

12 Sylvester's Books

12.1 Sylvester as a Reader

Patriarch Sylvester had a passion for reading. Thanks to his habit of leaving “historical” notes on books, on personal and official documents, as well as on icons, many of the texts he read are identifiable.

In the 1720s, he asked the metropolitan of Kition on Cyprus for a three-volume Western European edition of the works of Saint John Chrysostom, inviting his correspondent to mention the price of the book, which he was ready to pay. Apparently, the metropolitan sent him the volumes, but only as a loan.¹

In one of his manuscript codices, the patriarch included a list of books “that we have in two chests”. The list offers an unexpected insight into the interests of the patriarch. It contains theological, patristic, and liturgical books, but also Ancient Greek classics and Byzantine authors. Among them, there are 20 volumes of the *Patria Constantinoupoleos* (most likely a part of the *Corpus Byzantinae Historiae* published in Paris in 42 volumes between 1645 and 1711, or the second edition printed in Venice in 1729–1733), with the mention that one volume is missing. The missing volume contained the work of the Byzantine author Glykas: “Τὰ Πάτρια Κωνσταντινουπόλεως τόμοι εἴκοσι ἐκτὸς τοῦ Γλυκᾶ” (“The *Patria of Constantinople*, twenty volumes except Glykas”).

The record does not mention many Arabic books, probably because the list itself is in Greek. In the same manuscript there are lists of Arabic books, some of them in relation with Ilyās Fakhr, the secretary of the Patriarchate and, for a time, its representative in Constantinople. A well-known intellectual of the time, he was also a close collaborator of the patriarch in cultural and literary projects.

Most of the books in the list are printed editions, many of them easily recognizable. The list also contains Greek editions printed in Moldavia and Wallachia in the late 17th and early 18th century, including books published by Dositheos and Chrysanthos of Jerusalem, such as the *History of the Patriarchs of Jerusalem* (Bucharest, 1715 on the title page, but published in the 1720s). Some of the titles were printed in several volumes, others are recorded in more than one copy.

In 1745, Sylvester donated a Greek *Menologion* in twelve volumes, printed in Venice in 1729–1732, to the Monastery of Saint Sabbas in Iași. Sylvester's contact with this monastery includes several aspects: it probably was his residence during his stay in Moldavia, and he certainly printed several Arabic books there. When he

1 D[ēmētrakopoulos], “Σίλβεστρος πατριάρχης Ἀντιοχείας”, p. 368–369.

prepared his donation, he added a manuscript note identifying him as the donor of each of the twelve volumes. The notes were written in Greek, with a shorter version in Arabic. There are minor differences in the content of the notes in the various volumes. It cannot be determined whether they were handwritten by the patriarch or by one of his secretaries. They were, however, written by the same person, or possibly one for the Greek text and another for the Arabic. All the notes were personally signed by the patriarch with the abridged form of his signature.² Over the course of nearly three centuries since his donation, some of the volumes were misplaced or lost, with the result that at present only eight of them survive, in the University Library in Iași.³ A facsimile of the manuscript note on another volume, nowadays missing, is reproduced in an academic article published in 1934.⁴

Sylvester's notes provide important historical data, such as the time of the patriarch's arrival in Moldavia in May 1744, during the reign of John Mavrokordatos.⁵ The Arabic notes mention the year 1745, when the notes were written.

A note written by Sylvester of Antioch on a manuscript in the library of Saint John the Theologian in Patmos is particularly interesting. The manuscript contains the *Memories* of Sylvester Syropoulos about the Council of Ferrara–Florence, as well as the Greek text of the Acts of the council.⁶ At the time of the council (1438–1439), Syropoulos was the great ecclesiarch of the Great Church (the Patriarchate of Constantinople). If his identification with Sophronios Syropoulos is correct, he was later one of the first patriarchs of Constantinople, after the conquest of the city by the Ottomans in 1453.⁷ Syropoulos recorded the events of the council in detail, which makes his work one of the most precious sources on this topic. The author expressed the position of the Orthodox Byzantines who opposed the concessions made to the Roman Catholic Church by the Union-inclined Greeks and by the emperor John VIII Paleologos. These concessions, and the Union itself, were considered by many Byzantine Greeks as adopted for political and strategic reasons and were consequently considered invalid.

