

4 Christian Arabic Book-Printing after the 1724 Division: A Fruitful Antagonism

4.1 A New Mission for a New Patriarch: Defending the Greek Orthodox Church of Antioch

In the 17th century, nominations for the see of Antioch received a final endorsement in Constantinople, where various points of view and interests were at play and needed to be accommodated. In the urban centers of Greater Syria, pashas supported the church leaders who were backed by the notables and wealthy families. The situation is thus reflected in Paul of Aleppo journal, with reference to the city of Aleppo.

Vicars were appointed with the support of the well-to-do locals, obeying the pasha's orders, for some, backed by the weight of purses and props, were more successful in their battles and competitions, so that they burdened the church with debts of thousands [of *akçe*].¹

In these circumstances, Patriarch Makarios sent an emissary who resided in Istanbul and followed, as much as he could, the fulfillment of the interests of the Church of Antioch. In one of his letters addressed to the tsar of Moscow Alexei Mikhailovich in 1654, the patriarch mentions his representative Ivan Feodulov who resided in Constantinople.²

In the first decades of the 18th century, the bishops of the Churches of Antioch, Jerusalem, and Alexandria gained a certain autonomy and more power of decision. This came after a relative consolidation of the Christian Orthodox spirit across the Ottoman Empire in the early 18th century, which could reflect the union of the Greek Orthodox clergy's forces facing the threat of Latin proselytism. It was also the time when urban notables gained more power before the local government controlled from Istanbul. Albert Hourani describes the social situation of that period thus:

It was the pressure of these local forces which gave a new form to the relationship between the Ottoman Government and the provinces. All over the empire, there arose local ruling groups controlling the machinery of local Government, ultimately loyal to the Sultan but possessing a force, a stability and to some degree an autonomy of their own. It was onl

1 Ibid., f. 303r.

2 The letter is preserved in Moscow at the RGADA, Fond 52, inventory 1, year 1654, no. 21, part 3, f. 93; cf. Panchenko, *Arab Orthodox Christians under the Ottomans*, p. 558, n. 192.

through the mediation of these groups that the Ottoman Empire was still able to keep some sort of moral and material hold on its subjects.³

On the other hand, the change in attitude at the center of the imperial power was also an outcome of the increasing influence that wealthy families from the Phanar had after 1715 inside the mechanism of government of the provinces subjected to the Sublime Porte. Their members became princes of Wallachia and Moldavia, they were dignitaries at the Sultan's court, dragomans, etc.⁴ Polyglot and experienced diplomats, talented lobbyists, well-connected in the high circles of the capital, the Phanariots encouraged a new impetus in the fight against the Catholic influence in the Sultan's entourage. Western ambassadors and envoys, whose influence in Istanbul had long been in play, backed the Jesuit monks or Protestant scholars who resided there. During the first half of the 18th century, helped by these Christian officers of the Ottoman court – most of them educated, Greek-speaking, and devout Christians – the patriarchs of the Eastern Churches succeeded in achieving aspirations that their predecessors could not.⁵

Towards the middle of the 18th century, when the Phanariots had secured a considerable clout in administrative matters connected to the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the Ottoman authorities in Istanbul were involved in the re-thinking of the activity of the churches in the Eastern territories of the empire. Therefore, the *berats* issued to the patriarchs of Antioch, Alexandria, and Jerusalem comprised more chapters than those of the preceding centuries.⁶ The Ecumenical Patriarch in Constantinople had had a great power in the first centuries of Christianity, when the Eastern Churches organized their internal life by synodal reunions. As Klaus Peter Todt explains:

Though the bishops of Constantinople could not trace back the foundation of their church to one or several apostles – as the bishops of Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem did – it was the fact that their city had been declared the capital of the eastern Empire that provided them with precedence over those three more ancient churches. This preeminence was first formulated in the canons of the two Ecumenical Councils of Constantinople (381) and Chalcedon (451). Here, it was the establishment of the archbishop of Constantinople

3 Hourani, *A Vision of History*, p. 47.

4 Çolak, *The Orthodox Church in the Early Modern Middle East*, especially p. 137–169.

5 Çolak, “Catholic Infiltration in the Ottoman Levant”, p. 89–91.

6 Çolak, *The Orthodox Church in the Early Modern Middle East*, p. 154–169; Hasan Çolak and Elif Bairaktar-Tellan, *The Orthodox Church as an Ottoman Institution. A Study of Early Modern Patriarchal Berats*, Istanbul, 2019.

as supreme instance in canons 9 and 17 of the Council of Chalcedon which proved most important.⁷

Gradually, the Ecumenical Patriarch lost his effective power in the Eastern Patriarchates, which conducted their destiny according to local circumstances and political ties.⁸ For example, Patriarch Sophronios II, who had lived and worked for a long time in Aleppo and Damascus and was even asked to succeed Patriarch Sylvester of Antioch when he died in 1766 (which he declined), was not able to solve in 1777 the petition of the faithful of the Church of Antioch against the poor pastoral ruling of their new patriarch, Daniel of Chios.⁹ Appointed by the Ecumenical Patriarchate, Daniel, who was of Greek origin, had generated a conflict with the sizeable Arabic-speaking community of Damascus. The noble and wealthy families would sometimes dictate the election of a certain bishop, or even that of the patriarch of Antioch, through subterranean intrigues that reached as far as Constantinople.¹⁰ It happened that a patriarch resorted to the authority of the local Ottoman governor, who became a cautious referee in disputes in Syria and Lebanon. When the patriarch's interests coincided with those of the authorities – i.e., to restore the social order – the conflict was settled less painfully for the local Christian communities.

Summing up the evolution of the power balance between Constantinople and Antioch, Robert M. Haddad describes the situation in the beginning of the 18th century, the time when printing for the Antiochian Christians was made possible by Athanasios Dabbās.

The story of patriarchal politics at Antioch, principally during the reigns of Ignatius 'Atiyah (1619–34) and Cyril al-Za'im (1672–1720), should clarify the nature of Constantinople's authority over the Melkite see of Antioch after Syria fell to the Ottomans in 1516. The tale tells of an Ottoman-sanctioned authority of Constantinople over Antioch, evident from the early years of the Ottoman *imperium* in Syria but always seriously compromised by indigenous Syrian authorities and by Ottoman provincial officials who were unable or unwilling to counter them. As the narrative approaches the eighteenth century, it reveals the grip

7 Klaus-Peter Todt, "The Patriarchate of Constantinople and the Greek Orthodox Patriarchates of the East", in Christian Gastgeber et al. (eds.), *A Companion to the Patriarchate of Constantinople*, Leiden and Boston, 2021, p. 142.

8 For the series of changes that the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Constantinople underwent in the 18th century and the collaboration between the Ottoman administration and the ecclesiastic institutions, see Elif Bayraktar-Tellan, "The Patriarchate of Constantinople and the 'Reform of the Synod' in the 18th Century Ottoman Context", *Chronos*, 2019, 39, p. 7–22.

9 According to Haddad, "La correspondance de Ṭrābulṣī", p. 269, the autonomy of the Eastern Patriarchates did not allow him to intervene in such matters.

10 Panchenko, *Arab Orthodox Christians under the Ottomans*, p. 159.

of Constantinople over Antioch (and Istanbul's over Syria) loosened also by the religious ambitions of Rome and the political interests of Catholic France.¹¹

In the first two decades of the 18th century, the resolute actions of the Western missionaries, especially the Jesuits, became more forceful, aiming to convince as many of the faithful of the Church of Antioch to adopt the Latin creed.¹² Under the wary eye of the Ottomans, Jesuit priests would dress like Syrian clerics in order to enter the homes of the faithful and handed the local governors petitions against the Antiochian bishops and priests who obstructed them.¹³ After 1724, the year that a part of the Church of Antioch split and entered into union with the Latin Church, relations between the newly-defined churches became violent, so much so that, for example, Yūsuf Mark, a Greek Orthodox educator and scholar – later to become an apprentice typographer – chose not to sign a polemical work he had composed, for fear he would become a target of the wrath of Aleppo's Catholics. He was convinced that they had tried to poison him before, while he was travelling.¹⁴

Under pressure from the Latin missionaries, a part of the clergy of the Church of Antioch adopted Catholicism and later returned to their original church.¹⁵ In 1746, the faithful of the Greek Orthodox Church of Antioch who had secretly embraced the Latin creed were prohibited from entering Catholic churches. To avoid this ban, they attended Maronite churches and prayer halls, where the divine service was done according to the Latin rite.¹⁶

A revealing episode of 1742 is recounted by Rachid Haddad based on letters between Sophronios of Kilis and the Patriarch Sylvester of Antioch, after the former had become Bishop of Acre. The Franciscan friars had occupied a church in town that belonged to the Orthodox, and Sophronios succeeded in recovering

¹¹ Haddad, "Constantinople over Antioch, 1516–1724", p. 217–218.

¹² While discussing the Jesuits' fascination for the eremitic life, Bernard Heyberger notes "l'idéal d'action dans le monde qui fait la véritable identité jésuite"; see Bernard Heyberger, "Monachisme oriental, catholicisme et érudition (XVII^e–XX^e siècles)", in Florence Jullien and Marie-Joseph Pierre (eds.), *Monachismes d'Orient. Images, échanges, influences*, Turnhout, 2011, p. 170.

¹³ For the conflictual climate generated by the Jesuits in Ottoman Syria, see Chapter V, 2.d) *Aleppo between Orthodox and Catholic Parties (1732–1750)*, in Çolak, *The Orthodox Church in the Early Modern Middle East*, p. 192–198.

¹⁴ Haddad, "La correspondance de ʿTrābulṣī", p. 277.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 266, where the case of a priest Ambrose is evoked: he embraced Catholicism around 1734, then returned to the Greek Orthodox Church of Antioch a few years later.

¹⁶ Çolak, *The Orthodox Church in the Early Modern Middle East*, p. 196.

it by paying the Ottoman governor eight purses of gold coins. However, the faithful of that particular parish chose to stay attached to the Franciscan mission.¹⁷

The Catholics' schemes produced tension in the relations between the Greek Orthodox and the envoys of the Sublime Porte, and clashes were usually resolved with money, which caused great financial losses for the Church of Antioch. The conflictual rapports between the Western missionaries and the clergy of the Ottoman provinces were arbitrated by the local Ottoman governor (Ar. *mutasallim*), assisted by a qadi and a mufti, who were required to intervene even in the dogmatic disputes between the Christians of different denominations – Maronites, Greek Orthodox, Melkite Greek Catholic, and Syriac Orthodox and Catholics. In mediating these conflicts, the Ottoman authorities proceeded in equal condescendence, as revealed by a report of 1658 referring to the pasha's answer to complaints by some Syriac Orthodox about the Capuchin missionaries: "Learn that you are all equally non-believers, whatever faith you harbor outside our own, and all those that you Christians call 'saints' are in hell".¹⁸

Apparently, Patriarch Matthew of Alexandria¹⁹ was more successful around 1755, when he obtained in Istanbul orders against the Catholic missionaries, which the Ottoman governor of Cairo, Ibrahim Kīḥiyā, was called to enforce. To shield themselves from danger, the Catholics appealed to the mediation of some sheikhs of the al-Azhar Islamic university, the highest authority in the Muslim world at the time. However, the governor said that he was bound to obey the Sultan's orders.²⁰ Thrown in jail by the authorities, the Catholic missionaries who were accused of social strife were required to pay fines (*badriyya*) in order to be released. In these circumstances, the bishop Sophronios of Acre proposed to Patriarch Sylvester to write and approve, alongside the patriarchs of Jerusalem, Constantinople, and Alexandria, a declaration requesting that the missionaries who stirred conflicts

17 See other reports on the battle waged by Sophronios against Catholic missionary works with Haddad, "La correspondance de Ṭrābulṣī", p. 266–267.

18 "Sachez que vous êtes tous des infidèles quelle que foy que vous puissiez tous tenir hors la nostre, et tous ceux que vous autres chrestiens appelez Saints sont en enfer", cf. MS Fr. 17881, BnF, 1668, ff. 31v–32r, cited by Heyberger, *Les chrétiens du Proche-Orient au temps de la Réforme catholique*, p. 354–355.

19 Matthew Psaltis, Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Alexandria from 1746 to 1766, was born on the Greek island of Andros. For a while, he was a hegumen of the Zlătari Monastery of Bucharest. Originally built of wood in the 17th century, then rebuilt of brick in 1705 (in the form still extant today), this church became a metochion of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria soon after its reconstruction, when Patriarch Gerasimos II Paladas (1688–1710) visited the court of Wallachia.

20 Haddad, "La correspondance de Ṭrābulṣī", p. 278–279.

between communities be punished and banned from the territories of these dioceses.²¹ These measures seemed necessary as long as the enmity between parties could lead to violence. Haddad recounts another episode extracted from the correspondence of Mūsā Ṭrābulṣī, where Michael, the son of Yūsuf Mark, exchanged profanities with a Catholic of Aleppo who was denigrating the Patriarch Sylvester and then resorted to beating him with a stick.²²

Between 1720 and 1730, Ottoman Syria was the scene of a real competition in the distribution of printed Orthodox, Latin, and Protestant books. This activity concentrated the efforts of several notable personalities of the time, including Chrysanthos Notaras, the Patriarch of Jerusalem, who received Greek printed books from the Romanian Principalities. Printing in Arabic was resumed on Moldavian territory in the mid-18th century due to the efforts of Sylvester, Athanasios Dabbās's disciple and successor as patriarch of the Church of Antioch. Thus, one of the important outcomes of Antim the Iberian's work in Snagov and Bucharest for the benefit of the Antiochian Christians was the relaunch of an Arabic-language and Arabic-type printing activity in the Romanian Principalities, this time under the direction of the Patriarch Sylvester.

Born in the 1690s in Cyprus (Ar. Qubruṣ), and therefore named by Arabic sources *al-Qubruṣī*, Sylvester was probably the son of Patriarch Athanasios III's sister.²³ He was educated by the patriarch, then ordained a deacon, a priest, and a *protosyncellos* of the Patriarchate of Antioch.²⁴ Modern historians claim that Sylvester was tonsured a monk on Mount Athos, where he seemingly studied the art of icon painting according to Byzantine models.²⁵ While an archdeacon, Sylvester accompanied Athanasios III on several of his journeys including

²¹ Ibid., p. 266.

²² Ibid., p. 280.

²³ Sylvester mentions his parents by the names of Giorgis and Fotini in the inscription on the icon that he presented to the Monastery of Saint Spyridon in Bucharest. According to Le Quien (*Oriens Christianus*, II, Paris, 1740, p. 776), his father was an Orthodox Greek, and his mother was a Maronite. He was contradicted by other historians, such as Clement Karnapas in "O Patriarchis Antiocheias Silvestros O Kyprios, 1724–1766", *Nea Sion*, 2, 1905, p. 193–194.

²⁴ On his life and works, see *Nea Sion*, 2, 1905, p. 191–206, 525–541; 3, 1906, p. 28–43, 364–389, 471–485, 602–617; 4, 1906, p. 49–67, 290–313, 429–444, 498–514; 5, 1907, p. 54–69, 361–378, 638–652, 846–867. Among the more recent sources, see especially Paschalis M. Kitromilides, *Kypriaki Logiosny, 1571–1878: Prosopografiki theorisi*, Lefkosia, 2002, p. 252–254. Mihai Țipău is preparing a monograph on Sylvester of Antioch where he will evoke many Greek documents and chronicles relevant for the life and pastoral works of this exceptional figure of the Church of Antioch.

²⁵ For Sylvester of Antioch and icons, see Archimandrite Policarp Chițulescu, „Le patriarche Sylvestre d'Antioche et son disciple spirituel Constantin César Dapontes et l'histoire de leurs icônes”, *Museikon*, 2022, 6, p. 157–168.

Wallachia, before 1704, as local chronicles suggest. Brought up in a Greek-speaking family, Sylvester received his early education in an Orthodox monastery. Owing to his heritage and keen learning, he became a Greek language scholar with a deep knowledge of Byzantine culture.

