

14 Sylvester and Russia

As the greatest independent Orthodox Christian state, the Russian Empire had a strong influence on the Orthodox population of the Ottoman Empire for centuries. The Russian sovereigns and the Moscow Patriarchate turned to the Patriarchate of Constantinople and to the other Orthodox Patriarchates when it needed to validate important and sometimes controversial decisions. Such decisions included the elevation of the Metropolis of Moscow to a Patriarchate in the 16th century, the revision of the translations of liturgical books in the 17th century, and the instatement of the Synod authority in the Russian Church in the 18th century.

The patriarchs of Antioch had a special connection with Russia. Patriarch Makarios III ibn al-Za'im traveled to Russia in 1654–1656. His journey was described by his son, the archdeacon Paul of Aleppo (ibn al-Za'im), in his famous *Journal*.¹ Patriarch Makarios's portrait was included in the official Russian *Tituliarnik*, alongside those of other high-ranking clerics, envoys, and rulers.² Apparently, during his stay in Moscow he was granted, among other presents, an annual sum of money as aid for the Patriarchate of Antioch. An official document was seemingly issued for the patriarch, but the original was lost, most likely during the troubles in the Patriarchate of Antioch in the late 17th and early 18th centuries.

Unlike the help from the Danubian Principalities, the financial aid from Russia was more difficult to obtain by Orthodox Patriarchates and monasteries, for several reasons. First, there was a greater geographical distance from the Levant to Moscow. For letters sent to and received from Russia, the average time of delivery was between four and six months. Traveling in Russia was more complicated, as the climate made moving about during the winter months quite difficult. Moreover, Moldavia and Wallachia, governed by Christian princes appointed by the sultan, were somewhat connected to the Ottoman Empire from a juridical point of view, so that going there was not seen as traveling “abroad”. For a patriarch, an official permit was necessary for such a travel. Travelling inside the Ottoman Empire meant, in practice, to make use of whatever facilities were available. For a Christian patriarch, it could require a military escort of janissaries.³ Furthermore, Russia was a rival, often an enemy power at war with the Ottomans, time and again. High

1 For Paul of Aleppo, see *Paul of Aleppo's Journal. Syria, Constantinople, Moldavia, Wallachia and the Cossacks' Lands*, introductory study by Ioana Feodorov, Arabic edition and English translation by Ioana Feodorov, with Yulia Petrova, Mihai Țipău, Samuel Noble, Leiden/Boston, 2024.

2 B. Heyberger, “Le renouveau de l'image de religion chez les chrétiens orientaux”, *Archives des sciences sociales des religions*, 183, 2018, p. 199.

3 Patriarch Sylvester made use of such an escort during his stay in Aleppo in 1725–1726.

Church leaders travelling there could be accused of treason by the Ottoman authorities. However, individuals with lesser positions and merchants did travel in both directions.

In 1708, while he was in Aleppo, the former patriarch Athanasios III Dabbās wrote a letter to Peter the Great asking for financial help, especially to produce Arabic books in the printing press he had established at the Metropolitan residence of the city. The original letter, preserved in the Russian archives, and in a copy in a manuscript codex at the Monastery of Saint Catherine at Mount Sinai, is a veritable “manifesto” of Athanasios’s views on his printing activity.⁴ The letter was accompanied by samples of books printed in Aleppo.

It is not clear whether and how Moscow responded to the patriarch’s attempt to obtain help for his printing press. In any case, the military conflict of 1711 between Russia and the Ottoman Empire made contacts more difficult. Under these circumstances, it is not surprising that the printing activity in Aleppo stopped. The last book from Athanasios’s press was published in 1711. The impossibility of continuing the printing activity “due to the circumstances” was confirmed in a *chrysoboullos* of prince Stephanos Kantakouzēnos of Wallachia (1714–1716).⁵ Although the press was supported by an annual grant from Wallachia, there is no proof either that such help ever came from the Russian Empire, or that printing ended because of the absence of funding during the military conflict.

During his second time on the patriarchal throne of Antioch (1720–1724), Athanasios III Dabbās tried to obtain the annual aid that had been granted by the Russians to Makarios ibn al-Za’īm. On September 26, 1723, Athanasios wrote a letter to the Holy Synod of the Russian Church.⁶ As the original document issued to Patriarch Makarios had been lost and no copy could be found in the Russian archives,⁷ there is no indication that the patriarch’s request was answered.

