

10 The Patriarchate of Antioch in Sylvester's Times: "Greeks" and "Latins"

10.1 The "Greeks" of Damascus

A report by the Jesuit priest Pierre Fromage written in 1730 estimated the number of Christians in Aleppo at 40,000, while in Damascus there were around 25,000, three quarters of which were allegedly "Catholics". In Tripoli, the residents were "stubborn heretics" (meaning Orthodox), while in Sidon "the heretics do not dare to move anymore".¹

A memorandum about the situation in Damascus, dated June 31, 1731, written by Jean-André du Bellis, chancellor of the French consulate in Sidon, contains news of the Christian population of the city.² The author estimated that the Christians of Damascus: Maronites, "Greeks" (Orthodox), Syrians, and Armenians, were altogether fewer than 6,000. The "Greeks" represented most of the Christian population. This estimate, based on 4,000 receipts of taxpayers, was most likely well below the real number.³ Du Bellis mentioned disputes among three missionary orders in Damascus: the Franciscans of *Terra Sancta*, the Capuchins, and the Jesuits. He also referred to something the Patriarch Kyrillos (probably Kyrillos Tanās) had said, namely that "at the time, missionaries were needed for the missionaries" ("aujourd'hui, au langage du patriarche Cyrille, il faudrait des missionnaires pour les missionnaires").⁴ Du Bellis also makes an estimation of the revenue of the Patriarchate of Antioch, which he defines as "significant" ("considérable") but less than thirty "purses".⁵ According to his source, every bishop delivered a large part of his income to the patriarch. Sylvester had a deputy or vicar ("grand vicaire") in Damascus, called *vekil* (Ar. *wakīl*).⁶

1 Letter of the Jesuit priest Pierre Fromage to a German Jesuit, April 25, 1730, in Rabbath, *Documents inédits*, vol. II, p. 397.

2 Rabbath, *Documents inédits*, vol. I, p. 590–596.

3 Rabbath, *Documents inédits*, vol. I, p. 590, n. 2.

4 Rabbath, *Documents inédits*, vol. I, p. 591.

5 Rabbath, *Documents inédits*, vol. I, p. 595. Thirty "purses" are equivalent to 15,000 *piasters* or *groschen*. It is not clear from the text, but that was most likely the annual revenue of the Patriarchate.

6 Rabbath, *Documents inédits*, vol. I, p. 595.

10.2 Aleppo

Aleppo was perhaps the richest city in the Patriarchate of Antioch, and the one with the largest number of Christians. In his second term in office as patriarch (1720–1724), Athanasios III Dabbās often preferred Aleppo over Damascus as his city of residence. He traveled to Constantinople whenever necessary, for example, to participate in and sign the Acts of the Synod of 1722. He also had allies in Aleppo, such as the English consul, and especially Rowland Sherman.

There were also potential opponents in Aleppo: the French consul, Latin missionaries of several orders and nationalities, and their converts. Dabbās chose to be cautious and did not overtly provoke anyone. He even succeeded in being on somewhat friendly terms with certain missionaries. It was a wise move, not uncommon in the history of the Patriarchs of Antioch. In Constantinople, as mentioned, Athanasios signed the Acts of the 1722 Synod that strongly rejected Latin practices. A condemnation of this document written by ‘Abdallāh Zākhir, one of his former collaborators, was also strongly rejected by the Patriarch.

The role of Aleppo in the election of Sylvester was considerable. Not only did the Orthodox community intervene on his behalf, but also certain missionaries were well disposed towards him. Athanasios’s choice for his successor seemed the best solution. The initiative of Seraphim Ṭanās’s supporters in Damascus to elect him as patriarch only encouraged the Aleppo party to insist in their choice. Local rivalries between the residents of the two cities may have played a role in this.

