. These editions demonstrate that the engravers who worked on them drew on iconographic sources from a wide range of regions.²¹ Such crossregional borrowing was common practice in early modern Europe; Ukrainian engravers, for example, worked similarly, drawing inspiration from Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant models.²² In what follows, I will show that the engravers who decorated the editions produced for Arabic-speaking Christians adopted the same approach. The ornamentation and decorative program of these books may therefore be described as “eclectic.” Publications by Antim the Iberian and Athanasios Dabbās in the Romanian Principalities, the Aleppo editions produced by Dabbās between 1706 and 1711, the books issued by Patriarch Sylvester, and the volumes printed at the Monastery of Saint John the Baptist in Shuwayr combine elements of both Eastern and Western artistic traditions, and this mixture is among their most distinctive features.

According to my observations, the engravers who worked on books for Arab Christians – especially those active in the Aleppo press of Athanasios III Dabbās – did not simply copy European models. In many cases, they adapted the designs they found appealing to their own needs and artistic intentions. Direct copying is relatively rare; more often, we encounter a creative reworking of a chosen model.

For this reason, I group the decorative elements not by printing press but by design type. This approach makes it easier to demonstrate borrowings and influences. As much as possible, I also follow a chronological order, presenting the decorative elements that appear earlier first, and then those that emerged later. As it is not feasible to cover the entire range of visual motifs, I will focus on the most representative examples.

²¹ See Iacubovschi, “Woodcut Tailpieces,” 392. Dr Oana Iacubovschi has noted this point in her analysis of the Aleppo editions. In my view, this observation applies to all the publications within the corpus under consideration, which comprises 18th-century Arabic books printed in Eastern Europe and Greater Syria (present-day Syria and Lebanon).

²² Liudmyla Miliaieva, “Переддень бароко [Pereddien baroko]”, *Мистецтвознавство України: збірник наукових праць Академії мистецтв України* 1 (2000): 41–42.

3.1. Title pages, Colophons and Individual Elements of Their Decoration

A natural point of departure is the title page. It is noteworthy that in the books printed for Arab Christians there are no instances of direct borrowing in title-page design, even though such borrowings are well attested in Romanian editions of the same period. A characteristic example²³ is the title page of the *Anthologion* printed in Iași in 1755,²⁴ which closely reproduces the title page of the Lviv *Anthologion* of 1632.²⁵

However, we do not see this practice in books printed in Arabic script. It should also be noted that title pages of this kind are very rare in Christian Arabic editions. Compared with the title pages of early modern European books, these are quite specific. In most cases (with only a few exceptions), they are rather modest, and the main emphasis is placed on the text itself.

Often, the text on the title page is simply framed by a decorative border made of stylized geometric or vegetal motifs. Sometimes a small decorative element appears at the bottom of the page, resembling European tailpieces or headpieces. In some cases, several decorative elements appear together: for example, the lower part of a title page may include motifs that resemble both European headpieces and tailpieces. Their placement, however, leads to a reinterpretation of their role and meaning, since these elements now occupy the space traditionally reserved in European editions for the printers' devices.

Illustrative examples of this type of titlepage design can be seen in such editions as: *Book of the Divine Liturgies* printed by Antim the Iberian and Athanasios III Dabbās (Snagov, 1701) – here, the text on the title page is simply framed by a decorative border;²⁶ the Aleppo edition of the *Gospel* by Athanasios III Dabbās (1706): here, in the lower part of the title page, we see a decorative element that resembles a tailpiece.²⁷ On the title page of the 1776 *Gospel* printed at the Monastery of Saint John the

²³ Dr Anca Tatay has identified some examples. See Anca Elisabeta Tatay and Cornel Tatai-Baltă, "The Transfer of Ukrainian Engraving Models to Presses of the Romanian Lands in the 18th Century," in *Icons, Ornaments, and Other Charms*, 429–30, 447–48.

²⁴ Gligorie T[ipograf] and Sandul T[ipograf], title page in the *Anthologion*, Iași, 1755 (The Library of the Romanian Academy, from here on: B.A.R., Bucharest).

²⁵ Georgiy Hierodeacon, title page in the *Anthologion*, Lviv, 1632 (Vernadskyi National Library of Ukraine, Kyiv).

²⁶ My analysis relies on the first of the four copies held by the B.A.R. in Bucharest (CRV 130).

²⁷ My analysis relies on the unique copy of the B.A.R. in Bucharest (CRV 154A).

