

8 Patriarch Sylvester in Damascus after 1760

Sergios Makraios summarized the activity of Sylvester in the 1750s as follows:

Διαπραξάμενος τοίνυν ἐν τῇ Κωνσταντινουπόλει τὰ δυνατὰ καὶ ὁ μακαριώτατος Ἀντιοχείας Σίλβεστρος πρότερον, ἐπανῆκεν εἰς τὸν ἴδιον κλῆρον ἐπισκεψόμενος αὐτοπροσώπως ὡς ἀπ' ἀρχῆς τὰ ἴδια· καὶ δὴ ἐπανιών συντονοτέρως ἐκαλλιέργει τὴν ἀμπελον τοῦ Χριστοῦ, καὶ πάντα ἐποιεῖ ὑπὲρ τῆς σωτηρίας τοῦ ποιμνίου.¹

His Beatitude Sylvester of Antioch, having done at first what was in his power in Constantinople, returned to his clergy, visiting in person his eparchy for the first time. And when he was back, he cultivated the vineyard of Christ more carefully and did everything for the salvation of his flock.

The attachment of the Metropolis of Aleppo to the Ecumenical Patriarchate with the consent of Patriarch Sylvester and the election of Philemon as metropolitan are also recorded by Sergios Makraios in his historical work. According to this author, Sylvester asked Patriarch Samuel and the local Holy Synod in Constantinople to place the Metropolitan See of Aleppo under their protection. The reasons for this decision were the continuous attacks from the pro-Latin party and the Catholic missionaries.

By 1759, troubles arose in the Greek Catholic hierarchy. Kyrillos VI, in his refuge on Mount Lebanon, wanted to renounce his throne in favor of his nephew Ignatios Jawhar, but was opposed by the bishops. Only after considerably pressuring the hierarchs did he succeed in proclaiming Ignatios patriarch, under the name of Athanasios. Kyrillos died in 1760 and the dispute about who was to succeed him on the patriarchal throne continued. Some of the bishops preferred Maximos Ḥakīm, the metropolitan of Aleppo, who was eventually appointed patriarch by Rome. In 1762, Maximos was succeeded by Theodosios V, also supported by Rome, who continued to be contested by Athanasios Jawhar. The dispute in the Greek Catholic hierarchy ended only in 1768, when Jawhar finally accepted Rome's choice.²

Four documents concerning the appointment of Anthimos as metropolitan of Eirenoupolis are preserved in a manuscript of Matthaïos of Alexandria in the library of the Koutloumousiou Monastery on Mount Athos.³ In the first of these documents, dated February 1765, Sylvester of Antioch, alongside Makarios of Tyre

1 Makraios, “Υπομνήματα ἐκκλησιαστικῆς ἱστορίας”, p. 250.

2 See Bachel, “Une période troublée de l'histoire de l'Église melkite”, p. 340–351; Frazee, *Catholics and Sultans*, p. 205. For Athanasios Jawhar, see Nasrallah, Haddad, *HMLÉM* IV.2, p. 67–69.

3 See Ch. Papadopoulos, “Σιλβέστρου Ἀντιοχείας Ἐγγραφα περὶ τοῦ Εἰρηνοπόλεως Ἀνθίμου”, *Γρηγόριος ὁ Παλαμάς. Ἐκκλησιαστικὸν περιοδικόν*, 2, 1918, p. 124.

and Sidon and Ierotheos of Şaydnāyā, ordained archimandrite Anthimos as metropolitan of Eirenoupolis in the church of the Most Holy Mother of God in Damascus. The position of titular metropolitan of Eirenoupolis was granted to him in recognition of his merits and services to the Patriarchate of Antioch. The ancient city of Eirenoupolis was located “in the East near the Euphrates River” (“ἐν Ἀνατολῇ ἐγγὺς τοῦ Εὐφράτου ποταμοῦ”), where the Orthodox Christian presence was very limited at the time. According to the document, “once, this city was under a shepherd and [had a] flock, but now it is dominated by the local Arabs of the desert” (“Ἦν ποτε αὕτη ἡ πόλις ὑπὸ ποιμένος καὶ ποιμνίου, τὰ νῦν δὲ ἐξουσιάζεται παρὰ τῶν ἐκεῖσε ἐρημίτων Ἀράβων”).

