

17 Other Printed Items

17.1 *Antimensia*

Among the liturgical items that usually (but not necessarily) involved printing were the *antimensia*. A piece of cloth printed with images and text, consecrated by a bishop, and containing pieces of holy relics (attached to it), an *antimension* was necessary for a priest to celebrate the Divine Liturgy outside the consecrated altar of a church.¹

Many *antimensia* from the 18th century have survived. They were commissioned by bishops, metropolitans, and patriarchs across the entire Orthodox world. Usually, the printing was done on their request and their names were inscribed on the typographic plate. The year was also mentioned, although usually this was the first year of their office, not the year of printing. In some cases, both the first year of office and the year of printing were indicated. It was not unusual to also inscribe the names of the sponsors who had paid to print the *antimension*. Later, non-personalized *antimensia* were printed for the Orthodox clergy both in Eastern and in Western Europe (Venice, Mount Athos, etc.). When consecrated, these were provided with a handwritten note mentioning the consecration date and the bishop's name.

The printing plates were in copper or woodcut, each with a different aspect when printed on cloth.² The cloth itself could be white or colored (for example, yellow). The ink was in most cases black, but sometimes red ink was used. The printing plates were often made with replaceable parts to allow changes in the position or content of the text, or even the images. This was done to ease the printing of similarly looking items for different bishops, with different sponsor names or dates and inscriptions in various languages. A new print run, often with a different design, was always done when a change of bishop occurred, and even by the same bishop when considered necessary.

Antimensia were printed in large numbers, especially at the initiative of patriarchs. A source mentions that for the Metropolitan See of Ungro-Wallachia, in

¹ For *antimensia* in general, see P. S. Agathōnos, *Τὸ Ἀντιμίνσιον. Συμβολή εἰς τὴν μελέτην τῆς λατρείας τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου Ἐκκλησίας*, Nicosia, 2003; Diacon Dr. N. M. Tuță, *Sfântul Antimis. Studiu istoric, liturgic și simbolic*, Bucharest, 1943 (2nd ed., Bucharest, 2014); Pr. Dr. V.-I. Roșu, *Antimisul. Origine, istorie și sfințire*, Bucharest, 2023.

² A source mentions two printing plates for *antimensia*, one in copper and the other in wood, used by the metropolitans of Ungro-Wallachia in Bucharest in the first half of the 18th century. See Simedrea, “Tiparul bucureștean de carte bisericească”, p. 858, 922.

the 1740s, after some troubles generated by wars in the region, at least 100 new *antimensia* were needed. Engraving a new plate required a considerable expense, but after it was ready, the cost of the *antimensia* would have been moderate. The amount of work and the price of materials used were nowhere near those required for typesetting and printing a book. However, special typographic skills and a press were necessary for printing *antimensia*.

Identifying where *antimensia* were printed, if the place is not mentioned, is rather difficult. The use of certain plates can relate to specific places and periods, but the lack of a complete database of such images makes this research a pioneering work.

Sylvester of Antioch printed *antimensia* since the beginning of his pastoral office. His frequent travels and keen interest in printing must have facilitated this activity. As a result, *antimensia* printed at his order at different times, and of various types, survive in several collections.

At least four of Patriarch Sylvester's *antimensia* are known to have been preserved on Mount Athos. It is possible that there are more, as the information about all the monastic collections there is incomplete. We briefly describe henceforth each of these four *antimensia* on Mount Athos.

Patriarch Sylvester's *antimension* at the Karakallou Monastery is dated 1738. A different printing plate was used for this item than for two other *antimensia* printed in the same year, which will be discussed further on. It was printed most likely with a woodblock, not with a copperplate. In its current shape, the artefact is bordered with yellow cloth (sized 40 x 45 cm).³ Its most important feature is the inscription with intricate epigraphic qualities (letters inside letters, etc.), and the mistaken use of the word Παναγιώτατος (*Panagiōtatos*) to refer to Sylvester. This title was reserved for the patriarch of Constantinople. The correct term for referring to the other Orthodox patriarchs was Μακαριώτατος (*Makariōtatos*). After the year, there is the word "month" and an empty space. These features add up to suggest that the printing plate was previously used for an *antimension* of a patriarch of Constantinople whose name and title were replaced with Sylvester's. The printing place was most likely the capital of the Ottoman Empire. Further research on the *antimensia* of the ecumenical patriarchs will probably confirm this supposition.

