

1 Before 1724

1.1 The Patriarchate of Antioch

The election of a new patriarch of Antioch in Constantinople was not unusual for the Orthodox Church. For the Ecumenical Patriarchate, even if in theory the other three Patriarchates – of Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem (in order of precedence) – were autocephalous, i.e., self-governed, in practice, the situation was somewhat different. The Great Schism between the Western and Eastern Churches in 1054 had caused the *de facto* abolition of the Pentarchy (i.e., the system of the five Patriarchates). The result was that the patriarch of Constantinople held the “primacy of honor” (τὰ πρωτεῖα τῆς τιμῆς) in the Orthodox Church. This new position and the title of “Ecumenical Patriarch” meant that he became a kind of authority to which the other Churches could apply in case of disputes. Another patriarch who had a similar title was the one of Alexandria, referred to as “pope and patriarch of the great city of Alexandria and judge of the world” (πάπας καὶ πατριάρχης τῆς μεγάλης πόλεως Ἀλεξανδρείας καὶ κριτῆς τῆς οἰκουμένης). Unlike the patriarch of Constantinople after 1453, the patriarch of Alexandria had not been able to make use of any of the powers such a title could provide. Therefore, “judge of the world” remained just a title, although it continued to be used until late in the Ottoman period.

After the Arab conquest, the Orthodox patriarchates of the East became somewhat less relevant in the Orthodox Church as a whole. The Byzantine system meant that the Church organization followed the political one closely. Even before the Arab conquest, the Eastern Churches had often been divided. Dogmatic disputes had led to the formation of Monophysite and Nestorian Churches, of the Coptic Church in Egypt, and the Jacobite, Maronite, and Nestorian churches in Syria and Lebanon. There was also the ancient Armenian Church, with an important population in Cilicia and a diaspora in the major urban centers of the East. A language barrier also separated many Oriental Churches from the Greek-speaking Byzantine Church. The Coptic and Syriac languages used in the Oriental Churches were progressively replaced by Arabic. The people who were attached to the Orthodox Church were often in a difficult position. They were called by the other religious denominations “Melkite”, meaning “those who sided with the (Byzantine) emperor”. No matter what their native tongue was, they were also called *Rūm*, after the ethnic name Ῥωμαῖοι, or Romans, assumed by the Byzantines. The Byzantines (the term itself is

a modern invention) always considered themselves Romans, as their capital city was the New Rome.¹

The Crusades disrupted the life of the Patriarchates, replacing the Greek Orthodox hierarchy with a Latin one in Antioch and Jerusalem, for various periods. Sometimes, the Byzantines appointed titular patriarchs who resided in Constantinople. An example is Theodore Balsamon, a renowned legal scholar, who was appointed patriarch of Antioch in 1193.

During the last centuries of its history, the Byzantine Empire itself became less and less relevant in the geopolitical world system. In contrast, the Church of Constantinople did not lose its prestige and position in the areas culturally influenced by Byzantium. Eastern and South-Eastern Europe (the so-called Orthodox Commonwealth),² areas of the Caucasus, Asia Minor, Egypt, and large parts of the Middle East remained in Constantinople's sphere of influence. Moreover, in the 14th–15th centuries new eparchies were established in areas which had not previously been controlled by Byzantium, such as the Metropolis of Ungro-Wallachia and that of Moldavia.

The Ottoman conquest changed the whole ideological system built by the Byzantines but, as a paradox, some of the patterns of the Byzantine way of administration survived (as they were, or in an adapted form). The Ottomans allowed for the Church organization to be maintained in the territories they gradually annexed to their empire. The Patriarchate of Constantinople was reinstated shortly after the conquest of the city in 1453. After the conquests of Egypt, Syria, and Palestine in the early 16th century, three other historical Orthodox Patriarchates came under Ottoman control. Therefore, the Ottoman authorities had to face the questions arising from this situation and find ways to manage their relations with these institutions.

The question of the role of the Patriarchate of Constantinople and the position of the patriarch in the Ottoman Empire is a topic that generated much debate in modern historical writing over the course of decades. Ottoman and Modern Greek historians were involved in discussions and controversies. Older and more recent sources were used to support or reject specific points of view. Sometimes,

1 The bibliography of the subject is very rich and even an attempt to give some orientation would surpass the aim of this book. For a general idea see C. Mango, *Byzantium. The Empire of New Rome*, London, 1980.

2 For this term, see P. M. Kitromilidēs, “Από την ορθόδοξη κοινοπολιτεία στις εθνικές κοινότητες. Το πολιτικό περιεχόμενο των ελληνορωσσικών πνευματικών σχέσεων κατά την Τουρκοκρατία”, in *Χίλια χρόνια Ελληνισμού – Ρωσίας*, Athens, 1994 p. 139–165; P. M. Kitromilides, *An Orthodox Commonwealth. Symbolic Legacies and Cultural Encounters in Southeastern Europe*, 2nd ed., Abingdon/New York, 2007.

projections of modern ideas on ethnicity were applied to late medieval or early modern realities. It is not the place here to present, repeat, or discuss the various theories on this subject. Generally speaking, a purely theoretical approach to the sources can obscure their meaning, or the value of the information they provide. As a rule, long theoretical discourses do not improve the understanding of historical facts, but they often have the opposite effect. The reader will not find them in this book.

To complete this brief historical presentation, it should be added that all the considerations above are relevant for a clear understanding of the situation of the Church of Antioch in the 18th century.