Locating this city “near the Euphrates River” is not very easy. In Late Antiquity, there were two cities named Eirenoupolis (Irenopolis), one in Cilicia (also called Neronias) and the other in Isauria.⁴ However, neither of them was located near the Euphrates. A work written in the 12th century by Neilos Doxapatrēs, *The Order of the Patriarchal Thrones* (Τάξις τῶν Πατριαρχικῶν Θρόνων), provides different information, stating that a *katholikos* of Eirenoupolis used to be appointed by the patriarch of Antioch for “Babylon, which is now called Baghdad” (“Βαβυλώνα, τὴν νῦν καλουμένην Βαγδά”).⁵ The Greek name Εἰρηνοῦπολις renders in this case the old Arabic name of Baghdad, *Madīnat al-salām* (مدينة السلام), the “City of Peace”.⁶ It was this, or a similar source, that was used in Sylvester’s time, and it is clear that in the 1765 documents Eirenoupolis meant Baghdad.

Anthimos received the act of his ordination together with a patriarchal letter of recommendation where his service for the Patriarchate was also mentioned, and it was indicated that he was allowed to collect alms.⁷ On his request, the Patriarch granted him permission to go wherever he wished in his role as metropolitan of Eirenoupolis. He was thus a titular metropolitan.

This practice of appointing titular metropolitans (nominally appointed to famous ancient eparchies) was common in the Orthodox Church in the 18th century.⁸ Many of the titular metropolitans settled in the Romanian Principalities,

4 For Eirenopolis in Cilicia, see K. Panagopoulou, “Eirenopolis”, *Encyclopaedia of the Hellenic World, Asia Minor*, at <http://www.ehw.gr/l.aspx?id=12369>. For the bishops of the two cities in Late Antiquity, see Le Quien, *Oriens Christianus*, t. II, col. 897–900 (Eirenoupolis or Irenopolis in Cilicia), and col. 1029–1030 (Eirenoupolis or Irenopolis in Isauria).

5 Le Quien, *Oriens Christianus*, t. II, col. 1087–1088; N. Doxapatrēs, “Τάξις τῶν Πατριαρχικῶν Θρόνων”, in J.-P. Migne, *Patrologiae Cursus Completus. Series Graeca*, vol. 132, Paris, 1864, col. 1088.

6 Le Quien, *Oriens Christianus*, t. II, col. 1088.

7 Papadopoulos, “Συμβέστρον Αντιοχείας Ἐγγραφα”, p. 122.

8 See M. Țipău, “Titular Metropolitans of Asia Minor in Walachia (17th–19th C.)”, *Études byzantines et post-byzantines*, IV, Iași, 2001, p. 319–325.

where they often acted as superiors of monasteries (*hegoumenoi*). One well-known example is that of Iōannikios of Stavroupolis, whom Sylvester met in Bucharest in 1730. The practice was also common in the Roman Catholic Church.

Another of the four documents in the manuscript at the Koutlounousiou Monastery is a fragment of a letter from a patriarch (most likely Sylvester) requesting help for Anthimos of Eirenoupolis and allowing him to officiate bishop's services.⁹

More information about Anthimos and Sylvester is provided by a fourth, undated letter. The text was written after February 1765, when Anthimos was ordained metropolitan of Eirenoupolis. According to this text, the patriarch of Antioch, probably Sylvester and not his successor Philemon,¹⁰ was at the time in Constantinople because of conflicts in his eparchy. Learning that peace was finally achieved, he wished to return before Easter, but he was required by the ecumenical patriarch and the local Synod to stay in the imperial city to participate in a "commission of the community" ("ἐπιτροπική τοῦ κοινοῦ"), which he did unwillingly. Instead, he sent Anthimos of Eirenoupolis to his eparchy.¹¹

This commission, also attested in other sources, was instituted by Patriarch Samuel Hantzeris (1763–1768 and 1773–1774) to manage the finances of the Patriarchate of Constantinople. The fact that Sylvester was asked to participate illustrates the relations of trust and understanding between the two Patriarchates in the 18th century, offering a new perspective on the elections for the See of Antioch that were conducted in Constantinople.