Damascus was the See of the Patriarchate of Antioch and remained so throughout the Patriarchate of Sylvester (and to this day). In his letters, he refers to the city as “our See” even if he spent long periods of time far from it. The ancient city of Antioch was at the time little more than a village with a small Christian population.⁷

After his election, Sylvester spent several months in Constantinople before going to Aleppo. At the time, Aleppo seemed to be the right choice of residence for the new patriarch. The events that unfolded there are difficult to reconstruct in an objective way. The fact is that part of the Aleppo residents manifested a lot of animosity towards the new patriarch. Some sources suggest that the reason was his vehement opposition to their Latin practices.⁸

⁷ R. Pococke, *A Description of the East and Some Other Countries*, 2, part 1, London, 1745, p. 188–193. According to Pococke, there were 300 Orthodox Christian (“Greeks”) in Antioch in the 1740s; cf. Pococke, *A Description of the East*, 2, part 1, p. 192. See also R. Finnegan (ed.), *Richard Pococke’s Letters from the East (1737–1740)*, Leiden/Boston, 2020, p. 216. For a description of Antioch, see Grigorovitch-Barski, *Pérégrinations (1723–1747)*, p. 372–374.

⁸ Komnēnos Hypsēlantēs, *Εκκλησιαστικῶν καὶ Πολιτικῶν*, p. 325.

In 1726, as we mentioned, Sylvester left Aleppo by night, as he himself mentioned, perhaps with the English consul's help. He reached Sidon and then he went to Constantinople.

Even when the patriarch resided in the city, Aleppo had its own metropolitan, as did Damascus. After their conflict with Sylvester, the inhabitants of Aleppo requested a resolution, so the eparchy of Aleppo was removed from under the jurisdiction of the Church of Antioch and became independent, like Cyprus. Obviously, this process was not straightforward, considering the canons and customs of the Orthodox Church. The patriarch of Constantinople assumed his ecumenical role and proposed another solution, or maybe the solution was proposed by the Ottoman administration, which could deal more easily and more directly with the patriarch of Constantinople. Anyway, the transfer was approved, and the eparchy of Aleppo became part of the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople. Sylvester accepted the compromise, as he could not have solved the situation by himself. It is difficult to understand how the solution worked in practice. Most likely, the *status quo* was maintained, with the Melkite Christians divided into two communities, the Greek Orthodox and the Greek Catholic.

Even if the situation was accepted for the moment, Sylvester did not renounce the idea to recover Aleppo for the Greek Orthodox Church of Antioch. As we have mentioned above, the opportunity to recover it came in 1745, when Kyrillos Ṭanās, helped by his supporters and intermediaries, succeeded in obtaining the *berat* of patriarch of Antioch for a brief period. Sylvester's new *berat* was obtained on December 2, 1745. One of the first things Sylvester did in his newly recovered function was ordaining a new metropolitan of Aleppo, a learned priest called Gennadios.

The idea of the separation of Aleppo from the Patriarchate of Antioch might have had its origin in the period after the agreement between Athanasios III Dabbās and Kyrillos V ibn al-Zaʿīm. After several years of conflict, the two contenders to the Antiochian throne had reached an agreement that Athanasios would remain in Aleppo, presumably as metropolitan of the city, and former patriarch. According to the agreement, Kyrillos was acknowledged as patriarch of Antioch, and Athanasios was going to succeed him. During this period, Athanasios used the title *πρώην Πατριάρχης*, former patriarch of Antioch. He is referred to with this expression in the forewords of the books he printed.

After being re-appointed patriarch of Antioch in 1720,⁹ Athanasios maintained his residence in Aleppo and traveled to Constantinople to participate in synods, like in 1723–1724. The See of the patriarchate was still in Damascus, but Athanasios

⁹ See the *berat* of 1720 for Athanasios III Dabbās in Çolak, Bayraktar-Tellan, *The Orthodox Church*, p. 91 (transcribed Ottoman text), 217 (English translation).

seemed to have visited the city only rarely in the period 1720–1724. Perhaps this “neglect” of Damascus determined, in a way, the election of Seraphim/Kyrrillos VI as patriarch in this city in 1724.