Baptist in Khinshāra, we see elements that recall both European headpieces and tailpieces, along with some smaller ornamental motifs.²⁸

It is worth noting that the layout of the final pages – whether concluding the entire volume or marking the end of individual sections – often mirrors the visual organization of the title pages. Their ornamental program remains similarly restrained: the same types of framing devices and minor decorative motifs are employed, and the overall visual hierarchy is preserved. In this way, the concluding pages echo the compositional logic of the title pages, reinforcing a consistent aesthetic structure throughout the book. Typical examples of such designs on final pages can be found in editions such as: *Book of the Holy and Pure Gospel* by Athanasios III Dabbās (Aleppo, 1706, final page with colophon and ornamental devices); the second version of this *Gospel*, bound in 1708 with the financial support of Hetman Ivan Mazepa (end of the foreword),²⁹ and *The Christian Guide (Al-Murshid al-Masīhī)* by Philippe d’Outreman, SJ (Shuwayr, 1738, colophon).³⁰

3.1.1. Candelabrum-Type Motifs

Some decorative elements placed on the title and final pages are particularly striking. First of all, let us mention the *candelabrum*-type motif. It appears in the lower part of the title page of the Aleppo *Gospel* of 1706 bound in 1708. Let us note that the candelabrum motifs are among the most widespread types of decorative elements in European Baroque and Renaissance book design. They were used as tailpieces, ornamental fillers, or as devices that visually “close” the composition of a page. The appearance of such a motif in the Aleppo *Gospel* indicates a deliberate adoption of European printing models. A motif closely related in character to the decorative element on the title page of the aforementioned *Gospel* is the candelabrum-type tailpiece found in the Roman edition of the *Horologion* printed in 1677 (Fig. 1).³¹

Candelabrum-type motifs also appear in the decoration of headpieces and title-page frames. A characteristic example of the use of this motif

²⁸ *Book of the Holy and Pure Gospel, or the splendidly shining Lamp*, Shuwayr, 1776 (B.A.R.).

²⁹ *Book of the Holy and Pure Gospel, or the resplendently shining Lamp*, Aleppo, 1706, bound in 1708 (B.A.R.).

³⁰ Philippe d’Outreman, SJ, *The Christian Guide*, Shuwayr, 1738 (Forschungsbibliothek, Erfurt–Gotha Branch).

³¹ *Book of Hours*, Rome, 1677 (Library of the Pontifical Greek College of Saint Athanasius, Rome).

in headpiece decoration can be found in the *Sluzhebnyk* (*Service Book*) printed at the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra press in 1639.³²

An example of its use in the decoration of a titlepage frame appears in the Venetian edition of the Greek *Apostolos* printed in 1720.³³ However, the closest parallel can be found in the 1750 Romanian edition of the *Book of Hours* (*Ceaslov*), printed in Iași (Fig. 2).³⁴ We observe that the block used to print the image is partially worn, most likely due to frequent use. I believe that the Aleppo and Iași editions ultimately relied on the same prototype, which remains to be identified.

It should be noted that the corpus of editions for Arab Christians that we examine includes several versions of this visual motif. Another variant of the candelabrum-type ending appears in the Iași edition of 1746, printed by Patriarch Sylvester, of the *Book of the Rule of Justice and the Transmission of Truth* (*Kitāb qaḍā al-ḥaqq wa-naql al-ṣidq*), written by Nektarios, Patriarch of Jerusalem (Fig. 3).³⁵ And exactly the same tailpiece is presented in the Iași Octoechos of 1747.³⁶ In Western European editions we can find many similar motifs. For example, a compositionally close tailpiece appears in the *Gospel* printed in Venice in 1671.³⁷

3.1.2. The Diamond-Shaped Motif

Another common decorative element that resembles a tailpiece in editions produced for Arabic-speaking Christians is the diamond-shaped motif,³⁸ which we encounter, in particular, on the front page of the Aleppo edition of the *Gospel* (1706). This motif has very close analogies in the Iași prints. A characteristic example is the tailpiece in the book *Apostolic Net*, published in Greek in 1756.³⁹ Although we do not observe literal copying here, it is most likely that both the Aleppo tailpiece and the one from the Iași edition were based on the same pattern. A very similar dia-

³² *Service Book* (*Sluzhebnyk*), Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra, 1639 (Vernadskyi National Library of Ukraine, Kyiv).

³³ *Apostolos*, Venice, 1720 (Library of the Pontifical Greek College of Saint Athanasius, Rome).

³⁴ *Ceaslov* (*Book of Hours*), Iași, 1750 (Library of the Holy Synod, Bucharest).

³⁵ Nektarios of Jerusalem, *Book of the Rule of Justice and the Transmission of Truth* (Iași, 1746), last page (Bucharest: B.A.R., CRV 250C).

³⁶ *Octoechos*, Iași, 1749 (Library of the Holy Synod, Bucharest).

³⁷ *Evangelion* (*Holy Gospel*), Venice, 1671 (Library of the Pontifical Greek College of Saint Athanasius, Rome).

³⁸ See also the analysis of these tailpieces in the paper by Iacubovschi, "Woodcut Tailpieces," 401–403, 411–12.