Designated as a successor on the Antiochian see by Patriarch Athanasios III in a document that he signed near his death, Sylvester was elected and soon consecrated by a Synod in Constantinople. This speedy procedure was considered necessary because the same year, backed by the pasha of Damascus, the local Jesuits missionaries, and a group of Christians who supported the union with Rome, Seraphim Țănăs was also elected a patriarch, named Cyril VI. This action taken by a fragment of the Christian community of Damascus displeased the Ecumenical Patriarchate and angered the majority of the faithful. Alerted by them, Jeremiah III, the Patriarch of Constantinople, swiftly convened a synod that confirmed Sylvester on the see of the Church of Antioch.²⁶ In the *berat* that validated Sylvester as patriarch, composed in Greek in the chancellery of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, it is mentioned that the election was also supported by Patriarch Chrysanthos of Jerusalem. A second *berat* in Turkish, with the same content, was issued in 1730 by the Ottoman court, after the advent of Sultan Mahmud I. There, the value of the *peşkeş* paid by the Patriarch Sylvester to obtain this document is also mentioned: 10,000 *akçe*. There is also a list of the dioceses that he ruled: Antioch, Damascus, Aleppo, Tripoli, Sidon, Beirut, Lattakia, Payas, Adana, Hama, Homs, Baalbek, Diyarbakır, Erzurum, Akhaltsikhe, and Çıldır, with adjoining territories.²⁷

²⁶ In *The Orthodox Church in the Early Modern Middle East* (p. 171, n. 526), Hasan Çolak remarks that the opinions are divided as to the canonical character of the election of Cyril VI and, later, that of Sylvester by involving the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Some sources maintain that Sylvester was lawfully enthroned by the Patriarch of Constantinople, as requested by the Syrian faithful. On the canonicity of these elections, see Dom C. L. Spiessen, OSB, “Les patriarches d’Antioche et leur succession apostolique”, *Orient Syrien*, 7, 1962, 4, p. 339–345. Carsten Walbinder expresses his belief that “from the strict point of view both elections/consecrations were at least doubtful if not in-canonical” [sic]; cf. Walbinder, “The Split of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch”, p. 13, n. 9.

²⁷ The confirmation documents of Istanbul were commented on and translated in Çolak and Bairaktar-Tellan, *The Orthodox Church as an Ottoman Institution*, p. 218–220 (August 29, 1724) and 226–228 (October 2, 1730). See also A. Papadopoulos-Kerameus (ed.), *Analekta hierosolymitikēs stachilogias: hē, Syllogē Anekdoton kai Spanion Ellinikon Syngrafon peri ton kata tin Eoan Orthodoxon Ekklision kai Malista tis ton Palaistinon*, Saint Petersburg, II, 1894, p. 385–389, where the opinion held by a part of the clergy of the Ecumenical Patriarchate is evoked, with respect to the election of Sylvester.

Another supporter of Sylvester was the Phanariot prince of Wallachia Nikolaos Mavrokordatos (Nicolae Mavrocordat), who was apparently acquainted with Athanasios III. Mavrocordat was an erudite son of the Phanar, the offspring of an aristocratic and scholarly family, who mastered several languages – Italian, French, Latin, Turkish, and apparently also Persian and Arabic – and had inherited, and further enriched, a great library of historical and literary works.²⁸ According to the Romanian chronicler Radu Popescu,

This year [1724], also, his holiness the Patriarch of Antioch [Athanasios] died, and before passing away he left word that Sylvester, his *protosyncellos*, be appointed in his place. And they wrote to his lordship, the prince of our country, to appeal to the Porte, with his highness's friends, so they do not appoint any other but this one, whom his holiness had named. And thus, owing to his lordship's letters, written to some of his friends, it was decided that Sylvester, the one named by his beatitude Patriarch Athanasios, be appointed.²⁹

The great dragoman Grigore Ghika (1698–1741), a future prince of Wallachia (1728–1735, intermittently) and Moldavia (1735–1741) also spoke at the Sublime Porte in favor of Sylvester.³⁰ It is unclear why Ghika was not mentioned in the list of Sylvester's supporters contained in the letter of confirmation issued by the Patriarch Jeremiah III. Nevertheless, he is mentioned in the second *berat* issued by the Ottoman chancellery. As the Sultan's great dragoman, Ghika held enough power in Istanbul to interfere in the election of a patriarch of the Church of Antioch. His decision must have been determined by the exceptional ties that had connected Sylvester's predecessor and spiritual teacher Athanasios III Dabbās with Wallachia, and especially with the Prince Constantin Brâncoveanu and the country's upper clergy.³¹

Sylvester was enthroned by the Ecumenical Patriarch Jeremiah III on October 8, 1724, and headed the Church of Antioch until he died on March 13, 1766.³² His

²⁸ See the laudatory portrait of Nicolae Mavrocordat drawn by Apostolo Zeno in the *Giornale de' Letterati d'Italia* that he edited in Venice, vol. 33, 1721, part I, p. 511–513, reedited in Corneliu Dima-Drăgan, *Biblioteci umaniste românești. Istoric. Semnificații. Organizare*, Bucharest, 1974, p. 192–193 (“Anexa IX”).

²⁹ Popescu, *Istoriile domnilor Țării Românești*, p. 273; M. Gregorian (ed.), *Istoriile domnilor Țării Românești*, p. 544. See also Çolak, “Catholic Infiltration in the Ottoman Levant”, p. 91.

³⁰ The son of Matei Ghika with one of Alexandru Mavrocordat's daughters, Grigore was proficient in several languages, a talented speaker and writer. He held the position of great dragoman of the Ottoman court for 11 years, from 1717 to 1728. Accused of treason, he was executed by the Sultan's order.

³¹ Çolak, *The Orthodox Church in the Early Modern Middle East*, p. 179 and 190, n. 583.

³² Another recent contribution on Patriarch Sylvester is the PhD thesis of Vasileios Nassour,

time was that of the division that split this church in two: from 1724 on, Sylvester led the Greek Orthodox Church of Antioch, and Cyril VI Ṭānās the Melkite Greek Catholic community, supported by Rome. This latter community had been growing over the previous century, in connection with the Latin missionaries' activity in Greater Syria. In 1726–1730, several attempts to secure the see for Cyril VI and to replace Sylvester failed one after the other.³³ Finally, in 1730, while residing at Dayr al-Muḥalliṣ, the Monastery of the Savior on Mount Lebanon, Cyril was confirmed by Pope Clement XII as Patriarch of the newly-founded Melkite Greek Catholic Church of Antioch.³⁴

Contemporary testimonies, including several letters of his disciple Sophronios of Kilis (the Bishop Sophronios of Acre, later, the Patriarch Sophronios II of Constantinople) contained in Mūsā Ṭrābulṣī's collection reveal Sylvester as a strong defender of the Orthodox spirit and the old rites and rituals of the church, rooted in the Byzantine tradition.³⁵ In a letter dated 1751, Eustratios Argentis, a medical doctor and philosopher of Chios, declares him 'a second Athanasios' and 'a truly apostolic man'.³⁶ Having chosen a monastic life since his young age, he lived according to the teachings of the ancient holy fathers of the church and showed sternness towards the sins of his flock, in the same spirit as his predecessor. For instance, when the Christians of Aleppo welcomed him back from Constantinople after he obtained the confirmation *berat*, Patriarch Sylvester noticed that he was offered, on a Wednesday, a meal that included fish: he rose from the table in anger and severely reprimanded the hosts.³⁷

His firm attitude in defense of the Orthodox rituals is also reflected in his encyclicals addressed to the bishops and faithful of Ottoman Syria preserved in the Codex no. 124 of the library of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem,

Silvestros Patriarchēs Antiocheias (1724–1766) kata tis Hellēnikes kai Aravikes pēges, PhD thesis, Thessaloniki, 1992 (unpublished).

33 Korolevskij, "Antioche", cols. 648–649, where the author notes the essential role played by the Phanar-born nobility in contradicting before the Ottoman court Serafim Tanās's claims. See also Çolak, *The Orthodox Church in the Early Modern Middle East*, p. 181–191.

34 The division in the Church of Antioch was addressed by Rachid Haddad in several books and articles, including his unpublished PhD thesis *The Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and the origins of the Melkite Schism* (Massachusetts, 1965). For other sources, see a list of titles in Çolak, "Catholic Infiltration in the Ottoman Levant", p. 91, n. 51.

35 Haddad, "La correspondance de Ṭrābulṣī", p. 265.

36 Timothy Ware, *Eustratios Argenti: A Study of the Greek Church under Turkish Rule*, Oxford, 1964, p. 30; see Çolak, *The Orthodox Church in the Early Modern Middle East*, p. 171, n. 529.

37 Rustum, *Kanīsat madīnat Allāh 'Anṭākiya al-'Uẓmā*, t. 3, p. 143. On the severity of Sylvester's measures against the less devout, see Çolak, *The Orthodox Church in the Early Modern Middle East*, p. 172–173, relying on documents in the Ottoman archives.

an autograph work composed in 1724–1730.³⁸ Relying on the information contained in this codex, the Archimandrite Clement Karnapas portrays Sylvester as the savior of the Church of Antioch in the 18th century through his firm opposition to the enemies of the Orthodox faith.³⁹ Rachid Haddad evokes “the apostolic zeal of Sylvester, Sophronios, and many other in defense of the holy cause of their church. The long-distance, exhausting journeys abroad and the active and unrelenting correspondence stand proof in this respect”.⁴⁰

Sylvester’s activity over his 42 years of pastoral leadership provided enough material for Hasan Çolak to dedicate an entire chapter to him in his book *The Orthodox Church in the Early Modern Middle East: Relations between the Ottoman Central Administration and the Patriarchates of Antioch, Jerusalem and Alexandria*. Çolak found significant evidence of an “anti-Catholic organization of the Patriarchate of Antioch” under Sylvester.⁴¹ Nevertheless, the patriarch seemingly encouraged a moderate spirit, carefully weighing the important elements before deciding on all issues during his long mandate as the head of an Eastern Church of great tradition. Thus, he hesitated to sign the decision issued in 1756 by the Ecumenical Patriarch Cyril V which stated that the baptism of non-Orthodox (i.e., the Catholics and the Armenians) was not considered valid. This issue often came up in the conflicts between the Orthodox and the Catholics.⁴² Sylvester avoided signing this encyclical, which was, however, endorsed by the patriarchs of Alexandria and Jerusalem, who only accepted Orthodox baptisms.⁴³ Moreover, several letters written in 1737 by Louis-Sauveur marquis de Villeneuve, the ambassador of France at the Sublime Porte, sent to the Count of Maurepas in Constantinople, reveal that the Patriarch was not against the opening of a Jesuit school in Damascus that year and he issued an order (“un Commandement”) that defended his “procureur” (*wakīl*)⁴⁴ Ebn Thoma from persecuting the Latin missionaries.⁴⁵ This Ebn Thoma was considered “un schismatique”, the enemy of Catholics and missionaries in Damascus, as he was:

³⁸ Karnapas, “O Patriarchis Antiocheias Silvestros O Kyprios, 1724–1766”, *Nea Sion*, 5, 1907, p. 866.

³⁹ Karnapas, “O Patriarchis Antiocheias Silvestros O Kyprios, 1724–1766”, p. 193–194.

⁴⁰ Haddad, “La correspondance de Ṭrābulṣī”, p. 288.

⁴¹ Çolak, *The Orthodox Church in the Early Modern Middle East*, p. 204.

⁴² The topic was also debated passionately at the synods convened in Moscow while Patriarch Makarios III ibn al-Za’īm was there.

⁴³ Panchenko, *Arab Orthodox Christians under the Ottomans*, p. 247–248.

⁴⁴ The *wakīl*, similar to a vicar, was appointed by the patriarch to replace him in managing administrative issues in his absence.

⁴⁵ See Sinan Kunalalp (ed.), *Les rapports de Louis-Sauveur marquis de Villeneuve, ambassadeur*

“Le saraf, et l’homme de confiance du Pacha de Damas, qui est la créature du Kiaya du Grand Vizir. La protection que ce Pacha donne à ce procureur de Sylvestre est si forte que les PP de Terre Sainte doutent encore, s’il convient au bien de la religion de faire usage de ce Commandement”.⁴⁶

We may presume that as the leader of the Greek Orthodox flock, Sylvester was trying hard to balance the situation and maintain peace in his community.

During the term of Sylvester, due to a closer relationship with the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the central administration of the empire, the Church of Antioch obtained benefits and incomes as never before, which resulted from two important sources: first, from collecting a tax named *tasadduq*, required of all Christians residing in the territories of the Patriarchate of Constantinople but not those attached to the Church of Antioch;⁴⁷ second, from the system, traditionally employed in the Romanian Principalities, of granting *metochia* to the Patriarchate of Antioch. Sylvester was supported in various moments by dignitaries of the Ottoman court: for instance, in a letter dated November 15, 1725, the Reis Efendi brought to the attention of the French ambassador in Istanbul the fact that the French had no right to intervene in favor of the Latin missionaries in Damascus at the expense of Sylvester and his community, because this city had not been included in the Capitulations and did not have a large Frankish presence (Westerners, French, Catholics),⁴⁸ as opposed to Galata, Smyrna, Sidon, or Alexandria.⁴⁹ Four documents held in the Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivleri (BOA) in Istanbul studied by Hasan Çolak reflect the help that Patriarch Sylvester received every time he complained to members of the Sultan’s court about wrongs committed by the administration against the Antiochian Christians.⁵⁰

The situation was typical for the mid-18th century: the central administrative body did not oppose the attempts of Middle Eastern patriarchs to improve, by securing donations and gifts, the situation of the Christian population across territories of the empire. In 1745, members of the Sultan’s court supported the envoys of Patriarch Parthenios who were charged to collect donations for “the

du Roi de France auprès de la Sublime Porte (1728–1741), t. IV. (1736–1739), Istanbul, 2021, p. 198 (letter of February 15), 252 (letter of July 6), and 291 (letter of July 28).

⁴⁶ Letter of July 28, 1737, referring to a newly secured “Commandement” from Patriarch Sylvester, an order to exile Ebn Thoma.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 173–174, 215–217; Çolak, “Catholic Infiltration in the Ottoman Levant”, p. 92.

⁴⁸ See Ioana Feodorov, “The Meaning of *Ifraṅḡ* and *Ifraṅḡiyy* in Paul of Aleppo’s Journal”, in Radu G. Păun and Ovidiu Cristea, *Istoria: utopie, amintire și proiect de viitor. Studii de istorie oferite profesorului Andrei Pippidi la împlinirea a 65 de ani*, Iași, 2013, p. 177–188.

⁴⁹ Çolak, *The Orthodox Church in the Early Modern Middle East*, p. 190–191.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 232–235.

poor Orthodox monks living in the monasteries of Jerusalem.” When a conflict broke out in Rumelia, on the eastern stretch of the Via Egnatia, with the collectors of the *ğizyā*’ (the ‘capitation’), the envoys of the Patriarch of Jerusalem received a letter ordering them to refrain from obstructing the Antiochians without good reason, and all donations, bequests, presents, and for other gifts offered by Orthodox priests, monks, and the ordinary people to be collected by the patriarch of Jerusalem with the confirmation of Orthodox witnesses.⁵¹

Incidentally, at the time, *berats* of confirmation granted to the eastern patriarchs included a new indication that, although in the Ottoman-ruled provinces non-Muslims were not allowed to ride horses, the patriarch and his attendants were exempt from this injunction, as they enjoyed a certain immunity from Islamic laws.⁵² During the fall of 1746, before leaving for the Romanian Principalities, Patriarch Sylvester wrote to Istanbul, asking for a document to be issued to him, ordering the Ottoman authorities and commanders on his road to facilitate his journey and not obstruct him in collecting donations granted to his person (not to the Church of Antioch), for he had no other means of subsistence. The letter he received as *laissez-passer* was addressed to all the qadis on his way from Istanbul to Wallachia (*Eflak*).⁵³

Patriarch Sylvester had many sources of information on the princes’ and boyars’ munificence in the Romanian Principalities, which had been a real help for the Patriarchates of Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem: patriarchal chronicles, contemporary events, and the direct testimony of his predecessor Athanasios III Dabbās. If indeed he visited Wallachia in the patriarch’s retinue, he had the opportunity to see it with his own eyes. The close ties that Dositheos and Chrysanthos Notaras had with the courts and upper clergy of Bucharest and Iași were well-known in Damascus. In 1727, the monk Azaria was sent by Patriarch Chrysanthos to Southeast Europe to secure donations, aiming to also reach Transylvania. He was also charged with collecting the inheritance of good Christians who had bequeathed their assets to the monks of Jerusalem, whenever they could reach an agreement with the heirs.⁵⁴ On the threshold of the 17th and 18th centuries, a network of connections was in place between the

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 227–228.

⁵² Ibid., p. 229; see also p. 234, concerning the outfit adopted by the patriarchs’ envoys while travelling.

⁵³ Çolak, *The Orthodox Church in the Early Modern Middle East*, p. 235ff., where part of the document is translated (BOA.D.PSK.16/11, dated October 20, 1746).

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 209. On the practice of collecting money from the Orthodox of South-Eastern Europe, see especially p. 213–218.

Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, the Eastern Patriarchates, and the courts of Wallachia, Moldavia, and Moscow.⁵⁵

The donations of the princes of Moldavia and Wallachia to the Eastern Patriarchates are also documented in files held at the National Archives of Romania in Bucharest. In an act dated December 8, 1746, Constantin Mavrocordat, the prince of Wallachia, validates the decision of the prince's divan to grant the Patriarchate of Alexandria 300 thalers yearly by means of an exemption from the tax placed on winery incomes, named "vinărici," which was required from the *metochia* of this patriarchate, the monasteries of Stănești, Zlătari, and the Holy Archangel on the river Râmnic (Vâlcea County). In exchange, the prince desired that the patriarch send a Greek language teacher and an Arabic-language teacher to tutor the Wallachian pupils. This act was reconfirmed on November 15, 1761.⁵⁶

According to his notes included in the Codex no. 124 of Jerusalem, Sylvester travelled from Ioannina to Bucharest in 1730, after Easter, and then left for Constantinople.⁵⁷ He mentions that he sojourned for a while in Wallachia when Prince Nicolae Mavrocordat was ruling, thus confirming the assertion of the chronicler Radu Popescu. Their meeting could not have occurred later than September 3, 1730, the date the prince died. In 1733, he was in Wallachia again, at the court of Constantin Mavrocordat, as Patriarch Meletios of Jerusalem (1731-1737) stated in a speech, adding that "the prince much honored and helped him [i.e., Sylvester]."⁵⁸

The first information on the presence of Patriarch Sylvester in Moldavia is provided by him in the foreword to the book *The Rule of Justice and the*

55 Çolak, *The Orthodox Church in the Early Modern Middle East*, p. 211–212, citing Dēmētrios E. Stamatoopoulos, *To Hagiotafitiko Metochi Kōnstantinoupoleōs. Katagraphē merous tou Archeiou tou Hagiotaphitikou Metochiou*, Athens, 2010.

56 See the facsimile and description of this document preserved in the Collection 'Monastery of Saint Spyridon the Ancient' at the National Archives of Romania in Bucharest (ANR, Fond BU-F-00146), in Claudiu Victor Turcitu, *Istorie în documente. Mavrocordații (1711–1786)*, Bucharest, 2015, p. 218–219 (Doc. nr. 99). The collection at the ANR contains documents written in Romanian, Slavonic, and Greek. For a description of the Fond BU-F-00146, see Maria Soveja, Iulia Gheorghian and Marcel Dumitru Ciucă, *Îndrumător în Arhivele Centrale*, vol. I, Part. I, 2nd ed., Bucharest, 1972, p. 175–176; Vasile Gh. Ion, *Actele Secției Bunuri Publice – București. Mănăstirile: Slobozia lui Enache și Apostolache, Snagov, Spirea din Deal, Sf. Spiridon Nou și Sf. Spiridon Vechi*, Bucharest, 1954, p. 115ff.

57 *Nea Sion*, 2, 1905, p. 198, cf. Radu, "Mănăstirea Sf. Spiridon și patriarhul Silvestru al Antiohiei", p. 25.

58 *Nea Sion*, 5, 1907, p. 857, 859, cf. Radu, "Mănăstirea Sf. Spiridon și patriarhul Silvestru al Antiohiei", p. 25.

Transmission of Truth. Here, he mentions that he was in Iași in 1735.⁵⁹ Having reached the Moldavian capital after a thorough preparation of his journey by an intense exchange of letters with the local boyars and clergy, Sylvester was hosted as a most honored guest at the Monastery of Saint Sava, where Patriarch Makarios III ibn al-Za'im had also resided eight decades earlier. Letters addressed to the Patriarch Sylvester attest that in January 1735 he was in Lattakia, where he met the deacon Sophronios (the future Bishop of Acre),⁶⁰ and later he arrived in Damascus, then in Homs. Therefore, his journey to Iași must have started in spring, when the sea routes were safer to travel.

In a letter of 1736 from Patriarch Neophytos of Constantinople to the metropolitans of Asia Minor, towards whom Patriarch Sylvester was heading at the time, he requested them to grant, as much as they could, financial assistance to the Patriarchate of Antioch, greatly indebted to the Ottoman administration.⁶¹ In 1739, Patriarch Sylvester sent from Damascus to Iași an emissary named Ḥaḡḡi Yūḥannā, who carried a letter of recommendation dated February 10 and addressed to the Prince Grigore Ghica, asking him to grant support to the Patriarchate of Antioch. He sent a similar letter at the same date to the Metropolitan Neophytos of Ungro-Wallachia.⁶²

The Greek scholar and chronicler Konstantinos Dapontes,⁶³ who accompanied Constantin and Ioan Mavrocordat during their rule in Bucharest and Iași,

⁵⁹ *Qadā' al-ḥaqq*, see BRV IV, p. 64, and the description below, in Chapter VI.

⁶⁰ According to Haddad, "La correspondance de Ṭrābulṣī", p. 261, Sophronios handed to him the amount he had collected as *nūriya* (patriarchal dues) in the region of Adana – Payas – Antioch – Idlib.

⁶¹ See "Patriarshie dokumenti (1592–1735)", in *Materialy dlia istorii arkhiepiskopii Sinaiskoi gori*, Saint Petersburg, 1909, p. 300, cf. Panchenko, *Arab Orthodox Christians under the Ottomans*, p. 245.

⁶² Neofit Cretanul (or Criteanul), 'of Crete' (1738–1753), metropolitan of Ungro-Wallachia from 1738 to June 16, 1753, when he was poisoned by order of the ruling prince of Wallachia, Matthew Ghica, who accused him of plotting against him with a group of boyars. On October 22, 2023, he was canonized by the Romanian Orthodox Church as a martyr, and his feast was included in the Orthodox calendar, to be celebrated on June 16.

⁶³ Also known as Kaisários (Rom. Chesarie) Dapontes (1713–1784), he composed the *Katalogos historikos tōn kath' hēmas chrēmatisantōn episēmōn Rōmaiōn* (*Historical Catalogue of the Distinguished Rhomaioi in Our Area*), edited and translated into Romanian by Constantin Erbiceanu in *Cronicari greci cari au scris despre români în epoca fanariotă*, Bucharest, 1888, p. 87–227. See also Nestor Camariano, "Constantin Dapontes et les Principautés Roumaines", *RESEE*, 8, 1970, 3, p. 481–494; Claudia Rapp, "Kaisarios Dapontes (1713–1784): Orthodoxy and Education between Mount Athos and the Danubian Principalities", *Analele Putnei/The Annals of Putna*, 11, 2018, 1, p. 61–80.

notes that Sylvester was in Moldavia in 1741. He also composed an elegant portrait of the Patriarch:

Sylvester, the successor [of Athanasios III] who came from Cyprus, virtuous, kind, a painter, died in his see, may his memory live forever! He had come to Iași for alms, in the days of my lord Ioan-voivod [Mavrocordat]. He preached in churches and served the Divine Liturgy in Arabic, for he knew [how to]. He also printed the Divine Liturgy in Arabic and Greek in Iași, and *antimensia* too.⁶⁴

Papadopol-Calimach presents another testimony about Sylvester: “Elders tell a traditional story that the Turks [i.e., the Turkish-speaking Christians] kneeled in the metropolitan church of Iași when they heard the Patriarch Sylvester serving the Divine Liturgy in Arabic”.⁶⁵

Patriarch Sylvester’s journeys can also be traced in the letters exchanged by some of the people who made up his entourage, especially the deacons Mūsā Ṭrabulsī and Yūsuf Mark. The MS 9/22 held in the library of the Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate in Damascus is a compilation of copies of successive letters, seemingly collected by Yūsuf Mark, where the patriarch’s actions and projects are recorded in the flow of friendly conversations.

Born in Tripoli of Lebanon (d. ca. 1773), Yūsuf Mark was a *protosyncellos* of the Patriarchate of Antioch and a disciple of the Patriarch Sylvester, whose rejection of the Latin proselytism he embraced. He is the author of an epistle in twelve chapters against the primacy of the pope, *Kitāb al-šudūr fī naqd haḍayān al-nūr* (*The Book of Light Flowing to Fight against Folly*),⁶⁶ and he copied important theological works, such as, in 1744, part of Nektarios of Jerusalem’s *Περὶ τῆς ἀρχῆς τοῦ Πατρὸς ἀντιρρήσεις*,⁶⁷ to which he gave the Arabic title *Kitāb ḡālā’ al-abṣār min ḡiṣa’ al-akdār* (*The Book that Clears the Eyes from the Mire of Trouble*). In the ecclesiastical annals of the city of Beirut, he is portrayed as ‘the teacher of book lovers’, ‘the first among priests, light of theological learning, glory of the Arab writers’.⁶⁸ Just

⁶⁴ Daponte, *Catalogul istoric al oamenilor însemnați din secolul al XVIII-lea*, p. 103. See also id., *Cronicari greci care au scris despre români în epoca fanariotă*, Bucharest, 1890, p. 103, and Papadopol-Calimach, “Un episod din istoria tipografiei în România”, p. 146.

⁶⁵ Papadopol-Calimach, “Un episod din istoria tipografiei în România”, p. 146, citing the Greek historian Constantin Sathas, *Neoelliniki philologia*, p. 457–458.

⁶⁶ Graf, *GCAL* III, p. 148; *HMLĖM* IV.2, p. 216.

⁶⁷ Printed in Iași, 1682, London, 1702, and Paris, 1718.

⁶⁸ “Iz beirutskoi tserkovnoi letopisi XVI-XVIII vv.”, in *Drevnosti Vostochniya*, 3, 1907, 1, p. 88; *HMLĖM* IV.2, p. 216; Panchenko, *Arab Orthodox Christians under the Ottomans*, p. 472.

like the printers of the Romanian Principalities and beyond, the Arab scholars involved in printing activities enjoyed the high esteem of their contemporaries.⁶⁹

By combining the information available in this collection of letters with that of the Codex no. 124 of Jerusalem, we can glean some more details of Patriarch Sylvester's journeys. In a letter dated July 5, 1737, the information is given that he was, at the time, at Gümüşhane, while on October 17 of the same year he was in Erzurum.⁷⁰ In the Jerusalem codex, Sylvester mentions that he was in Moldavia and then Trabzon in 1742 and 1745.⁷¹ In 1743, while the plague was wreaking havoc in Damascus, the patriarch travelled to Moldavia accompanied by the deacon Mūsā Ṭrabulsi, who gives an account of their preparations for departure. According to the Syrian historian Miḥā'il Burayk who relied, as a rule, on local sources, Sylvester headed for Moldavia in 1744 with his vicar Miḥā'il Ṭumā, determined to open an Arabic-language press in Iași. He was surely aware by then of the Moldavian printers' skill and experience, and the technical capabilities of the presses there.⁷² He had secured Arabic translations of the polemical works that he wanted to distribute in Ottoman Syria. On May 3, 1745, Ioan Mavrocordat, the prince of Moldavia, signed an endowment act for the Patriarchate of Antioch, due to the Patriarch Sylvester's presence in Iași.⁷³

The Patriarch presented to the monastic community of Saint Sava in Iași twelve volumes of the *Menaion* printed in Venice in 1731–1732 as a token of gratitude for the constant hospitality he had received there every time he resided in the capital of Moldavia.⁷⁴ In the volume for the month of June (now lost), two

69 "The typographer was well respected by the people of those times", states Tit Simedrea with respect to the times of Antim the Iberian; see Simedrea, "Tiparul bucureștean de carte bisericească în anii 1740–1750", p. 882. Then, on p. 899, the author mentions a couple of clerics whom printing elevated to high ranks in the Church: the hieromonk Macarios, metropolitan of Wallachia during the rule of Neagoe Basarab, and Antim the Iberian.

70 Haddad, "La correspondance de Ṭrābulsi", p. 270.

71 "Nea Sion", 5, 1907, p. 859, cf. "Mănăstirea Sf. Spiridon și patriarhul Silvestru al Antiohiei", p. 26, n. 4.

72 Miḥā'il Brayk, *Tārīḥ al-Šām*, Ḥarīšā, 1930, p. 27.

73 Nicolae Iorga, *Documente grecești privitoare la istoria românilor*, vol. XIV, *Partea a II-a din Colecția Hurmuzaki, 1716–1777*, Bucharest, 1917, p. 1118, Doc. no. 1083. A translation of this act is included in the Codex no. 124 of Jerusalem.

74 Only eight volumes survive, now at the Central University Library of Iași. They were thoroughly described for the first time by Archim. Policarp Chițulescu, who corrected the erroneous details given by authors who had previously surveyed these volumes and their notes. See Archim. Policarp Chițulescu, "Patriarhul Silvestru al Antiohiei și dania sa de carte către mănăstirea Sfântul Sava din Iași. O reevaluare necesară"/ "The Patriarch Sylvester of Antioch and his book donation for the Saint Sava monastery in Iassy. A needed reconsideration", in Mariana

notes were handwritten, one in Greek, the other in Arabic.⁷⁵ The Greek note mentions ‘May 1744’ as the time the Patriarch was in Iași and dedicated the books. An Arabic note, possibly written by the patriarch himself (as well as the Greek one), indicates the year 1745. Having carefully studied these notes, Archim. Policarp Chițulescu concludes that the Patriarch Sylvester was in Moldavia both in 1744 and 1745.

Testimonies contemporary to Patriarch Sylvester’s travels to the Romanian Principalities and the dates of the books that he printed in Iași also indicate that he was there in 1747, while in 1747–1749 he travelled to Bucharest.⁷⁶ Considering the ordinations recorded in the annals of the Patriarchate of Antioch, he was in Damascus during the spring of 1746, appointing bishops for various dioceses. An echo of his Moldavian journeys is also present in a letter addressed on April 13, 1747, from Izmir, by the Beirut-born Dimitrios Şabbāğ to Mūsā Trabulsī, asking him if the rumor that the patriarch had left for Moldavia was true.⁷⁷ In fact, in 1747, Sylvester left Moldavia and headed to Wallachia. There is a note in a local chronicle that he served the Divine Liturgy in the great church of the town of Urziceni and, on this occasion, pronounced a prayer against an invasion of locusts. Later, he fulfilled a boyar’s wife request for a memorial service dedicated to her deceased relatives.⁷⁸ In reporting on the rule of Constantin Mavrocordat, Konstantinos Dapontes mentions that at this time, the Patriarch Sylvester came to Bucharest from Moldavia and the prince, out of his great love for him, dedicated the Monastery of Saint Spyridon to the Patriarchate of Antioch.⁷⁹ The decision to leave Iași for Bucharest was supported by the welcoming attitude shown to the Syrian patriarch by Constantin Mavrocordat, who was one of the most enlightened and educated sons of the Phanar to rule the Romanian Principalities in

Lazăr (ed.), *Mărturii de istorie și cultură românească*, t. I, Bucharest, 2022, p. 52–64 (with an English abstract).

⁷⁵ The page with Greek and Arabic notes was first published in facsimile and translation by Constantin Bobulescu (with an Arabic translation by Vasile Radu) in “Iași la 1402 în legătură cu aducerea moaștelor sfântului Ioan-cel-Nou de la Suceava”, on p. 75. See also Constantin Bobulescu, “Din trecutul cărții bisericești. Colportajul”, *București. Revista Muzeului și Pinacotecii Municipiului București*, t. I, 1936, p. 84–85; Gheorghiță, “Tipografia arabă din Mănăstirea Sfântul Sava”, p. 420.

⁷⁶ The dates were briefly presented by Dan Simonescu in “Impression de livres arabes et karamanlis”, p. 61.

⁷⁷ Haddad, “La correspondance de Trābulsi”, p. 282–283.

⁷⁸ Gabriel Ștrempel, *Catalogul manuscriselor românești*, t. II, Bucharest, 1983, p. 104.

⁷⁹ Daponte, *Catalogul istoric al oamenilor însemnați din secolul al XVIII-lea*, p. 183–184.

Ottoman times. The chroniclers of the time maintained that “he loved learning and corresponding with people from all foreign countries”.⁸⁰

Sylvester was still residing in Bucharest in April 1747, according to the inscription placed on the icon of Saint Spyridon that he presented to the monastery dedicated to the Patriarchate of Antioch. Later, on July 15, 1748, the patriarch signed a title in Bucharest concerning two pieces of land destined for housebuilding that the *vornic* Constantin Strâmbeanu sold to him.

In 1745–1746, while Sylvester was travelling, his competitor Cyril VI succeeded in occupying for a short while the patriarchal see of the Greek Orthodox Church of Antioch.⁸¹ During this period, he sent to the Sublime Porte a plea against Sylvester to inform that he left for Wallachia and Moldavia (“countries of the infidel enemies”, according to Miḥā’il Burayk) without notifying the Ottoman administration and leaving the Antiochian Orthodox see empty.⁸² Cyril declared himself a resident of an Orthodox monastery at the time Sylvester had left, and claimed that the Syrian Christians, without a pastoral direction, addressed him, and asked him to take over the see and defend them against his mistreatment of them. The plea included Cyril’s pledge to pay for the *berat* of investiture 10,000 *akçe* more than Sylvester had paid, i.e., a total *peşkeş* of 20,000 *akçe*. Three months later, having secured the document, Cyril was nevertheless deposed by Sylvester, who secured for himself a new *firman* on November 7, 1747, supported by the Ecumenical Patriarch Paisios, Parthenios of Jerusalem, thirteen metropolitans, and the entire Greek Orthodox community of Damascus. To be reconfirmed, Sylvester had to pay a *peşkeş* of 20,000 *akçe*, the same amount as Cyril, but double the sum requested for his first validation.⁸³ Having studied this file in the Ottoman archives in Istanbul, Hasan Çolak concluded that, in the end, the Ottoman court preferred the competitor who

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 867, cited by Enaki Kogălniceanu, *Letopiseşul Ţerei Moldovei*, în *Cronicele României*, ed. Mihail Kogălniceanu, t. III, Bucharest, 1874, p. 203.