In Aleppo, the period of separation from the Church of Antioch possibly helped the emergence of a separate Christian identity. Of course, in time, this was only one factor, and maybe not the most significant, in explaining the “dissidence” of some of the residents of Aleppo during Sylvester’s patriarchate.¹⁰

10.3 Sylvester and the Metropolitan of Şaydnāyā

One of the bishops involved in Kyrrillos Tanās’s election and ordination as patriarch of Antioch was Neophytos, the metropolitan of Şaydnāyā. Neophytos had been a monk at the monastery of Balamand and then at the monastery of Saint John the Baptist in Shuwayr, before being appointed metropolitan by Athanasios Dabbās.

An Arabic source about Neophytos’s *Life* written by Ignatios, a priest close to him, provides useful information about the events after Kyrrillos’s election and Sylvester’s actions.¹¹

Ignatios describes “the persecutions” of the “Catholic” party by Sylvester’s supporters, a topic often found in pro-Latin sources. When a *kapıcı* bearing a *firman* against Neophytos and his group was sent over, they were warned in a letter from the missionaries, and they succeeded in escaping. The *kapıcı* was accompanied by the metropolitan Leontios, Sylvester’s vicar. After a period of hiding on Mount Lebanon, Neophytos succeeded in returning to Şaydnāyā, with the help of missionaries who secured an order from the pasha of Aleppo authorizing him and his retinue to return to the monastery without fear of persecution.¹² According to the source, after the return of Neophytos, Leontios wrote to Sylvester, who was in Constantinople at the time. Allegedly, the patriarch of Antioch and the patriarch of Constantinople asked the sultan for a new *firman*. A document was issued ordering

10 For the issue of Aleppo, based on evidence from documents in the Ottoman archives, see Çolak, *Relations between the Ottoman Central Administration and the Greek Orthodox Patriarchates*, p. 197–203. For Aleppo during the Ottoman rule, see also A. Raymond, “An expanding community: the Christians of Aleppo in the Ottoman era (16th–18th centuries)”, in A. Raymond, *Arab Cities in the Ottoman Period: Cairo, Syria, and the Maghreb*, Aldershot, 2002, p. 83–100.

11 “Vie de Neophytos, métropolitte de Saidnaya par son prêtre Ignace”, in Rabbath, *Documents inédits*, vol. I, p. 597–608 (Arabic text), p. 609–621 (French translation). For Neophytos of Şaydnāyā, see also H. Boustani, “Les évêques de Sidnaïa”, *Échos d’Orient*, 7, 1904, 47, p. 214.

12 Rabbath, *Documents inédits*, vol. I, p. 613–614.

the execution of Neophytos and his group. Neophytos succeeded once again in escaping to the mountains before the *kapıcı* arrived with the *firman*.

Neophytos's *Life* composed by Ignatios is an interesting source for Sylvester's attitude towards the dissident metropolitan of Şaydnāyā. Apparently, the patriarch repeatedly tried to reach a consensus with him. According to Ignatios's account, Sylvester asked Neophytos to excommunicate the pope. He also offered to appoint him vicar in Damascus, but he refused. The patriarch insisted and sent other messengers. He promised in a letter not to surrender the metropolitan to the Ottoman governor, signed the letter, and applied his seal. However, Neophytos's *Life* mentions that the letter also contained threats from the notables of the city of Tripoli, who again requested that the metropolitan excommunicate the pope. Neophytos again refused to comply and asked Sylvester in return to submit to the sovereign pontiff.¹³ He eventually succeeded in escaping from Sidon by sea with the French consul's help, reaching Rome in 1730 by way of Marseille.¹⁴

Ignatios's *Life* of Neophytos emphasizes the religious side of the issue. It does not explain whether Sylvester's solemn promises not to harm the metropolitan of Şaydnāyā were deemed sincere. It is very plausible that Sylvester sought reconciliation with the metropolitan to appease the disputes and to further weaken Kyrillos Ṭanās's party. After all, the reestablishment of order was something Sylvester, as the legitimate patriarch, would wish for, and it was also the main concern of the Porte.