³⁹ *The Apostolic Net* (Το Αποστολικόν Δικτύων), Iași, 1756 (Library of the Holy Synod, Bucharest).

mond-shaped tailpiece can also be seen, for example, in the edition *Vita del B. Nicolo Albergati...* by Fr. Buonaventura Cavallo, Rome, 1654.⁴⁰ It should be added that early modern Western European book design features numerous comparable tailpieces.

3.1.3. Title Page of the *Paraklitiki (Oktoechos)*, or “the Comforter” (1711)

A rare example of a fully developed title-page design among books printed for Arabic-speaking Christians is the title page of the *Oktoechos* published in Aleppo in 1711 by Athanasius III Dabbās.⁴¹ The title page of the book features an elaborate narrative composition with numerous figural elements. As a reminder, in the vast majority of books produced for Arabic Christians, the title page typically contains only an ornamental motif and (or) a decorative frame. Here, however, we encounter a complex, multi-figure composition.

At the bottom centre of the title page, we see a seated prophet holding a scroll and giving a blessing. In Western European title pages, this position was most often occupied by a printer’s device, a heraldic composition, or a cartouche with the book’s imprint. I would suggest that the image in the Aleppo *Oktoechos* functions, to a certain extent, as a substitute for a printer’s mark. It is also possible that a Western model was used here. For example, a very similar composition appears on the title page of *Annotazioni sopra gli Evangelii* (Venice, 1590), printed by Francesco de’ Franceschi Senese.⁴² Even if this specific image was not the direct source, the engraver was clearly working with a similar model.

3.2. Reverse Side of Title Pages and Heraldic Compositions

Heraldic compositions found in several publications produced for Arabic-speaking Christians are no less significant for analysis. This is the case, in particular, in both editions prepared by Athanasius III Dabbās and Antim: the *Book of the Divine Liturgies* (Snagov, 1701) (Fig. 4) and the *Horologion* (Bucharest, 1702). On the reverse side of the title pages of both editions, we see the coat of arms of the prince of Wallachia Constantin Brâncoveanu.

⁴⁰ Fr. Buonaventura Cavallo, *Vita del B. Nicolo Albergati*, Rome, 1654 (Library of the Pontifical Greek College of Saint Athanasius, Rome).

⁴¹ My analysis relies on the unique copy of the *Paraklitiki (Oktoechos)*, Aleppo, 1711, held by the B.A.R. (CRV 161A).

⁴² *Annotazioni sopra gli Evangelii*, Venice, 1590 (Vatican Apostolic Library).

Comparable examples also appear in the Aleppo prints of Athanasius III Dabbās: the *Holy Book of the Psalms* (Aleppo, 1706),⁴³ in which the verso of the title page also features the coat of arms of Constantin Brâncoveanu; the *Book of the Holy and Pure Gospel, or the Resplendently Shining Lamp*, bound by Hetman Ivan Mazepa (1708), which includes his coat of arms; and the *Book of the Holy and Pure Gospel, or the Resplendently Shining Lamp* sponsored by Danylo Apostol (1706 edition, bound in 1708), where we see the coat of arms of the Ukrainian Hetman Danylo Apostol.⁴⁴

Heraldic compositions can also be found in the editions of Patriarch Sylvester: for example, Ioannes Mavrokordatos's coat of arms in the *Book of the Rule of Justice and the Transmission of Truth* (*Kitāb qaḍā al-haqq wa-naql al-sidq*) by Patriarch Nektarios of Jerusalem (Iași, 1746).⁴⁵

Such compositions were traditionally placed in early modern publications from Eastern Europe, particularly in Romanian and Ukrainian books. In the Romanian editions produced by Antim, we also find the same coat of arms of Constantin Brâncoveanu, for example, in the Greek-language book *The Orthodox Confession of Faith* (Snagov, 1699).⁴⁶ In early modern Ukrainian editions, similar heraldic compositions were likewise an integral part of the book's design. On the verso of the title page, the patron's coat of arms – whether of a secular or ecclesiastical figure – was typically displayed, accompanied by a laudatory poem. A characteristic example of Ukrainian ecclesiastical heraldry is the coat of arms of Varlaam Yasynskyi, which appears in Stefan Yavorskyi's *Arctos and Anctarctos* (1690).⁴⁷ However, in the books printed for Arab Christians, this feature appears only rarely, mostly in cases where the publishers wished to express special gratitude to a foreign patron. As we can see, these were princes of the Romanian Principalities and Ukrainian hetmans.

In this context, we should also mention the hierarch's emblem placed in the Arabic *Akathist* (Fig. 5),⁴⁸ possibly published at Bucharest in 1747.⁴⁹ Although it is not placed on the verso of the title page, it is typologically

⁴³ *Holy Book of the Psalms*, Aleppo, 1706 (B.A.R.).

⁴⁴ *Book of the Holy and Pure Gospel, or the Resplendently Shining Lamp*, Aleppo, 1706 (Daniel Apostol sponsor, State Archives of Russia of the Ancient Acts, Moscow, Russia).

