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The First Arabic Book Printed in Lebanon in 1734: A Codicological and Historical Approach

1 Introduction

This chapter examines the codicological and historical aspects of *Mizān al-zamān wa qisṭās abadīyat al-insān*, the first Arabic book printed in Lebanon in 1734. Authored by the Spanish Jesuit Juan Eusebio Nieremberg, the book underwent multiple translations before its publication in Arabic. It explores the translations, revisions, and adaptations surrounding Nieremberg's seminal work, shedding light on intersections of religion, culture, and intellectual exchange. Renowned for its contemplation of the eternal and temporal realms, *Mizān al-zamān* stands as a testament to Jesuit scholarship, shaped by translators, printers, and scholars across centuries and continents. Delving into the nuances of translation and adaptation, the article uncovers the socio-cultural contexts informing each edition. It investigates the historical circumstances of the translation, printing and dissemination of the book, offering insights into the Levant's intellectual landscape in the 18th century. By tracing *Mizān al-zamān*'s reception and influence in Eastern and Western intellectual circles, this study illuminates its path before becoming part of the Mediterranean basin's cross-cultural exchange.

Numerous studies on the Arab cultural resurgence, often referred to as the Renaissance (*Nahḍa*), place this movement as early as the end of the 18th century. They correlate it with significant events, including the French campaign in Egypt (1798–1801), the arrival of Protestant missionaries in the Levant, the Ottoman *Tanzimat* reforms, and the widespread proliferation and democratization of newspapers, printing presses, schools, and universities, notably in Beirut and other major Ottoman urban centers across the Middle East.¹ Upon closer scrutiny of the history of book production in the Levant, the portrayal of the Arab Renaissance in this timeline seems both incomplete and tendentious.² As demonstrated in the following para-

1 A. Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798–1939*, Cambridge, 1983; P. Hill, *Utopia and Civilisation in the Arab Nahda*, Cambridge, 2019.

2 For a comprehensive survey of the history of book production in the Levant, see: W. Gdoura, *Le début de l'imprimerie arabe à Istanbul et en Syrie: Évolution de l'environnement culturel*

I thank Guita Hourani and Carsten Walbinder for their valuable advice in language and content, and I owe Father Bülus Nazha a debt of gratitude for his wonderful hospitality every time I visit the monastery of Shuwayr.

graphs, the Levantine individuals and communities had already embarked on the trajectory of the Renaissance by the 17th century.

Notwithstanding the commencement of Arabic book publication in the West with the release of the Horologion (Book of Hours) of Fano in 1514,³ a significant advancement unfolded with the Maronites of Mount Lebanon. Concurrently publishing their Syriac and Garshuni liturgical books in the West,⁴ they ushered in a pivotal moment by introducing the Syriac-type printing press to the Levant, publishing the Book of Psalms in Qozhaya in 1610.⁵ This development marked a transformative shift in the region's printing landscape, which would await nearly a century before experiencing another significant metamorphosis, this time centered in Aleppo and spearheaded by the Orthodox Patriarch Athanasios Dabbās. At the outset, he initiated the printing of liturgical books for his community in Wallachia with the technical and financial backing of the Prince Constantin Brâncoveanu.⁶ Subsequently, armed with similar patronage, printing tools, matrices, and Arabic type, he established the first Arabic printing press in Aleppo in 1706.⁷

(1706–1787), Tunis, 1985; C.-M. Walbiner, “The Christians of Bilād al-Shām (Syria): Pioneers of Book-Printing in the Arab World”, in K. Kreiser (ed.), *The Beginning of Printing in the Near and Middle East: Jews, Christians and Muslims*, Wiesbaden, 2001, p. 11–29; A. Ayalon, *The Arabic Print Revolution: Cultural Production and Mass Readership*, Cambridge, 2016; I. Feodorov, *Arabic Printing for the Christians in Ottoman Lands. The East-European Connection*, Berlin/Boston, 2023.

3 See, for example, P. K. Hitti, “The First Book Printed in Arabic”, *The Princeton University Library Chronicle*, vol. 4/1, 1942, p. 5–9; M. Krek, “Was the First Arabic Book Really Printed at Fano?”, *MELA Notes*, 10, 1977, p. 11–16, 26.

4 For a historical overview of this period, see various articles in C. Aboussouan (dir.), *Le Livre et le Liban jusqu'à 1900*, Paris, 1982; N. Gemayel, *Les échanges culturels entre les Maronites et l'Europe: du Collège Maronite de Rome (1584) au Collège de Ayn Warqa (1789)*, t. I–II, Beirut, 1984. See also P. Dib, *History of the Maronite Church*, transl. by S. Beggiani, Detroit, 1965, p. 207–214, for the edition of liturgical books among the Maronites.

5 The adventure of publishing this book is described in J. Moukarzel, “Le Psautier syriaque-garchouni édité à Qozhaya en 1610. Enjeux historiques et présentation du livre”, *MUSJ*, 63, 2010–2011, p. 511–566. Its reception in the West is recounted in C. Walbiner, “The Collection, Perception and Study of Arabic Incunabula from the Near East in Europe (17th – early 19th Centuries)”, in R. Dıpratu, S. Noble (eds.), *Arabic-Type Books Printed in Wallachia, Istanbul, and Beyond. First Volume of Collected Works of the TYPARABIC Project*, Berlin/Boston, 2024, p. 191–207 (here, 192–196).

6 H. Kilpatrick, “From Venice to Aleppo: Early Printing of Scripture in the Orthodox World”, *Chronos*, 30, 2014, p. 33–61; I. Feodorov, “Beginnings of Arabic Printing in Ottoman Syria (1706–1711): The Romanians' Part in Athanasios Dabbās's Achievements”, *ARAM*, 25, 2013, 1&2, p. 231–260; Feodorov, *Arabic Printing for the Christians in Ottoman Lands*, p. 143–162, 255–262.

7 J. Nasrallah, *L'imprimerie au Liban*, Harissa, 1949, p. 15–25; Feodorov, *Arabic Printing for the Christians in Ottoman Lands*, p. 162–186, 263–285. On the ecclesiastical and missionary context in the Levant at the time, especially in Aleppo, see B. Heyberger, *Les chrétiens du Proche Orient au*

This expansion of printing capabilities came about amid heightened tensions caused by the Uniate movement and ongoing frictions between Orthodox and Catholics.⁸ Consequently, the Aleppo native ‘Abdallāh Zākhir,⁹ a longtime convert and supporter of the Uniates,¹⁰ who had worked with Patriarch Dabbās in the Aleppo press before becoming one of his opponents,¹¹ fled Aleppo to the monastery of Shuwayr in Mount Lebanon in late 1722.¹²

The arrival of Zākhir in Shuwayr marked the onset of a significant era in the annals of Arabic printing. He was welcomed there by his first cousin and confidant, Fr Nicolas Šāyegh, who played a pivotal role in boosting Abdallah’s resolve

temps de la réforme catholique, XVII–XVIIIe siècles, Rome, 1994, p. 273–510. On the cultural revival in Aleppo, see H. Kilpatrick, “From *Literatur* to *Adab*. The Literary Renaissance in Aleppo around 1700,” *Journal of Eastern Christian Studies*, 58, 2006, p. 195–220.

8 Nasrallah, *L’imprimerie au Liban*, p. 26–27; P. Bachel, “Abdallah Zakher: ses premiers travaux (1680–1722)”, *Échos d’Orient*, 11, 1908, p. 225–226; Feodorov, *Arabic Printing for the Christians in Ottoman Lands*, p. 218–219.

9 References describing the life and work of Zākhir are uncertain and are either painted under the romantic aspect or under the whip of controversy. In general, sources recounting Zākhir’s life belong to three groups, the first of which consists of historical fragments taken from his letters, works, and the *Annals* and archive of the Congregation of the Shuwayr monks. The other two groups appeared in the early 20th century and are suspected of forgery or excessive exaggeration. The first group was probably “created” by Bachel in his articles published in *Échos d’Orient* in 1908. The second is a biography attributed to Yuwākīm Muṭrān, one of Zākhir’s disciples, “discovered” in the late 19th century and edited twice, in 1913 and 1948. These later groups were determined to defend Zākhir’s Catholicism from the time of his childhood and his sole responsibility in the founding of the Shuwayr press. Thus, the documents and references related to the life and work of Zākhir deserve a new critical approach. Among the studies dealing with Zākhir’s life and work, we can mention GCAL III, p. 191–201; Gdoura, *Le début de l’imprimerie au Liban*, p. 154–157; HMLÉM IV.2, p. 111–138, 322; J. Kahale, *Abdallah Zakher el-Halabi: inventeur de l’imprimerie arabe en Orient*, Arabic and French edition, Alep, 2006; J.-P. Ghobrial, “The Ottoman World of ‘Abdallah Zakher. Shuwayr Bindings in the Arcadian Library”, in G. Mandelbrote and W. de Bruijn (eds.), *The Arcadian Library: Bindings and Provenance*, Oxford, 2014, p. 193–231; R. el Gemayel, “Abd Allah Zakher”, in *CMR* 12, p. 101–107; Feodorov, *Arabic Printing for the Christians in Ottoman Lands*, p. 209–226.

