

TRADITIONAL PAPER BOOKS VS. ELECTRONIC BOOKS - A PRESENT DAY CHALLENGE

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Abstract: *The book is the outcome of one or several authors and reaches us, the readers, under various forms. The first forms of a book were the clay tablets and papyrus sheets. Later, people commenced to write calligraphic texts, excerpts from the Bible accompanied by images, and so the manuscript was born. The discovery of printing by Johann Gutenberg revolutionized the book format and the printed book helped reduce conception time, increase print-run and book dissemination over a wider territory. The digital book represented a step forward and a new book format which is familiar to us today. The book, either in print or digital form, fulfils its purpose to train and educate. My article focuses on the classical and electronic forms of books and highlights their contribution to communities' personality and culture. Books are made to circulate.*

Key words: *manuscript, printed book, digital book, book circulation.*

1. Introduction

A major part of our culture is governed by books and this satisfaction is provided by reading a book. Reading and the love for reading is an educated habit and it becomes a reflex after many years. Valuing the book and the time spent reading it is time saved for each of us, but some claim that reading a book drives them to sleep, while others cannot sleep without reading at least several pages. We live in a world of paradoxes and everything surrounding us has an impact upon ourselves. Psychologists believe, rightly so, that reading and handwriting activate and develop specific regions of our brain and preserve our spirit alive,, deep reading activates the part of brain that responds to imagination, mosaic activates brain area responsible for decision, command, control" (Paraschiv, T., Tănase, V. I, 2016, p.2). Unfortunately, another reality of our present days is the invasion of mass-media into our private lives. Television provides information, I would say mediocre, which promotes easy to emulate and meaningless models. Another part of our free time is dominated by computer-based activities and social networks, equally harmful. The present-day challenges are more numerous and more tempting than in the past days. Currently, our free time is a luxury that only some cannot afford. On the other hand, another the reality of our present days is the

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adaptation of books to digital format, which also facilitates the possibility and their access by the general public and allows a larger storage of information. My article aims to analyse the strengths and weaknesses of the two types of book medium and to determine if books are still of interest at present. But the main focus of my article is the advocacy for reading, either in traditional or digital form. Honoré de Balzac said “Time is the only capital of those who just have their intelligence as fortune” (de Balzac cited by Roossa Books Editorial Group, 2016, p. 527). We each have to learn how to manage our time and dedicate a part of our daily time to reading. Time measurement and time quality have been viewed differently throughout the ages. The Antiquity and the Middle Ages are characterized by grand buildings raised in tens or even hundreds of years with the purpose of perpetuating the image of certain leaders. The fate of books is similar to that of such constructions: they have evolved and adapted their form in order to meet the requirements of certain time periods and thus have become available to the masses. Consequently, both the pyramids of Egypt and books, whether as manuscripts, printed or in electronic form, are measurement units for time and mankind

2. The First Form of Existence - The Traditional Book

The printed book, under its primitive form of manuscript, included religious texts, collections of sermons, prophecies and gathered medical, astronomy and history knowledge. Such books compiled all information available at that moment and were designed for the few initiated people who knew how to read and how to use that knowledge. Those primitive forms of books were rare also due to the fact that their making was a long process, which could take years. The first writing media were clay tablets, papyrus or parchments. Those first books were stored in two great cultural centres of antiquity: Ninive in Mesopotamia (Southern Iraq) and Alexandria in Egypt. The two great libraries of antiquity were built in those two locations. Wars and fire, as part of the destructive human intervention, led to the disappearance of the first libraries and the manuscripts that gathered the knowledge of mankind up to that moment, so they were lost for future generations. Later recordings mentioned the large number of tablets and papyrus on the shelves of the lost libraries. The first libraries of humankind were established through the initiative of King Nebuchadnezzar of Mesopotamia and Alexander the Great. The buildings hosting the libraries were grand: they provided facilities for students, had reading areas and special rooms, as well as wonderful gardens surrounding them. Such details dating back thousands of years ago unveil a great concern of the people of those times for books and the knowledge they provide.

Later records also mention such preoccupations, as well as the host of tablets and papyrus in the inventory in the now lost libraries. In this respect, to comprehend the real number of all those an effort of imagination is required.