⁴⁵ Nektarios of Jerusalem, *Book of the Rule of Justice and the Transmission of Truth*, Iași, 1746 (B.A.R.).

⁴⁶ *The Orthodox Confession of Faith*, Snagov, 1699 (B.A.R.).

⁴⁷ Stefan Yavorskyi, *Arctos and Antarctos*, Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra Press, 1690 (Vernadskyi National Library of Ukraine, Kyiv).

⁴⁸ Arabic *Akathist*, Bucharest (?), 1747 (?) (private collection).

⁴⁹ This attribution belongs to Archim. Policarp Chițulescu. See Chițulescu, "Noutăți despre întâia tipografie arabă din Moldova și despre activitatea tipografului Duca

close to the images discussed above. Most researchers of this image hold the view that this emblem belongs to Patriarch Sylvester of Antioch.⁵⁰ At the same time, it continues to intrigue researchers, since it remains impossible to determine with certainty what this emblem actually represents. It may be Patriarch Sylvester's personal emblem, a printer's device, or simply a tailpiece – albeit an unusual one, as tailpieces typically do not include insignia of ecclesiastical authority (a cross, a staff, and a mitre).⁵¹

The difficulties in studying this image are compounded by the fact that it survives in only one known copy of the Arabic *Akathist*, now held in a private collection, and all surveys were based on a (fairly good) scan. The image may be attributed to the publisher and engraver Duca Sotiriovici.⁵² Whoever the creator was, he was clearly familiar with book design traditions in both Western and Eastern Europe.⁵³ Yet, in my opinion, the most direct source of inspiration was the heraldry of Moldavian and Wallachian rulers. This emblem is particularly close to the coat of arms of Constantin Brâncoveanu.

3.3. *Deesis* Compositions

Some editions in the corpus under consideration include a fullpage *Deesis* composition placed at the beginning of the book. For example, we find this image in the Greek-Arabic *Book of the Divine Liturgies* of 1701 by Antim and Athanasius III Dabbās.

Sotiriovici din Thassos,” *Apulum, S. Historia & Patromonium, Supplementum*, no. LXI, 2024: 79–116.

⁵⁰ See, e.g., the description of this emblem provided by Dr. Ioana Feodorov, which supports the opinion that it is the emblem of Patriarch Sylvester of Antioch: “The Orthodox crutch and the cross are placed in an X shape under the Orthodox mitre. Other decorative elements, such as the lambrequins and the crowned characters, are baroque in style, influenced by the Western or perhaps the Ukrainian heraldic art. In the centre of the emblem, we can read «Silvestros», printed in Greek letters. Beside Sylvester of Chios, no other Patriarch of Antioch is known to have held this name in the 18th century. In the Romanian lands, the monogram was included in the bishops' emblems precisely in the 18th century, when a trend was set. We have, therefore, strong support in thinking that the design of this particular hierarchy's emblem was influenced by examples from East European Orthodox lands.” See Feodorov, “New Data on the Early Arabic Printing”, 219.

⁵¹ For an analysis of the various hypotheses concerning this image, see Kondratiuk, “Patriarchs' and Bishops' Emblems”, 477–81.

⁵² See Chițulescu, “Noutăți despre întâia tipografie”, 96; Kondratiuk, “Patriarchs' and Bishops' Emblems”, 477.

⁵³ *Ibidem*, 478–79.

Earlier, Antim had used the same composition in Snagov, in the *Akathist* of 1698,⁵⁴ and again in the *Proskynetarion of the Holy Mountain Athos* in 1701.⁵⁵

Dr. Ioana Feodorov has provided a list of Romanian editions in which this composition is reproduced almost identically: *Ceasoslov (Book of Hours)*, Târgoviște, 1715; Slavonic *Book of Hours*, Bucharest, 1703, *Brief Teaching for the Mystery of Repentance (Învățătură pe scurt pentru taina pocăinții)*, 1705, *Church Teaching (Învățătură besericească)*, Târgoviște, 1710, *Book of Hours (Horologion)*, Târgoviște, 1715.⁵⁶ Later, in a mirrored form,⁵⁷ the same composition appears in the Beirut *Holy Book of the Psalms (Kitāb al-Zabūr al-Sharīf)*, printed in 1752.⁵⁸ This is a striking example of the continuity between the Romanian printing tradition and the emerging Arabic presses.

Dr. Feodorov has noted that for the Beirut *Psalter*, the block was carved by a novice, which resulted in a rather awkward rendering. Moreover, the image was carved incorrectly on the woodblock, in a mirror-image, which caused the two holy figures flanking Christ – the Mother of God and John the Baptist – to appear inverted. Inverted images are also found in early European printed books, before the skill of reversing images during the preparation of woodcuts or copper plates had been mastered.⁵⁹ The material illustrates both the continuity of Romanian visual models in Arabic printing and, to some extent, the technical limitations that led to mistakes such as the inverted Beirut rendering.