Another *antimension* of Patriarch Sylvester of Antioch, preserved at the Stavronikita Monastery,⁴ seems to have September 1738 as its production date, but the reading of the year is not certain: it might also be 1724. It is printed with an

³ <https://repository.mountathos.org/jspui/handle/20.500.11957/75545>.

⁴ <https://repository.mountathos.org/jspui/handle/20.500.11957/145978>. On the website it is dated inadvertently September 1791, evidently outside the period of Sylvester's patriarchate.

entirely different copperplate than the one at the Karakallou Monastery. Its size is 50 x 64 cm. In the lower part, the name of the sponsor is indicated, but it is now unreadable. The letter “N” in the inscription looks like it was repeatedly printed in a mirror image.

The Simonos Petras monastery holds an *antimension* of Sylvester printed in red ink from a copperplate.⁵ Its size is 48 x 61 cm. The center field with figurative representations is identical to that of the one preserved at the Stavronikita Monastery. Some of the inscriptions are also the same: e.g., the inscription in the lower part, mentioning the consecration by Sylvester in September 1738. The text is not clearly visible, and the date might be September 1724. Other marginal inscriptions are different but share the particularity of the mirrored letter “N”. The inscription mentions once again the year 1738. A handwritten note indicates that it was consecrated (καθιερώθη). There is no mention of a sponsor, which seems to be the reason for a different design of the border inscription than the one used for the Stavronikita *antimension*. The central part was clearly printed with the same plate used for that item.

A fourth *antimension* of Sylvester is attested in the Vatopedi Monastery. From the description, it resembles the one in the Stavronikita Monastery. The inscription mentions the date “September 1724” (the starting point of Sylvester’s patriarchate), while the sponsor’s inscription, “Diamantis Moysis Mazlis, son of Antonios”, gives the year 1731.⁶

In addition to these four, several other *antimensia* printed for Patriarch Sylvester are known to exist.

One item, dated 1724, is preserved in the collections of the Byzantine and Christian Museum in Athens, transferred there from the Christian Archaeological Museum.⁷

In Cyprus, two *antimensia* of Sylvester of Antioch are connected to the two major monasteries on the island, Kykkos and Machaira.⁸ Sylvester’s visit to the Kykkos monastery in 1735 is attested in the patriarch’s notes and a few other sources. The *antimension* was apparently a gift for the Iereōn Monastery in Paphos,

5 <https://repository.mountathos.org/jspui/handle/20.500.11957/100555>.

6 I. E. Tavlakis, “The Engravings”, *The Holy and Great Monastery of Vatopaidi. Tradition. History. Art*, 2, Mount Athos, 1998, p. 555–556. See also <https://pemptousia.com/2011/11/the-engravings>.

7 [G. Lampakēs], “Ἐκθεσις τοῦ Διευθυντοῦ τοῦ Χριστιανικοῦ Ἀρχαιολογικοῦ Μουσείου Γ. Λαμπάκη περὶ τῶν κατὰ τὸ ἔτος 1891 πεπραγμένων”, *Δελτίον Α' περιέχον τὰς ἐργασίας τῆς ἐταιρείας ἀπὸ ἰδρύσεως αὐτῆς μέχρι τῆς 31 Δεκεμβρίου 1891*, Athens, 1892, p. 114.

8 Kokkinoftas, “Οἱ Κύριοι Πατριάρχες Αντιοχείας”, p. 311–329; Kokkinoftas, “Το Πατριαρχεῖο Αντιοχείας καὶ ἡ Κύπρος”, p. 139–158.

a *metochion* of Kykkos.⁹ Sylvester's *antimention* at the Machaira Monastery is dated 1728 and it is printed from a woodblock.¹⁰ A third *antimention* of Sylvester, also printed from a woodblock and dating from 1728, is mentioned in Sotira, Famagusta (Σωτήρα Αμμοχώστου).¹¹