During medieval times, the influence of Christian church was significant and all writings had a religious touch. Similarly, the religious book was designed for the few people who knew how to read. The monastic monasteries and the royal chancelleries were the places where religious writings and correspondence were drafted. The monasteries included a scriptorium - a place for writing, where the manuscripts were

written, illuminated, decorated and bound as a book. The antique parchments were to be replaced by codex during that period (books bound under the format of today's books). The manuscripts were true works of art: the quality of the animal skin used as a writing medium, the calligraphy, the different ink colours, the frame decorations for each page, Bible images on the first page and the first page of each chapter, finished with the book spine and gold or silver latched covers. The manuscripts were very expensive and cherished due to those elements. That was the period when the works of antiquity writers were copied for preservation purposes. However, such works were not disseminated, but stored in the library of the Holy See, and they were considered secret and with limited circulation. But they were not disseminated, as that was forbidden by the church. As a result, the Papal library owned all the manuscripts collected during the medieval period and was one of the richest libraries. Today, this wealth of books is inherited by the Vatican Library. A small part can be researched today at Vatican's Library. The buildings of the medieval libraries were impressive. They were either part of palaces or castles, or stood on their own. The Roman and Gothic styles employed for such constructions contributed to the creation of real-life architectural wonders. Allegedly, books in the form of manuscripts displaying decorations and the uncial letters are the emblem of the Middle Ages. Nowadays, the libraries of the monasteries in Western Europe have become touristic attractions for their cultural component, and even to this day medieval copyist workshops can be found in the monasteries transformed into museums from France, England and Germany.

The Age of Renaissance and Humanism and its influence was born in 16th century Italy and was spread throughout the entire Europe in the following years. The advancement of Renaissance as a new spirit led to the birth of a new era in European history, namely the modern age. That period generated multiple complex changes: the dissemination of the religious Reform, the period of great geographic discoveries and the foundation of colonial empires, the creation and production of literary works, completely detached from the influence of the church, as well as the circulation of printing. Humanism, as a philosophical movement, placed human being at the centre of its endeavours and started from the idea that we were all equal by birth, and culture was the differentiating element. During that period, the monopoly of the Catholic Church from Western Europe decreased significantly and a series of literary production were born, such as: national epics tragic narratives burlesque stories, personal essays and official theatre. The religious reform initiated by Martin Luther brought the final blow to the Catholic Church and divided Europe between Catholics and Reformed Churches.

The discovery of printing in the 15th century by the German Johannes Gutenberg represented a big step forward. He was the one that created movable type and then the fixed mold type. The creation of the printing press allowed the first print of the 42-line Bible to be translated into German language. The print-run of the first Bible was 200 copies. It was a blow to the Catholic Church monopoly and a tribute to the newly created Reformed Church and to all those who read the Holy Book in their language across all German states. A tribute offered to the book itself, which brought the natural progress from manuscript to printed book. **Gutenberg's printing press** has revolutionized books. The use of printed and impressed letters allowed not only the

printing of several copies of the same book, but also a better preservation of books, their faster circulation and lower costs compared to manuscripts. The books were printed in German and then in English. The languages employed until this moment, namely Latin and Greek, are only used in chancelleries and in time they are to be replaced and become old languages. The libraries of European universities have been among the best beneficiaries of printed books. The latter's contents was no longer preponderantly religious, but secular. The Catholic Church is no longer that influential and higher education gradually detaches itself from the religious impression.

The writing medium being used was different from the past, namely the paper made of cellulose, a cheaper product which enabled the production of multiple copies and their dissemination on a wider area, at a relatively cheaper price. This is how the printing presses appeared in university centres, where books were the foundation of education and where libraries were to be developed for student use. The first university books were secured on shelves with chains.

The book was a precious object in itself thanks to its content, but also in terms of value. The geographical area of Wallachia has been under various influences. For example, until the XIX century, the Cyrillic alphabet was used in Wallachia and Moldavia, whereas in Transylvania and Banat - provinces under the influence of the House of Habsburg, Latin was the language used in writing. However, neither of these reflected the language spoken by Romanians even though these languages were used for a long time by the church and chancelleries. Romanian rulers established manuscript workshops in monasteries and later printing houses in Târgovişte or in Govora. Books were extremely valuable: they were ordered by high ranking boyars and then offered as gifts to churches or they were bought through community efforts. The best-known example was the Bible of Şerban Cantacuzino dated 1688. Wallachia's rulers were in contact with everything that was printed in Western Europe and that ensured the circulation of books in this geographical area, as well.

