1 Introductory Study

1.1 Major Figures in the Correspondence

Undoubtedly, the three central figures who emerge from this correspondence are Sophronios of Kilis, Yūsuf Mark, and Mūsā Ṭrābulsī. While the surviving letters include exchanges addressed to Mūsā by both Sophronios and Yūsuf, the letters Mūsā sent to them have unfortunately not survived. Nevertheless, his role as the initiator and primary recipient of the correspondence makes him central to it.

When Rashīd Ḥaddād first uncovered this collection of letters and published a study on them, his primary focus was on reconstructing the historical backgrounds of Sophronios of Kilis and Yūsuf Mark.[1] However, there was no dedicated section on Mūsā Ṭrābulsī, creating a gap in the literature regarding his life and importance. As we will show in this chapter, earlier references to Mūsā in modern scholarship have been few and incomplete.

Although a strictly chronological structure might have dictated beginning with Sophronios, who was the first to be involved as secretary of Patriarch Sylvester, then turning to Mūsā, and concluding with his later associate and friend Yūsuf, we have chosen instead to begin with Mūsā Ṭrābulsī, the very reason this collection exists.

This decision stems from the nature of the source: the correspondence belongs to Mūsā, and it is through his effort to gather these letters that we access the larger network of collaborators. Mūsā is at the center of this collection of documents; Sophronios, Iakobos, Yūsuf Mark, and others appear in his circle as correspondents, mentors, or companions. Through this organized material, we gain the chance to reconstruct a forgotten chapter of the history of the Antiochian Orthodox Patriarchate.

1.1.1 Mūsā Ṭrābulsī

1.1.1.1 Mūsā Ṭrābulsī's Biography

Mūsā is part of the Nawfal family, as shown by his lineage "al-Nawfalī", mentioned in Letter 33. The author points out that Mūsā's identity as a Nawfalī, or member of

1 In his above-mentioned work signed Rachid Haddad, "La correspondance de Ṭrābulsī secrétaire du patriarche d'Antioche Sylvestre de Chypre", in P. Canivet, J.-P. Rey-Coquais (eds.), *Mémorial Monseigneur Joseph Nasrallah*, Damascus, 2006, p. 257–288.

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111649276-001

the Nawfal family, is not just a name but an essential part of who he is, including his appearance, demeanor, and character.

In a colophon, he signs Mūsā son of Jirjis son of Mīkhā'īl son of Abū Nawfal, known as Ibn al-Naḥū al-Ṭrābulsī.[2] This reveals the names of his father and grandfather, respectively Jirjis and Mīkhā'īl.[3] The family is named after Nawfal, who is either Mūsā's great-grandfather or one of his ancestors. Mūsā also provides the name of his mother, Maryam.[4]

Maryam was the sister of Ilyās Fakhr, who served as the Logothetis of the Patriarchate of Antioch. Mūsā is identified as Ilyās Fakhr's nephew in Letters 13, 30, and 68. The two dragomans, Jirjis ibn Abī Nawfal and Ilyās Fakhr, could have been friends before they became brothers-in-law.

According to 'Īsā Iskandar al-Ma'lūf, the Nawfal family is believed to have originated from Ḥawrān or a nearby area close to Homs or Aleppo in Syria. Ya'qūb Nawfal, who helped al-Ma'lūf reconstruct the family's history, told him that Patriarch Gregory IV Haddad, then bishop of Tripoli, had conveyed to him information contained in an old document about a certain Nawfal from Anfeh, who donated or sold land to the Monastery of Balamand.[5] This suggests the possibility of a migration of the family or some of its members to Anfeh, a small town near Tripoli. Drawing upon a range of other sources, al-Ma'lūf was able to identify the names of the brothers of Mūsā: Mīkhā'īl, Ḥannā, Buṭrus, 'Abbūd, Nawfal, and Wihba (?). Using a document dispatched by Patriarch Gregory IV on July 8, 1912, and other sources, al-Ma'lūf constructed the Nawfal family tree.[6] Since he does not specify details about his sources, we will make an effort to provide pertinent information on this matter.

Mīkhā'īl wrote a reading note dated to 1720, which he signed in Latin letters as "Michele Naufel", preserved in MS Aleppo, Fondation Georges et Mathilde Salem

2 MS Khinshāra, Ordre Basilien Choueirite 175.

3 I believe that the reading note written on folio 487v of MS Balamand, Monastery of Our Lady 105, was written by Jirjis, Mūsā's father. In the same manuscript we find a note by his brother 'Abd al-Masīḥ.
نظر في هذا الكتاب الالهي العبد الفقير المقر بذنبه التائب الى ربه جرجس ولد ميخائيل الطبيب الطرابلسي اصلاً الارثوذكسي مذهبًا وذلك نهار احد الشعنينة في اربعة عشر خلت من شهر نيسان من شهور سنة الف وسبعمائة وثمانية وعشرين سنة 1728 مسيحيّة

4 This information is derived from the colophon of the manuscript of Khinshāra and from a dedication note in a manuscript at the Monastery of Saint Thekla Ma'lūlā. For more details, see below.

5 Unfortunately, we could not find this document that should be preserved in the Archive of the Monastery of Balamand.

6 See 'Ī. al-Ma'lūf, *Tārīkh al-usar al-sharqīya, II. Lubnān al-shamāl*, ed. Fawwāz al-Ṭrābulsī, Beirut, 2008 (henceforth Al-Ma'lūf, *Tārīkh al-usar*), p. 140.

470 (formerly Sbath 1305) (f. 167r).[7] Al-Ma'lūf found in the Epistle of the Apostles a colophon stating that Mīkhā'īl ibn Jirjis Nawfal al-Ṭrābulsī copied them in 1746.[8]

Nawfal is the copyist of MS Beirut, Bibliothèque orientale Ar. 259, which he began copying on January 11, 1747.[9] The *laqab "al-ṭabīb"* in his name appears to be his own, rather than that of his father, Jirjis. This is also evident from the reading note in the MS Saint Petersburg D 226.[10] Nawfal's interest in copying the MS Beirut Bibliothèque orientale Ar. 259, titled *Majmū' al-ḥikma* (Collection of Wisdom), is obvious. This manuscript contains recipes for distilling plants considered beneficial in treating various ailments. Nawfal informs us that he hastily completed the manuscript at a rate of two quires per day. However, only one quire has survived (8 folios). Nawfal is mentioned in Letter 10 sent by Yūsuf from Tripoli, in which Nawfal and his mother send greetings to Mūsā.

'Abd al-Masīḥ, also known as 'Abdūh, is mentioned in Letter 29 and has a reading note dated March 24, 1774, in MS Balamand, Monastery of Our Lady 105.[11]

Buṭrus, another brother of Mūsā, traveled with Patriarch Sylvester to the Romanian Principalities, where he took on the responsibility of teaching Arabic to children from Wallachia. This is supported by Letter 54. In the absence of his brother, the secretary of the patriarch, he served as secretary for Patriarch Sylvester while in Bucharest in April 1747, as attested by the inscription on the Icon of Saint Spyridon drawn by Sylvester.[12] Buṭrus is also mentioned in a letter sent from Sylvester to Ilyās Fakhr, most probably from Bucharest.[13] This letter is a reply to a letter received from Ilyās informing him about his arrival in Aleppo. The date is not provided, but it can be inferred that it was written at the earliest in 1747, the year of Ilyās Fakhr's resignation from his position as chief dragoman, his move to Tripoli, and then back

7 نظر في هذا الكتاب المبارك ميخاييل ابن جرجس الشهير بابن ابي نوفل الطرابلسي من طايفة الروم الارثودكسيه وذلك في سنة 1720 مسيحيه الموافق سنة 1132 للهجره [الامضاء] Michele Naufel.

8 See also Ḥ. al-Zayyāt, *Khazā'in al-kutub fī Dimashq wa-ḍawāḥīhā fī arba'at ajzā' Dimashq wa-Ṣaydnāyā wa-Ma'lūlā wa-Yabrūd*, Damascus, 1982, p. 31.

9 تم بعون الله ما قد تيسر من مجموع الحكمة [...] على يد [...] نوفل بن جرجس المشهور بالنحو الطبيب منقول من نسخة منتثرة قديمة سقيمة [...] وقد كتبت بغاية العجلة جدًا كل يوم كراسين الابتداء نهار الاحد المبارك خلت احدى عشر يومًا من شهر كانون الثاني افتتاح سنة مسيحية 1747 الموافق في 11 محرم الحرام .فتتاح سنة 1160 هجرية.

10 The following note is mentioned by al-Ma'lūf as being preserved in one of Balamand's manuscripts. It was probably communicated to him by Patriarch Gregory IV (1906–1928), who offered the manuscript to Tsar Nicholas (r. 1894–1917) in 1913 (*Tārīkh al-usar*, p. 139): كتب بعد تصفحه في هذا الكتاب المبارك العبد المذنب نوفل المتطبب ابن جرجس النحوى الترجمان غفر الله له ولوالديه [...] 25 كانون الأول عيد الميلاد الالهي سنة 7266 ادم مسيحية 1758 [...].

11 نظر في هذا الكتاب الشريف وتامل معانيه العبد الحقير الذي ليس هو مستحق ان يذكر اسمه من كثرة ذنوبه واثمه عبد المسيح ابن جرجس نوفل الطرابلسي وطنًا والارتودكسي مذهبا حرر ذلك في 24 من شهر اذار سنة 1774 مسيحية [...]

12 See Ţipău, *Sylvester of Antioch*, p. 263–264, 399.

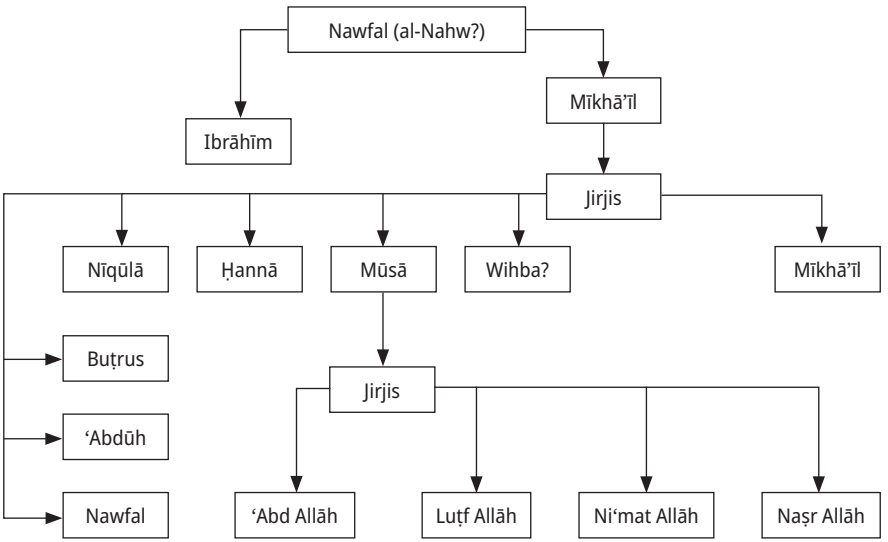
13 MS Ḥarīṣā, Saint Paul 210, f. 156v.

to Aleppo.[14] The main reason for this letter is to ask the communities in Tripoli and Latakia to gather two or three purses, which was the remaining amount needed to run the printing press. The document related to al-Nawfal of Ya'qūb Nawfal from July 8, 1912, mentions Buṭrus.[15] Ya'qūb Nawfal undoubtedly found this information in a manuscript to which we have no access.

Niqūlā, to whom Mūsā sent a letter, is attested in Letter 46. Two sisters sent him greetings from Tripoli, as noted in Letter 10.

Furthermore, al-Ma'lūf provides details about another generation of the Nawfal family, beginning with Jirjis. Jirjis had four sons: Naṣr Allāh, Ni'mat Allāh, Luṭf Allāh, and 'Abd Allāh. The two oldest were secretaries, while the youngest two were copyists. The youngest, 'Abd Allāh, was born in 1793. Therefore, the oldest might have been born in the early 1780s, especially since we do not know how many sisters they had, and their father, Jirjis, was likely born in the 1750s or 1760s. We know from Letter 33 that Mūsā had a son named Jirjis. Since Mūsā entered matrimony ca. 1743 and had three other children besides Jirjis, who might have been the youngest, we are inclined to believe the two Jirjis Nawfal are the same person.

Tab. 1: Family Tree of Mūsā Nawfal



14 Regarding Ilyās Fakhr's resignation from his position as chief dragoman, his subsequent move to Tripoli, then back to Aleppo, see R. el Gemayel, *Ḥāšiyah Waǧīzah of Ilyās Faḫr. An Arabic Byzantine Antiochian Ecclesiology Responding to Uniatism*, Unpublished PhD thesis, 2014 (henceforth El Gemayel, *Ḥāšiyah Waǧīzah*), p. 123–124.

15 See al-Ma'lūf, *Tārīkh al-usar*, p. 140–141.

The years of birth and death of Mūsā are unknown but can be roughly estimated. Mūsā died after 1787, the date of the latest letter in our collection (Letter 34), and before 1791, when Niqūlā Zrayb bought one of his books, noting that the previous owner was "the late master Mūsā Nawfal the grammarian and secretary from Tripoli" (*al-muntaqil ilā raḥmatih ta'ālā al-mu'allim Mūsā Nawfal al-Naḥawī al-Ṭrābulsī al-kātib*). From the Letter 68 dated November 29, 1732, mentioned above, we learn that he became Sylvester's secretary that year. At this time, he was probably in his twenties and thus would have been born around 1710. Moreover, Mūsā, along with his friend Yūsuf, seem to have been colleagues in Tripoli, where they studied Arabic. Therefore, they might have been the same age. It can be argued that when, in 1742, Sylvester asked Yūsuf to come to Damascus to ordain him, Yūsuf was around 30 years old, the canonical age to become a priest (Letter 52).[16] Mūsā would be in his 30s, too. Thus, we estimate these dates for Mūsā: ca. 1710–ca. 1790.

In 1732, Sylvester arrived in Damascus (Letter 12) after spending four years abroad. He appointed Mūsā as his secretary and sent Sophronios to Tripoli, where he met Iakobos of Patmos and became his close disciple. In Letter 68, Ilyās Fakhr expressed satisfaction with his nephew Mūsā, who was recently appointed secretary, although he believed his nephew still needs to improve in some areas. He advised him, for example, on how the layout of a letter sent on behalf of Patriarch Sylvester should be arranged, and promised to send him some specimens. In the same letter, he mentioned that Mūsā was paternally related to Patriarch Sylvester. However, this relation is not clarified.

In the first three years, Mūsā followed a daily routine in Damascus that included sending letters on behalf of the patriarch and teaching Arabic Orthodox boys as part of their training to become priests. Letter 13 is an emotional note in which Sophronios shares the contrast between his bad luck and his friend's ease. While Mūsā enjoyed reading literary books in Damascus, he had to endure traveling. As a result, he started forgetting Arabic and did not improve his Greek as he wished. It was not long before he began his travels related to pastoral visits with the patriarch. While Sophronios was entrusted with visits to the region of Mount Lebanon (Rāshayyā, Beirut, etc.), Tripoli, and the northern parts of the patriarchate (mainly Antioch and Adana), Mūsā traveled with the patriarch to more distant places, such as Erzurum and Diyarbakır, fortifying the patriarchate and collecting

16 Although some exceptions were made during Sylvester's late patriarchate for Makarios Ṣadaqa, who was slightly younger. Ṣadaqa notes in the manuscript of the Collection of E. Karam 6 that he was born in 1730 and was ordained as a priest in 1757, making him 27 years old at that time. See J. Nasrallah, *Catalogue des manuscrits*, vol. III, Beirut, 1961 (henceforth Nasrallah, *Catalogue des manuscrits*, III), p. 306–307.

alms.[17] As early as December 27, 1735, Sylvester and his companions traveled by sea from Latakia to Cyprus, with the final destination being areas around Erzurum, such as Gümüşhane and Trebizond.[18]

It appears that when Sylvester and his companions left Cyprus in February 1736, they entered Anatolia through the port of Antalya, which is the closest port to Isparta and Akşehir that they visited, around May 1736.[19] We do not know why Sylvester visited Isparta and Akşehir. It might be related to the inauguration of the Hagia Panagia church in Isparta, which is generally believed to have been built later, around 1750.[20] The patriarch may have changed the itinerary to increase the amount of alms he could receive, especially since his deacon Sophronios previously collected alms in the region of Northern Syria up to Adana.

This unusual itinerary does not clarify which route they took to Gümüşhane, where they arrived before July 5, 1736. On this date, Mūsā sent a letter to his friend Yūsuf from Gümüşhane. From a handwritten register of the church of Saint George in Gümüşhane, we learn that a *sakkos* was dedicated to this church in 1737 by Sylvester, patriarch of Antioch.[21] Ţipău suggests that the patriarch arrived in Gümüşhane on December 24, 1736, and stayed until the end of July 1737.[22] It was on July 17, 1737, that he ordained Makarios as bishop of Chaldia in the church of the village of Karmut in the province of Gümüşhane. Two bishops officiated alongside the patriarch; these were Azarias, bishop of Theodosioupolis, and Sylvester of Methone.[23]

On August 21, Yūsuf sent a letter to Trebizond, and Mūsā replied from Erzurum on October 17. Yūsuf delayed his response until June 1738, when he sent his reply to

17 Makarios ibn al-Zaʿīm recounts that when he became bishop of Aleppo, there was no bishop for Erzurum, Akin, Arztkan, Çemişkezek, al-Likh, and the surrounding villages. According to him, about five hundred Christian families still lived there, spread across a large area. For example, twenty families still resided in Cemişkezek. He visited them and appointed Dawūd as their bishop, who spoke their language, predominantly Armenian. See Nasrallah, *Catalogue des manuscrits*, III, p. 321. His successors took equal care of this bishopric.

18 The journey to Erzurum that Mīkhāʾīl Brayk dates to 1730 could actually be from an earlier trip, because Brayk says Sylvester passed through the city while returning from Wallachia and Constantinople. See Brayk, *Tārīkh al-Shām*, p. 8. See also Rustum, *The Church of the City of God*, p. 146.

19 See Ţipău, *Sylvester of Antioch*, p. 84–85.

20 I was unable to find the source of this information shared on tourist websites online.

21 See E. Papastavrou, N. Vryzidis, "Sacred Patchwork: Patterns of Textile Reuse in Greek Vestments and Liturgical Veils During the Ottoman Era", in I. Jevtić, S. Yalman (eds.), Spolia *Reincarnated: Afterlives of Objects, Materials, and Spaces in Anatolia from Antiquity to the Ottoman Era*, Istanbul, 2019, p. 279–280.

22 See Ţipău, *Sylvester of Antioch*, p. 153–154.

23 *Ibidem*, p. 159. Makarios is mentioned in Letter 54 as residing at the Monastery of Saint Spyridon in Bucharest.

his friend in Erzurum.[24] This delay was probably caused by information from Mūsā to his friend, indicating that he would be away from Erzurum for some time. In fact, we know from another document that the patriarch and his companions visited Diyarbakır in 1739, where they likely also appointed a bishop.[25]

That same year, the patriarch signed an inauguration document with the bishop of Trebizond and the bishop of Chaldia, establishing the bishopric of Akhaltzikhe in Georgia. This new institution was located in the same area as the mines of Ahtala and Alaverdi.[26] The patriarch spent Christmas that year in Gümüşhane.[27]

From other documents, we learn about the different places the patriarch and his secretary visited during this trip. On February 1, 1739, Sylvester was in Caesarea of Cappadocia, where he signed a *homologia* to certify that Hatzi Spandonakis of Constantinople had lent him 1,400 groschen. He also sent letters to Gregory II Ghikas, to the metropolitan of Ungro-Wallachia, and to Metropolitan Ioannikios of Stavroupolis.[28] No doubt Mūsā was with the patriarch there. On August 19, 1739, toward the end of this first journey, Mūsā was in Ḥamā, where he received a new letter from Yūsuf (Letter 40).

During this trip, Mūsā seems to have consistently sent letters to Sophronios, but received no replies from him. From Letters 13 and 14, we learn that Mūsā only heard back from Sophronios again around August 1739. Most likely, this was after he had returned to Damascus.

Soon, a new journey started, and in 1740, Mūsā spent at least five months, from February to July, with Patriarch Sylvester in Beirut and its surroundings (Letters 41–46). During this trip, they visited Ḥāṣbayyā and Marj'yūn (Letter 15). Sylvester was trying to rally the Emirs against his rival Cyril Ṭanās, who was hiding in the region under their control, in a place where Ottoman authorities could not reach him. This trip is documented in two letters addressed to Milḥim al-Shihābī (1732–1753), emir of

24 The document presented by Ţipău, dated November 1, 1737, attests that Sylvester was in Trebizond, from where he sent a written ὁμολογία to Sinior Lukakis. This might mean that the patriarch traveled back and forth to Trebizond. See Ţipău, *Sylvester of Antioch*, p. 85–86.

25 Çolak states that three years after 1736, Sylvester appointed a bishop (or bishops) for the kazas of Diyarbakır, Çemişkezek, Ergani, Keban, and their dependencies. See Çolak, *Relations*, 208.

26 See A. Ballian, *Relics of the Past. Treasures of the Greek Orthodox Church and the Population Exchange. The Benaki Museum Collections*, 2011, p. 112.

27 See Ţipău, *Sylvester of Antioch*, p. 151. Ţipău assumes that Sylvester spent two Christmases (1735 and 1737) in Gümüşhane. This does not seem plausible, as on December 27, 1735, he was leaving Latakia for Cyprus, as mentioned above, based on Ţipău's documentation. We believe both documents refer to the same year, 1737.

28 See Ţipău, *Sylvester of Antioch*, p. 86.

Mount Lebanon and Najm, emir of Ḥāṣbayyā, sent in 1741 and preserved in MS Ḥarīṣā 210. The style of the two letters suggests that Mūsā wrote them.[29]

Returning to Damascus, Mūsā appears to have been engaged in copying manuscripts. In April 1742, he finished a copy of Basil the Great's *Commentary on the Hexaemeron*.[30] That same year, although the exact date is unknown, he also copied the Psalms.[31]

In May of that year, Mūsā's uncle, Ḥannā Fakhr, passed away (Letter 18). On this occasion, Mūsā appears to have attended the funeral in Tripoli, and on his way back, he spent some time in Beirut either in June or July (Letter 19).

Before April 1743, he got married and decided to settle in Damascus (Letter 20). Unfortunately, during this time, Damascus experienced a severe outbreak of the plague, which was unfavorable for the newly married couple. Soon after, Sylvester believed it was wise to avoid staying in Damascus and depart for regions less affected by the disease. The plague caused the death of two priests in Damascus, and Mūsā was motivated to leave, as he informed Yūsuf in a lost letter to which we have the answer of the latter (Letter 10). Mūsā probably wanted to move along with his wife to Tripoli, his home city; however, he answered the call and joined the patriarch for another trip to Constantinople. As explained in Letter 10, Yūsuf Mark was initially scheduled to accompany the patriarch. However, he later declined, citing concerns about the risk of illness in colder regions. Since Sylvester planned to establish a printing press, he required a grammarian of the caliber of Mūsā or Yūsuf. When Yūsuf declined, Mūsā accompanied Sylvester. Subsequently, around December, Mūsā also departed Damascus and joined the patriarch in Aleppo (Letter 10).[32] From there, the patriarch and his secretary traveled to Constantinople.

It was during this journey that Dīmitrī Ṣabbāgh sent a letter to Constantinople, as mentioned in Letter 31. Not many details are known about his stay there. He

29 See Appendix 3.

30 We were unable to identify Mūsā's copy. This information comes from the MS Damascus, Greek Orthodox Patriarchate 179 (1827), a copy by Yūsuf ibn Mīkhā'īl Zrayq from Mūsā ibn Jirjis al-Naḥū's copy. Mūsā's copy might have burned in the 1860 fire. For the fire of al-Maryamīya, see L.T. Fawaz, *An Occasion for War: Civil Conflict in Lebanon and Damascus in 1860*, Berkeley/Los Angeles, 1994, p. 87. Regarding the stolen and retrieved books, we read in MS Damascus, Greek Orthodox Patiarchate 12: "The priest Yūḥannā al-Ṭawā bought it with his own money, after it was stolen, and found it in the village of Mnīn [near Ṣaydnāyā]. In the crafts and maneuvers, we paid a price of 200 ghurush, as the price set was unusually high in 1863".

31 See al-Ma'lūf, *Tārīkh al-usar*, p. 139. Al-Ma'lūf does not specify the location of this manuscript, and we were unable to identify it.

32 It appears that Mūsā did not have the letter dated December 1743 before his departure. As a result, he did not include it in his collection, yet a subsequent copyist appended it.

likely examined the 16 books printed by Müteferrika between 1729 and 1742.[33] He became particularly interested in the Turkish Ottoman version of Judasz Tadeusz Krusiński's *Tārīkh al-suyyāḥ*, published by Ibrahim Müteferrika in Constantinople in 1729.[34] Being fluent in that language, as we will see below, he later translated this book into Arabic.

We have no information on whether Mūsā traveled further with the patriarch to Edirne, Iaşi, and back to Constantinople.

In any case, he was back in Damascus before September 28, 1746, when he signed the report sent to the patriarch of Constantinople regarding the conflict that arose between Sylvester's newly appointed vicar, Nicephorus, and the previous lay representative Mīkhā'īl (see Figure 14).[35] As the report indicates, the Holy Synod had sent another *wakīl*, Nicephorus, at Sylvester's request.[36] Mīkhā'īl did not seem to recognize the new *wakīl* and hid the *berat* and its duplicate sent to him. At the end of the report, we find the name of Mūsā (Μωησής γραμματεύς τοῦ Ἀντιοχείας) as one of the signatories. We believe that this is Mūsā Ṭrābulsī.[37] Taking advantage of the presence of another Nawfal, Buṭrus, Mūsā's brother, Sylvester could have sent his secretary to report to him about the *wakīl*, and address the rising conflict.

Soon after, Mīkhā'īl was compelled to leave Damascus. On August 11, 1747, he met Sophronios, a mutual friend of his and Mūsā's. Likely intending to ease the tensions that had previously arisen with Mūsā and Nicephorus, he praised both in these words: "and our dear friend al-Ḥājj Mīkhā'īl Tūmā, who, from the moment we met him, has continuously sung your praises and commended your service to the Apostolic See. According to him, without your support, the burdens of the vicar in Damascus [Nicephorus] would have multiplied". In a separate letter addressed to Nicephorus, Sophronios informed him about the struggles Mīkhā'īl was going through at the hands of the Latins for Orthodoxy, probably aiming to restore good relations with the religious authorities and maintain a positive image.

