

3 English Translation of Mūsā's Correspondence

//1r//

We shall begin, with the help of the Almighty God and His good guidance, to write down copies of the letters that have come to us from literate friends, distinguished companions, and dear associates during our service as secretary under the guidance of His Holiness Patriarch Kyr Kyr Sylvester.

1. Copy of a letter from the Deacon Sophronios of Kilis

To the honorable, respected, revered, and cherished brother Deacon Mūsā, the most honorable, peace be upon you from the Lord.

If it so happened that our separation from you has brought us to such a state of lethargy and harm, how much more appropriate and fitting for us to partake in the solace and joy of meeting with you? It undoubtedly would be. However, this not being possible in person, I was struck by a rising motion from the fires of longing, and I took a pen and paper to write down some heartfelt prayers and convey them to you, and to inform you, firstly, that we reached Rāshayyā in safety.

As for the sweltering heat and the blazing warmth of the lofty and rugged paths of the hills, the hardship to [find] companions, the absence of solace, and the lack of guidance – before and after these fearful things – we eagerly yearn to see your radiant and joyful countenance; such that no one could possibly describe. But perhaps you might say: “Set aside your lamentations. Instead, bring us praise and commendations, and dispense with such sorrowful and tiresome matters.” Yet, can there be light without Venus¹ and Orion? Upon my life, it is not possible that any touching event can occur in your absence. For how can happiness arise when Mūsā, Meletius, and Ioannikios are not here; the ones whose absence causes every discomfort //1v// and misery?

I intended to write to 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.

Kiss the hands of His Eminence, the majestic and lord of all; a humble kiss to him, to whom my distance is indeed preferred to my closeness. If possible, hasten to send me a letter that proclaims and pays tribute to the well-being of your noble constitution. This way, even from here, we can collect enormous joy from the plentitude of your sweet fragrance.

1 Known to be the third brightest object seen in the sky, after the sun and the moon.

From here, Deacon Theodosius and Chrysanthos, along with Ibrāhīm Qaṭsh, extend to you abundant greetings. And we send our greetings to Kyr Philotheos the teacher, Kyr Basil, Kyr Christophoros, Kyr Kīryākū², Kyr Ioannis, Kyr Nicholas, Kyr Ioannis Tabā³ the Protosyncellus, the beloved Deacon Laurentius, 'Isā the cook, Peter the gatekeeper, Christophas, the holy Azarias, and to all our [other] loved ones.

Written in haste on the 15th of August, in the year 1733 AD, by the humble Sophronios, who loves you and prays for you. //2r//

2. Copy of the letter from the aforementioned Deacon [Sophronios]

To the honorable Deacon Mūsā of Tripoli, the grammarian (*al-Naḥawī*), may God protect him, Amen.

As the saying goes, if I had not begun this correspondence with you, it might have been a reason for you [to hold me to account]. If only I knew then what excuse or justification you could claim for following this wide path when my letter reached you and arrived in your lands.⁴ By God, I beseech you: why did you keep your silence and tarry in your response? Perhaps you have abandoned our friendship because difficult circumstances have overcome me? Why, then, were you so insistent that I make efforts to inform you what is going on here? Nevertheless, that expression does not deceive when it says, 'Absent from sight, absent from the heart.' Indeed, you might consider abandoning my friendship, for at this time I am struggling in the abyss of concerns, the yearning abode of the desert and wilderness, and the company of people who are not accustomed to ease. How could that be in order, while you reside in a house surrounded by family and magnificent landscapes, ornamented by flowing streams and the brilliance of invincible power? Your natural traits have been endowed with the noblest features, from which you have consistently benefited. I, meanwhile, have been wearied and emaciated, my eyes filled with the earnest tears from sleepless nights.

But let us leave this aside for now, so that I do not appear as one who has strayed from the circle of righteousness. Let the pen not be compelled to write

² We prefer to transliterate this name because we are not sure of its exact form. It could be Cyriacus, as Haddad suggests ("La correspondance", p. 261). However, this is intriguing because it would be the only noun in the genitive case.

³ We adopt here Haddad's reading ("La correspondance", p. 261). Another possibility would be تَبَاع ('followers of').