3.4. Annunciation Compositions

In the context of this discussion, I would also like to mention the illustration of the *Annunciation* found in the Arabic *Akathist* examined above (1747?) (Fig. 6). It appears on the first of the surviving pages, marked with the number 4 in pencil. This composition has been analysed in detail by Dr Ioana Feodorov,⁶⁰ who identified several very close compositional parallels in Romanian printed books. Thus, an almost identical illustration appears in the Snagov edition of the *Akathist* of 1698. Very similar compositions can also be found in the following Romanian editions: *Ceaslov slavonesc și românesc* (Bucharest, 1703), printed by Antim;

⁵⁴ *Akathist*, Snagov, 1698 (Library of the Holy Synod, Bucharest).

⁵⁵ *Proskynetarion of the Holy Mount Athos*, Snagov, 1701 (B.A.R.).

⁵⁶ Feodorov, *Arabic Printing*, 302.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁸ *The Holy Book of the Psalms*, Beirut, 1752 (Uppsala University Library).

⁵⁹ Feodorov, *Arabic Printing*, 302.

⁶⁰ *Ibidem*, 304–307; Feodorov, “New Data on the Early Arabic Printing”, 217–18.

Ceaslov (Târgoviște, 1715), printed by Gheorghe Radovici; *Acatist câtră Prea Sfânta Născătoare...* (Buzău, 1743), printed by Ioan Stoicovici; *Ceaslov* (Râmnic, 1745), printed by Dimitrie Pandovici; *Ceaslov* (Râmnic, 1753, a virtually identical version signed “Pop. Costandin”); *Ceaslov* (Bucharest, 1767) and *Ceaslov* (Bucharest, 1777).⁶¹

However, this illustration is absent from the *Horologion* printed by Antim and Athanasius III Dabbās in Bucharest in 1702, as well as from the Aleppo books of 1706–1711. According to my observations, a very similar composition is also present in some editions from the Iași presses, including: *Ceaslov (Book of Hours)*, Iași, 1743–1746 (Fig. 7),⁶² and *Ceaslov (Book of Hours)*, Iași, 1750.⁶³

It should be added that this version of the *Annunciation* iconography was extremely widespread. Closely related compositions appear in earlier Venetian and Ukrainian editions: for example, the *Annunciation* in the Greek *Menaion* (March), Venice, 1584,⁶⁴ and that in the *Akathists* printed by the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra Press in 1629.⁶⁵

The repeated appearance of nearly identical compositions in Venetian, Ukrainian, Moldavian, Wallachian and eventually Arabic books shows how visual models travelled along the same routes as printers, wood-blocks, and missionaries. This case demonstrates that the transmission of iconographic patterns was not accidental but formed part of a broader and sustained exchange that shaped the visual language of Christian book production in the early modern period.

3.5. *Deesis* Compositions on the Frontispiece and Title Pages of Books

It is also important to consider other figurative elements in the design of Arabic editions and to place them within the broader context of European art. Of particular interest is a kind of headpiece in the form of an extended *Deesis* composition on the opening page of the already mentioned Aleppo *Octoechos* of 1711. This composition has several close parallels in European printed books. It appears that its prototype was a Venetian engraving. Variants of this composition can be found in several Venetian

⁶¹ Feodorov, *Arabic Printing*, 304–305.

⁶² *Ceaslov [Book of Hours]*, Iași, 1743 – 1746 (Library of the Holy Synod, Bucharest).

⁶³ *Ceaslov [Book of Hours]*, Iași, 1750 (Library of the Holy Synod, Bucharest).

⁶⁴ *Menaion (March)*, Venice, 1584 (Library of the Pontifical Greek College of Saint Athanasius, Rome).

⁶⁵ *Akathists*, Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra Press, 1629 (Vernadskyi National Library of Ukraine, Kyiv).

editions, including the *Octoechos* of 1600 (Fig. 8)⁶⁶ and the *Gospel* of 1671.⁶⁷ The closest parallel to the image in the Aleppo *Octoechos* seems to be the version in the 1671 *Gospel*, which was likely its direct model.

I believe that these Venetian editions were well known in the Romanian Principalities. For example, the *Deesis* composition placed at the top of the title page of Antim's *Gospel* of 1697 (Snagov) is structurally very similar, although it represents a more condensed version of the Venetian *Deesis*. A closely related composition can also be seen at the top of the title page in the Tbilisi edition of the *Gospel* of 1709, printed by Mihail Ștefan (Mihail Stepaneshvili), a disciple of Antim.⁶⁸

3.6. Tailpieces with Angels (Putti)

The image of the so-called “angel-putto” often serves as a tailpiece in books printed for Arab Christian communities. In particular, it appears in editions produced in Aleppo and Shuwayr, such as the *Oktoechos* (Aleppo, 1711), Athanasios III Dabbās's *Brief Epistles on Repentance and Confession* (Aleppo, 1711) (Fig. 9),⁶⁹ and the Arabic translation of *Contempt for the Vanities of the World* by Diego de Estella (Shuwayr, 1740)⁷⁰ and others. At present, it is difficult to say which specific image served as the direct prototype for this motif. However, it should be noted that similar representations, some more or less close to this image, were widespread in early modern European printed books. The geographical range of such editions is remarkably broad. This motif is found across both Orthodox and Catholic book-design traditions, including books printed in the Romanian Principalities.