10 In a letter to Zākhir, Pierre Fromage declares that the latter converted thanks to the Jesuits. T. Jock, *Jésuites et Chouérites ou la fondation des religieuses basiliennes chouérites de Notre-Dame de l’Annonciation à Zouq-Mikail (Liban), 1730–1746*, Central Falls, [1936], p. 363.

11 Nasrallah, *L’imprimerie au Liban*, p. 21, 27. There is no material evidence of Zākhir working at the Aleppo workshop. If Nasrallah and other writers claim this apprenticeship, the biographies of Zākhir claim his own skillful ability to establish the Shuwayr printing press. The only attested information about this matter is that Zākhir asked someone to bring him some “material” from Aleppo to finish the installation of his printing press. See *Annals of Shuwayr* in the manuscript OBA 1163 of the Aleppo Basilian Order, Šarba, Lebanon, f. 30.

12 P. Bachel, “Abdallah Zakher et son imprimerie arabe”, *Échos d’Orient*, 11, 1908, p. 281–287 (here, p. 281); Nasrallah, *L’imprimerie au Liban*, p. 27.

and provided him with the necessary space and support to establish his printing press.¹³ In Mount Lebanon, Zākhir went through several places before settling at the monastery of Shuwayr, where he dedicated himself to diligently preparing for the establishment of an Arabic press.¹⁴ While he was still in Aleppo, Zākhir built a fruitful, longstanding friendship and partnership with the Jesuit Pierre Fromage (d. 1740).¹⁵ Together, they undertook the task of translating spiritual literature from Western languages, with Zākhir taking on the responsibility of refining the Arabic language; this continued in Lebanon and culminated in the successful printing of nine books in Shuwayr¹⁶ before Zākhir's passing in 1748.¹⁷

Following these collaborative efforts, the pinnacle of the Fromage – Zākhir translation project and the establishment of the new Shuwayr press resulted in the

¹³ On Nicolas Šāyegh, see P. Bachel, “Nicolas Saigh religieux chouérite (1692–1756)”, *Échos d'Orient*, 11, 1908, p. 71–76, 154–161; *HMLÉM* IV.2, p. 109–111, 268–270.

¹⁴ The origin of the Shuwayr press remains a subject of debate, particularly concerning the involvement of Zākhir and the Jesuits, as well as its connection to Dabbās's project in Aleppo. For further insights, see Nasrallah, *L'imprimerie au Liban*, p. 26–45, and Feodorov, *Arabic Printing for the Christians in Ottoman Lands*, p. 209–226. Furthermore, P. Bachel, “La congrégation des basiliens chouérites”, *Échos d'Orient*, 6, 1903, p. 174–183, 242–248, and *Échos d'Orient*, 7, 1904, p. 353–358; C.-M. Walbiner, “Monastic Reading and Learning in Eighteenth Century Bilad al Sham: Some Evidence from the Monastery of al Shuwayr (Mount Lebanon)”, *Arabica*, 51, 2004, p. 462–477, offer depictions of the religious life of the Shuwayr community. In addition, C.-M. Walbiner, “Die Bibliothek des Dair Mar Yuhanna ash-Shuwair / Libanon”, in P. Bruns (ed.), *Sonderdruck aus Orientalia Christiana. Festschrift für Hubert Kaufhold zum 70 Geburtstag*, Wiesbaden, 2013, p. 569–583, provides a detailed description of the library of the Shuwayr monastery.

¹⁵ On Fromage and his works, see C. Sommervogel, *Bibliothèque de la Compagnie de Jésus*, 12 tomes, facsimile reproduction, Louvain, 1960, t. 3, col. 1039–1044; L. Shaykhū, *Kitāb al-makhṭūṭāt al-ʿarabiya li-katabat al-naṣrāniya*, Beirut, 1924, p. 164–165 (n° 619); *GCAL* IV, p. 223–231.

¹⁶ Two letters exchanged between Zākhir and Fromage summarize the entire relationship that wove them together in the translation of Western books and in the operation of the Shuwayr press. Fromage's letter to Zākhir is dated January 22, 1740, and Zākhir's reply is dated October 22 of the same year. See Jock, *Jésuites et Chouérites*, p. 351–356 (summary of Zākhir's relationship with the Jesuits of Aleppo), p. 357–369 (Fromage's letter to Zākhir), and p. 370–493 (Zākhir's response to Fromage). For the list of the books published by Zākhir, see Nasrallah, *L'imprimerie au Liban*, p. 37–39; Ghobrial, “The Ottoman World”; Feodorov, *Arabic Printing for the Christians in Ottoman Lands*, p. 215–216. A complete detailed list is given in A. Šfayr, *Maṭbaʿat al-Shuwayr al-maṭbaʿa al-ʿarabiya al-ūlā (1733–1899): Fiḥris al-maṭbūʿāt al-mufaṣṣal*, Master thesis, Holy Spirit University of Kaslik, Lebanon, 2019 (not published).

¹⁷ On Zākhir last days, see P. Bachel, “Dernières années d'Abdallah Zakher”, *Échos d'Orient*, 11, 1908, p. 363–372; Nasrallah, *L'imprimerie au Liban*, p. 34–36.

publication of the book *Mizān al-zamān*, marking a historic milestone as the first Arabic book printed in Lebanon.¹⁸

In honor of the Shuwayr enterprise and in fulfilment of the objectives of the TYPARABIC project hosted by the Institute for South-East European Studies of the Romanian Academy in Bucharest, this article pays tribute to *Mizān al-zamān*.

2 History and Purpose of the Original Text, *De la Diferencia entre lo Temporal y Eterno*

Renowned as the “Jesuit polymath of Madrid”, Father Juan Eusebio Nieremberg (1595–1658), a Jesuit priest, theologian and mystic, earned acclaim for his extensive literary oeuvre spanning diverse domains such as philosophy, theology, asceticism, and spirituality. Notably, his seminal work, *De la diferencia entre lo temporal y eterno*,¹⁹ attained widespread recognition as a cornerstone of ascetic literature, emblematic of Nieremberg’s profound influence on the Jesuit mission for the redemption of souls.²⁰ His scholarly reputation among the Spanish Jesuits of the 17th–18th centuries is underscored by the dissemination of his works in multiple languages, paralleling the esteemed legacy of contemporaries such as Alonso Rodriguez, Luis de la Puente and Francisco de Salazar.²¹

Through his treatise, Nieremberg endeavors to imbue readers with a profound and existential understanding of this dichotomy, delving into the contemplation of the ramifications of eternal life, whether in celestial bliss or infernal torment. He underlines the temporal realm’s instrumental role in attaining communion with the divine, ultimately culminating in eternal felicity alongside the Creator.

18 For a detailed study of the content and the historical background, see C. Walbiner, “The appearance of Nieremberg’s *De la diferencia entre lo temporal y eterno* in Arabic 1734”, in A. Girard, B. Heyberger, V. Kontouma (eds.), *Livres et confessions chrétiennes orientales*, Brepols, 2023, p. 427–440; Walbiner, “The Christians of Bilād al-Shām”, p. 26–27.

19 *De la diferencia entre el temporal y eterno: crisol de desengaños con la memoria de la eternidad, postrimerías humanas y principales misterios divinos*. It was published for the first time in 1640 (Madrid: María de Quiñones).

20 S. Hendrickson, *Jesuit Polymath of Madrid: The Literary Enterprise of Juan Eusebio Nieremberg (1595–1658)*, Leiden, 2015, p. 131.

21 X. Baró Queralt, “Juan Eusebio Nieremberg (1595–1658) en la Italia Barroca: Difusión y circulación de su obra *De la diferencia entre lo temporal y eterno: Crisol de desengaños* (1640)”, *Revista Catalana de Teologia*, 43/1, 2018, p. 125–141 (here, p. 129–130).

Drawing inspiration from the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius of Loyola,²² Nieremberg's treatise reflects Neoplatonic influences, elucidating the struggle between transient materiality and enduring spiritual truth.²³ Moreover, echoes of Neostoic principles are discernible, idealizing the spiritual quest amidst life's illusory trappings.²⁴ The treatise portrays human existence as a sacred pilgrimage through the ephemeral confines of temporal reality, aspiring towards the boundless realms of eternity. Emphasizing the futility and transience of worldly pursuits, Nieremberg stresses the imperative of transcending temporal attachments, recognizing their propensity to engender spiritual decay and moral ruin.