The inscriptions on another of Sylvester's *antimensia* were published twice by the Romanian historian Nicolae Iorga, without information on the location of the artifact.¹² The editor only mentions the word "exposiție" ("exhibition"), meaning, as explained in the introductory notes, that the artifact was displayed at an exhibition in Sibiu in 1905, without further explanations.¹³ The current location of this item is unknown. The *antimention* was described for the first time by Iorga in a series of comments on similar items "found in Transylvania". According to him, the *antimention* had two different inscriptions, one in Romanian and the other in Greek. The Greek text mentioned Patriarch Sylvester of Antioch and was dated April 1748. The year is relevant, as Patriarch Sylvester was in Bucharest at the time. The Romanian inscription points to the fact that the *antimention* was printed in the capital of Wallachia in 1748.¹⁴ The same year, Sylvester printed (most likely also in Bucharest) a "letter of absolution".¹⁵

Another *antimention* dating from April 1748 and printed most likely from the same plate is preserved in the *skeuophylakion* (the special place for storing the liturgical objects) of the Saint John the Theologian monastery in Patmos, Greece. Its size is 65 x 50 cm, and it has Greek and Romanian inscriptions.¹⁶

Another copy of the *antimention* printed in 1748 by Patriarch Sylvester of Antioch was identified in 1909 as being preserved in the church of the Holy Trinity in Karpenisi (Greece).¹⁷

9 Kokkinoftas, "Το Πατριαρχείο Αντιοχείας και η Κύπρος", p. 139–158.

10 Kokkinoftas, "Οι Κύπριοι Πατριάρχες Αντιοχείας", p. 320; Agathōnos, *Tò Antimínasion*, p. 310, n. 77.

11 Agathōnos, *Tò Antimínasion*, p. 310, n. 77.

12 N. Iorga, *Scrisori și inscripții ardelene și maramureșene*, I. *Scrisori din archiva grecilor Sibiului din archiva protopopiei neunite a Făgărașului și din alte locuri*, Bucharest, 1906, p. 299, no. XII; Iorga (ed.), *Documente grecești privitoare la istoria românilor*, vol. II, p. 1121, no. MLXXXVIII.

13 Iorga, *Scrisori și inscripții ardelene*, p. LXV–LXVII.

14 Păcurariu, "Legăturile Țărilor Române cu Patriarhia Antiohiei", p. 612. For the *antimensia*, see also Feodorov, *Arabic Printing for the Christians*, p. 228–229.

15 Arhim. P. Chițulescu, "Câteva foi volante necunoscute Bibliografiei Românești Vechi", *Apulum*, LVII, 2020, series *Historia & Patrimonium, Supplementum*, p. 152–153.

16 S. A. Papadopoulos, "Ἐπιγραφές Ἱ. Μονῆς Ἰωάννου Θεολόγου", *Ἐπιγραφές τῆς Πάτμου*, Athens, 1966, p. 42, no. 81.

17 P. E. Poulitzas, "Ἐπιγραφαί, ἐνθυμήσεις καὶ συγύλλια ἐξ Εὐρυτανίας", *Ἐπετηρίς Ἐταιρείας Βυζαντινῶν Σπουδῶν*, 3, 1926, p. 257.

The printing of *antimensia* by Sylvester of Antioch is also mentioned by Kōnstantinos (Kaisarios) Dapontes in his *Κατάλογος ιστορικός* (*Historical Catalog*), alongside the printing of the Arabic *Book of the Divine Liturgies* in Iași.¹⁸ It is not clear from Dapontes's text where Sylvester of Antioch printed these *antimensia*, but the patriarch may have printed *antimensia* in Iași in 1744–1745.

Antimensia with Romanian and Greek inscriptions were not unusual among those printed in Wallachia and Moldavia. An earlier example is the one printed in 1724 for the Metropolitan Daniel of Ungro-Wallachia, sponsored by the *hieromonachos* Joasaph Vlachos (“the Wallachian”) and printed by the master typographer of Bucharest at the time, the priest Stoica Iacovici. It is preserved at the Stavronikita Monastery on Mount Athos.¹⁹ It contains Romanian text, except for the donor's and the typographer's names and a note on the metropolitan, all printed in Greek.

The elaborate copperplate used for printing Metropolitan Daniel's *antimension* was the same as the one used in May 1701 to print a similar item for patriarch Dositheos of Jerusalem, a copy of which is preserved at the Dionysiou Monastery on Mount Athos.²⁰ The Greek inscriptions of the 1701 *antimension* were replaced with Romanian ones in 1724.