Other facts support this timeline. Mūsā must have arrived in Damascus before Yūsuf undertook his journey because, in a letter sent from Bucharest in November 1747, shortly after his arrival, Yūsuf mentions having sent two letters to Mūsā, presumably in Damascus, en route: one from Aleppo and the other from Constantinople. Moreover, after this date, Mūsā would again begin receiving letters

33 See Sabev, *The Müteferrika Press*, p. 84–146.

34 *Ibidem*, p. 94–98.

35 See MS Ḥarīṣā, Saint Paul 210, f. 52r.

36 See M. Brayk, *Al-ḥaqā'iq al-waḍīya fī tārīkh al-kanīsa al-anṭāqīya al-urthūḏuksīya aw tārīkh al-ābā' baṭārikat Anṭākiya*, ed. by S. Qab'īn, Egypt, 1903 (henceforth Brayk, *Al-ḥaqā'iq al-waḍīya*), p. 66.

37 This event is also reported in the documents of Mīkhā'īl Brayk.

from friends – for example, the one he received from Izmir in April (Letter 31). His friend Dīmitrī Ṣabbāgh complains that some time had passed since Mūsā's return to Damascus, and yet he still had not sent him a letter. When Mūsā returned, Dīmitrī was still in Beirut and had observed that others – both friends and non-friends – had received letters from Mūsā, while he had not.

Around October 5, 1749, both Sylvester and Mūsā sent letters to Sophronios (Letter 64). Sylvester has not yet returned to Damascus, and we do not know whether Mūsā sent the letter as a secretary or as a friend. Sylvester called Sophronios to Damascus to entrust him with his new mission to visit the parishes and preach the Orthodox faith to prevent conversions to Catholicism.

Around that time, the patriarch was also assisted by his deacon Yurghākī, to whom Mūsā copied Germanos Farḥāt's *Baḥth al-maṭālib* in February 1750.[38] Yurghākī may have been secretary from 1750 to 1753, while Mūsā seemed to be managing the establishment of the printing press in Beirut along with Yūsuf Mark. This would explain Yurghākī's need for a book of grammar.

The presence of Mūsā along with Yūsuf Mark in Beirut best explains why they did not correspond during these three years. At the same time, Mūsā may have been managing silk production in Beirut. From Letter 29 we learn that, in 1754, Mūsā had some silk production near Beirut, which Yūsuf was handling. Mūsā likely left in 1753 and promised to meet his friend again for the harvest, presumably in June. It was during the 1754 silk season that the friends planned to meet, but the meeting did not take place. The friends also did not meet the following year when Yūsuf sent the product to his friend and inquired about its quality (Letter 61). In September, Mūsā confirmed the reception of the silk. We can also assume that Mūsā was ensuring the quality of the silk produced in the waqfs under the patriarchate.

38 Again, in this context, the title 'deacon' should be understood as a servant of the church rather than as an ecclesiastical rank. In the correspondence, Yurghākī is mentioned twice as Kyr Yurghākī (post-scriptum of Letter 29 and Letter 35). Interpreting the post-scriptum of the letter, Haddad believes that it is Yūsuf who introduces Mūsā to Yurghākī in 1754. However, as we see in the colophon, Mūsā already knew Yurghākī in 1750. Here is the colophon of MS Khinshāra, Ordre Basilien Choueirite 175 (Figure 12):
وكان الفراغ من نساخته في أواخر شهر اشباط سنة 1750 مسيحية. ونقل عن نسخة مغلوطة غير مقسطة ولا معتدلة وأصلح حسب الممكن وهو برسم كتبية ذي الذات الرضية والصفات المرضية والنفحات الزكية والطلعة البهية الذي لا زالت الأقلام خدامًا بخواطره والاسماع نظامًا لجواهره والطروس سواحل لزواخره بدر أفق السعادة نور روض المجادة، ناسج برود العقل بوشائح الأدب، نسج السندس بالذهب، مازج حكمة اليونان بفصاحة العرب مزج القند بالضرب، ذو الفضل النامي والقدس السامي، الشماس يورغاكي ابن أخي السيد البطريرك كيريو كير سيلبسترس الانطاكي الكلي الغبطة ونمقه بيده العبد المفتقر إلى ربه أسير وصمة ذنبه موسى بن جرجس بن ميخايل ابن أبي نوفل المعروف بابن النحو الطرابلسي الأرثوذكسي الكاتب يومئذ بقلاية البطركية بمدينة دمشق المحمية أحسن الله إليه وغفر له ولوالديه في سنة 1163 للهجرة.

From Letters 29 and 57, we learn that the two friends used to exchange other goods that were missing in either Beirut or Damascus. In 1754, Mūsā sent him a silk fabric (*kramsūtīyah*), likely made from the silk Yūsuf had sent. Perhaps Mūsā did not want his friend to pay for it, but Yūsuf insisted on paying and asked again about its price. He also sent him a pair of towels (Letter 29). Also, Mūsā sent some olives to Yūsuf to eat during Lent, and Yūsuf sent some fish (Letter 57).

In 1758, Mūsā apparently sent a letter to Yūsuf to inform him of his uncle Ilyās Fakhr's death. We believe the response to this letter is the one preserved in MS Greek Orthodox Diocese of Homs 37, f. 17v–18r (Appendix 2). On the same occasion, Mūsā received a letter from his friend Khalīl Ṣabbāgh. In this letter, Ṣabbāgh compares Ilyās to Elijah the prophet, who appointed Elisha as his successor. However, according to Ṣabbāgh, the actual Elijah (Ilyās Fakhr) did not reveal his successor, and he asks God that Mūsā be his successor.

Letter 55 is Mark's response to a letter Mūsā sent to him from Ṣaydnāyā. We date it to after 1748. Some clues about the timing include the fact that Yūsuf Mark was a priest, which suggests that the letter was written after 1743. Mūsā was not in Syria between 1743 and 1746, and therefore, a visit to Ṣaydnāyā is unlikely. Yūsuf Mark received two letters from Mūsā, one after the other, which could not have happened between 1746 and 1748 because Mark complained about not receiving any letters while he was in Bucharest.

There are no records of correspondence between the two men from 1759 to 1764. Therefore, less is known about Mūsā, who remained Sylvester's secretary until the patriarch died in 1766. As mentioned earlier, during this period, Sylvester was busy renovating the parishes, particularly after the heavy earthquake that struck Lebanon and Syria, especially in Damascus and Homs. We believe Mūsā spent his free time in Damascus copying manuscripts. We are only aware of the Book of the Prophecies, copied in August 1762, which was preserved at the School of Three Hierarchs in Beirut.[39]

In late March 1766, Mūsā sent a letter written in Ottoman Turkish to Samuel, patriarch of Constantinople, informing him of the death of his master Sylvester. Samuel, who received the letter in late April, replied by announcing that Philemon, formerly bishop of Aleppo, had been appointed patriarch of Antioch and encouraged Mūsā to serve as secretary to the new patriarch. Whether Mūsā accepted remains uncertain, as Philemon's patriarchate was brief (1766–1767) and our collection does not include any correspondence from this period.

39 See Nasrallah, *Catalogue des manuscrits du Liban*, III, p. 277.

The collection does not include any letters from the first decade of Daniel of Chios's long patriarchate (1767–1791) before the conflict that arose between the patriarch and the Damascenes in 1776. When tensions with Daniel escalated, Mūsā wrote a letter to his friend Sophronios, then patriarch of Constantinople, explaining the nature of the conflict and seeking his intervention. In this context, our collection contains three letters by Athanasios al-Dimashqī Mukhalla', although these offer little insight into the specific reasons for the tensions.[40] However, Mīkhā'īl Brayk offers a clearer picture.[41] He states that the main grievance against the patriarch was his practice of lending money at interest, which earned him a reputation as a usurious patriarch. According to Brayk, this provoked a prolonged crisis: for two years, the Damascenes held assemblies, exchanged letters, and quarreled among themselves to the point that no two could agree on a single course of action. Ultimately, Sophronios intervened by sending letters and proclamations, urging reconciliation. His mediation secured a settlement that was acceptable to both sides, thereby restoring peace and mutual understanding. This peace seems to have lasted until the end of Daniel's patriarchate. In the letter from Athanasios dated 1787, he speaks positively of Patriarch Daniel and laments that at an old age, he must endure travels.

Mūsā's participation in the event shows his engagement with ecclesiastical circles during this period, although probably not as a secretary. Additionally, in 1774, when he compiled a collection of specimens for use in ecclesiastical correspondence, he was probably training a young secretary. During this time, he copied and gifted manuscripts. In 1769, he copied the Horologion preserved in MS Joun, Saint Sauveur 1143.[42] According to al-Ma'lūf, Mūsā's name appears in three other manuscripts. In 1772, he offered a manuscript containing the Letter of Cassianus of Rome, *Al-'ashā' al-rabbānī* of Eustratios Argentis, translated by Mas'ad Nashū, and

40 We examine these letters in the section dedicated to Athanasios, see below Ch. 1.2.4.

41 See Brayk, *Tārīkh al-Shām*, p. 107-108.

42 كان الفراغ من نساخة هذه السواعي المبارك نهار الاربعا خامس شهر اب سنه تسع وستين وسبعمايه بعد الالف للتجسد الإلهي الموافق لثلثة عشر خلن من ربيع الثانى لسنة ثلث وثمانين ومايه والف للهجرة العربية سنة 7277 لادم سنة 1769 مسيحية 1183 ونمقها بيده الفانيه من فاق <>اه اللص والعشار والزانية العبد الاثيم <...> موسى بن جرجس نوفل النحوي الطرابلسي <القا>طن يوميذ بمدينة دمشق الشام وكاتب <الكرسـ>ي الرسولي الانطاكي ويسال كل من <يقع> على هذه السطور الحقيره بان يدعوا<له> ويذكره بالرحمة والغفران والعفو <>ن من الرحيم الرحمن لانه على كل <شي قد>ير وبالاجابة جدير واليه الماءب <...> فهو حسبنا ونعم الوكيل (Fig. 9).

the correspondence of Ilyās Fakhr and Sherman to the Monastery of Saint Thekla Ma'lūlā.[43] In 1782, he copied the *Book of the Divine Liturgies*.[44]

In Letter 33, Athanasios confirmed the position Mūsā still held among the Damascenes in 1777, in his words, "[May the Lord] keep you for many years as an honor for the holy Antiochian throne and a guiding light for the Orthodox people, my blessed brothers and sisters".

Mūsā died after receiving in 1787 the letter from Athanasios mentioned previously, and before 1791, when Niqūlā Zrayb bought his copy of Yūsuf Mark's *Durūr wa jalā' li-fāqidī nūr al-'alā' bi-al-radd 'alā yūsuf Bābīlā,* copied in 1769 and preserved in the Greek Catholic Archbishopric in Baalbek (n. 30).[45]

Although there are no direct records of Mūsā Ṭrābulsī's formal education, his correspondence and literary work show a man deeply immersed in Arabic language and religious literature, influenced by the scholarly traditions of the Nawfal family. Several of his brothers participated in the intellectual and scribal arts, including Mīkhā'īl, who copied biblical texts and left reading notes in Latin script, and Nawfal al-Ṭabīb, who copied scientific texts such as *Majmū' al-ḥikma,* which covers medicinal recipes. Buṭrus, another brother, was active in teaching Arabic language to children while accompanying Patriarch Sylvester in Wallachia. Such family involvement suggests a household where education, particularly in Arabic and religious disciplines, was valued and cultivated.

Mūsā's personal literary preferences are clearly evident in the letters he received from his close friend Yūsuf Mark. Among the classical Arabic texts he asked Yūsuf to copy were grammatical and literary works by al-Ḥarīrī (d. 516/1122),

43 On Eustratios Argentis, see K. Ware, *Eustratios Argenti: A Study of the Greek Church under Turkish Rule*, Oxford, 1964; on Mas'ad Nashū, see Nasrallah, Haddad, *HMLÉM* IV.2, p. 219–223; for the endowment of the manuscript, see al-Ma'lūf, *Tārīkh al-usar*, p. 139. The Monastery currently has a collection of over 100 rare books, including both printed and manuscript items. The Saint Joseph Center – Balamand has digitized fifty of these. We were unable to identify the manuscript mentioned here among them. Fortunately, when al-Ma'lūf visited the Monastery, he took a photo of the dedication note that he later sent to 'Abd Allāh Ḥabīb Nawfal, who published its text in *Tarājim 'ulamā' Ṭrāblus wa-udabā'ihā*, p. 40.
اوقف هذا الكتاب المبارك المتضمن رسالة أبينا الجليل في العلماء الأفاضل كاسيانوس الروماني وبعض فصول من تأليف العالم العلامة أوسطراتيوس الصاقزي في العشاء الرباني وبعض مجادلات جرت بين الشماس الياس فخر لوغاثاتي الكرسي الانطاكي وأحد علماء الانكليز، العبد الفقير المسيء موسى بن جرجس نوفل النحوي الطرابلسي وقفًا مؤبدًا وحبسًا مخلدًا على دير القديسة اول الشهيدات ثقلا البتول في قرية معلولا في زمن رئاسة الأب الفاضل كريم الشمائل الخوري مخائيل الجزيل بره وذلك في سنة اثنين وسبعين وسبعمائة وألف للتجسد الالهي الموافق آخر شهر ربيع ثاني سنة ست وثمانين ومائة وألف هجرية عن روحه وروح والديه جرجس ومريم رحمهما الله تعالى.

44 See al-Ma'lūf, *Tārīkh al-usar*, p. 140. Unfortunately, al-Ma'lūf does not indicate the source of this information.

45 See Nasrallah, *Catalogue des manuscrits*, III, p. 20–21.

notably *Mulḥat al-iʿrāb*, a didactic poem about Arabic grammar, and possibly *Maqāmāt*, which was popular in the Christian Arabic intellectual circles. His engagement with these works underlines not only his dedication to mastering Arabic grammar and style but also his intent to preserve and transmit these classical forms within the Arabic-speaking Orthodox community. Such efforts were not just literary; they played a polemical and pedagogical role, as Mūsā and his peers sought to refine Orthodox apologetics and liturgy in good Arabic, free from linguistic mistakes, a concern they often discussed in their letters (e.g., Letter 71).

In addition to his Arabic training, Mūsā had a strong command of Ottoman Turkish. Three key pieces of evidence support this. First, after his stay in Constantinople in the mid-1740s, he translated the Ottoman Turkish version of Judasz Tadeusz Krusiński's *Tārīkh al-suyyāḥ* into Arabic, initially published by Ibrahim Müteferrika in 1729. This interest in translating a historical work not only reveals Mūsā's fluency in Ottoman Turkish but also his ability to understand and convey complex material from Turkish into Arabic. Second, in one of their exchanges, Yūsuf Mark explicitly asked Mūsā to include Ottoman Turkish equivalents in his Arabic grammar manual (Letter 51) – an acknowledgement of Mūsā's proficiency in both languages and his role in creating bilingual teaching materials. Finally, he addressed in 1766 a letter to Samuel, patriarch of Constantinople, in this language (Letter 67).

These details indicate that Mūsā's education was deeply rooted in Arabic religious and grammatical traditions. However, it also remained adaptable and multilingual, allowing him to serve the Antiochian Patriarchate as both secretary and grammarian. His training was not purely scholastic in a monastic sense, but rather practical, hands-on, and intellectually driven, enriched through correspondence, manuscript copying, translation, and polemical writing. Yūsuf Mark's request highlights the increasing importance of bilingual tools for Christian students navigating a multilingual Ottoman environment. At the same time, Mūsā's ability shows the sociocultural adaptability needed for a lay intellectual working across ecclesiastical, educational, and imperial spheres.

1.1.1.2 Mūsā Ṭrābulsī's Works

Mūsā, along with his uncle Ilyās and his friends Sophronios and Yūsuf Mark, was involved in writing, translating, proofreading, and copying books with polemical content, especially against Catholics. They were entrusted with this task because of their knowledge of the Arabic language, which enabled them to produce accurate copies free of mistakes to avoid criticism from learned Catholics like ʿAbd Allāh Zākhir (Letter 71). Mūsā seems to have authored two works, although neither explicitly mentions him. These are *Risāla ʿabqarīya*, addressed to Yuwākīm Muṭrān

in 1744, and *Ba'd dībājāt wa murāsalāt li-ajl manfa'at ṭālibīhim*, a collection of specimens for letter writing. He also translated the Ottoman Turkish version of Judasz Tadeusz Krusiński's *Tārīkh al-suyyāḥ* (*The History of the Traveller*) into Arabic.

A *Risāla 'abqarīya*

Yuwākīm Muṭrān, the author of *Ṣaḥīfat al-maḥū li-ṣafḥat Ibn al-Naḥū* (*The Erasure Sheet Against the 'Page' of the Grammarian*), describes his work as a refutation of Ilyās Fakhr's nephew, who was a member of the Banū Nawfal, also known as Banū al-Naḥū. This nephew is undoubtedly Mūsā.[46] The date of composition is noted as the second week of Holy Lent 1744, in Beirut.

In the preface, Yuwākīm Muṭrān noted that Mūsā was not the first to oppose the Latins, likely in Arabic, and that the Catholics had refuted all of their works. Before him, Zākhir challenged the Letter of Gabriel of Philadelphia, the Letters of the Synods of 1723 and 1727, and the Letter of Ilyās Fakhr. The most recent work that Zākhir had not yet refuted is Eustratios Argenti's *On the Last Supper*, presumably in an Arabic translation. This work was translated into Arabic in 1740 and again in 1741/2.[47]

The title that Mūsā gave to his work, partially preserved in the refutation, is: *Risāla 'abqarīya*. Fragments from Mūsā's letter are preserved in the refutation. It seems that Mūsā's work was not very long; consequently, Muṭrān calls it *ṣafḥa*, 'the page'. However, the choice of *ṣafḥa* might have been a stylistic choice to rhyme with *Ṣaḥīfa*. In the central part of the text, when Muṭrān refers to Mūsā's work, he calls it *karrāsa* (quire) and, in one instance, refers to it as a second *karrāsa* in which Mūsā was defending his first paper. In the conclusion, he says that this is the refutation of the second work of Mūsā against him. He calls the first *al-wurayqa al-ūlā*, 'the first short paper'. This might mean that while the first work was one or two pages long, the *ṣafḥa* could have been at least eight pages. It is perhaps in 1742, while staying in Beirut for a short period (Letter 19), that Mūsā met Yuwākīm Muṭrān and had a discussion with him. Later, Muṭrān sent him a letter to which Mūsā replied.

46 'Īsā Iskandar al-Ma'lūf had two copies of the work in his collection. These were call numbers 1213 and 1967. The MS 1967 is currently preserved at the American University of Beirut under call number 230 M99. Unfortunately, the location of MS 1213 is unknown. However, a note by al-Ma'lūf on page 4 of MS 1967 suggests that the refutation is addressed to an author from the Nawfal family known as Banū al-Naḥū, nephew of Ilyās Fakhr. This information appears in MS 1213. Since the location of the manuscript is not known to the present author, the reliability of al-Ma'lūf's account in this regard is accepted.

47 See below, Ch. 1.1.2.

B *Baʿd dībājāt wa murāsalāt li-ajl manfaʿat ṭālibīhim*

As a secretary, Mūsā gathered a variety of greeting formulas and forms, mainly from the correspondence he sent and received, to serve as an introduction to this art. He referred to it as *Baʿd dībājāt wa murāsalāt li-ajl manfaʿat ṭālibīhim* (*Some Ornate Introductions and Correspondences for the Benefit of Those Who Seek Them*). This collection is preserved anonymously in two manuscripts: Joun, Saint Sauveur 1517 (1774) and Greek Orthodox Diocese of Homs 37.[48] The manuscript of Homs is a copy of the one in Joun. This is evident because the copyist Jirjis ibn Niʿmat Allāh Ilyān (1814), arriving at the end, distracted, copied partially the original colophon where the name Mūsā ibn Jirjis Nawfal ibn al-Naḥū al-Ṭrābulsī is provided (folio 72r).

Although the author remains anonymous, there is substantial evidence pointing to his identity. First, we consider the context in which it is kept. As mentioned, the manuscript contains two works. Along with the first work, *Baʿd dībājāt*, which we are considering to establish Mūsā's authorship, there is a second one, *Manāhij al-tawassul fī mabāhij al-tarassul* of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Bisṭāmī. Bisṭāmī's is a manual on epistolography. We cannot be sure that Mūsā used Bisṭāmī's specimens, as his letters to Yūsuf Mark and Sophonios are not preserved. However, as the correspondence shows, Yūsuf Mark uses it frequently. Therefore, Mūsā's interest in this work could be interpreted as either to use it himself as a specimen or to verify how his correspondents are using it. In addition to these initial hints, there is textual evidence. Some of the *dībājāt* are copied from letters that are preserved in the collection of letters we are editing. These are the indicated passages in Letters 20, 44, 45, and 72.

C Judasz Tadeusz Krusiński's *Tārīkh al-suyyāḥ*

One of Mūsā Ṭrābulsī's most notable achievements is his Arabic translation of the Ottoman Turkish version of Judasz Tadeusz Krusiński's *Tārīkh al-suyyāḥ*. This work traveled through multiple languages and empires before reaching Mūsā. The original was written in Latin by the Polish Jesuit Krusiński (1675–1756), who spent nearly two decades in Safavid Iran as an interpreter and diplomat. A witness to the fall of the Safavid state and the Afghan occupation of Isfahan in 1722, Krusiński documented these events, aiming to inform European audiences about the shifting geopolitical landscape of the East.

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48 I came across the information about the manuscript of Joun in an unpublished handlist dated 10-10-2012. I am grateful to Fr. Makarios Haydamous, library curator of the Monastery, who shared with me the photos of folios 43v–45r, where we can read the colophon:
تم الكتاب والله المهدي للصواب وعلقه بيده الفانيه العبد المفتقر الى ربه اسير وصمه ذنبه موسى بن جرجس نوفل النحوي الطرابلسي الأرثوذكسي ويسال من يتامل في هذا الكتاب وينظر اليه ان يترحم عليه ويدعو له بالغفران ولوالديه ولكافة المسيحيين لانه سبحانه جلت الاوه وتقدست اسماوه ارحم الراحمين في سنة 1774 مسيحية الموافق سنة 1187 عربيه في اشباط.

This Latin text was soon translated into Ottoman Turkish and printed in Istanbul in 1729 by the pioneering printer Ibrahim Müteferrika under the title *Tārīkh-i seyyāḥ der beyān-i zuhūr-i Afgānīyān ve sebeb-i inḥiṭāṭ-i Bānī-i devlāt-i Ṣafawīyān*. It was the third book printed in Müteferrika's press. It was intended to provide an instructive mirror for Ottoman leaders during a time of reform and reflection on the empire's fragility. The translation gained widespread recognition in Ottoman literary and bureaucratic circles, and it was likely during his stay in Constantinople (ca. 1745–1747) that Mūsā had access to the printed version.

The Arabic version produced by Mūsā, preserved under the title *Mir'āt al-'ibra fī 'ajā'ib al-qudra* (*Mirror of Reflection on the Marvels of Divine Power*), is found in a unique manuscript now held at the Egyptian National Library and Archives in Cairo. There are two photographic copies of this manuscript kept at the American University of Beirut and the Library of the Arab League.[49] Mūsā clearly refers to the Müteferrika print edition, stating that the work was translated "from the Ottoman tongue" and praising its clarity and historical breadth. His translation, though faithful in structure, reflects his stylistic preferences and rhetorical flair.

What makes this translation particularly notable is that it falls outside the main religious or polemical agenda of Mūsā's works. Unlike his *Saḥīfa 'abqarīya* or his linguistic collections, this translation reflects a broader intellectual curiosity and engagement with contemporary history. It places Mūsā within a larger trend of Arab Christian speakers absorbing and sharing knowledge from Turkish and European sources. His decision to translate such a politically sensitive and diplomatically informed narrative also indicates his awareness of the Ottoman Empire's complex relationship with Iran, as well as his understanding of the importance of informing Arab Christian elites about regional affairs.

Stylistically, Mūsā's Arabic is rich, yet balanced. He avoids the elaborate *saj'* often seen in church-related letters, opting instead for clarity. The title he chose for the work, *Mir'āt al-'ibra fī 'ajā'ib al-qudra*, aligns with his rhetorical instincts and religious worldview, framing the fall of dynasties and empire upheavals within a divine context. The very idea of *'ibra* (reflection or moral lesson) evokes a spiritual tone, emphasizing the tendency to present historical events as spiritual lessons.

In summary, Mūsā Ṭrābulsī's Arabic translation of *Tārīkh al-suyyāḥ* provides insight into the trans-imperial and multilingual nature of 18th-century Arab Christian intellectual life. It showcases his engagement with Ottoman print culture, his proficiency in Turkish and Arabic, and his involvement in the cross-cultural exchange of historical knowledge across linguistic, religious, and political boundaries.

49 See Al-Mṭīrī, *Kitāb "Mir'āt al-'ibra"*, p. ي (introduction).

1.1.2 Sophronios of Kilis

1.1.2.1 Sophronios of Kilis's Biography

Sophronios ibn ʿĪsa al-Kilzī signs as secretary and deacon to Patriarch Sylvester of Antioch in his Arabic translation of the letter of Meletius, the former bishop of Heraclea.[50] In the same manuscript, this translation is followed by another text concerning the *Sayings of the Pharisees against Jesus in the Synagogue*, where he signs as "Sophronios the deacon ibn ʿĪsa al-Kilzī" and notes that he translated it in Bucharest on June 20, 1730.[51]

This tells us that Sophronios originates from the city of Kilis in southeastern Turkey, near the Syrian border. His father's name was ʿĪsa. The title "deacon" in this context likely refers to his role as a servant of the Church, specifically his function as secretary of the Patriarch, rather than indicating a specific ecclesiastical rank, even though the ecclesiastical function should not be excluded.[52] To distinguish the two roles, the ecclesiastical rank might be referred to as *shammās injīlī*.