2 Chițulescu, “Patriarhul Silvestru al Antiochiei și dania sa de carte”, p. 53–64.

3 Chițulescu, “Patriarhul Silvestru al Antiochiei și dania sa de carte”, p. 56.

4 Chițulescu, “Patriarhul Silvestru al Antiochiei și dania sa de carte”, p. 54–57.

5 See Diaconu, *Mănăstirea “Sfântul Nicolae Domnesc” din Popăuți*, vol. II, p. 24–26; Chițulescu, “Patriarhul Silvestru al Antiochiei și dania sa de carte”, p. 57–60.

6 This is the Patmos MS no. 423. See I. Sakkeliōn, *Πατμιακή Βιβλιοθήκη, ἥτοι Ἀναγραφή τῶν ἐν τῇ βιβλιοθήκῃ τῆς κατὰ νήσον Πάτμον γεραρὰς καὶ Βασιλικῆς Μονῆς τοῦ Ἀποστόλου καὶ Εὐαγγελιστοῦ Ἰωάννου τοῦ Θεολόγου τεθεσαυρισμένων χειρογράφων τεύχων*, Athens, 1890, p. 187, no. 423; Laurent, *Les “Mémoires” du grand ecclésiarque*, p. 78, no. 16.

7 Laurent, *Les “Mémoires” du grand ecclésiarque*, p. 16–19.

Sylvester of Antioch could have read Syropoulos's manuscript work in Patmos, during a visit he may have made there in the 1730s. At the end of the Act of Union issued by the council, he wrote and signed a note condemning it. The decree is considered as “Ὁρος ἀσεβέστατος καὶ ἀπάδων ὅλως τῆς ὀρθοδόξου ἡμῶν πίστεως, τῆς Ἀνατολικῆς φημὶ Ἀγίας Καθολικῆς καὶ Ἀποστολικῆς Ἐκκλησίας” (“A most impious decree utterly differing from our Orthodox faith, of the Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church”).⁸

Sylvester's note is not without relevance, as it illustrates that the patriarch had read historical sources about the issues that concerned him at the time, such as the Orthodox-Catholic relations and the dogmatic distinctions between the two Churches.

It has been suggested that the entire manuscript was copied by Sylvester. If this is the case, it means that the patriarch not only read, but also copied Syropoulos's work.⁹ In any case, his note became part of the manuscript tradition of the text and it was transcribed in another manuscript now held in the Public Library of Zagora, Greece. That manuscript was further enriched with the comments of the metropolitan of Philippopolis.¹⁰

In 1732, Vasileios Grimanis of Patmos probably copied a manuscript at Sylvester's request while traveling with the patriarch in Samos.¹¹ Grimanis identified himself as a *grammatikos* (secretary) and “spiritual son” of the patriarch. The manuscript contained an alphabetical index of the Greek text of Saint John Chrysostom's works printed in Eton.¹² The eight-volume edition either belonged to the patriarch, or he had found it in a library during his travels. In any case, the manuscript, once in a library on the Greek island of Symi, reflects Sylvester's interest in the works of this important Church Father.

8 Sakkeliōn, *Πατμιακὴ Βιβλιοθήκη*, p. 187, no. 423; Laurent, *Les “Mémoires” du grand ecclésiarque*, p. 78.

9 A. N. Diamantopoulos, “Σὺλβεστρος Συρόποθλος καὶ τὰ Ἀπομνημονεύματα αὐτοῦ τῆς ἐν Φλωρεντία συνόδου”, *Νέα Σιών*, 18, 1923, p. 596; Laurent, *Les “Mémoires” du grand ecclésiarque*, p. 51, 78, n. 4.