A letter of Anthimos the Iberian while bishop of Râmnic refers to the printing of *antimensia* for the Patriarch Chrysanthos of Jerusalem by using a woodblock which had been previously used for the *antimensia* of the metropolitan of Ungro-Wallachia. Here, Anthimos mentions that producing a copperplate was expensive and would take much time.²¹

The print run of Sylvester of Antioch's *antimensia* cannot be determined with certainty, but sources about the Metropolitan See of Ungro-Wallachia suggest that the regular demand was in excess of one to two hundred copies.²²

¹⁸ Dapontes, “Κατάλογος ιστορικός”, p. 89.

¹⁹ <https://repository.mountathos.org/jspui/handle/20.500.11957/146134>.

²⁰ <https://repository.mountathos.org/jspui/handle/20.500.11957/137821>. On the website, the date is erroneous, 1730 instead of 1701, a mistake justifiable by the fact that the last Greek character of the year looks like a Λ (*lambda*) and not an α (*alpha*), thus allowing for a reading of the numerical values of the letters as 30 instead of 1. The fact that the Prince Constantine Brâncoveanu is mentioned as the sponsor would not allow for this later date.

²¹ See Sfântul Antim Ivireanul, *Scrisori*, ed. by Archim. M. Stanciu, Acad. Dr. G. Ștrempel, p. 53–54 (the Greek text), p. 55–57 (Romanian translation); Stanciu, *Ο Ιερομάρτυρας Ανθίμος Ιβηρίτης*, p. 603.

²² In 1776, Patriarch Avramios of Jerusalem ordered 200 *antimensia* from Wallachia: cf. the letter of Archimandrite Germanos to the Patriarch Avramios of Jerusalem, September 28, 1776, in Iorga (ed.), *Documente grecești privitoare la istoria românilor*, vol. II, p. 1243, no. MCCXLIX; Arhim. P. Chițulescu, “Completări și îndreptări la *Bibliografia Românească Veche*”, *Libraria. Anuar. Studii și cercetări de bibliologie*, XIV–XV, 2015–2016, p. 148.

17.2 Letters of Absolution

In February 1727, the Synod of Constantinople discussed the question of the right to issue “letters of absolution”, known in the West as “indulgences”.²³ The decision was that the right to issue such documents was not reserved to the Roman pontiff, but belonged to every one of the four Orthodox patriarchs – of Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem. The *Ἐκθεσις* (*Exposition*) of the Synod of Constantinople (1727) also mentions that such documents should be granted with spiritual caution as to whom and when they are issued. The text also mentions how the issue had been approached by the Latins and the results for the Western Church.²⁴ It was the first official, synodal document about the topic of “letters of absolution”, but similar documents issued by individual Orthodox patriarchs were attested before. The aim of the Synod was to formulate a *Profession of Faith* of the Orthodox Church addressing many of the points of divergence from the Catholic Church, including the issue of letters of absolution. The text was most likely composed by Chrysanthos of Jerusalem.²⁵

Letters of absolution could be handwritten or printed. The printed versions were forms intended to be filled in with the name of the beneficiary.

In Sylvester of Antioch’s text collections there are several such συγχωρητικά (*synchoōrētika*), formulated in a similar manner. The term συγχωρητικόν (*synchōrētikon*) most likely stood for “συγχωρητικὸν γράμμα” (“letter of absolution”). The presence of these texts in surviving manuscripts attests to the importance the patriarch attributed to this type of document.

In one of the manuscripts belonging to Sylvester, there is also an Armenian translation of a Greek letter of absolution issued by the patriarch of Antioch. The Armenian text is undated, but it was written most likely in the 1740s. The Armenian text is written with double line spacing, so, it can be assumed that an interlinear translation was intended. The text is followed by a transcription of the Armenian alphabet in Greek letters and a few lines of Armenian text written in Greek alphabet.²⁶ The existence of this Armenian letter is not easy to explain. There could have been Armenian-speaking Christians attached to the Orthodox Church of Antioch, either in Syria or in the Eastern eparchies. The reality of Armenians converted to

²³ For a comment on the significance and purpose of issuing letters of absolution from the Orthodox point of view, see Chițulescu, “Câteva foi volante necunoscută”, p. 144–145.

²⁴ Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum*, vol. 37, col. 903–904; Karmiris, *Τὰ δογματικά καὶ συμβολικά μνημεία τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου Καθολικῆς Ἐκκλησίας*, vol. II, p. 867–868 [947–948].