Sophronios's exact birthdate is unknown but he likely became a priest around the canonical age of 30, sometime between August 1740 (when he is still referred to as a deacon in Letter 14) and March 1741 (when he is referred to as a priest in Letter 15). Having accompanied Patriarch Sylvester as a secretary during his first trip to Greece and the Romanian Principalities between 1725 and 1732, it might be inferred that he was around 20 years old when the journey started. We understand his reference to his illness as related to age in the letter dated 1749 as exaggerated and poetic. He could have been in his forties. Therefore, we suggest he was born shortly before 1710, probably around 1705. He died while patriarch of Constantinople on October 19, 1780, at around 75 years old.

Before June 20, 1730, when he was in Bucharest, as mentioned earlier, there is no biographical information about Sophronios, unless it can be inferred that he, as a deacon and secretary of Sylvester, visited the places the patriarch visited, such as Ioannina in February of that year.[53] Consequently, the exact details of his education remain uncertain. However, we believe that Sophronios had a solid command of

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50 See MS Khinshāra, Ordre Basilien Choueirite 569, f. 230v. Referring to this manuscript under call number Shuwair 148 (12), Nasrallah indicates the name of the father of Sophronios and that he was secretary of Sylvester. See Nasrallah, Haddad, *HMLEM* IV.2, p. 95.

51 See MS Khinshāra, Ordre Basilien Choueirite 569, f. 232r.

52 This information is also preserved in a marginal note of the preface of his book *Jalā' al-abṣār min ghishā' al-akdār* in MS Bibliothèque orientale Ar. 954, f. 2v, 956, f. 3v and MS Balamand, Monastery of Our Lady 171, f. 1v.

واما منشأه فكان محروسة كلس وفي ابتدايه كان شماسًا لكير سيلبسترس البطريرك الانطاكي

53 For the date of this visit, see Ţipău, *Sylvester of Antioch*, p. 78.

the Arabic language. This is clearly demonstrated by his stylistic ability to express his ideas visually, as shown by his letters written to Mūsā on topics like friendship and longing for a friend.

Furthermore, Haddad suggested that Sophronios was familiar with Ottoman Turkish, considering that Kilis was part of a multicultural environment influenced by Arab and Turkish cultures, and that he begins one of his letters with an Ottoman Turkish poem (Letter 3). He shows at least some knowledge of Ottoman Turkish, as evidenced in the collection of letters we are publishing, which explains why he was chosen as secretary by Sylvester.

Moreover, we believe there is another reason for his appointment. It can be hypothesized that Sophronios was in Athanasios Dabbās's circles. Supporting evidence is a saying of Dabbās, presumably from oral witness, that Sophronios heard and related in his work *Midrār sayl al-maṭar fī ṭafī nār al-maṭhar*.[54]

It can be inferred that Sophronios learned Greek grammar while in the Romanian Principalities, at the request of the patriarch. A similar situation was observed in the case of Yūsuf Mark during his visit to Bucharest in 1747, when Sylvester instructed him to study Greek grammar at school (Letter 28).

It is likely that these early lessons inspired Sophronios to pursue formal training in Classical Greek, a skill he aimed to acquire after returning to Syria in 1732 (Letter 7).

It appears that Sophronios returned to Damascus from the Romanian Principalities in October 1732 with Patriarch Sylvester. He resigned from his position as secretary, in favor of Mūsā Ṭrābulsī, and left, presumably to rest in a monastery and deepen his knowledge of Greek. On November 30, he was in Tripoli, where he composed a letter to Sylvester, requesting his prayers to aid his study of Greek literature (Letter 7). The purpose of this letter is unclear; it is uncertain whether Sophronios was informing the patriarch of his arrival in Tripoli or requesting his blessing to depart from the Antiochian lands to pursue his Greek classical studies. The motivations behind his visit to Tripoli remain unclear, as does the timing of his encounter with Kyr Iakobos of Patmos. Reading Letter 3, one becomes uncertain if Sophronios met the master during his visit to Tripoli or if this only happened on a later date (May 1733!). However, it is conceivable that Sophronios intended to meet Iakobos and hand him the amount of 130 piastres (γρόσια) he requested, as documented by Sylvester when tracking the school expenses from July 1728 to October

54 See MS Bibliothèque orientale Ar. 957, f. 64r–65r.
وذلك، أنّ الأب الجليل أثاناسيوس بطريرك مدينة الله العظمى أنطاكية، لمّا سُئل عن هذه القضيّة، أي عن حالة أنفس الخطأة والصدّيقين بعد الموت، قبل القيامة، أين هي؟ فأجاب قائلًا هكذا: أنّ ولا واحدًا قط من الآباء والمعلّمين، قال قولًا واضحًا لنا بتدقيق من أجل هذا الأمر، بل أنّنا قد تعلّمنا من الأقوال الإلهيّة السّنّديّة، المُقالة من ربّنا يسوع المسيح، بأنّ أنفس الصدّيقين، مع نفس اللّص الصدّيق، هي في الفردوس [...].

1732. Additionally, Sylvester says that Iakobos expressed his desire to return to his homeland and receive an allowance of 1,200 piastres.[55]

In the title Mūsā gives to Letter 5, he mentions the departure (*khurūj*) of Sophronios from Damascus in 1733, while in Letter 3, Sophronios states that on the sixth day after his departure (*khurūjī*) from Damascus on Thursday, May 8, he changed (*istabdal*) Damascus for Tripoli. This letter contains important information about the route Sophronios took to reach Tripoli and the length of the journey. He notes that the weather was stormy from Damascus to Baalbek, which was unusual for May, and Sophronios considered it to be divine retribution for his sins. Passing through Baalbek means he took the road toward Homs, and from there to Tripoli, unless there were shortcuts through the mountains that we are unaware of.[56] In total, it took six days to reach Tripoli.

In Letter 3, Sophronios reveals his intention to stay in Tripoli until he finds a ship bound for Cyprus or Constantinople, and then to other unspecified places left to the divine will. Subsequently, Sophronios may have submitted a request to travel abroad, possibly to Patmos with the master to attend a Greek school, to which Sylvester appears to have responded by summoning Sophronios to Damascus. There, the patriarch blessed him before he returned to Tripoli. There, Sophronios (and Iakobos!) worked to find a ship.

However, the ship was late and, during his stay in Tripoli, the plans seemed to have changed. Sophronios appears to be again involved in the affairs of the patriarchate. It is probable that because of the lack of maritime travel, the issue of the master's departure was revisited, and he remained in Tripoli for an additional year and four months before the school was relocated to Damascus because of the plague of February 1734. Sophronios gained significant intellectual stimulation from the master's teachings, becoming a disciple of Kyr Iakobos, likely motivated by the opportunity to further his education in the field of Greek literature. During his time in Tripoli, and likely as a consequence of his encounter with the master, Sophronios translated a pedagogical treatise from Greek into Arabic, entitled *Tuḥfat al-bayān fī ādāb al-fityān min laṭā'if ba'ḍ 'ulamā' al-Yūnān* (Letter 8).[57] He left this work in the hands of the Metropolitan when he left Tripoli for the next pastoral mission.

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55 See MS Ḥarīṣā, Saint Paul 210, f. 169r: ἐπιστρέφοντός μας ἀπὸ ξενιτείαν τοῦ ἐδώσαμεν ὄντος του ἐν Τριπόλει, γρ. ἑκατὸν τριὰντα […] καί ὅταν ἤθελε μισεύσει εἰς τήν πατρίδα του διὰ τὸν κόπον του γρ. χίλια διακόσια.

56 See the map of سوريه ولايتى (Syrian Province), dated 1913, in the David Rumsey Historical Map Collection, online at https://www.davidrumsey.com/luna/servlet/detail/RUMSEY~8~1~367106~90134370:-Syrian-Province.

57 See MS Damascus, Greek Orthodox Patriarchate 245; Beirut, Bibliothèque orientale Ar. 1402. The title is not provided. The work was identified in Haddad, "La correspondance", p. 261.

In August 1733, Sophronios was assigned a new task, to collect alms from the bishoprics. On August 15, he wrote to Mūsā from Rāshayyā (Lebanon), which is 60 km from Damascus (Letter 1). On August 31, he sent another letter from an unknown location, likely still near Beirut (Letter 2). In this letter, Sophronios told Mūsā that he was waiting for a response to his earlier message. We do not have details about the rest of the mission, but it was probably a short trip, covering only the Mount Lebanon area and Beirut. This can be inferred from Sophronios's words: "I intended to write you many letters, but the scarcity of paper has prevented me from doing so, because I neglected to take with me a sufficient supply for letters. Please forgive me if you can". The plan was likely to deposit the alms in Damascus before heading out on another mission to the northern parts of the patriarchate the following year.

According to the traveler Vassili Grigorovitch-Barski, in February 1734, a plague ravaged Tripoli and worsened daily. At that time, the teacher and the students became uncertain about what to do, and some parted ways, heading in different directions. Hearing about the situation, Sylvester wrote a letter to Iakobos of Patmos, asking him to come to Damascus with the remaining disciples. They were scheduled to arrive at the end of the Great Fast in Damascus. They arrived on the Great Thursday, March 22, and took part in the Washing of the Feet ritual.[58] Barsky says that in Damascus, he made little progress because of the turmoil between the Orthodox and Catholic communities. Along with his colleagues, they were in constant fear, afraid that they might suffer some sudden misfortune. They were hiding daily in the monasteries. This meant the school was hardly functioning, and only one disciple remained in the entire school, while the rest had been driven out. Seeing this, Sylvester sent the Daskalos throughout the Antiochian Patriarchate to preach and to strengthen the Orthodox. Barsky informs us that all these efforts were in vain. As a result, the number of Orthodox declined, while the Catholics multiplied.

The mission Sylvester entrusted to Iakobos allowed the Master and his disciple Sophronios to travel together to Adana via Antioch and Kilis, then return through Antioch and Latakia to Tripoli. On July 16, while they were en route to Adana and still in Antioch, they learned of the death of the deacon Niʿma ibn Dīb Yaʿīsh, and they sent a letter of consolation to his father (Letter 6). This Niʿma ibn Dīb was probably one of Iakobos's disciples.

Iakobos might have had another motivation for this trip; he probably wanted to visit the historic pilgrimage sites of the Patriarchate of Antioch, where he had served for nearly ten years, before leaving. We know from other sources that he

58 See V. Grigorovitch-Barski, *Pérégrinations (1723–1741)*, traduit du russe par Myriam Odayski, Genève, 2019, p. 396.

completed this pilgrimage tour in Jerusalem the same year, and from there he traveled back to Patmos.

Between 1735 and 1739, we lose track of Sophronios. There are three possibilities: First, he visited the Trebizond region with Sylvester and Mūsā briefly, so no correspondence was needed. Second, he joined Iakobos in his pilgrimage to Jerusalem and stayed in a monastery to rest. In several letters, Sophronios expressed the fatigue he endured during his journeys and wished for all of this to end soon, so he could enjoy being retired in a peaceful place. The last possibility is that he is on a visit to Patmos (and Chios?) with his master Iakobos and comes back with him to open the Greek school in Jerusalem.

Around August 1739, he was in Jerusalem, where he received a letter from Mūsā through his uncle, Ilyās Fakhr (Letter 14). Sophronios replied to this letter but never received a response, and decided not to write to Mūsā anymore. It was in August 1740, more than a year later, that, at the courier's request, he agreed to write to him.

This mirrors another issue raised in March 1741. It appears that after deciding to join Iakobos in Jerusalem to establish a school, the plan was poorly received by his old friend Theodosius "the skilled teacher" and by Basil, presumably the Greek secretary of Sylvester. Theodosius "entirely abandoned us, denied our friendship, and raised his eyebrows at us", while in Basil's case, "his letters tell me one thing, but his actions arm against me". In Letter 1, written six years earlier, a deacon Theodosius was travelling with Sophronios, and Kyr Basil was at the patriarchal residence. We believe these are the same people. Very good friends, at the time, Theodosius, who joined Sophronios for the trip, sent greetings to Mūsā and to Kyr Basil, who assisted the patriarch in Damascus. It might mean that Sophronios understood Mūsā's silence in the same way.

We have shown Sophronios's mastery of Arabic and how he combined it with Greek knowledge, after spending several years with Daskalos Iakobos of Patmos. His words in Letter 13, "we have lost the slight proficiency we had in the Arabic language and are incapable of grasping the Greek treasures", should be seen as an expression of modesty. It appears that around 1739 he had a strong command of both languages, which led him to dedicate most of his time to proofreading Arabic texts and translating works from Greek into Arabic.

Between August 1739 and April 1743 (Letters 14 and 20), communication with Mūsā was intermittent. Mūsā occasionally sent letters to Sophronios inquiring about his health and updating him on his travels with the patriarch, and Sophronios replied to them. However, we know from various sources that Sophronios spent his time translating various anti-Latin works, likely influenced by Kyr Iakobos. At the end of June 1739, he finished translating Περὶ τῆς ἀρχῆς τοῦ Πάπα ἀντίρρησεις,

composed in 1671 by Nektarios, patriarch of Jerusalem (1602–1676).[59] He entitled it in Arabic *Kitāb jalā' al-abṣār min ghishā' al-akdār*. The location of the translation work is not specified, but it is undoubtedly Jerusalem.

At the beginning of 1740, he translated an anonymous work against the Purgatorium that he titled in Arabic *Sharḥ yasīr min ba'd 'ulamā' fī bāb nār al-maṭhar al-muḥdath*.[60] Still referring to himself as a deacon in 1740, while staying with his master in Jerusalem, Sophronios translated an abridged catechism written by his master.[61] In 1741 or 1742, he translated the Σύνταγμα κατά αζύμων of Eustratios Argentis.[62] As early as 1740, Mas'ad Nashū had translated into Arabic the same book.[63] A quick comparison reveals that the version Sophronios was translating had been altered in several places. This is likely because Argentis himself made corrections to his Greek text.

As a deacon, though the exact date is unknown, he translated the *In Historiam Melchisedec* (*Hebrews* 7:2–4) of Athanasios of Alexandria.[64] As he states in the colophon, he translated from the second volume of Athanasios's works, which were printed in both Greek and Latin. This is the 1698 edition of Paris.[65]

Latin influence in Acre increased in the early 18th century, mainly because of Euthymius Ṣayfī, bishop of Sidon.[66] According to the traveler Vassili Grigorovitch-Barski, the patriarchs of Jerusalem, Dositheos and Chrysanthos Notaras, were often in conflict with Ṣayfī and had to take measures to prevent the Catholics from annexing Acre to Sidon.[67] As a practical move, Chrysanthos Notaras consecrated

59 See MS Balamand, Monastery of Our Lady 179, p. 9.

60 On the different revisions of this work and its attribution in later version to Nilus of Thessaloniki, see el Gemayel, *Ḥāšiyah Waǧīzah*, p. 153–155.

61 See MS Damascus, Greek Orthodox Patriarchate 213, f. 225v–257r. It was refuted by Zākhir in his work entitled *al-Radd 'alā ta'līm ḏhawī al-infiṣāl wa-al-ṣadd*. It differs from the *Kitāb muqtaṣar al-ta'līm al-masīḥī* included as an opening section in the Psalter of Beirut, printed in 1752.

62 The first part is preserved in MS Vatican, Sbath 245 (1742). In his *Fihris*, Sbath states that this work is preserved in the private collection of the heirs of Constantin Antāki in Aleppo. See Sbath, *Al-Fihris*, II, p. 55 [1557]. Unfortunately, this information cannot be verified since the collection is no longer accessible.

63 Both Arabic translations are earlier than the edition of the Greek text, published in Leipzig in 1760. Mas'ad's translation was published with linguistic corrections in Iaşi in 1747.

64 See MS Greek Orthodox Patriarchate 141 (1810), p. 212b–214. Nasrallah believed that a different Sophronios translated this work because he found it in some manuscripts of *al-Naḥla* by Makarios ibn al-Za'īm (Nasrallah, *HMLEM* IV.1, p. 218). We believe it was included at a later date by copyists.

65 *Sancti patris nostri Athanasii archiep. Alexandrini opera omnia quae extant*, 2, p. 239–241.

66 Euthymius Ṣayfī, bishop of Sidon and uncle of Cyril Ṭanās, promotor of Catholicism in the Antiochian Patriarchate. See Nasrallah, *HMLÉM* IV.1, p. 185–193.

67 See I. Feodorov, "Un observateur orthodoxe de Kiev face à la scission de l'Église Rūm d'Antioche (1726–1735): Vassili Grigorovitch-Barski", in Heyberger, Pasha, el Gemayel (eds.), *La division du patriarcat*, p. 453–454.

Photios ʿAbd al-Nūr as bishop of Acre in 1713.[68] Recently, Photios of Acre has been identified with Photios of Jabal ʿAjlūn (r. 1687) based on a note by his disciple ʿĪsā ibn Shāhīn, preserved in MS Saint Petersburg D 226.[69] If this is correct, Photios was moved from Jabal ʿAjlūn to Acre.

In 1714, Euthymius Ṣayfī and Cyril Ṭanās wrote to Pope Clement XI, recounting the actions taken against them by the Orthodox. To oppose the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, Ṣayfī and Ṭanās sent a second letter to Rome in 1716 claiming that the clergy of Acre had petitioned to leave the jurisdiction of Jerusalem and asking the pope to intervene with the King of France to facilitate this. That same year, Photios wrote a work titled *al-Ifshīn*, which scholars believe to be a treatise on the Epiclesis directed against the Latins.[70]

The exact sequence of events is unclear. However, it seems that the Catholics succeeded neither in installing a pro-Latin bishop in Acre nor in detaching the city from the Patriarchate of Jerusalem. An Orthodox bishop must have existed during the three years of Ṣayfī's tenure (1717–1720). This can also be inferred from Barski's account of his visit to Acre in 1729, where he stated that the bishop of Acre always lived in the episcopal residence. Comparing this with his later account of Baalbek, it is evident that the situation in Acre was different. In Baalbek, the Catholics occasionally gained the upper hand, forcing the bishop to abandon his episcopal residence.

Unfortunately, Barski did not record the name of the bishop of Acre. Therefore, we do not know who the immediate successor of Photius before Sophronios was, if indeed there was one.

By 1738, just before Sophronios's enthronement, the number of Catholics in Acre had reached a peak of 7,526.[71] Sophronios's involvement in anti-Latin literature was well known; he was urged to accept ordination as a priest and bishop to gain an official ecclesiastical rank, which would give him greater power to counter Catholic influence. An official status would allow him to interfere with the rulers, particularly with the ruler of Sidon and the emirs of Mount Lebanon. According to Panchenko (the source is not specified), in 1740, the patriarch of Jerusalem

68 See Nasrallah, Haddad, *HMLÉM* IV.2, p. 201.

69 See P. Ermilov, C. A. Panchenko (†), M. Bernatsky, "Gerasimos Palladas of Alexandria and the Eucharistic Disputes in the Church of Antioch (1701–1702)", in Heyberger, Pasha, el Gemayel (eds.), *La division du patriarcat*, p. 5. We can add another manuscript that preserves a note by the same disciple, MS Balamand, Monastery of Our Lady 105, 486v.

70 See Nasrallah, Haddad, *HMLÉM* IV.2, p. 202.

71 See C. Zwierlein, "The European Merchant Nations and the Economic Dimensions of the 1724 Schism", in Heyberger, Pasha, el Gemayel (eds.), *La division du patriarcat*, p. 180, n. 9.

appointed Sophronios as bishop of Acre. Sophronios requested that his consecration be postponed for a year so that he might complete his studies with the Daskalos.[72]

In March 1741, Sophronios was already a priest (Letter 15), and it is likely that his consecration as bishop occurred in October of the same year (Letter 21).[73] On that occasion, Patriarch Sylvester appears to have sent him a congratulatory letter through a certain Mūsā, who visited him in Ṣaydnāyā. The fact that the patriarch dispatched the letter while still in Ṣaydnāyā, rather than waiting until his return to Damascus, might suggest both the timing of the consecration and the ceremonial importance of the message. In this letter to the patriarch, Sophronios expressed both his deep filial affection and his sense of dependence on Sylvester's prayers and support. He described his new episcopate as one beset by "storms of daily persecution", which he implicitly linked to the broader struggle between the Orthodox and the Latins. The tone of the letter is one of reverence, encouragement, and a request for continued correspondence, revealing how closely Sophronios connected his own precarious position to the authority and moral strength of the patriarch of Antioch.

A second letter, written in January 1742 and addressed to his friend Mūsā Ṭrābulsī, provides a more candid account of the daily struggles Sophronios faced during his first months in Acre. In it, he explains that the delay in his replies was not because of negligence but because he was overwhelmed by "excessive concerns and engagements" since taking on what he describes as a "very troubled bishopric". He details continuous battles – against "hostile outsiders" on one side and "deceitful deviants" on the other. A particularly revealing part is his account on the church in Nazareth, which had fallen into Catholic hands "by money" and was only returned to Orthodox use thanks to Sheikh Ẓāhir al-ʿUmar, who extracted eight sacks of money from the Greeks. Even after this expensive recovery, Sophronios laments that many of the faithful remained loyal to the Latins. He also notes that within two months of becoming bishop, he was unfairly fined five hundred piasters by a local sheikh, allegedly prompted by the Catholic faction.

From another letter, we learn that after the siege of Tiberias, which ended in December 1742, Sophronios visited the nearby villages affected by the conflict, especially those near Acre, offering condolences to the Orthodox Christians for the hardships they faced. Although the diocese's financial situation was terrible,

72 C. Panchenko, *Arab Orthodox Christians under the Ottomans: 1516–1831*, trans. B. Pheiffer Noble and S. Noble, New York, 2016, p. 471.

73 In early 1742, ʿAbd Allāh Zākhir wrote a refutation of Sophronios's catechism and indicated that while the author was still a deacon when he wrote it, he was then a bishop in the eparchy of Jerusalem. See Nasrallah, Haddad, *HMLÉM* IV.2, p. 95.

with its income completely stopped because of plunder, destruction, and village burnings, Sophronios was less concerned about material losses. What troubled him more was the renewed activity of the pro-Latin faction in his diocese, whom he described as having hidden "in dens" during the siege, only to reemerge "like serpents" afterward to continue persecuting the Orthodox faith.

According to a note preserved in MS Ḥamaṭūra, Monastery of Our Lady 8, Sophronios collated the Arabic and Greek texts of the *Qundāq*.[74] This should have happened before 1745, when Sylvester printed the *Qundāq* in Iaşi (Moldavia).[75]

There is no exchange of letters between Sophronios and Mūsā between April 23, 1743, when Sophronios congratulated his friend on his marriage (Letter 20), and August 11, 1747 (Letter 63). In the latter, Sophronios recalls the fact that Mūsā got married and, since that time, never corresponded with him, probably because he was taking care of the family. He also mentions the fact that Mūsā is not the secretary of the patriarch anymore since he left the patriarch, presumably in Constantinople, and settled in Damascus. The correspondence between the two men seems to be disrupted again, until Sylvester, preparing his return to his See, sent him a letter through his friend Mūsā.

However, we know that, between 1744 and 1748, Sophronios was still pursuing his primary task, which was pastoral care, trying to reduce the influence of the Latin. This can be inferred from the MS Cairo, The Franciscan Center of Christian Oriental Studies 170, which has preserved, among others, three polemical texts that can be attributed to Sophronios.[76] Although only the first is attributed clearly to him, scholars have found evidence to attribute them all to Sophronios. The texts come in a sequence (f. 163r–201v) and cover polemical topics, contradicting the Latins. To this, we add the evident proximity of the author of the third letter to Sidon. This letter, written in 1748, is a diatribe against a so-called patriarch who took Dayr al-Mukhalliṣ as See. Among others, this work discusses how the Catholics

74 We believe that this information is trustworthy. The copyist notes in the colophon: "The present copy of the Holy Qundāq was achieved on Saturday, the 3rd of the blessed month of July, by the hand of the copyist Neophytos, by name priest in the robe of a monk in the flourishing Monastery of Balamand. It was collated on the Greek by the Holy and of eternal memory Sophronios, patriarch of Jerusalem, previously in a printed edition, and we copied it as it was edited, without additions or omissions […] in the Christian year 1815". Thus, the attribution of the collation to Sylvester in the Preface of the edition needs to be understood as authoritative. Sylvester states that he revised it with the help of collaborators who knew both languages.

75 While this *Qundāq* is a copy of the version printed in the Romanian Principalities, the information regarding Sophronios can be linked to the *Qundāq* of Beirut printed around 1753. Unfortunately, the Beirut edition is lost and there is no way to verify whether the edition's text was revised again.

76 See el Gemayel, *Ḥāšiyah Waǧīzah*, p. 78.

mistreat their bishops, probably to say that they force the orthodox bishops to leave the bishopric because they have no money to survive. When in 1723 Athanasios Dabbas appointed Ignatius, disciple of Ṣayfī, as bishop, he saw in him a moderate and therefore acceptable Catholic.[77] Probably influenced by Sophronios, Ignatius rejected Catholicism. This can also be reflected in the measures taken by Sylvester in 1743 in the eparchy of Sidon to help the survival of their bishop, Ignatius.[78] He sent a *statikon* obliging the parish to dedicate half of the income to the bishop, and half to the priests, and one piastre from any ceremony for individuals (marriage, funerals, etc.), along with other benefits from different incomes. The author, presumably Sophronios, laments the Catholics' actions against their bishop. We know from other sources that in 1747, a new bishop, Jeremias, was consecrated for Sidon. At the time when the diatribe was written, the new bishop had not yet reached his See, or probably, he had not yet faced the same crisis as his predecessor. By April 1749, Jeremias faced the same situation and abandoned his See, as attested in a letter sent by Sylvester to the Emir Milḥim.[79]

The first letter is, in fact, a treatise composed by Sophronios on the interpretation of the writings of the Fathers. Written at the request of his parishioners, it tackles the problem of patristic passages that seem to contradict Orthodox teaching. Throughout the work, one finds clear traces of his polemic against Catholics. The text is entitled *Sharḥ mukhtaṣar fī irshād wa-dalālat al-qāri' fī annahu kayfa yaqra' kutub al-ābā' al-qiddīsīn*. As for the second text, it is a polemical treatise directed against the doctrine of papal infallibility. Bearing the title *Fī anna kathīrīn min al-bābāwāt akhṭa'ū fī al-īmān al-urthūḏuksī al-qawīm al-ra'y wa-al-b'ḍ minhum ṣārū harāṭiqa*, it seeks to demonstrate that many popes erred in matters of Orthodox faith and that some even fell into heresy. To support his argument, the author marshals historical evidence drawn from the history of the papacy.