Starting with the 19th century, many modern historians identified the election of Kyrillos Ṭanās as patriarch of Antioch, followed by the election of Sylvester within less than a month (even if, as we shall see, he was officially appointed as patriarch by the Ottoman authorities earlier), as a turning point in the history of the Church of Antioch. As we mentioned above, the year 1724 is considered the birth date of the Melkite Greek Catholic Church of Antioch, celebrated – or commemorated – as such three centuries later, in 2024. At the same time, Sylvester is considered as the first “Greek” patriarch of the Church of Antioch after centuries of Arabic-speaking leaders. He is seen as the first in a long line of Greek-speaking patriarchs that ended only in the late 19th century. As usual, the reality of the historical facts is more complex than general statements such as these can reveal. The way contemporary witnesses perceived these events is yet another issue. To fully understand their development, a return to the sources is definitely necessary.

1.2 Athanasios III Dabbās

The aim of this book is not to present a biography of Athanasios III Dabbās, nor the history of the Patriarchate of Antioch in the period before Sylvester became patriarch. The events that took place before this date are presented here only to help the reader better understand what followed. Of course, all historical data considered essential, for the same reason, is also provided henceforth.

Athanasios Dabbās became patriarch of Antioch for the second time in 1720, after the death of Kyrillos V. According to an agreement made to end a long dispute between the two, Dabbās, who resided in Aleppo and had for a while been *proedros* of the Church of Cyprus, followed Kyrillos on the Antiochian throne.

Athanasios Dabbās had not been archbishop or metropolitan of Cyprus, but his title from 1705 and 1708 was *proedros* (πρόεδρος), “president”, i.e., leader of the

Church of Cyprus.³ This term was used for a metropolitan who also had administrative responsibility over another Church.⁴ There is a document issued by Patriarch Gabriel III of Constantinople recording the deposition of Archbishop Germanos of Cyprus and the election of Athanasios, the former patriarch of Antioch, by the Cypriot clergy, “presidentially” (προεδρικῶς). The document records Athanasios’s election as archbishop of Cyprus, mentioning that the former patriarch accepted “the presidency of the Archbishopric in Cyprus” (τὴν προεδρίαν τῆς ἐν Κύπρῳ Ἀρχιεπισκοπῆς). The patriarch of Constantinople asked for Athanasios to be recognized as “president and protector of the Most Holy Archbishopric of Nea Justiniana of Cyprus” (πρόεδρον καὶ προστάτην τῆς αὐτόθι ἁγιωτάτης Ἀρχιεπισκοπῆς νέας Ἰουστινιανῆς Κύπρου).⁵ The document is undated, but a time clue is that Gabriel III had been patriarch from 1702 to 1707. According to other opinions, Athanasios was *proedros* of the Archbishopric of Cyprus until 1710.⁶ Others have suggested that Athanasios, although appointed, did not actually occupy the office of archbishop of Cyprus.⁷

The position of patriarch of Antioch came with a lot of challenges that Dabbās was aware of. The period of Dabbās’s second term as patriarch coincides with an increase in the level of activity of the Roman Catholic missionaries in the Patriarchates of Antioch and Jerusalem. Western monastic orders were very active, and the zeal of the missionaries bore fruit. Many of the faithful of the Church of Antioch declared themselves Catholics or were considered as such by others. They

3 Διοικητική συγκρότηση της Εκκλησίας Κύπρου και των λοιπών Ορθόδοξων Εκκλησιών. Έτος 2018, Nicosia, 2017, p. 31.

4 For the meaning of the term *proedros* (πρόεδρος), see “Περὶ τῶν τίτλων “προέδρου” καὶ “τόπον ἐπέχοντος”, Νεολόγου Εβδομαδιαία Επιθεώρησις. Πολιτική, φιλολογική, ἐπιστημονική, 2, 28, 1893, p. 541–546 (three studies on the subject by various authors). The Romanian version: C. Erbiceanu, “Studii literare asupra cuvintelor πρόεδρος = președinte și τόπον ἐπέχοντος loco-țitor, ce se întâmpină în Practicalele Sântelor Sinoade și în praxa Bisericii Orthodoxe”, *BOR*, 17, 1893, 5, p. 326–332, 6, p. 435–442. See also A. P[apadakis], “Proedros”, in A. P. Kazhdan, A.-M. Talbot, et. al. (eds.), *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, vol. 3, New York/Oxford, 1991, p. 1727–1728.

5 K. Delikanēs, *Τὰ ἐν τοῖς κώδιξι τοῦ Πατριαρχικοῦ Ἀρχιεποφυλακείου σωζόμενα ἐπίσημα ἐκκλησιαστικά ἔγγραφα τὰ ἀφορόντα εἰς τὰς σχέσεις τοῦ Οἰκουμενικοῦ Πατριαρχείου πρὸς τὰς Ἐκκλησίας Ἀλεξανδρείας, Ἀντιοχείας, Ἱεροσολύμων καὶ Κύπρου (1574–1863)*, Constantinople, 1904, p. 566–570.

6 Delikanēs, *Τὰ ἐν τοῖς κώδιξι τοῦ Πατριαρχικοῦ Ἀρχιεποφυλακείου σωζόμενα ἐπίσημα ἐκκλησιαστικά ἔγγραφα*, p. 571. See also I. Hakkett, *Ἱστορία τῆς Ὀρθοδόξου Ἐκκλησίας τῆς Κύπρου*, 1, Athens, 1923, p. 284–285.

7 C.-M. Walbiner, “Die Bischofs- und Metropolitensitze des griechisch-orthodoxen Patriarchats von Antiochia von 1665 bis 1724 nach einigen zeitgenössischen Quellen”, *Oriens Christianus*, 88, 2004, p. 50; C.-M. Walbiner, “The Relations between the Greek Orthodox of Syria and Cyprus in the 17th and 18th Centuries”, *Chronos*, 16, 2007, p. 120.

professed allegiance to the pope at the missionaries' entreaty. Among them, there were priests and even bishops.