In his treatise, Nieremberg expounds upon the divine purpose of humanity as ordained by God, positing that mankind's purpose lies in the exaltation, reverence, and service of the Creator, thus securing salvation. Concurrently, Nieremberg asserts that the earthly elements are crafted to aid humanity in fulfilling its divine calling. Consequently, individuals are enjoined to employ worldly possessions to the extent that they facilitate their spiritual journey, while discarding those that hinder it, thereby discerning the dichotomy between the ephemeral and the eternal in the pursuit of life's ultimate meaning.

Here is a summary of the content of *Mizān al-zamān*, following Baró Queralt's outline.

1. The first treatise or book (*maqāla*) reflects broadly on the concept of eternity and the notion of time, focusing particularly on the profound impact of the passing of time. Nieremberg juxtaposes the miseries of earthly existence and the transience of material possessions with the splendor of eternal life. He advocates for a vigorous deconstruction of the material realm to unveil and construct the ideal image of the spiritual domain.
2. The second treatise portrays a vivid image of the end of temporal life and the apocalypse. Nieremberg asserts that death lies solely in the hands of God, depicting, in the style of the era, the grim realities of human mortality and bodily decay. He contends that humanity is sentenced to death from conception, urging readers to contemplate these ugly truths and recognize the impermanence inherent in all aspects of life.
3. The third treatise emphasizes the mutability and sorrow of temporal existence. Amid reflections on the evils of war and the temporality of human life, Nieremberg presents a positive interpretation of temporal suffering, highlighting its

²² S. Hendrickson, *Jesuit Polymath of Madrid*, p. 42.

²³ S. Hendrickson, *Jesuit Polymath of Madrid*, p. 45.

²⁴ S. Hendrickson, *Jesuit Polymath of Madrid*, p. 49.

fleeting and changeable nature. He suggests that temporary afflictions, being subject to change, offer the consolation of hope for improvement.

4. Treatise 4 delves into the magnitude of eternity and juxtaposes it with the eternal damnation of hell. Detailed explanations of the torments and punishments of hell are provided, alongside mentions of the bliss experienced by those who gain paradise.
5. The final book reiterates the distinction between the temporal and the eternal, advocating for the contempt toward temporality. It concludes with a clear reference to the charity of God, urging believers to focus on this divine attribute.

De la diferencia enjoyed immense reception, with over 75 editions in Spanish and numerous translations across Europe from the 17th to the 19th century.²⁵ It found its way to the Americas alongside missionaries, serving as a catechetical text, and was printed in various indigenous languages, including Guaraní.²⁶ Nieremberg's work proved to be one of the most potent tools of the Catholic Counter-Reformation in Europe, so much so that the renowned painter Juan de Valdés Leal depicted it around 1671 in his painting *San Ignacio y San Francisco de Borja contemplando la Eucaristía* or *Alegoría de la Eucaristía*. In this painting, positioned at the saints' feet are two books: the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius of Loyola and Nieremberg's *De la diferencia*.²⁷

3 Physical Description of USEK's Copy of *Mizān al-zamān*

3.1 General Aspect

Our physical description of *Mizān al-zamān* is based on the copy held at the Library of the Holy Spirit University of Kaslik in Lebanon, identified by shelf number Pat 1049.²⁸ This volume consists of 375 pages, with the initial thirteen unnumbered (XIII + 362).²⁹ The format is in-4°, measuring 219 x 161 mm, while the binding, measuring 225 x 171 x 37 mm, is crafted from black goat leather. Adhering to the Euro-

²⁵ S. Hendrickson, *Jesuit Polymath of Madrid*, p. 131.

²⁶ S. Hendrickson, *Jesuit Polymath of Madrid*, p. 126.

²⁷ S. Hendrickson, *Jesuit Polymath of Madrid*, p. 127. The canvas is preserved in the Museum of Fine Arts in Seville.

²⁸ I am grateful to Essine Gemayel for helping in this section.

²⁹ The copy of Kaslik has two end papers, one at the beginning and the other at the end. The un-paged folios contain the prologue, introduction, and table of contents. Pagination begins with the start of the first treatise.

pean aesthetics, the binding decoration employs the blind finishing technique, and the book's sections are sewn with embedded cords in four segments, featuring end bands. The paper bears a watermark of the "grape and crown" variety, indicative of its probable French origin, with the name of the papermaker A. Gailhardon associated with its production in Provence between 1702 and 1740, as documented by Briquet.³⁰ The prevalence of the "grape" paper type suggests its widespread exportation to the Levant during the 17th–18th centuries, indicative of the commerce and cultural exchange that flourished between European papermakers and Levantine markets during this period.³¹

3.2 Layout of the Book

The layout of the book exudes elegance and uniformity. The text is delicately framed by an oblong rectangle formed by double frames, with the outer frame thicker than the inner one (Fig. 1). Additionally, headers and catchwords adorn the pages, enhancing the overall aesthetics. In the unnumbered sheets [I–XV], the header of each page contains the title word that marks the beginning of the respective section. For instance, the word *al-fātiḥa* ("Preface") graces the headers of pages [I–III], while page [IV], hosting the end of the preface, features the header word *al-muqaddima* ("Introduction"), a section that commences on this page and extends to pages [IV–VIII]. A similar pattern is observed on page [VIII], where the introduction ends and the table of contents begins, with the word *fihris* ("Contents") adorning the header of the page. Furthermore, catchwords are carefully placed at the end of each page, situated on the left and below the frame that encloses the main printed text.

3.3 Punctuation of the Book

As for the punctuation, the text adopts a star as a single sign system (Fig. 2). Additionally, short vowels, including *shadda*, *tanwīn*^{-an}, *tanwīn*⁻ⁱⁿ, *fatha*, and *kasra*, are carefully incorporated throughout the text. The text also showcases various calligraphic styles, particularly in marking final letters (Fig. 3). Furthermore, the

³⁰ C. Briquet, *Les filigranes: Dictionnaire historique des marques du papier dès leur apparition vers 1282 jusqu'en 1600*, t. IV. P-Z, Hildesheim, 1991, p. 646.

³¹ T. Walz, "The Paper Trade of Egypt and the Sudan in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries and its Re-export to the Bilād as-Sūdān", in G. Krätli, G. Lydon (eds.), *The Trans-Saharan Book Trade: Manuscript Culture, Arabic Literacy and Intellectual History in Muslim Africa*, Leiden, 2012, p. 83–84.

typographic style occasionally employs a *yā' maqṣūra* to signify the final *yā'*, and vice-versa (Fig. 4). Notably, the prologue, introduction and table of contents, along with the titles of treatises and chapters, feature a larger, stylized font compared to the rest of the text, adding to their visual distinction.

3.4 The Arabic Type

Zākhir's Arabic type was hailed as a typographic triumph, with even critical observers such as Volney acknowledging its excellence. Volney remarked that the Arabic letters were so impeccable and aesthetically pleasing that even Zākhir's adversaries were tempted to purchase his book.³² Furthermore, Volney noted that these letters effectively replicated handwriting, faithfully capturing its bold and intricate strokes, unlike the thin and disjointed appearance of the Arabic type commonly seen in books printed in Europe.³³

3.5 Decoration

The decoration of the book embraces simplicity, drawing inspiration mostly from a unique ornamental motif (Fig. 5). In the table of contents, treatise numbers and chapter titles are flanked by this motif's elegant lines. Similarly, the frontispiece and the beginning of each treatise feature three bands adorning the top and sides, while the bottom is left unembellished. Additionally, the conclusion of the table of contents, as well as several treatises and chapters, are demarcated by centered lines bordered by the same refined motif.³⁴ Notably, a full-page cross (on p. [XIII]) is meticulously crafted from this fundamental decorative element, with a slightly different motif for the outer rectangle (Fig. 6). An exception to this uniformity is found on p. [XII], where a delicate floral vignette, reminiscent of bouquets seen in the earlier editions of Aleppo, introduces a touch of artistic variation (Fig. 7).³⁵

³² C.-F. Volney, *Voyage en Syrie et en Egypte pendant les années 1783, 1784 et 1785...*, Paris, 1787, vol. 2, p. 177.

³³ Volney, *Voyage en Syrie et en Egypte*, vol. 2, p. 177.

³⁴ P. [XII], 6, 77, 84, 113, 160, 163, 176, 184, 224, 227, 273, 288, 311, 345, and 362.

³⁵ It is present in the Gospel with commentaries published in Aleppo in 1706, in the *Chosen Pearls of John Chrysostom* (Aleppo, 1707), in the *Octoechos* and the *Sermons* of Athanasios of Jerusalem (both Aleppo, 1711). I thank Oana Iacubovschi for this valuable information.