10 Laurent, *Les “Mémoires” du grand ecclésiarque*, p. 78, no. 17.

11 “Πίναξ ἀκριβῆς κατὰ στοιχεῖον ἐν εἶδει συμφωνίας, τῶν σποράδην ἐμφερομένων ἐν ἅπασι τοῖς τόμοις τῶν Χρυσοστομικῶν τῶν τυποθέντων ἐν Ἑτῶνῃ ἐλληνιστὶ μόνον κατὰ στοιχεῖον” (“Precise alphabetical table in the form of a concordance of the [matters] referred to throughout the [works] of Chrysostom printed in Greek only, in Eton, alphabetically”), cf. Papadopoulos-Kerameus, “Ἀνέκδοτα Συμαϊκά”, p. 191.

12 The edition is undoubtedly the one in eight volumes published by Sir Henry Saville in 1613, a masterpiece of Greek printing in England: S. Ioannis Chrysostomi, *Opera Graecé*, vol. VIII, Eton, 1613.

The same manuscript contains two other texts: a letter of Patriarch Paisios I of Constantinople to the Patriarch Nikon of Moscow, dating from ca. 1652–1653,¹³ and a letter of Makarios Patmios to Rowland Sherman, dated March 28, 1731.¹⁴ The content of both texts is theological, discussing and explaining various issues. Whereas the first text was several decades old at the time it was copied by the patriarch of Antioch's secretary, the second was a contemporary one. The sender and the addressee were two persons familiar to Sylvester: the *didaskalos* Makarios Patmios and Rowland Sherman, the English merchant in Aleppo, who were both interested in theology.

In his letter, Makarios explains to Sherman the position of the Orthodox Church concerning the Holy Mysteries, the icons, and the canonical books of the Bible, apparently in response to a letter addressed to him by the latter. In the end, Makarios asks Sherman to keep an open mind and not abstain from seeking the truth, while saying goodbye to the “modernizers” and searching for the truth about Calvin and Luther, who were supported by the “British” Church.¹⁵

12.2 Writing and Supervising

Sylvester of Antioch was not a writer in the classical sense of the word. He produced nonetheless a significant written corpus in several categories of works. First, he wrote an important number of epistles of which only a portion has been preserved. Most letters are in Greek, some in Arabic. Certain letters are personal in style, while others are official, but they all provide a unique insight into the patriarch's personality. Some are of outstanding interest, mainly the circular letters (*ἀπανταχοῦσαι*, *apantachousai*) addressed to his eparchy. In some of them, Sylvester presents his theological ideas, especially concerning the distinctions between the Greek Orthodox and the Roman Catholic Churches.

13 Papadopoulos-Kerameus, “Ἀνέκδοτα Συμαϊκά”, p. 195–209.

14 Papadopoulos-Kerameus, “Ἀνέκδοτα Συμαϊκά”, p. 210–214.

15 Papadopoulos-Kerameus, “Ἀνέκδοτα Συμαϊκά”, p. 214: “ἡ δὲ σὴ τιμιότης ἐρρώμενη εἶη παρὰ Θεοῦ, καὶ τὴν ἀλήθειαν μὴ ἀποκάμῃ ποτὲ ἀνιχνεύουσα, χαίρειν εἰποῦσα τοῖς νεωτερισταῖς, ἀλλ’ ἁείποτε ἀπαθῶς διώκουσα ἣν ἐπρεσβευσεν ἀλήθειαν περὶ Καλβίνου καὶ Λουτέρου ἢ Βρεττανικῆ Ἐκκλησίας, καὶ ἡμῖν σύγγνωθι τῆς ὀλιγομάθειας” (“and may your honesty be loved by God, and never abandon your search for the truth, saying farewell to the modernists, and always following without passion the truth about Calvin and Luther accepted by the British Church, and forgive our little knowledge”).

Other texts composed by Sylvester, or attributable to him, are the forewords to some of the Arabic books that he printed in Iași, Bucharest, and Beirut.¹⁶

Another important category contains the translations of theological, liturgical, and canonical works from Greek into Arabic. Many of them remained in manuscript, but even the later copies mention Sylvester's role (see below, Ch. 12.3).