⁸¹ Çolak, *The Orthodox Church in the Early Modern Middle East*, p. 198, citing M. Brayk (Burayk), *Tārīḥ al-Šām*, 2nd ed., Damascus, 1982, p. 27, where this brief period is described as one of terrible persecutions against the Orthodox.

⁸² For Patriarch Sylvester’s journeys to Moldavia, his relations with the local princes, and the estates granted by them to the Church of Antioch, see the comprehensive account included by Archim. Luca Diaconu in his outstanding work *Mănăstirea „Sfântul Nicolae Domnesc” Popăuţi. Importantă ctitorie a Moldovei închinată Patriarhiei de Antiohia*, vol. II. *Mănăstirea „Sfântul Nicolae Domnesc” Popăuţi în perioada 1750-2018*, Iaşi, 2018, especially p. 13–30.

⁸³ Cf. the document labelled BOA.D.PSK.15/16, cited by Çolak, *The Orthodox Church in the Early Modern Middle East*, p. 200.

proved able to maintain the social order by controlling the majority of the Christian population of the province of Syria.⁸⁴

Joseph Nasrallah suggests that Patriarch Sylvester remained in the Romanian Principalities until 1750.⁸⁵ There is no information on his presence in the Romanian lands after 1749, the last news being that the Archimandrite Vasile of the Poiana Mărului skete conversed with the patriarch at the court in Bucharest in 1749 about fasting rules, in the presence of Prince Constantin Mavrocordat. This report was given by Archimandrite Vasile in the foreword that he composed for the book *Questions and Answers [...] about the Food to Be Avoided by Monks According to Their Monastic Vows*, printed at the Monastery of Neamț in 1816.⁸⁶

As I mentioned, while residing in Bucharest, Patriarch Sylvester received the Monastery of Saint Spyridon as a *metochion* of the Patriarchate of Antioch. The document issued by the Prince Constantin Mavrocordat bears the date of December 8, 1746, the same date that he signed the tax exemption for the Patriarchate of Alexandria.⁸⁷ However, the Antiochian grant must have been decided earlier, since on October 26, 1746, the patriarch wrote from Syria to the hegumen that he was expecting the 300 thalers that the monastery was supposed to contribute yearly to the patriarchate's treasury.⁸⁸ Ever since the beginning of the 18th century, the Monastery of Saint Spyridon had received princely endowments that generated profits: Ioan Mavrocordat donated to it a shop in Bucharest, backed by a document issued on July 5, 1718, Grigore I Ghica granted it a part of the princely estate on the outskirts of Bucharest,⁸⁹ Grigore II Ghica signed off an adjoining piece of land,⁹⁰ Mihail Racoviță allowed the hegumen to seize the house of a person who had not paid his dues to the administration,⁹¹ etc.

The monastery dedicated to Saint Spyridon in Bucharest was first mentioned in a document signed by the Prince Șerban Cantacuzino on March 9, 1680.⁹² In

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ See *HMLÉM* IV.2, p. 85, where he mistakenly refers only to Wallachia.

⁸⁶ *Întrebătoare răspunsuri [...] pentru depărtarea de bucatele cele oprite făgăduinții călugărești*; see *BRV* III, p. 148, nr. 908.

⁸⁷ See the facsimile and description of this document in Turcitu, *Istorie în documente. Mavrocordații (1711–1786)*, p. 220–221 (Doc. nr. 100).

⁸⁸ Letter in the ANR collections.

⁸⁹ A copy of this document, dated June 25, 1718, is preserved at the ANR.

⁹⁰ Document of June 25, 1748, at the ANR.

⁹¹ Stan Bărbierul ('the Barber') had had an understanding with the monastic community, which he had not observed. See a copy of this document dated September 1, 1742, at the ANR.

⁹² It was stated that this was the foundation of the Florescu family of boyars, who owned houses nearby, on the left bank of the river Dâmbovița. See Gheorghe Vasilescu, *Biserica Sfântul Spiridon Vechi din București*, Bucharest, 1996, p. 3–4.

1732, the church of this monastery was rebuilt in brick by the Prince Constantin Mavrocordat, at his own expense, on the foundations of a wooden church. In the absence of precise information, we may presume that, since in the early 18th century the neighboring houses were built of bricks, the wooden church had already been replaced by a sturdier structure. Works on the church progressed under the supervision of Patriarch Sylvester, who consecrated the building in 1748 and dedicated it to Saint Spyridon, the Bishop of Trimythous, Miracle-Worker and Protector of the Sick. Among the few material traces conserved from the passage of Middle Eastern patriarchs on Romanian soil, the most famous is the Greek and Arabic inscription set in stone on the front wall of the Church of Saint Spyridon in Bucharest, above the Western door, at the time of its reconsecration. The text states that the Prince Constantin Mavrocordat rebuilt the church and all the surrounding buildings in memory of his parents and for his own salvation, presenting it to “the Holy Apostolic and Patriarchal See of the Great City of God Antioch,” the “city of Peter’s residence.”⁹³ The Patriarch Sylvester resided there for a long time, and this place would become essential in his printing activities, especially after the arrival of his disciples from Syria. Moreover, it was there that the story of the Beirut press founded in 1751 at the Greek Orthodox Monastery of Saint George began.

The patriarch of Antioch presented to the church an icon of its protector, Saint Spyridon of Trimythous, painted on wood, 127 x 92 cm, which was initially placed in the right side of the narthex.⁹⁴ All around an older icon placed in the center, Patriarch Sylvester painted fourteen scenes of the saint’s life, which then received Romanian inscriptions and was partially covered in silver. In the lower part, the icon was inscribed in April 1748 with a long Arabic text, with red ink on a golden background, by the Syrian monk Buṭros Nawfal, who calls himself, when signing, “the son of George of Tripoli, a scribe in the service of the holy monastery.”⁹⁵

⁹³ Nicolae Iorga, *Inscripții din bisericile României*, Bucharest, t. I, 1905, p. 267ff.; Nicolae Iorga, “O biserică siriană la București”, *Buletinul Comisiei Monumentelor Istorice*, 22, 1929, 61, p. 97; Radu, “Mănăstirea Sf. Spiridon și Patriarhul Silvestru al Antiohiei”, p. 11–31; George D. Florescu, “Din istoricul bisericii Sfântul Spiridon Vechi din București”, *Glasul Bisericii*, 21, 1962, 1–2, p. 139–140.

⁹⁴ Presented in the exhibition *Îcônes melkites* of the ‘Nicolas Sursock’ Museum in Beirut in 1969 and returned to the monastery in Bucharest, the icon disappeared around 1990 from the Museum of the Cernica Monastery, where it was placed when the Church of Saint Spyridon was demolished by the Communist regime in 1987. See Virgil Căndea, “Une icône melkite disparue”, *Revue Roumaine d’Histoire de l’Art. Série Beaux-Arts*, 28, 1991, p. 59–61.

⁹⁵ Iorga, “O biserică siriană la București”, p. 100 (photo); Radu, “Mănăstirea Sf. Spiridon și patriarhul Silvestru al Antiohiei”, p. 20–22; Florescu, “Din istoricul bisericii sfântului Spiridon cel

The text attests that the Prince Constantin Mavrocordat rebuilt the church of the Saint Spyridon Monastery “in his parents’ memory, and his, and presented it to the Arab upper clergy and the monks”. The information is also provided that the patriarch was in Bucharest while the works progressed, supervising until the end the repair of the main building, the *kellia*, and other edifices around the church.⁹⁶

The buildings were damaged by several earthquakes, the first in 1802, and then most of them remained untended for a long time.⁹⁷ The 1838 earthquake demolished the cupola over the narthex and damaged the porch dome and ceiling. In 1847, the hegumen was asked to see to the necessary repairs. The establishment was preserved as a monastery until the secularization of monastic assets by the state in 1863. At an unknown date, the *kellia* and other buildings inside the monastery walls were demolished.

After his return home, in 1752–1753, the Patriarch Sylvester continued to receive donations from the Romanian princes for the Church of Antioch, as well as their political support at the Sublime Porte. His requests and gratitude are expressed in the Greek letters conserved in Damascus.⁹⁸ The Patriarch Sylvester repeatedly asked for valid documents reflecting the ownership rights of the Patriarchate of Antioch in the Romanian Principalities, so he could confirm the grants received, such as estates and assets. In 1751, Constantin Racoviță, the prince of Moldavia, granted to the Patriarchate of Antioch as a *metochion* the Church of Saint Nicholas in Popăuți (near the city of Botoșani in Northern Moldavia), a foundation of Stephen the Great in 1496.⁹⁹ While keeping an eye on this *metochion*, the Patriarch Sylvester surveyed the situation in Bucharest, where

Vechiu din București”, p. 140–141. The inscription was transcribed in Latin characters and (poorly) translated into Romanian in Alexandru Elian (gen. ed.), *Inscripțiile medievale ale României*, vol. 1. 1395–1800, Bucharest, 1965, p. 396–398.

⁹⁶ After the old building was demolished on August 27, 1987, the church was rebuilt in 1992–1997, with the support of Patriarch Teoctist, who secured a state allowance for it. It was rebuilt using contemporary photographs, in the same place, near the bridge of the Operetta Hall (today, 5–7, Bd. Națiunile Unite). In the new church, all the items that were salvaged by the parish priest, Fr Alexandru Zaharescu, and stored at the monastery of Cernica were placed where appropriate: the stone-carved entry door frame, the interior pillars, the porch pillars, the window frames, the Greek and Arabic inscription, icons of the old iconostasis. The program of the interior frescoes was composed by Archim. Sofian Boghiu, who had painted churches in Lebanon and Syria between 1972 and 1992. See Vasilescu, *Biserica Sfântul Spiridon Vechi din București*, p. 15ff.

⁹⁷ Vasilescu, *Biserica Sfântul Spiridon Vechi din București*, p. 13.

⁹⁸ Iorga, *Textes post-byzantins*, p. 31–55, 57–82. Another section of the manuscript was published by Ghenadios M. Arabazoglu in *Fōetieios Vivliothikī*, t. II, Constantinople, 1935, p. 167ff.

⁹⁹ Iorga, *Textes post-byzantins*, p. 74; Pr. prof. dr. Mircea Păcurariu, “Legăturile Țărilor Române cu Patriarhia Antiohiei”, *Studii teologice*, 16, 1964, 9–10, p. 614.

the first hegumen of the Monastery of Saint Spyridon passed away in the fall of 1747. A new hegumen was appointed on December 11: Archimandrite Nicodemus, who was charged with sending a sum of 300 lei to the patriarchate in Damascus every year.¹⁰⁰ His constant connections with the Prince Grigore II Ghica were beneficial for the patriarchate's *metochia*: on October 1, 1748, the prince issued an order that the tenants of the khan at the Monastery of Saint Spyridon in Bucharest were not to be disturbed by authorities, and later he granted two other buildings to the Patriarchate of Antioch.¹⁰¹

In 1863, when the Romanian administration repossessed all the domains and buildings that had been granted as *metochia* by Moldavian and Wallachian rulers to monasteries and patriarchates abroad, over several centuries, the assets controlled by the Patriarchate of Antioch were prosperous. The Monastery of Saint Spyridon owned two estates in the nearby county of Ilfov, a khan and twenty shops in Bucharest, while the Monastery in Popăuți controlled three estates in the county of Vaslui and a vineyard in the famous wine region of Nicorești.¹⁰² In his memoirs published in 1869, Ulysse de Marsillac, a French intellectual who visited Bucharest repeatedly and finally decided to settle there in 1852, described the Church of Saint Spyridon as follows:

It is located in the neighborhood of the Saint Sava College and is built in the center of a courtyard surrounded by sheds that host poor people. Looking from the Brâncoveanu Street, you might think they are prison walls. There is nothing gloomier than this church and everything around it.¹⁰³

Patriarch Sylvester died on March 13, 1766. He was buried at the Church of the Saint Archangel Michael in Damascus, located at the time outside the city walls. An inscription preserved in Damascus indicates the period of his pastoral tenure: 41 years, 5 months and 26 days.¹⁰⁴

As far as we know, no other patriarch of the Church of Antioch came to Romania until 1951, when Patriarch Alexander III Țaḥḥān (1931–1958), the successor of Gregory IV Ḥaddād, was invited to Bucharest by Justinian (Marina), the

100 The appointment letter is preserved at the ANR, in the collection of the Monastery of Saint Spyridon.

101 Documents in the ANR, same collection.

102 On the income of the assets granted to the Patriarchate of Antioch, see Marin Popescu-Spineni, *Procesul mănăstirilor închinat*, Bucharest, 1936, p. 143ff.

103 Ulysse de Marseillac, *Bucureștiul între Orient și tentația modernității*, ed. by Adrian Majuru, transl. by Elena Rădulescu, Bucharest, 2021, p. 130.

104 *Nea Sion*, 5, 1907, p. 864.

patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church (1948–1977).¹⁰⁵ Nevertheless, during this long period, priests, archimandrites, and monks from the Church of Antioch came to Romania to teach and take courses or doctoral programs at the faculties of theology, mostly in Bucharest and Iași. They kept alive the relations between the two churches and created literary works here, conserving and further developing the historical connections between Romanians and the Arabic-speaking Christians of present-day Syria and Lebanon.¹⁰⁶ Among them was the priest Emil Murakade, who spent thirteen years in Romania and, returning home to Damascus, became a 'cultural ambassador of Romania' in his country through literary translations and radio broadcasts.

4.2 'Abdallāh Zāḥir's Press, a Beacon for the Greek Catholics of Greater Syria

The earliest information on 'Abdallāh Zāḥir's life and works originates in several written sources: a brief story of his life, presumed to be autobiographic;¹⁰⁷ letters exchanged by him with Athanasios Dabbās and Fr Pierre Fromage;¹⁰⁸ the chronicle of the Monastery of Saint John the Baptist in Ḥinšāra;¹⁰⁹ passages of the journal composed by the Comte de Volney, who was hosted in this monastery for a time while visiting Mount Lebanon and recorded the stories of the monastic community there about their press;¹¹⁰ finally, a biography written by Zāḥir's disciple Yuwākīm Muṭrān (1696–1766), published (unsigned) in a special issue dedicated to him in 1948 in the journal *al-Masarra*.¹¹¹ The last work, however, contains

105 Păcurariu, "Legăturile Țărilor Române cu Patriarhia Antiochiei", p. 616–620, where he discusses the renewed close connections between the Patriarchate of the Romanian Orthodox Church and that of the Greek Orthodox Church of Antioch after 1899.

106 Ibid., p. 490–493.

107 Nasrallah, *L'imprimerie au Liban*, p. 26–27, n. 1–2.

108 Letters to Fr Fromage preserved in a manuscript in Ḥariṣā and published by Timothy Jock in *Jésuites et Chouérites ou La Fondation des religieuses basiliennes chouérites de Notre-Dame de l'Annonciation à Zouq-Mikail (Liban) (1730-1746)*, Central Falls, R.I., [s.d.], and the correspondence between the Propaganda Fide and Athanasios Dabbās.

109 The information in this chronicle was presented a century ago by Paul Bachel, Antoine Rabbath, and Cyrille Charon in their articles published in *Échos d'Orient*, *Al-Machriq* and *Al-Masarra*. They were then repeated by Joseph Nasrallah in *L'imprimerie au Liban* and, from his book, by other historians.

110 Volney, *Voyage en Syrie et en Égypte*, p. 78–79.

111 *Al-Masarra*, Special Issue, 34, 1948, 7, p. 385–397. Joseph Nasrallah contributed to this volume a study devoted to "The Melkites' Presses" ("Maṭābi' al-Malakiyyīn", p. 437–462), accompanied by

a great number of exaggerations.¹¹² These sources were used by Joseph Nasrallah and other historians who researched ‘Abdallāh Zāḥir’s literary and printing activities. In 1998, under the direction of Archimandrite Bulos Nazhā, the head of the monastic community of Ḥinšāra, a richly illustrated booklet of 48 pp. in Arabic was published in memory of ‘Abdallāh Zāḥir. His life and works are recollected there based on the most reliable sources, with a comprehensive list of the 33 books printed in the monastic press in his lifetime and after his death (p. 25–27).¹¹³ Another chronological list, with titles given in full, was prepared by Almaza Sfeyr based on the rich collection of the Holy Spirit University of Kaslik. Additionally, Ronney el Gemayel composed for *Christian-Muslim Relations (CMR)*, vol. 12 (2018), an accurate biography of Zāḥir, with a list of his works, a comprehensive bibliography, and a commentary on his epistle *al-Burhān al-ṣarīḥ fī ḥaqīqat sirray al-Masiḥ, wa-humā sirr al-tathlīth wa-sirr al-tajassud al-ilāhī* (1721).¹¹⁴

Born in 1680 in an Orthodox family of Ḥamā, the son of Zakāriyā al-Šā’ig (“the Goldsmith”), ‘Abdallāh Zāḥir learned from a young age, in the family workshop, the craft of jewelry-making.¹¹⁵ After 1701, he was in Aleppo, where he worked at the press of Athanasios Dabbās, founded after he returned from Wallachia in 1705. According to his own reports, he was tutored, alongside his cousin Niqūlā al-Šā’ig,¹¹⁶ by Fr Yūḥannā Baġa’,¹¹⁷ who taught them theology and philosophy. Rare for a Christian of those times, Zāḥir studied Arabic with a Muslim *ṣayḥ*, the scholar known as Sulaymān al-Naḥwī al-Ḥalabī, ‘the grammarian of Aleppo’. He later collaborated with Germanos Farḥāt, the Maronite bishop of Aleppo, who

more illustrations than his French-language book published later that year. See also, in the same issue, Yūsuf al-Šā’ig, “Tarġamat ḥayāt: al-faylasūf al-šammās ‘Abdallāh al-Zāḥir”, p. 385–396.