3.6 Title Page and Chapters

The absence of a title page in this copy of the book is notable. Instead, the book commences directly with the prologue, which begins with the customary *basmala*. The title, *Mizān al-zamān wa-qistās abadiyat al-insān*, is disclosed within the prologue on p. [II]. The author's name, Juan Eusebio Nieremberg, is prominently displayed at the beginning of the introduction on page [III]. The Shuwayr Monastery, the place of printing, is indicated at the conclusion of the prologue on pages [II-III], accompanied by the pivotal date of 1733, marking the commencement of printing, on page [III]. Concluding the book on page 362, the year 1734 is inscribed, which indicates the completion of the printing.

Mizān al-zamān comprises several sections, including the prologue spanning p. [I-III], followed by the introduction on p. [III-VII], and the table of contents on p. [VII-XII]. The book announces five treatises (*maqāla*) containing a total of fifty-three chapters (*faṣṭ*), organized as outlined below.

- Treatise 1: Expounds on the distinction between the temporal and eternal across thirteen chapters, covering pages 1–84.
- Treatise 2: Discusses the differentiation between the temporal and the eternal concerning the purpose of temporal life and time, in nine chapters spanning pages 85–176.
- Treatise 3: Examines the disparity between the temporal and the eternal concerning the alteration of temporal phenomena, its limitations, and associated risks, in ten chapters, on pages 177–231.
- Treatise 4: Analyses the contrast between the temporal and the eternal concerning the significance of eternal rewards and eternal punishments, in twelve chapters covering pages 232–311.
- Treatise 5: Explores the differentiation between the temporal and the eternal regarding the means bestowed by God upon humanity to attain eternal rewards and answers for disparaging temporal matters, in nine chapters, on pages 312–362.

4 Prologue and Introduction

The prologue of *Mizān al-zamān* articulates the rationale behind printing the book. It emphasizes the necessity for Christians to possess a potent instrument enabling them to discern between good and evil, to distinguish the earthly matters from the eternal ones, to pursue salvation, and to steer clear of straying from the righteous path. The text draws parallels with the practices of saints, fathers, hermits, and

martyrs who navigated the world with the aim of attaining eternal life. It urges readers to benefit from the contents of the book for similar aspirations.

In the introduction, the narrative shifts towards the biography of the author, Juan Eusebio Nieremberg (1590–1658), a Spanish Jesuit of German descent. However, the depiction of Nieremberg's life in the Shuwayr edition reveals several inconsistencies when juxtaposed with conventional biographies of the author.³⁶ It is conceivable that Pierre Fromage drew upon the account of Nieremberg published in the *Journal de Trévoux* in 1708, as indicated by significant parallels in various aspects of the biography.³⁷

5 The Date and Place of Printing

The Shuwayr edition of *Mizān al-zamān* is marked with two significant dates: one indicating the commencement of printing in 1733 (p. [III]), subtly referenced,³⁸ and the other denoting the completion of the printing process on February 16, 1734, explicitly stated at the conclusion of the book colophon (p. 362).³⁹ It is worth noting that the Greek Catholics gradually transitioned to the Gregorian calendar starting in 1857.⁴⁰ Consequently, it remains uncertain whether the dates of Shuwayr adhered to the Gregorian or Julian calendar systems, with February 16 potentially corresponding to Saturday, February 27, 1734, in the Gregorian calendar.

The place of publication is explicitly identified on pages [II]–[III] of the prologue as the Saint John the Baptist Monastery, commonly known as the Shuwayr Monastery, situated in the Druze Mountains within the eyalet of Sidon.⁴¹

³⁶ On Nieremberg and his works, see C. Sommervogel, *Bibliothèque de la Compagnie*, t. 5, col. 1725–1766; t. 9, col. 720–721; t. 12, col. 1166–1167; H. Didier, *La vie et la pensée de Juan Eusebio Nieremberg (1595–1658)*, Université de Paris IV, Paris, 1974 (unpublished Ph.D. thesis), t. 1, p. 39–81; Hendrickson, *Jesuit Polymath of Madrid*, p. 9–50.

³⁷ “Article CLXIX. Traité de la différence du Temps et de l’Éternité; composé par le P. Eusèbe Nieremberg de la Compagnie de Jésus, traduit de l’Espagnol par le R. P. Jean Brigon de la même Compagnie, avec des règles pour conduire à la perfection Chrétienne, tirées du même Père Nieremberg”, *Journal de Trévoux*, t. 8, décembre 1708, p. 2087–2093.

³⁸ *Sanat alf wa-sab’a māya wa-thalātha wa-thalathīn li-l-tajassud al-ilāhī*.

³⁹ *Wa-qad tamma ṭab’u hadhā al-kitāb fī al-yawm al-sādis ‘ashar min shahr ishbāt sanat alf wa-sab’a māya wa-arba’a wa-thalathīn li-l-tajassud wa-l-ḥamdu li-l-lāh waḥda-hu*.

⁴⁰ S. Najm, “The Imposing of the Gregorian Calendar and its Impact on Levantine Christians: Local Dynamics and Foreign Interferences (1857–1864)”, *Annals*, 12, 2021–2022, p. 254–292.

⁴¹ *Fi jabal al-Drūz min mu’āmalat Ṣaydā*: the eyalet of Sidon, including the territories of Beirut, was created in 1660. Its mountain hinterland is often referred to as the Druze Mountain (*jabal al-Drūz*) and comprised several *nahiyes*, among them Kesrwan, where the monastery of Shuwayr

6 The Italian Antigraph of the Book

As noted in the prologue of *Mizān al-zamān* (p. [II]), it is stated that the Arabic version printed in Shuwayr was derived from Italian. Notably, Italian publishers displayed considerable interest in Nieremberg's works, particularly *De la diferencia entre lo temporal y eterno*. From 1653 to 1693, over a span of 40 years,⁴² at least eleven Italian editions of this work were published. The Italian translation was achieved by the Jesuit Anton Giulio Brignole Sale (1605–1662), who released his translation in Genoa in 1653.⁴³

Nevertheless, it is crucial to note that the Italian translation was not a strictly literal or literary rendition, but it was rather more a text adapted to the prevailing Italian mindset of the era. In his prefatory notes, Anton Giulio Brignole Sale acknowledges modifying the text's formulations and condensing lengthy passages deemed unnecessary or incompatible with the tastes of an Italian audience.⁴⁴ Mazzocchi's analysis offers numerous examples illustrating instances where the Italian translator omitted, condensed, or even rephrased sections from the original Spanish text.⁴⁵

If the Arabic translation of Shuwayr draws indeed from the Italian version, it would likely involve some degree of adaptation and condensation. To illustrate the nuances of phrasing adjustments, abbreviations, and textual alterations, as content transitions from Spanish to Italian, and eventually to Arabic, we highlight the following examples, which represent significant shifts in the text.

1. The title of Chapter 1 of the first treatise undergoes modifications as it transitions from Spanish to Italian, and finally to Arabic. In the original Spanish version, the title reads “La ignorancia que ay de los bienes verdaderos, y no solo de las cosas eternas, sino de las temporales”,⁴⁶ which can be translated as “The ignorance of true goods, not only of eternal things, but also of temporal ones.” The Italian translation abbreviates this title to “Della differenza trà il

lies, located in the far north. This administrative system ceased in 1841; see A.-R. Abu-Husayn, “Problems in the Ottoman Administration in Syria during the 16th and 17th Centuries: The Case of the Sanjak of Sidon – Beirut”, *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 24, 1992, p. 666, 673.

42 Baró Queralt, “Juan Eusebio Nieremberg”, p. 136–137.

43 Sommervogel, *Bibliothèque de la Compagnie*, t. 5, col. 1740; G. Mazzocchi, “Note sulla fortuna italiana e lombarda di Padre Juan Eusebio Nieremberg”, *Studia Borromaeica*, 13, 1999, p. 59.

44 Baró Queralt, “Juan Eusebio Nieremberg”, p. 138.

45 Mazzocchi, “Note sulla fortuna italiana e lombarda di Padre Juan Eusebio Nieremberg”, p. 59–64.

46 J. E. Nieremberg, *De la Diferencia entre lo temporal y eterno crisol de desengaños, con la memoria de la Eternidad, prostrimerias humanas, y principales Misterios divinos*, Barcelona, 1643, p. 1.

Temporale, e l'Eterno,”⁴⁷ which translates to “On the difference between the Temporal and the Eternal.” Finally, the Arabic edition presents it as *Fi al-zamān w-al-abadī*,⁴⁸ which conveys a similar meaning of “On the temporal and the eternal”. These variations in the title reflect not only linguistic differences but also potential differences in emphasis or interpretation between the translators. The Spanish title appears to focus on the concept of ignorance regarding true goods, whereas the Italian title emphasizes the distinction between the temporal and the eternal. While aligned with the theme, the Arabic title may render nuances specific to the Arabic language and cultural context.