During his second time in office (1720–1724), Athanasios Dabbās mostly resided in Aleppo, home to a large Christian community (some 40,000 people, according to a 1730s estimate).⁸ The city was also a thriving commercial center with an active merchant community, both Ottoman subjects and foreigners. Consuls of England and France also resided in the city, as well as Roman Catholic missionaries.

The latter belonged to at least four monastic orders, as mentioned in sources of the time: Cordeliers, Carmelites, Capuchins, and Jesuits of various nationalities. Their zeal in accomplishing their mission was in many cases remarkable and results were often beyond expectations. However, such an approach often implied high risks and could be dangerous for themselves and for others. As stated in a source of the time that mentions the instructions given to the French ambassador Marquis de Villeneuve in 1728 by the central authorities, their main task was to convert Turks to Christianity and unite the Orthodox and the Armenian Christians with the Church of Rome.⁹ If the first objective was easier to formulate theoretically than to implement practically, the second was producing some tangible results, after a period of intense activity.

Missionaries traditionally had had the support of the king of France in their actions in the East, so they were confident in their actions, as they could count on his (almost) unconditional backing. They were supported by the French ambassador in Constantinople and the consuls in the main cities. The king of France considered himself to be the protector of the Catholic faithful in the Ottoman Empire, based on the historically good relations between the two states. These relations were confirmed by the so-called “capitulations”, dating back centuries, renewed from time to time and with every new reign. Among other clear provisions, the capitulations contained chapters on the extent of the authority of the consuls, the jurisdiction and the rights of Latin missionaries in the Ottoman Empire.

The most active of the Melkite bishops who embraced Catholicism and supported the union of the Melkite Church with Rome was Euthymios (Aftīmiyūs) Şayfī, metropolitan of Tyre and Sidon.¹⁰

8 Letter of the Jesuit priest Pierre Fromage to a German Jesuit, April 25, 1730, in A. Rabbath, *Documents inédits pour servir à l'histoire du Christianisme en Orient (XVI–XIX siècle)*, vol. II, Paris/Leipzig/London, 1910, p. 397. See also Nasrallah, Haddad, *HMLÉM* IV.2, p. 34.

9 Instructions given to the French ambassador Marquis de Villeneuve, August 11, 1728, in Rabbath, *Documents inédits*, vol. II, p. 328–329.

10 Walbiner, “Die Bischofs- und Metropolitensitze”, p. 80–82.

Information about Euthymios Şayfî can be found in a 1731 memorandum of Jean-André du Bellis, chancellor of the French consulate in Sidon (Şaydā). Du Bellis wrote that Euthymios wanted to obtain the annexation of the Bishopric of Acre from the Patriarchate of Jerusalem by paying 1,000 *piasters* to Osman, the pasha of Sidon. His actions attracted the attention of the Orthodox patriarchs. According to Jean-André du Bellis, Euthymios had studied in Rome and was a man of action. In 1720, after the death of Patriarch Kyrillos V, Euthymios tried to obtain the patriarchal throne of Antioch.¹¹ His attempt was not successful, as Athanasios succeeded Kyrillos, based on the agreement the two had made. Euthymios wanted to appoint a bishop in Acre (also known in the Greek sources as Ptolemais) who would promote the pro-Latin innovations he had implemented in his eparchy. He was allegedly supported by Thomas of Campaya, a Franciscan monk of *Terra Sancta* residing in Damascus. The only problem was that the Bishopric of Acre was dependent on the Patriarchate of Jerusalem and not on the Patriarchate of Antioch. In Euthymios's project, the See of Acre was prepared for his nephew Seraphim, the future patriarch of Antioch Kyrillos Ṭanās.¹² Eventually, with help from the English in Aleppo, the patriarch of Jerusalem succeeded in recovering the Bishopric of Acre.¹³

In 1710, Euthymios Şayfî printed an Arabic book about the "Concordia" of the Western and Eastern Churches in Rome, with the title *Kitāb al-dalāla al-lāmi'a bayna quṭbay al-Kanīsat al-jāmi'a*.¹⁴ The book, which supported the main teachings

11 Rabbath, *Documents inédits*, vol. I, p. 593. Du Bellis states that after 1720 no election took place for the Patriarchate of Antioch and that the information that Athanasios remained on the See of Aleppo must be taken with caution. Dabbās was officially appointed Patriarch of Antioch by the Ottomans in 1720. About Athanasios's berat issued on February 17, 1720, see H. Çolak, *Relations between the Ottoman Central Administration and the Greek Orthodox Patriarchates of Antioch, Jerusalem and Alexandria: 16th–18th Centuries*, PhD thesis, Birmingham, 2012, p. 95, 263–265 (the text and translation of the berat).

12 Du Bellis mentions an anecdotic episode about Seraphim, who, while in Rome, learning about his new intended position, ordered a portrait of himself as a cleric. The portrait remained in Rome, while Seraphim returned to Euthymios. Apart from the anecdotic aspect, this episode is an interesting source on portraits among the Antiochians. See Rabbath, *Documents inédits*, vol. I, p. 592. For painted portraits in the Antiochian Church, see B. Heyberger, "From Religious to Secular Imagery? The Rise of the Image among Christians in Syria and Lebanon in the Seventeenth to Nineteenth Centuries", in B. Heyberger, *Middle Eastern and European Christianity, 16th–20th Century. Connected Histories*, ed. by A. Girard, C. Santus, et al., Edinburgh, 2023, p. 199–224.