Following his predecessor’s strategy, Patriarch Sylvester of Antioch resumed the correspondence with the Russian sovereigns, with the Holy Synod of the

4 The letter was published in V. Tchentsova, “Les documents grecs du XVII^e siècle: pièces authentiques et pièces fausses. 4. Le patriarche d’Antioche Athanase Dabbās et Moscou: en quête de subventions pour l’imprimerie arabe d’Alep”, *Orientalia Christiana Periodica*, 79, 2013, 1, p. 173–195. The copy is in manuscript 1605 (531/532), f. 201v–203v, in the library of the Monastery of Saint Catherine at Mount Sinai. For the manuscript, see Beneshevich (ed.), *Описание греческих рукописей*, 1, p. 392–545; for Athanasios’s letter, see p. 421.

5 MS 210 Ḥarīṣā, f. 21r–21v. The *chrysoboullos* is mentioned in a subsequent letter written by Prince Michael Rakovitzas.

6 RGIA, F. 796, Op. 5, D. 211, f. 11r–11v. See L. Gerd, “Russian Sacred Objects in the Orthodox East. Archive Evidence from the 18th to the Early 20th Century”, *Museikon*, 4, 2020, p. 235, n. 2.

7 Gerd, “Russian Sacred Objects”, p. 227.

Orthodox Church in Russia, and the Russian ambassadors in Constantinople. The Greek text of several letters sent by Sylvester and a few Russian translations survive in manuscripts.

Sylvester also continued the attempts made by Athanasios Dabbās to obtain the annual financial support promised to the Patriarchate of Antioch by the Moscow court in the 17th century. He wrote several letters on this topic to the Holy Synod and to the Empresses Catherine I (1725–1727) and Anna Ioannovna (1730–1740).

The first surviving letter addressed to the Russian Holy Synod was written by Sylvester in June 1725 from Constantinople. The letter contained a veritable elegy dedicated to the emperor Peter the Great. It was delivered to the Holy Synod in Saint Petersburg on October 15, 1725, by Arsenios, the metropolitan of Thebais, who had arrived from Moscow. A copy of the Greek text could be the one in a manuscript once belonging to Iakovos of Patmos.⁸ A Russian translation of the letter is preserved in the archives of the Holy Synod of Russia.⁹

In 1725, Sylvester wrote a letter to the Empress Catherine I and other Russian officials,¹⁰ asking for the renewal of the charter granted to the Patriarch Makarios III by Tsar Alexei I Mikhailovich (1645–1676). The original charter was lost in the times of Patriarch Kyrillos V ibn al-Zaʿīm, as mentioned in Sylvester's letter written to the Russian Holy Synod on September 29, 1725, which survives in a Russian translation.¹¹

As he usually did in his letters, the patriarch mentioned the “attacks of the Latin schismatics” in his eparchy, the great debts of the Patriarchate, and the desire to establish schools with capable teachers in Damascus and “Antioch”, to promote Orthodoxy.¹² He suggested that a copy of the charter granted to Makarios III was preserved in the “Holy Registers”. Sylvester designated Metropolitan Arsenios of

⁸ Papadopoulos-Kerameus, *Γερουσιαστική Βιβλιοθήκη*, 1, p. 309, no. 233, on MS 233 Jerusalem, f.80–82.

⁹ RGIA, F. 796, Op. 6, D. 328. See *Описание документов и дел*, vol. V, col. 628–633; Gerd, Petrunina, *Антиохийский патриархат и Россия*, p. 109–111 (Russian translation).

¹⁰ Namely, the state chancellor Gavriil Ivanovich Golovkin and Pyotr Andreevich Tolstoy, a member of the Supreme Privy Council.

¹¹ Letter of Sylvester to the Russian Holy Synod, September 29, 1725, in RGIA, F. 796, Op. 7, D. 133, f. 2–4. See Gerd, Petrunina, *Антиохийский патриархат и Россия*, p. 112–114 (Russian translation).

¹² The archival material related to Sylvester's letter is in the Archive of Foreign Policy of the Russian Empire (AVPRI), F. 52, Op. 1, 1726, no. 5. See N. P. Chesnokova, “Жалованные грамоты греческим иерархам в контексте конфессионально-политических связей России и православного Востока в XVIII в.”, *Каптеревские чтения*, t. 17, Moscow, 2019, p. 195. More archival material most likely related to the same letter is preserved in RGIA, F. 796, Op. 6, D. 328 (documents dated October 15–October 22, 1725). See <https://fgurgia.ru/object/5810507>.

