

11 Sylvester's Schools

After Sylvester succeeded in getting back to “Arabia”, as he often called his eparchy, i.e., the region of Greater Syria and Lebanon, he strove for the establishment of a “Hellenic” school in Tripoli or Damascus. The fact that establishing a school was one of Sylvester's main concerns as a patriarch is revelatory of his cultural aims. It also supports the theory that he had a thorough classical and Byzantine Greek education, regardless of whether his native language was Arabic or Greek.

In Ancient and Medieval Greek culture, education was defined as a good knowledge of literature, both ecclesiastical and secular, alongside grammar, philosophy, and rhetoric. This sort of education could be achieved at the time in some of the great centers of Greek learning in the Ottoman Empire (Constantinople, Patmos, Mount Athos etc.), as well as in the semi-autonomous principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia. Superior learning, however, greatly depended on the teachers and the students. Competent professors were few and much sought after. Ambitious students sometimes continued their education at Western European universities.

While it is unknown where Sylvester studied, his written texts, reading, and cultural interests prove that he had enjoyed a superior Greek education, which served him well in his position. Nothing less was expected of an Orthodox patriarch at the time, as is illustrated also by the cultural level of his predecessor, Athanasios Dabbās, and that of the patriarchs of Jerusalem Dositheos and Chrysanthos.

As we mentioned before, Sylvester may have studied in his native island of Cyprus, could have pursued his higher education while he was metropolitan of Aleppo, on Mount Athos, as some modern historians conjectured, or in another major teaching center such as Patmos, where he had connections as patriarch. One should not forget that along with his philological training, Sylvester had acquired an artistic formation: the art of painting Byzantine icons. This dual training was rather rare, as painting was considered more of a craft than as a form of fine arts.

Even before he was acquainted with Kaisarios Dapontes,¹ Patriarch Sylvester wrote about the school on the island of Skopelos in a letter addressed to its sponsor, the former metropolitan of Arta, Neophytos Mavromatis.² In this letter dated May 3, 1725, a short time after he was elected to the patriarchal throne of Antioch, Sylvester mentions the “Academy” in Skopelos, praising the importance of education. The passage is very significant for Sylvester's ideas about instruction in general, and

1 For Dapontes, see Ch. 7.

2 For Neophytos Mavromatis, see Kallianos, “Εξι ανέκδοτες επιστολές”, p. 159–160, n. 5, with the earlier bibliography.

the school of Skopelos might have been a model for the patriarch's initiatives in the field of education.

Ἐμάθομεν ὅτι πῶς ἐσύστησε καὶ τὴν Ἀκαδημίαν εἰς τὴν Σκόπελον καὶ ὃχι μόνον ἡμεῖς, ἀλλὰ καὶ ὅσοι ἄλλοι τὸ ἤκουσαν ἔδωσαν δόξαν τῷ Θεῷ ὅπου εὐρίσκονται καὶ εἰς τοὺς καιροὺς μας τοιοῦτοι ζηλωταὶ καὶ ἔργον θεάρεστον ὑπερασπισταὶ καὶ συμπράκτορες, ἐπειδὴ καὶ οὐδὲν ἐστὶ τῶν τῆδε Θεῷ τε καὶ ἀνθρώποις ἐπαινετώτερον, ὡς ἡ ὁδὸς τῆς σπουδῆς καὶ ἡ ταύτης ἀνέκτης.³

We learned that he also established the Academy in Skopelos, and not only we, but also those who heard it, gave glory to God that in our times there are such zealous and devout defenders and collaborators of a work that pleases God, because there is nothing more praiseworthy to God and men, as the path of study and to obtain it.

For the school Sylvester established in "Arabia", he turned to a well-known scholar of the day, Makarios Kalogeras of Patmos. Sylvester's connection to Kalogeras, who was a professor at the school in Patmos, is well documented through letters dating from the 1720s and 1730s.⁴ The future patriarch of Antioch may have studied with Makarios. In any case, from the correspondence it seems that they knew each other. Kalogeras also held Sylvester in great esteem. In one of his letters, he mentioned to the patriarch that his students were learning the laudatory style (ἐγκωμιαστικός) by writing texts dedicated to the patriarch of Antioch.⁵

Kalogeras recommended one of his students, Iakovos of Patmos, to the patriarch. Iakovos went to Syria, became the head of the Hellenic school established