2. In the title of the Chapter V of the first treatise, the Arabic version appends the epithet “Areopagite”⁴⁹ after the name of Denis, potentially for clearer identification. In contrast, both the Spanish and the Italian texts incorporate the epithet within the content of the chapter rather than including it in the title.⁵⁰
3. Similarly, the same observation extends to the Arabic title of Chapter VI of the first treatise. Here, the Arabic version adds in the title the epithet “the Christian philosopher”⁵¹ after the name of Boethius, again for identification purposes. However, both the Spanish and the Italian versions omit this epithet altogether.⁵² Furthermore, the Italian text begins with the phrase “Facciamoci ad udire la opinione che Severino Boezio e Polotino filosofi grandi amandue, ed il primiero non minore Teologo, protano intorno all’eternità. *Presso il Boezio l’eternità é una...*”⁵³ which introduces the philosophical perspectives of Boethius and Plotinus on eternity. This introductory passage is absent in the Arabic text, which commences with “Boethius, the Christian philosopher and theologian, says that eternity...”⁵⁴
4. In Chapter VIII of the first treatise, within a commentary on Habakkuk, “The ancient mountains crumbled, and the age-old hills collapsed” (*Habakuk* 3:6), the Italian text offers the example of Atlantis and Olympus.⁵⁵ In contrast, the Arabic version attributes this to the Mountains of Lebanon, presenting a different geographical reference.⁵⁶

47 J. E. Nieremberg, *La Differenza fra il temporale, e l'eterno*, Genoa, 1653, p. 1.

48 *Mizān al-zamān*, p. 1.

49 *Mizān al-zamān*, p. 28.

50 Nieremberg, *De la Diferencia*, p. 19; Nieremberg, *La Differenza*, p. 47.

51 *Mizān al-zamān*, p. 32.

52 Nieremberg, *De la Diferencia*, p. 22; Nieremberg, *La Differenza*, p. 54.

53 Nieremberg, *La Differenza*, p. 54–55.

54 *Mizān al-zamān*, p. 32: *Qāla Būyisiyūs al-faylasūf al-masīhī wa-l-thāwulūghus inna abadīyat...*

55 Nieremberg, *La Differenza*, p. 83.

56 *Mizān al-zamān*, p. 47.

5. Chapters XII and XIII of the first treatise in the Spanish version⁵⁷ are condensed and amalgamated into Chapter XII of the Italian version,⁵⁸ a structure followed by the Arabic version as well. Additionally, the Arabic version summarizes several passages from the Bible and teachings of the Church Fathers, offering a concise interpretation.
6. Chapter XV of the Spanish version is omitted in the Italian translation, resulting in its absence in the Arabic version as well. This chapter delves into the perspectives of Plato and Plotinus on time and the finite nature of material and temporal things.
7. In Chapter I of the second treatise, the Arabic version condenses some extended paragraphs found in the Italian translation, providing a more succinct rendition.
8. Chapter V of the fourth treatise in the Italian translation deviates from that of the Spanish version. Upon comparison, it becomes apparent that the Italian translator opted not to translate anything in Chapter V, choosing to incorporate instead selected paragraphs from Chapter VI. Consequently, the chapter labelled as V in the Italian translation corresponds to the content of Chapter VI in the Spanish version.⁵⁹ This adjustment results in the subsequent chapter being numbered differently, with what is Chapter VII in the Spanish version being numbered as Six in the Italian translation, followed by the Arabic rendition. Additionally, it is noteworthy that the Arabic text summarizes several paragraphs from the Italian text in Chapters Six and Seven.
9. In Chapters VIII to X of the Arabic version, ranking numbers of the eternal torments are introduced, corresponding to the content of each chapter. Specifically, numbers three and four are added to the title of Chapter VIII, while numbers five and six are included in the title of Chapter IX.⁶⁰
10. Furthermore, the Italian version supplements the title of Chapter X with the expression “della morte eterna”,⁶¹ which translates to “of eternal death”. However, the content of the chapter discusses two types of torments: that of

57 Nieremberg, *De la Diferencia*, p. 57, 63.

58 *Mizān al-zamān*, p. 69.

59 Chapter titles in Spanish: Ch. 5. *Quan dichosa es la vida eterna de los justos*; Ch. 6. *La excelencia y perfección de los cuerpos de los Santos en la vida eterna*; cf. Nieremberg, *De la Diferencia*, p. 294 and 304. However, in the Italian translation: Ch. V. *La eccellenza e perfezione dei corpi de' Santi nella vita eterna*; cf. Nieremberg, *La Differenza*, p. 482.

60 For example, *Mizān al-zamān*, p. 264: *al-faṣl al-thāmin fī ‘adhābay al-hālikīn al-thālith wa-l-rābi’ wa-humā al-nafy min al-samā wa-l-sajn fī al-jahīm*.

61 Nieremberg, *La Differenza*, p. 257.

death as a consequence of sin (“la morte della pena”)⁶² and that of death as a consequence of guilt (“la morte della colpa”).⁶³ Consequently, the Arabic text incorporates these two torments into the title of Chapter X under numbers seven and eight, respectively.⁶⁴

Comparing the various Spanish, Italian, and Arabic versions allows us to deduce that, in general, the Italian translation is less verbose than the Spanish version, and the Arabic translation also summarizes several paragraphs from its Italian model. Additionally, the Arabic translation omits the biblical, philosophical, and scholastic references that are perfectly reproduced in the Italian translation.

Furthermore, the comparison of the translations highlights the complex process of adaptation and interpretation. From alterations in titles to adjustments in content, each translation reflects the historical context and the linguistic, cultural and interpretative choices of its respective translator. These variations provide valuable insights into the complexities of conveying philosophical and theological concepts across different linguistic and cultural contexts.

7 The Translator

Furthermore, the translator of the text is not mentioned in the edition itself. It is Jean de la Roque, who first attributed the translation to the Jesuit Father Pierre Fromage, in a letter dated December 1735. This information is confirmed by Zākhir himself in his letter dated October 22, 1740, where he reminds Fromage that when they were printing *Mizān al-zamān*, they agreed to mention only the author, omitting the translator, Fromage.⁶⁵ Following Jean de la Roque’s attribution, various authors designated Pierre Fromage as the translator of the Arabic version before it became widespread, especially in Jesuit literature.⁶⁶

62 Translated into Arabic as *mawt al-asīya*, cf. *Mizān al-zamān*, p. 289.

63 Translated into Arabic as *mawt al-‘adhāb*, cf. *Mizān al-zamān*, p. 289.

64 *Mizān al-zamān*, p. 289: *Fi ‘adhābay al-hālikin al-sābi’ wa-l-thāmin wa-humā al-mawt al-abadi wa-l-‘adhāb al-muwāzī li-l-dhanb*.

65 Jock, *Jésuites et Chouérites*, p. 461.

66 C. F. von Schnurrer, *Bibliotheca Arabica*, Halae ad Salam, 1811, p. 279–280; L. Shaykhū, *Tārīkh fann al-ṭibā‘a fi al-Mashriq*, 2nd ed., Beirut, 1995, p. 41; *HMLÉM* IV.2, p. 135.

8 Yūsuf al-Bānī, Proto-Antagonistic Translator

In addition to the spiritual impetus outlined in the prologue and possibly supplemented by biographical insights into Nieremberg's work, as provided by the *Journal de Trévoux*,⁶⁷ Fromage (or Zākhīr) refrains from elucidating the criteria behind the selection of this text, beyond his expressed aim to supplant an existing unpublished translation already in circulation among readers. Conspicuously, the prologue (p. [II]) underscores the recent translation of this book from Italian into Arabic, emphasizing, through collation and revision, the contrast with the Arabic manuscript translation marred by distortion, error, alteration and deviation (p. [III]).⁶⁸

The exploration of manuscript catalogs has revealed the survival of a pre-existing translation of *Mizān al-zamān*, with the exact same Arabic title given to the Shuwayr edition. This “other” translation of *Mizān al-zamān* was the work of a Maronite figure named Yūsuf ibn Jirjis al-Bānī from Aleppo,⁶⁹ who, following the completion of his philosophical and theological studies in Rome, returned to Aleppo in 1704.⁷⁰ Renowned for his intellectual pursuits in translating spiritual and ascetic texts, particularly biblical commentaries, he earned the esteemed title of a distinguished theologian and eminent philosopher.⁷¹

67 “Article CLXIX. Traité de la différence du Temps et de l'Eternité”, p. 2087–2093.