Thebais as his representative in Russia.¹³ Arsenios was still in Saint Petersburg on June 13, 1726, when he wrote a letter to patriarch Chrysanthos of Jerusalem, whom he most likely also represented in Moscow.¹⁴

The charters mentioned in Sylvester's letter were not found at the time.¹⁵ They did exist, however, but drafts of them were discovered only in the early 20th century.¹⁶ The charters were issued by the Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich in 1656 for the Patriarchate of Antioch and the monasteries of the Nativity of the Theotokos in Ṣaydnāyā and Saint George al-Ḥumayrā' (Dayr Mār Jirjis al-Ḥumayrā'). The content was similar for both monasteries, so there is only one draft. However, the charters did not contain any indication of the exact amount of the financial aid.

A similar letter was addressed by Sylvester to the Holy Synod in Moscow on September 29, 1725, from "Antioch".¹⁷ As known from other sources, Sylvester reached Aleppo on November 9 (Gregorian calendar),¹⁸ therefore, "Antioch" meant "Aleppo", or more generally the province of Antioch. Alternatively, as Antioch (Antakya) itself was part of the jurisdiction granted by his *berat* of appointment, a

13 Chesnokova, "Жалованные грамоты греческим иерархам", p. 196–197. Thebais was a metropolis attached to the Patriarchate of Alexandria.

14 Archim. Ch. A. Papadopoulos, "Addenda et corrigenda περί τὸν Σπαντωνή", *Εκκλησιαστικός Φάρος*, 2, 1909, vol. 4, no. 23, p. 433. Metropolitan Arsenios of Thebais was in Russia since 1717. See Gerd, Petrunina, *Антиохийский патриархат и Россия*, p. 114, n. 55.

15 See the order (указ) of Empress Anna Ioannovna dated December 3, 1731, for research in the archives of the documents granted to the patriarch of Antioch: RGIA, F. 796, Op. 12, D. 434, f. 5r–5v; see Gerd, Petrunina, *Антиохийский патриархат и Россия*, p. 118–119, no. 9. As a result of this search, only one document issued for Patriarch Paisios of Alexandria was found: RGIA, F. 796, Op. 12, D. 434, f. 17–18; cf. Gerd, Petrunina, *Антиохийский патриархат и Россия*, p. 122–123, no. 11. For further research in the Russian archives in 1732 for the old charters granted by the tsar Alexei Mikhailovich to the patriarch of Antioch, see also RGIA, F. 796, Op. 12, D. 434, f. 19–22v; cf. Gerd, Petrunina, *Антиохийский патриархат и Россия*, p. 123–125, no. 12.

16 The drafts are published in Chesnokova, "Жалованные грамоты греческим иерархам", p. 205–210. See also N. P. Chesnokova, *Христианский Восток и Россия: политическое и культурное взаимодействие в середине XVII века (По документам Российского государственного архива древних актов)*, Moscow, 2011, p. 108.

17 RGIA, F. 796, Op. 7, D. 133, f. 2–4 (protocol of February 11, 1726). See Gerd, "Russian Sacred Objects", p. 235, n. 2; *Описание документов и дел, хранящихся в архиве Святейшего правительствующего синода*, vol. VI, 1726, Saint Petersburg, 1883, col. CXIX–CXXII; Chesnokova, "Жалованные грамоты греческим иерархам", p. 196 (AVPRI, F. 52, Op. 1, 1726 г., № 5, f. 6.). For other archival material most likely related to the same letter see RGIA, F. 796, Op. 7, D. 133 (documents dated February 9–April 30, 1726). See <https://fgurgia.ru/object/5810517>. A letter of Sylvester to the Russian Holy Synod, September 29, 1725, survives in RGIA, F. 796, Op. 7, D. 133, f. 2–4, cf. Gerd, Petrunina, *Антиохийский патриархат и Россия*, p. 112–114 (Russian translation).

18 Rabbath, *Documents inédits*, vol. I, p. 586.

patriarchal residence in this city might be considered. Presumably, the letter was written by Sylvester shortly before leaving Constantinople.