13 A. Rabbath, *Documents inédits pour servir à l'histoire du Christianisme en Orient (XVI–XIX siècle)*, vol. I, Paris/Leipzig, 1905, p. 591. On Euthymios, see also P. Bacel, "Les innovations liturgiques chez les Grecs Melkites au XVIII^e siècle", *Échos d'Orient*, 9, 1906, 56, p. 5–10.

14 *Ecclesiae Graecae Orthodoxae Orientalis cum Romana Catholica Occidentali Concordia*, Rome, 1710. C. F. von Schnurrer, *Bibliotheca Arabica*, Hallae, 1811, p. VIII, 274, no. 272; Nasrallah, Haddad, *HMLÉM* IV.2, p. 186–188. On the 2nd edition, published in Jerusalem, 1863, and a Latin

of the Roman Catholic Church, reached the East and, as expected, generated reactions from the opposite side. Ideas in the book were criticized by Orthodox scholars of the time. Patriarch Sylvester addressed its salient points in a letter to the inhabitants of Aleppo, as did Patriarch Chrysanthos of Jerusalem (Fig. 3).

Euthymios became known as one of the leaders of the *Latinophrones*, “Latin-minded”, as they were called by the Orthodox.¹⁵ This was not new in the history of the Patriarchate of Antioch. The existence of opposing parties was an ordinary phenomenon, and each side usually tried to enlist all the foreign help it could get to reach its goals. Appeals to Rome, directly or through Catholic missionaries, were also not new in the region.

In 1722, however, the Orthodox patriarchs, assembled in Constantinople, decided to act against what they considered the excessive zeal of the Latin missionaries.¹⁶ Athanasios Dabbās joined the patriarch of Constantinople and the patriarch of Jerusalem in this combat. Of these three, the patriarch of Jerusalem, Chrysanthos Notaras, was perhaps the most experienced in dealing with the Roman Catholic missionaries. Having studied in Western Europe, he knew his opponents well. He was part of a succession of patriarchs of Jerusalem who had faced the challenges posed by Western missionaries in their eparchy. One of them, Chrysanthos’s uncle Dositheos, had supervised the printing of several books in Moldavia and Wallachia, which presented differences between Orthodoxy and Catholicism. Chrysanthos continued his uncle’s editorial work by printing Dositheos’s monumental *Ιστορία τῶν ἐν Ἱεροσολύμοις πατριαρχουσάντων* (*History of Those who Were Patriarchs in*

translation achieved in 1711, see J. L. Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio*, ed. by J. B. Martin, L. Petit, vol. 37, Paris, 1905, col. 120. See also R. Haddad, “Sources hellènes de la controverse dans l’Église melkite au XVIII^e siècle”, in C. Todorova, E. Sarafova (eds.), *Actes du premier Congrès international des études balkaniques et sud-est européennes*, vol. IV. Histoire (XVIII^e – XIX^e siècles), Sofia, 1969, p. 501. The Latin translation of the Arabic text was done by Joseph Simon Assemani, then a student in the Maronite College of Rome. The Latin text is preserved in MS 66 of the Institute of Byzantine Studies in Paris. See A. Binggeli, M. Cassin, V. Kontouma, “Inventaire des manuscrits de l’Institut français d’études byzantines”, *Revue des études byzantines*, 72, 2014, 66, p. 97, no. 66. For the Jerusalem edition of 1863, see G. Graf, *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur*. Vol. III: *Die Schriftsteller von der Mitte des 15. bis zum Ende des 19. Jahrhunderts, Melchiten, Maroniten*, Vatican City (henceforth Graf, *GCAL* III), p. 182.

¹⁵ In a letter to the French king dated September 28, 1706, Euthymios signed: “Aftimos, Archevêque de Tyr et Sidon, fils de l’Église Romaine”. See Rabbath, *Documents inédits*, vol. II, p. 409–410.

¹⁶ For the Synod of 1722, see G. Vendotès, *Προσθήκη τῆς Ἐκκλησιαστικῆς Ἱστορίας Μελετίου Μητροπολίτου Ἀθηνῶν*, vol. 4, Vienna, 1795, p. 59–60; A. K. Dēmétrakopoulos, *Ὁρθόδοξος Ἑλλάς ἡτοι Περί τῶν Ἑλλήνων γραψάντων κατὰ Λατίνων καὶ περὶ τῶν συγγραμμάτων αὐτῶν*, Leipzig, 1872, p. 170–171.

Jerusalem) in Bucharest.¹⁷ Among other topics, the book reported on the disputes of Orthodox patriarchs with Latin missionaries.

Chrysanthos of Jerusalem was also a learned theologian and there are strong indications that the document issued by the Synod of Constantinople in 1722 was composed by him. The document was addressed to the faithful of the Antiochian Church and defined the main points of divergence between the Roman Catholic and the Orthodox Churches.¹⁸

Finally, his extensive correspondence demonstrates that Chrysanthos of Jerusalem was well connected with the rich and influent Phanariot aristocracy. Among this élite group, grand dragomans of the Ottoman Empire and princes of Moldavia and Wallachia were selected by the Sublime Porte. This also helped Chrysanthos hold a position of influence. He even resided for long periods of time in the Ottoman capital.

Athanasios Dabbās tried to avoid being overtly in conflict with Latin missionaries during his second term in office. He had close relations with some of them, and the general impression of the missionaries active in Aleppo was that Dabbās was, if not a “Catholic” or a sympathizer, at least not opposed to them. This explains the generally positive attitude of the Latin friars in Aleppo towards Athanasios and, at first, even towards Sylvester, the successor commended by the late patriarch. This confident attitude was strongly criticized by the missionaries in Damascus.