Sylvester of Antioch returned to Damascus in 1765 or early in 1766. He died on March 13, 1766, in Damascus. He was buried in the place dedicated to the late patriarchs outside the walls of Damascus. An Arabic inscription on the walls of the *parekklēsiōn* of the Holy Archangel Michael in the cathedral of Damascus recorded the duration of his tenure: 41 years, 5 months, and 26 days.¹² The inscription was translated into Greek at the request of the Russian scholar Porfirii Uspenskii sometime before 1874 and published by him (in Greek). The current location of the inscription is unknown. At an indefinite date, the tombs of the Patriarchs were moved to the Maryamiyya Cathedral in Damascus, as proven by a surviving inscription where the patriarch Makarios III ibn al-Za'im is mentioned.¹³

9 Papadopoulos, "Σιλβέστρου Ἀντιοχείας Ἐγγραφα", p. 123.

10 See the discussion in Papadopoulos, "Σιλβέστρου Ἀντιοχείας Ἐγγραφα", p. 126–127.

11 Papadopoulos, "Σιλβέστρου Ἀντιοχείας Ἐγγραφα", p. 123–124.

12 Uspenskii, *Восток Христианский*, p. 11; Karnapas, "Ὁ πατριάρχης Ἀντιοχείας Σιλβεστρος", *Νέα Σιών*, 5, 1907, p. 864.

13 É. Zayyat, "Stèle de la tombe du patriarche d'Antioche Makarios III (al-Za'im)", in Canivet, Rey-Coquais (eds.), *Mémorial Monseigneur Joseph Nasrallah*, p. 364–366 (with the Arabic

The other Orthodox Patriarchs reacted quickly and tried to find a successor for Sylvester. The new Patriarch of Antioch was the metropolitan of Aleppo, Philēmon,¹⁴ who had been metropolitan of Aleppo since 1757, according to Athanasios Komnēnos Hypsēlantēs,¹⁵ or since 1763, according to Sergios Makraios.¹⁶ Philemon was elected patriarch of Antioch on April 28 or 29, 1766, in Constantinople.¹⁷

The date of April 29, 1766, for this election has been recorded by Sergios Makraios. According to his *Memories of Ecclesiastical History*, the election of the new patriarch was entrusted by the local bishops, the clergy and the *epitropos* of the entire Orthodox nation in the Patriarchate of Antioch to the Patriarchs Samuel of Constantinople, Matthaïos of Alexandria, and Parthenios of Jerusalem, and to the Synod of Constantinople.¹⁸ Makraios mentions this when discussing the placing of the Orthodox Churches of Peć and Ohrid under the authority of Constantinople in 1766–1767, during Samuel's patriarchate.¹⁹

The centralization of the ecclesiastical authority in the Orthodox Church by the patriarch of Constantinople, although not entirely new, became apparent in the second half of the 18th century. The progress of the Latin propaganda in the Patriarchate of Antioch, and especially in Aleppo, and the increasingly evident separation of the Melkite Greek Catholics from the Greek Orthodox were just catalyzing factors in this development. During Sylvester's time in office, the need for a swift response to various challenges from the opposing party became clear. Only someone who had good connections with the central authorities in the Ottoman capital, including the patriarch of Constantinople, could act with the necessary speed and determination to face such challenges.

inscription). The Arabic text of the inscription corresponds with the Greek translation published in Uspenskii, *Восток Христианский*, p. 11.

14 For Philēmon, see G. S. Iōsēfidēs, “Φιλῆμων πατριάρχης Ἀντιοχείας”, *Γρηγόριος ὁ Παλαμᾶς. Ἐκκλησιαστικὸν περιοδικόν*, 1, 1917, p. 732–733; Dapontes, “Κατάλογος ἱστορικός”, p. 89; Komnēnos Hypsēlantēs, *Ἐκκλησιαστικῶν καὶ Πολιτικῶν*, p. 409.

15 Komnēnos Hypsēlantēs, *Ἐκκλησιαστικῶν καὶ Πολιτικῶν*, p. 377.

16 Makraios, “Υπομνήματα ἐκκλησιαστικῆς ἱστορίας”, p. 250.

17 Delikanēs, *Τὰ ἐν τοῖς κώδιξι τοῦ Πατριαρχικοῦ Ἀρχιεποφυλακείου σωζόμενα ἐπίσημα ἐκκλησιαστικά ἔγγραφα*, p. 208; Makraios, “Υπομνήματα ἐκκλησιαστικῆς ἱστορίας”, p. 253.

18 Makraios, “Υπομνήματα ἐκκλησιαστικῆς ἱστορίας”, p. 252–253.

19 Makraios, “Υπομνήματα ἐκκλησιαστικῆς ἱστορίας”, p. 251–252. For this measure, see Kitromilides, “Orthodox Culture and Collective Identity in the Ottoman Balkans”, in Kitromilides, *An Orthodox Commonwealth*, Study II, p. 131–145.