In 1750, Sophronios left Acre to assume his new mission in Aleppo. It seems that the Patriarchate of Jerusalem could not find a successor and soon consolidated its position in the city, managing to install a Catholic bishop within ten years. It was in Acre, in 1759, that Yuwākīm Muṭrān composed his work, *Qadḥ zināد fikrī fī daḥḍ ḍalālat Ibn al-Makrī*. In the preface, Muṭrān states that he is refuting a treatise written by an ignorant man who copied passages from another treatise without establishing any connections between them. Around 1760, it seems that the Catholics managed to install the bishop of Ṣaydnāyā, Clement, as bishop of Acre. The monks of Dayr al-Mukhallis supported him. Around 1763, Ignatius Jarbū' was

77 See Rustum, *The Church of the City of God*, p. 139.
78 See MS Ḥarīṣā, Saint Paul 210, f. 159v.
79 *Ibidem*, f. 157v.

proclaimed the canonical bishop of Acre. These events can be inferred from the response to the priest Sābā Baḥūs, dated July 28, 1764.[80] Since then, there has been a long line of Catholic bishops of Acre.

On October 5, 1749, Sylvester sent a letter to Sophronios via Mūsā; he asked him to preach from parish to parish. Sylvester wanted to entrust Sophronios with the same mission that had previously been entrusted to his master, Iakobos. Sophronios was also informed that the bishop of Sidon, presumably Jeremias, would be sent to Aleppo (Letter 64).[81] As previously mentioned, Jeremias was in a precarious situation as he was not accepted by the community in Sidon, primarily because he was Orthodox and Greek. Sylvester was therefore trying to find him a new bishopric in Aleppo to support him. In a letter sent to Ilyās Fakhr in Aleppo in 1750, Sylvester expressed that he had few options regarding the bishopric of this city.[82] Sylvester received permission to retrieve Aleppo for his See, but he had no human or financial resources. The bishop of Latakia was amnesic, and the bishop of Akkar was incapable. Sylvester urged him to raise money in Latakia and Tripoli "for the sake of Aleppo". Sylvester continued that the people of Latakia and Tripoli must understand that if Aleppo falls, all the cities will gradually fall.

However, Sophronios suggests that a better idea would be to send him to Aleppo instead of sending the bishop of Sidon. There might be another letter by Sophronios in which he provided his argument, but it is unfortunately lost. From other sources, we know that the patriarch accepted Sophronios's suggestions and sent him to Aleppo, where he arrived one year later. The detailed story of Sophronios's misadventure in Aleppo is told from the Catholic point of view by Niʿma ibn Tūmā.[83]

At an unknown time of the year 1750, probably while waiting for the *berat* to go to Aleppo, Sophronios translated from Arabic into Greek the Covenant of Muḥammad.[84]

According to Niʿma, Sophronios arrived at Aleppo on November 16, 1750. To avoid causing any disturbance, the Catholics paid 3,500 piastres to register his *berat*. Initially, Sophronios appeared to be indulgent towards them, "at least in appearance". He tried to convince the less knowledgeable to abandon Catholicism. Niʿma describes Sophronios's behavior as "cloaked in hypocrisy, schism, deceit, and manufactured piety. He expressed his dissatisfaction with the harm to the flock and the

80 See MS Ṣarbā (Jūniya), Ordre Basilien Alepin 1172.

81 On the ordination of Jeremias of Tyre and Sidon, see Ţipău, *Sylvester of Antioch*, p. 94–95.

82 See Ms Ḥarīṣā, Saint Paul 210, f. 143r.

83 See the Annex to the edition of Brayk, *Tārīkh al-Shām*, p. 138-139.

84 See O.-A. Negoiță, "Preliminaries on an Unknown Greek Translation of the Covenant of Muḥammad by Sophronios of Kilis", *Scrinium* 9, 2023, p. 52.

actions of previous bishops, even denouncing Sylvester's behavior." Soon, the problems started when the bishop could no longer hide his dissatisfaction toward the priests and deacons who adhered to Catholicism. According to Ni'ma, the climax of the turbulence occurred on April 12, 1751, when Sophronios succeeded in imprisoning the Catholic clerics at the behest of the Pacha, despite claiming that he had not ordered it. They were released only after paying 15,000 piastres. The Catholics wrote a *'ard ḥāl* (statement of the case) against Sophronios and managed to imprison him. On January 18, 1752, he was released, and he retired to Constantinople.

Sylvester wanted Sophronios to join him in Smyrna, but Sophronios chose to go via Patmos instead.[85] Until July 1753, Sylvester continued to try to resolve the Aleppians' issue with Sophronios, attempting to reinstate him as bishop without success. At various times, Sylvester insisted to his representative in Constantinople and to the patriarch of Constantinople that they needed to find a solution to the matter of Sophronios, at least until October.[86]

It is noteworthy that even when the Aleppian managed to exile Sophronios from Aleppo, they still recognized his authority in the Orthodox church, especially when it comes to translating and correcting translations of liturgical texts. Therefore, during the debates between Catholics and Orthodox, Catholics referred to Sophronios as the one who taught them this interpretation. In the discussion on the Eucharist that took place in 1755 between the Catholic Arsāniyūs of Homs and Yūsuf Mark, the Catholic says:

We have thoroughly examined the Greek text, and we did not find in it the word '*wa-iṣna'*' (and make) nor the word '*nāqilahumā*' ([by] changing them), nor 'change and transform them by Your Holy Spirit'. But, after the priest pronounces the dominical words, which are: 'Take, eat' and what follows it, 'and drink from it,' and what follows it. Then he says: 'As for this bread, it is the honored Body of Your Christ, and what is in this cup is the honored Blood of Your Christ, transformed and changed by Your Holy Spirit.' And thus did Metropolitan Sophronios interpret them.[87]

Surely, unhappy, Mark criticizes the Greek knowledge of his adversary and how daring it is to attribute to this 'virtuous, knowledgeable, and hard-working man' such blasphemies. But Mark thinks that it is the only way to convince those who listen to his teaching by attributing the translation to Sophronios, and that, like all heretics when they wanted to prove their heresies, they attributed them to

85 See Ţipău, *Sylvester of Antioch*, p. 106.

86 *Ibidem*, p. 108.

87 This episode is preserved in Yūsuf Mark's *Al-qawl al-dāfin* under Question 8. See below Ch. 1.1.4.

virtuous masters. Then Mark talks about all the hardships of Sophronios in defending Orthodoxy, and all the time he asks him to translate Patristic passages to him.

In Constantinople, Sophronios probably chose to live in the Mega Reuma district. We find him there in August 1753, alongside Matthaios, patriarch of Jerusalem. He took refuge when the pandemic ravaged the region.[88]

On October 29, 1756, a new *berat* for Sophronios was issued, according to Niʻma; however, Sophronios never showed up. He seems to be on retreat for the next fifteen years. We are not aware of any activity of composition or translation during the years 1756–1771.[89] He even refused to be Sylvester's successor in 1766. The only unmarried one of the three disciples in the orbit of Sylvester (along with Yūsuf and Mūsā), Sophronios was the natural candidate to become Sylvester's successor. However, in his will to avoid the disturbance of the Catholics, Sophronios refuses this position.[90]

Five years later, he agreed to become patriarch of Jerusalem, serving as Sophronios V (1771–1775), succeeding Ephraim II (1766–1771). He was later chosen as patriarch of Constantinople, serving as Sophronios II from 1774 to 1780.

We know from the prefaces and colophons of the printed books that in Iaşi, in 1745, at the Monastery of Saint Sabbas, Sylvester printed the *Qundāq* (*Liturgikon*) and in 1746, he printed in 1,500 copies *Kitāb qaḍā' al-ḥaqq wa-naql al-ṣidq* (*Judgment of Truth and Conveyance of Honesty*) of Nektarios of Jerusalem, translated by Sophronios in 1733, and *Risāla mukhtaṣara fī al-radd ʻalā ʻadam ghalaṭ bābāwāt Rūmiya* (*Brief Epistle against the Pope's Infallibility*) composed by Eustratios Argentis. In February 1747, he printed *Kitāb al-ʻashā' al-rabbānī* (*Book of the Lord's Supper*) composed by Argentis and translated into Arabic by Masʻad Nashū. The typesetters were Mīkhā'īl al-mutawaḥḥid (the hermit or the monk) and Girgis al-shammās (the deacon).[91]

Later, the patriarch received the Monastery of Saint Spyridon in Bucharest, Wallachia, as a metochion dedicated to the Church of Antioch. He moved the

88 See Ţipău, *Sylvester of Antioch*, p. 107.

89 Panchenko identifies the bishop Sophronios of Akkar who consecrated the priest Faraḥ in Balamand as Sophronios of Kilis, which is most unlikely. See Panchenko, *Arab Orthodox Christians*, p. 238. This is clearly a confusion between عكا and عكار.

90 Matthaios, patriarch of Alexandria, reports in a letter dated April 29, 1766, that together with Samuel of Constantinople, Parthenios of Jerusalem, and other bishops present in Constantinople, they asked Sophronios if he wished to become patriarch of Antioch, but he refused.

91 Jirjis al-shammās is the copyist of MS Vatican, Sbath 438 in Wallachia on June 8, 1748. Later, he became a priest, and in 1770, he copied MS Damascus Greek Orthodox Patriarchate 71; in 1773, he copied MS Damascus Greek Orthodox Patriarchate 70 (completed on June 30) and 91 (completed on July 15). He might be the copyist of MS Vatican, Sbath 302 (1763), 303 (1770), and 404 (1770).

printing press there, but seeing that the type was by now damaged from all the prints they endured, he created new typefaces.

On August 11, 1747, Sophronios sent a letter to Mūsā expressing his happiness for the news of the establishment of the printing press (Letter 63), probably referring to the one in Iaşi and not the newly established one in Bucharest. He also expresses his will to translate the book entitled *Fī al-muḥāmāt ʻan al-īmān al-mustaqīm* (*In Defense of the True Faith*) to be printed in this press. This title is not preserved in manuscripts nor in print. Sophronios might have changed the title after translation to make it rhyme, or was advised to translate another book that was more needed.

While the printing press of Sylvester in the Romanian Principalities only printed one book to which Sophronios contributed, there are more contributions he made to Sylvester's press, which were printed in Beirut.

A few things are known about the history of the brief printing activity in Beirut.[92] We believe the choice of the place to install it, as Beirut is not only related to the person of Yūnus Niqūlā, its sponsor and supervisor, who was also Sylvester's *wakīl* in Beirut. We think above all that the reason was that Beirut was under the authority of the Emirs and not the Ottomans. In this case, a figure like Yūnus Niqūlā, who had a good relationship with the Emirs, may have facilitated this. After all, it is through him that the Orthodox restored the Monastery of Mar Ilyās Shwayyā.

From the recent works of the TYPARABIC team, it is now known that at least three books were printed in this press. However, all these books reached us in very few copies. Printed in 1751, the *Abridged Horologion* is only known from a selling announcement on Ebay.[93]

The recently discovered Psalter of Beirut, printed in 1751–1752, was corrected by Sophronios in response to a request by Yūsuf Mark, likely for publication in the recently established printing press of Bucharest, or that of Beirut.[94] Sophronios's preface indicates that Yūsuf Mark consulted him to offer his perspective on the translation of the Psalter, presumably the version printed by Athanasios Dabbās. Sophronios remarks that while his predecessors corrected certain mistakes through comparison with the Greek text, others remained uncorrected because of a lack of familiarity with Classical Arabic. This observation by Sophronios resonates with a similar sentiment expressed by Dabbās in his preface, where he states that he "roughly corrected it" (*iṣlāḥ*^{an} *mutawassiṭ*^{an}).

92 See Feodorov, *Arabic Printing*, p. 245–256.

93 The Arabic title is: كتاب مختصر السواعي فرض العامي المشاعي طبع حديثًا; see Ţipău, *Sylvester of Antioch*, p. 224–225.

94 See Feodorov, *Arabic Printing*, p. 296–298.

As a result, he began a careful process of correcting the text, aiming to match the original as closely as possible. Deacon Ilyās Fakhr, the logothetes of the Antiochian Apostolic See, supervised this effort. During this process, he kept the phrases and words that show the linguistic features of earlier times, maintaining their form as seen in early copies. He removed anything that had been added, and restored all that was missing.

At the end of the edition, the editors [Sophronios and Yūsuf?] announce that the Commentary on the Psalter is being prepared for printing soon. We believe this Commentary is the one translated from Greek into Arabic by ʻAbd Allāh ibn al-Faḍl al-Anṭākī (11th century).[95] Interestingly, in 1753, the Catholic printing press of Khinshara printed a Commentary on seven psalms selected from Pierre Arnoud's Commentary on the Psalms, translated by Zākhir in 1748.

Furthermore, the editors warn readers that they added the symbol ";" in both the current Psalter and in *Al-sawāʻī* (*Book of the Hours*), like in Greek, indicating that the sentence should be read with an interrogative tone. This may suggest that both Sophronios and Yūsuf were also involved in printing *Al-sawāʻī*.

About the sort of printing press, theories can be advanced. When the Latins took over the bishopric of Beirut, shortly before Sylvester arrived in 1753, they might have moved parts away. This could not be confirmed with the bit of information we have, though. Another possibility is that the remaining printing press tools and the books printed with them became unusable when the material was partially or fully damaged during the earthquake that hit Beirut on October 30, 1759.

In a recent article on Beirut during the schism, Philippe Asseily states that when the new church's building was renewed after the earthquake of 1759, it fell on March 4, 1768, during the liturgy. The printing press housed in an adjacent building was damaged.[96] This theory, however, does not explain why the press's activity stopped earlier. We know that in 1765, another Daskalos Theodosius was active in Beirut.[97] He collaborated with the bishop of Beirut at that time, Makarios Ṣadaqa, to translate Ēlias Mēniatēs's *Homilies for the Great Lent* from Greek into Arabic.[98] According to Ibn Ṭrād, when Patriarch Daniel asked Makarios whether

95 This Commentary is preserved in many manuscripts such as MS Sinai, Monastery of Saint Catherine Ar. 34, 65, 66 etc. For more information about it, see Roberts, *Reason and Revelation*, p. 36–37.

96 See P. Asseily, "Beirut's Rivalry: Intra Rum-Melkite Conflicts in the Eighteenth Century", in Heyberger, Pasha, el Gemayel (eds.), *La division du patriarcat*, p. 230.

97 Because of the lack of information about him, he was confused with Iakobos of Patmos by Sbath and Nasrallah. See Sbath, *Al-Fihris*, II, p. 21; Nasrallah, Haddad, *HMLÉM* IV.2, p. 218.

98 The Greek title is: Διδαχαὶ εἰς τὴν Ἁγίαν καὶ Μεγάλην Τεσσαρακοστήν (*Teachings for the Holy and Great Lent of Forty Days*).

he would like to become bishop of Tripoli or Beirut, he chose Beirut for these reasons: the growing influence of the Latins in the presence of a Greek bishop; the parish needed an Arab bishop who could explain the truth to the community; in Beirut, there was freedom because it was under the Emirs, unlike Tripoli, which was governed by Ottoman rulers; this would give him more time for his pastoral duties.[99] In addition, along with Bishop Ioannikios, a Master of Theology, another master, Theodosius, deacon of Sylvester, originally from Aleppo, was installed in Beirut after Sylvester's death in 1766. At that time, Yūsuf was still active in Beirut. We believe that if the printing press were still functional, they would have collaborated to print new books. This did not happen because, we think, the printing press was already out of service.

1.1.2.2 Sophronios of Kilis's Works

We have presented most of Sophronios's works and translations in their context above. We provide here a summary list.

A Original Works

a) *Kitāb midrār sayl al-maṭar fī ṭafī nār al-maṭhar*, preserved in MS Vatican Sbath 259 (dated 1744).

b) *Jawāb Ṣufrūniyūs muṭrān ʿAkkā ilā ahl Ḥayfā al-munshaqqīn*, preserved in MS Damascus, Orthodox Patriarchate 221.

c) *Aqwāl muṣarraḥa jalīya wāḍiḥa fī riʾāsat al-bābā*, preserved in the same manuscript.

d) *Sharḥ mukhtaṣar fī irshād wa-dalālat al-qāriʾ fī annahu kayfa yaqraʾ kutub al-ābāʾ al-qiddīsīn*, preserved in MS Cairo, The Franciscan Center of Christian Oriental Studies 170.

e) *Fī anna kathīrīn min al-bābāwāt akhṭaʾū fī al-īmān al-urthūḏuksī al-qawīm al-raʾy wa-al-baʿḍ minhum ṣārū harāṭiqa*, preserved in the same manuscript.

f) Diatribe against a so-called patriarch who took Dayr al-Mukhalliṣ as his See, preserved in the same manuscript.

g) *Maqāla wajīza fī bāb al-sabʿat asrār*, once preserved at the School of the Three Hierarchs in Beirut.

99 See Ibn Ṭrād, *Mukhtaṣar tārīkh*, p. 123.

B Translations[100]

a) *Kitāb qaḍā' al-ḥaqq wa-naql al-ṣidq*, translation of *De Artibus quibus missionarii latini...* of Nektarios Pelopidis (1602-1676), patriarch of Jerusalem.

b) *Kitāb jalā' al-abṣār min ghishā' al-akdār*, translation of Περὶ τῆς ἀρχῆς τοῦ Πάπα ἀντίρρησεις, composed in 1671 by the same Nektarios.

c) *Kitāb taqrīr sharḥ wajīz muqtaṣar fī al-radd 'alā al-ra'ī al-muḥdath bi-nār al-maṭhar* of Mark of Ephesos (1392-1444), Bessarion of Nicaea (1403-1472).

d) *Tatimmat al-maqāl* of Makarios of Patmos (1688-1737).

e) *Kitāb al-baḥth al-naḍīr fī māddat al-khamīr wa-al-faṭīr*, translation of Σύνταγμα κατά αζύμων of Eustratios Argentis.

f) *Ta'līm mukhtaṣar masīḥī*, translation of Iakobos of Patmos's *Catechesis*.

1.1.3 Yūsuf Mark

1.1.3.1 Yūsuf Mark's Biography

Yūsuf Mark is from Tripoli, as indicated by his *kunya* 'al-Ṭrābulsī'. As shown above, he was likely born around 1705. In one colophon, he refers to his father as Yūsuf.[101] Still a layman in 1725, he visited the Monastery of Balamand and left a reading note on the Book *Khalāṣ al-khaṭa'a*.[102] The poetic way he formulates his note shows his knowledge of the Arabic language already at this stage. His interest in reading this book might be twofold: first, as an introduction to spiritual life, but also for the poetic preface that the translator Yūsuf al-Muṣawwir inserted in the middle of the Book.[103]

Before 1737, he became a deacon and later lived in Latakia, where he worked as a tutor, probably teaching Arabic. In February 1740, Yūsuf said he wanted to leave Latakia after Easter because he could no longer support himself there. However, in July 1740, he was advised not to travel because of the disorder in the *miri* system (Letter 44). Yūsuf planned to go to Damietta, where Mūsā's uncle, Ḥannā Fakhr, was a well-known merchant; he needed a letter of recommendation from his uncle to stay safe. This shows the strong status of the Orthodox community through the al-Fakhr family in both Syria and Egypt.

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100 For a list of manuscripts, see Nasrallah, Haddad, *HMLÉM* IV.2, p.97–98.

101 MS Damascus, Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch 4, f. 169r. See Figure 15.

102 Agapios Monachos's Αμαρτωλών σωτηρία. See MS Balamand, Monastery of Our Lady 163 (1662), f. 143v.

103 It is usually believed that al-Muṣawwir only translated the second part, which follows the preface. The title he provides to this part, like the whole preface, is written in *saj'*: *Kitāb al-farā'id al-liṭāf fī bāb sirr al-i'tirāf*. See MS Balamand, Monastery of Our Lady 163, f. 63v.

To assist him in overcoming his financial difficulties, Mūsā is believed to have enlisted Yūsuf Mark to help with the transcription of books. On June 29, 1740, Yūsuf Mark received from Mūsā a copy of the *Book that Clears the Sight from the Veils of Darkness*, which had been translated a year earlier by Sophronios and corrected by Ilyās Fakhr.[104] In July of the same year, Yūsuf promised to make two copies of this book, one for Ilyās Fakhr and the other for himself. Between July 1740 and June 1741, he relocated to Amyūn in the *qaḍā'* al-Kūra (χώρα), where he presumably completed his copy on June 20, 1741.[105] Among other duties, he had to teach Christian children at the episcopal residence (Letter 48). It was only in the spring of 1742 that he planned to move the family from Latakia to Tripoli.

In autumn 1742, Patriarch Sylvester requested Yūsuf's presence in Damascus to ordain him as a priest. Yūsuf requested that the consecration be postponed until the following spring, invoking the cold weather and health concerns (Letter 52). This request appears to have been granted by Sylvester. Consequently, Yūsuf's ordination as a priest did not take place until 1743. Following his ordination, Yūsuf paid a visit to Sophronios in Acre in April 1743 (Letter 20). The journey from Beirut to Acre was undertaken by sea. The same letter also reveals that Yūsuf departed Acre on April 23.

Yūsuf was ordained a priest to serve not only in the city of Tripoli but also in the surrounding area called al-Kūra in the eparchy of Tripoli. On May 25, 1744, he was in Amyūn, probably having taken it as his residential place, where he copied the MS Damascus, Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch 4.[106] This activity of copying manuscripts was probably sponsored by Sylvester, who sent 500 piastres in February 1745 for the expenses of 'our Marqus', presumably Yūsuf Mark.[107] This money could also have been sent to cover the expenses of Yūsuf's trip to Bucharest, which is described below.

Around 1746, he authored *al-Shuḏūr fī naqd haḏayān al-'adīm al-nūr* (*Collected Excerpts to Oppose the Delirium of the Lightless*), as hinted in Letter 56.[108] According to this letter, the treatise was a refutation of twelve objections (*i'tirāḍāt*) raised by a proponent of Latin doctrines against Gennadius, bishop of Aleppo

104 This is a translation by Sophronios of Nektarios's Περὶ τῆς ἀρχῆς τοῦ Πάπα ἀντίρρησεις, composed in 1671. See above Ch. 1.1.2.

105 See MS Beirut, Biblothèque orientale Ar. 955.

106 Only the second part of the manuscript (f. 124r–169v) was copied by Yūsuf.

107 See Ţipău, *Sylvester of Antioch*, p. 90.

108 Gennadios also requested a refutation of the Catholic objections regarding the sacraments. As we mentioned before, this was the *Maqāla wajīza fī bāb al-sab'at asrār*, *A Short Treatise on the Seven Sacraments*, preserved at the School of the Three Hierarchs in Beirut. See Nasrallah, *HMLEM* IV.2, p. 99.

(r. 1746–1749).[109] Yūsuf wrote the book under the supervision of Ilyās Fakhr in the span of just 45 days. He was advised to remain anonymous for his own safety, fearing retaliation from segments of the Aleppian populace. Yūsuf intended to attribute the work to Gennadius himself, since the objections were directed against him.[110] However, the question of authorship remained obscure for a time, and, because of unknown circumstances, the Daskalos claimed the treatise as his own.[111] Rachid Haddad identified this Daskalos with Iakobos of Patmos. However, we believe this Daskalos is Theodosius, also mentioned in the correspondence (Letters 15 and 51).[112] We also noted previously a similar tension with Sophronios.

According to Yūsuf, the Daskalos's only contribution was the collation of a passage from John Chrysostom in Arabic translation with the Greek original. It was only after Sophronios of Kilis arrived in Aleppo in 1750 that Yūsuf's authorship was acknowledged once again.

This episode offers valuable insight into the internal dynamics of the Orthodox ecclesiastical elite in mid-18th-century Syria. The letter reveals both the hierarchical tensions and how members of this elite evaluated one another's intellectual and moral standing. Expressing his anger over Theodosius's appropriation of the work, Yūsuf draws a sharp contrast between himself and the Daskalos, stating:

"If I were to make a comparison between you [Mūsā] and him [Theodosius], how stark the difference would be! And if you were to compare him to Bishop Sophronios, the disparity would also be evident. If he should align himself with Eustratios [Argentis] and his student, the Priest Mas'ad, how differently I would perceive their view of me from his! And the way in which he corresponds compared with other friends!"

This passage reflects not only the bitterness Yūsuf felt over the misattribution of his work but also the complex social fabric of the Orthodox scholarly elite

109 Neophytos Edelby reports that according to the register of the baptisms of Aleppo Gennadios arrived from Constantinople to Aleppo in April 1746. In 1749, Ibn Dīb became the representative of the patriarch in Aleppo, which means that the bishop was absent. Next year, Sophronios of Kilis arrived in Aleppo as the new representative. See N. Edelby, *Asāqifat al-Rūm al-malakīyīn bi-Ḥalab fī al-'aṣr al-ḥadīth*, Aleppo, 1983, p. 133. Sophronios does not seem to hold the title of bishop of Aleppo, probably because this is against the rules of the Church related to the transfer of bishops. Therefore, he is still called Sophronios bishop of Acre in the printed edition of the Psalter of Beirut in 1752.

110 Even though this information is provided in the letter, Haddad confused Gennadius for Sophronios, who is also mentioned in the letter. See Haddad, "La correspondance", p. 277. For an explanation, see the edition below.

111 See Haddad, "La correspondance", p. 277.

112 The same Theodosius promised Yūsuf to translate his *Book of Grammar* into Greek, and probably did not (Letter 51).

in the Patriarchate of Antioch and its broader network. His harsh comparisons between Theodosius, Mūsā, and Bishop Sophronios suggest a well-defined hierarchy of respect, intellectual competence, and loyalty. By contrasting Theodosius with figures like Eustratius and Mas'ad, Yūsuf implies that while certain clergy members may have disagreed with him, their opposition was principled or at least respectful – unlike that of Theodosius, whose actions are presented as opportunistic and deceitful. The remark about "how he corresponds" hints at underlying tensions in written communication, perhaps alluding to sarcasm, veiled criticism, or lack of collegial tone in Theodosius's letters. Altogether, the episode illustrates how authorship, attribution, and the politics of ecclesiastical reputation could become entangled in personal rivalries and theological polemics.