Within the Romanian Country, the religious books were ordered by boyars and donated to monasteries and churches. There are records of communities that would sell several acres of land and a pair of oxen to buy a book and donate it to the parish. I have discovered the admiration literate people nurtured for books while studying the book notes on a book from Şcheii Braşovului "the notes on the book margins can render the image of an age. In this respect, their varied nature and contents provide information on book circulation the community the book reached at a given moment in time, historical events or personal experiences (of rare beauty and distinction or unusual weather phenomena that were closely related to people's preoccupations" (Borcoman, 2015, p. 9). The content of the margin notes is varied and includes the name and position of the person making the note, mentions of historical events, information on the history of the book and the attempt to portray local history. Both the printed book and the manuscript have a twofold function as a means of performing religious service and as textbook uses for teaching reading and writing. The margin notes introduce the reader to the world of priests and school teachers from the Bârsa Country, as well as to that of common people who, at given a moment in time, had access to books. Only some of them become known due to their studies or works in the field and hence they augment

the list of priests and school teachers kso far” (Borcoman, 2015, p. 81). Books costs is quite high or the times, equalling the value of half a hectare of land or of pair of oxen (in the Middle Ages hat was the equivalent of the dowry a girl would get from her parents).

Education is part of family legacy in Şchei. The Romanian community in this neighbourhood is very well organized, consisting of very rich and influential merchants, as well as of craftsmen whose historical importance and right are acknowledged by the Saxons. The wealth of this community is increased by donation of books, money and precious objects made to the church by the rulers and from across the mountains as a results of their connections with the Romanians from Transylvania and Şchei, in particular. The margin notes disclose important information on the mentality of people, on their attitude to education and books, on the role played by the church in preserving moral principles underpinning community life and, most importantly on the fact that books are so valuable that they are viewed as legacy for future generations.

In conclusion, the information provided by this book replenishes the data on the local history of the school and church in Şchei, Braşov, as well as providing into sight the people who worked closely with books by analysing archive documents that have not been by other researches in the field.

The 19th century came with major political changes in Europe: Napoleon's regime generated the repositioning of continental borders, research progress in medicine led to curing diseases formerly deemed as fatal, and the introduction of railroad doubled Europe's population and facilitated its mobility on larger areas. The education system became diversified and books played a role in that. Moreover, education provided to larger numbers of people through books, along with public policies on education yielded results.

The book science proliferated due to the implementation of an education system supported by the state and a series of reforms on the introduction of compulsory primary education. All those changes became visible in the doubling of book print-runs. That was the century when we could talk about a diversification of book types: literature books (chivalric novels, history novels, romantic novels) and educational books. People's access to learning was significantly higher than in previous centuries. That effort was supported by the state, the community, as well as by the church. Those three actors merged their interests to disseminate book science and to diversify the type of books, within the context of the century of nations. Alongside mass media, books served the national desideratum to found the state within its natural borders.

The 20th century represented a revolution for books, which would have as many profiles, as there were in society. Hence, economic books appeared, which addressed issues specific to a large market, social books aiming to capture the profound or superficial changes of society, literature books and recreational books. The main writing medium in the first part of the century was paper. The XX century bears the mark of the two World Wars and it is characterized not only by human loss, but also by progress. There is a real-life revolution during this century as far as books are concerned. Thus, luxury editions of important titles in literature or history are printed, which, even though more expensive, are very cherished by collectors. Book donations to public libraries contribute to enlarging and diversifying their inventories. An unusual situation also

emerges: there is a black market for rare books, namely for manuscripts, books printed in small number or covered in leather and beautifully decorated. The prices for such books are exorbitant and their acquisition is made by pre-ordering and most often by private collectors.

The affordable price helped a straightforward book purchase in bookshops and private or public libraries. However, the storage space for such a diverse number of books was getting smaller and that was the moment when the book digitization took place.