17 The year of publication on the title page is 1715, but archival documents reveal that the printing of the book (an in-folio with over 1,429 pages) took longer and was finished only in the 1720s. For the book, see G. P. Kournoutos, “Η Δωδεκάβιβλος τοῦ Δοσιθέου εἰς τὴν τυπογραφίαν τοῦ Βουκουρεστίου”, *Θεολογία*, 24, 1953, 2, p. 250–273; Th. Papadopoulos, *Ελληνική Βιβλιογραφία (1466 ci. –1800)*, 1, Athens, 1984, p. 331, no. 4442 (dated 1714); K. Sarrēs, “Ο Χρύσανθος Νοταράς και η έκδοση της ‘Δωδεκαβίβλου’ του Δοσιθέου Ιεροσολύμων: μια περίπτωση αναληθούς χρονολογίας έκδοσης (1715/c. 1722)”, *Μνήμων*, 27, 2005, p. 27–53. The book includes a copperplate engraving of Patriarch Dositheos’s portrait, ordered in Western Europe. For the portrait, see V. Tchentsova, “La naissance du portrait dans l’espace orthodoxe. Représenter l’auteur dans les livres grecs du début du XVIII^e siècle”, in R. Dipratu, S. Noble (eds.), *Arabic-Type Books Printed in Wallachia, Istanbul, and Beyond. First Volume of Collected Works of the TYPARABIC Project*, Berlin/Boston, 2024, p. 145–175.

18 Published in Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum*, vol. 37, col. 127–208, from the MS 239 of the Library of the Orthodox Patriarchate in Jerusalem, f. 3–69, and the MS Vallicellianus Allatianus 202 (LXXIV), f. 1–43. See also I. Karmiris, *Τὰ δογματικά καὶ συμβολικά μνημεία τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου Καθολικῆς Ἐκκλησίας*, 2nd ed., vol. II, Graz, 1968, p. 822 [922]–859 [939]. See also M. Gedeon, “Η κατὰ Λατίνων Σύνοδος τοῦ πατριάρχου Ἱερεμίου Γ’”, *Κωνσταντινούπολις. Ἐφημερίς τῶν λαῶν τῆς Ανατολῆς*, 6, 1872, 1177, p. 2–3. For the synod, see also Haddad, “Sources hellènes de la controverse dans l’Église melkite”, p. 505; J. Nasrallah, *Historie du mouvement littéraire dans l’Église Melchite du Ve au X^e siècle. Contribution à l’étude de la littérature arabe chrétienne*, vol. IV. *Période Ottomane 1516–1900*, tome 1. 1516–1724, Louvain/Paris, 1989 (henceforth Nasrallah, *HMLÉM* IV.1), p. 141.

While in Constantinople, there were no ambiguities in Athanasios's behavior. He signed the letter to the Antiochians issued by the Synod of 1722 alongside Jeremias III of Constantinople, Chrysanthos of Jerusalem, and seven metropolitans.

The same year, the Orthodox patriarchs also made another move, trying to enlist the support of the Ottoman political power. Apparently, they asked for and obtained an imperial decree: an old French translation of this Ottoman document mentions Jeremias (III) of Constantinople and Athanasios of Antioch "and Damascus".¹⁹ The decree was issued by sultan Ahmed III (1703–1730) on September 14, 1722, and prohibited the Latin missionaries' proselytism among Ottoman subjects. It also ordered the Christian Ottoman subjects to retain their ancient religion and not to adhere to that "of the pope". The decree was especially addressed to the viziers and pashas of Aleppo, Sidon, Diyarbakır, Tripoli, and Damascus, and to other major government and justice officers in these cities.²⁰ The reason for issuing the decree was the fact that Latin monks had succeeded in converting to Catholicism Christian subjects of the sultan (priests, monks, and lay people). The Orthodox patriarchs mentioned the example of the island of Chios.²¹ The decree intended to guarantee that Christians that observed their ancient religion were not to be disturbed. After the implementation, the new document was to stay in their possession. The decree also mentioned a previous document issued by the former sultan, Mustafa II (1695–1703). The sultan's decree of 1722 triggered a lot of reactions, and even years later it was mentioned and used in disputes between the two groups.

The effects of the decree were mitigated by the intervention of French diplomatic representatives and the way it was applied by the local authorities. For example, a decision to exile seven Catholics of Damascus and Sidon alongside Euthymios, the metropolitan of Tyre and Sidon, was annulled after the pasha of Sidon appealed to the central authorities.²²

¹⁹ Rabbath, *Documents inédits*, vol. I, p. 546.

²⁰ The document was published in an old French translation which survives in the French archives; see Rabbath, *Documents inédits*, vol. I, p. 546–547.

²¹ "Scio", in the old French translation. In Chios, there was a Roman Catholic community even before the Ottoman conquest, when the island was governed by the Genoese family of Gattilusio. For the Gattilusio family, see A. P. Kazhdan, A.-M. Talbot, et al. (eds.), *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, 2, New York/Oxford, 1991, p. 824.

²² Letter of the French ambassador in Constantinople, Jean-Louis d'Usson, Marquis de Bonnac, to the king of France's minister, June 9, 1723, in Rabbath, *Documents inédits*, vol. I, p. 547–549. De Bonnac was ambassador in the Ottoman capital between 1716 and 1724. See also Rabbath, *Documents inédits*, vol. I, p. 592. Apparently, Osman, the pasha of Şaydā (Sidon) was at the time pasha of Damascus, while his son Ahmet governed Sidon.