²⁵ Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum*, vol. 37, col. 889.

²⁶ MS 210 Ḥariṣā, f. 137r–138r (letter), f. 138r (Armenian alphabet), f. 138v (Armenian text in Greek letters).

the Orthodox Church is attested by a Greek *typikon* for Armenians who embraced Orthodoxy included in the same manuscript.²⁷

The linguistic variety of Sylvester of Antioch's printed συγχωρητικά include specimens printed in Greek, Arabic, and Romanian with Cyrillic letters.

Sylvester's Greek "letters of absolution" are not mentioned in the earlier sources, but parts of them were found in two Arabic manuscripts, where they were used as binding waste for the initial and/or the final part of the manuscript. With the pieces found in one of these manuscripts, we were able to reconstruct ca. 90% of the printed text of a Greek "letter of absolution" (Fig. 37).²⁸

The landscape-oriented page is divided into three areas. The upper one has the image of the Holy Apostle Peter on a throne and the Greek inscription "Ὁ Ἅγιος Ἀπόστολος Πέτρος" located on both sides of the image. The remaining fragments of at least three copies of the printed text do not preserve a complete image, but from the available details, the image resembles the one on Athanasios Dabbās's patriarchal seal.²⁹ The rest of the upper field displays a floral decoration and the title of the patriarch in two cartouches distributed on the left and the right of the central image. The inscription reads: "Σίλβεστρος ἐλέω Θεοῦ π(ατ)ριάρχης τῆς μεγάλης Θε(εο)υπόλεως Ἀντιοχείας καὶ πάσης Ἀνατολῆς" ("Sylvester by the mercy of God patriarch of the great City of God Antioch and All the East").

The central area contains the main text, reproducing the form known from Romanian and Slavonic "letters of absolution" of other Orthodox patriarchs, such as Dositheos or Parthenios of Jerusalem, starting with: "Ἡ μετριότης ἡμῶν ἀπὸ τοῦ χάριτος, δωρεάς τε" ("Our humility by the grace and the gift"), and ending in: "τοῦ Ἁγίου ἐνδόξου καὶ [πανευφήμου] Ἀποστόλου Πρωτοκορυφαίου Πέτρου καὶ πρώτου ιεράρχου τῆς μεγάλης Θεουπόλεως Ἀντιοχείας καὶ πάντων τῶν Ἁγίων. Ἀμήν. .αψκδ'" ("of the Holy Glorious and [All Praised] First and Supreme Apostle Peter the Great the first hierarch of the great City of God Antioch and of all the Saints. Amen. 1724"). The initial letter "H" is placed in an ornate square.

The lower area of the document contains Sylvester's very elaborate signature, rendered in the characteristic way of Greek patriarchs of the time, and containing the same text as the title.

²⁷ MS 210 Ḥarīṣā, f. 108r-109v.

²⁸ MS no. 9, Dayr Sayyidat al-Balamand, HMML Project Number BALA 00003, at <https://w3id.org/vhmmml/readingRoom/view/107673>; MS no. 87, Dayr Sayyidat al-Balamand, HMML Project Number BALA 00083, at <https://w3id.org/vhmmml/readingRoom/view/108235>.

²⁹ For the image of Athanasios Dabbās's seal, see Tchentsova, "Les documents grecs du XVII^e siècle: pièces authentiques et pièces fausses, 4", p. 173–195, il. 2.

The document could have been printed either with a single or a composite woodblock (or, less likely, a metal plate).³⁰ The text was carved on the woodblock and does not seem to have been typeset and printed with movable type.

The year on Sylvester's Greek "letter of absolution" is 1724, meaning that it was most likely printed between September (the month of Sylvester's election) and December 1724. There are no indications about where the letter was printed. At that time, Sylvester was in Constantinople. It is possible, in analogy with some of the *antimensia*, that "letters of absolution" were printed with the year of Sylvester's election as patriarch rather than the year of printing. Likewise, Sylvester's patriarchal seal mentions the year 1724. The same is true for the seal of Kyrillos VI, the Greek Catholic patriarch who applied his seal with the year 1724 (the year he claimed to have become patriarch) even on later documents, although officially he had only held this position briefly in 1745. Interestingly, the seal used in the correspondence with the Ottoman authorities is different from the seal used for the letters sent to France.³¹