112 An unreliable biography of Zāḥir was published by Joseph Elie Kahalé: *Abdallāh Zakher, Philosophe, théologien et fondateur de l'imprimerie arabe en Orient. Son époque, sa vie, ses oeuvres*, Paris, 2000.

113 On his life and works, see also Graf, *GCAL* III, p. 191–201; Nasrallah, *L'imprimerie au Liban*, p. 26–45; John-Paul Ghobrial, “The Ottoman World of ‘Abdallāh Zāḥir. Shuwayr Bindings in the Arcadian Library”, in Giles Mandelbrote and Willem de Bruijn (eds.), *The Arcadian Library: Bindings and Provenance*, Oxford, 2014, p. 193–231. On the congregation of the Monastery of Saint John the Baptist in Zāḥir’s time, see also Walbiner, “Monastic Reading and Learning in Eighteenth-Century Bilād al-Šām”, p. 464ff.

114 Ronney el Gemayel, “‘Abd Allah Zakhir”, in *CMR* 12, p. 101–107.

115 Aboussouan, “À Grenade et à Gênes”, p. 112.

116 See Walbiner, “Monastic Reading and Learning in Eighteenth-Century Bilād al-Šām”, p. 472, 475; Mona Karam, *Al-Ḥūrī Niqūlāwus al-Šā’ig*, Ġūniya, 2007.

117 A descendant of the Greek Catholic deacon Miḥā’il Baġa’ of Aleppo.

had also improved his knowledge of Arabic with the same *ṣayḥ*.¹¹⁸ However, his most productive connection was that with the Jesuit scholar Pierre Fromage, Superior General of the Jesuit missions in Syria and Egypt: together they translated together three books from Latin into Arabic.

Under the influence of the Jesuits, and especially that of Buṭrus al-Tūlāwī,¹¹⁹ Zāḥir embraced the Latin creed. Soon, he became well-known for his polemical talent, which he put to work for the benefit of this community. Among his works there is an adapted Arabic text of the *Monastic Rules* composed by Saint Basil the Great, the central figure of the Greek Catholic Basilian Order.

At the Aleppo press, 'Abdallāh Zāḥir was an engraver and a typographer, earning a modest wage, which forced him to also work as a copyist.¹²⁰ It seems that during this period he was also involved in tutoring future priests. Around 1710, Zāḥir was directing the entire work done at the press.¹²¹ While residing in Rome, Gabriel Farḥāt was asked to convey to him an invitation to go work at the press of the Propaganda Fide, but he declined.

In 1711, as a consequence of doctrinal differences with Athanasios Dabbās (and, possibly, a financial disagreement as well), Zāḥir left and spent some time at the Monastery of Saint John the Baptist in Ḥinšāra, where he had been hosted several times. There is no precise information as to the reason why Zāḥir left Aleppo for good in November 1722. His cordial relation with the Metropolitan Athanasios is documented at least until around 1720, when Zāḥir became a fervent defender of the Latin Church. After the Synod of Constantinople in 1722, Dabbās became more assertive of his Orthodox convictions, which had always been strong, as his Wallachian hosts – the Prince Constantin Brâncoveanu, bishop Antim the Iberian, clergy, and boyars – undeniably witnessed while he resided in Bucharest.¹²² Back from Constantinople, he adopted certain measures against

¹¹⁸ Farḥāt mentioned Zāḥir among his close friends in his poetry *Diwān*; see I. Kratschkowsky and A. G. Karam, *Farḥāt*, in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, Brill online, s.v.

¹¹⁹ On this scholar, see Antoine Moukarzel, "Buṭrus al-Tūlāwī et son *Traité sur la Logique*", *Parole de l'Orient*, 2002, 27, p. 263–280.

¹²⁰ According to a letter that he addressed to Fr Fromage, cf. Nasrallah, *L'imprimerie au Liban*, p. 21.

¹²¹ El Gemayel, "Abd Allah Zakhir", p. 102.

¹²² A different opinion has been expressed by several biographers of Zāḥir. Nasrallah considers that at the time, Dabbās had not yet declared himself against Catholicism. See Nasrallah, *L'imprimerie au Liban*, p. 26–27; *HMLÉ* IV.2, p. 112–113. Ronneyel Gemayel states that: "'Abd Allāh entered the service of Athanasios Dabbās, who was still undecided between Romanophilism and its opponents until he attended the Synod of Constantinople in late 1722 (El Gemayel, "Abd Allah Zakhir", p. 102). After that date, when Athanasios started to oppose Romanophilism, collaboration between the two men became impossible and 'Abd Allāh had to leave Aleppo for Mount

the pro-Latin priests and openly favored the Orthodox-leaning believers. As Zāḥir had recently declared publicly his attachment to the Latin creed, he felt endangered by the patriarch's new measures. Therefore, on July 20, 1723, Zāḥir took residence for a brief time at the Maronite Monastery of Luwayza (Louaizé) in Zūk Mosbeh (Lebanon). Joseph Nasrallah portrays Zāḥir as 'a refugee from Syria' and notes that, at first, he did not wish to go to the Monastery of Saint John the Baptist in Ḥinšāra, as he wanted to avoid directing the wrath of the Patriarch Athanasios III against this monastic community.¹²³ They would soon be attached to the Greek Catholic order, which became in the 18th century an intellectual hub of Greater Syria, with an influence mostly limited, nevertheless, to their own faithful.¹²⁴

In 1721, 'Abdallāh Zāḥir composed a treatise on the Holy Trinity and the Lord's Incarnation, meant to explain the Christian Holy Mysteries to a Muslim readership. In 1723–1730, Zāḥir, a gifted polemist and fervent Catholic by now, wrote several epistles against the Protestants, Armenians, and Jacobites, which he considered equally heretical.¹²⁵ Of the fourteen epistles that he authored, six are directed against the Orthodox, one against the Armenians, and one against the Protestants. Other works that he authored contain comments in opposition to Jewish beliefs.¹²⁶

A few days before Athanasios Dabbās left for the Synod of Constantinople of 1722, Zāḥir finished his first polemical work, *al-Tiryāq al-šāfi min samm al-Filādelfī*, *The Curing Antidote to the Poison of the Philadelphian* [Archbishop]. This was a refutation of the first part of the trilogy *Ekthesis* composed by Gabriel Severus, which addressed the main diverging points between the Greek Orthodox Church and the Latin Church.¹²⁷ As I mentioned above, this part was translated into Arabic by Dabbās together with Elias Faḥr (d. 1758) and the English merchant Rowland Sherman¹²⁸ supported its printing in England and its distribution

Lebanon". See also Heyberger, *Les chrétiens du Proche-Orient au temps de la Réforme catholique*, p. 439; Aurélien Girard, "Quand les 'Grecs-Catholiques' dénonçaient les 'Grecs-Orthodoxes': la controverse confessionnelle au Proche-Orient arabe après le schisme de 1724", in Chrystel Bernat and Hubert Bost (coord. ed.), *Énoncer/dénoncer l'autre. Discours et représentations du différend confessionnel à l'époque moderne*, Turnhout, 2013, p. 159.

¹²³ Nasrallah, *L'imprimerie au Liban*, p. XII, 27.

¹²⁴ Walbiner, "Monastic Reading and Learning in Eighteenth-Century Bilād al-Šām", p. 462.

¹²⁵ *HMLÉM* IV.2, p. 123–124.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 125.

¹²⁷ Heyberger, *Les chrétiens du Proche-Orient au temps de la Réforme catholique*, p. 476; *HMLÉM* IV.2, p. 115–116.

¹²⁸ See Di Pietrantonio, "Le *Kitāb fī šinā'at al-faṣāḥa* du patriarche Athanase III Dabbās", p. 137–139.

in the Middle East.¹²⁹ He also sponsored the publication of the *Rock of Scandal*. Sherman was the author and translator of several polemical books composed from a Protestant perspective, which he distributed in the Holy Land and Ottoman Syria.¹³⁰

In 1723, already at the monastery of Ḥinšāra, Zāḥir wrote the epistle *Muḥtaṣar al-tafnīd li-l-mağma' al-'anīd* (*Brief Refutation of the Hostile Council*), in reference to the Synod of Constantinople of 1722. Here, he opposed the Orthodox dogmas formulated at the Synod, which he declared “schismatic,” and commented the disputed articles: papal primacy, rejection of the *Filioque*, beatification of saints, Purgatory, issue of the unleavened bread, age required for baptism (“confirmation”), holy communion for the infants, last myrrh anointment, fasting on Saturdays, etc.¹³¹ After this anti-Orthodox epistle was distributed, Athanasios Dabbās, who would return to the Antiochian see the next year, banned its reading and excommunicated Zāḥir. On August 7, 1724, Zāḥir wrote a letter to the patriarch where he explained his views in detail. He received a reply written by Elias Faḥr in defense of the Orthodox position on all these issues. Then, in his epistle *al-Muḥāwara al-ğadaliyya 'alā al-kalimāt al-Rabbiyya* (*Clear Explanation of the Lord's Words*), Zāḥir contested the statements of Sevastos Kimenites, the archbishop of Trabzon (d. 1702), in his work *Dogmatike didaskalia tēs hagiōtatis anatolikes kai katholikes Ekklesias*,¹³² which had been translated into Arabic as *Burhān al-'asrār fī taqdīs al-'asrār* (*The Secret Proof of the Holy Mysteries*).¹³³ These pro-Orthodox explanations were repeated by Elias Faḥr in his work *al-Munāẓara al-ğāliyya fī da'wat al-Ruḥ al-Qudsiyya* (*A Clear View on the Descent of the Holy Spirit*).¹³⁴ In another epistle composed the same year, Zāḥir condemned the asser-

¹²⁹ See Simon Mills, *A Commerce of Knowledge: Trade, Religion, and Scholarship between England and the Ottoman Empire, c. 1600–1760*, Oxford, 2020.

¹³⁰ The Catholic general superior of Jerusalem wrote on August 28, 1730, that “Chairman” (i.e., Sherman) was unstoppable, and he spreads the poison of heresy *come demonio uscito dall'inferno* (“as a demon coming out of hell”). Sherman finally ceased his anti-Catholic actions by order of the king of England. See Heyberger, *Les chrétiens du Proche-Orient au temps de la Réforme catholique*, p. 476.

¹³¹ The epistle was published twice: see *HMLÉM* IV.2, p. 117, where the entire episode is reported, and Aurélien Girard's enlightening comments in “Quand les ‘Grecs-Catholiques’ dénonçaient les ‘Grecs-Orthodoxes’”, p. 157–170.

¹³² *The Dogmatic Teaching of the Eastern and Universal Holy Church*. The book was printed by Antim the Iberian in 1703 at Bucharest, in the prince's press.

¹³³ Graf, *GCAL* III, p. 136, 138–139. In other sources, its title is *Kašf al-'asrār fī taqdīs al-'asrār* (*Revelation of the Holy Mysteries*).

¹³⁴ Written in 1728, the text survives in several manuscripts; see Paul Sbath, “Les manuscrits orientaux de la bibliothèque du R. P. Paul Sbath (suite)”, *Échos de l'Orient*, 23, 1924, 135, p. 339–340;

tions made by Eustratios Argentis about the Holy Mystery of Eucharist in his book *Syntagma kata azimōn* (*Epistle against the Unleavened Bread*), which he had read in Mas'ad Našū's translation (a book later printed in Iași, as I shall explain below).

Basile Aggoula remarked that Zāḥir made an undecided, "semi-nomadic" journey from 1722 to 1726 between three monasteries on Mount Lebanon, successively residing in Ḥinšāra, Zūq Mikael (Ḍūq Mikā'yil) and 'Aynṭūra (a monastery of the Jesuits), for no clear reason. His dedicated biographer does not clarify this issue either. Aggoula supposes that his presence and skills were simultaneously required by the Greek Catholics of Ḥinšāra and the Jesuit missionaries of 'Aynṭūra. In any case, he left Ḥinšāra in 1728, when the monastery was temporarily taken over by the Orthodox. Residing for a time in Zūq Mikael, he planned there the opening of his own press, which he finally set up in Ḥinšāra in 1731. He was helped by the Jesuit missionaries who provided him with books printed in Rome and Paris and a good part of the texts that were to be printed at his new press.

In Ḥinšāra, printing started in 1733, several years after the necessary tools and implements were prepared in 'Aynṭūra. Two simple presses of unequal size are on display in the museum of the Monastery of Saint John the Baptist, allegedly from Zāḥir's time (Fig. 14). A contemporary traveler learned from the monastic community that they had been adapted on site from olive oil presses.¹³⁵ To underline the Western assistance that Zāḥir enjoyed throughout his printing activity, Joseph Nasrallah mentions that the main press (the large one) is not "devoid of resemblance to that shown in an engraving in a book printed in 1507 at the press of the Parisian typographer Josse Bade."¹³⁶ Nevertheless, Zāḥir's exceptional role as a pioneer of printing in Lebanon is thus presented by Nasrallah:

Nous arrivons ensuite aux temps héroïques de l'histoire de la typographie au Liban; ils embrassent le XVII^e et le XVIII^e siècles. Une imprimerie se fonde dans la Sainte Qādiša.¹³⁷ Un

Graf, *GCAL* III, p. 197; *HMLÉM* IV.2, p. 120, 122; Heyberger, *Les chrétiens du Proche-Orient au temps de la Réforme catholique*, p. 476.

¹³⁵ Tit Simedrea commented on the manufacture of a press: "It is a very simple work: carved from oak wood (or sometimes pear wood), without requiring much skill, the printing press was easy to manufacture"; see Simedrea, "Tiparul bucureștean de carte bisericească în anii 1740–1750", p. 879–880.

¹³⁶ Nasrallah, *L'imprimerie au Liban*, p. 144. On Josse Bade, see Annie Parent-Charon, "La pratique des privilèges chez Josse Bade (1510–1535)", in *Bibliologia* 21, *Printers and Readers in the Sixteenth Century*, p. 15–26.

¹³⁷ He referred to the press of the Monastery of Saint Anthony in Qozhaya, where a Psalter book was printed in 1610, as I explained above.

refugié de Syrie apporte en hommage au pays qui le protège le fruit de son talent et de son esprit inventif et le dote de la première imprimerie arabe.¹³⁸

While visiting the Monastery of Saint John the Baptist in Ḥinšāra in 1908, the Russian orientalist Ignatiĭ Iu. Krachkovskiĭ notes:

Mais il n’y avait pas beaucoup de livres, et j’examinai avec beaucoup plus d’attention qu’ils n’en méritaient les pauvres restes de la bibliothèque, naguère bonne, d’un monastère ou, autrefois, on avait réussi à fonder une des premières typographies arabes de l’époque.¹³⁹

The printing workshop installed at the Monastery of Saint John the Baptist produced over the entire period of its activity, from 1734 to 1880, thirty-three titles, whereas twenty-two had second editions, or more. Between 1734 and 1748, while Zāḥir headed the press, seven books were printed.

The first book printed by Zāḥir in 1734 was *Kitāb mizān al-zamān wa-qisṭas ‘abadiyyat al-insān*, *Book of the Balance of Time and Man’s Transient Nature* (262 pp.). This is the translation of the book composed by Johannes Eusebius Nieremberg¹⁴⁰ *De la diferencia entre lo temporal y lo eterno*, printed at Madrid in 1640. The Arabic version, a text comprising 370 pp. in the printed book, was prepared by Fr Pierre Fromage with ‘Abdallāh Zāḥir. The book had a print-run of 800 copies.¹⁴¹

Next, in 1735, a Greek Catholic version of the Arabic Psalter, *Kitāb al-Zābūr al-Ilāhī li-Dāwūd al-Nabī* (X + 254 pp.), was published, containing the text of the 1706 Psalter of Aleppo and ten hymns at the end.¹⁴² The most requested book in Eastern Christian communities, the Psalter was reprinted again and again in Ḥinšāra, in a total of fifteen editions. The Horologion of Bucharest (1702) was first reprinted in Ḥinšāra in 1779 (752 pp.), and by 1879 six editions of this book were printed there.