Most often, the “angel-putto” motif appears as a tailpiece, but it can also be found as a decorative element in other components of book design. Examples of its use as a tailpiece are present in the following European editions: *Sacrum Elaeochrismaton* (Ελαιοχρισμάτων), Rome,

⁶⁶ *Paraklitiki (Oktoechos)*, Venice, 1600 (Library of the Pontifical Greek College of Saint Athanasius, Rome).

⁶⁷ *Evangelion (Gospel Book)*, Venice, 1671 (Library of the Pontifical Greek College of Saint Athanasius, Rome).

⁶⁸ *Gospel*, Tbilisi, 1709 (B.A.R.). See Vera Tchentsova's essay in this issue of *RES*.

⁶⁹ *Brief Epistle on Repentance and Confession*, Aleppo, 1711 (Bibliothèque Orientale, Beirut).

⁷⁰ Diego de Estella, *Contempt for the Vanities of the World*, Shuwayr, 1740 (Université Saint-Esprit de Kaslik, Lebanon).

1627;⁷¹ *Service Book* (*Sluzhebnik*), Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra Press, 1639;⁷² Fr. Buonaventura Cavallo, *Vita del B. Nicolo Albergati*..., Rome, 1654;⁷³ and *Îndreptarea legii* (*Code of Law*), Târgoviște, 1652.⁷⁴ These examples could be multiplied.

This motif could also function as part of a headpiece or as an element of a title-page frame. In particular, it is quite widespread as a constituent element of the title-page compositions in Kyiv and Lviv editions. For example, it appears at the zenith of the arch that frames the text on the title page of the *Service Book* (*Liturgiarion*) printed at the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra press in 1620.⁷⁵ We can see a similar image on the title pages of the *Euchologion* printed at the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra in 1646⁷⁶ and the *Anthologion* issued by the Lviv Brotherhood Press in 1694.⁷⁷ In these cases, the motif crowns the book's title. Comparably, the angel-putto image appears on the title page of the Romanian and Greek *Gospel* printed by Antim the Iberian in Bucharest in 1693.⁷⁸ These are only a few examples, which could easily be supplemented. As elements of the frontispiece, similar images of angel-putti also appear in the letters of absolution (in Romanian) issued by Patriarch Sylvester of Antioch.⁷⁹

This motif can also be found in heraldic compositions. In particular, it crowns the coat of arms of Ivan Mazepa in the Aleppo *Gospel* of 1706 (bound in 1708). However, a much earlier example of this motif placed above a heraldic composition can be seen in the *Evangelhelie* (*Gospel*) printed in Braşov in 1581.⁸⁰

In my view, the closest parallel to the angel motif found in the Aleppo and Shuwayr editions is the depiction of two similar angel-putti in the

⁷¹ *Sacrum Elaeoichrismaton* (Ελαιοχρισμάτων), Rome, 1627 (Library of the Pontifical Greek College of Saint Athanasius, Rome).

⁷² *Service Book* (*Sluzhebnik*), Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra Press, 1639 (Vernadskyi National Library of Ukraine).

⁷³ Fr. Buonaventura Cavallo, *Vita del B. Nicolo Albergati*, Rome, 1654 (Library of the Pontifical Greek College of Saint Athanasius, Rome).

⁷⁴ *Îndreptarea legii* (*Code of Law*), Târgoviște, 1652 (B.A.R.).

⁷⁵ *Service Book* (*Liturgiarion*), Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra Press, 1620 (Vernadskyi National Library of Ukraine).

⁷⁶ *Evhologion*, Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra Press, 1646, front page (Vernadskyi National Library of Ukraine).

⁷⁷ *Anthologion*, Lviv Brotherhood Press, 1694 (Museum of Books and Printing of Ukraine, Kyiv).

⁷⁸ *Gospel*, Bucharest, 1693 (B.A.R.).

⁷⁹ Sylvester of Antioch, *Letter of Absolution* (in Romanian), probably Bucharest, ca. 1730 (Collection Foi Volante 1323, B.A.R.); see: Mihai Țipău, *Sylvester of Antioch. Life and Achievements of an 18th-Century Christian Orthodox Patriarch* (Berlin-Boston: De Gruyter, 2024), 236–37, 390.

