# The Development of Printing Press in Romanian Countries: a Changing World

Agnes ERICH
"Valahia" University of Targoviste

**Abstract:** The period between the 14th and 18th centuries saw the rise of a print-dominated society, one that moved away from the Church's monopoly of information that existed during the manuscript book period. This was initially fueled by the reproduction of classic texts of antiquity. The technology of the printing press, coupled with the surrounding changes in the political/economic system, wrought changes in the ways in which Eastern Europe saw its place in the world trough Rumanian printing activity.
**Key-words:** printings, printing house, publishing house, ornamental art, book's spread, Transylvania, Moldavia, Walachia

The history of the book presents us with a complete, observable communications revolution. The historical record is such that we can watch the whole of a vast socio-cultural, political, and economic change happen over a period of some three to five hundred years (depending on whose perspective you prefer). By following the developments in manuscript and print book production, tied to the changes in the technologies used to produce those texts, we can also chart the various changes in social organization, politics and economics from the feudalism of the 7th century, through to the advent and advance of early capitalism in the 15th century.

The appearance of the printing activity in Walachia at the beginning of the XVI th century represents a fact of culture and civilization, expressing the level where reached at the development of Romanian culture from that time. In the general scenery of the appearance of Cyrillic print, the print of Macarie was the third, chronologically, after Cracovia ( 1491), Cetinje ( 1493-1496) and before Venetia( 1512), Prague ( 1519), Goražde ( 1519), Vilnius ( 1525) and Moscova ( 1553).

The greater part of the history of Romanian printing is in fact the story of the struggle of culture against various difficulties in the history of the nation. Favoring progress, Romanian culture adopted printing years before other cultures in the European neighborhood did. In this respect, evidence is provided by the fact that after only 50 years since the appearance of printing, invented by Gutenberg in the middle of the 15$^{th}$ century, the first book was already being printed in the Romanian territory.

Once introduced in the Romanian space, printing could not remove the manuscript book, often illustrated with highly artistic miniatures, the art of miniature-painting enjoying a long life here, up to the modern times. The emergence of printing is connected to the main cultural centers and if, for different reasons, especially political, one of the centers had ceased its fervent activity of book issuing and distribution, another one would have taken its place, another printing establishment would have flourished through the passionate work of its masters, so that the continuity of the Romanian printing was never interrupted.

The Old Romanian book is a precious testimony of the Romanian people's culture. The first book was printed in 1508, in full swing of the European post incunabular era. Romania is one of the first countries who introduced printing immediately after 1500. After the fall of Montenegro, Serbian printing was forced to search for external sanctuary and support. The mission of printing Orthodox books was first continued in the dukedoms of Romania, primarily in Walachia. Starting in 1507 there, the printer Macarie, most likely the same one, who was at Cetinje, printed church books in the Bulgarian variant of Church Slavonic. These books were a great influence not only in Romanian, but also in later Serbian printing.

Macarie learned the art of printing in Venice and started his activity at Târgoviste, the capital of Walachia, with support from Prince Radu the Great. The first print was **The Missal** - issued in

BDD-A20484 © 2008 Valahia University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.75 (2026-11-03 00:49:58 UTC)

1508; then followed The **Oktoih** in 1510 and **The Gospels**, in 1512. The three writings printed by Macarie spread not only in the Romanian regions, but also in some of the Balkan monasteries. The imprints are harmoniously worked: text in two colors, initials and frontispieces adorned with geometrical and floral motifs reminding of the Romanian miniature-painted manuscripts.

Dimitrie Liubavici and Moisi, who printed five more religious books between 1545-1551, carried on this craft: **Prayer Book**, **Apostle** - 2 editions, **Daily Missal**, **Four Gospels**. In the same period, Filip from Moldavia was printing **The Romanian Catechism**, **The Slavonic Four Gospels** and **The Slavonic-Romanian Four Gospels** at Sibiu, Transylvania. Towards the end of the century, Bucharest, another printing center, is being developed. Craftsman Lavrentie worked out a **Slavonic Four Gospels**, here, in 1582.

Between 1557-1582, deacon Coresi increased the number of the cultural testimonies written in Romanian, turning Brasov into a powerful publishing center. Here, Coresi and his apprentices printed around 40 volumes. He played an important role in promoting the Romanian language in cult books, in framing the literary language. Coresi's work is part of the whole humanistic publishing and printing activity taken up by the Europe of his age, setting a most prominent example to the European mind.