3. The Digital Book

The digital book was developed and distributed in the second part of the 20th century, due to the information revolution and the limited storage space. For several years, there have been discussions about the book's advancement to another stage, as a natural evolutionary process. As a result, books can now be stored on CD-ROMs or as eBooks. "The information needs of users need for information hanged, and one of the consequences is the emergence of electronic documents, which can be accessed by all users" (Repanovici, 2012, p. 24). The internet helped to position to online libraries and their accessibility from all over the world. This automatically reduces printing on paper, which is much more expensive due to the fact that the print-runs are smaller, and unfortunately, their purchase has decreased. The benefits of a digital book are the following:

1. The price is smaller than the price of a printed book;
2. Digital books have increased in number and can be quickly accessed;
3. Their storage space is very small;
4. Their print on demand and dissemination can be made very quickly.

Digital texts allow the increase of the fonts and even faster, diagonal reading of such books. Nowadays, readers find less time to go to the bookshops because of the hustle of a deeply consumerist society, and then they have no time to sit and peruse a traditional book. The internet quickly compensates for this lack of time and offers the benefits of reading from the comfort of the home. Various search engines for scientific research keep us informed with the latest articles published in journals and specialized publications from any corner of the world. Time is reduced to a minimum, in a world where we are in a rush and we try to complete as many tasks as possible in one day. Therefore, digital books compensate for the lack of time, but I believe that the time dedicated to reading is not diminished. At least, that is what I would like to believe! However, this type of format is associated with interactive games, which cover a side of entertainment, and it has a true negative impact, on young people in particular. "On the other hand, according to theory information it represents the organized transmission of a unitary system of knowledge about nature, society, though; scientific content, technical, literary, artistic, philosophical, ethical, religious, information is transmitted thus the foundations of science and culture" (Bolborici, 2010, p. 29).

Educating young people to read is a challenge nowadays. Both family and school should equally contribute to fulfilling this objective. Based on my experience with my students, I can say that some of them come with a solid background of general

knowledge (also enriched due to reading), but others have serious gaps, which can no longer be compensated at that age. I also encourage them to read books in their classical form. At the end of each course I introduce them to a book and detail information about its author in order to raise their interest and thus, offer them a model. I also guide them towards digital books but, at the same time, I remind them that the sources in the Internet need to be carefully analysed and perused.

4. Conclusions

Books, either in printed or digital format, are important for each of us. My researches on the book of Șcheii Brașov were important to see the importance people gave to the book in the past and what was written on the edges of the book. The book was used as a school book for schoolchildren and as a part of supporting the religious service. It is a beautiful blend between the components: the church and the school. "Priests and teachers from the school of Brașov had a family tradition and supported the entire Romanian community" (Oltean, 1981, p. 85). Respect for the book can be seen in the notes, and no little thing is here. The most important data were related to the circulation of the book in the area of Brașov and Bârsa. In the absence of books lending cards as they do today, they give us arguments about the users of the book. The economic evolution and the social changes of mankind have also reflected in the change of writing medium for books. Supporting one or the other book format seems on sense to me. I confess that I personally preserve the pleasure of discovering traditional books in bookshops and book fairs, the smell of ink when opening a book fascinates me. Reading a book, I can hold in my hands gives me a comfort I have already acquired since childhood. However, I also use eBooks while travelling and when luggage space does not allow me to pack traditional books. The book is keeping up with us, even if we do not realize it at the moment. The manuscript is the result of years of work under candle light of a monk or calligrapher in the royal chancellery. The printed book is based upon the printing press, the teamwork of the people in printing workshops, the creative work, cover and format structuring. The author's thoughts are reflected in the printed lines of the book and his effort transposes the reader while perusing the book. The digital book is also backed up by a lot of work: transfer, formatting and dissemination. All these, so that books get to us in the best possible presentation.

My article is an advocacy of the book and reading, regardless of its form. In addition to material needs, mankind also has spiritual needs, which are fulfilled by music, travelling and a good read. The numerous databases available allow people to gain information on the latest issues and research in various fields. The evolution of technology replaces books in their classical form and gives most of us more time.

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