In 1726 or 1727,¹⁹ in a letter addressed to the Metropolitan Arsenios of Thebais, Sylvester asked the support of the empress and the Holy Synod of Moscow. He was informing the metropolitan that he had opened “two schools of Hellenic learning in Damascus and Aleppo” (“δύο σχολεῖα τῆς ἑλληνικῆς παιδεύσεως εἰς Δαμασκὸν καὶ Χαλέπιον”), he had hired professors and accepted students. From this it follows that the students were provided with some sort of scholarship. Sylvester also wrote about the considerable amounts of money spent, leading to a debt of over 80 “purses”.²⁰

The Russian policy of granting financial aid changed in the 1730s, during the reign of Empress Anna Ioannovna (1730–1740),²¹ possibly due to the great number of requests not only from the Orthodox Patriarchates, but also from monasteries in the Ottoman Empire. The aid was centralized, and a certain sum was fixed for every kind of institution. Collecting alms on Russian territory was prohibited, except with the approval of the Holy Synod. There were small sums of money, 100 rubles for the Patriarchates and 35 rubles annually for a long list of monasteries, to be collected from Moscow every five years by an appointed representative. The expenses for these representatives’ stay in Russia were covered by the state.²²

In June 1731, Patriarch Sylvester of Antioch wrote another letter to Empress Anna Ioannovna.²³ It was followed in the same month by a letter to the Holy Synod of Russia.²⁴ In these letters, the patriarch asked for help for the school established in Tripoli “in Syria”. At the time, Sylvester’s representatives in Russia were archimandrite Athanasios and the *logothetes* Spandonis. The delegation of four (Athanasios, Spandonis, a servant, and a translator) arrived at the Holy Synod, presumably in

¹⁹ RGIA, F. 796, Op. 8, D. 84, letter of Sylvester, possibly dated March 7, 1727. See <https://fgurgia.ru/object/5760849>.

²⁰ Letter of Sylvester to Metropolitan Arsenios of Thebais, May 2, 1726, in RGIA, F. 796, Op. 8, D. 84, f. 1–2v; cf. Gerd, Petrunina, *Анτιοχειαῖς ἐπιστολὴς καὶ ἀποκρίσεις τοῦ Πατριάρχου Συλβέστηρος τῆς Ἀντιοχείας πρὸς τὸν Μητροπολίτην Ἀρσένιον τῆς Θέβαις*, p. 114–115 (Greek text), p. 115–115 (Russian translation), no. 7.

²¹ Gerd, “Russian Sacred Objects”, p. 227.

²² Gerd, “Russian Sacred Objects”, p. 228.

²³ Letter of Sylvester to Empress Anna Ioannovna, June 1731, Constantinople, in RGIA, F. 796, Op. 12, D. 434, f. 7r–12v; cf. Gerd, Petrunina, *Анτιοχειαῖς ἐπιστολὴς καὶ ἀποκρίσεις τοῦ Πατριάρχου Συλβέστηρος τῆς Ἀντιοχείας πρὸς τὴν ἑκκατὸν ἑταίρην*, p. 119–122 (Russian translation), no. 10. See also Gerd, “Russian Sacred Objects”, p. 235, n. 2. For other archival material most likely related to the same letter, see RGIA, F. 796, Op. 12, D. 434 (documents dated November 12, 1731, to October 11, 1734). See <https://fgurgia.ru/object/5810551>.

²⁴ Letter of Sylvester to the Holy Synod of Russia, June 1731, Constantinople, in RGIA, F. 796, Op. 12, D. 434, f. 1r–3v; cf. Gerd, Petrunina, *Анτιοχειαῖς ἐπιστολὴς καὶ ἀποκρίσεις τοῦ Πατριάρχου Συλβέστηρος τῆς Ἀντιοχείας πρὸς τὸν Ἁγίον Σύνοδον τῆς Μόσχας*, p. 116–118 (Russian translation), no. 8.

Saint Petersburg, in November 1731, and in Moscow in January the next year. They were provided for their expenses during their stay in Russia and the return journey.²⁵ The state bureaucracy was moving slowly, and in the meantime archimandrite Athanasios asked for permission to officiate holy services during his stay in Moscow, a permission that he was seemingly granted.²⁶

From Russian archival documents it results that Sylvester of Antioch received at some point in 1732 from the resident Nepliev in Constantinople the amount of 1,000 rubles in order to cover his expenses. Sylvester's representative Kritias acted as a mediator.²⁷

In another letter sent to the Russian Holy Synod on August 1, 1733, Patriarch Sylvester asked for the renewal of the charters for the support granted to the Patriarchate and for the monastery of Şaydnāyā, a foundation of the emperor Justinian I, which received a separate charter,²⁸ seemingly, in the times of Patriarch Joachim.²⁹ In this letter, the patriarch mentions that in May 1732 he sent archimandrite Athanasios with letters asking the empress to grant a new charter to the Patriarchate. Sylvester also refers to the attacks of the “pagan and corrupted” Arabs. In the event the archimandrite Athanasios left Russia, the patriarch appointed as his representative the *hierodiakonos* Gennadios, the metropolitan of Thebais.³⁰ The letter mentions also as sending place “Antioch”, in this case, most likely, Damascus.³¹ The reason for mentioning “Antioch” as the place of expedition was perhaps the intention not to raise suspicions with the Russians, who expected a letter from the