At some point, Sylvester ordained a new metropolitan of Şaydnāyā, most likely Ierotheos, documented in 1744.¹⁵

10.4 Rome and Kyrillos VI

Kyrillos remained at the monastery of Saint Saviour and he rarely visited Sidon, only for the services of Christmas (1730) and Easter (1731), taking advantage of the favorable attitude of Soliman, the pasha of Sidon, towards him.

After the 1743 decree and Kyrillos's solemn plea to submit to it, he was given the *pallium*. The papal document of 1743 reached Beirut in October of the next year, probably through the legates sent to deliver the *pallium* to Kyrillos. It was deemed important enough to be translated into Greek and copied in one of the codices in which Sylvester collected interesting texts. The translation was made most likely from the Latin version. As the pope's letter was addressed, among others, to the

¹³ Rabbath, *Documents inédits*, vol. I, p. 616.

¹⁴ Rabbath, *Documents inédits*, vol. I, p. 617–618.

¹⁵ Ḥ. Zayyāt, *Khabāyā al-zawāyā min tārikh Şaydnāyā*, Ḥarīṣā, 1932, p. 233.

patriarch of Antioch, the Orthodox patriarch thought that it also concerned him. This recognition by the pope was followed in 1745 by a more determined attempt of Kyrillos's supporters to secure the official Ottoman validation of his position.¹⁶

The Latin policy in the Patriarchate of Antioch had two main aspects. One was the intention to control the Patriarchate itself. The other was supporting a pro-Latin metropolitan in Aleppo. At times, the Latin policy in Aleppo was successful, due to the cooperation of the local authorities. By its attempts to control the Church of Antioch, Rome was not doing anything different than the Patriarchate of Constantinople when it intervened in the patriarchal election in Antioch, or when it acted in support of the Orthodox patriarch.

After a period of hesitation, Rome endeavored to obtain the recognition of Kyrillos as patriarch of Antioch from the Ottoman authorities. It is unclear whether Pope Benedict XIII was persuaded (perhaps by the missionaries' reports) that such attempts could be successful, or whether just responded to requests sent by Kyrillos for him to show support for the leader of the emerging "Greek Catholic" party. Anyway, the sovereign pontiff decided to delegate the matter to King Louis XV of France. In a letter written in Latin on August 12, 1729, the pope asked the king, among other things, to obtain Kyrillos's recognition.¹⁷ The French officials, well informed of the situation in the field by their diplomats, conveyed the request, but put no pressure on the latter to try to get Kyrillos appointed as patriarch, a rather unrealistic goal at the time.

According to a memorandum written in 1731 by Jean-André du Bellis, an official of the French consulate in Sidon, Pope Benedict XIII appointed father Dorotheos, a Capuchin missionary in Sidon, as his envoy, in a letter dated August 13, 1729. He was asked to receive Kyrillos's profession of faith and confirm his election. The patriarch had to take an oath that he would observe the Greek rite in its genuine form. On April 25, a synod was held at the monastery of Saint Saviour, Kyrillos's refuge, with the participation of the metropolitans of Caesarea Philippi (Banyas, Πανεάς) and Şaydnāyā. Kyrillos recognized the pope's primacy and his infallibility, pledged to preserve the "Greek" rite, and was confirmed by the pope's envoy as "patriarch of the Greeks' nation".¹⁸

Rome's apparent reluctance to fully recognize Kyrillos as patriarch was not due to doubts about his Catholicism. It was based more on the issue of whether he was the right person to facilitate the success of the Latin policy concerning the

¹⁶ See Ch. 6.2.

¹⁷ Rabbath, *Documents inédits*, vol. II, p. 391, n. 1.