Sometime later, Yūsuf set out on a trip to the Romanian principalites to join Patriarch Sylvester. It seems that during this trip, Yūsuf also served as the patriarch's secretary. This can be inferred from Letter 63, where it is said that Mūsā is not secretary anymore, and the title Mūsā provides to the letters of Yūsuf, where he calls him *al-kātib* (f. 30r). Between Mūsā's departure and Yūsuf's arrival, Buṭrus, the brother of Mūsā, seems to have served as secretary, as mentioned earlier. Yūsuf arrived in Bucharest undoubtedly after April 1747, probably in November (Letter 28), albeit with some delay, and remained there for nearly two years, until 1749. It is possible that "al-Khawāja Markū", *wakīl* of Sylvester, with whom Ni'ma ibn Tūmā sent a letter to Sylvester, is Yūsuf Mark.[113] When Yūsuf arrived in Bucharest, the patriarch had already printed the Letter of the Synod of Constantinople of 1723.[114] Sylvester requested him to write an opening formula (*ḥamdala*) for it and apologized for any misspelling (Letter 28).[115] He also apologized for the quality of printing, which was due to the typefaces being worn.

We mentioned above the works printed before the arrival of Yūsuf. These works wore out the type, and for this reason, the patriarch was engrossed in creating Arabic typefaces at the Monastery of Saint Spyridon because the previous ones

113 This letter is mentioned in another one entitled: *Sūrat al-maktūb alladhī harrarnāhu lil-batriyark kīr Silfistrūs lammā kāna fī al-Walāh wa-kāna waqta'idhin mustawliy*^{an} *min qibalihi 'alā madīnat Ḥalab Jannādyūs*…

114 The recently identified copy of Sylvester's book contains the *Acts of Constantinople* of 1723, 1725 and 1727. The preface seems to be destined to introduce only the first letter. The other letters could have been printed after Yūsuf's arrival.

115 //5r والمأمول من محبّتكم المسيحيّة بألّا يكون بحثكم في هذا المجموع لأجل تهذيب الإعراب وتركيبه وتزخرف اللفظ وتنميقه ولا في إملاء الحروف وتثقيفها، بل أمعنوا النظر في معاني الكلام ووضعه ومضمون القول الروحي وقصده، وإن وجدتم بعض الحروف مقطّعة فأصلحوها، لأنّها قديمة، والذي نقشها جاهل اللغة العربيّة، لكن بمنّه تعالى وحيوله الآن نقشنا أحرف جديدة وعن قريب – انشاء الله تعالى – نطبع بها كتب عديدة على نهج الصحّة. وقد طبعنا هذا المجموع ليتوزّع على المسيحيّين مجّانًا.

were worn. The Syrian printer Jirjis Abū Sha'r, who had been generously compensated by both the patriarch and Prince Ioan Mavrocordat, had begun casting lead types for a new set of Arabic fonts. However, the conceived plan did not work, and Yūsuf informed his friend in Letter 54 that the type he produced was not useful. The work of Abū Sha'r was a big failure, and the Patriarch, seeing that it was a waste of time to stay longer, set out for Constantinople in October 1748. The last letter that Yūsuf sent from Bucharest is dated March or April 1749 (Letter 27).[116] He informed his friend that they had begun manufacturing the type for the new printing press: the iron engraving is now nearly finished, and they will soon proceed to the finer copper engravings. He hopes that "by the grace of He who dwells in heaven, it will make for a most suitable printing press. All we need is for the Creator to facilitate its installation in a quiet place, and for us to join you again and enjoy living among you". He probably means by "a quiet place" Beirut, where the patriarch was planning to install it with the help of al-Shaykh Yūnus Niqūlā al-Jubaylī, whom we will introduce below.

Afterwards, he traveled back to Syria through Constantinople, where he met the metropolitan of Aleppo, Gennadius (Letter 56). Arriving in Aleppo, he clarified the authorship of *Al-Shuḏūr* with Sophronios and Theodosius. Awaiting the arrival of the printing press, he might have collaborated with Sophronios to correct the Psalter and the Horologion.

Yūsuf Mark's presence in Beirut between the years 1750 and 1770 coincided with a turbulent yet pivotal era in the history of the city's Orthodox community. His return from Bucharest marked not only a homecoming but also a strategic settlement in Beirut, likely at the instigation of Patriarch Sylvester, who was preparing the groundwork for an Orthodox printing press in the city. The endeavor was supported by prominent lay elites, foremost among them al-Shaykh Yūnus Niqūlā al-Jubaylī, a native of Jubayl, and longtime administrator and confidant of the Shihābī emirs.[117] Yūnus, known for his administrative acumen and piety, emerges in contemporary chronicles as the primary sponsor of the press and a leading patron of Orthodox institutions in Beirut. His name, Yūnus, was printed on every book issued from the press, suggesting his direct and sustained involvement.

It is in this city of freedom, to repeat Makarios Ṣadaqa's words, that Yūsuf opened a school of linguistic and theological sciences in the 1750s.[118] One of his stu-

116 On the fifth Sunday of the Holy Lent.

117 On the figure of Yūnus Niqūlā al-Jubaylī and the role he played for the Christian community of Beirut, see Ibn Ṭrād, *Mukhtaṣar tārīkh*, p. 88–120. For the most important implications in the ecclesiastical life in Beirut, a resume is to be found in Asseily, "Beirut's Rivalry", p. 227–234.

118 Referred to also in Panchenko, *Arab Orthodox Christians*, p. 472–473.

dents was the young Khawāja Mūsā Ṣadaqa, future bishop of the city. Ibn Ṭrād calls Yūsuf "the teacher of bibliophiles", "the best of priests", "luminary of the theological sciences", and "Glory of Arab writers".[119] The school and the press likely shared not only sponsors but also intellectual ambitions: to reinforce the Orthodox identity in a city where Catholic influence was growing. The printing press of Beirut issued its first publication in 1751, titled *Mukhtasar al-Sawāʿī farḍ al-ʿāmmī al-mashāʿī* (Abridged Horologion for the Common Lay Pilgrim).[120] Later, a Psalter containing the *Taʿlīm Masīḥī* (Catechism) were printed in 1751–1752. The typeset bore a striking resemblance to that of the Aleppo press of Athanasios Dabbās, indicating a deliberate continuity in Orthodox printing culture.

Later, Sylvester may have supported Yūsuf Mark's residence in Beirut, a city whose strategic and economic importance was growing amid Catholic efforts to assert control over its bishopric. The economic downturn of 1753 in inland Syria had prompted an influx of workers and merchants to Beirut, which was then a significant hub for the export and processing of silk from Mount Lebanon.[121] As Letters 29 and 61 attest, Yūsuf was actively engaged in silk production and trade, a pursuit that likely combined personal motives with ecclesiastical obligations.

This connection to silk also recalls the activities of al-Shaykh Yūnus. A document published by Asad Rustum states that, in 1749, Yūnus paid 1,500 *qurūsh* to the Shihābī emirs Ismāʿīl and Ḥasan Abī al-Lamaʿ to recover the Monastery of Mar Ilyās Shwayyā, which had slipped from the community's control.[122] The agreement restored the monastery to Orthodox monks and required the emirs to protect the community and listen to its grievances. The case highlights the fragile legal standing of *waqf* (endowment) properties, which were often pledged or mortgaged in efforts to boost agricultural output and increase tax revenues. Identified in other sources as a site of silk production, the monastery exemplifies the interdependence of religious authority, land ownership, and economic strategy in 18th-century Beirut.

119 The translation of these titles is borrowed from Panchenko in the English translation by Brittany Pheiffer Noble and Samuel Noble.

120 See Ţipău, *Sylvester of Antioch*, p. 123, 388–389.

121 See A. Ismail, *Documents diplomatiques et consulaires relatifs à l'histoire du Liban*, vol. II, Beirut, 1975, p. 105–106. Philippe Asseily perceives these consequences as the result of Ẓāhir al-ʿUmar's taking over Acre and his measures against French merchants in Sidon. See Asseily, "Beirut's Rivalry", p. 229.

122 See A. Rustum, "Mār Yūḥannā wa-Mār Ilyās wa-al-kathlaka fī al-Shuwayr", *al-Nūr*, 6, 1962, p. 168–170. For an analysis of this document, see S. Slim, "L'enjeu des *waqfs* dans le conflit des monastères: Mār Yūḥannā al-Ṣābiġ Choueir et al-Nabī Ilyās Šwayyā", in Heyberger, Pasha, el Gemayel (eds.), *La division du patriarcat*, p. 397–400.

Shortly before Sylvester arrived in Syria in 1753, the Catholics gained full control of the Orthodox Church of Beirut and appointed a Catholic bishop to the see.[123] What happened to the printing press after that remains a mystery. Logically, one would expect Sylvester, who had encouraged its establishment in Beirut, to have ensured the continuation of its activities upon his arrival, especially since Yūsuf, who had supervised the press in Bucharest, was present in Beirut at the time. One theory is that, following the Catholic takeover, the authorities pressured Yūnus Niqūlā to withdraw his support for the press. But why would they do so, given that, unlike the Bucharest press, the Beirut press appears to have produced only liturgical books? Another possibility is that the Catholics transferred the press and its printed materials to locations under their control. However, none of the books printed in Beirut – rare as they are – have been found in Catholic convents, nor do any Orthodox sources mention such a transfer or express complaints about it. As a result, many aspects of the history of this printing press remain a mystery.

At that time, Yūsuf was in contact with Mas'ad Nashū in Egypt (Letter 29). In 1754, the latter sent him a letter asking him for a list of the patriarchs of Antioch from the first until now because he is about to write a History (*Tārīkh 'ajīb*). Having no access to such a list, Yūsuf asks his friend for help. Nashu informed Yūsuf that he will soon send him a collection of treatises concerning the Orthodox baptism and the invalidity of the Latin baptism, which he translated from Greek.

Around the same time, Yūsuf went to Ma'lūlā to visit the Monastery of Saint Thekla.[124] On his way, he came across the Monastery of Saint Sergius and Bacchus of the same village, inhabited by Catholic monks. This was the occasion of the debate with the Catholics about the epiclesis. Yūsuf asked the monks represented by Arsāniyūs to provide him with their objections and promised to compose a lengthy treatise in which he refutes them. In the preface, he calls himself al-Ṭrābulsī *aṣl*^{an} *wa-nisbat*^{an} (originally from Tripoli) al-Bayrūtī *mawṭin*^{an} *wa-baldat*^{an} (resident in Beirut) (f. 2v). This confirms that his travel to Syria was temporary. We analyse the content of this work below.

Following this period, an unfortunate earthquake struck Beirut and its church on October 30, 1759. We do not know the direct impact on Yūsuf's primary activities, which included teaching, proofreading books to be printed, and taking care of the silk production. However, we know that despite these unhappy events, the

123 See Rustum, *The Church of the City of God*, p. 150.

124 In his work *Al-qawl al-dāfin li-i'ṭirādāt Arsāniyūs al-zāfin*, he mentions Jibrīl, presumably Jibrīl Jilda. "Especially, their head Jibrīl the infamous, who used to disgrace us regarding the Holy Lent and was proud to say that the solution of fasting for the soul and body is unparalleled". For more details on this work, see below.

controversy between Orthodox and Catholics still intensified in the following years, and Yūsuf became more involved than ever. In 1761, in Beirut, Yūsuf met Daskalos Papa-Ephraim, who was en route to Damascus.[125] He asked him to list all the heresies the Latins invented until that year.

The conflicts among the elders also affected the younger generation. As Yūsuf describes in the same Letter 35, six days before August 21, 1764, his son Mīkhā'īl was involved in an incident with an Aleppian boy who insulted the Patriarch Sylvester. An adherent to Catholicism, the Aleppian recited some verses from Niqūlā al-Ṣā'igh, famous for criticizing in his poems the Orthodox clergy. To this, Yūsuf's son replied by insulting the pope. A fight rose, and Yūsuf's son struck him with a staff. The location of this event is specified as the *qaysarīya* of Shāhīn Talhūq. Though this *qaysarīya* was not preserved until today, it is generally admitted that it was located in the surroundings of al-'Umarī Mosque. To solve the problem, the emir interfered and asked for fifty piastres as a bribe and twenty for the exile, presumably of the son. Awaiting the outcome, Yūsuf and his son were hiding.

This event is not attested elsewhere; therefore, we do not know how the problem was solved. However, it is one of the events when Sylvester would have interfered with the emirs through the elites of Beirut.

We previously discussed the incident related to the proofreading of the *Octoechos*. We suggest that this collaboration began when Theodosios was active in Beirut around 1765, probably after he translated the *Homilies* of Mēniatēs.[126] The main reason this project was abandoned is that Theodosios became amnesic before completing it. Despite tensions with Theodosius, Yūsuf supported him from his wage along with the bishop, presumably Makarios Ṣadaqa.

Yūsuf died in 1773 or 1774, during the Russo-Turkish War, when Russian troops occupied Beirut. According to Ibn Ṭrād, as cited by Panchenko, his body was carried from his home to the church in a solemn procession with lit candles.[127] Leading the procession was the cross, followed by priests wearing their epitrachelion, then the metropolitan, accompanied by Russian officers, junior officers, and a crowd of Christians. With Mark's death, the Christian community lost a respected spiritual leader and a beloved writer.

125 This work is preserved in MS Vatican, Sbath 275.

126 See above, Ch. 1.1.2.

127 See Ibn Ṭrād, *Mukhtaṣar tārīkh*, p. 123–124.

1.1.3.2 Yūsuf Mark's Works

A *Al-Shudhūr fī naqd haḏayān al-'adīm al-nūr* (*Collected Excerpts to Oppose the Delirium of the Lightless*)

This text is preserved in two manuscripts: Vatican, Sbath 258 (18th c.), and the private collection of the Anṭākī family.[128] The manuscript of the Anṭākī collection is inaccessible, and, unfortunately, in the only extant manuscript, the second page of the preface and a large part of the refuted text are missing. Therefore, we do not know the exact title. The one provided before the text (f. 1r) on a cover page could have been added by the scribe or owner and may be slightly different from the original. For more information, see above.

B Preface, Letter of the Synod of Constantinople, 1723

This preface, written on behalf of Patriarch Sylvester of Antioch, addresses the Orthodox clergy and faithful in the Arab East. It was created to accompany the edition of Letter of the Synod of Constantinople, 1723, which examined and condemned the teachings of the Latins. Sylvester warns that these individuals, although they claim to be Orthodox, are actually "deceivers whose doctrines deviate from the true Apostolic faith". The preface affirms that their errors were judged according to Scripture, the holy canons, and the interpretations of both Eastern and Western saints.

At the end of the volume, anathemas are pronounced against those who followed these "false teachers", whom Sylvester likens to "wolves in sheep's clothing". He exhorts all Orthodox Christians to hold fast to the true faith, the faith of the Fathers and of the seven ecumenical and local councils. The patriarchs of Constantinople, Alexandria, Jerusalem, and Antioch, he says, are united in confessing this same Orthodox faith and are prepared to defend it even unto death.

Sylvester also advises readers not to focus on the elegance or grammar of the text, which may contain stylistic imperfections because of the limitations of the original Arabic types, but instead to consider its theological content. He notes that new typefaces have been prepared and promises that more books will soon be printed. Finally, he affirms that this work was printed in Bucharest in 1747 and was intended for free distribution to the faithful.

128 *Al-Fihris* 1786.

C *Al-qawl al-dāfin li-iʿṭirādāt Arsāniyūs al-zāfin*

In 1755, Yūsuf composed *Al-qawl al-dāfin li-iʿṭirādāt Arsāniyūs al-zāfin*, preserved in the unique MS Brummānā, Archdiocese of Mount Lebanon 4.[129] The work includes a preface, twelve chapters, of which ten are responses to Arsāniyūs's ten objections and two additional chapters where Yūsuf discusses different matters, and a final section that refutes Arsāniyūs's conclusion.

The preface recounts the incident that led Yūsuf to compose this treatise. During a visit to Maʿlūlā, he went to venerate Saint Thekla, "the first among the martyrs". While exploring the site of her miraculous escape through the split mountain, he noticed, at a height, a domed monastery dedicated to Saint Sergius.

Upon entering the church to admire its architecture, he was approached by the abbot, who invited him upstairs under the guise of hospitality. There, Yūsuf encountered a certain Arsenius from Homs, engaged in altering the text of the *Kondakion* of consecration, omitting or changing key liturgical phrases, particularly the invocation of the Holy Spirit during the Eucharist. Arsenius claimed that calling upon the Holy Spirit was unnecessary, as the priest's authority alone was sufficient, even if the priest were excommunicated or unworthy. He argued that his altered version corresponded to the Greek original, although he admitted ignorance of both Greek and Arabic grammar.

When Yūsuf rebuked him for these falsifications, which he considered not merely corruptions but blasphemies, Arsenius became visibly angry and embarrassed, attempting to justify himself with sophistic arguments. The situation escalated when the abbot and other monks, whom Yūsuf describes as morally and doctrinally corrupt, surrounded him with hostility. Quoting Psalm 21:17, he recalls feeling beset by "dogs" and "evil doers", and, fearing for his safety, he replied briefly and left the place, promising to send them a written reply.

He also accuses them of mocking the Great Fast, as did their leader Jibrīl Jilda, dismissing the need for communion under both species, and boasting of lax attitudes toward fasting.[130] Some claimed to be Greek, others French, seemingly to avoid accountability, but Yūsuf saw this as spiritual self-destruction.

Writing in *saj*ʿ (rhymed prose), he makes his rival say the first verse from al-Mutanabbī's poem *Lā taḥsabū raqṣī baynakum ṭarab*^{an} but compares him to Herodias, who danced to bring death. Then, he modestly explains that because of his limited theological knowledge, he will refer to patristic citations and the work

129 The date is not provided but it can be inferred from a historical event related to the Ethiopian Church which is dated by the author to "the previous year, 1754".

130 Nasrallah identifies him with Jabbūr al-Jildī, the physician mentioned in the Anonymous history preserved in MS BnF Ar. 6538, f. 110r. Cf. Nasrallah, Haddad, *HMLÉM* IV.2, p. 287.

Miḥakk al-ikhtibār. The work in question is Mas'ad Nashū's *Homily for the first Sunday of the Holy Lent*, composed in 1750, to which Ilyās Fakhr added a preface and renamed it *Kitāb Miḥakk al-ikhtibār fī bayān ḥaqq al-i'tibār*.[131] Ilyās Fakhr chose a title echoing Nashū's introduction, where he explains the need for a touchstone, *miḥakk*, to distinguish the gold and the copper, the gold here representing the true One Catholic and Holly Apostolic Church. Yūsuf Mark refers to the same image.

Most of the pages of this work are biblical and patristic citations. This aligns with the Orthodox tradition, which prefers to cite Patristic texts, rather than innovating, which is risky. Despite that, the work has some originality, especially when the author eloquently introduced these citations, e.g., the case of a citation from John of Damascus:

And how clear and eloquent and how compelling, sound, and decisive are the words of Saint John of Damascus, son of Manṣūr, renowned for his noble virtue, the rare gem of Damascus and its offspring, the honor of the Eastern Church and the ornament of its scholars, the mouthpiece of the Fathers who spoke on theology, the elite among them, who gathered their opinions and distilled their mastery. For this glorious saint spoke on this sound doctrine with such clarity that no one could surpass it. This is found in his fourteenth discourse…	وما أوضح وافصح | والى البيان الزم وارجح | ما قاله القديس يوحنا الدمشقي ابن منصور| ذي الفضل المشهور| نادرة دمشق ومنشاها | وشرف الكنيسة الشرقية وزينة علماها | فم الابا المتكلمين باللاهوت نخبتهم | الذي جمع اراوهم وبراعتهم | لان هذا القديس المجيد تكلم في باب هذا المعتقد السديد | قولاً واضحًا ما عليه من يزيد | وذلك في مقالته الرابعة عشر…

Yūsuf Mark deploys the *saj'*, which needs a sophisticated command of Arabic rhetoric, in the service of Christian theological argument. Through parallel structures, end-rhyme, and cumulative praise, he elevates his discourse and reinforces the authority of patristic sources. In the passage praising John of Damascus, Yūsuf layers honorifics, theological epithets, and rhythmic cadences, and positions the saint as a doctrinal authority. Through ornamental eulogy, he venerates the saint like an iconographer with an icon.

Besides its importance as a literary work, this piece is notable for preserving some significant information. As previously highlighted, an essential passage has been identified that defends Sophronios of Kilis and confirms his authority as a philologist of the Greek language, even among Catholics.

It is also relevant to mention at this juncture two other historical pieces of information preserved in chapter 12. The opponent of Yūsuf posited that most Christians worldwide currently adhere to Catholicism, a phenomenon that even

131 See el Gemayel, *Ḥāšiyah Waǧīzah*, p. 258–260.

extends to Russia and the entirety of Syria's Christian population. Only three authors continue to defend Orthodoxy: Ilyās Fakhr, Eustratius Argentis, and Yūsuf. To challenge his claim, Yūsuf provides a detailed account of his travels to Wallachia, as well as another related to the history of the Ethiopian Church. Regarding the first, he asserted that during his journey from Aleppo, through Antioch, Payas, Adana to Constantinople, and subsequently onward to the Romanian Principalities, he did not encounter any individuals who adhered to Catholicism. This assertion is further corroborated by the observation that neither individuals residing to the east nor to the west of his trajectory exhibited any such religious affiliation. This enables us to partially reconstruct his journey from Aleppo to Bucharest.

Regarding the second point, Yūsuf adds other ethnicities that he did not encounter during his journey through the Romanian Principalities, such as the Ethiopians, and therefore he was not witness to their doctrine. However, he believed that their rejection of the Catholic doctrine was a well-known fact.[132] He recalls that, in the previous year, the Ethiopian king, presumably Iyasu II (r. 1723–1755), had sent letters and envoys to Patriarch Matthaios of Alexandria, requesting a metropolitan, two priests, and a teacher to guide his people back to their ancient, Orthodox faith. The patriarch responded by dispatching the requested clergy and teacher, who were met at the Ethiopian border with the highest honors by distinguished members of the royal court. According to Yūsuf, reports continued to reach the Alexandrian patriarch, confirming the success of the mission and the growth of the true faith in those lands. The reporter might be Mas'ad Nashū, at that time in Egypt, who was in contact with Yūsuf, as shown in the correspondence.[133]

Stating in this context that all the books printed in the Ethiopian language to convert Ethiopians to Catholicism implies, even though not explicitly mentioned, that the books printed in Iaşi and Bucharest, and the ones he had supervised in Beirut, contributed to and helped preserving the Orthodox faith.

D Controversies with Yūsuf Bābīlā

In 1763, Yūsuf Mark engaged in a debate with Jibrīl Jilda and Yūsuf Bābīlā over issues dividing Orthodox Christians and Catholics. The story of the disagreement between the two Yūsufs goes like this: one day, Jibrīl Jilda insulted Orthodox priests in front of Yūsuf Mark. We do not know exactly what sparked the quarrel, but it was likely a dispute over the Filioque. During the incident, Yūsuf Mark asked him: "It is

132 On the short Franciscan mission in Ethiopia, 17 months in 1751–1752, see J.H. Arrowsmith-Brown (ed.), *Prutky's Travels in Ethiopia and Other Countries*, London, 1999.

133 See above, Letter 29.

known and understood in both the Eastern and Western Church that the Father is the cause of the Son alone. Is the same cause also the cause of the Holy Spirit alone? We await your answer".

Apparently, Yūsuf had asked Jilda the same question verbally before sending it to him in writing. This is inferred from Bābīlā's words, who said in his answer that he was aware of the question and had drafted a preliminary response before receiving it a second time through Jilda.

Unable to answer the question, Jilda sent it to Bābīlā, who then copied the same preliminary response he had drafted for him. According to Bābīlā, he did not bother to improve his response because he was unaware of who had asked the question. His response mainly addressed the types of "causes" according to Aristotelian philosophy. Yūsuf Mark was not pleased with Bābīlā's reaction, so he composed his first work against Bābīlā, entitled: *The Book of Establishing the Proof in Firm Faith: A Refutation of Jibrīl Jilda and His Teacher Father Yūsuf Bābīlā and the Sect of Tyranny*.[134]

Bābīlā responded to this in 1764 by composing a work entitled: *An Explanation of the Doctrine Beyond Comprehension: Refuting the Answers of Father Yūsuf Mark.* This marked the first round of the controversy. After that, things are unclear, but it seems that one or two more rounds may have taken place. MS Dayr al-Mukhalliṣ (Joun) 763 contains a response attributed to Yūsuf Mark, addressed according to the title to Yūsuf Bābīlā, and a reply to this response, which is anonymous but presumed to be by Yūsuf Bābīlā. The first is entitled: *Response to the Objector from Yūsuf Mark to Yūsuf Bābīlā.*

According to the author of the first response, he was replying to a brief treatise that begins with a syllogism and ends with another syllogism. The author he was responding to had agreed that the councils and the Fathers did not say that the Spirit proceeds from the Son. However, this silence does not imply rejection. None of these points relates to Bābīlā's treatise entitled *An Explanation of the Doctrine Beyond Comprehension*. Furthermore, the author of the reply to this response does not mention Yūsuf's name as he usually does but merely refers to him as "a Christian of our times". This is surprising and makes us consider a second round of letters.

The entire controversy seems to be preserved in an inaccessible manuscript that was preserved in the bishopric of Baalbek, *Kitāb al-burhān al-jalī al-mu'tala li-daḥd ajwibat al-khūrī Yūsuf Bāb al-bīlā* (*The Book of the Manifest Proof, Elevated, for Refuting the Replies of Priest Yūsuf the Gate of Affliction*), and the copyist of the manuscript, as mentioned earlier, is Mūsā Ṭrābulsī, who provided a second title to

134 *Kitāb iqāmat al-burhān fī sadīd al-īmān: radd 'alā Jibrā'il Jilda wa-mu'allimihi al-khūrī Yūsuf Bābīlā wa-shī'at al-ṭughyān.*

the book.[135] In Letter 35, sent to Mūsa in August 1764, Yūsuf thanks Mūsā for helping him copy his work against his opponent and for writing a preface that includes *al-Ḥamdala* and the following phrase: "Just as the Devil once hid in the serpent to wage war against the ancestors, so Bābīlā hid in his disciple, the son of Jilda, Jibrān, and began to wage war against the Church with his mouth and tongue, as if he were his tool". Not finding this preface in any of the works mentioned above, I firmly believe it existed in this manuscript, which is seemingly a complete and revised version of the controversy copied by Mūsā in 1769.

1.2 Secondary Figures in the Correspondence

Along with the principal correspondents of Mūsā, his friends Sophronios (24/26 letters and one repeated) and Yūsuf (35 letters), we find some letters received from secondary figures: Ilyās Fakhr (2/4), Athanasios of Damascus (3 letters), Iakobos of Patmos (2 letters), Khalīl and his brother Dīmitrī Ṣabbāgh, and Samuel of Constantinople (1 each).