25 Gerd, Petrunina, *Антиохийский патриархат и Россия*, p. 125–127.

26 Gerd, Petrunina, *Антиохийский патриархат и Россия*, p. 130–131.

27 Gerd, Petrunina, *Антиохийский патриархат и Россия*, p. 132.

28 Letter of Sylvester to the Holy Synod of Russia, August 1, 1733, Antioch, in RGIA, F. 796, Op. 15, D.427, f. 3r–6v. See Gerd, Petrunina, *Антиохийский патриархат и Россия*, p. 134–135 (Greek text), p. 135–137 (Russian translation), no. 26.

29 Probably Joachim VI (1593–1604) and not Joachim V (1581–1592), because a letter of the first to the Tsar Feodor Ivanovich, dated 7102 (1594), is preserved in the Russian archives. See *Описание документов и дел, хранящихся в архиве Святейшего правительствующего синода*, vol. XIV. 1734, Saint Petersburg, 1910, col. 660–662; cf. Gerd, Petrunina, *Антиохийский патриархат и Россия*, p. 137.

30 Archival documents mention the arrival in 1734 in Saint Petersburg of archimandrite Athanasios, the envoy of Patriarch Sylvester of Antioch, archdeacon Makarios, envoy of patriarch Kosmas of Alexandria, and hierodiakonos Gennadios, envoy of Arsenios, metropolitan of Thebais. See RGIA, F. 796, Op. 15, D. 50 (documents dated February 6 to July 12, 1734). See <https://fgurgia.ru/object/2485539544>.

31 RGIA, F. 796, Op. 15, D. 27, f. 3–4. See Gerd, “Russian Sacred Objects”, p. 235, n. 2; *Описание документов и дел*, vol. XIV, col. 659–660.

patriarch of Antioch sent from this particular location. In general terms, Antioch was understood as “the Patriarchate of Antioch”.

In 1735, an order was issued to release five hundred rubles from the treasury every five years for the Patriarchate of Antioch. The amount could be collected by a clergyman accompanied by a servant. If they travelled through Kyiv, they would also receive transportation and an allowance for food. The payment method was to be chosen by the patriarch and included the possibility of issuing a bill of change, or a payment via English or Dutch merchants.³²

In April 1744, while he was in Adrianople on his way to Bucharest, Sylvester appointed Hatz Spandonis as his representative to collect the financial aid from Russia. From the letter that indicates this appointment, it results that the period for receiving the aid was drawing near the end (probably, a second expected payment, as the five years period was set in 1735). As Spandonis was already in Moscow at the time, Sylvester sent letters to the Russian resident in Constantinople to certify that Spandonis was entitled to receive the aid.³³ Patriarch Sylvester’s letters of 1744 survive in translation in Russian archives.³⁴

On December 25, 1744, while he was in Iași (Moldavia), Patriarch Sylvester wrote to the empress Elizaveta (Elisabeth) Petrovna, asking for financial aid for the Arabic press in Iași, but the request was seemingly denied.³⁵ The document is significant, as it shows that Sylvester had to rely in his printing activity mainly on the support provided by the prince John Mavrokordatos of Moldavia.

Another letter written on the same day, preserved in Russian archives, provides certain details unknown from other sources.³⁶ At first, Sylvester presents the recent pleas for Russian help that he had made starting with 1731, when he

³² Chesnokova, “Жалованные грамоты греческим иерархам”, p. 198.

³³ Letter of Patriarch Sylvester, then in Adrianople, to Vasily Barsky, in Constantinople, April 6, 1744. See Barsukov (ed.), *Странствования Василья Григоровича-Барского*, vol. 4, p. 56–59 (Greek text and Russian translation).

³⁴ RGIA, F. 796, Op. 25, D. 355 (July 6 to November 5, 1744). The figures represent most likely the date when the letter was written and the date when it was received or translated. See <https://fgurgia.ru/object/2429895285>.

³⁵ L. Gerd, “Russia and the Melkites of Syria: Attempts at Reconverting into Orthodoxy in the 1850-s and 1860-s”, *Scrinium*, 17, 2021, p. 137, n. 11. See RGIA, F. 796, Op. 26, D. 159, f. 1–2. See also the entire file RGIA, F. 796, Op. 26, D. 159 (documents between May 1–December 19, 1745).