An inventory of Rowland Sherman's library in Aleppo drawn in 1748 mentions two "epistles" written by Sylvester, spelled "Salvestro" in the Italian text. One is an epistle (it. *epistola* in the text) about "the Sacrament of the Eucharist". The other epistle (*ditto*) concerns the Calvinists. The data is too scarce to enable any comment on these two texts. It is also unclear if they were written in Greek or Arabic, or what their extent was – brief texts or books, manuscript or printed.¹⁷

12.3 Translations

In several Arabic manuscripts, Sylvester of Antioch is credited with a series of translations from Greek. Whether these translations were made by the patriarch himself or whether he only ordered the translation is a matter of debate that exceeds the scope of this book and would require a special survey. It is possible that Sylvester found the Greek material and prepared a first translation that was later revised by others. In some of the forewords of these works, Sylvester is mentioned as the translator.

An important work attributed to Sylvester is a corpus of canon law with the title *Kitāb al-nāmūs al-sharīf*, which has been preserved in several Arabic manuscripts.¹⁸ The text was published in 1992 by the University of Balamand.¹⁹ The title in the MS 434 in the Library of the Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch in Damascus is *Al-nāmūs al-muqaddas al-sharīf wa-l-sirāj al-sāmī al-munīf al-jāmi' qawānīn al-ru-sul al-qiddīsīn*.²⁰

The text of the *Kitāb al-nāmūs al-sharīf* is also preserved in the Arabic MS no. 1 in the Library of the Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem, copied in 1886 from an earlier manuscript. It mentions that the translation was made by Patriarch

16 Yulia Petrova and Ioana Feodorov are preparing for the EAPE series of De Gruyter the forewords of the Arabic books published in Eastern presses included in the TYPARABIC project corpus: Y. Petrova (with I. Feodorov), *Forewords of the 18th-Century Arabic Books Printed in the East. Texts and Translations*, Berlin/Boston, forthcoming in 2025.

17 Mills, *A Commerce of Knowledge*, p. 246 and n. 204.

18 Nasrallah, Haddad, *HMLÉM* IV.2, p. 86, 212–214.

19 *Kitāb al-nāmūs al-sharīf*, vol. 1–3, Kalhat, Al-Koura, 1992.

20 El Gemayel, Dabaghy, Dabaghy, "Les manuscrits du Patriarcat grec-orthodoxe de Damas", p. 229.

Sylvester of Antioch from Greek and Latin.²¹ As there are no indications that Sylvester knew Latin, apart from a few words and common phrases noted in one of his manuscripts,²² this might again point to Ilyās Fakhr, who was able to translate from Latin, and to whom modern authors attribute the translation.²³ One of the older manuscripts (MS no. 517 of the Bibliothèque Orientale in Beirut) dates from 1751 and its foreword was composed by Patriarch Sylvester.²⁴ A note mentions Ilyās Fakhr as the translator of this work.²⁵

Canon collections were very common in Byzantine and post-Byzantine literature. In the Orthodox world, one of the most popular was the *Nomokanon* of Manuel Malaxos (16th century), in two versions, one in the vernacular, the other in Byzantine Greek.²⁶ Sylvester's collection, however, does not seem to be a copy of any of the existing Greek models, and it could be a collection of texts prepared by the patriarch himself.

One of the 19th-century manuscripts stands out by the fact that it was lavishly decorated in 1866 with figurative and nonfigurative miniatures by the copyist Qusṭanṭīn ibn al-Khūrī Dāwūd al-Ḥomṣī, who obviously also had painting skills.²⁷ Does it reproduce a manuscript made by Sylvester himself? The idea is appealing but cannot be proven at this time.