1.2.1 Ilyās Fakhr[136]

Ilyās Fakhr (d. 1758), known as Ibn al-Fakhr al-Ṭarābulsī, was a significant intellectual and religious figure of the 18th-century Orthodox Church. His life was marked by a shift from early sympathies with Catholic circles in Tripoli to becoming a leading advocate for the anti-Roman Orthodox cause. His involvement in theological controversies and his extensive network, which included Patriarch Sylvester, his nephew Mūsā, Sophronios of Acre, and Yūsuf Mark, positioned him as a central player in the struggle between Orthodox and Catholic factions in the Levant.

Born in a prominent Tripolitan family, Fakhr was initially engaged with the Catholic missionaries and the French consular circles. By the early 18th century, he had established himself as a respected scholar and translator. His early works included theological treatises commissioned by Catholic patrons, reflecting his engagement with the Latin Church. However, by the 1720s, his allegiances began to shift, coinciding with his move to Aleppo, where he became the dragoman of the British Consulate.

135 See above, Ch. 1.1.1.

136 Our note on Ilyās Fakhr mostly relies on the PhD thesis of Ronney el Gemayel, *Ḥāšiyah Waǧīzah*, p. 85–126.

Multiple factors influenced Fakhr's transition from a Catholic sympathizer to an Orthodox polemicist. His growing exposure to anti-Roman arguments, coupled with the increasingly aggressive Latinization policies of the Catholic missionaries, led him to reconsider his stance. His close association with Patriarch Sylvester, who emerged as the leader of the anti-Roman Orthodox faction following the schism of 1724, reinforced this shift.

As a logothete and an intellectual, Fakhr played a crucial role in articulating and defending the Orthodox theological position. He became a prolific writer, producing treatises that countered Catholic claims, particularly on the issue of papal authority and the procession of the Holy Spirit. His collaboration with Sophronios of Acre and Yūsuf Mark was particularly significant in this regard. Together, they worked on translating and disseminating key Orthodox texts, such as Patriarch Nektarios's *Peri tēs archēs tou Papa*, which was rendered into Arabic as *Kitāb jalā' al-abṣār min ghishā' al-akdār*.

These translations were not merely linguistic exercises; they were strategic tools in the broader Orthodox resistance against Catholic encroachment. Fakhr was particularly meticulous about ensuring textual accuracy, emphasizing the need to preserve the integrity of patristic citations to pre-empt Catholic critiques. His letters to fellow scholars, including Mūsā Ṭrābulsī, his nephew, reveal his deep concern over potential misrepresentations and his insistence on rigorous scholarship in defense of the Orthodox position.

Fakhr's ties to Patriarch Sylvester were both intellectual and personal. His nephew, Mūsā, served as the patriarch's secretary, further strengthening his connection to the anti-Roman leadership. Fakhr's role extended beyond scholarship; he actively participated in the political and ecclesiastical maneuvers that sought to consolidate Orthodox authority in Aleppo and beyond.

One of his most critical interventions came in 1731 when he presented the *berat* recognizing Sylvester's authority over the Rūm Archdiocese of Aleppo. However, the implementation of this decree was obstructed by Catholic factions, who leveraged their financial resources to bribe Ottoman officials. Despite such setbacks, Fakhr remained steadfast in his efforts to support Sylvester's position, providing intellectual and logistical support to the patriarch's administration.

Beyond his literary and diplomatic activities, Fakhr also played a tangible role in sustaining Orthodox religious life in Aleppo. In 1753, following the forced departure of Bishop Sophronios of Acre from Aleppo because of Catholic pressure, Patriarch Sylvester authorized the celebration of Orthodox liturgies in Fakhr's home. This decision underscored his status as a trusted figure within the Orthodox hierarchy and highlighted the crucial role he played in maintaining the continuity of Orthodox worship in times of crisis. His home became a sanctuary for Orthodox

clergy and faithful, reflecting his unwavering commitment to the preservation of the Eastern Christian tradition.

Fakhr's legacy lies in his tireless defense of the Orthodox Church against Latinization. His scholarly contributions, polemical writings, and active engagement in ecclesiastical politics made him a formidable figure in the 18th-century religious landscape of the Levant. His collaborations with Sophronios of Acre and Yūsuf Mark ensured that the Orthodox response to Catholic challenges was well-articulated and widely disseminated.

His work also provides valuable insights into the broader dynamics of Christian-Muslim relations in the Ottoman Empire. As a dragoman, he navigated the complex political terrain of consular and ecclesiastical rivalries, leveraging his position to advance the Orthodox cause. His ability to operate at the intersection of religious scholarship, diplomatic service, and community leadership makes him a key figure in understanding the intricate web of alliances and conflicts that shaped 18th-century Middle Eastern Christianity.

To sum up, Ilyās Fakhr was not merely a theologian or translator; he was a defender of the Orthodox identity at a time when external pressures threatened to fragment his community. His intellectual rigor, strategic acumen, and unwavering dedication to his faith ensured that the Orthodox tradition remained resilient in the face of formidable challenges.

1.2.2 Iakobos of Patmos[137]

Iakobos of Patmos was an influential Orthodox scholar and educator in the 18th century. Born on the island of Patmos, he was profoundly shaped by the monastic and academic environment of the Monastery of Saint John the Theologian. Under the guidance of Makarios Kalogeras, a prominent Orthodox scholar and theologian, Iakobos became one of the leading figures in Orthodox education. His expertise in Greek philosophy, theology, and languages positioned him as a crucial asset to the Orthodox Church, particularly during a time of heightened missionary activity by Latin Catholic and Protestant groups in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Iakobos received his education at the renowned Patmian School, established in the early 18th century. This institution attracted students from across the Orthodox world, including the Balkans, Russia, and the Middle East. The curriculum focused

137 For Iakobos's biography we have mostly relied on an unpublished partial Arabic translation of K. Karnapas, Ιάκωβος ο Πάτμιος ως Διδάσκαλος εν τῳ Αντιοχικῷ και Ιεροσολυμιτικῷ θρόνῳ κατά τον ΙΗ΄ αιώνα, Jerusalem, 1906.

on Greek and Latin grammar, philosophy, rhetoric, and theology, ensuring that its graduates were well-versed in the Orthodox intellectual tradition. Iakobos excelled in these studies and later became a teacher at the school, solidifying his reputation as a leading Orthodox scholar.

Sylvester of Antioch, who ascended to the patriarchal throne in 1724, faced significant challenges. The Latin missionary presence had led to a division within the Orthodox community, culminating in the establishment of the Melkite Greek Catholic Church. Determined to preserve and strengthen Orthodox identity, Sylvester sought scholars and educators who could reinforce Orthodox theological teachings and counter the influence of Latin and Uniate missions. Recognizing the need for a strong educational institution, he turned to the Patmian School for assistance in establishing Orthodox learning centers in his Patriarchate.

Responding to Sylvester's call, Makarios Kalogeras recommended Iakobos as the ideal candidate to spearhead Orthodox education in Antioch. In 1726, Iakobos arrived in Aleppo, a central intellectual and commercial hub within the Patriarchate of Antioch. His primary task was to establish a school that would provide Orthodox clergy and laity with theological and linguistic training, thereby countering the growing influence of Catholic missionaries.

Under Iakobos's direction, the school in Aleppo flourished, attracting students from various regions. The curriculum was modelled on that of the Patmian School, incorporating Greek language studies, patristic theology, and Aristotelian philosophy. Iakobos's ability to translate and adapt Greek theological texts into Arabic allowed him to make Orthodox teachings accessible to the local population. His work laid the foundation for a renewed Orthodox educational tradition in the region.

By 1728, political and religious opposition in Aleppo forced Iakobos to relocate to Tripoli, where he established another school. Supported by Sylvester and local Orthodox leaders, he continued his mission of providing high-quality theological education. His efforts, however, were not without challenges. Latin missionaries and local adversaries sought to undermine his work, leading to tensions that ultimately compelled him to leave the Patriarchate of Antioch in 1735.

Following his departure from Antioch, Iakobos was invited by Patriarch Meletios of Jerusalem to establish a higher theological school for the Brotherhood of the Holy Sepulcher. Arriving in Jerusalem in 1736, he founded an advanced theological school that educated Orthodox clergy in Greek and Arabic. He was assisted by his disciple Sophronios of Kilis. His work significantly contributed to the intellectual and theological resilience of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, reinforcing Orthodox teachings at a time of growing external pressures from Latin and Protestant missions.

The exact date of Iakobos's death, September 20, 1765, is preserved in the MS Vatican, Sbath 264.[138]

1.2.3 Khalīl and Dīmitrī Ṣabbāgh

In the collection of letters, we find two letters sent to Mūsā by Ṣabbāgh family members: Khalīl and Dīmitrī. While Khalīl is known from other sources, Dīmitrī is not known outside the correspondence.[139]

Khalīl Ṣabbāgh left descriptions of two pilgrimages he undertook to some of the most celebrated monasteries of the Christian East: The Monasteries of Saint Catherine on Mount Sinai and Our Lady of Ṣaydnāyā. The first journey took place in 1753, when he accompanied Archbishop Constantine II of Sinai himself.[140] This privileged circumstance allowed him to visit all the sanctuaries at leisure and to record a vivid account of his stay among the monks of the monastery. His second journey, to Ṣaydnāyā, is recounted in the work *Riḥla ilā Ṣaydnāyā*, dated 1755.

We have noted earlier that Ṣabbāgh sent a condolence letter to his friend on Ilyās Fakhr's death, and his brother sent a follow-up regarding a matter that he wanted his friend to solve for him in Constantinople.[141]

1.2.4 Athanasios Mukhalla' al-Dimashqī

Athanasios Mukhalla' al-Dimashqī is the most recent figure featured in this collection, which includes three of his letters (Letters 33–35), and a fourth letter on behalf of Sophronios of Kilis, who was the patriarch of Constantinople at the time (Letter 66), all of which are connected to the tensions between the Damascenes and Patriarch Daniel of Chios (1767–1791) mentioned earlier.

Athanasios was born in Damascus around 1750. He was the son of Mīkhā'īl Mukhalla', as can be inferred from his translation of *Al-būq al-injīlī*. Introducing himself, he says: "The priest Athanasios the monk son of Mīkhā'īl Mukhalla',

138 See Sbath, *Bibliothèque*, p. 126.

139 See Cheikho, *Catalogue des manuscrits des auteurs arabes chrétiens depuis l'Islam*, Beirut, 2000, p. 132; Graf, *GCAL* III, p. 159; Cheikho, "Mīkhā'īl al-Ṣabbāgh wa-usratuh", *al-Mashriq*, 1905, p. 26; Nasrallah, Haddad, *HMLÉM* IV.2, p. 303.

140 The Arabic text was published in: Louis Cheikho, "Riḥlat Khalīl Ṣabbāgh ilā Tūr Sīnā", *al-Mashriq*, 7, 1904, p. 958–968, 1003–1013.

141 See above, Ch. 1.1.1.

Damascene by origin, the carpenter, he received the monastic schema in Sinai".[142] We have no information about his early years. His command of the Arabic language and engagement in church affairs suggest he had studied Arabic in ecclesiastical circles, probably with Mūsā Ṭrābūlsī. In his letters to Mūsā, he calls him "the father and the master".

According to Joseph Zaytūn, Athanasios studied Greek with Dawūd al-Qusṭanṭīnī.[143]

As mentioned, he received the monastic schema in Sinai. We do not know his monastic name before priesthood. In his *Histoire*, Nasrallah identifies him as Acacius al-Dimashqī, a monk in Sinai.[144] If this is correct, it should not be understood that Athanasios spent his monastic life in Sinai. We are aware that a *metochion* of the Monastery of Saint Catherine of Sinai was active in Damascus in the 18th century.[145] We learn from a manuscript preserved in Khinshara (OBC 868) that Yūsuf, son of Mīkhā'īl Mukhalla', presumably the brother of Athanasios, copied a manuscript for Deacon Ioannikios, son of the priest Yūḥannā Khabbāz of Damascus. Ioannikios endowed the manuscript to the *Metochion* of Saint Catherine of Sinai in Damascus. Nasrallah associates the families Mukhalla' and Khabbāz, saying that Khabbāz is a branch of the family.[146] Even though Nasrallah does not specify his source, it can be accepted that Ioannikios Khabbāz was a relative of Athanasios and Yūsuf.

Athanasios appears in the correspondence under the signature *Bābā* Athanasios al-Dimashqī. On April 21, 1776, writing from Jerusalem, he informed Mūsā Ṭrābulsī that he had just received two of his letters, one by land and one by sea, accompanied by a letter from Patriarch Daniel of Chios (1767–1791). In his letter, Athanasios explained that he had wished to travel to greet the patriarch in person (*li-laṭm anāmilihi al-ṭāhira*) but was detained in Jerusalem by the "venerable fathers", both out of affection and because they needed his assistance. They promised, however, to fulfill his wish and entrusted him to Kyr Anthimos, who renewed his promise but advised delaying the journey. This episode, later clarified by a letter from Sophronios (October 5, 1777), related to tensions between the Orthodox community of Damascus and Patriarch Daniel. Athanasios's father, a notable of Damascus, had

142 See Kyr Makāriyūs, *Kitāb Al-būq al-injīlī*, vol. 1, Beirut, 1888, p. 2.

143 See J. Zaytūn, *Al-āsīya masīrat qarn wa-niṣf*, Damascus, 1993.

144 Nasrallah, Haddad, *HMLÉM* IV.2, p. 195, 303-304. Acacius al-Dimashqī is the author of a description of Mount Sinai.

145 The *Metochion* of the Monastery of Saint Catherine of Sinai in Damascus is attested for the first time in the 1220s. It seems that its activities stopped around 1238 and the monks and some of their belongings were transferred to Sinai. See H. Ibrahim, "Poimen al-sīqī moine copiste (fl. 1223-1237) et la cellule des moines sinaïtes à Damas", *Parole de l'Orient*, 50, 2024, p. 93–129.

146 Nasrallah, Haddad, *HMLÉM* IV.2, p. 195.

been tasked with delivering the community's report to his son, who was then to travel to Constantinople to present it directly to the Ecumenical Patriarch Sophronios II (Sophronios of Kilis). Anthimos, likely the future patriarch of Jerusalem (1788–1808), opposed this recourse to Constantinople and sought to resolve the matter locally, possibly also wishing to retain Athanasios in Jerusalem to help revise his own Arabic texts, such as *al-Hidāyat al-qawīmat* (1775) and, later, his *Commentary on the Psalms* (1778).[147] Athanasios also told Mūsā that he had been ordained priest at the church of the Holy Sepulcher shortly before April 1776, and that the new patriarch of Jerusalem, Abramios (†1787), though less learned than his predecessors Chrysanthos and Ephraim, was pious, austere, and a patron of letters.

Athanasios finally reached Constantinople in 1777, carrying the complaints from Damascus against Patriarch Daniel. In a rushed letter dated October 5, 1777, written the same day as Sophronios's own to Mūsā, he described a tense encounter with Patriarch Daniel, who had arrived in the city via Chios and was upset about the accusations. Sophronios, however, supported Athanasios's cause. He urged Mūsā to come to Constantinople in person as he had promised to. The letter also includes greetings to al-Maqdisī Abū Yūsuf Dīmitrī (Ṣabbāgh?), Deacon Girgis, Mūsā's son, and Deacon Yūsuf, Mūsā's son-in-law.

The last extant letter from Athanasios, now bishop of Homs, dated 25 June 1787, reports his arrival in his diocese at the start of Lent, a brief illness, and his preaching during the season. He inquired about rumors of Patriarch Daniel's departure from Damascus – news that proved true, as Patriarch Daniel had left the city a month earlier, never to return.

The activity of Athanasios in Homs is known from a historical work on Homs composed by Constantin son of David al-Ḥimṣī entitled *Kitāb tawārīkh Homs al-ʿādīya dākhilan wa-khārijan*.[148] This book is primarily an inventory of sacred artefacts that could be found in Homs in the years 1862–1863 when the book was written.[149]

From the numerous objects endowed to the church of the Forty Martyrs in Homs we learn that, in 1759, Patriarch Sylvester together with his *wakīl*, Ilyās Sīyālāt, initiated an important phase of pastoral care for the parish. Sylvester devoted much

147 Haddad, "La correspondance", p. 284, n. 31.

148 He is better known for his illuminated manuscript of the *al-Nāmūs al-muqaddas al-sharīf wa-al-miṣbāḥ al-sāmī al-munīf* (a Canon Law Collection) preserved in MS Balamand, Monastery of Our Lady 196. See his biography by Ilyās al-Zayyāt, "Qusṭanṭīn ibn al-Khūrī Dāwūd al-Ḥimṣī, khaṭṭāṭ wa-muzakhrif ʿāsha fī al-qarn al-tāsiʿ ʿashar", in *Kitāb al-nāmūs al-sharīf: Muqaddima wa-dirāsāt*, Beirut, 1991, p. 39–65.

149 See MS BnF Ar. 5936. The author announces a more extensive version of the book entitled *Kitāb al-jughrāfīya, The Book of Geography* (f. 9r, 14v, etc.)

time to decorating the church, painting its frescoes, and endowing to it a program of more than ten icons, as described by Constantin al-Ḥimṣī.[150] The most prominent was the fresco of the Mother of God [*Platytera*][151] *tôn Ouranôn*, which, according to the author, himself an artist, did not fully adhere to the established "principles of icon painting" (*usūl al-taṣwīr*).[152] Ilyās Sīyālāt and other parishioners offered liturgical vessels and utensils for the services.

When Athanasios succeeded to the episcopal throne of Homs, he continued this work of embellishment, focusing especially on the furniture of the church. In the beginning of the description of the furniture he endowed or commissioned for the church of the Forty Martyrs, Constantin does not avoid elogy. "Athanasios al-Dimashqī who was distinguished in languages (*bāri' fī 'ilm al-lughāt*), an erudite man in theology and [Christian] doctrine (*jahbaz fī 'ilm al-lāhūt wa-al-diyāna*), and conversant with the sacred texts of other faiths, who learned the Qur'ān by heart, and [was even known] to debate leading Muslim scholars in Homs.[153]

So, Athanasios commissioned several remarkable pieces for the church. Among his works was a specially crafted bishop's chair (*Kursī Yidak Ayman*), built by skilled carpenters brought from Constantinople. It was a solid walnut seat, adorned with a wooden crown and reached by two steps, used by the bishop during weekday services. Athanasios also installed two additional walnut chairs, richly carved with delicate motifs, for use inside and outside the sanctuary during vesting and liturgical processions.

The most celebrated of his commissions, however, was a monumental walnut throne placed beside the royal doors of the iconostasis, elevated on three marble steps sheathed in decorative fabric. Supported by carved lions entwined with serpents, flanked by cherubim and seraphim, and surmounted by a high crown adorned with angels playing trumpets, instruments, and holding doves, its intricate reliefs were all carved from the same wood. This extraordinary throne, dated 1787, had no equal in the churches of Syria, and Constantin remarked that even the patriarchal throne in Damascus, before its destruction in the massacre of 1860, could not rival it.

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150 Some of these are now preserved in the church of Saint George al-Ḥamīdīya, Homs; see Figures 48–53 in Ţipău, *Sylvester of Antioch*, p. 404–409.

151 This part was covered with lime during the restoration of the church, so the author did not reproduce it. See MS BnF Ar. 5936, f. 16r.

152 See MS BnF Ar. 5936, f. 15r.

153 Constantin's words echo Ibn Ṭrād's: Athanasios was esteemed for his knowledge. Learned in sciences and philosophy (*'ālim faylasūf*), Greek and Arabic, and good administrator (*qayyim*), called "the Star of the East" (*kawkab al-sharq*), and the philosopher of his time (*faylasūf al-dahr*). See Ibn Ṭrād, *Mukhtaṣar tārīkh*, p. 149.

In the same year, Athanasios also commissioned a grand walnut ambo, reached by ten steps, for Gospel readings on Sundays and feast days and for the sermons of the bishop or priests. Circular in form and five-sided, its panels bore reliefs of Christ and the Four Evangelists, alongside ornamental carvings and birds. This ambo, like the thrones, was the work of master carpenters from Constantinople, funded from the church's own resources.

Through these commissions, Athanasios not only enriched the liturgical space of the church of the Forty Martyrs but also left a lasting artistic legacy, complementing and extending the pastoral and artistic vision initiated by Patriarch Sylvester.

We are tempted to see behind Athanasios's career the guiding hand of Mūsā Ṭrābulsī. Recognizing Athanasios's potential, Mūsā may have encouraged him to pursue a path like that of Sophronios, in the hope that one day an Arab patriarch might occupy the See of Antioch. We hear echoes of this ambition in Athanasios's Letter 33, written from Constantinople. At the same time, in the company of Sophronios: "We ask the Almighty to grant patience to the Christians of Damascus and strengthen them in their faith, for they have endured not only persecution from the Greeks and the Catholics but now are also being attacked by those of their own kin and faith". Yet, once again, this plan came to nothing.[154]

In the appendix to Brayk's *Al-ḥaqā'iq al-waḍīya*, we read that after the death of Patriarch Daniel in 1791, the metropolitans convened and elected Athanasios, bishop of Homs, as patriarch. However, the Patriarchate of Constantinople disregarded this election, asserting that "the sons of the Arabs do not know how to preserve their sound Orthodox faith". Instead, in 1792, it appointed one of its own bishops, Anthimos (or Euthymius) as patriarch of Antioch, providing him with imperial decrees (*awāmir 'āliya*).[155] The source of this information, added by the editor Salīm Qab'īn, remains unknown.

Athanasios continued to serve as bishop of Homs until 1804, when he was transferred to the bishopric of Beirut. Ibn Ṭrād, who records this transfer, expresses a somewhat negative opinion of him.[156] According to Ibn Ṭrād, Athanasios put himself forward for the vacant see of Beirut following the death of Bishop Makarios Ṣadaqa. At that time, he had left Homs "out of fear of the authorities, being a man of wealth who loved prestige and worldly order".

In 1804, Athanasios departed from Homs. On his way, he celebrated Easter in Tripoli, where the local community warmly received him. He then proceeded to

154 As mentioned in the preface, previous attempts were made with Sophronios of Kilis and Makarios Ṣadaqa.

155 See Brayk, *Al-ḥaqā'iq al-waḍīya*, p. 68.

156 See Ibn Ṭrād, *Mukhtaṣar tārīkh*, p. 148-149.

Mār Ilyās al-Muḥayyiṭa, where prominent figures from Beirut and Mount Lebanon met with him and urged him to accept their diocese. They petitioned Patriarch Anthimos of Antioch in Constantinople, who issued a formal decree transferring him from Homs to Beirut. Athanasios was consecrated for Beirut in Damascus on July 20, 1804, by Metropolitan Barnabas, the patriarch's representative, assisted by two other bishops.

Nevertheless, according to Ibn Ṭrād, his relations with the clergy were strained because of "his harsh temper, love of worldly honor, and habit of hoarding wealth while claiming poverty". Despite these tensions, he enlarged the Beirut episcopal residence at his own expense. He left the church a library of about 160 Greek and Arabic volumes – many copied or translated by his own hand – including his Arabic version of *Evangelikē Salpinx* by Makarios Kalogeras.

In 1813, following Patriarch Anthimos's death, Athanasios aspired again to the patriarchal throne of Antioch. According to Ibn Ṭrād, "he relied on his wealth, learning, and reputation".[157] However, the Holy Synod of Constantinople elected instead Metropolitan Seraphim of Karyopolis, who was enthroned in Constantinople on August 10, 1813. Seraphim visited Beirut in December, then proceeded to Damascus, accompanied by Athanasios, whom he valued highly for his learning and bilingual proficiency. While in Damascus, Athanasios fell ill during Holy Week and died on Wednesday, April 8, 1814. According to Ibn Ṭrād, the Arab Orthodox Church mourned "the eclipse of this sun", the loss of a figure of exceptional erudition and eloquence.[158] Ibn Ṭrād complains that aside from the expanded episcopal residence and the library, Beirut retained little from the bishop's considerable personal fortune, which was claimed by his relatives, the patriarch [Seraphim?], and the Monastery of Saint Catherine on Mount Sinai.

1.3 Other Topics

1.3.1 Mīkhā'īl Tūmā[159]

During Sylvester's extended absences, the Apostolic See was managed through *wikāla*. Although the standard practice was to appoint one or more vicar bishops, a practice seen in the early years of Sylvester's patriarchate, the position was soon

157 *Ibidem*, p. 150.

158 *Ibidem*, p. 151.

159 Cf. Nasrallah, Haddad, *HMLÉM* IV.2, p. 274–275; Nasrallah, "Shā'ir malakī majhūl min al-qarn al-thāmin 'ashar", *al-Masarra*, 1948, p. 273–281.

entrusted to a layman, Mīkhā'īl Tūmā, who held it for an exceptionally long time. As Mīkhā'īl Brayk, a contemporary witness, explains, the main duty of the vicar (*wakīl*) of Damascus was to oversee the patriarchal cell in the city. However, Tūmā, the longest-serving lay *wakīl* during Sylvester's patriarchate, broke this arrangement by overseeing the entire patriarchal See.

Before arriving in Damascus, Sylvester kept Leontius, who was formerly Athanasios Dabbās's vicar, as his representative there.[160] He also appointed another vicar bishop, Timotheos of Ḥamā, to oversee the eparchy of Aleppo. Timotheos arrived with a *statikon* from Sylvester, imposing strict measures on the Aleppians regarding their interactions with Catholic missionaries. Sylvester himself arrived in Aleppo on November 9, 1725, and enforced these restrictions. His strictness was poorly received, leading to lawsuits and ultimately forcing him, as noted earlier, to leave for Constantinople.

From Constantinople, Gregory was appointed vicar bishop and entered Aleppo on June 16, 1727, to oversee an eparchy that was then under the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople. He remained until April 1730, when he withdrew from the position. Meanwhile, in Damascus, the representative appears to have been a monk named Christophor.[161] As Sylvester was still not authorized to re-enter Syria, the Catholics installed in Aleppo a pro-Latin bishop for a short time. When Sylvester returned, now holding a *berat*, he appointed Ḥabīb al-Aʿwar as *wakīl* on July 20, 1733, though Aleppo remained under Constantinopolitan jurisdiction.