In the same century in Alba Iulia was printing Lorint, Coresi's apprentice, a Gospel (1579). In Brasov, Johannes Honterus set up the third printing house being in the same time printer and publisher.

Old chronicles would describe **Matei Basarab** (1632-1654) as a kind, just, wise brave and ardent Christian whose subjects were very fond of. His rule was a period of quiet, stability and prosperity for Walachia. His foreign policy was marked by alliances with Transylvanian princes Ráckózi I and II, by good relations with Poland, Venice and Rome, and by a constant opposition to the Ottomans' interference into Walachia's internal affairs. He thwarted the Turks' plans to sow discord between him and Vasile Lupu (who ruled Moldavia by that time, and who had tried, encouraged by the Turks, to take over Wallachia too).

Though not a scholar himself, like his forefather Neagoe Basarab, Matei Basarab encouraged and assisted the learned men of his time. One of them was Udriste Nasturel, who fostered a Romanian humanism in the Slavonic language, which, in his opinion could express, just like the Latin, beside the values of classical antiquity, Orthodox solidarity of peoples living in South Eastern Europe. Udriste Nasturel played also an important part in the copying and printing activities of the time.

After 1641, the Romanian language both in divine service and in religious literature gradually replaced Church Slavonic, as the Romanian was the people's living language. Matei Basarab through Petru Movilă, Metropolitan of Kiev, provided two printing presses. One of them was placed at Câmpulung Monastery, the other at Govora Monastery. Most printed works were religious. Among them, are situated the Govora **Code of Laws** and the **Psalm Book**, written in the Slavonic language, which was also widely circulated to Moldavia, Transylvania and to the Orthodox Christians, living south of Danube. The Law Reform printed in the Romanian language had a marked secular character and expressed legislative strengthening of the state, and of the princely rule. A first history of Walachia was written at the court of Matei Basarab and later on printed as the Cantacuzins' Chronicle.

Due to the rapid spread of printing, the "minor" arts of calligraphy and miniature record their last years of "vogue" in Matei Basarab's Walachia.

Constantin Brâncoveanu's rule (1688-1714) was marked by the spread of the Counter-Reformation's ideas, by the Habsburgic Empire's expansion, by the tensions, plots and corruption of the Ottoman Empire, by Poland's gradual loss of power with repercussions for South Eastern Europe, by the rapid emergence of Peter the Great*'s* Russia.

For 26 years, "*the Prince of Gold*", as he was called by the Turks, used "a bribing policy" that ensured his country's autonomy and his own maintenance to the throne. His political and administrative capabilities brought to the country a period of stability, economic prosperity, demographic growth, and cultural boom. The civic humanism fostered by the artists and scholars

BDD-A20484 © 2008 Valahia University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.75 (2026-11-03 00:49:58 UTC)

drawn around Brâncoveanu's princely court brought about a new *model of humanity*, based on the study of Antiquity, of Latin and Greek, of *Aristotle*'s and *Cicero*'s writings.

Printing knew a remarkable progress in Brâncoveanu's time. Books were issued in Romanian, but also in Slavonic and Greek, thus becoming accessible to the Slavs south of Danube, to Greeks and Arabians. The printing houses set up in Bucharest, Snagov, Buzău, Râmnicu Vâlcea or Târgoviste joined together many translators, proof readers, engravers, who, alongside consecrated writers like metropolitans *Antim Ivireanul*, *Mitrofan*, *Teodosie* or *Greceanu brothers*, created an important *intellectual movement.* In neighboring Moldavia of the same period propitious conditions would allow the issue of masterpieces of old Romanian literature, philosophy, and history written by *Dimitrie Cantemir*, a most outstanding representative of the Romanian early Enlightenment, and the first Romanian elected member of the Academy in Berlin. Also, in Moldavia, Metropolitan Dosoftei and Varlaam had a great role in developing this noble art.

Major books of the Romanian culture were issued during Brâncoveanu's time*:* **Serban Cantacuzino's Bible** (1688) accomplished by two brother scholars of modest origin, *Radu and Serban Greceanu*; a popular book called ***The Flower of the Gifts*** (1700), printed by Metropolitan *Antim Ivireanul*; ***The Sermons*** (1708) written by *Antim Ivireanul* against the boyars' abuses. Also, many religious books offered to the "Christian crowd" for free, in order to protect them from Habsburgic and Ottoman proselytism; history books, works of aphorisms, of rhetoric (mainly developed by Brâncoveanu's sons, *Antim Ivireanul* and *Sevastos Kymenites*).