To prevent the potentially dangerous effects of the decree for the missionaries, the French ambassador Marquis de Bonnac decided to meet with the Greek patriarchs of Jerusalem and Antioch. The meeting seemed to have had good results. De Bonnac secured the word of Chrysanthos not to pursue the provisions of the decree against the Latin monks. It seems that in his turn, the ambassador promised to moderate the missionaries' zeal. He also decided to write to Rome "not to abandon the missionaries to their zeal, not to send such a great number of monks, and to better choose the topics".²³ Athanasios also wrote a letter in Greek to his representatives in Aleppo and one in Arabic to those in Damascus, with the intention to calm the situation.²⁴ The French minister conveyed to the missionaries in Aleppo, through the French consul there, the request to act more discreetly.²⁵

The subject of Euthymios of Tyre and Sidon was a topic for yet another meeting of the French ambassador with the Patriarch Athanasios of Antioch, in June 1723. The ambassador wrote a letter to the *gérant* of the French consulate in Sidon reflecting on this conversation. He included a description of Dabbās's ideas on the unity of the Christian communities. The patriarch had expressed the view that efforts were to be made on both sides to avoid strong and offensive language towards each other. He mentioned that although the missionaries were generally moderate in their attitude, their converts were not, and neither were the "Greeks". Sources of the time use the term "Greeks" to refer to the Orthodox Christians in general, regardless of their ethnicity or language.

Concerning Euthymios, the patriarch told the ambassador that he had joined the patriarchs of Constantinople and Jerusalem in requesting an order to exile the metropolitan and his nephew Seraphim to a monastery. However, he was willing to refrain from applying this order, issued by the Ottoman authorities, and he was not ready to appoint a successor for Euthymios. Once again, the French ambassador

23 "J'écris à Rome qu'il me paraît absolument nécessaire de ne pas abandonner les missionnaires à leur zèle, de ne plus envoyer un si grand nombre de religieux, et de mieux choisir les sujets", cf. Rabbath, *Documents inédits*, vol. I, p. 548–549. The information is contained in the letter of Marquis de Bonnac to the minister and his correspondence with the French consul in Aleppo, Gaspard de Péleran. De Bonnac also had definite ideas about the way the missionaries should not insist, at first, that the new converts recognize the pope's supremacy, and that this topic should be left for later, or at least be discussed with delicacy. See Rabbath, *Documents inédits*, vol. I, p. 548–549.

24 Athanasios' representative, an *epitropos* (ἐπίτροπος in the Greek texts), "vicaire" in the French sources, was Leontios, a close collaborator, also maintained in this role by his successor Sylvester; cf. Rabbath, *Documents inédits*, vol. I, p. 549, n. 2.

25 Rabbath, *Documents inédits*, vol. I, p. 551 (minister's letter to the French consul in Aleppo, August 25, 1723).

warned that if the Catholics were expecting the patriarch to act in their favor, it could lead to a situation beyond reconciliation.²⁶

After the order against him was revoked, Euthymios of Tyre and Sidon went to Damascus, where he died on October 8, 1723.²⁷

The missionaries in Aleppo did not share the French ambassador's conciliatory attitude. They considered Dabbās a dangerous heretic, as he sometimes openly pretended to be a Catholic. A letter of the Synod attacking the Latin positions, most likely the one approved in 1722, had already been circulating. Although it had no signature or seal, the catholic missionaries ascribed it to Athanasios.²⁸ Marquis de Bonnac reminded the missionaries that they were only tolerated in the Ottoman Empire and recommended them to befriend Patriarch Athanasios.²⁹ The ambassador's attitude of moderation was approved by the king of France.³⁰ However, a few days later, Louis XV asked de Bonnac to do his best to have the Sultan's decree of 1722 against the missionaries revoked.³¹

Marquis de Bonnac replied to the king's order in February 1724 with a long letter describing the Catholics' situation in the Ottoman Empire and the missionaries' status. Historically, Catholic communities had existed only on Mount Lebanon, in Galata, Chios, and some other islands of the Greek Archipelago. The missionaries came later in the Ottoman Empire, to places where French communities lived. They tried to convert the "Greeks" (Orthodox) and the Armenians to Catholicism. The first decree against the Catholic missionaries was issued in 1696, followed by the one of 1722. De Bonnac attributed the renewal of the decree to the trouble caused by two bishops converted to Catholicism, Abraham, an Armenian, and Euthymios Şayfî. The French ambassador expressed his view that having the decree revoked would be a difficult task and described to the king the actions he had taken in that direction so far.³²

26 Rabbath, *Documents inédits*, vol. I, p. 551–553 (letter of Marquis de Bonnac to Bertrand, the gérant of the French consulate in Sidon, September 3, 1723).

27 Rabbath, *Documents inédits*, vol. I, p. 559.

28 Rabbath, *Documents inédits*, vol. I, p. 553–554 (letter of Marquis de Bonnac to the French consul in Aleppo, September 7, 1723).

29 Rabbath, *Documents inédits*, vol. I, p. 554, n. 1.

30 Rabbath, *Documents inédits*, vol. I, p. 555 (letter of the king's minister to the ambassador in Constantinople, October 13, 1723).