¹⁸ Rabbath, *Documents inédits*, vol. I, p. 594. The information provided by du Bellis is based on the documents of the synod he could have access to at the (French) chancellery in Sidon.

Church of Antioch. In the decree *Demandatam caelitus humilitati nostrae* issued on December 24, 1743 (generally known as *Demandatam*, after its first word), Pope Benedict XIV expressly asked Kyrillos and all the bishops and clergy to observe the Greek rite and to renounce the Latin alterations to the services, introduced by Euthymios Şayfi. The decree was printed in Rome in a leaflet with parallel texts, Latin original and Arabic translation. Two other decrees followed, one in 1745 and the other in 1746. Both were published in similar bilingual editions. The 1746 decree was addressed to the metropolitan (bishop) of Hierapolis, the ancient name for Aleppo. A rare copy of these three decrees is preserved in the Bavarian State Library in Munich.¹⁹

The question of observing the “Greek” rite was important for Rome for several reasons. New “Latin” converts, subjects of the sultan, were difficult to protect, as their community was not among the older ones recognized by the Ottomans. Maintaining the “Greek” rite also had the advantage of having the potential to attract, in time, other “Greek” Orthodox. However, in practice, some of the missionaries did not always accept the orders issued from Rome and tried to make “Latin” converts, as in Damascus.²⁰

As for the revenues, in 1731, Kyrillos could only count on those from Sidon and from “the mountains”. He also sent envoys to collect alms in the Christian lands.²¹

According to du Bellis, there was always the fear that Sylvester, as the legitimate patriarch, could obtain an order of the Porte to arrest Kyrillos. The French author of the memorandum of 1731 understood the official view of the Ottoman state that Kyrillos was an intruder, affecting the authority of Sylvester, who had been appointed by the sultan.²²

Kyrillos succeeded in achieving a very significant breakthrough when he obtained in 1745 the berat recognizing him as patriarch of Antioch. It is unclear what changed after that, but Kyrillos had Rome and the Latin missionaries’ support, especially that of the Jesuits. A French diplomat, namely the consul of Damascus, also intervened on his behalf. For the Catholic party, the immediate pretext to act were a series of events in Damascus, involving a French merchant and Jesuit missionaries who suffered abuses and extortions from the local authorities. The Orthodox inhabitants of the city were blamed for the troubles and the French consul in Sidon, François de Lane, asked the French ambassador in Constantinople,

¹⁹ Accessible online in digital form: <https://mdz-nbn-resolving.de/details:bsb10627741>.

²⁰ Rabbath, *Documents inédits*, vol. I, p. 595.

²¹ Rabbath, *Documents inédits*, vol. I, p. 595. For Kyrillos’ envoys, see Saracino, “The *Album Amicorum*”, p. 75.

²² Rabbath, *Documents inédits*, vol. I, p. 594–595.

Michel-Ange, Count de Castellane,²³ to request the Porte to dismiss Sylvester.²⁴ The French diplomatic correspondence, partially unpublished, offers a glimpse of the whole issue of Sylvester's temporary replacement with Kyrillos as patriarch of Antioch in 1745.

The plan was to act within the frame of Ottoman bureaucracy. A petition was sent denouncing the absence of Patriarch Sylvester, accused of being in Moldavia and Wallachia, or even in an "enemy country", an insinuation that he could have been in Russia.²⁵ Therefore, claimed the petition, he neglected his eparchy. The request was made to appoint in Sylvester's place Kyrillos, who had been acting as a patriarch without a *berat* for the last two decades. Attempts were also made by French diplomats to secure an order for the exile of Mikhā'il ibn Tūmā, Sylvester's vicar in Damascus, considered responsible for the troubles against the Jesuits.²⁶

Many factors contributed to Ṭanās's achievement. The pressure from Rome and the behavior of Jesuit missionaries forced the somewhat reluctant French diplomats to act for the appointment of Kyrillos by the Porte, although they were aware of the disadvantages of such a project. A document mentions that the actions began during de Villeneuve's time in office (1728–1741), by securing an order for Kyrillos to return to his "homeland".²⁷ The French ambassador most likely provided the financial support to pay the official and unofficial sums of money requested by the Ottomans. Rich merchants in Aleppo and elsewhere were also influenced by Rome's ideas and supported Kyrillos. Another important factor were the Latin missionaries in present-day Syria and Lebanon, who were directly interested in having as leader of the Church of Antioch an ally, not an opponent.

