

THE ROLE OF THE ROMANIAN PRINTING PRESS IN CREATING A NATIONAL IDENTITY

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Abstract: The printing press was one of the reasons behind the social, political and psychological faced by mankind over the centuries, having an immense influence on every aspect of universal culture. The great historians suggest that the printing press was one of the instruments that influenced the production of major changes in science, religion, politics and our way of thinking, being the first means of mass communication. The appearance of printing press with mobile letters led to revolutionizing communication system entirely. From then until now the book has gone through a number of innovative techniques for multiplication so that more often now we talk about eBook, which tends to replace traditional books. The time of occurrence of the printing press in Wallachia, at the early sixteenth century, is an act of culture and civilization because it demonstrated the stage of development of Romanian culture at that time, occupying a prominent place in southeast European culture space. In this paper we try to emphasize the role of printing press in the development of national identity but also its influence in southeast European space.

Keywords: Romanian printing press, national identity, Romanian culture, Targoviste, Wallachia, book history

In *Notre Dame de Paris* Victor Hugo depicts the archdeacon Claude Frollo holding a printed book open on the table and looking towards the cathedral, exclaiming: *This will kill that. The book will kill the edifice.* The explanation would consist in the fear of the clerics in front of the appearance of a new phenomenon, the printing press: *“the fright and the dizziness of the servant of the altar in front of Gutenberg’s shining printing press. There were the pulpit and the manuscript, the spoken word and the written word scared by the printed word; it was something like the amazement of a sparrow at the sight of the angel Legion opening its six million wings. It*

was the prophet's call when he begins to hear the emancipated mankind rustling and swarming, when he sees, in the future, intelligence demolishing religion, opinion dethroning faith... It was the prophecy of the philosopher who sees the human thinking volatilized by the printing press... These words meant that a power was going to follow another power... The printing press would kill the Church."

The moment of emergence of the printing press in Wallachia, at the beginning of the 16th century, represents an act of culture and civilization because it demonstrates the stage reached by the development of the Romanian culture of that time, which was holding a forefront position in the South-East European culture. Lajos Demény and Lidia Demény affirm that the Macarian printing press was not a randomly appearance in the context of the European printing press, but its reflection at the local level.

Due to the fact that the Ottomans had settled in the Balkans during this century, and the printing conditions had become increasingly difficult, the Romanian printing press will make up for the lack of books in this region, as the Wallachian autonomy was allowing it.

During the period 1508-1512, three books emerged: **The Liturgy Book**, **The Octoich** (Book of Psalms), and **The Gospel Book**, which do nothing else but put into practice, under a printed and unitary form, the largest and most essential part of the divine services of the Orthodox Church. Thus, **The Liturgy Book** is the first Romanian book printed and the first edition of this worship book in Slavonic. **The Octoich** is the only book, out of the series printed by Macarie at Cetinje (1494) and at Târgoviște, which is repeated, while **The Gospel Book** is the first book printed for all the Orthodox people that were using the Slavic language as official language of their religious worship.

In the course of time, a series of controversies emerged regarding the place where the three books were printed, but also regarding the person of the one who carried out this operation. Personally, we consider that the three Macarian books must have been printed at **Dealul Monastery** (Târgoviște), from where directives for the political, cultural and ecclesial feudal reforms came, too, by the attempt of the Romanian rulers of centralizing the State powers in their hands. At the same time, it is much more likely that the printing press could have been inside a monastery, as it is here that literate scribes and monks were living, who could have helped achieve these printings. It should be noticed that the adornments of the frontispices of Macarius

are similar in style to the “Armenian”-style ones of Dealu Monastery (adornments forming intertwined circles and squares of stylized plant stems).

The books printed by Macarius in Târgoviște situate the Romanian on a foremost position in Eastern Europe, because they came in handy for the Romanian priests who were celebrating the religious service using manuscripts, but also because, circulating in all the three Romanian Countries, as well as outside the borders, in the countries celebrating the divine service in Slavonic, they made it possible to realize a unification of the religious practice.