3 Cf. S. Eustratiades, "Ἱεροθέος Πελοποννήσιος ὁ Ἰβηρίτης καὶ Μεθόδιος Ἀνθρακίτης ὁ ἐξ Ἰωαννίνων", *Ρωμανὸς ὁ Μελωδός*, Paris, 1, 1933, p. 290, n. 37, apud K. N. Kallianos, "Ἐξὶ ἀνέκδοτες ἐπιστολές του Ἱεροθέου Ἰβηρίτη στον μητροπολίτη πρ. Ἀρτης Νεόφυτο Μαυρομάτη για την σύσταση Σχολῆς στη Σκόπελο", *Θεσσαλικό Ἡμερολόγιο*, 57, 2010, p. 163, n. 18. The letter was probably published from MS M 100 of the Great Lavra Monastery on Mount Athos. See Spyridon of the Laura, S. Eustratiades, *Catalogue of the Greek manuscripts in the library of the Laura on Mount Athos with notices from other libraries*, Cambridge, 1925, p. 321, no. 1791, accessible at: <https://archive.org/details/catalogueofgreek00monm/page/n5/mode/2up>. For the text, see also A. P. G. Eumorphopoulos, "Νεόφυτος ὁ Μαυρομάτης", in *Ἐταιρεία τῶν Μεσαιωνικῶν Ἑρευνῶν. Δελτίον τῶν ἐργασιῶν τοῦ Α' ἔτους*, 1, Constantinople, 1880, p. 86.

4 Nine letters sent by Makarios of Patmos to Sylvester, dating from 1726 to 1736, are preserved in MS 233 of the Patriarchal Library in Jerusalem. See Papadopoulos-Kerameus, *Ἱεροσολυμιτικὴ Βιβλιοθήκη*, 1, p. 305–309, no. 233. More letters, no. 164, 205 (ρξδ', σε'), are part of Makarios' correspondence while in Patmos. See Malandrakis, *Ἡ Πατμιάς Σχολή*, p. 100, 134; Archim. N. Tsoulkanakēs, "Τοῦ διδασκάλου Μακαρίου Καλογερά ἐπιστολές πρὸς τῇ Συρίᾳ", *Κληρονομία*, 19, 1987, 1-2, p. 277–289.

5 Letter of Makarios of Patmos to Sylvester, August 7, 1726. See Malandrakis, *Ἡ Πατμιάς Σχολή*, p. 147–148, n. 95; Tsoulkanakēs, "Τοῦ διδασκάλου Μακαρίου Καλογερά ἐπιστολές", p. 280–282.

by Sylvester, and taught there. A letter by Makarios to Iakovos mentions that the *didaskalos* (Iakovos) was forced to leave Aleppo with Sylvester (in 1726) and the school moved to Tripoli.⁶

A note by the patriarch in a manuscript record of the sums of money that were spent for the school states that he was pleased with the results, as the school succeeded in training a certain number of good students. Sylvester also mentions that he took care of the school finances until he left the region in 1728, when the managing position was transferred to the *didaskalos* Iakovos.⁷ The manuscript report continues, on the same folio, with the information that Sylvester sent Iakovos, various sums of money, from Philippopolis, Thessaloniki, Kastoria, Tripoli, and Aleppo. The patriarch also recorded the sums he had sent for the school in 1728–1732 from various places while he was travelling. On the same page, all these sums were added, and the total amounted to 2,165 *groschen*. From these, 1,200 *groschen* were given to Iakovos “when he wanted to go to his native place, for his effort” (“ὅταν ἤθελε μισεύσει εἰς τὴν πατρίδα του διὰ τὸν κόπον του”). Sylvester also presented Iakovos with a watch when they met in Patmos: “καὶ εἰς τὴν Κύπρον ὅταν ἀνταμώθημεν τοῦ ἐδώσαμεν ἓνα ὥρολόγι παντόλη”.

After the foundation of the school, Sylvester asked Makarios of Patmos for a new teacher. After a first reluctant answer, Makarios sent the priest Anastasios as an “associate professor” (“συνδιδάσκαλος”). Anastasios was considered equal to Iakovos both in terms of education and morals (“δὲν θέλει φανῇ δεύτερος τοῦ κυρ Τακώβου, οὔτε κατὰ τὴν παιδείαν, οὔτε κατὰ τὰ ἤθη”).⁸ In a letter to Sylvester, Makarios Patmios mentions that he insisted that Anastasios go and teach in the patriarch’s school. He mentioned that the new teacher was not beyond the level of Iakovos. Makarios also stated that Sylvester knew Anastasios.⁹ He had also persuaded another of his disciples to teach in the same school, the priest Athanasios, but this one did not go after all.