Brâncoveanu supported with money, gifts and printed literature the Orthodox communities in Transylvania, Bulgaria, Istanbul (where he had several residence houses) at Mount Athos, in the Greek Archipelago, in Minor Asia etc.

In the 17$^{th}$ century was printed The **New Testament** from Bălgrad (1648), a language monument and a message book complying with the reality of the unity of the Romanian literary language.

The 18$^{th}$ century provided the Romanian graphic culture with the ideas specific of the Enlightenment philosophy with the wide-spreading and diversification of the Romanian writings. Beside the content of those books and their design are presented other aspects (the bind of the book is an artistic work).

The end and beginning of a new century brought about momentous changes in the development of Romanian writing, all over the world, that did away with the religious and princely dependence. A number of new private printing houses opened, the issues thickened in number and diversified, which responded to the social climate evolved by the movements of historic and cultural purport. This is the time when appear the pioneers of the modern secular printing- Ion Heliade Rădulescu in Walachia, Gheorghe Asachi and Mihail Kogălniceanu in Moldavia.

A most important phenomenon is the ornamental art Walachia, Transylvania and Moldavia, being analyzed the presence of Venetian ornamental elements in the Romanian printing from the 16$^{th}$ century and the influence of the Macarie's printing from Walachia in the South-Slav printing from the same century.

Also, the spread of the printings is an important subject for the history o printings being analyzed also the notes from the books which demonstrate that the book was very appreciated not only the high class but also the poor people. The book always represented the noble vehicle of all generous ideas, of progress, but at the same time it was a flame and a fighting device for the assertion of our national consciousness and of our unity and Latin origin. Despite any obstacles, the uninterrupted spread of the Romanian book, both older and recent, in all the Romanian territories, kept the national consciousness alive. The temporary and arbitrary borders separating those of the same blood could not stop the flow of ideas carried by the Romanian books. The spiritual unity of our people, its specificity remained untouched due to the book's permanent spread.

We can affirm most assuredly, that the printing craft played an important role in the development of the Romanian society. Unfortunately, due to historical vicissitudes and human negligence, many values were lost or perished. Therefore, to say that now, at the last stroke, our

BDD-A20484 © 2008 Valahia University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.75 (2026-11-03 00:49:58 UTC)

concern is not only to preserve and restore all the surviving copies, but also to elaborate a clear record keeping, represents a beneficial statement.

As a conclusion we can quote from "The History of the Romanian Book written by Mircea Tomescu: *"First of all, the book is a fruit born by the human mind. It holds within an entire universe of ideas and feelings, mediators through which we know, study and live the past and the present and through which we can foresee the human society's future"* (Bucharest, 1968).

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**


1. **BIANU,** Ion; **HODOŞ,** Nerva; **SIMONESCU**, Dan. **Bibliografia românească veche,** vol.I - IV. Bucureşti, 1902-1944.
2. **BULUTA**, Gheorghe; **CRAIA,** Sultana. **Manuscrise miniate şi ornate din epoca lui Matei Basarab.** Bucureşti, 1984.
3. DEMENY, **Lajos;** DEMENY, **Lidia.** Carte, tipar şi societate la români în secolul al XVI-lea: **studii, articole şi comunicări. Bucureşti: Kriterion, 1986, 351p.**
4. PAPACOSTEA-DANIELOPOLU, **Corneliu;** DEMENY**, Lidia.** Carte şi tipar în societatea românească şi sud-est europeană (sec. XVII-XIX). **Bucureşti: Editura Eminescu, 1985, 264 p.**
5. SCHIANU, **Octavian.** Cărturari şi cărți în spațiul românesc medieval . **Cluj-Napoca, 1978.**
6. SIMONESCU, **D**.; BULUȚA, **Gh.** Pagini din istoria cărții româneşti. **Bucureşti: Editura Demiurg, 1994, 126p.**
7. TOMESCU, **Mircea**. Istoria cărții româneşti de la începuturi până la 1918. **Bucureşti: Editura Ştiințifică, 1968**



**BDD-A20484 © 2008 Valahia University Press**
**Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.75 (2026-11-03 00:49:58 UTC)**