The printing activity in Wallachia will be resumed after more than three decennia (33 years), during the reign of Radu Paisie (1535-1545). The initiator of this new printing press was Dimitrije Ljubavic, who had brought, from Serbia, a printing press that he had installed in Graanica, but, finally, because of the unfavorable historical circumstances, he would come to Târgoviște, in the year 1544, called by the Wallachian voivode.

The printing material of Dimitrije Ljubavic is different from that of Macarius and we can talk about a new stage in the history of the Romanian printing press and, at the same time, about a proof of the continuity of the printing activity in these areas. The works printed by him in Târgoviște include an **Euchologion (1545)**, in whose epilogue it is mentioned that the work was finished on 10 January 1545, *"with Dimitrije Ljubavic's moulds... in the princely city, Târgoviște."* We deduce from here that the printing material belonged to the typographer because, later on, it is added: *"In Dimitrije Ljubavic's houses"*. We can deduce that the printing press no longer belonged to the reigning prince, but to a private enterpriser who could address other clients, too, not just the official authorities. Yet, from Ljubavic's printing presses, no books emerged of a different kind than the previous one. His second printing was an **Apostle (1547)**, appeared in two editions, one for Wallachia, on the order of Mircea Ciobanul and another for Moldova, on the order of Iliăș II Rareș. L. Demény, following his research carried out in the libraries of the former Soviet Union, considers that in Dimitrije Ljubavic's printing press were printed, as well, a Slavonic **Menaion**, probably in 1546, discovered in the National Library of Russia, and a **Gospel Book** printed, probably, between the years 1546 and 1551, these two being probably another order for the same Iliăș II of Moldova.

The Macarian printing press will exert a decisive influence on the whole Romanian printing press of Târgoviște, Bucharest, but especially of Transylvania. Thus, the Slavonic **Gospel Book** of 1546, printed by Philip the Moldavian in Sibiu, is but a copy of the Macarian

one. At the same time, Coresi will cut letters and engrave adornments identical to those used by Macarius to print his three works. But it is not just Macarius' printings that served as a model for those of Transylvania, but also those of Dimitrije Ljubavic, typographic elements specific of him being present especially in the printings of the second half of the 16th century: **Sbornicul slavon** (1580), namely a book on Jesus' Prayer, **Evanghelia cu învățătură** (Evangel with teaching) (1581).

As far as the 16th century is concerned, the book rarely tells something new and important in point of the content, because the printings in this century were books used in the divine service, and the books' belonging to an exclusively religious topic is only natural in the general context of the medieval culture, in which the only ideology was the religious one.

In South-East Europe, in the 17th century, the printing press went through a series of transformations compared to the previous century, so that in the territories under direct Ottoman dominion, no printing press was operating, whereas during the previous century, despite their limited activity, the printing presses of Cetinje, Gorazde, Belgrad and from the monasteries Rujan and Mrksina were still producing an important number of books. The production of Cyrillic books becomes smaller and smaller, and, in this context, Wallachia acquires an increasingly important role in providing the Orthodox Slavs with printed religious book.

During the first decennia of the century, the quite frequent changes of rule in Wallachia and Moldova and the intrusion of the Ottoman Porte in the internal policy have led to the ceasing of the printing activity. With the enthronement of Matei Basarab in Wallachia and Vasile Lupu in Moldova, one can note an improvement of the cultural policies, the Romanian reigning princes taking care of the printing of books, of the creation of new printing presses and of the restoration of those of yore. Compared to the printing press of the previous century, the Romanian printing press of the 17th century will put an end to the monopoly of the book printed for the divine service, this being the period when a series of works with lay content appear as well, such as: **Îndreptarea legii** (The Straightening of the Law) (1652), **Bucoavna** (The Alphabet) (1699), **Divanul sau gîlceava înțeleptului cu lumea** (The Dispute between the Wise Man and the World) (1698) etc. It is also during this period that Modern Greek books begin to be printed, leading to the development of the Greek literary creation, and during the second part of the 17th century, culture acquires a new impetus, culminating in the translation and printing in Romanian of the Bucharest **Bible** (1688). It is the period when, in Wallachia, operate the printing presses of