The start of Mīkhā'īl Tūmā's *wikāla* happened around the same time. This can be inferred from Brayk's information in 1764 that Mīkhā'īl Tūmā's *wikāla* lasted a little over 30 years. In any case, by July 25, 1735, he had assumed his position. This fact was confirmed by the French ambassador in Constantinople, who considered him the main cause of the difficulties faced by Catholic missionaries in the city.[162]

When Sylvester departed for Cyprus on December 27, 1735, the missionaries exerted heavy pressure on the French ambassador to either have Cyrill Ṭanās appointed patriarch or ensure the exile of Mīkhā'īl Tūmā. The ambassador reported that he had obtained an order to arrest the *wakīl* but advised the consul in Sidon to persuade the missionaries not to enforce it, fearing that such an action might disturb public order.[163]

In 1737, Mīkhā'īl Tūmā. composed an Arabic document outlining the criteria for recognizing priests and laypeople as members of the Orthodox Church. The

160 See Walbiner, "Die Bischofs- und Metropolitensitze", p. 64.
161 See Ţipău, *Sylvester of Antioch*, p. 74.
162 *Ibidem*, p. 85.
163 *Ibidem*, p. 84.

document was implemented on behalf of the patriarch, who was not present at the time.[164] This could be indicative of the fact that, within a relatively brief period, he came to represent the entire Patriarchate.

As demonstrated in another document, the authority of Mīkhā'īl Tūmā over the Rūm in the patriarch's absence is evident. On July 20, 1737, Sim'ān al-Sim'ānī (also known as Assemani) composed a letter addressed to Mīkhā'īl.[165] In this letter, al-Sim'ānī asserted that Rome had not mandated alterations to the rite observed in other churches, as some, presumably the Rūm Catholics, were doing.[166]

In January 1741, Mīkhā'īl was still serving as *wakīl*, as indicated in Sylvester's letters to the Emirs Milḥim and Najm (Appendix 3). The wording suggests that the Emirs already knew Mīkhā'īl at that time, and that Sylvester envisioned permanent collaboration through his representative. This may imply that Tūmā visited the Emirs in 1740 alongside the patriarch and his companions.

Sometime between May and July 1742, Mīkhā'īl was dismissed from his functions. In Letter 19, the priest Salāma is referred to as a *wakīl*. From the document mentioned above, we learn also that Ṣalībā ibn Yūsuf was appointed in Sidon in 1743.[167]

However, very influential with the Ottoman rulers, Tūma soon secured another position, and he was recognized in 1743 as *muta'ahhid al-iltizām* (collector of farm taxes) of Nāḥiyat Rāshayyā.[168]

Mīkhā'īl Brayk tells us that Tūma was reappointed as *wakīl* in 1743 by Sylvester before his departure to the Romanian Principalities and remained in this position until 1745, when the Catholics managed to imprison him and appoint a Catholic representative for a short time.[169]

On May 25, 1746, Sylvester appointed a new representative in Damascus and its dependencies, Nicephorus of Payas (Letter 64).[170] More details can be found in an official petition preserved as a copy of the order sent to the governor, *mütevellî*, and *kadıs* of Damascus, summarized by Çolak.[171] In this petition, Sylvester requested the replacement of his representative Mīkhā'īl because he was not a clergyman

164 *Ibidem*, p. 86.

165 It is preserved in MS Jerusalem, Séminaire Saint-Anne 167.

166 The second letter preserved in this manuscript, written by an anonymous Rūm Catholic and addressed to Cardinal Vincenzo Petra (1662–1747), is a refutation of al-Sim'ānī's letter.

167 MS Ḥarīṣā, Saint Paul 210, f. 159v.

168 A copy of the document is posted on the Facebook page of Aldar Alsultaniyeh. The call number is not provided. The original seems to be preserved in the Archive of Constantinople.

169 Brayk, *Tārīkh al-Shām*, p. 11–12.

170 *Ibidem*, p. 19; for the exact date, see Çolak, *Relations*, p. 209.

171 See Çolak, *Relations*, p. 209.

and thus unfit to perform religious ceremonies. Consequently, Sylvester proposed appointing a cleric named Nicephorus instead. The duties of the new representative included not only tax collection and overseeing ceremonies but also enforcing conformity to the Greek Orthodox rite, reflecting the Anti-Catholic stance of the Patriarchate of Antioch. The Porte's approval of the petition reveals its support for this internal reorganization.

However, Mīkhā'īl Tūma was still active against Catholics in Jerusalem. Letter 61, dated August 1747, reports that Mīkhā'īl Tūma had problems with the representative of the Franks.

Probably at the same time or slightly later, Yūnis Niqūlā was appointed *wakīl* in Beirut, as we learn from two documents dated in 1749 preserved in MS Harisa 210.[172] We mentioned above Sylvester's letter sent to the Emir Milḥim regarding the bishop of Sidon and Tyre, in which the *wakīl* of Beirut, Yūnus, is mentioned. After this letter, Sylvester or his secretary added a note that in April the same year, a letter was sent to Yūnus the *wakīl*.

In 1750, Nicephorus set out on a journey to Ḥāṣbayyā and Rāshayyā to collect alms; he appointed Mīkhā'īl Brayk as *wakīl* for a short time.[173]

Mīkhā'īl Brayk mentions that in 1751 a conflict arose between the *wukalā'* and the *mutaqaddimīn* of the Rūm, because the Catholics used to make the Rūms pay penalties equally with the Catholics from which they were exempted earlier.[174] He sees this event positively as a divine providence to protect the Church and liberate it from the injustice (*jūr*) of the *ru'asā'*. In another work, he adds:

"For the rulers seized every chance to extort money: occasionally, they would arrest them [Catholics] and imprison them until they paid a ransom. Afterward, they would order them to return to obedience to Sylvester and to pray in the church. These Catholics would come back only to be mistreated again, suffering losses and expenses so great that only God knows their full extent. This had become a customary practice of the rulers, continued by their successors. It is estimated that over roughly twenty years, the rulers took about a thousand purses from the Damascenes. All of this was done in the name of enforcing the [Holy] word and for personal gain".

Reading between the lines, we see that Brayk believes three reasons lead to the mass shift to Catholicism. These are: Sylvester, despite his sanctity, was not a good administrator; *jūr al-wukalā'* (Mīkhā'īl Tūma and the vicar Nicephorus of Payas) *wa-al-ru'asā'* (Sylvester?), who wanted to enforce their authority; and the ability of

172 MS Ḥarīṣā, Saint Paul 210, f. 157v.
173 Brayk, *Tārīkh al-Shām*, p. 63.
174 *Ibidem*, p. 16, 19.

the Catholic missionaries to adapt their behavior depending on how the patriarch administered the patriarchate.[175]

In 1758 or 1759, Patriarch Sylvester and his *wakīl* Mīkhā'īl Tūmā were arrested for having done construction works in Damascus without permission.[176] In 1761, Mīkhā'īl was replaced by Jirjis al-Ḥalabī. In 1762, Mīkhā'īl once again replaced Jirjis al-Ḥalabī for a year and a half before his death.[177]

Brayk also reports that at that time, Mīkhā'īl served as *wakīl* for just over 30 years. When he was first appointed, his main role was to oversee the patriarchal cell and church during Sylvester's absence. Later, he managed all the affairs of the [Antiochian] Christians.[178]

The scattered information regarding Mīkhā'īl Tūmā provided by Brayk that we gathered along with the other information as exposed above confirms Brayk's note that Tūmā was primarily assigned the *wikāla* of the patriarchal cell only, but he appointed himself *wakīl* of all the Antiochian Orthodox. Another *wakīl* could be appointed in other eparchies only when Tūmā was not a *wakīl*. We therefore know of Ṣalībā ibn Yūsuf in Sidon in 1743, Yūnus in Beirut in 1749, Ilyās Sīyālāt in Homs in 1759, and Makarios Ṣadaqa, who was appointed bishop of Sidon and *waqīl* in 1763.

1.3.2 Sylvester's Printing Press

The story of Patriarch Sylvester's Arabic press at Saint Sabbas in Iaşi remains fragmentary. Thanks to the close reading of Sylvester's correspondence and the work of scholars such as Mihai Ţipău, it is now possible to piece together a surprisingly detailed narrative. The Arabic expense register from Saint Sabbas, preserved for the year 1746, documents monthly costs for type-cutters, apprentices, repairs, and even binding, revealing the outlines of a functioning Arabic print shop in Iaşi, in Moldavia. From the outset, Sylvester's project appears both ambitious and technically hands-on. According to Ţipău, Sylvester personally experimented with ink recipes and was involved in multiple aspects of the technical life of the press.

175 "And know that all of this was orchestrated by the Padres, who, when they saw weakness on the part of the patriarch, would tell them to openly declare their Catholic faith. But when they saw the patriarch grow strong, they would say to them: 'Be obedient to your patriarch, celebrate the liturgy in their churches, and confess to their priests. We have no difference whatsoever, except for what is incumbent upon you: refrain from eating fish during the Great Fast and on Wednesdays and Fridays; as for the Nativity Fast, fifteen days are sufficient; and the Apostles' Fast, twelve days' […]"

176 See Brayk, *Tārīkh al-Shām*, p. 65.

177 *Ibidem*, p. 74.

178 *Ibidem*, p. 72–73.

Yet one of the most puzzling aspects of the story remains unresolved: the source of the Arabic type used in Iaşi. As Ţipău notes, there is no surviving documentation that identifies where the original Arabic type came from, or who cast it. The colophons of printed books do name two individuals – Mīkhā'īl from Kūrat al-Dhahab, a monk, and Jirjis, a deacon – as typesetters or correctors, and Ţipău has suggested that Deacon Jirjis may be the same as Jirjis Abū Shaʿr, who appears in the correspondence. If this identification is correct, then it is possible that Abū Shaʿr played a central role in creating the type used at Iaşi. Supporting this idea is a note in the letters that he was paid twice for his work: once by the voivode in Iaşi, and again later in Bucharest.

The correspondence itself, however, is often silent about this first Iaşi phase. This silence may be explained by the simple fact that Mūsā Ṭrābulsī, the usual correspondent, was physically present with the patriarch in Iaşi during this time. If he had been in Damascus, his brother Buṭrus could have reported on developments at the press. However, since the extant letters from this early period are sparse and clearly incomplete, such updates may have existed but are now lost.

A clearer narrative only emerges after the press was moved from Iaşi to Bucharest. It is from this moment onward, beginning in 1747, that Yūsuf Mark becomes a central witness. His frequent letters chart both the technical setbacks and the institutional ambitions surrounding Sylvester's printing efforts.

In Letter 63 (August 11, 1747), we learn that Sophronios of Acre was translating *The Defense of the True Faith* specifically as a task for the newly established press. His knowledge of the press had come from Mūsā and al-Ḥājj Mīkhā'īl Tūmā – evidence that the news of the project had traveled beyond the Romanian Principalities, and was understood within the wider Orthodox world as a bold initiative led by the patriarch himself.

But this optimism was short-lived. In Letter 28 (November 21, 1747), Yūsuf Mark, newly arrived in Bucharest, reported that Patriarch Sylvester was directly supervising the casting of new Arabic type. The work was being undertaken by Jirjis Abū Shaʿr and a companion, with hopes that the new typefaces would correct the defects of the first set. Just before this, they had completed printing the Letter of the Council of Constantinople, for which Yūsuf himself had composed the preface. However, the press soon fell silent. The abrupt halt to production was likely caused by the complete deterioration of the original Arabic typefaces, which had already been used in several large runs of up to 1,000 copies.

By mid-October 1748 (Letter 54), Yūsuf was still writing from Wallachia. He had now taken control of the operation. The previous effort – led by Abū Shaʿr, whom Yūsuf now dismissively called Abū Barāqish – had failed entirely. All money, labor, and materials had been lost. The failure was blamed on Abū Shaʿr's incompetence and treachery. In response, Sylvester withdrew his support, transferring

the machinery and remaining tools to Yūsuf, who was tasked with reorganizing the project, together with Monk Mīkhā'īl and Deacon Parthenios.

In Letter 27 (spring 1749), Yūsuf updated Mūsā on the slow but steady progress of this new venture. By Easter, the iron type had been completed, and the team had moved on to brass plates. There was cautious optimism that printing would soon resume. Meanwhile, Abū Sha'r – once a central figure in the project – was now entirely marginalized and held no position.

Taken together, these letters unfold the history of an ambitious but fragile project: from its hopeful beginnings in Iaşi, through the mechanical and organizational failures that brought production to a halt, to the frustrated attempt at revival in Bucharest, and the eventual reorganization under a new direction. Where official reports by Sylvester are absent or laconic, the correspondence supplies the missing voices: it names the craftsmen, records setbacks and accusations, and preserves the intentions and disappointments of those involved. Hopefully, more sources of this kind will come to light in the future, allowing us to complete the picture.

1.3.3 Arabic Eloquence and Classical Erudition in Mūsā Ṭrābulsī's Letters

Until now, our focus has been mainly on the historical matters related to the Correspondence. However, it is essential to discuss the eloquence in Arabic that the authors of the letters demonstrate.

The earliest Christian work preserved, known as *On the Triune Nature of God* or *An Apology for the Christian Faith* and dated 755 or 788, demonstrates a proficient command of the Arabic language and a familiarity with the Qur'ān and Islamic terminology.[179] This remark is also applicable to authors from various Christian denominations. These authors are praised for having expressed the Christian Theology in Arabic, which helped both Christians and Muslims find common ground and define what distinguishes them in polemics and debates.[180]

179 For an analysis of this work, see M. Swanson, "An Apology for the Christian Faith", in S. Noble, A. Treiger (eds.), *The Orthodox Church in the Arab World, 700–1700: An Anthology of Sources*, DeKalb, 2014, p. 40–59.

180 For the terminology used by early Christian authors, see R. Haddad, *La Trinité divine chez les théologiens arabes 750–1050*, Paris, 1985; N. Awad, *Orthodoxy in Arabic Terms. A Study of Theodore Abu Qurrah's Theology in its Islamic Context*, Boston/Berlin, 2015, p. 74–88.

In the Orthodox Church, in Jerusalem, in the 11th century, Sulaymān al-Ghazzī is known as the author of the first Christian religious poems.[181] In Antioch, Yūḥannā ʻAbd al-Masīḥ and ʻAbd Allāh ibn al-Faḍl wrote prefaces in *sajʻ*.[182]

This art experienced a boom in Christian communities during the late Ayyubid and early Mamluk eras. In the East Syriac Church, ʻAbdīshū of Nisibe wrote a version of the Gospels entirely in *sajʻ* in the year 1300. [183] In the Coptic milieu, rhythmic prefaces were added to a vast number of patristic texts, including even short ones, such as John Chrysostom's homilies.[184] But these are not the only Christian productions. While a few Christian authors cultivated ornate *sajʻ* and stylistic sophistication, many Christian writings were composed in relatively simple Arabic, prioritizing clarity over rhetorical flourish.

However, it appears that Arabic literacy among Christians in Syria declined during the 14th to 16th centuries.[185] One work that might have employed exquisite language is the one that Constantin ibn Abū al-Maʻānī wrote around 1330, titled *al-Hādī fī fahm al-sīmādī*.[186] This work is unfortunately lost. Other works are rare

181 N. Edelby, *Sulaïman Al-Gazzi (Xe-XIe siècles)*, 3 vols., Rome, 1984–1986; S. Noble, "Sulayman al-Ghazzi", in S. Noble, A. Treiger (eds.), *The Orthodox Church in the Arab World, 700–1700: An Anthology of Sources*, DeKalb, 2014, p. 160–170.

182 For more information on Yūḥannā ʻAbd al-Masīḥ, see our edition of his *Discourse on the Presentation of the Lady in the Temple* written in *sajʻ*: H. Ibrahim, "Yūḥannā ʻAbd al-Masīḥ al-Anṭākī - Discours sur la Présentation de la Vierge au temple", *al-Mashriq*, 96, 2022, 1, p. 259–290, and 96, 2022, 2, p. 191–220; for more information on ʻAbd Allāh ibn al-Faḍl, see, for example, his preface to his translation of the book of Psalms edited in: A. Roberts, *Reason and Revelation in Byzantine Antioch*, p. 124–125. The influence of this preface on the one written by Athanasios Mukhallaʻ for his translation *Al-būq al-ʻinjīlī* is especially notable in how he specifies that the reasons for translating this work are three and how he presents these reasons.

183 S. Khoury † (ed.), *L'Évangéliaire arabe rimé de ʻAbdīshū de Nisibe (†1318)*, with a French introduction by Samir Khalil Samir, 2 vols., Beirut/Jounieh, 2007.

184 See H. Ibrahim, "Jean Chrysostome arabe: Histoire de la traduction et réception (1)", *Chronos*, 40, 2019, nr. 29, 31, 34, and 147.

185 One becomes aware of this situation when examining Graf's *GCAL* II and Nasrallah's *Histoire* III.2 for the period between the 14th and 16th centuries. The differences in the quantity of Christian Arabic literature produced, compared to earlier and later periods, are evident. There are very few known authors, and when they are known, their periods of activity are roughly estimated. Nasrallah preserved the names of some Melkite poets and scientists; however, they did not produce any religious literature, and most of their works have been lost. To fill the gap, Nasrallah also provided the names of copyists who were active in the same period.

186 Nasrallah mentions this work under the name Abū al-Fatkh, which is the Arabic equivalent of Constantin, a *laqab* that explains Constantine's success in war. For more details on this work, see Nasrallah, *HMLEM* III.2, p. 149–150.

and do not show exquisite language.[187] We mention the Homilies composed by Athanasios, patriarch of Jerusalem (r. 1460-1466?) and those of Daniel ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (ca. 1327–1382). It seems that during this period, Christian elites in the Monastic milieu preferred Syriac and Greek to Arabic. In this context, an interesting case is Makarios, bishop of Qāra (ca. 1429-1480), who translated from Arabic into Syriac liturgical texts and copied Syriac manuscripts.[188] In the Maronite milieu, Garshūnī was used.[189] In 1596, in his Syriac grammar, George Amira explained that since Christians lived among Muslims and shared Arabic with them, they chose to write their sacred texts in Syriac script to keep them inaccessible and safeguard the faith. Over time, many works – biblical, liturgical, grammatical, poetic, and scientific – were produced in this form. Thus, Garshūnī served both a protective and a cultural function, ensuring that Christian learning and identity remained distinct. This led to the printing of the first book, the Qozhaya Psalter, in the Ottoman East in Syriac and Garshūnī in 1610.[190]

In the late 16th century, the arrival of the Jesuit missionaries favored the growth of manuscript production not only among communities that showed the will to become united with Rome, e.g., the Maronites, but also among the Orthodox, especially in the region of Tripoli, where a small activity of copying manuscripts was present and took advantage to develop.[191] The Jesuits required manuscripts for the education of Christians they wished to bring to Rome, preparing them for the priesthood. Therefore, they commissioned or bought manuscripts written by David of Bṭurrām.[192] These manuscripts were endowed to the School of the Maronites in Rome.[193]

187 These homilies were printed by Athanasios Dabbās in Aleppo in 1711.

188 See Nasrallah, *HMLEM* III.2, p. 148 and 201.

189 See J. Moukarzel, "Maronite Garshuni Texts: On their Evolution, Characteristics, and Function", *Hugoye*, 17, 2, 2014, p. 237–262.

190 See J. Moukarzel, "Le psautier syriaque-garchouni édité à Qozhaya en 1610. Enjeux historiques et présentation du livre", *Mélanges de l'Université Saint-Joseph*, 63, 2010–2011, p. 511–566.

191 Earlier to this period, Mīkhā'īl ibn al-Māwardī, patriarch of Antioch (1523–1540), could have copied the works of John of Damascus, as we have shown in our PhD Thesis: Habib Ibrahim, *Jean Damascène arabe: édition critique des deux traités contre les Nestoriens*, École Pratique des Hautes Études, Paris, 2016, p. 86, 105–106.

192 On the MS Vatican Ar. 468 commissioned by Giovanni Battista Eliano, see A. Vaccari, "Una Bibbia araba per il primo Gesuita venuto al Libano", *Mélanges de l'Université Saint-Joseph*, 10, 1925, p. 77–104.

193 See MS Vatican Ar. 436 (1581), 467, 468 (1578), and 472 (1560/1561).

This movement soon expanded into Damascus and Aleppo.[194] The initial phase mainly involved gathering available texts as patriarchs, bishops, and monks collected as much material as possible. Patriarch Karma aimed to produce texts such as the Bible, Synaxarion, Horologion, Leitourgikon, Typikon, and Euchologion in accordance with the Greek editions.[195] He also strove to have his corrected versions printed by the Propaganda Fide, though this effort was unsuccessful.

Makarios ibn al-Zaʿīm, disciple of Karma, continued to advance his master's project. He first gathered more texts available in Arabic manuscripts. To provide but one example, in the domain of Hagiography, he collected more than 70 long hagiographical texts in a book called *al-Dūlāb* (*The Wheel*).[196] The story of his travels, an interesting piece of literature, was written by his son, Deacon Paul ibn al-Zaʿīm.[197]

This movement created a need within the Christian communities in the Middle East to master the Arabic language. This can be inferred from the book *Baḥth al-maṭālib wa-ḥathth al-ṭālib* written by Germanos Farḥāt, the Maronite bishop of Aleppo, in the early 18th century. Farḥāt dedicated much of his career to promoting Arabic among the Christians by producing manuals and grammars tailored to their needs. His book *Baḥth al-maṭālib wa-ḥathth al-ṭālib* was widely used and copied by Maronite and Rūm communities. As mentioned, it was copied by Mūsā Ṭrābulsī, who complained that the copy he had was full of mistakes and needed correction. This symbolizes a broader movement to demonstrate that Christians, too, were

194 For the Aleppian Scribes, see our articles: H. Ibrahim, "Marqus of Aleppo, a Seventeenth-Century Forgotten Scribe. Biography Reconstructed from the Colophons", in G. Kiraz, S. Schmidtke (eds.), *Literary Snippets: Colophons Across Space and Time*, Piscataway, 2023, p. 255–283; idem, "Talǧat an-nāsiḥ fils du prêtre Ḥūrān al-ḥamawī", *Chronos*, 39, 2019, p. 125–171.

195 For the works of Karma on the Gospels, see E. Dannaoui, "From Multiplicity to Unification of the Arabic Biblical Text: a Reading of the Rūm Orthodox Projects for the Arabization and Printing of the Gospels during the Ottoman Period", in D. Bertaina, S. Toenies Keating, M. N. Swanson, A. Treiger (eds.), *Heirs of the Apostles*, Leiden, 2018, p. 24–27; for more details on the Euchologion, see Charbel Nassif, *L'euchologe melkite depuis Malatios Karmé (†1635) jusqu'à nos jours: Les enjeux des évolutions d'un livre liturgique*, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Institut Catholique de Paris, Paris, 2017; C. Nassif, "Autour de l'euchologe melkite de Malatios Karmé (†1635)", Proche-Orient Chrétien, 68, Beirut, 2018, p. 46–61; for more information on the Horologion, see A. Wade, "A Preliminary Comparison of the Horologion in Sinai Arabic 232 (13th c.) with the 1702 Edition of Athanasios Dabbās and the Earlier Version of Meletios Karma", in R.-A. Dipratu, S. Noble (eds.), *Arabic-Type Books Printed in Wallachia, Istanbul, and Beyond*, Berlin/Boston, 2024, p. 243–265.

196 For more details on this work, see H. Ibrahim, "Makarios ibn al-Zaʿīm's *Book of the Wheel*", in Dipratu, Noble (eds.), *Arabic-Type Books Printed in Wallachia, Istanbul, and Beyond*, p. 307–331.

197 See I. Feodorov, *Paul of Aleppo's Journal*, Vol. 1: *Syria, Constantinople, Moldavia, Wallachia and the Cossacks' Lands*, Leiden, 2024.

heirs to the Arabic literary tradition, fully capable of mastering its grammar and drawing on its rhetorical richness.

In the 1730s and 1740s, the Orthodox and the newly formed Rūm Catholic community became entangled in fierce polemical exchanges. One central figure in this debate was ʿAbd Allāh Zākhir, a printer and writer who, after leaving Aleppo, established the Arabic press in Dayr al-Shuwayr. His printed works promoted the Rūm Catholic viewpoint but also launched direct attacks on the quality of the Orthodox manuscript tradition. He accused the Rūm Orthodox of producing grammatically flawed, poorly translated, and theologically imprecise works. ʿAbd Allāh Zākhir's excellent command of Arabic is acknowledged by his rivals in Letter 71, which was either written by Sophronios or by Ilyās Fakhr. The Orthodox strived to publish all polemical texts free of mistakes.

A more thorough reading of the correspondence between Mūsā Ṭrābulsī and his circle should consider this complex environment. The letters serve not only as evidence of intellectual friendships but also as demonstrations of linguistic skill in theological debates. Amid accusations and rivalry, these Orthodox authors aimed to showcase their command of Arabic through their correspondence itself. Their letters are filled with poetic quotations and classical references, and demonstrate grammatical accuracy.

The assessment of Sophronios and Yūsuf Mark, who authored most of the letters, varies. Both are creative, but in different ways. Sophronios leverages his knowledge of the Arabic language to craft an authentic text from start to finish, utilizing sophisticated vocabulary and numerous metaphors. He writes with intense emotion. Yūsuf Mark often repeats elegant letter openings and formulas from manuals, but he also shows creativity, especially when he writes entire letters in *sajʿ*.

The letters of Sophronios of Kilis (later bishop of Acre) addressed to his friend Mūsā Ṭrābulsī present a compelling portrait of friendship in the early 18th-century Orthodox world. They reveal not only personal affection but also a profound theology of brotherhood where remembering a friend is closely linked to honoring one's vocation. The correspondence shifts between warmth, reproach, lamentation, and comfort, providing a rare glimpse into how intellectual and pastoral bonds were nurtured, challenged, and maintained during difficult times.

For Sophronios, friendship is never just about sentiment. Instead, it manifests as a form of spiritual brotherhood, rooted in their shared struggle to defend Orthodoxy under difficult circumstances. He repeatedly calls Mūsā a "cherished brother" and emphasizes that their friendship offers comfort amid humiliation and poverty. "Even if I am here without companions", he writes, "in your quarter I have friendship and remembrance". Here, friendship is not simply personal comfort but a vital force that keeps Sophronios committed to his mission of debating with the Latins and defending the Church in Jerusalem.

A central theme in these letters is Sophronios's repeated criticism of Mūsā's silence. He often presents this as a betrayal of friendship: "Why did you keep your silence and tarry in your response? Perhaps you have abandoned our friendship because difficult circumstances have overcome me?" Elsewhere, he laments that although he has written several times, "only one letter from you has reached me. As for my other three letters, there has been no response". For Sophronios, friendship must be mutual and shown through letters; silence is seen not as a neutral lapse but as a wound. The act of writing serves as a test of loyalty.