³⁶ Letter of Sylvester to the Holy Synod of Russia, December 25, 1744, Iași, in RGIA, F. 796, Op. 26, D. 159, f. 1, 2, 9–12. See Gerd, Petrunina, *Антиохийский патриархат и Россия*, p. 137–139 (Greek text), p. 139–140 (Russian translation), no. 28. The date in the edition (December 25, 1745) is obviously mistaken, since Sylvester was already in Constantinople at the time. The most compelling evidence is the fact that the Russian translation was registered with the date May 1, 1745, i.e., before the supposed date of the letter.

had sent archimandrite Athanasios from Constantinople to the Empress Anna Ioannovna and the Holy Synod. In May 1736, the empress granted an annual amount of 100 rubles to the Patriarchate of Antioch, to be collected every five years by an archimandrite. Athanasios left Russia in 1734 and destroyed the documents attesting to the Russian help, “for fear of the governing pagans” (“δέει τῶν κρατοῦντων ἐθνικῶν”). He died during this journey. Apparently, the financial aid was no longer collected afterwards because of the long, dangerous, and expensive voyage it would have required and the incursions and invasions of the foreign powers that took place.

In another letter written in 1744 from Iași, Sylvester addressed Alexei Veshnyakov, the Russian resident in Constantinople. The letter indicates that the patriarch appointed as his representative (*epitropos*) in Russia Alexandros (son) of Andreas (Ἀλέξανδρος Ἀνδρέου) instead of Hatzi Spandonis (son) of Dimitrios. Alexandros delayed his departure for Russia, and he arrived in Iași on December 20, 1744. So, the patriarch wrote to the Holy Synod of Russia in November that the money should be sent to “Nizhyn of Ukraine” (“Νίζναν τῆς Οὐκρανίας”), to Vouktos kyr Petros (son) of Sterios, and to kyr Samuel (son) of Theodoros. If the money had not yet been sent at the time Alexandros of Andreas arrived, it was to be given to him.

The most interesting component of the letter to the Holy Synod is Sylvester’s information about the Arabic printing press (“τὴν Ἀράβικὴν τυπογραφίαν”) that he had established in Iași. The patriarch asked for a double amount of the grant because of the urgent need “of the above-mentioned Arabic printing press, which we started with much effort and heavy expenses” (“τῆς ῥηθείσης Ἀραβικῆς τυπογραφίας, ὅπου μετὰ πολλοῦ μόχθου, καὶ ἐξόδου βαρυτάτης ἡρξάμεθα”).³⁷ In response to this request, the decision was made to grant the annual amount of 100 rubles for the period from 1732 to 1745, but not to award additional money for the printing press.³⁸ The money was paid to Alexandros of Andreas, along with a sum for travel expenses. Alexandros was also the representative of a monastery in Pogoniana in “Macedonia” (Epirus).³⁹

Another person mentioned in Russian archival documents of this period is a certain *sheikh* Nasser of Beirut, who arrived in Saint Petersburg in 1746 carrying letters of recommendation from the Patriarchs Paisios II of Constantinople, Kosmas III of Alexandria, Sylvester of Antioch, and the Metropolitan Iōannikios of Beirut. Nasser, also presenting himself as Nikōn (the Greek form of his name), was part of an

37 Gerd, Petrunina, *Αντιοχειαῖς πατριάρχαι καὶ Ῥωσσία*, p. 138.

38 Gerd, Petrunina, *Αντιοχειαῖς πατριάρχαι καὶ Ῥωσσία*, p. 141–143.

39 Gerd, Petrunina, *Αντιοχειαῖς πατριάρχαι καὶ Ῥωσσία*, p. 143–144.

important family of his city and was asking permission to obtain alms from Russian cities, due to his economic situation. Considered a nobleman (шляхтич, *shlyakhtich*), he was granted permission to collect alms in various cities of the empire.⁴⁰ It is interesting that *sheikh* Nasser is the same person referred to in a letter of the patriarch of Alexandria, which was copied in one of Sylvester's codices.⁴¹ It mentions a letter of Sylvester of Antioch describing Nasser's situation. The patriarch of Alexandria refers to the nobleman's name as "Σῆχ Νάσερ, τὸν διερμηνευόμενον Νίκων ονόματι" ("sheikh Naser, whose name is translated Nikōn").

In 1760, Patriarch Sylvester wrote again to the Russian Holy Synod, stating that the document issued in 1735 had burned in the fire of Constantinople in 1756 and, therefore, it needed to be renewed.⁴² The information is significant, as it shows that important documents were kept in Constantinople, perhaps by the representative of the Patriarchate of Antioch in the Ottoman capital.