Zāḥir translated in collaboration with Fr Pierre Fromage, and printed in his press, two other books besides the *Mizān al-zamān*: Philippe d’Outreman, S. J.,

¹³⁸ Nasrallah, *L’imprimerie au Liban*, p. XII.

¹³⁹ Ignatiĭ Krachkovsky, *Avec les manuscrits arabes (Souvenirs sur les livres et les hommes)*, transl. from Russian by M. Canard, Algiers, 1954, p. 17.

¹⁴⁰ Juan Eusebio Nieremberg, S. J., d. 1650.

¹⁴¹ De Sacy, *Bibliothèque*, t. I, p. 412, no. 1378; Glass and Roper, “Arabic Book and Newspaper Printing in the Arab World”, p. 180; Walbinder, “The Christians of *Bilād al-Shām* (Syria): Pioneers of BookPrinting in the Arab World”, p. 26.

¹⁴² Copies of this particular book are held by the INALCO library in Paris, the Catholic University of America in Washington, DC (Hyvernatt Fund), the London Library (14, St John’s Square), and the Arcadian Library of London.

al-Muršid al-masīhī, *The Christian Guide* (1738), and Paolo Segneri, *Muršid al-ḥaṭī' fī sirr al-tawba wa-l-i'tirāf*, *The Sinner's Guide to the Mystery of Repentance and Confession* (1747). After Zāḥir's death, another book by Paolo Segneri was printed in Arabic in Ḥinšāra: *Muršid al-kāhin*, *The Priest's Guide* (1760). A Catholic catechism in two successive versions, an abbreviated form and a standard one, were printed in 1756 and 1768. Among the other Arabic books translated or authored by Zāḥir and printed at the Saint John the Baptist monastery there were: in 1739 and 1740, Diego de Estella, *Iḥtiqār 'abāṭil al-'ālam* (*Contempt for the Vanities of the World*), Parts 1 and 4; in 1753, Pierre Arnoudie, S. J., *Kitāb tafsīr sab'a Mazmūrāt min Mazāmīr Dāwūd al-Nabī* (*Interpretation of Seven of David the Prophet's Psalms*); in 1768, Joachim de la Chétardie, *'Idāḥ al-ta'lim al-masīhī* (*Clarification of the Christian teaching*); in 1769, Giovanni Pinamonti, *Ta'ammulāt ḡahannam al-marī'a wa-ḥamāqat al-ḥaṭ'a l-faṣī'a* (*Meditations on the Horrendous Hell and the Sinners' Terrible Folly*); in 1772, Francesco Rainaldi, S. J., *Kitāb qūt al-naḥs* (*Book of Food for the Soul*). This list of authors reveals the fact that the constant focus of the Ḥinšāra printing program was the Catholic literature selected and distributed by the Sacra Congregatio de Propaganda Fide in support of the mission of the Jesuit fathers sent to teach and spread the Latin creed in the East. As Bernard Heyberger has noted: "une grande partie de leurs parutions a un caractère catholique militant marqué".¹⁴³

John-Paul Ghobrial explored "The Ottoman World of 'Abdallāh Zāḥir", describing the collection of books printed in Ḥinšāra held by the Arcadian Library in London. Here are his conclusions as to the topics they cover, which are applicable to the entire production of this press, in Zāḥir's lifetime and after his death:

The Arcadian collection of Shuwayr books can be divided into three main categories: (1) translations of European works into Arabic, (2) 'original' texts written by Zakher or other Melkites, and (3) liturgical books, Psalters and editions of the Gospels for devotional use by the Melkite community.¹⁴⁴

It is therefore probable that this was another reason for the dissensions between 'Abdallāh Zāḥir and Athanasios Dabbās around 1710: while the former was interested in printing pro-Catholic literature, most of these titles were unacceptable to the latter, who was struggling at the time to keep the Church of Antioch together and to avoid the division that would occur in 1724. Dabbās had no intention to

¹⁴³ Heyberger, *Les chrétiens du Proche-Orient au temps de la Réforme catholique*, p. 440.

¹⁴⁴ Ghobrial, "The Ottoman World of 'Abdallāh Zāḥir", p. 200. He described several of these books on p. 200–207 and the Annex, with illustrations. Among them, only three were printed by Zāḥir himself. The others are dated after 1748.

print in Aleppo books of teachings about the Latin creed, nor to fuel the disagreements that smoldered between the Catholic-inclined and the Orthodox. Books such as those later printed in Ḥinšāra would have ended up in the possession of the Western missionaries, whose task was to attract the Arabic-speaking Christians of the Ottoman territories into union with the Church of Rome. Basile Aggoula suggests that the main reason for Zāḥir's transfer to Mount Lebanon was his aspiration, in harmony with that of Pierre Fromage, to have the freedom to print whatever they wished, beginning with the above-mentioned titles that they translated together.

It is worth mentioning that the texts they printed were either translations from Latin that the Jesuit fathers brought with them or translated with him, or his own compositions in Arabic. He seems to have revised some of the texts printed in Aleppo that were republished in Ḥinšāra, but only by improving the Arabic language, as, according to Charon, he did not know Greek:

La version des péripécopes des Épitres en usage chez les Melkites dérive de la traduction arabe de la Bible faite ou revue sur le grec par le célèbre 'Abd Allah Ibn el Faḍl, au onzième siècle. Au dix-huitième, le clerc alépin 'Abdallāh Zāḥir, qui s'était attaché aux Chouérites sans faire pour cela partie de leur congrégation, corrigea cette traduction dont le style laissait par trop à désirer, mais en se basant uniquement sur les règles de la grammaire arabe, car il ne savait pas le grec.¹⁴⁵

In a will dictated on August 20, 1748, Zāḥir left the entire press, with all the printing implements, and his library to the monastic community in Ḥinšāra, indicating the person who was going to head the printing activity: Suleymān Qaṭṭān (d. 1799), a disciple of his who had also followed his lead in composing several polemical works.¹⁴⁶ After Zāḥir died, the press was at a standstill for two years because of disagreements between the Greek Catholic order and the new printer, who finally left the monastery for a time. After his return, he created new Arabic type and kept working until he died in 1775. He trained three apprentices who learned how to cast type, to typeset, and to bind printed sheets. The Melkite Greek Catholic bishops of the time paid close attention to the press, where seven workers were active in the last quarter of the 18th century. A document preserved in the archive of Dayr al-Šīr, signed on January 1, 1776, by the superior, Paul Qassār, and other clerics, and confirmed by Theodosius Daḥdāḥ, the Melkite

¹⁴⁵ Charon, *Le Rite byzantin dans les Patriarcats melkites*, p. 122.

¹⁴⁶ On Zāḥir's apprentices, see Joseph Nasrallah's article in *Al-Masarra*, 1948, p. 431–435, and Panchenko, *Arab Orthodox Christians under the Ottomans*, p. 472.

Greek Catholic Patriarch, Germanos Adam, the bishop of Aleppo, and the bishop of Diyarbakır, comprises the rules for the work and wages of the typographers.¹⁴⁷

While travelling across Mount Lebanon in 1783–1785, Volney found at the press of Ḥinšāra only four workers, who were still printing Christian books (dogmatic, patristic, and mystical) but at a slower pace than in Zāḥir's times. The Psalter was the only book in demand, while other titles failed to secure sufficient income for the press. Volney expressed his opinion that if the fathers had accepted to also print Western books of a more practical content (*d'une utilité pratique*), they would have encouraged an interest of the Arab readership in the sciences and arts, thus securing a larger profit from the sales.¹⁴⁸

Between 1797 and 1802, the press stopped working. It was closed for good in 1899, when the competition with other more modern presses could no longer be faced. The last book printed in Ḥinšāra was the 15th edition of the Psalter.

Virgil Cândea notes that this was the Arabic press with the longest activity in the Middle East, considering that it functioned 165 years, from 1734 to 1899, longer than any press in Syria and Lebanon. Moreover, it worked with technology and expertise inherited from the presses of Wallachia – Snagov, 1701, and Bucharest, 1702.¹⁴⁹

Information on 'Abdallāh Zāḥir's press in Ḥinšāra is also presented in the correspondence between Fr Fromage and M. Truilhier of Marseilles, the commercial resident of France in Sidon, who shared it with another traveler to the Levant, Jean de la Roque, as he mentions in a letter dated December 21, 1735. Thus, de la Roque credits Fr Fromage with the founding of the press on Mount Lebanon, and the financial support to Truilhier.¹⁵⁰ Indeed, after 1726 the financial needs of the new press were covered, at least in part, by the French commercial resident in Sidon, who was exchanging letters with Fr Fromage and backed the Jesuits in their missions to the Middle East.

Basile Aggoula, who studied all the sources mentioned above, concludes that the Annals of Ḥinšāra and the biography of Zāḥir are “closer to the *hagiographic* style than that of *chronicles*.” Thus, for the monk who recorded Zāḥir's death on August 30, 1748, he was:

[...] l'astre de l'Orient, modèle des savants, unique à son époque, sans pareil dans son pays...

[...] En effet, grâce à sa pénétration d'esprit, il excelle dans toutes les branches de la science,

147 Nasrallah, *Al-Masarra*, p. 463.

148 Volney, *Voyage en Syrie et en Égypte*, p. 80–82.

149 Cândea, “Dès 1701: Dialogue roumanolibanais par le livre et l'imprimerie”, p. 288 and 293, n. 30.

150 The letter was published in the *Mercure* of May 1736, cf. De Sacy, *Bibliothèque*, t. I, p. 412.

notoirement dans la langue arabe qui n'avait pour lui aucun secret. Il était surtout maître en logique, en théologie, en philosophie et en sciences naturelles. Mais ce qui le mit au premier rang des savants, ce fut, sans contredit, l'habileté avec laquelle in maniait l'art de la controverse.¹⁵¹

The image of Zāḥir depicted by Nasrallah, based on the same sources, was not far from this style either: "Zāḥir est l'un de ces hommes universels à qui tout réussit. Il excelle à la fois dans l'orfèvrerie, la gravure, l'horlogerie, la peinture, la littérature dans ses diverses branches enfin",¹⁵²

The most intensely debated aspect of 'Abdallāh Zāḥir's printing activity was the source of the Arabic type used in producing his books and the extent of the help that he received: From whom? From where? Joseph Nasrallah states that Athanasios Dabbās had acquired in Wallachia knowledge of manufacturing and casting type and then transmitted this expertise to Zāḥir, who, being more skilled than the metropolitan, succeeded in becoming a better printer. This is the theory that was formulated in the biography probably composed by Zāḥir's disciple Yuwākīm Muṭrān (1696–1766), who claimed that his master manufactured all the necessary Arabic type without any previous training, just looking at books printed in Rome that circulated in Ottoman Syria. In Nasrallah's translation of this passage from the special issue of *al-Masarra*:

Il fit une imprimerie à Alep avec son frère. In en grava les matrices, les caractères et tous les instruments. Ils y imprimèrent plusieurs livres et cela sans qu'ils eussent vu d'imprimerie et sans être guidés par quelqu'un dans ce travail.¹⁵³

Based on this assessment, Nasrallah contradicted the idea that Arabic type was brought from Wallachia to Aleppo, claiming that the type used in Dabbās's press was manufactured right there by Zāḥir, based solely on the Arabic printed books that Dabbās had in his press (probably from Wallachia). This conclusion is supported by an incorrect interpretation of a passage in Dabbās's foreword to the Psalter of Aleppo (1706, the first book), where Nasrallah saw a reference to Zāḥir's contribution, without real support:

¹⁵¹ Aggoula, "Le livre libanais de 1585 à 1900", p. 303, and Nasrallah, *L'imprimerie au Liban*, p. 28, citing a 'Ms. de Harissa', p. 365–366. This is most likely MS Ḥariṣā 209, 3°, edited in *Al-Masarra*, 4, 1913, p. 201–209. See El Gemayel, "Abd Allah Zakhir", p. 102.

¹⁵² Nasrallah, *L'imprimerie au Liban*, p. 28.

¹⁵³ [Yuwākīm Muṭrān], in *Al-Masarra*, 1948, p. 387, also cited by Nasrallah, *L'imprimerie au Liban*, p. 18–19.

Pourquoi Athanase dédie-t-il les prémices de son œuvre à Constantin [Brâncoveanu] et pourquoi le remercie-t-il de ses bienfaits insignes envers les chrétiens des pays arabes? Les bienfaits précédents du voïvode ne justifient pas pareils éloges, surtout dans la préface d'un premier livre sorti d'une imprimerie nouvelle, si réellement le voïvode n'avait pas aidé à la création des nouvelles presses d'Alep. Quant à en déterminer les détails, cela nous est difficile pour le moment: secours matériels, envoi de la presse elle-même, peut-être. Zāḥir se serait chargé de fonder les caractères et de fabriquer tout le matériel. C'est à lui que fait allusion Dabbās en disant dans la préface de son édition du *Psautier*:

حيث انه (الله) وفقنا الى عمل طبع الحرف العربي.¹⁵⁴

Nous pouvons ainsi toujours regarder Zāḥir comme le créateur de la première imprimerie d'Orient. Tous ce que nous savons de son habileté artistique confirme le témoignage de la *Biographie*.¹⁵⁵

Reading carefully the entire foreword and other texts composed by Dabbās where he reports on the circumstances that allowed him to print the first Orthodox liturgical books for the Arabic-speaking Christians, it becomes clear that he always refers to the support granted by Constantin Brâncoveanu. Moreover, Nasrallah himself states in the conclusions to his chapter dedicated to Zāḥir in vol. IV.2 of *HMLÉM* (1989): “La *Biographie* fait un éloge dithyrambique de l’œuvre de Zāḥir.”¹⁵⁶ It is worth noting that this reevaluation was presented forty-two years after his first comments published in 1948 in *L'imprimerie au Liban*.

The assertions of Zāḥir's biographer were earlier contradicted by the Romanian historian Virgil Cîndea, who comments in his contribution to *Le livre et le Liban*:

[...] nous nous demandons comment il était possible que quelqu'un eut pu fonder une imprimerie de toutes pièces, depuis la gravure des matrices jusqu'à la presse, sans en avoir jamais vu une ('Abdallāh n'ayant jamais voyagé en Europe), et sans qu'on lui eût au moins décrit cette installation tellement sophistiquée pour les non-initiés.¹⁵⁷

In his study published in the same volume, Basile Aggoula opposes the opinion expressed by Zāḥir's biographer that the Arabic type of Aleppo could have been created by the latter alone. Moreover, he considers that the press could only have been set up with direct help from typographers coming from Wallachia, who must have manufactured the Arabic printing implements as well.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁴ “For Him [i.e., Allāh – *my note*] allowed us to print with Arabic type.”

¹⁵⁵ Nasrallah, *L'imprimerie au Liban*, p. 19–21.

¹⁵⁶ *HMLÉM* IV.2, p. 136.

¹⁵⁷ Cîndea, “Dès 1701: Dialogue roumanolibanais par le livre et l'imprimerie”, p. 286.

¹⁵⁸ Aggoula, “Le livre libanais de 1585 à 1900”, p. 301.

Nevertheless, the role of the Jesuits missionaries residing in Lebanon must have been very significant in the activity of Zāḥir's press, as proven by the fact that he sent Fr Pierre Fromage a gift of twenty-eight elegant copies of four of the books printed there, with a gilded binding, i.e., 'deluxe' or 'protocol' versions. He also sent and a similarly elegant copy of the *Mizān al-zamān* to Fr Truilhier in Sidon.¹⁵⁹

Indeed, it is hardly plausible that without any models and training by an experienced typographer Zāḥir could have turned, in a short time, from a talented apprentice goldsmith to an expert printer capable of cutting punches, carving complicated woodblocks, and casting the elegant Arabic type and page-ornaments of his books, a selection of which was published by Joseph Nasrallah in *L'imprimerie au Liban* (*Gravure sur bois de Abdallāh Zāḥir* on p. III, the title page, then on p. 17, 45–47, 142, 143, 152, 158, and the back cover of the book).

One of the most far-fetched opinions expressed on this subject was formulated by Joseph Elie Kahalé in his book dedicated to Zāḥir's life and works:

Quant à nous, nous nions tout cela et nous disons que, lors de sa visite en Roumanie [sic], le patriarche Dabbās a visité une imprimerie dont il a observé le fonctionnement et noté les instruments. De retour à Alep, il la décrit à Abdallah Zakher qui, par son ingéniosité et son imagination, créa la première imprimerie arabe en Orient.¹⁶⁰

These statements may have originated in a brief note written by an anonymous person, in an 18th-century style script in the opening of a copy of the Psalter printed by Zāḥir (probably, the first edition), which Basile Aggoula evokes in support of the "total confusion" of the sources in Ḥinšāra: "Ce psautier arabe a été imprimé par un Syrien, qui sur la seule inspection de quelques caractères d'imprimerie a fondu des caractères et établi à lui seul une imprimerie au commencement de ce siècle XVIII."¹⁶¹

Nevertheless, the idea that Zāḥir was the first ever to print in the Middle East is so entrenched in Lebanese intellectual circles that it was possible for the Psalter printed in 1706 by Athanasios Dabbās in Aleppo to be described as follows: "Aleppo 1706, *The Psalms*, translated by 'Abdallāh ibn al-Faḍl al-Anṭāki, Zāḥir's press, printed with type cast in Europe."¹⁶²

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 306.