Although these letters often carry a passionate tone, Sophronios derives his vocabulary of longing from Scripture and the tradition of lamentation. Separation from Mūsā is compared to Benjamin's grief for Joseph (*Genesis* 43:30) and to David's desire for the wings of a dove to escape and find rest (*Psalm* 55:6). In another passage, he wishes that paper itself could speak and witness his sighs and sorrows. Such intensity is not romantic, but biblical: it reveals how absence and longing are woven into the fabric of faithful friendship – a friendship shaped by suffering and tested by distance.

Perhaps the most profound statement comes when Sophronios turns the charge of forgetfulness into a reflection on identity and vocation. In response to Mūsā's suggestion that he has forgotten him, Sophronios insists:

"I implore you, by God, if my mind has darkened to such an extent that I forget you, then how could I possibly remember anyone? As an inevitable consequence, I would forget all things worthy of remembrance, and my mind would be devoid of pleasant [thoughts prepared for] debates, for which we now endure sleepless nights, extreme poverty, and total humiliation".

Here, the memory of the friend and the memory of the mission overlap. To forget Mūsā would mean losing awareness of the very debates and struggles that shape Sophronios's life. Forgetting a friend, then, is not merely social neglect; it is spiritual decay.

Finally, Sophronios expands his accusations into thoughts on the fragility of human friendship. "Please write to us now and let us know if you no longer wish to remember us", he warns, "so that we can sever our hopes from you as we have done with others. There is no good in a love that feels like an imposition; its troubles outweigh its joys". Elsewhere, he criticizes another correspondent for having "entirely abandoned us, denied our friendship, and raised his eyebrows at us. God will judge this haughty grandeur". For Sophronios, friendship that is not mutual is worse than all. The collection of letters becomes a reflection of loyalty and disloyalty, of endurance and abandonment.

In Sophronios's letters, friendship is not just private sentiment but a theological reality. It supports memory, grounds mission and reveals character. Silence is seen as betrayal; remembrance is honored as a sign of fidelity. Separation causes grief

but also provides an opportunity to express the depth of brotherhood in Christ. The letters thus demonstrate how 18th-century Orthodox intellectuals employed letter exchanges to establish a community of faith and memory, where the distinction between personal and pastoral love was intentionally blurred.

If Sophronios's letters pulse with emotional urgency, those of Yūsuf Mark radiate refinement and rhetorical craft. His correspondence with Mūsā Ṭrābulsī demonstrates how eloquence, learning, and friendship were interwoven in the epistolary culture of the 18th-century Orthodox world. Yūsuf's creativity lies not so much in spontaneous outpourings as in the artful transformation of formulas, poetry, and sacred texts into letters that both console and instruct.

He frequently frames friendship in the language of abundance and beauty. Receiving a letter from Mūsā is likened to a healing encounter: "Your letter, rather, your noble and honorable image, reached me. What a letter it was, more delightful than a meeting! When the deserted embraces it, it extinguishes his torment. The pearls of its words, strung along chains of sincere affection, embody the fulfillment of desires and wishes". In another place, he confesses, "If you have abandoned me, I will not abandon you, and if you have indeed forgotten me, I will not forget you". For Yūsuf, silence does not end friendship; rather, it intensifies his obligation to remember, turning absence into an occasion for even greater displays of loyalty.

His letters abound in citations from Scripture. Confronted with plague, he exhorts: "Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee: hide thyself… until the indignation be overpast" (*Isaiah* 26:20–21). On the death of a bishop, he recalls the Psalmist: "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints" (*Psalm* 116:15).

Yet Yūsuf is equally at home citing poets and *maqāmāt*. Yūsuf Mark's texts are full of citations from poems by al-Mutanabbī, Abū Tammām, Ibn al-Fāriḍ, and Ṣafī al-Dīn al-Ḥillī, which are cited and reworked in rhetorical flourishes. His mastery of *saj'* stems from learning the *Maqāmāt* of al-Ḥarīrī, which are a recurring presence – especially *maqāmas* 36, 49, and 51 – woven into letters with a familiarity that suggests not only reading, but memorization and reuse, adding new ideas. He rebukes Mūsā with rhetorical balance: "My beloved, I have not ceased writing to you out of boredom, nor have I broken the bond of affection by my actions. But from my great longing for you I envied my letter for reaching you before me".

If Sophronios's language turns absence into lament, Yūsuf's turns it into ornament. His descriptions transform correspondence into a theater of eloquence. A letter is "like Moses restored to his mother, or Joseph's robe when it reached Jacob". The news of separation become "tears [that] flowed until he swam in their sea, and the periods of separation lengthened from months to years". Even reproach is couched in excess: "Neither the abundance of work nor other preoccupations

deterred me from corresponding with you… the burning desire to see your handwriting ignited in my heart".

Beyond friendship, Yūsuf's letters are a window into the intellectual practices of his milieu. He reports on copying, translating, and circulating texts. "As for *Mulḥat al-iʿrāb,* I have completed the text, and it will soon reach you through His Eminence the bishop, so make it into one volume". When rivals accused Orthodox scribes of incompetence, Yūsuf responded not with polemic but with precision: books must be recopied with vigilance so that "the book is not criticized". For him, the act of writing – whether a letter or a manuscript – was both a gesture of friendship and a defense of communal reputation.

The letters also mirror the turbulent life of their author. At one point, Yūsuf writes from imprisonment: "Your letter reached me and alleviated my sorrow and distress… Indeed, I am indebted to your love for the remainder of my life and for eternity". Elsewhere, he chronicles controversies over authorship, rivalries among scholars, and the establishment of printing presses in Wallachia. Friendship with Mūsā is never isolated from these broader struggles; rather, it is the medium through which Yūsuf shares news, seeks counsel, and sustains morale.

What emerges is a portrait of a man who lived through upheaval yet anchored himself in eloquence. If Sophronios defines friendship as spiritual brotherhood tested by silence, Yūsuf defines it as rhetorical abundance tested by distance. For him, memory is not only fidelity but also style: to remember a friend is to craft elaborate praise and to turn sorrow into poetry.

In conclusion, the correspondence provides insight into the Classical texts they studied during the curriculum and the works they developed an interest in during their careers. References to figures like Sībawayh, al-Mutanabbī, Abū Tammām, Ibn al-Fāriḍ, and Ṣafī al-Dīn al-Ḥillī, and to didactic works such as Farḥāt's grammar or al-Ḥarīrī's *Mulḥat al-iʿrāb* are not uncommon. What emerges is a picture of an intellectual culture in which the correct use of Arabic was a priority. This attention to language extended to the physical production of texts. In reaction to the accusations brought by Zākhir and others, the Orthodox communities took special care to ensure that the manuscripts they copied were error-free. Together, Sophronios and Yūsuf show two complementary faces of 18th-century Orthodox intellectual life: one passionate and biblical, the other ornate and literary.

1.4 Codicology

1.4.1 General Aspects

The *unicum* we are studying is stored at the Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate in Damascus, under call number 300. Unfortunately, because of the ongoing events in Syria, we have not been able to examine the physical manuscript in person to provide a more detailed codicological description. Our analysis partly depends on the work of Rachid Haddad and mostly on our own review of digital reproductions of the part of the manuscript we are editing.

The manuscript is in octavo format (in-8°), roughly 20 × 15 cm. Haddad did not record the exact measurements when he examined the manuscript in 1969. It contains 94 folios and is written in black and red ink. The number of lines per page varies, ranging from 18 to 26. The manuscript is divided into ten distinct sections.

1. The Correspondence of Mūsā Ṭrābulsī that we publish here.
2. Decree of Sultan ʻAbd al-Majīd to the Orthodox Patriarch of Constantinople [Anthimos IV (1840–1841, 1848–1852)], dated March 1849.
3. *A Hundred Sayings of Wisdom*, which stops at Saying Number 80. Incipit:
   الحمد لله الذي ارشدنا الى منهج العدالة برحمته... اما بعد فاني لما رايت كلام العارفين,
   Praise be to God, who has guided us to the path of justice through His mercy... To resume: when I observed the words of those endowed with knowledge...
4. Life of Simeon Stylites by Theodoret of Cyrrhus.[198]
5. Account of the Fall of Constantinople to Sultan Mehmet II (Muḥammad ibn Murād abū al-Fatḥ).
6. Anonymous *Homily on the Epiphany*. Incipit:
   الحمد لله البالغة كلمته السابغة نعمته,
   Praise be to God, whose Word is all-pervasive and whose blessing is all-encompassing.
7. An anonymous and acephalous work, recounting various historical events from the Umayyad and Abbasid periods.
8. Poem by Mīkhāʾīl Ḥātim on the Ottomans, in 16 verses. Incipit:
   تاريخ في دولة السلطان احمد خان,
   History of the reign of Sultan Ahmed I (Aḥmad Khān).
9. A few medical recipes.

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198 We edited this translation based on manuscript MS Sin. Ar. 423, f. 14r–25r in H. Ibrahim (ed.), *Yūḥannā ʻAbd al-Masīḥ († 11e s.). Maʻīn al-ḥayāt al-markab al-sāʾir fī mīnāʾ al-naǧāt autrement connu comme al-Dūlāb*, vol. 1, Beirut, 2020, p. 79–90; see also H. Ibrahim, "Liste des Vies de Saints et des Homélies conservées dans les ms. Sinaï arabe 395-403, 405-407, 409 et 423", *Chronos*, 38, 2018, p. 50.

10. Excerpts from an anonymous work on war instruments and chemical science, illustrated with several geometric and mechanical drawings.

At the time Haddad examined the manuscript, the order of the folios was the same, at least for the part we are studying, as in the images we received. This order, as we will show below in our description, is not the original sequence. Haddad noted that this collection was transcribed by five different scribes, with scribe A being Mūsā Ṭrābulsī himself.[199] However, it should be emphasized that variations in handwriting do not necessarily indicate the involvement of different scribes. Changes in script can result from several factors, such as the use of various writing tools or inks, variations in the scribe's level of care or attention, or the passage of time between writing sessions. A single scribe's handwriting may appear inconsistent across a manuscript depending on these materials and contextual conditions.

These observations also apply to Mūsā Ṭrābulsī. When comparing the various surviving manuscripts written by him (see Figures 9–10), one notices significant differences in script. However, these differences are best understood not as evidence of multiple scribes but as reflecting the different circumstances under which he worked. Therefore, we cannot be certain which parts, where the script appears different, were written by Mūsā, nor can we determine exactly how many scribes contributed to the collection.

Therefore, instead of labeling the various hands as Scribe A–E, we will more carefully refer to them as Handwriting 1–5.

They are evidenced as follows:

Handwriting 1, folios 1r–8r; 11r–18v; 30r–37v; 41v–43r; 44r; 47v;[200] 48r–48v.

Handwriting 2, folios 8v–9v; 20r–20v; 38r–38v; 40v–41r; 43v–45r.

Handwriting 3, folios 21r–29v; 46r–47r.

Handwriting 4, folios 39r–40r; 49r.

Handwriting 5, folios 45r–46r.

1.4.2 The Original Corpus (Handwriting 1)

The original corpus (Handwriting 1), presumably transcribed by Mūsā Ṭrābulsī himself, only covers the period from 1732 to 1743. This matches the years when Mūsā served as secretary to Patriarch Sylvester, before they departed for Constantinople. From the letters, we learn that Mūsā was married before April 23, 1743. When Sylvester decided to leave for Constantinople and then continue to Moldavia, Mūsā,

199 Haddad, "La correspondance", p. 258.

200 Haddad swapped the pages 88 (f. 49r) and 91 (f. 47v).

now married, wished to step down from his position. However, he had no choice but to go with the patriarch, since Yūsuf Mark opposed the idea of making the journey.

This context helps explain why Letter 10, which was received in December 1743, shortly after their departure, was not copied by Mūsā (Handwriting 1), but instead appears later in the manuscript in a different script (Handwriting 2).

In its original form, this corpus consisted of four quires (possibly quaternions); only one quire remains as six scattered folios, which most likely made up the fourth quaternion, along with two now-missing folios. Folio 8 does not belong, as it might initially appear, to the first quire; instead, it is one of the misplaced folios. Neither the author, presumably Yūsuf Mark, nor the date (1743) fits the context of that section. It could be an error by the binder, who replaced what he thought was a missing folio from the first quire (containing seven folios) to complete a quaternion.

Therefore, the first part includes the letters of Sophronios from 1732 to 1743 (f. 1r–7v; 11r–18v). In this section, we find two letters from Kyr Iakobos of Patmos, which probably means that Sophronios himself wrote them at a time when Kyr Iakobos had not yet gained enough knowledge of the Arabic language. The second part consists of the letters of Yūsuf Mark from 1737 to 1743 (f. 30r–37v; 41v–43r; 44r; 8r).

It is worth noting that the letters are not arranged in strict chronological order, as mentioned earlier. Mūsā appears to have chosen what he considered the most eloquent letter (or letters) from each author to place at the beginning of each collection, even when it is not the first chronologically.

At the end of this initial collection, there was at least one letter from Ilyās Fakhr, Mūsā's uncle (dated 1732). R. Haddad attributed Letters 68–72 to Ilyās Fakhr.[201] For reasons explained in the edition, we believe that Letters 70–71 (on f. 48r–48v) may, in fact, have been written by Sophronios, and that this folio could originally have belonged to either the first or the second quire.

The letter attributed to Ilyās Fakhr is written on the verso, with the recto currently blank – or perhaps, initially on the recto with the verso left blank before binding. This layout could indicate either that a blank page was intentionally left for adding more of Yūsuf's letters later, or that the letter was intended to be the final item in the collection, uniquely authored by Ilyās Fakhr. If the first possibility is accepted, it may suggest that additional letters by Ilyās Fakhr – possibly covering two or three folios from the now-missing fourth quire – were lost.

Given the small number of letters by Ilyās Fakhr preserved in this corpus, their inclusion may have served as a supplement – perhaps intended to create a sense of symmetry with the two letters by Kyr Iakobos found in the first section.

201 Not to forget that Letter 72 is written in a different handwriting.

The blank pages in the sections with Ilyās Fakhr and Yūsuf Mark's letters offer enough space – as we will discuss shortly – for adding more letters by other scribes or by Mūsā himself, especially those written in Handwriting 2. The same applies to folio 8, which we believe was originally part of the fourth quire. Unfortunately, we cannot get precise information about the scattered folios just from the scanned images. This issue needs to be addressed through direct examination of the manuscript itself.

The following table shows an approximate reconstruction of the original order of the folios.

Tab. 2: The Letters in Chronological Order

Folio number (Possibility 1)	Folio number (Possibility 2)	Quire
1–7 (+48?)	1–7; 11	1
11–18	48; 12–18	2
30–37	30–37	3
44; 41; 42; 8; 47 (+3 lost folios?)	44; 41; 42; 8; 47 (+3 lost folios?)	4

1.4.3 Additions (Handwritings 2–5)

As previously stated, Mūsā decided to step down from his role as secretary to Patriarch Sylvester in 1743, likely because he was unwilling to spend a long time away from his family. However, this probably did not take effect until after he returned from Constantinople in 1746. When Patriarch Sylvester went back to Damascus in 1753, Mūsā resumed his duties as the patriarch's secretary. At this time, he again started receiving letters from his friends, mainly Yūsuf but also Sophronios, and later Athanasios Mukhalla', probably a disciple of Mūsā.

This means that some of the newly added letters from 1746–1753 do not strictly align with the framing of the original collection's title, which presents the corpus as the correspondence of Mūsā solely in his role as secretary. However, most of the letters from this period relate to Mūsā's travels with the patriarch. Letters 26–28 and 54 are reports by Yūsuf on the progress of establishing the printing press, which was the primary goal of the patriarch's earlier journey to Constantinople. Letter 63 is a congratulatory message from Sophronios on the publication of the first printed books. In contrast, Letter 31 is a follow-up from Dīmitrī Ṣabbāgh regarding a matter he had previously asked Mūsā to address in Constantinople.

The letters from the period 1747–1787 were primarily added by two hands – Handwriting 2 and Handwriting 3. The order in which these two copyists worked has not yet been definitively determined. However, some evidence suggests that Handwriting 2 may have preceded the others. For example, on folio 46r, Handwriting

3 writes over a page already used by Handwriting 5, while the text in Handwriting 5 begins on folio 45r, a page previously copied by Handwriting 2. This might indicate the sequence was: 2, 5, 3. Nevertheless, it is also possible that Handwriting 5 simply filled a gap left by Handwriting 3 at the start of his text on folio 46r. This remains the only case where Handwriting 3 appears after Handwriting 5.

As the manuscript currently stands, the folios copied in Handwriting 3 – unlike those in Handwriting 2 – are mostly preserved together as a block (f. 21r–29v). These probably formed a separate quire, added after the four main quires, where two additional folios in Handwriting 3 are also present. Handwriting 4 (f. 39r–40r), which is inserted between two pages copied by Handwriting 3 (f. 38v and 40v), may have been written by the same copyist; however, the use of a different writing tool gives it a slightly different appearance.

Various theories have been proposed about who copied these letters. One such interpretation was provided by Ioana Feodorov, who noted that the teaching of Greek and Arabic appears repeatedly in the letters copied under Mūsā's supervision.[202] Leaders of the Antiochian and Wallachian churches encouraged young Christians to learn foreign languages that would help them in their future service to the Church. As part of their Arabic studies, students were asked to copy simple texts. This educational setting likely explains why some of the handwriting seems shaky, hesitant, or inaccurate.

1.4.4 Chronological Order of the Letters

To help readers navigate the collection more easily, we provide a chronological list of all the letters included. Because the letters in the manuscript are not arranged in order – likely due to transcription errors, later additions, or rearrangements by different copyists – this list is a helpful tool for understanding the historical flow of the correspondence. It allows us to trace the development of relationships, themes, and historical events as seen in the letters, from as early as 1732 to the last document received in 1787. This chronological index is based on the dates within the letters (when available), internal references, and paleographical clues. For undated letters, the suggested dates are approximate and derived from contextual evidence.

202 Feodorov, *Arabic Printing*, p. 237.

Tab. 3: Reconstruction of the Original Order of Folios

Nr	folio	Date/Year	Month	Day	Author	Recipient
68	47v	1732	11	29	Ilyās Fakhr	Mūsā
7	6v–7r	1732	11	30	Sophronios (deacon)	Sylvester
12	11r–11v	1733	1		Kyr Iakobos	Sylvester
5	4r–5r	1733	[5?]		Sophronios	Mūsā
3	2v–3r	[1733]	[5]		Sophronios	Mūsā
1	1r–1v	1733	8	15	Sophronios	Mūsā
2	2r–2v	1733	8	31	Sophronios	Mūsā
6	5r–6r	1734	7	16	Kyr Iakobos	Dīb
4	3v–4r	[1734]	7?		Sophronios	Mūsā
8	7r–7v	1735	1	5	Sophronios	Nektarios
38	30v–31r	1737	8	21	[Yūsuf Mark (deacon)]	Mūsā
37	30r	[ca. 1737]			Yūsuf Mark	Mūsā
39	31r–31v	1738	6		[Yūsuf Mark]	Mūsā
40	31v–32r	1739	8	19	[Yūsuf Mark]	Mūsā
41	32v	1740	2	6	[Yūsuf Mark]	Mūsā
43	33r	1740	3	20	[Yūsuf Mark]	Mūsā
42	33r	[1740]	[3]	[18]	[Yūsuf Mark]	Mūsā
13	11v–12r	1740	4		Sophronios	Mūsā
44	33v	1740	5 or 6		[Yūsuf Mark]	Mūsā
45	34r	1740	6	29	[Yūsuf Mark]	Mūsā
46	34v	1740	7	27	[Yūsuf Mark]	Mūsā
14	12v	1740	8		Sophronios	Mūsā
47	35r	1741	3	9	[Yūsuf Mark]	Mūsā
15	13r–13v	1741	3		Sophronios (priest)	Mūsā
16	13v	[1741]	3 to 12		Sophronios (priest?/ Metropolitan?)	Mūsā
21	16r–16v	1741	11	5	Sophronios (Metropolitan)	Sylvester
62	44r	[1742]	[1?]		Yūsuf Mark (deacon?)	Mūsā
70	48r	[ca. 1741]			[Ilyās Fakhr or Sophronios]	Mūsā
71	48v	[ca. 1741]			[Ilyās Fakhr or Sophronios]	Mūsā
17	14r	1742	1		Sophronios	Mūsā

48	35v–36r	1742	3 or 4		[Yūsuf Mark]	Mūsā
65	46r–46v	[1742]	5		Sophronios	Mūsā
18	14v–15r	1742	5		Sophronios	Mūsā
19	15r–15v	1742	7		Sophronios	Mūsā
52	37r–37v	1742	10	5	[Yūsuf Mark]	Mūsā
22	17r–17v	1743	1		Sophronios	Sylvester
49	36r	[1743]	[ca. 4]		[Yūsuf Mark (priest)]	Mūsā
20	15v–16r	1743	4	23	Sophronios	Mūsā
24	18r–18v	1743	4	[23]	[Sophronios]	[Sylvester]
50	36v	1743	6		[Yūsuf Mark]	Mūsā
58	41v	[1743]	7	mid	[Yūsuf Mark]	Mūsā
59	42r	1743	8	mid	[Yūsuf Mark]	Mūsā
9	8r	1743	8	27	[Yūsuf Mark]	Mūsā
25	18v	[1743]	[ca. 8]		[Sophronios?]	Mūsā
60	42v–43r	1743	9		[Yūsuf Mark]	Mūsā
10	8v–9v	1743	12		[Yūsuf Mark]	Mūsā
23	17v	[ca. 1743]			[Sophronios]	[Sylvester]
51	36v–37r	[ca. 1743]			[Yūsuf Mark]	Mūsā
53	37v	[ca. 1743]			[Yūsuf Mark?]	Mūsā
31	24r–24v	1747	4	13	Dīmitrī Ṣabbāgh	Mūsā
63	44r–45r	1747	8	11	Sophronios	Mūsā
28	21r	1747	11	21	[Yūsuf Mark]	Mūsā
26	20r	1748	7	29	[Yūsuf Mark]	Mūsā
54	38r–38v	1748	10		Yūsuf Mark	Mūsā
27	20r–20v	1749	30		[Yūsuf Mark]	Mūsā
64	45r–46r	1749	11	5	Sophronios (Metropolitan)	Mūsā
72	49r	[ca. 1750]			[Ilyās Fakhr]	Mūsā
11	9v	[ca. 1750]			[Yūsuf Mark]	Mūsā
29	21v–22r	1754	[5]	[end]	[Yūsuf Mark]	Mūsā
57	40v–41r	[1754]			[Yūsuf Mark]	Mūsā
61	43v	1755	9	end	Yūsuf Mark	Mūsā
30	23v	1758			Khalīl Ṣabbāgh	Mūsā
55	39r	[ca. 1760]	5 or 6		[Yūsuf Mark]	Mūsā

36	29v	[1762]			[Yūsuf Mark]	Mūsā
56	39v–40r	[1762]			[Yūsuf Mark]	Mūsā
35	29r	1764	8	21	[Yūsuf Mark]	Mūsā
67	47r, 48v	1766	4	end	Samuel of Constantinople	Mūsā
32	25r–26r	1776	4	12	Papa Athanasios	Mūsā
33	26v–27v	1777	10	5	[Papa Athanasios]	Mūsā
66	46v–47r	1777	10	5	Sophronios of Constantinople	Mūsā
34	28r–28v	1787	60	25	[Papa Athanasios]	Mūsā

1.5 Rules of Edition and Translation

We have numbered the letters. When a letter has no title, but the author's identity is known, we have added a title with the author's name in square brackets [ ].

We included biblical references in square brackets [ ] within the text. We have aimed, as much as possible, to render the biblical quotations in English according to the King James Version. However, this was not always feasible, as the authors often quote the Bible from memory.

In the text, we show folio numbers as follows: //#r// or //#v//, with 'r' indicating recto and 'v' indicating verso. When a letter begins on a new page, we added the folio numbers at the end of the previous letter.

We have marked passages that are quotations from classical works or are repeated in other letters with curly brackets { }.

In the translation, we have provided the dates in the format: 'on the day of the month in the year'.

In the apparatus criticus, we labeled our manuscript as M.

We have standardized the Arabic text by adding missing diacritical dots: for example, on ه in feminine forms and on ى pronounced *ī*. Conversely, we removed the dots from ي when it is pronounced *ā* (*alif maqṣūra*).

We have standardized the spelling of *alif ṭawīla* and *alif maqṣūra*, e.g., كلا.

We have not changed the sentence structure to improve the style, but we have fixed certain grammatical forms, especially in the nominative and accusative plurals (where و becomes ي or ي becomes و).

We have deleted the tanwīn ًا in the case of *jarr* and *raf'*, e.g., واحدًا, جوابًا.

After *ghayr*, we have changed *naṣb* into *jarr*, e.g., غير مُتقلقِل.

We have corrected the declension of the "five nouns" (الأسماء الخمسة), e.g., أباك .

We have corrected the orthography of the *hamza*, e.g., ينأى (not ينئي).

In the letters of Sophronios and Athanasios of Damascus, we wrote digressions in parentheses (). We preserved these parentheses in the Arabic text and rendered them likewise in translation.

We have standardized the spelling of certain words with varying graphic forms, e.g., سنونو instead of صنونو.

We have restored the *alif* that is sometimes omitted in Middle Arabic verbs, e.g., طَرَأت.

We have deleted the final ي in verb in the *al-jazm* mood, e.g., اهدِ.

We have corrected *naṣb* into *raf*ʿ after *lā al-nāfiya*, e.g., يكفّون.

We have corrected *naṣb* to *raf*ʿ after a pronoun when it is not a case of *takhṣīṣ*, e.g., مُرتبطون.

We have supplied the missing *alif* in rare cases of plural verbs, e.g., تقطعوا.

In medieval Arabic, ظ and ض were sometimes interchanged; we have standardized their spelling, e.g., باهض.

We have removed the definite article *al-* and the pronoun suffix in cases of *iḍāfa* when it was clearly a scribal mistake, e.g., شوق القلب.

Transcription from the Arabic alphabet to the Latin alphabet follows the Library of Congress system, except for very few issues governed by the De Gruyter guidelines agreed for the *EAPE* series.