The answer to Sylvester's letter could be a document issued by the Russian Holy Synod on April 7, 1763, mentioning a yearly donation of 100 rubles for the Patriarchate of Antioch. The document was seen by Porfirii Uspenskii in Damascus in 1843.⁴³ It was presumably destroyed in the incidents of 1860, which also damaged the patriarchal library.

Further research in Russian archives may procure other results on the topic of the patriarch's relations with Russia and could even lead to the discovery of Sylvester's original letters, many of them never published.

One of the manuscripts used by Sylvester as a personal and official register also offers interesting information about the patriarch's relations with Russia.⁴⁴ The beginning of a letter addressed to Alexei Veshnyakov, the Russian resident in Constantinople,⁴⁵ proves that they were in correspondence in the period 1742–1745.⁴⁶

⁴⁰ See the documents related to Nasser in Gerd, Petrunina, *Антиохийский патриархат и Россия*, p. 145–148.

⁴¹ MS 210 Ғарішā, f. 4r.

⁴² Chesnokova, "Жалованные грамоты греческим иерархам", p. 198.

⁴³ Uspenskii, *Восток Христианский*, p. 120.

⁴⁴ MS 210 Ғарішā.

⁴⁵ Alexei Andreevich Veshnyakov was a diplomatic representative in Constantinople in 1734–1739 and from 1741 on, then he was appointed ambassador, a position he held from May 1742 to June 1745. For his biography, see <http://www.rusdiplomats.narod.ru/veshnyakov-aa.html>; M. V. Amelicheva, *The Russian residency in Constantinople, 1700–1774. Russian-Ottoman diplomatic encounters*, unpublished PhD dissertation, Washington, DC, 2016, p. 123–127, 146–148. The thesis is accessible online at https://repository.library.georgetown.edu/bitstream/handle/10822/1041841/Amelicheva_georgetown_0076D_13417.pdf

⁴⁶ MS 210 Ғарішā, f. 8r.

The most extensive texts on this topic in the same manuscript are four letters dated March 1750.⁴⁷ The first is a letter addressed to another Russian resident in Constantinople, Adrian Ivanovich Nepluev (1746-1750).⁴⁸ The letter, of utmost interest for the insight it provides into Sylvester's thinking, begins by mentioning the situation of the Orthodox people's servitude after the conquest of Constantinople. Weak and burdened by the yoke of slavery, they were also persecuted by the papacy and the Latins, who took advantage of the situation. They corrupted the Orthodox with their learning. By means of bribes, they separated the throne of Antioch from the eparchies and expelled the Orthodox metropolitans, to replace them with Latin ones. They succeeded twice in severing Aleppo from the throne of Antioch. Nevertheless, Patriarch Sylvester restored Aleppo to the throne of Antioch with the ecumenical patriarch's help, as reflected in the imperial decisions. To counter the attacks of the papists, he had to borrow 50 "purses" of *aspra*.

Another issue that Sylvester brought to the ambassador's attention was the trouble stirred by a certain "Tzortzos, son of Aite", a dragoman of the English merchants in Aleppo.⁴⁹ He was an "Arab by nation" and used to belong to the Eastern Church, and then he became a *Latinophron* and started attacking the Orthodox. His position granted him influence and power with "the English nation" ("ναυζιόνε τῶν Ἀγγλῶν"). Therefore, the patriarch asked Nepluev to talk to the English ambassador⁵⁰ to remove him from the position of dragoman and appoint someone else from the Orthodox *Rhomaioi*, as among them there were people better suited than Tzortzos for the position of dragoman.

This rather long letter mentions one of the achievements Sylvester was proud of, the printing of books in the Arabic language. The recently printed books contained "the Orthodox confession and the customs and laws of the true ecclesiastic thinking". They brought light to the Orthodox, helping them learn the truth. The patriarch also narrates how he appointed a new metropolitan for Aleppo, a

47 MS 210 Ḥariṣā, f. 113v–115r.

48 For Nepluev, see A. Polovtsov (ed.), *Русский биографический словарь*, vol. 20, Saint Petersburg, 1914, p. 227–229; <http://www.rusdiplomats.narod.ru/nepluev-ai.html>; Amelicheva, *The Russian Residency in Constantinople*, p. 113–118, 146–148.