⁸⁰ *Evangelhelie* (*Gospel*), Braşov, 1581 (B.A.R.).

headpiece of the *Paterikon* printed at the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra press in 1678 (Fig. 10). In this composition, three medallions contain a *Deesis* arranged as a traditional *trimorphon*: the central bust of Christ is flanked by angel-putti whose heads are surrounded by halos.⁸¹ These figures closely resemble the angels in the above-mentioned Arabic editions. It is therefore highly likely that this Kyiv headpiece served as a direct prototype for the Arabic composition in later books.

The angel-putto thus became a recognizable and flexible element of early modern book design. The widespread diffusion of this motif suggests not only the mobility of engravings and ornamental models across Europe and the Eastern Mediterranean but also the permeability of artistic traditions among Orthodox and Catholic printing centres.

3.7. Headpieces with the “Green Man”

One of the most refined decorative elements found in early modern editions produced for Arabic-speaking Christians is the headpiece depicting the so-called “Green Man”. In particular, this headpiece appears in the Aleppo edition of the *Octoechos* of 1711.

This decorative element also has numerous analogies in Western European printed books. Particularly close compositions appear as frontispieces in *Vacationes Autumnales* (Paris, 1620) (Fig. 11),⁸² as well as in John of Damascus, *Showing Faith*, included in the *Liturghier (Service Book)* (Fig. 12), Iași, 1715.⁸³ Similar examples could also easily be offered.

Conclusion

This recurrence of the Renaissance-derived ornamental motifs across Arabic books demonstrates the remarkable mobility of visual models in the early modern period. Their adaptation in diverse confessional and regional contexts reveals a shared decorative vocabulary that transcended cultural boundaries and shaped the visual language of Christian book design.

In the early modern period, the decoration of books produced for Arabic-speaking Christians was shaped by several artistic traditions. Western Europe, particularly Italy, as well as Ukrainian printing presses,

⁸¹ *Paterikon*, Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra Press, 1678 (Odesa National Scientific Library, Odesa, Ukraine).

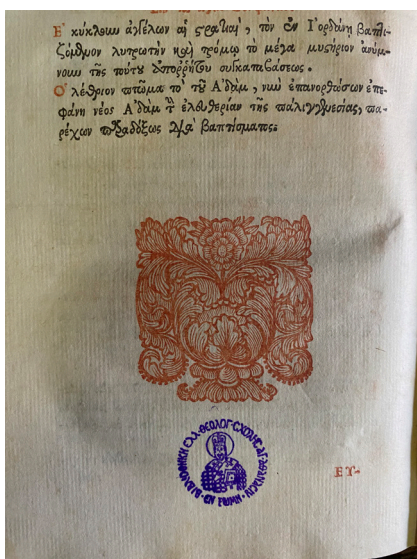
⁸² *Vacationes Autumnales*, Paris, 1620 (Library of the Pontifical Greek College of Saint Athanasius, Rome).

⁸³ John of Damascus, *Showing faith*, in *Liturghier (Service Book)*, Iași, 1715 (Library of the Holy Synod, Bucharest).

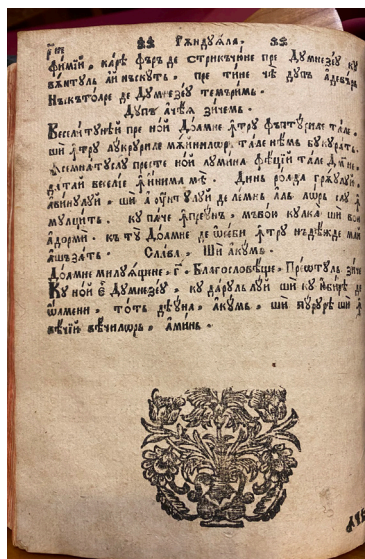
contributed to this development. However, Romanian printing played the most important role. Through the Romanian presses, the decorative language of Arabic Christian books became part of a wider artistic exchange that connected different regions and cultures.

The examples above represent only a limited part of the decorative materials collected in the TYPARABIC project's database. Undoubtedly, this material merits further study. Iconographic research in this field is still at an early stage, yet even the evidence discussed here shows how printing initiatives – especially those of Athanasius III Dabbās and Patriarch Sylvester – created strong artistic connections between Western Europe, present-day Ukraine, the Romanian Principalities, and the Arabic-speaking communities within the Ottoman Empire.

Illustrations



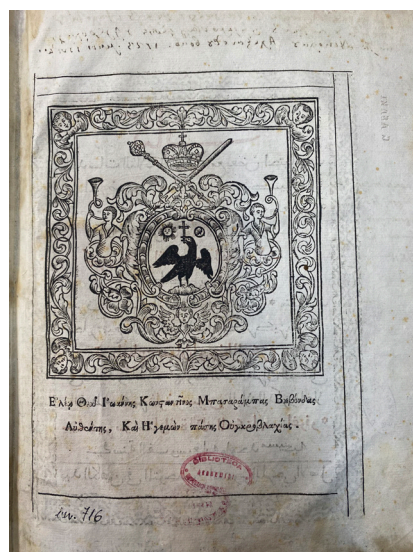
1. Tailpiece. Book of Hours. Rome, 1677 (Pontifical Greek College of Saint Athanasius).