¹⁶⁰ Kahalé, 'Abdallāh Zakher, *Philosophe, théologien et fondateur de l'imprimerie arabe en Orient*, p. 66.

¹⁶¹ Cf. Aggoula, "Le livre libanais de 1585 à 1900", p. 303.

¹⁶² "Alep, 1706, *Les Psaumes*, traduits par 'Abdallāh ibn al-Faḍl al-Anṭāki. Imprimerie Zāḥir, avec des caractères fondus en Europe", cf. Fouad E. Boustany, "Les Libanais et le livre", in Aboussouan (dir.), *Le livre et le Liban jusqu'à 1900*, p. 153, n. 1.

The theory that Zāḥir initiated the Arabic-type printing by himself has been convincingly disproved by Middle Eastern historians as well. Historical testimonies prove that the new press of Ḥinšāra borrowed type and other implements from the Aleppo one, probably leaving the remaining type sets incomplete.¹⁶³ ‘Īsā ‘Iskandar al-Ma‘lūf states that he found at the monastery of Balamand (Lebanon) typographic wooden tools that could have come from the Aleppo press, perhaps copies of those presented to Dabbās by Antim the Iberian. Joseph Nasrallah opposed this possibility:

On a prétendu que l'imprimerie d'Alep a été transportée à Balamend, et de là, les religieux catholiques qui quittèrent le monastère en 1697 l'acheminèrent avec eux à Šueir. Prétention gratuite, sans aucun fondement et qui ne mérite pas qu'on s'y arrête. L'imprimerie de Šueir est l'œuvre exclusive du *šammās* Abdallah Zāḥir.¹⁶⁴

Indeed, in 1740, writing angrily to Fr Fromage, Zāḥir declared that the press at Ḥinšāra was entirely his work. Nasrallah extracted from Zāḥir's biography information on the models of the type that he manufactured, which seemingly came from books printed in Rome by the Sacra Congregatio de Propaganda Fide and are closer in style to the “*kanasi* (ecclesiastic)” calligraphic script.¹⁶⁵ Therefore, Nasrallah states that Zāḥir manufactured punches and type and woodcuts at the Monastery of Zūq Mikael, where he prepared the essential typographic tools and implements for the new press. Zāḥir's type is elegant and harmonious. The lines on each page are generally separated by small decorative elements, more significant pages are adorned with borders and vignettes of stylized flowers. The text is set within single or double frames.

As with the Arabic books printed in Wallachia and Aleppo, in Zāḥir's books woodblocks are used for printing the significant or recurring phrases and words, such as *kitāb*. Joseph Nasrallah published in *L'imprimerie au Liban* several words printed with woodblocks presumably created by Zāḥir: a title for Chapter One, *al-Maqālat al-'ulā* (p. XXV), and the word *muqaddima* (foreword) with a *šadda*, the sign of a double consonant, above the *rasm* and the final *tanwīn*, the mark of the indefinite state (on p. XV). Nasrallah states at the closing of his foreword that he was granted the approval to reproduce, at the above-mentioned pages of his book, the woodcut images (*les clichés gravés sur bois*) for the icons and ornamental elements allegedly carved by Zāḥir, which are still preserved in the

¹⁶³ Nasrallah, *L'imprimerie au Liban*, p. 21.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 25.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 29. Correct: Adj. *kanā'isiyy* < Ar. *kanā'is*, Pl. < *kanīsa*, ‘church’.

museum of Ḥinšāra.¹⁶⁶ Aggoula maintains, however, that the plates and matrices are mostly made of metal, not wood, and dated from a later period. Indeed, one can notice the presence of vignettes with medieval symbols specific to Western Europe, such as the 'Green Man', a frequent decoration in the books and architecture of the Anglo-Saxon lands, known to have spread all across Europe (Fig. 37).¹⁶⁷ Having visited the museum of the Monastery of Saint John the Baptist in 2022, I can confirm that there are a few woodcut matrices among the exhibits and sensibly more metal-cast material. It is difficult to draw a conclusion on the dates and the entire heritage of Zāḥir's period of activity without access to the entire museum collection.

Aggoula goes further in his analysis of the Ḥinšāra books, expressing his opinion that the beauty of the type forms and the distinctions between them and those used in Aleppo prove that they were manufactured with punches created in the West, in a press where such artistic works were already mastered by experienced typographers, since printing in non-Latin type had become a common activity in Western Europe.

L'examen du *mizān al-zamān*, le premier livre imprimé à Šueir en 1733–1734, montre une mise en page presque parfaite et des caractères d'une grande beauté. Il est impossible d'attribuer de telles matrices à un alépin qui n'avait pas vu d'autres caractères en dehors de ceux d'Alep. La différence entre les deux est frappante. Ceux de Šueir trahissent des matrices en acier gravées par des typographes professionnels, c'est-à-dire venus d'Europe. [...] Nous préférons accorder à ces matrices une origine européenne.¹⁶⁸

According to Dagmar Glass and Geoffrey Roper, when moving forward from Dabbās's press, "the next stage in the history of Arabic typography in the Middle East was demonstrably a continuation of the Aleppo venture."¹⁶⁹ Based on the findings of the Arab historians [Salaheddine] al-Bustānī and [Yūsuf al-Šā'ig] al-Būlusī,¹⁷⁰ the authors believe that Zāḥir's role in manufacturing the printing implements of his press was essential:

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., p. XIII. More ornamental elements, undated, were reproduced in Ghobrial, "The Ottoman World of 'Abdallāh Zāḥir", p. 216.

¹⁶⁷ See the reproduction with Nasrallah, *L'imprimerie au Liban*, p. 17, and Ghobrial, "The Ottoman World of 'Abdallāh Zāḥir", p. 216. For the motif of the Green Man, a useful source is the book of Clive Hicks, *The Green Man. A Field Guide*, Fakenham, 2000.

¹⁶⁸ Aggoula, "Le livre libanais de 1585 à 1900", p. 306.

¹⁶⁹ Glass and Roper, "Arabic Book and Newspaper Printing in the Arab World", p. 179. As I mentioned before, they had just mentioned on the previous page, referring to the Aleppo workshop, that: "After 1711, however, it disappeared without trace".

¹⁷⁰ They often cite their works, both printed in 1948: Salaheddine al-Boustani, *The Press During*

Instructed in the goldsmith's art by his father, he later taught himself additional arts such as engraving, painting and woodcarving. Using these skills he drafted elements of book design, often evidently inspired by European originals. But Az-Zāḥir's indisputably greatest contribution was that he supplied the Šuwayr workshop with his own Arabic types and thereby gave the monastery its really valuable asset.¹⁷¹

An interesting aspect that was not explored before the survey of the Arcadian Library collection done by John-Paul Ghobrial is that of the similarities of the book-bindings from Antim the Iberian's presses with those of Ḥinšāra.¹⁷² Based on the three books printed by Antim that are preserved at the British Library in London, which include the Greek Psalter of 1699, Ghobrial reached these conclusions:

When Dabbas returned to Aleppo from Bucharest in 1704, he brought with him some parts of a printing press, tools and perhaps even actual craftsmen. It is very likely that he also brought binding tools. For the Arcadian Library's copy of the last work to be printed on Dabbas's press, his treatise on the confession of 1711, also suggests a continuity with the border tooling of the Bucharest binding. More importantly, it carries the central cross medalion that would become so typical of most Shuwayr bindings. While in Aleppo, 'Abdallāh Zakher must have participated in the operation of the Aleppo press: if Bucharest craftsmen were present, he would have been working and learning alongside them. This would help to account for the close similarities between the tooling on the Shuwayr bindings and that of the Greek Psalter printed in Bucharest. Given that Zakher requested parts from the Aleppo press while he was working to create his own press at Shuwayr, he might also have obtained binding tools that had first been used in Bucharest. Alternatively, considering Zakher's reputation for engraving and woodcarving, he may even have created his own set of binding tools based on the ones he had seen in Aleppo.¹⁷³

I have mentioned before the theory that Dabbās was accompanied to Aleppo by one or more apprentices sent by Antim the Iberian to assist him in starting his own press. John-Paul Ghobrial's findings also point in this direction, although, as he notes, Zāḥir may as well have done it all in Aleppo by copying models from Wallachian presses, both for books and bindings.

Ghobrial is also, as far as I know, the first historian in Europe who mentions the "characteristic 'Shuwayr' cross" when describing the books printed in

the French Expedition in Egypt, 1798–1801, Cairo, 1954, and Yūsuf al-Šāyeḡ al-Būlusī, "Tarḡamat ḥayāt: al-Faylasūf aš-Šammās 'Abdallāh az-Zāḥir", *Al-Masarra*, cited above.

¹⁷¹ Glass and Roper, "Arabic Book and Newspaper Printing in the Arab World", p. 179–180.

¹⁷² According to his own statement (*The Ottoman World of 'Abdallāh Zāher*, p. 213, n. 37), he was helped in examining the bindings by Nicholas Pickwoad, professor with the University of Oxford, an expert in bookbinding and book conservation.

¹⁷³ Ghobrial, "The Ottoman World of 'Abdallāh Zāḥir", p. 213.

Ḥinšāra.¹⁷⁴ This cross has become a 'trademark' of the Ḥinšāra books, useful in identifying the origin of copies scattered all over the world – even in Bucharest, where the Library of the Romanian Academy holds a copy of the 1776 Gospel with commentaries from this press, as proven by this ornamental element on its covers (Fig. 15).¹⁷⁵

Unlike the books printed in the Romanian Principalities for Arabic-speaking Christians, the books produced at Ḥinšāra were sold to churches, monasteries, and private people. Bernard Heyberger also mentions this fact: the two books printed in Snagov and Bucharest (as well as those of Iași, I should add), were "works meant to be distributed to the clergy for free,"¹⁷⁶ while "these books [of Ḥinšāra] are not distributed for free."¹⁷⁷

Here, books were printed to be retailed, as revealed by a letter addressed by Zāhir to Fr Pierre Fromage where he mentions the prices of the books that he was sending him for various monasteries and missionary schools.¹⁷⁸ The main center of sales for the books printed at Ḥinšāra was the city of Aleppo, where the Greek Catholic community, like the Maronite one, had adopted Arabic in a larger proportion and earlier than the Christians of Mount Lebanon. From about 1750 on, the Greek Catholic bishops employed, for acquisitions and sales of monastic produce, a *wakīl* ('agent') among those who operated in Aleppo, Damascus, Tripoli, Homs, Baalbek, Acre, Rome, or in Egypt. In the suppliers' commercial records, books printed in Ḥinšāra are listed among the merchandise they traded.¹⁷⁹

The press at Ḥinšāra answered the Christians' needs of the moment in that part of the Ottoman world: on the one hand, the need of the Maronites and the Melkite Greek Catholics (similar to those of all denominations across Greater Syria) to read and serve the Divine Liturgy in Arabic; on the other, the energetic activities of the Western missionaries to draw the churches of the East closer to

¹⁷⁴ See *ibid.*, p. 209, and the reproduction of an upper cover where this cross appears, on p. 208.

¹⁷⁵ Ioana Feodorov, "O carte arabă rară în colecțiile B.A.R.", *Tezaur*, 2, 2021, 3, p. 10–11. Incidentally, the copy of the IMO in Saint Petersburg comes from the same source, as shown by the mark on its front and back covers. See Frantsouzoff, "Le premier lectionnaire arabe orthodoxe imprimé", p. 468, Fig. 11.

¹⁷⁶ Heyberger, *Les chrétiens du Proche-Orient au temps de la Réforme catholique*, p. 439: "C'est ainsi que paraît à Bucarest l'*Horologion* de Malātyūs Karma, que Rome avait refusé de publier, ainsi qu'un *Liturgicon*, en arabe et en grec, ouvrages destinés à la distribution gratuite dans le clergé."

¹⁷⁷ Heyberger, *Les chrétiens du Proche-Orient au temps de la Réforme catholique*, p. 440: "Ces livres ne sont pas distribués gratuitement" (referring to the Ḥinšāra books).

¹⁷⁸ Aggoula, "Le livre libanais de 1585 à 1900", p. 318, n. 39.

¹⁷⁹ Heyberger, *Les chrétiens du Proche-Orient au temps de la Réforme catholique*, p. 114, 440.

the Latin creed. It is worth noting that the opening of a press at the Monastery of Saint John the Baptist on Mount Lebanon required the collaboration between ‘Abdallāh Zāḥir and Fr Pierre Fromage, superior of the Jesuit Order of the East, large expenses, and six years of preparing the typographic material (1728–1733).

Recently, while conducting field research in Lebanon, the Brazilian anthropologist Rodrigo Ayupe Bueno da Cruz witnessed the importance of Zāḥir’s press for the identity of the contemporary community of the Monastery of Saint John the Baptist. He reports on several interviews with the residents of Ḥinšāra who expressed their pride of the outcomes of “the first Arabic press in the Middle East, located in the central Chouerite convent” and described the printing of Arabic books for the Melkite Greek Catholics as formative for the local people, who learn about it in school.

A 30-year-old Greek Catholic resident of Khenchara defined *dayr mar yūḥannā* as a touristic and religious place belonging to the Greek Catholic community. In his interview, he states that the importance of this monastery in Lebanon is due to the ‘presence of the oldest Arabic press in the Middle East’. He also mentioned learning about the historical importance of the printing press in school. Teachers emphasised this in history classes and organised tours and summer camps in Choueirite’s central convent. [Like the teachers, monks and priests have usually emphasized the importance of the printing press in their speeches. During an interview with a former Choueirite monk, Priest Charbel Maalouf (2014), of the Julien le Pauvre Church in Paris, reinforced the importance of the Choueirite printing press. According to him, this institution played a fundamental role in the history of Eastern Christians. Another priest, at *dayr mar yuhanna*, made a similar speech when he knew I never visited the museum: ‘I cannot believe that you have not visited our printing press yet, it is very important for the history of our church, everyone wants to come here and visit the press [...]. The same priest also reinforced the importance of the Choueirite printing press to other Christian communities. In his words, ‘everyone wants to come here and visit the press’, suggesting that it served as a multi-confessional attraction. In this sense, the museum has received visitors from other regions of the country and Christians of other traditions, mainly Maronites and Greek Orthodox.¹⁸⁰

All the above reveals the significance of the efforts – in time and money spent – of those who jointly carried out the ambitious project of installing the first Arabic-type press in Aleppo: Constantin Brâncoveanu, Antim the Iberian and Athanasios Dabbās. Without their initiative and efforts, none of the subsequent developments of Arabic printing in the 18th century Greater Syria would have been possible.

180 Ayupe Bueno da Cruz, “The Greek Catholic Community and its Collective Memories”, p. 42.

4.3 Patriarch Sylvester's Response: The Arabic Press of Iași in Moldavia

In 1725, soon after he was installed as patriarch, Sylvester asked the Sacra Congregatio de Propaganda Fide to print in Rome new editions of the Book of the Divine Liturgies and the Horologion that his predecessor had printed in Wallachia. His request was rejected, as the texts were considered non-compliant with Catholic dogma. The situation did not improve with time. In the foreword to the *Neos Epistolarios* printed at Leipzig in 1764, a report was included about the realities of the day in the Middle East, as the editor perceived them: Orthodox priests were living in misery, the Eastern Patriarchates were oppressed by the Ottoman governors, and several metropolitan and episcopal sees were removed.¹⁸¹

Following the refusal he received from Rome, Sylvester resumed the connections that Patriarch Athanasios III had enjoyed with the Romanian Principalities. He wrote around 1730 to the princes of Moldavia and Wallachia, Ioan and Constantin Mavrocordat, who came from a family of the Phanar and had received a solid Greek and Orthodox education. Soon, the patriarch of Antioch secured the approval of Ioan Mavrocordat to print several books in Arabic at the Monastery of Saint Sava in Iași, a *metochion* of the Holy Sepulcher: in 1745, *Kitāb al-Qundāq*, a new edition of the Arabic text in the Book of the Divine Liturgies of Snagov (1701); in 1746, the Arabic translation of a book written by Patriarch Nektarios of Jerusalem against the papal primacy, in Arabic: *Kitāb qaḍā al-ḥaqq wa-naql al-ṣidq* (*Book of the Rule of Justice and the Transmission of Truth*), and, bound in the same volume, the Arabic translation of Eustratios Argentis's *Brief Epistle against the Pope's Infallibility*, in Arabic: *Risāla muḥtaṣara fī l-radd 'alā 'adam ḡalaṭ bābāwāt Rūmiyā*; in 1747, *Kitāb al'-aṣā al-Rabbānī* (*Book of the Lord's Supper*), the translation of Eustratios Argentis's work *Sintagma kata azymon*, and the *Resolutions of the Church Councils convened at Constantinople concerning the Catholics' advent among the Antiochian Christians* (Arabic title: *'A'māl al-maḡma'ayn al-kanīsiyayn al-mun'aqidayn fī-l-Qusṭanṭīniyya bi-ša'n zuḥūr al-kāṭūlik bayna ṣufūf al-masiḥiyyīn al-anṭākiyyīn*), accompanied by five brief polemical epistles concerning the divergent points of the Orthodox and the Catholic dogmas, and a *Confession of the Orthodox Faith*.