31 Rabbath, *Documents inédits*, vol. I, p. 555–556 (king's letter to Marquis de Bonnac, October 30, 1723).

32 Rabbath, *Documents inédits*, vol. I, p. 560–564.

In November 1723, Athanasios travelled from Constantinople to Aleppo, and avoided meeting the Latin missionaries and the French consul.³³

The French then appointed a new ambassador in Constantinople, Jean-Baptiste Louis Picon, Viscount d'Andrezel (1663–1727) (Fig. 4). On January 5, 1724, he received the instructions for his diplomatic mission. He was asked to continue the policy of moderation, exhorting the missionaries to be prudent, but at the same time offering to protect them.³⁴

In 1724, when a meeting was convened with the French consul in Aleppo, Catholic missionaries of four religious orders participated: Franciscans of *Terra Sancta*, Capuchins, Carmelites, and Jesuits.³⁵ The fact is indicative for the situation of the Roman Catholic missions in this city.

As the pope was a traditional enemy of the Ottomans, the Latin element was sometimes viewed with circumspection by the governing authorities. Missionaries generally used their skills to convert the “schismatic” Armenians or “Greeks” to the Latin rite.

The Roman Church understood that creating a group of Roman Catholics of the Latin rite, in Syria, for example, involved a potential conflict with the Ottoman authorities. After adopting another rite, or the “pope’s religion”, as it was formulated in the sultan’s decree of 1722, they remained Ottoman subjects. But in changing their religion, did they become “Franks”?³⁶ Could the new community give European powers a pretext for intervening in Ottoman state affairs? However, the intentions of the Roman Church at home were interpreted in different ways by the missionaries in the field. Supported, at least in theory, by the French ambassador, missionaries sometimes crossed the boundaries set by the official documents. They visited the houses of the Orthodox Ottoman subjects trying to convert them to Catholicism and the Latin rite.

The decision of Rome was therefore to allow the converts to preserve their Eastern rite. It was not a new idea: it had already been introduced at the Council of Ferrara-Florence in 1438–1439, when an attempt was made towards the union of

³³ Rabbath, *Documents inédits*, vol. I, p. 556–557.

³⁴ Rabbath, *Documents inédits*, vol. I, p. 558–559.

³⁵ Rabbath, *Documents inédits*, vol. I, p. 555–565.

³⁶ On the use of “Frank” in Arabic sources, see I. Feodorov, “Ifraṅğ/Ifraṅḡiyy: what language was Paul of Aleppo referring to in his travel notes?”, *Romano-Arabica*, New Series, 12, 2012, p. 105–116; I. Feodorov, “The meaning of Ifraṅğ and Ifraṅḡiyy in Paul of Aleppo’s journal”, in R. G. Păun and O. Cristea (eds.), *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; I. Feodorov, “Les Firang – Franks, Européens ou catholiques? Témoignages d’un chrétien syrien du XVII^e siècle”, *Orientalia Christiana Periodica*, 82, 2016, p. 1–32.

the Roman and the Greek Churches. In practice, maintaining the Greek rite while declaring to be Catholic and recognizing the pope's primacy (this was the point on which the missionaries insisted the most) meant to create a new Church.

At first, the intention of the Roman Catholic Church was to attract the whole Patriarchate of Antioch to Rome's sphere of influence. There was no intention to split the Antiochian Patriarchate and to establish a separate Greek Catholic Church. The official goal was not, at any time, to "convert Greeks" (who were in fact mostly Arabic speaking) to the Latin rite. The tactful attitude of some of the previous patriarchs of Antioch and, in part, even that of Athanasios Dabbās had left the impression that the plan had almost succeeded. The zeal of certain converts ultimately made the initial plan impossible. The other Orthodox patriarchs, led by the most influential of them, the Ecumenical patriarch of Constantinople, took action. They condemned the converts' leaders and issued a Symbol of Faith at the Synod of 1722, particularly addressing the elements that divided them from the Roman Church. Leaders and lay people were forced to take a position and choose sides. Gradually, over the course of several decades, a Greek Catholic Arabic-speaking Church emerged, with its own hierarchy.

Creating a new religious identity was not an easy task. Especially for the more isolated communities, such as those on Mount Lebanon, things seemed not to have changed much. However, their remoteness contributed to the eventual success of the new Church. Evidence of this success was the fact that Greek Catholic communities started to appear in large cities too. But the problem of the new Church was its name that was to be recorded in Ottoman official documents. When in 1745 Kyrillos Ṭanās succeeded for a brief time in holding a *berat* that confirmed him as patriarch of Antioch, he was still considered *Rūm*, without any mention of his Catholic allegiance.³⁷ While aware of the differences, the Ottoman authorities preferred for a long time, all through the 18th century, to ignore, at least in official documents, the specific identity of the new community.

Western sources, especially French ones, usually name the members of the new community "Catholic", or, less often, "Greek Catholic". Later, the word "Melkite", which had previously been attributed to the entire Chalcedonian Church of Antioch, came to be used to refer exclusively to the Greek Catholics of the Eastern Mediterranean regions.³⁸

37 For the circumstances of Kyrillos Ṭanās's appointment as patriarch in 1745, see H. Çolak, "When a Catholic is invested as the Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch: Serafim/Kyrillos Ṭanās and the Ottoman central administration in 1745", *Collectanea Christiana Orientalia*, 20, 2023, p. 29–55.

38 For the Melkites, see, among other sources, A. d'Avril, "Les Grecs Melkites", *Revue de l'Orient Chrétien*, 3, 1898, 1, p. 1–30, and 3, p. 265–279; I. Dick, *Les Melkites. Grecs-Orthodoxes et Grecs-Catholiques des Patriarcats d'Antioche, d'Alexandrie et de Jérusalem*, Turnhout, 1994.