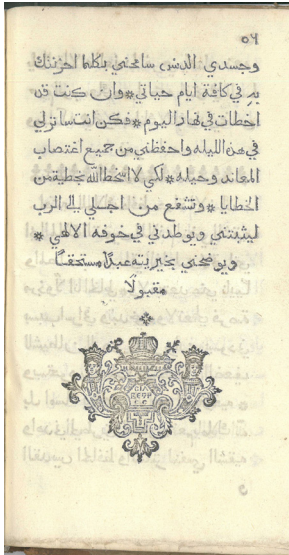
2. Tailpiece. Ceaslov (Book of Hours), Iași, 1750 (Library of the Holy Synod, Bucharest).



3. Tailpiece in the book: Nektarios of Jerusalem, Kitāb qadā al-haqq wa-naql al-šidq, Iași, 1746, last page (B.A.R.).



4. Constantin Brâncoveanu's coat of arms, Book of the Divine Liturgies, Snagov, 1701 (B.A.R.).

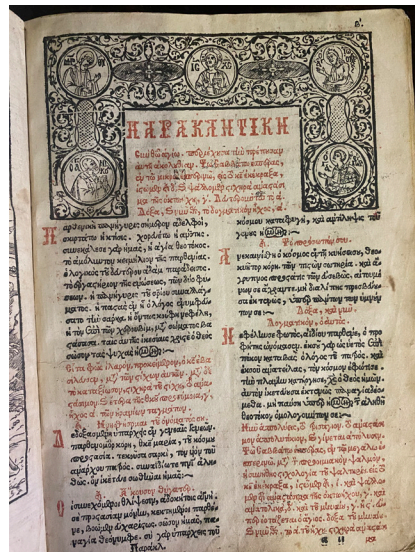


6. *Annunciation*. Arabic Akathist, Bucharest (?), 1747 (?) (private collection).

5. *Hierarch's emblem*, closing page of the Arabic Akathist, Bucharest (?), 1747 (?).



7. *Annunciation*, Ceaslov (Book of Hours), Iasi, 1743 – 46 (Library of the Holy Synod, Bucharest).



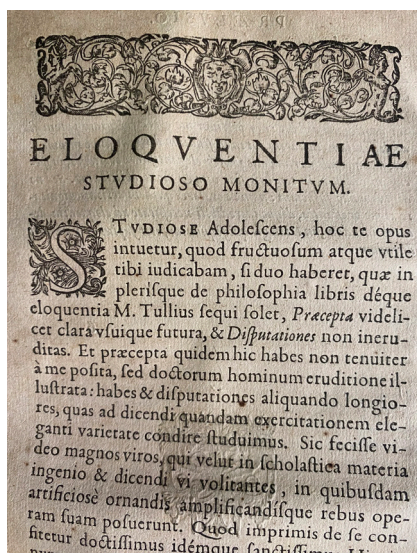
8. *Deesis*, Frontispiece in the Paraklitiki (Oktoechos), Venice, 1600 (Pontifical Greek College of Saint Athanasius).



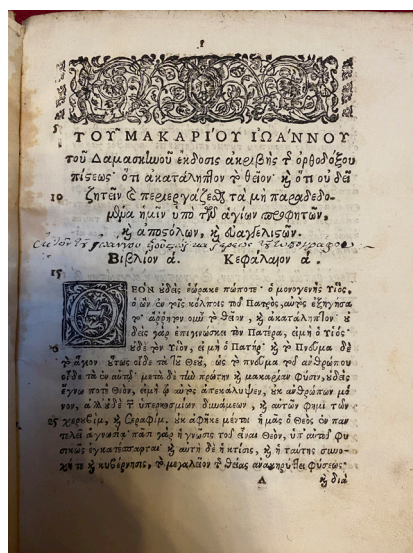
9. *Angelputto. Tailpiece in the book:* Brief epistles that explain how repentance and confession are done, Aleppo, 1711 (Bibliothèque Orientale, Beirut, Lebanon).



10. *Deesis. Headpiece in the Paterikon,* KyivPechersk Lavra Press, 1678 (Odesa National Scientific Library, Odesa, Ukraine).



11. The Green Man, frontispiece of the *Vacationes Autumnales...*, Paris, 1620 (Pontifical Greek College of Saint Athanasius).



12. The Green Man, frontispiece in the book: John of Damascus, Showing faith, Iași, 1715/Liturghier (Service Book), Iași, 1715 (Library of the Holy Synod, Bucharest).