As for Patriarch Sylvester's contribution to the *content* that was being printed, he states in the forewords to the books produced in Iași that he revised and

¹⁸¹ Constantin Erbiceanu, *Bibliografia greacă sau Cărțile grecești imprimate în Principatele Române în epoca fanariotă și dedicate domnitorilor și boierilor români. Studii literare*, Bucharest, 1903, p. 104.

improved all the re-edited Arabic texts, such as the Book of the Divine Liturgies in 1745. This was the way any patriarch of an Orthodox church would proceed when addressing texts printed by his predecessors. The Romanian theologian and historian of the Orthodox Church Fr Ene Braniște states that in Romanian printing culture “every edition was generally improved in connection with its language features. Texts were compared with the Greek originals specially to remove the translation errors present in old editions, so that phrases were expressed with more clarity, while a new form of the Typicon indications was adopted”.¹⁸² Revising the text that Athanasios Dabbās had printed, Patriarch Sylvester worked in the same spirit, intending to adapt it to the ecclesiastic language of his time and bring it closer to the Arabic vernacular of the mid-18th century.

The fact that Patriarch Sylvester printed in Iași only the Arabic version of the Book of the Divine Liturgies is proof enough that Greek had vanished from liturgical use. Undoubtedly, the patriarch could have asked the skilled typographers of Iași to include the Greek version in his new edition, placing the two versions on parallel columns as Antim had done in 1701. But Sylvester was printing for the priests of his time. Although he was a native speaker of Greek, the clergy and the flock were Arabic-speakers, in their vast majority. For this reason, certain words and phrases that had a Greek form in the 1701 edition were changed to an Arabic form in 1745. For example, the text for the order of the *Proskomidia* (ترتيب الذبيحة المقدسه), which also gives the prayers uttered during the priest’s dressing in liturgical vestments (طقس اللبس البدله), is printed in the Snagov edition as a continuous Arabic text, with insertions of Typikon indications in Greek, some translated into Arabic (p. 41–78, 1st seq.).¹⁸³ In the 1745 edition, the same text is printed only in Arabic (ff. 17–22r).

Wahid Gdoura had expressed his opinion that the Patriarch Sylvester secured from the church authorities who controlled the press in Iași the publication of Arabic translation of certain polemical works as a priority.¹⁸⁴ It was easier to do this in Moldavia, because the presses there had already printed Greek books written by anti-Catholic scholars, especially after the year 1700, when the Emperor Leopold I forced union with Rome on the Orthodox Christians of Transylvania.

Several texts were also printed in other languages at the request of Patriarch Sylvester: in 1745, seemingly in Bucharest, a letter of pardon in Romanian, on a flyer,¹⁸⁵ and, in 1748, several *antimensia* with Greek inscriptions, which he subse-

¹⁸² Pr. Ene Braniște, *Liturgica generală cu noțiuni de artă bisericească, arhitectură și pictură creștină*, 2nd ed., Bucharest, 1993, p. 652.

¹⁸³ Chițulescu (coord. ed.), *Antim Ivireanul. Opera tipografică*, p. 91–92.

¹⁸⁴ Gdoura, *Le début de l'imprimerie arabe à Istanbul et en Syrie*, p. 183.

¹⁸⁵ Today, in the collections of the B.A.R. See Papadopol-Calimach, “Un episod din istoria

quently consecrated. In the Romanian presses of the time, printing *antimensia* was a separate activity.¹⁸⁶

Although Sylvester had wished to print earlier, procuring Arabic type proved difficult and required much time. There is no information on the source of the Arabic type that was used in Iași. The available historical information mostly concerns the patriarch's printing activities of Wallachia after 1747. After these books were printed, Sylvester left for Bucharest, where a press functioned at the Monastery of Saint Sava, dependent on the Văcărești monastery, a *metochion* of the Holy Sepulcher, and a second one at the Metropolitan palace. While still in Iași, moving in the printers' circles, the patriarch undoubtedly learned that the metropolitan of Ungro-Wallachia, Neophytos of Crete, had endowed the press at the Monastery of Saint Sava "with 180 new matrices, two printing presses, six bundles of paper, and various tools."¹⁸⁷ Moreover, Constantin Mavrocordat, the new prince of Wallachia, was obviously interested in book production, since he pleaded with the Metropolitan Neophytos to pardon the typographer Popa Stoica Iacovici, the best typographer of Bucharest at the time, who had printed theological books without asking for His Holiness's approval. Among the Mavrocordat princes, possibly this Prince Constantin was the firmest supporter of printing, as Tit Simedrea portrays him, based on the chronicles of the day:

When he moved to be a prince in Iași (1741), he encouraged the Moldavian upper clergy to set up in their dioceses presses to print church books; and he brought with him from Bucharest Romanian printed books, the Gospel, the Apostolos, and Book of the Divine Liturgies, and he ordered they be read at church. And again, he would perhaps have spent money from his own purse to print a book or other, had he not had a big house packed [...] with mouths to feed.¹⁸⁸

Commenting the expression 'by order of Nicolae voivod Mavrocordat' mentioned in the foreword of the *Catavasier*¹⁸⁹ printed in 1724 at Bucharest, Tit Simedrea

tipografiei în România", p. 146; *BRV* II, p. 84; Păcurariu, "Legăturile Țărilor Române cu Patriarhia Antiohiei", p. 612.

186 Simedrea, "Tiparul bucureștean de carte bisericească în anii 1740-1750", p. 858. See also p. 907, where he explained that *antimensia* were often the victims of raids and riots and, in their aftermath, the metropolitan of the country was requested to have them replaced.

187 *Ibid.*, p. 860, 873.

188 *Ibid.*, p. 867.

189 *Catavasier*, or *Anastasimatarion*, is a service book of the Orthodox Church that contains the hymns of the Vespers (Anastasima or Resurrectional hymns), Sunday Orthros, and other hymns celebrating the Resurrection of Christ.

explains what the prince's order meant at a time when 'neither the prince's court nor the church had their own presses':

[...] a princely 'order' of this sort implied: a) the approval granted by the prince to a 'typographer' who owned a press to carry out the art of printing; b) an exemption from taxes for him and the 'apprentices' in his workshop and the exemption from custom dues for the tools and materials brought from abroad, as required by the press; c) the agreement to sell the books printed by him, and d) quite often, even a payment by the prince of all expenses incurred in printing a certain book.

Predictably, soon after Constantin Mavrocordat took over the Wallachian throne, the master typographer Popa Stoica Iacovici obtained a license for the prince's printing workshop. The Bucharest printers' activity was, in mid-18th century, very important both for the upper clergy and the ruler: presses were opened or transferred, type sets were acquired or manufactured, presses that were no longer used were sold to the highest bidder, etc.¹⁹⁰ That was the appropriate environment to procure the necessary typographic material for an Arabic-language printing press.

The first query about Sylvester's printing venture refers to the source of the Arabic type used in Iași. One of the possible answers is that he brought it from Syria, having learned, in his correspondence with the Moldavian boyars and clerics, that there was none at the presses there and no Arabic printing had ever been done in their principality. It is hard to ascertain today whether there was a connection between the Aleppo press – and the Arabic typographic material manufactured by Antim the Iberian – and that of Iași. There is no documentary proof in this respect and a rigorous survey of the relevant Syrian archives (in Aleppo and Damascus, firstly) has not yet been conducted.

An episode connected to this topic brings to the foreground the interest of Silvestre de Sacy for the Arabic books printed in the Romanian Principalities. Baron Silvestre de Sacy held many offices, such as 'Président de la Société Asiatique' and 'Conservateur des manuscrits orientaux de la Bibliothèque Royale'. In 1811, among his other tasks, de Sacy was in charge of the press of the French court. He wrote on July 30, 1811, to Théodore Ledoulx, the French vice-consul in Bucharest, asking him to inquire and respond what Arabic books were printed there by Athanasios Dabbās and Sylvester of Antioch.¹⁹¹ He had recently received from the

¹⁹⁰ Simedrea, "Tiparul bucureștean de carte bisericească în anii 1740–1750", p. 864–865.

¹⁹¹ This correspondence is preserved in a large folder of letters received by Silvestre de Sacy (and copies of some of his own) at the Institut de France in Paris, in de Sacy's archive (MS NS 377, with a catalogue, *Correspondance et papiers divers de Silvestre de Sacy*, II). The Romanian historian Teodor Holban partially published the two letters, with a commentary, in his article

French consul in Aleppo, Mr [Jean-François Xavier] Rousseau,¹⁹² a Psalter printed by Sylvester, apparently dated 1747.¹⁹³ De Sacy, who was not informed about the situation in the Romanian Principalities, did not understand the Syrian patriarchs' interest in printing Arabic books there. Undoubtedly, to him, the books printed in Rome and Paris for Arabic-speaking Christians were enough to cover their needs. He expressed his theory about Sylvester's probable reason for printing in Arabic in Wallachia and Moldavia as follows:

Sans doute il y a dans la Moldavie et la Valachie un assez grand nombre de chrétiens qui parlent arabe et ne font point usage de la langue grecque dans leur liturgie, puisque le patriarche a jugé nécessaire d'imprimer pour leur édification et pour l'instruction de leurs enfants des livres purement arabes.¹⁹⁴

Ledoulx replied to de Sacy in a letter dated February 12, 1812, after he consulted Ignatios (the Greek), the metropolitan of Wallachia,¹⁹⁵ who conveyed to him the following information. to which Ledoulx added explanations required by his correspondent's unfamiliarity with the situation of this country.

Il n'y a jamais eu en Walachie d'imprimerie arabe établie sous les auspices du gouvernement & à l'usage des gens du pays, a qui cette langue absolument étrangère & inconnue.

“Tipografii și cărți armenesti [i.e., arabe] în Țările Românești”, *Arhiva. Revistă de istorie, filologie și cultură românească. Organul Societății Istorico-Filologice din Iași*, 1936, 43, p. 111–115. I have studied the entire folder in 2023 in Paris, on a research trip for the TYPARABIC project.

192 On the two generations of scholars and diplomats in the Rousseau family, see: [Jean-Baptiste Louis Jacques Rousseau], *Éloge historique de feu Jean-François-Xavier Rousseau, ancien consul-général de France à Bagdad et Bassora, Mort à Alep le 12 Mai 1808, Précédé de quelques détails curieux et intéressans sur le voyage de son père à la cour de Perse, au commencement du dix-huitième siècle*, [Paris], 1810; Henri Dehéraïn, “Jean-François Rousseau, agent de la Compagnie des Indes, consul et orientaliste (1738–1808)”, *Journal des savants*, August–October 1927, p. 355–370; Ulrich Jasper Seetzen, *Tagebücher, 2. Tagebuch des Aufenthalts in Aleppo 1803–1805*, ed. by Judith Zepter, with Carsten Walbinder and Michael Brauner, Hildesheim, 2011, especially p. 198, 253, 305–306; Serge A. Frantsouzzoff, “Les vieux livres imprimés en écriture arabe dans la collection des Rousseau, père et fils, conservée à Saint-Petersbourg”, in Feodorov, Heyberger and Noble (eds.), *Arabic Christianity between the Ottoman Levant and Eastern Europe*, p. 251–285.

193 This may be the copy that Émile Picot later declared he owned. See Picot, “Notice biographique et bibliographique sur l'imprimeur Anthime d'Ivry”, p. 544. I shall return to this topic below.

194 MS NS 377, *Correspondance et papiers divers de Silvestre de Sacy*, no. 196, letter dated July 30, 1811, sent from Paris to “Mr. Ledoulx, vice consul de France en Valachie à Bucharest.”

195 Elected on January 15, 1810, installed on May 5, Ignatios the Greek was patriarch until August 10, 1812. He reformed the Princely Academy during the rule of Ioan Gheorghe Caragea, requesting the assistance of acknowledged scholars of the time, such as Grigore Brâncoveanu.

Elle leur est si étrangère, si inconnue qu'on ne trouverait pas un seul individu dans toute la Walachie qui fut en état d'en entendre un seul mot. Il y a dans le pays plusieurs couvents dépendants des différents Patriarches du Levant, & entre autres, il y en a qui dépendent du Patriarche d'Antioche. Ces couvents sont quelques fois visites par leurs Patriarches respectifs. Celui d'Antioche nomme Sylvestre a été en Walachie & il y a résidé quelque temps dans un des couvents de la juridiction. On présume que pour remédier à l'extrême pénurie des livres saints dans le Levant, et pour faire une chose qui ne pouvait manquer de lui rapporter beaucoup d'argent [sic], il avait fait venir des caractères arabes de Dadone ou de Mome, & avait établi dans son couvent une imprimerie à ses propres frais. Les livres sortis de cette imprimerie doivent, d'après les intentions du Patriarche, avoir été répandus dans tout le Levant. Le Psautier dont vous parlez doit nécessairement être de ce nombre-là. [...] Le couvent dans lequel le patriarche Sylvestre avait établi son imprimerie n'est point dans la ville de Bucharest, mais à 20 lieues d'ici.¹⁹⁶

From this incomplete and somewhat inaccurate information an assumption was born, unconfirmed by documentary sources, that the press at the Monastery of Snagov had started printing Arabic books again in the mid-18th century, beginning with this Psalter. However, Ledoulx was undoubtedly referring to the workshop set up at the Monastery of Saint Spyridon in Bucharest, which was granted as a metochion to the Patriarchate of Antioch, and thus could be named “the monastery of [Sylvester],” unlike the monastery of Snagov. According to the Arabic inscription on the icon of Saint Spyridon that Patriarch Sylvester presented to the monastery, the church was “placed to the east of the river that crosses the city [Dâmbovița] and it is beyond the bridge.”¹⁹⁷ Therefore, it was possible to regard it as being outside the city.¹⁹⁸ In 1716, in one of the houses inside the Monastery of Saint Spyridon walls lived the typographer Metrophanes.¹⁹⁹ Moreover, several disciples of the Patriarch Sylvester worked in 1747–1749 on the manufacture of Arabic type, a fact that the upper clergy of Wallachia apparently still remembered in de Sacy's time.

One of the confusions that this letter created is the reference to ‘Dadone et Mome’. This raises the question if the Metropolitan Ignatios had perhaps heard of the city of Modone in the Peloponnesus, where the Armenian monk Mkhitar (‘the Comforter’) had briefly taken refuge. He was the one who later succeeded

¹⁹⁶ MS NS 377, *Correspondance et papiers divers de Silvestre de Sacy*, no. 197.

¹⁹⁷ Also called the Senate Bridge, it crosses the Dâmbovița River at the start of Calea Victoriei.

¹⁹⁸ Since about 1880, the church lies on the right bank of the river. See George D. Florescu, *Din vechiul București. Biserici, curți boierești și hanuri între anii 1790–1791 după două planuri inedite*, Bucharest, 1935, p. 33; Vasilescu, *Biserica Sfântul Spiridon Vechi din București*, p. 4.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

in printing with Armenian type in the workshop he installed on the island of San Lazzaro near Venice, where the Mkhitarist Order has resided since 1717.²⁰⁰

Information about an Arabic Psalter printed at Bucharest can be found in an 18th-century manuscript preserved at the Patriarchate of the Greek Orthodox Church of Antioch in Damascus and has been duly repeated by historians of early Arabic printing.²⁰¹ Today, there is no trace of this Psalter. The entire discussion may in fact have referred to a Psalter printed in Beirut in 1752, at the Greek Orthodox Monastery of Saint George, to which I shall return in the next chapter.

After the Patriarch Sylvester's return to Syria in 1749, there is no further evidence of Arabic printing in the Romanian Principalities. Nevertheless, the Patriarch kept following up his typographic project and succeeded in having Arabic books printed in Beirut after 1749.

200 Interestingly, Holban's article mistakenly refers to "Armenian" printing activities: "Tipografii și cărți armenesti în Țările Românești", "Armenian [correct, Arabic] presses and books in the Romanian Principalities". Could it be that the information gleaned by Ledoulx from his Wallachian informers was, in fact, connected to the Armenian printing done in Bucharest?

201 The information on this book was first given by Julius Theodor Zenker, *Bibliotheca Orientalis. Manuel de bibliographie orientale*, t. I, Leipzig, 1846.