68 *I'lam anna hādhihi al-nuskha qad ustukhrijat jadīd^{an} min al-lugha al-iṭālyānīya ilā hādhihi al-lugha al-ʿarabīya, istikhrāj^{um} maḍbūṭ al-naql bi-l-tadqīq, muṭābiq al-aṣl ʿalā al-tahqīq, fa-lā iʿtimād ʿalā tilka al-nuskha al-ūla al-muktataba, al-mashḥūna min al-taḥrīf wa-l-ghalaṭ wa-l-tabdīl wa-l-shaṭaṭ.*

69 Details about al-Bānī's life are shrouded in uncertainty and occasional inconsistency, suggesting the possibility of multiple individuals sharing this name. See M. Jabbūr, *Fihris makhtūṭāt maktabat abrashīyat Ḥalab al-mārūnīya*, Ḥalab, 1918, vol. 1, p. 70–71; P. Sbath, *Al-Fihris: Catalogue de manuscrits arabes*. Deuxième partie: *Ouvrages des auteurs des trois derniers siècles*; Troisième partie: *Ouvrages anonymes*, Cairo, 1939, p. 12–14; GCAL III, p. 383–389; J. Nasrallah, *Catalogue des manuscrits du Liban. I: Bibliothèque des missionnaires de Saint Paul (Harissa); Bibliothèque du séminaire de l'Annonciation (ʿAin-Traz)*, Harissa, 1958, p. 88, 131, 181; J. Nasrallah, *Catalogue des manuscrits du Liban. III*, Beirut, 1961, p. 129; J. Nasrallah, *Catalogue des manuscrits du Liban. II: Bibliothèque des missionnaires libanais de Dayr al-Kreim; Bibliothèque de Dayr Mar ʿAbda Harharaya; Bibliothèque des moines libanais de Dayr al-Banāt*, Harissa, 1963, p. 13, 14, 166, 213, 226; Y. Dibs, *Al-Jāmiʿ al-mufaṣṣal fī tārikh al-mawārīna al-muʿaṣṣal*, 2nd ed. by M. Hayek, Beirut, 1982, p. 299–300; El Gemayel, *Les échanges culturels*, vol. 1, p. 107; M. Breydy, *Jean Maron: exposé de la foi et autres opuscules*, Leuven, 1988, vol. 1, p. 20.

70 I. Ḥarfūsh, in “Talāmīdhāt al-madrasa al-rūmānīya al-mārūnīya al-qadīma”, *Al-Manāra*, 7, 1936, p. 20, edited the list of students from the Maronite College in Rome sourced from MS Vatican Syriac 410.

71 For instance, in the compilation of manuscripts from the Maronite archdiocese of Aleppo, refer to the prefaces of MSS AMA 277, AMA 278, AMA 280. See Jabbūr, *Fihris makhtūṭāt*, vol. 1, p. 936, 939, 943.

Al-Bānī's translation of *De la diferencia* predates the endeavor at Shuwayr, as indicated by a copy acquired in Aleppo by Nicolas Šāyegh in 1716,⁷² and was already housed in the library of the monastery during Zākhīr's residence. Moreover, multiple manuscripts of the translation, distinctly bearing al-Bānī's signature, including BAV Vat Syr 426 (1719),⁷³ AMA 280 (1724),⁷⁴ and NDU SP 22 (1727),⁷⁵ provide additional corroboration of this chronological precedence.⁷⁶ Furthermore, al-Bānī's translation surpassed the edition of Shuwayr and remained in circulation, which is evident in his autographed manuscript AMA 278 (1738)⁷⁷ and in MS Sbath 95 (1809).⁷⁸ It also persists in numerous undated manuscripts, highlighting its enduring significance and continued use over the years.

72 See J. Abū Nuhrā, "Arshif al-adyār mašdar li-kitābat tārikh Lubnān al-iqtisādī wa-l-ijtimā'ī. Dafātīr ḥisābāt al-rahbāniyatayn al-shuwayriya wa-l-ḥalabiya (1723–1796)", in J. Abū Nuhrā, *al-Iklirūs wa-l-mulkīya wa-l-sulṭa. Abḥāth fī tārikh Lubnān al-ijtimā'ī wa-l-iqtisādī*, Beirut, 2007, p. 90. The correlation between the two translations of *Mizān al-zamān* was first made by Walbīner, "The appearance of Nieremberg's *De la diferencia entre lo temporal y eterno* in Arabic 1734", p.435–436.

73 The translator is identified as the subdeacon Yūsuf ibn Jirjis of Aleppo, who was previously enrolled as a student at the Maronite College in Rome. The manuscript was transcribed in Aleppo in mid-June 1719 by Andreas Scandar, and subsequently presented to the Library of the Maronite College in Rome in 1741. It is written in Garshuni and comprises 282 pages. For details, see A. Mai, *Scriptorum veterum nova collectione Vaticanis codicibus*, t. V, Rome, 1831, p. 68.

74 The manuscript is part of the collection of the Maronite archdiocese of Aleppo and was transcribed by Jibrā'īl Ḥawshab of Aleppo at the end of November 1724. It is in Arabic and comprises 172 folios. The translator is identified as Yūsuf Jirjis al-Bānī. For more detailed information, consult Jabbūr, *Fihris makḥṭūṭāt*, vol. 1, p. 942–943.

75 The manuscript is housed in the collection of the Maronite Maryamite Order, specifically at the Saint Anthony the Great Monastery in Rome. It is dated June 27, 1727, and is written in Garshuni. The translator is identified as Yūsuf ibn Jirjis of Aleppo, and it consists of 173 folios. A digital copy of the manuscript is accessible at the library of Notre Dame University in Loueizeh, Lebanon.

76 The vHMML holds 7 copies of al-Bānī's translation of this text: two from the Bzummār convent in Lebanon (BzAr 00071, BzAr 00078), two from the Melkite Archdiocese of Aleppo (GCAA 00175, GCAA 00440), two from Maronite collections in Lebanon (LMMO 00336, OLM 00972), and one from Université Saint-Joseph in Beirut (USJ 01821). I thank Dr. Ioana Feodorov who inquired with Dr. Joshua Mugler for the benefit of my research, and Dr. Mugler for kindly providing the data.

77 Contained within the collection of the Maronite archdiocese of Aleppo, AMA 278 stands as an autographed manuscript, meticulously completed at the Monastery of Notre-Dame of Loueizeh in Lebanon, with a date marking its finalization on March 13, 1738. This Arabic manuscript has 159 folios and bears the name of both the translator and copyist, identified as Yūsuf ibn Jirjis al-Bānī. For further reference, see Jabbūr, *Fihris makḥṭūṭāt*, vol. 1, p. 938–939.

78 No mention of the scribe, meticulous calligraphy, Arabic, 258 folios. See P. Sbath, *Bibliothèque de manuscrits Paul Sbath*, t. 1, Cairo, 1928, p. 59.

Yūsuf al-Bānī asserted that he translated his book from a foreign language (*mu'ajjama*) without explicitly stating that the original text was Italian. Nonetheless, the structure of his translation impeccably mirrors the Italian version, which also served as the foundation for Fromage's translation.

Furthermore, a noted difference between the two translations is that al-Bānī's version does not contain a biography of Nieremberg. Additionally, al-Bānī's version incorporates the list of pericopes found in the Italian version, meant to be read as meditations in preparation for general confession. For instance, reading Chapter XIII of Treatise IV of *Mizān al-zamān* helps in contemplating the gravity of mortal sin.

After uncovering these details, one might wonder: Who deemed al-Bānī's translation so inadequate that it required a replacement – Fromage, or Zākhir? And why retain the same Arabic title as given by al-Bānī?⁷⁹ Any answer remains speculative without further research. What is certain is that al-Bānī's translation persisted for a time in manuscripts, while the Fromage – Zākhir version would ultimately claim the title of being the first Arabic book published in Lebanon.

Ironically, al-Bānī, whose translation of *De la diferencia* was deemed inadequate, had his translation of the work of the Jesuit Giovanni Pietro Pinamonti (d. 1703), titled in Arabic *Ta'ammulāt jahannam*, published posthumously in 1769 by the same Shuwayr press.⁸⁰

9 Reception of the Shuwayr Edition

At the Shuwayr press, 800 copies of *Mizān al-zamān* were produced,⁸¹ whereas thirteen were sent by Zākhir to Fromage for distribution. Six copies went to Jesuit convents in the Levant, and one copy was sent to M. Truillhier,⁸² a Marseille merchant

⁷⁹ Walbiner, “The appearance of Nieremberg's *De la diferencia entre lo temporal y eterno* in Arabic 1734”, p. 436, wonders how al-Bānī's translation could be so bad when he was well-known for his translations revised by the famous linguist Jirmānūs Farhāt!