An Arabic "letter of absolution" of Patriarch Sylvester also survives (Fig. 36).³² The overall design is different from the Greek letter just described, but the text is nearly the same. The top area contains two icons with Greek inscriptions. The icon on the right portrays the Theotokos and the one on the left, the Holy Apostle Peter. In between them, two angels hold an open scroll with the inscription "Glory to God always" (*al-majd li-l-Lāh dā'im*^{am}) above Sylvester's patriarchal title. The middle area contains the Arabic text, very similar in content to that of the Greek letter of 1724.³³ The lower area bears the patriarch's signature, also resembling the one in Greek copies.

An unusual feature of this Arabic letter is that its main text appears to be printed with movable type rather than a woodblock, as in the Greek letter. The location of this copy of the Arabic letter is not known, and the only available illustration does not provide much information. If it were printed in 1724 in Constantinople (as could have been the case for the Greek letter), it would be the first document printed with Arabic type in the city. There are two other possibilities. The first is

³⁰ A copper plate for a later "letter of absolution" issued by the patriarch of Jerusalem Athanasios (1827–1844) is mentioned in A. Philadelphus, "Ευχωρητική εὐχή τοῦ Πατριάρχου Ἱεροσολύμων Ἀθανασίου", *Δελτίον Χριστιανικῆς Ἀρχαιολογικῆς Ἑταιρείας*, 2nd period, vol. 3, 1926, p. 90–91.

³¹ Kyrillos VI's letter to the king of France and to the Dauphin, in MS Arabe 6100, BnF, Paris, at <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b52501251z>, and MS Arabe 6635, BnF, Paris, at <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b10030487j>. See also Çolak, "When a Catholic is invested as the Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch", p. 42, 54.

³² See the image of the letter in Nassour, *Σύλβεστρος πατριάρχης Αντιοχείας*, p. 221.

³³ A Greek translation of the text is provided in Nassour, *Σύλβεστρος πατριάρχης Αντιοχείας*, p. 222.

that it was printed in Aleppo. This is unlikely, as there is no documented printing in this city after 1711. The second possibility is that it was ordered in a Western European country, presumably in England, from where either the entire print run or only the typeset plate was shipped to the patriarch. Further research in comparing the Arabic typeface of the letter with others used in the same period may provide more clues, or even an answer, to this question.

Issuing “letters of absolution” in languages other than Greek was not unusual for the Eastern patriarchs. There are a few examples of such documents printed in Slavonic and in Romanian with Cyrillic type, mostly issued by patriarchs of Jerusalem. Based on elements such as language, typeface, and decoration, it has been suggested that at least some of these documents were printed in Wallachia and Moldavia.³⁴ The *pittakia* (πιττάκια) mentioned in a letter by Anthimos the Iberian were also letters of absolution. They had been sent to Wallachia in 1707 by patriarch Chrysanthos of Jerusalem to be translated into Romanian and Slavonic, and then printed.³⁵

In Wallachia, and perhaps also in Moldavia, Sylvester printed and maybe distributed “letters of absolution” in Romanian, as proven by some rare surviving copies.³⁶

Four types of letters of absolution printed in the Romanian language by Sylvester of Antioch’s are known. They are different in typographical decoration but similar in content. Most likely, three types correspond with the three periods when Sylvester visited the Romanian Principalities: in Wallachia, in 1730 and 1747–1748, in Moldavia, in 1744–1745.

The first letter has the year 7230 according to the Byzantine calendar, in Cyrillic numerals (×3C/Л), corresponding to the year 1721/1722, before Sylvester’s election as patriarch. The explanation is that, as in other documents, the units digit has been

³⁴ In addition to the documents issued by Sylvester of Antioch, the Library of the Romanian Academy in Bucharest holds “letters of absolution” of Gerasimos of Alexandria (Greek, 1693, Slavonic, dated between 1700 and 1710), Cosmas of Alexandria (Greek, 1736), Parthenios of Jerusalem (Romanian, 1740, 1742, Slavonic, 1749, Greek, 1764), Matthaïos of Alexandria (Slavonic, 1747), and Avramios of Jerusalem (Romanian, 1782 and 1784). A Greek “letter of absolution” of Avramios of Jerusalem dated 1783 is in the library of the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church in Bucharest. See Chițulescu, “Completări și îndreptări la *Bibliografia Românească Veche*”, p. 147; Al. T. Dumitrescu, *Foi volante din colecțiunea Academiei Române 1642–1866*, [Bucharest], 1912, p. 86 (350)–87 (351). Another letter issued by Avramios in Romanian in 1789 (1780/1781) is preserved in the collections of the Municipal Museum of Bucharest (Muzeul Municipiului București); see Ș. Ionescu, *Bucureștii în vremea fanarioților*, Cluj, 1974.