It seems that Kyrillos's most convincing argument was of a financial nature. Beside the *pîşkeş* of 15,000 *akçe* (eventually, the amount reached 20,000), he offered to pay an unheard-of annual tax of 30,000 *akçe* to the public treasury, to convince the Ottoman authorities to appoint him. As we mentioned before, Sylvester of Antioch refers to this tax in his Greek letters as *miri* (μῖρι). Kyrillos thus paid for the *berat* the huge sum of 50,000 *akçe* only in official taxes, plus the usual unofficial payments to various Ottoman dignitaries and clerks. Moreover, it appears from the

²³ Michel-Ange, Count de Castellane, was ambassador of France in Constantinople from 1741 to 1747.

²⁴ "Histoire des différentes persécutions exercées contre les catholiques d'Alep et de Damas", in *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses*, 1, p. 478–479.

²⁵ Çolak, "When a Catholic is invested as the Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch", p. 42.

²⁶ Letter of Count de Castellane to Count de Maurepas, June 28, 1745, ANF, MS AE/B/I/422, f. 277r–278v.

²⁷ Letter of Count de Castellane to Count de Maurepas, April 14, 1745, ANF, MS AE/B/I/422, f. 164r–167v.

sources that the amounts proposed by Kyrillos were raised by the authorities. The amount of 50,000 *piasters* paid by Kyrillos to replace Sylvester is also confirmed by another source, Alexei Veshniakov, the Russian resident in Constantinople.²⁸

Comparing this sum with the 10,000 *akçe* paid by Sylvester in 1724, the difference is evident. It is thus clear that the Ottoman central authorities' main motivation in granting Kyrillos the *berat* was financial. After two decades of attempts, the governing bodies were aware of the situation on the ground. They knew that Kyrillos lived in a monastery in the mountains, that orders had been issued against him in the past, and that he was repeatedly accused of following the religion of the "Franks", i.e., of the pope. It is plausible that, although they issued the *berat*, the authorities were determined not to enforce it and just waited for Sylvester's offer to be reestablished on the throne of Antioch. Or, perhaps, the whole issue was a scheme to obtain money from both parties.

Where did Kyrillos find such sums of money to support him and his host monastery, when in 1730 he was denied even the request to have a ship placed under the French flag? Most likely, French merchants had lent the money to him, as they had done in 1724. If he was successful, the money could have been recovered from a rich eparchy, as the Latin missionaries believed.

Eventually, the pro-Latin Maximos was forced to leave the city, although he continued his attempts to return to his Throne. In 1759, Maximos became involved in the disputes surrounding the election of Kyrillos's successor as Greek Catholic patriarch and was supported by one of the factions. In practice, these attempts were equally challenges for Sylvester, who had to find ways to counter them. He enlisted the help of his supporters, such as Gregory II Ghikas, the patriarch of Constantinople, and the Ottoman authorities.

In conclusion, a Catholic became Orthodox patriarch of Antioch in 1745, in the person of Kyrillos.²⁹ But there was more to it. Nowhere in the official documents, neither in the petition nor in the *berat*, was there any mention of Catholicism or the "Franks' religion".

²⁸ Panchenko, "Иерусалимский Патриарх Парфений (1737–1766 гг.) и Россия", p. 37.

²⁹ For this formulation, see Çolak, "When a Catholic is invested as the Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch", p. 29–55.