⁴ Probably referring to the popular saying: عذر أقبح من ذنب, "an excuse worse than the offense".

something that may not be well received by you. Instead, I shall throw my words as an arrow directed toward you, sent out from the fortress of eloquent poets not to wound you but to remind you of an ancient love, proclaiming:

'You see me approaching you, yet you turn away from me

As if God has enriched only you. //2v//

The One who enriched you will enrich me,

And neither my poverty nor your wealth will last forever.'⁵

As for Deacon Meletius, honorable and loyal brother, and Deacon Laurentius, and Philotheos and Ioannikios: convey my greetings to them. May God bless them all.

We have heard news of the arrival of Çavuş Ahmed Agha at the prosperous patriarchal residence. Hopefully, this will give rise to good and fruitful outcomes. We look forward to hearing about it afterwards.

I wish you a long life as always.

[Written on] the 31st of August 1733.

3. Copy of a letter by the aforementioned Deacon [Sophronios]

May the best of friends be near
may happiness and joy abound⁶

Abundant peace and continuous yearning are extended to our dear and noble brother Mūsā from the humble Deacon Sophronios, who prays for him.

In truth, I have never stopped desiring a brighter future, and I lament the fate that, since my youth until now, has not ceased to bring hardships and disasters my way, myself alone among humankind. For among the series of sorrows that have befallen me and the relentless misfortunes that have poured upon me, none has caused me deeper and more grievous pain than the excruciating separation from you. Oh, how I wish it had never happened! It has brought tears to my eyes, regret to my heart, sighs to my thoughts, and filled my life with unimaginable sorrow, such that no one has ever experienced, not even Benjamin //3r// when he lost his beautiful brother Joseph [*Genesis* 43:30].

And now, as I lack the wings of a dove to fly like the king and prophet [David], [*Psalms* 55:6], to make the distances shorter, and reach you, I am in need of the tears of Jeremiah, lover of mourning, to lament my wretchedness until death. If only

⁵ A poem attributed to Ibn al-Fāriḍ.

⁶ In Ottoman Turkish.

paper could speak and feel, it would tell you without concealment the number of sighs and sorrows that reside in my heart because of your absence.

From here, I briefly inform you that on the sixth day after leaving Damascus, on Thursday the 2nd of May, we arrived in Tripoli and were kindly received by its honorable bishop, Kyr Nektarios. At that point, we were concerned with finding a ship⁷ heading either to Cyprus or to Constantinople, so we could go wherever God willed.

We encountered there the holy lord Daskalos, who showed me the joys of love along with all the people of Tripoli, truly blessed by God, and whose forefathers' land shall be abundant. Though a lack of silver might be a great concern for us, the Creator, Most High, will manage it with His economy.

I further inform you that on the way we were struck by heavy rain and thunderstorms. For from Damascus to the City of the Sun [Baalbek] the downpour and storms did not cease as a result of our sins and transgressions.

Please convey our greetings and deepest longing to all our loved ones, and long may you live. //3v//

4. Copy of a letter from the aforementioned Deacon [Sophronios]

To the esteemed one, pride of nobles and peers, adornment of enlightened brothers, the honorable Deacon Mūsā, may God Almighty preserve him.

Since I departed from you, O noble and esteemed one, to the present day, only one letter from you has reached me. As for my other three letters, there has been no response from you, perhaps because of a delay or damage en route. Yet I assure you that if your silence is due to hesitation, then this will not come as a surprise, for this is a matter of love which is, from one side, unsure. The swallow, upon entering the orchard in early spring, sings joyfully, but falls silent in winter when it departs. Such have you been: at first, you sang to us sufficiently in your letters, but why did you then fall silent before the season of the swallow? For the spring of our friendship, in my opinion, has not yet ended. But I beseech you not to despise my love, which some – I daresay – may long for. Henceforth, do not refrain from writing to me concerning every matter, especially the well-being of your pleasant temperament.

⁷ Haddad reads the word *wuqūf*, unfamiliar in Arabic, as 'a ship'. See Haddad, "La correspondance", p. 260.

Today we are present in Antioch, the great city of God, and from here we plan to proceed to Payas⁸. As for the hardships we endure, our dear brother Deacon Ambrosius, bearer of loving letters, will inform you about them, including [our] lack of silver. We hope you will treat him in a brotherly spirit.

With respect to the love, care, and overwhelming longing we have for you, //4r// time is not sufficient [to express it], and neither pen nor tongue, nor even intellect, can fully comprehend it. Perhaps our Lord will bless us with a longed-for meeting with you shortly, possibly in February.