³⁵ See Sfântul Antim Ivireanul, *Scrisori*, p. 53–54 (the Greek text), p. 55–57 (Romanian translation).

³⁶ Chițulescu, “Câteva foi volante necunoscute”, p. 152–153, il. on p. 159; Ciucă, Vătafu-Găitan et al. (eds.), *Colecția Achiziții Noi*, vol. II, p. 195, no. 2153.

left blank, to be filled in later. Thus, it could be filled in with numbers from 2 to 9, to be dated between 1724 and 1731. In the previous sources, the document was dated between 1724 and 1729, based on the statement that the date mentioned was noted as 172 followed by a blank space. Most likely, the letter of absolution was printed in Bucharest in 1730, during Sylvester's visit to the capital of Wallachia.³⁷ A copy of this letter is preserved in the Library of the Romanian Academy in Bucharest (Fig. 33).³⁸

Concerning its structure, we note that the upper area contains images of Christ, the Theotokos, and the Holy Apostle Peter, with Greek inscriptions, as well as the images of two cherubs. The patriarch's title is given in Romanian: "Silvestru cu mila lui Dumnezeu patriarh al marii și dumnezeieștii cetăți a Antiohiei, și a tot Răsăritul" ("Sylvester by the grace of God patriarch of the great and Godly city of Antioch and All the East").

In the central part is the text in Romanian, with the same content as in the Greek and Arabic versions. Both the title and the text were printed with movable Cyrillic type. The lower area contains the patriarch's elaborate signature in Greek, alike but not identical with the ones in the Greek and Arabic letters of absolution. It appears that the signature was drawn by the patriarch especially for this document and then carved on a woodblock or a metal plate to be printed. The Greek text of the signature is the same as the Romanian one: "Σίλβεστρος ἐλέω Θεοῦ π(ατ)ριάρχης τῆς μεγάλης Θ(εο)υπόλεως Ἀντιοχείας καὶ πάσης Ἀνατολῆς" (Sylvester by the mercy of God patriarch of the great City of God Antioch and All the East).³⁹

The second type of letter of absolution issued by Sylvester of Antioch in Romanian is dated according to the Byzantine calendar in the year 7253 (corresponding to 1744/1745). During most of this period, Sylvester was in Moldavia at the invitation of the ruling prince, John Mavrokordatos. The letter of absolution was most likely printed in Moldavia in 1744 or 1745, while the patriarch resided there.⁴⁰ A copy of the 1744/1745 letter is preserved in the Library of the Romanian Academy in Bucharest (Fig. 34).⁴¹

37 For the attribution of the document to a printing press in Bucharest, based on similarities in decoration with books printed in 1723-1729, see Chițulescu, "Câteva foi volante necunoscut", p. 147-148.

38 Library of the Romanian Academy, Bucharest, shelfmark *Colecția Foi Volante* 1323. The dimensions are 34 x 28 cm. See Dumitrescu, *Foi volante din colecțiunea Academiei Române*, p. 86 (350).

39 Dumitrescu, *Foi volante din colecțiunea Academiei Române*, p. 86 (350).

40 For an analysis of the similarities in the decorations of the letter compared with those in books printed in Iași in the same decade and particularities in the text suggesting a printing press in Moldavia, see Chițulescu, "Câteva foi volante necunoscut", p. 148.

41 Library of the Romanian Academy, shelfmark *Colecția Foi Volante* 1327. The dimensions are 38 x 24.3 cm. See *BRV* II, p. 84, no. 239; Dumitrescu, *Foi volante din colecțiunea Academiei Române*, p. 87 (351).