6 Papadopoulos-Kerameus, *Γεροσολυμιτικὴ Βιβλιοθήκη*, 1, p. 306, no. 233 (4).

7 MS 210 Ḥariṣā, f. 169: “Ἐξοδα τοῦ σχολείου τοῦ ἑλληνικοῦ ὅπου ἐγκροτήσαμεν εἰς Ἀράβιαν, ἀπὸ τοὺς 1728 ἕως τοὺς [17]32 μηνὶ Ὀκτωβρίῳ, ὄντος μᾶς εἰς Ἀράβιαν μέχρι τοῦ Ιουλίου τὸ ἐκυβερνοῦσαμεν, καὶ μισεῦντός μας εἰς Βασιλεύουσαν ἀφήκαμεν τὴν ἐπιστάσιαν τῷ διδασκάλῳ Τακώβῳ Πατμίῳ, καὶ τοῦ ἐπέμπαμεν διὰ κυβέρνησιν τῶν μαθητῶν” (“Expenses of the Greek school that we established in Arabia, from 1728 until [17]32, October; while we were in Arabia, until July, we supervised it, and when we went to the Imperial City, we left the administration to the teacher Iakovos of Patmos, and we sent him [money] for the administration of the students”).

8 Papadopoulos-Kerameus, *Γεροσολυμιτικὴ Βιβλιοθήκη*, 1, p. 305, no. 233; Malandrakis, *Ἡ Πατμιάς Σχολή*, p. 91, n. 84.

9 Karnapas, “Ο πατριάρχης Ἀντιοχείας Σίλβεστρος”, *Νέα Σιών*, 5, 1907, p. 851–852.

The school had as head teacher and manager Iakovos of Patmos, considered as one of the most cultivated people of his time and the best alumnus of the Patmos school.¹⁰ Eventually, around 1736, Iakovos of Patmos left for Jerusalem, where he continued his work as a teacher.¹¹ It is unknown if the school or schools founded by Sylvester in “Arabia” continued.

At some point, Sylvester was searching for yet another teacher for his school. He asked the same Makarios to send another one of his disciples. The latter's answer was somehow confusing, as he said the island had pupils who knew to recite well, but few or no true scholars. So, if the patriarch wanted one of the less prepared pupils, he could send one.

The school moved from Aleppo to Tripoli. Then, in March 1732, it moved again to Damascus because of an epidemic. The patriarch had returned to the city after his long voyages.¹² Soon, the conflicts in Damascus between the Orthodox and the pro-Catholic factions also affected the activity of the school. The fact was noted by Vasily Barsky, who was a student there at the time.¹³

Sometime after 1732, the patriarch expressed his satisfaction regarding the outcome of the school. He noted that a lot of pupils attended and some of them even became bishops (“ἀρχιεράτευσαν” in the text): “Ἐπρόκοψαν καὶ μαθηταὶ πολλοὶ καὶ τινὲς ἐξ αὐτῶν ἀρχιεράτευσαν” (“Many students also made progress and some of them became archpriests”).¹⁴

One of these students who reached high positions in the Church could have been Sophronios of Kilis, an Arabic-speaking clergyman who received a good Greek education and distinguished himself as metropolitan of Aleppo, patriarch of Jerusalem, and patriarch of Constantinople. In 1766, he was invited to take over the patriarchal throne of Antioch, which he refused.¹⁵

When he was in Wallachia, Sylvester also assured that two of his collaborators (Yūsuf Mark and Parthenios of Adana) attended a school to learn Greek. It has been suggested that he also established a school of Arabic in Bucharest: the same Yūsuf Mark and Buṭrus, Mūsā Ṭrābulṣī's brother, were teaching Arabic to four Wallachian

10 Karnapas, “Ο πατριάρχης Αντιοχείας Σίλβεστρος”, *Νέα Σιών*, 5, 1907, p. 852.

11 Papadopoulos-Kerameus, *Τεροσολυμιτική Βιβλιοθήκη*, vol. 4, Sankt Petersburg, 1897, p. 291, a text of Kyrrillos Athanasiadēs about the libraries of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, written in 1874–1881.

12 Karnapas, “Ο πατριάρχης Αντιοχείας Σίλβεστρος”, *Νέα Σιών*, 5, 1907, p. 853

13 Grigorovitch-Barski, *Pérégrinations (1723–1747)*, p. 435.

14 MS 210 Ḥarīṣā, f. 169.

15 P. Uspenskiĭ, *Александрійская Патриархия. Сборник материалов, исследований и записок относящихся до истории Александрийской Патриархии*, ed. by Hr. M. Loparev, Saint Petersburg, 1898, p. 57.

children.¹⁶ No information is available about this Arabic school after Sylvester left Wallachia in 1748.

Given the difficult financial circumstances and the frequent threats to his position, the patriarch's success in logistically and financially supporting one or more schools means that he had made it one of his priorities. In these circumstances, Sylvester of Antioch essentially increased the cultural level of his eparchy.

¹⁶ Haddad, "La correspondance de Ṭrābulṣī", p. 275; Feodorov, "New Data on the Early Arabic Printing", p. 202; Feodorov, *Arabic Printing for the Christians*, p. 237.