The assertion made by Geōrgios Zaviras that Sylvester translated from Greek into Arabic the book *On the Jews* (*Περὶ Τουδαίων*), written in 1743 by Eustratios Argentis, and then printed it is less credible.²⁸ No such book by Argentis is known

21 K. M. Koikylidēs, *Κατάλογος ἀραβικῶν χειρογράφων τῆς Ἱεροσολυμιτικῆς Βιβλιοθήκης*, Jerusalem, 1901, p. 1–8, no. 1. For the manuscript, see also Nasrallah, Haddad, *HMLÉM* IV.2, p. 214.

22 In MS 124 Jerusalem, f. 97r, the title is “Λατίνα” (“Latin”), and the Latin words are in Greek letters.

23 H. Kaufhold, “Sources of Canon Law in the Eastern Churches”, in W. Hartmann, K. Pennington (eds.), *The History of Byzantine and Eastern Canon Law to 1500*, Washington, DC, 2012, p. 238.

24 Nasrallah, Haddad, *HMLÉM* IV.2, p. 213–214.

25 L. Cheiko, “Catalogue raisonné des manuscrits historiques de la Bibliothèque Orientale de l'Université St. Joseph”, *Mélanges de l'Université Saint-Joseph*, 11, 1926, p. 220–221, no. 517.

26 For the *Nomokanon* of Manuel Malaxos, see A. Siphōniou-Karapa, M. Tourtoglou, S. Trōianos, “Μανουὴλ Μαλαξοῦ Νομοκάνων”, *Ἐπετηρίς τοῦ Κέντρου Ἑρευνῆς τῆς Ἱστορίας τοῦ Ἑλληνικοῦ Δικαίου τῆς Ἀκαδημίας Ἀθηνῶν*, 16–17, 1969–1970, p. 1–39. For Manuel Malaxos, see G. di Gregorio, *Il copista greco Manouel Malaxos. Studio biografico e paleografico-codicologico*, Città del Vaticano, 1991; G. M. Țipău, *Identitate post-bizantină în sud-estul Europei. Mărturia scrierilor istorice grecești*, Bucharest, 2013, p. 84–102; M. Țipău, “Manuil Malaxos și Constantinopolul”, in C. Luca, C. Neagoe, M. Păduraru (eds.), *Miscellanea historica in honorem Professoris Marcel-Dumitru Ciucă septuagenarii*, Brăila/Pitești, 2013, p. 199–216.

27 HMML Project Number BALA 00047, accessible at: <https://www.vhmm.org/readingRoom/view/537908>.

28 G. I. Zaviras, *Νέα Ἑλλάς ἢ Ἑλληνικὸν Θέατρον*, ed. by Geōrgios P. Kremos, Athens, 1872, p. 301.

to exist²⁹ and the information might be entirely based on a confusion with the two texts by Argentis translated into Arabic at Sylvester's initiative and printed in Iași: *Brief Epistle against the Pope's Infallibility* and the *Lord's Supper* (see below, Ch. 16.2 and 16.3). Zaviras was usually well informed and owned a rich library with manuscript copies of many unpublished Greek texts of the 18th century. One of the two manuscripts of Argentis's work about the pope was preserved in Zaviras's library. The title of the Greek original work is *Περὶ τῆς ψευδοῦς ἀψευδίας τοῦ πάπα Ῥώμης* (*About the False Infallibility of the Pope of Rome*).³⁰

²⁹ See the list of Argentis's works in T. Ware, Eustratios Argenti. *A Study of the Greek Church under Turkish Rule*, Oxford, 1964, p. 177–179.

³⁰ For the manuscript in Zaviras's library, see V. Todorov, *Catalogue of Greek Manuscripts and Printed Books (17th–19th century). The Collection in Nyiregyhaza, Hungary. Contribution to the History of the Greek Diaspora*, Athens, 1999, p. 171; V. Seirēnidou, *Το Εργαστήριο του λογίου, αναγνώσεις, λόγια παραγωγή και επικοινωνία στην εποχή του Διαφωτισμού μέσα από την ιστορία της βιβλιοθήκης του Δ. Ν. Δάρβαρη (1757–1823)*, Athens, 2013, p. 289, no. 6.