As we shall see, Greek sources preferred the term *Λατινόφρωνες*, “Latin-minded”, or the newly coined name *Κατόλικοι*, modeled on the existing word *Καθολικοί* (“universal”). Another form, with “τ” instead of “θ”, meant that the user ignored the “universal” pretention of the Roman Church. A pun with the similarly pronounced *κάτω λύκοι* (“lowly wolves”) might have been intended at times. The term *παπισταί* (“papists”) was also employed pejoratively. *Λατινόφρωνες*, or “Latin-minded”, used by Sylvester in many of his letters, is a Byzantine word, commonly used in late Byzantine literature.³⁹

Athanasios Dabbās died on July 13/24, 1724, in Aleppo.⁴⁰ He was most likely buried in Aleppo, as the inscription on his tomb is not among those of the former patriarchs recorded in Damascus and published in 1876 by Porfirii Uspenskiĭ.⁴¹

The assessment of Athanasios’s personality among his Catholic contemporaries is different from one source to the other. Some missionaries in Aleppo considered him a “Catholic” because he eventually rejected the anti-Latin letter of the Synod of Constantinople in 1722 and the condemnation of the pro-Catholic letter composed by ‘Abdallāh Zākhir, and of the latter’s person.⁴² Other Latin sources mentioned his anti-Latin actions.⁴³ A report written by the French ambassador Marquis de Bonnac offers an objective evaluation of Athanasios’s actions towards maintaining a peaceful situation despite the activities of the missionaries, who repeatedly stirred trouble and forced the patriarch to take sides.⁴⁴

The French diplomatic correspondence presented above offers a general idea of the situation in the major cities of the Patriarchate of Antioch, as far as the Roman Catholic element and its relationship with the Orthodox communities are concerned, a few years before the election of Sylvester as patriarch, in 1724.

39 For the use of the word *Λατινόφρων* / *Λατινόφρωνες* in late Byzantine sources, see V. Laurent, *Les «Mémoires» du grand ecclésiarque de l’Église de Constantinople, Sylvestre Syropoulos, sur le concile de Florence (1438–1439)*, Paris, 1971, p. 428, 556.

40 Nasrallah, *HMLÉM* IV.1, p. 132; I. Feodorov, *Arabic Printing for the Christians. The East European Connection*, Berlin/Boston, 2023, p. 131.

41 P. Uspenskiĭ, *Восток Христианский. Сирия. Список антиохийских патриархов*, Kyiv, 1876, p. 10–11.

42 H. de Barenton, *La France catholique en Orient durant les trois derniers siècles. D’après des documents inédits*, Paris, 1902, p. 179–180. For Zākhir’s writing rejecting the Synod of 1722, see Rabbath, *Documents inédits*, vol. I, p. 568, n. 2; Nasrallah, Haddad, *HMLÉM* IV.2, p. 117–119.

43 “Letter of a Capuchin Father of Damascus” dated October 30, 1724, in Rabbath, *Documents inédits*, vol. I, p. 567–569.

44 “Mémoire sur l’état actuel où se trouvent les affaires de la religion en Levant”, in C. Schefer (ed.), *Mémoire historique sur l’ambassade de France à Constantinople par le marquis de Bonnac publié avec un précis de ses négociations à la porte Ottomane*, Paris, 1894, p. 189–190.

The overall good relations between France and the Ottoman state, legally secured by the capitulations, allowed the former to intervene in favor of the Catholic Church across the empire. But during the 1720s, the Catholic missionaries took their zeal to higher levels. The fact attracted unwanted attention from the Ottoman authorities and a stronger reaction of the Orthodox higher clergy. The Orthodox Patriarchs of Constantinople, who had the “primacy of honor” (τὰ πρωτεῖα τῆς τιμῆς), and those of Jerusalem united their efforts against the Latin propaganda. Soon, Sylvester, the newly elected patriarch of Antioch, joined them. His attitude in this matter proved to be constant over the course of four decades. In the territories under the authority of the Church of Antioch, the Latin influence was the most intense. Priests and even bishops pronounced Catholic professions of faith and were acknowledged by the Roman Church. The phenomenon was not new in the 18th century.

They succeeded to convert some laymen, priests, and even a few bishops. As is often the case with converts, their zeal surpassed that of their mentors. The most active of these “Greek Catholics”, as they were increasingly called in European sources, was by far Euthymios Şayfî, the metropolitan of Tyre and Sidon. In 1710, the printing press of the Sacra Congregatio de Propaganda Fide in Rome published his Arabic book about the union with Rome. He was soon excommunicated by the Patriarch Chrysanthos of Jerusalem, who also rejected Euthymios’s book and advised against reading it.⁴⁵

As the most senior of the Arabic-speaking clerics sympathizing with Rome, Euthymios Şayfî also wanted to promote his nephew Seraphim Ṭanās to a metropolitan See. When Euthymios died in 1723, Seraphim remained the obvious choice as the leader of the pro-Latin faction.

In August 1724, after patriarch Athanasios Dabbās’s demise, Seraphim tried to take his place. Supported by the Western missionaries and by the faithful who were favorable to the union with Rome, he succeeded in securing the help of Osman Pasha, the governor of Damascus, in exchange, as customary, for an important sum of money. The pasha promised to obtain the Patriarchal *berat* from the central Ottoman authorities, but the affair ended in Sylvester’s favor.

45 B. Heyberger, “Réseaux de collaboration et enjeux de pouvoir autour de la production de livres imprimés en arabe chez les chrétiens (XVII^e-début XVIII^e siècle)”, in A. Girard, B. Heyberger, V. Kontouma (eds.), *Livres et confessions chrétiennes orientales. Une histoire connectée entre l’Empire ottoman, le monde slave et l’Occident (XVI^e-XVIII^e siècles)*, Turnhout, 2023, p. 403–404.