⁸⁰ The Arabic title *Kitāb ta'ammulāt jahannam al-murī'a wa-ḥamāqat al-khaṭa'a al-faṣī'a* translates to “The Contemplations of the Horrible Hell and the Foolishness of the Terrible Sin”. The title of the original Italian version, published in Parma by Pazzoni & Monti in 1693, is *L'inferno aperto a cristiano perché non v'entri*.

⁸¹ Nasrallah, *L'imprimerie au Liban*, p. 30, citing the *Annals* of the Shuwayrite Basilian Order in the manuscript of Harissa, p. 122, which is the current MS Harissa 5 according to the catalog of Nasrallah, *Catalogue des manuscrits du Liban*, I, p. 42. Also, see another copy of the *Annals* in the manuscript OBA 1163, f. 89.

⁸² This same copy was then given by Truillhier to Jean de la Roque, who kept it in his cabinet “as a token of his friendship”: M. D. L. R. [Jean de La Roque], “Lettre de M.D.L.R. écrite à M. Maillart, ancien Avocat en Parlement, sur quelques Sujets de Littérature”, *Mercure de France*, May 1736, p. 839.

residing in Sidon. His copy boasted an elegant binding in Levant ("Morrocan") leather,⁸³ featuring striking red leather and gilded edges. Notably, this luxurious binding was priced at three piastres in Aleppo at the time.⁸⁴ Truilhier had already donated 60 piastres to dispatch copies of the book to the following institutions and individuals: the Jesuit school in Antoura, the French consul in Sidon, his own dragoman, the Jesuit procurator in Sidon, the superior of the Capuchins, and, lastly, the French consul in Tripoli.⁸⁵ Zākhīr's letter to Fromage in 1740 and the archives of the Basilian Order in Shuwayr reveal that the *Mizān al-zamān* was sold along with other books printed there.⁸⁶

The recognition of *Mizān al-zamān* in Europe was very fast due to several factors. Initially, Jean de la Roque's⁸⁷ notice dedicated to the work contributed to its early acclaim. Subsequently, orientalist and travelers,⁸⁸ including Scholtz,⁸⁹ Schultz,⁹⁰ Volney,⁹¹ Seetzen,⁹² and Schnurrer,⁹³ played a pivotal role by providing detailed descriptions of the book in their works. Additionally, *Mizān al-zamān* found a place in the famous library of the baron Sylvestre de Sacy,⁹⁴ further enhancing its recognition and importance in intellectual circles.

In the Levant, the reception of *Mizān al-zamān* is not well documented.⁹⁵ Interestingly, the first book printed in Shuwayr was copied by hand, as evidenced

83 M. D. L. R. [Jean de La Roque], "Lettre de M.D.L.R", p. 839.

84 Bachel, "Abdallah Zakher", p. 287.

85 Letter to Pierre Fromage dated 1740; cf. Bachel, "Abdallah Zakher", p. 287.

86 Bachel, "Abdallah Zakher", p. 287; J. Abou Nohra, "La première imprimerie à caractères arabes au Liban (1733): les origines et le rayonnement culturel", *Parole de l'Orient*, 28, 2003, p. 717.

87 M. D. L. R. [Jean de La Roque], "Lettre de M.D.L.R", p. 838–840.

88 The reception of the "incunabula" printed in the Levant is eloquently depicted in Walbinder, "The Collection, Perception and Study of Arabic Incunabula".

89 H. Scholtz, *Specimen I. Bibliothecae Arabicae de Typographiis Arabicis*, Hamburg, 1741, p. 10, falsely claims that the book was printed at the Monastery of Saint John the Baptist in Aleppo in 1734.

90 He visited the monastery of Shuwayr in 1755. See S. Schultz, *Der Leitungen des Höchsten nach seinem Rath auf den Reisen durch Europa, Asia und Africa*, Vol. 5, Halle im Magdeburgischen, 1775, p. 452.

91 Volney, *Voyage en Syrie*, vol. 2, p. 180: "n° 1. *Mizān el Zamān*, Balance du Temps, ou Différence du Temps et de l'Éternité, par le Père Nieremberg, jésuite."

92 U. J. Seetzen, "Nachricht von den in der Levante befindlichen Buchdruckereyen von U. J. Seetzen in Haléb", *Intelligenzblatt der Jenaischen Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung*, n° 76, July 13, 1805, col. 645, titles it "*El misān*" and gives the two dates of printing.

93 C. F. von Schnurrer, *Bibliotheca Arabica*, p. 279–281 (n° 282), provides a detailed description of the book.

94 P. C. F. Daunou (ed.), *Bibliothèque de M. le baron Sylvestre de Sacy*, t. 1, Paris, 1842, p. 413 (n° 1378).

95 For a few examples of the perception of this work, see Walbinder, "The appearance of Nieremberg's *De la diferencia entre lo temporal y eterno* in Arabic 1734".

by the manuscript OLM 791, dated 1863,⁹⁶ and a manuscript preserved in Cairo, dated 1873.⁹⁷ It is astonishing that despite there being reprints, the editions produced by the Jesuits in Beirut in 1863, 1867, and 1883⁹⁸ failed to acknowledge that their source was the Shuwayr edition. This lack of attribution raises ethical concerns surrounding the proper acknowledgment of intellectual property and scholarly contributions. In 1884, a Syriac version made by the Chaldean Bishop Toma Audo (d. 1918) was published in Mosul at the Dominican Fathers' press.⁹⁹

10 Conclusions

The legacy of *Mizān al-zamān* extends far beyond its immediate textual content. *Mizān al-zamān* stands among the earliest “incunabula”¹⁰⁰ produced in the Levant and attracted significant interest in Western circles. It is portrayed as an “Ottoman affair”,¹⁰¹ primarily stemming from the post-Tridentine context and the Catholic missionary endeavor: authored in Spanish by a Jesuit, translated into Italian by another Jesuit, and subsequently rendered into Arabic by a third Jesuit.¹⁰²

As one of the earliest printed works produced in the Levant, it serves as a testament to the intellectual vibrancy of the region during the 18th century. Its journey from Spanish to Italian and finally to Arabic reflects not only the linguistic diversity of the era but also the intercultural dialogue that characterized it. The cloud of

⁹⁶ Collection of the Lebanese Maronite Order kept at the Library of the Holy Spirit University of Kaslik, copied in late January 1863 by the Lebanese monk Ni'matullāh al-Kafrī for his own use. Arabic copy, occupying f. 4r–191r.

⁹⁷ Preserved at the Franciscan Centre for Christian Oriental Studies. Additionally, two manuscripts held by the Library of Charfet contain selected excerpts from *Mizān al-zamān*, but the catalog does not indicate which version is used, that of Shuwayr or that of al-Bānī. For more information, see Walbiner, “The appearance of Nieremberg's *De la diferencia entre lo temporal y eterno* in Arabic 1734”, p. 438.

⁹⁸ See the catalog of the University Library of the Holy Spirit University of Kaslik, the shelfmarks Pat 1049a (1863), Pat 1049b (1867), and Pat 1049c (1883). Shaykhū, *Tārīkh fann al-ṭibā'a*, p. 41, mentions two editions, 1862 and 1886, information reiterated by Bacel, “Dernières années d'Abdallah Zakher”, p. 370. In Shaykhū, *Tārīkh fann al-ṭibā'a*, p. 72, four other editions are mentioned: 1860, 1867, 1882, and 1889.

⁹⁹ *Ktobo d-masato d-zabno*. See Shaykhū, *Tārīkh fann al-ṭibā'a*, p. 182.

¹⁰⁰ The term used by Walbiner to designate the first books printed in the Middle East. See Walbiner, “The Collection, Perception and Study of Arabic Incunabula”.

¹⁰¹ Ghobrial, “The Ottoman World”, p. 195.

¹⁰² On the beginning of the Catholic missionary expansion in the Levant, see Heyberger, *Les chrétiens du Proche Orient au temps de la réforme catholique*, p. 273–382.

uncertainty surrounding the origin of the Arabic translation does not diminish the pivotal role played by Zākhir, Fromage, and the Shuwayr printing press.¹⁰³ Their efforts in shepherding the translation process and ensuring scholarly excellence were instrumental in bringing *Mizān al-zamān* to fruition. Indeed, their contributions paved the way for the emergence of other Arabic presses in Beirut and chief Levantine cities, heralding the Renaissance (*Nahḍa*) in the region.

103 On the life of the Shuwayr press after Zakher, see Nasrallah, *L'imprimerie au Liban*, p. 35–45.

Note: All the illustrations belong to the copy of the *Mizān al-zamān*, Shuwayr, 1733–1734, held by the Library of the Holy Spirit University of Kaslik, Lebanon.