Bucharest, Câmpulung, Govora, Snagov, Buzău, and Târgoviște; in Moldova, that of Iași, and in Transylvania those of Alba Iulia, Sebeș and Sibiu, where fewer books are printed in Slavonic than in Romanian, Greek and Arab. Simultaneously, books are printed at Uniev, Rome and Bratislava, and one must not forget either the fact that towards the end of the 17th century, the foundation of the printing of Arab books is laid, Anthim the Iberian and Mihail Stefanovici playing an overwhelming role in this sense.

The afterwords of the books printed in the 17th century contain, beside information regarding the place and date of printing, also exhortations regarding the need to print in Romanian, information on the foreign authors from whose works a book or the other have been translated, providing in this way also information related to the universal culture. In this sense, we need to highlight the preface to *Îndreptarea Legii* (The Straightening of the Law), where a short presentation of the Byzantine and Roman law history is made in a larger framework of European history of the Antiquity.

The notes on the books kept since the 17th century prove that it was still expensive and simple people often got together to buy a copy of a book.

The 18th century is the one when the Greek dominion reaches its apogee by its political influence, yet it is not an epoch devoid of culture. The Phanariot reigning princes set up Greek schools, pass decrees and write laws in Greek, and the Greek language becomes the language of the ruling class. The number of Romanian books printed is large enough, and the main centres of this activity are in Moldova, Iași, in Wallachia, Bucharest, Râmnic, Târgoviște and Buzău, to which we need to add as well the printing press of the Monastery of All Saints, and in Transylvania those of Alba Iulia, Brașov, Sibiu, Cluj and Blaj. Just as during the previous century, the book gradually becomes more and more secularized, so that, towards the end of the 18th century, it becomes dominant, a fact that led as well to the increase of the number of literates, for whom manuals, calendars, popular books, and books with an agricultural content were printed. It ought to be remembered that it is not just reigning princes that get involved now in the printing of books, but also boyars, merchants and intellectuals. At the turn of the 19th century, the book stops being very expensive, rare, and hard to reach.

An old book, beside the content of ideas transmitted, was also a product of the craftsman's artistry. The first typographers kept the manuscript as form of presentation of the book, since they were unable to think about any other book form than the one they knew. During the 17th-

18th centuries, a diversification in the graphic art of the printings occurs, and a larger variety of common letters, new wood engravings and also a new book adornment emerge. However, regarding the illustrations of the Church books, one cannot bring into discussion their originality, because the Christian tradition imposed a certain treatment of the various biblical cycles.

The notes present on the books reveal a series of political and social history aspects by the fact that they write about certain events, such as wars, also containing demographic indications. With their help, one can reconstitute the social, economic and cultural life of the Romanian society of the centuries analyzed above. A special role in the series of notes goes to the notation of certain events: princely donations, changes of reigns, revolts, wars etc. At the same time, man's interaction with nature emerges as well from these notes, where they describe aspects of floodings, earthquakes, draughts or other phenomena – meteorological or of a different nature – which the people of those times were unable to explain. We can remark the curses, as well, whose role is to protect the books from being stolen.

The circulation of these books represented one of the most important and particularly significant aspects regarding the social function of the old Romanian writings. Highlighting the importance of this process, Nicolae Iorga wrote that "the great merit of these books is that, going over the borders, they brought together, by means of the cultural life, all the Romanians. By them, more than by means of the old manuscripts circulating and being copied relatively little (...), a common literary life for all the Romanians was created. By them (...) something priceless for every people has been started, because they comprise what will give shape to the thoughts and feelings of the generations to follow: the literary language".

The Romanian culture adopted the printing press much earlier than other South-East European cultures, since on the territory of our country the first book was already printed just 53 years after the first work executed with mobile letters came out. Yet, the introduction of the printing press in the Romanian area did not replace the manuscript book: since they did not know any other book form, the first typographers preserved the manuscript as a basic model.

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