The third type of Romanian letter of absolution printed for Sylvester of Antioch is dated according to the Byzantine calendar in the year 7255 (corresponding to 1746/1747) (Fig. 35).⁴² There are several similarities with the one dated 7253 (1744/1745). The upper part is printed with the same plate, as is the patriarch's signature. The text itself, printed with mobile type, is positioned in a different way but is similar in content. The letter was probably also printed in Moldavia, or in Wallachia with plates brought from Moldavia.

The fourth type of Romanian letter of absolution issued by Sylvester of Antioch is dated 7256 according to the Byzantine calendar (corresponding to 1747/1748). The upper area contains the images of the Christ, the Theotokos, and the Holy Apostle Peter, with Greek inscriptions. The style of the images is different from the one in the 1730 letter. The text is the same, and the patriarch's signature is similar but not identical with any of the other letters.⁴³ Once again, the timeframe of the printing coincides with Sylvester's presence in Bucharest at the end of 1747, or during the first half of 1748, a supposition supported by the typographical decoration.⁴⁴ Like the other two Romanian letters of absolution issued by Sylvester, the text is printed with movable type, while the Greek signature is printed with a woodblock or a metal plate.

The print run of such letters could be quite large, in the range of several thousands of copies. For example, patriarch Avramios of Jerusalem ordered 4,000 letters to be printed in Wallachia in 1776.⁴⁵

According to the data now available, Sylvester of Antioch printed five different forms of letters of absolution: one in Greek, one in Arabic, and three in Romanian. There are no indications about where the Greek and Arabic versions were printed. The Romanian ones were most likely printed in Bucharest (1730 and 1747/1748) and Iași (1744/1745). Further research on this topic will provide additional information concerning the press of the Greek and Arabic versions, possibly new copies of these documents, and even other unknown versions.

⁴² Library of the Romanian Academy, Bucharest, shelfmark *Colecția Foi Volante* 1329. The dimensions are 36.4 x 26 cm.

⁴³ A copy of the document, previously held in the Central Library in Blaj (Biblioteca Centrală Blaj), is preserved in the collections of the National Archives of Romania in Bucharest (shelfmark *Achiziții Noi*, MDCCCXCV/8). The size of the document is 20 x 35 cm. Another copy of this document was displayed at the General Exhibition of Bucharest in 1906 (no. 3863).

⁴⁴ Chițulescu, "Câteva foi volante necunoscute", p. 148.

⁴⁵ Letter of Archimandrite Germanos to Patriarch Avramios of Jerusalem, September 28, 1776, in Iorga (ed.), *Documente grecești privitoare la istoria românilor*, vol. II, p. 1243, no. MCCXLIX; Chițulescu, "Completări și îndreptări la *Bibliografia Românească Veche*", p. 148. For the difficulty in estimating print runs, see Chiaburu, *Carte și tipar în Țara Moldovei*, p. 176.

Interesting, though almost neglected information about Sylvester's printing activities was provided by Vasily Grigorovich-Barsky in the journal of his voyages. The traveler from Kyiv was tonsured a monk in 1734 in Damascus by Patriarch Sylvester and then ordained priest. Sylvester greatly appreciated Barsky for the knowledge of Greek he had acquired while studying with Iakovos of Patmos and for another service he rendered to the patriarch, related to Barsky's artistic skills. According to his own account, the traveler carved for the patriarch of Antioch, "with great effort and care", two woodblocks for letters of absolution. The original text is "разрѣшительныхъ грамотъ", which the French translator of Barsky's work thought it referred to another kind of document.⁴⁶

This kind of imprint, also used in the Romanian lands, was a form certifying the ordination of a priest. The forms were printed and when used, they were filled in with the name of the ordained person.

Barsky's information is significant as it reveals a new type of printed document issued by Sylvester. Although the text only mentions the manufacturing of the woodblocks and not the printing itself, it is probable that such documents were eventually printed. Why was Barsky commissioned to carve the two woodblocks? It is difficult to give a definitive answer, but there is a possibility that the form was conceived as to be printed in two different languages, Greek and Arabic. In any case, Barsky's text demonstrates that there are potential discoveries to be made in relation to the material printed under Sylvester's supervision.

⁴⁶ Barsukov (ed.), *Странствования Василья Григоровича-Барского*, 2, p. 219; Grigorovitch-Barski, *Pérégrinations (1723–1747)*, p. 435 (the translation is "documents d'ordination").