49 Most likely, the dragoman of the English consulate in Aleppo, as the letter indicates that it was an official position. Tzortzos (Τζόρτζος) renders the Arabic name جرجس (Jirjis). This was Jirjis Aida or George Aidé, first dragoman of the English consulate in Aleppo from 1747 to 1778. See B. Lewis (ed.), *A Middle East Mosaic. Fragments of Life, Letters and History*, New York, 2007, p. 151; M. H. van den Boogert, *The Capitulations and the Ottoman Legal System. Qadis, Consuls and Beraths in the 18th Century*, Leiden/Boston, 2020, p. 139–140.

50 At the time, Sir James Porter (ambassador between 1747 and 1762), known to have had good relations with Adrian Ivanovich Nepluev.

wise person who mastered Arabic and Greek, but who was prevented from acting because of Tzortzos.

Finally, Sylvester asked Nepliev to convey his request for the empress's help to pay the great debts of the patriarchal Throne. He stated that he had sent archimandrite Ignatios to Russia and asked the ambassador to write to the empress accordingly.⁵¹

Three other letters were written at about the same time, in March 1750, each with its own particularities but with a common theme, namely the great debt of the Patriarchate and a request for financial aid. The first letter is addressed to empress Elizaveta (Elizabeth) Petrovna (1741–1762),⁵² the second to Simon, archbishop of Pskov (Πισκοβία), president of the Holy Synod of Russia,⁵³ and the third to Alexei Petrovich Bestuzhev-Riumin, first chancellor and minister of the Russian Empire (1744–1758).⁵⁴

An undated letter of Patriarch Sylvester to the Russian Holy Synod about the problems in Aleppo, the *protosynkellos* “kyr Ignatios” appointed as representative of the patriarch, and a request for financial help, seems to belong to the same period.⁵⁵ These letters are an important source for the patriarch's familiarity with Russian culture and customs, as well as for his intentions.

Apparently, Sylvester's appeals for financial aid in 1750 bore some fruit. His representative, the archimandrite Ignatios, received from the Russian authorities the aid for the period 1745–1753 and an additional sum of 3,000 rubles because of the letter written by Sylvester to the Empress Elizaveta Petrovna.⁵⁶

In 1765, the archimandrite Anthimos, Sylvester's envoy, received the aid due for the period 1753–1761 but failed to secure the grant for another five years in advance.

51 Letter of Sylvester of Antioch to Adrian Nepliev, March 12, 1750 (Constantinople), in MS 210 Ȧariřā, f. 113v–115r.

52 MS 210 Ȧariřā, f. 115r–117v.

53 MS 210 Ȧariřā, f. 117v–118v. However, sources mention that between 1745 and 1753 Archbishop Stephan of Novgorod was president of the Synod. Simon Todorsky was bishop (from 1745) and then archbishop of Pskov, Izborsk and Narva (1748–1754). He was a polyglot (he also knew Greek) and a respected figure at the imperial court. It appears that Sylvester was well informed when he decided to write to him. For Simon of Pskov, see A. Polovtsov (ed.), *Русский биографический словарь*, vol. 18, Saint Petersburg, 1904, p. 498.

54 MS 210 Ȧariřā, f. 118v–119v.

55 MS 210 Ȧariřā, f. 130r–130v.

56 Panchenko, *Ближневосточное православие под османским владычеством*, p. 417; Panchenko, *Arab Orthodox Christians under the Ottomans*, p. 359.

He succeeded, however, in obtaining another 1,000 rubles from the Russian Holy Synod for paying the debts of the Patriarchate.⁵⁷

Patriarch Sylvester of Antioch requested again, in July 1765, that the allowance for five years be handed to Hatzi Nikolaos Angelos, a Greek merchant. Apparently, this aid was not paid after all. Requests and emissaries were also sent by later patriarchs of Antioch, Philemon and Daniel.⁵⁸ Oddly enough, for several decades, the sums from Russia in aid to the Patriarchate of Antioch were no longer provided.⁵⁹ The explanation of this situation might be the international situation, especially the wars between the Russian Empire and the Sublime Porte. Travels became more difficult and any relations with an enemy power could be dangerous for the Ottoman subjects.⁶⁰

57 Decree of February 28, 1763; see Panchenko, *Ближневосточное православие под османским владычеством*, p. 417.

58 Gerd, Petrunina, *Антиохийский патриархат и Россия*, p. 148–151.

59 The next payment was made in 1800 for the period since 1761. See Panchenko, *Ближневосточное православие под османским владычеством*, p. 417.

60 See for example Makraios, “Υπομνήματα ἐκκλησιαστικῆς ἱστορίας”, p. 230–231: the participation of the Russian representative in Constantinople to a religious festival was considered as suspect. The same source mentions the persecutions of the Orthodox in the Ottoman Empire during the military conflicts with Russia.