Fig. 1: The first page of *Mizān al-zamān*.

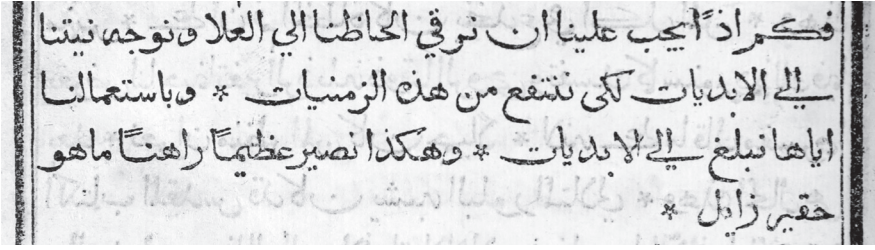


Fig. 2: P. 4, the star as a punctuation sign.



Fig. 3: Various calligraphic styles, particularly in marking final letters: *ilī(ā)*, *fī*, *in*, *alī(ā)*.

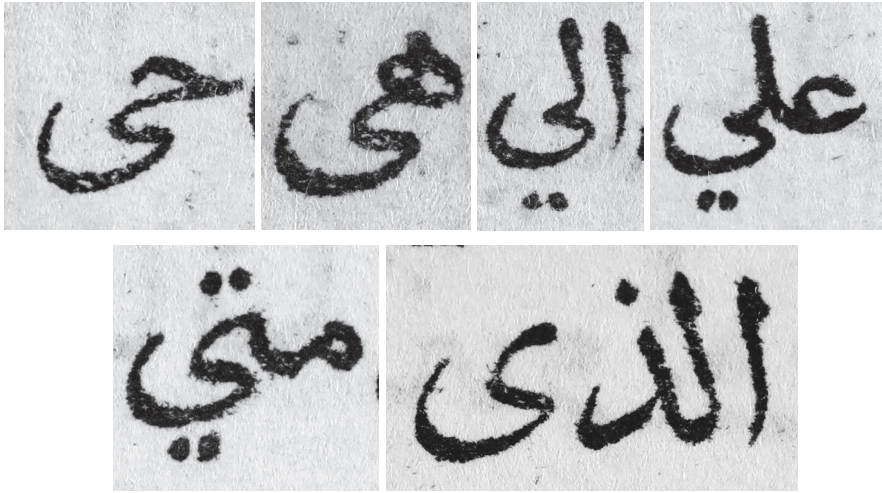


Fig. 4: The use of *alif maqṣūra* to signify the final *yā'*, and vice-versa.



Fig. 5: The decorative motif mostly used for all adornments, here, on p. 7.

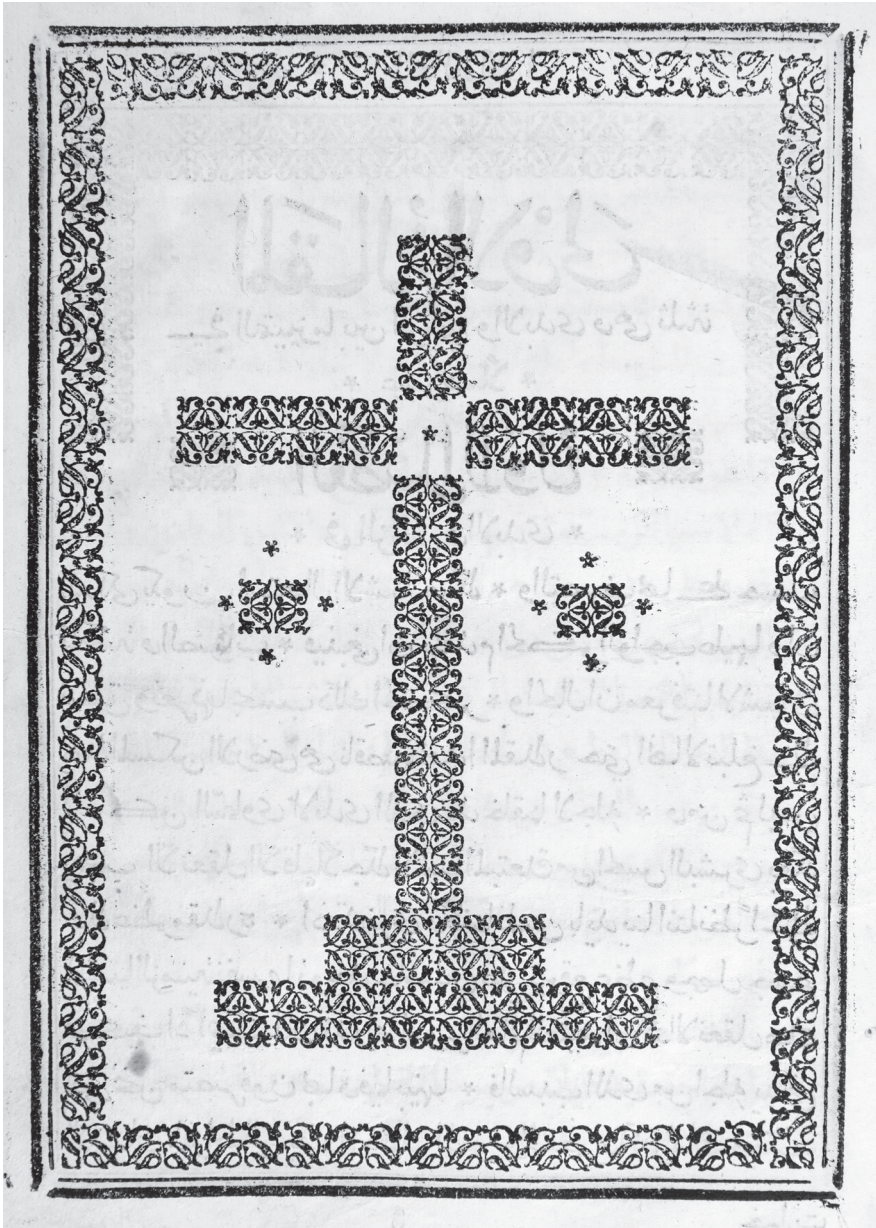


Fig. 6: P. [XIII], a full-page cross artfully crafted from the basic decorative element, with a slightly different motif in the outer rectangle.

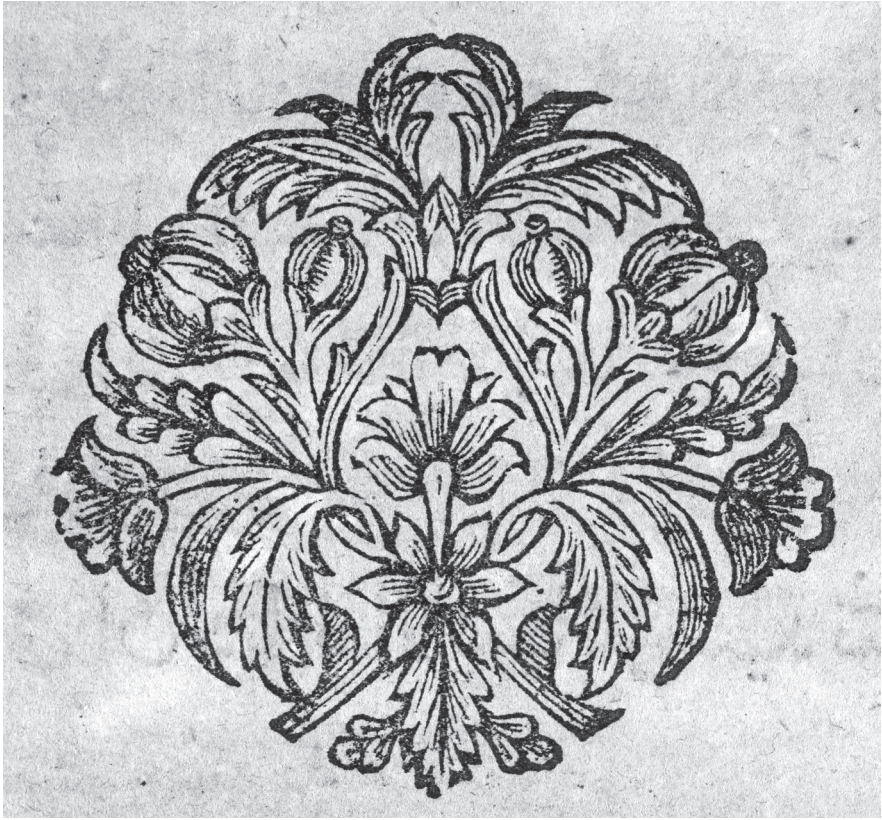


Fig. 7: P. [XII], a floral vignette “reused” from the Aleppo press.

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