All those with us send you abundant greetings, and from us, we extend abundant peace to all members of the patriarchal residence.

Yours, your brother, the Deacon Sophronios.

5. Copy of a letter of condolence from the aforementioned deacon, the knowledgeable one, before his departure from Damascus in the year 1733 AD

To the beloved brother in God, the honorable Deacon Mūsā, from your humble and faithful brother, Sophronios.

'I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others who have no hope' (*Hebrews* 6).⁹

Indeed, as the blessed, the chosen vessel, says, O honored brother, me neither, I do not wish you to be melancholic and gloomy over the departed, like those who are without hope. By God, I beseech you: why have you been so quickly overwhelmed by sorrow? Why, in such a short while, have you grown so weary? Are you depressed over the passing of your honorable father, as he transitioned from this fleeting, worldly life to the eternal one? What a foolish assumption! Tell me, was the one you lament and mourn for (that is, your father) made of clay, or was he eternal? Evidently, he was made of clay. His journey from the land of exile to the real homeland thus leaves you desolate and without comfort!

Cease, then, //4v// cast aside these absurd assumptions, and be encouraged and confident in God, who has taken him and will take us all after him. Do you not see how all the kings, the mighty, the prophets, the righteous, and all leaders of the world have drunk from the cup of death? Who gave birth to and created your father and mother? God. And where have they gone? To God. Likewise, here you are, like all humankind, waiting to join them.

⁸ A municipality and district of Hatay Province, Turkey.

⁹ The correct reference is *1 Thessalonians* 4:13.

Reflect on the words of the prophet: 'What man is he that liveth, and shall not see death? Shall he deliver his soul from the hand of the Gehenna?' [*Psalms* 89:48]. The wise man says: 'Vanity of vanities; all is vanity' [*Ecclesiastes* 1:2]. And David says: 'Every man is [altogether] vanity' [*Psalms* 39:5]. So, if you love your father, offer supplications on his behalf to relieve those in need, and present offerings for him in the temples of God, so that you may assist him in his actual state and qualify him to share with the saints in blessings and goodness. Don't lament and mourn for him with tears like the ignorant and inexperienced. Contemplate the condition of that heroic and courageous man and fierce lion, Job: how he was joyful even in the depths of sorrow, untroubled in the waves of adversity, and tranquil in the face of ruin. Therefore, join him in that delightful and comforting melody and say: 'Blessed be the name of the Lord from this time forth and forevermore' [*Job* 1:21].

Do you not see how death extends its sword and cuts down every human stature? It does not spare kings, does not honor the virtuous, does not fear saints, does not show mercy to the young, does not mourn grooms, does not wait for children. Indeed, it seizes those of every age and stature, reaping the harvest of human life with its sharpened scythe. Many are the philosophers who reached the pinnacle of wisdom and knowledge, yet whose intelligence became futile at the time of their death.

Alas! Alas for you, O death! To where can we humans escape from your clutches? For you are present in lands and deserts, in forests and plains, in every place, ready //5r// and determined to claim the lives of human beings. But since the Son of God was hung on the cross and descended into hell for the salvation of humanity, death has become a mockery for believers. For many martyrs and saints have despised and scorned it, considering it a transition and advancement from one state to a better one, drinking its bitter cup with joy and delight, and chanting with the voice of the great Isaiah: 'O death, where is thy sting? O Gehenna, where is thy victory?' [1 *Corinthians* 15:55; see also *Hosea* 13:14]. And now, our Lord – to whom be glory – says: 'He that heareth My word, and believeth on Him that sent Me, he passed from death unto life' [*John* 5:24]. Therefore, if you believe in Christ's word, your father did not die but passed from death unto life. And if your father is alive, why do you weep and mourn for him? Do you wish for him to die and not live? Then you are not confident in the words of Christ the Lord, the truthful and glorious One, who is everlasting. Amen.

6. Copy of a letter from the knowledgeable scholar and sage, the blessed Anba Iakobos, the hieromonk from the island of Patmos, to Khawāja Dhīb Ya'īsh, offering condolences for the loss of his son Ni'mat Allāh

Let it be known that my heart felt great sorrow when I heard about the passing of your son, the revered Deacon Ni'ma, and I did not grieve only in thought, but also in tears. For the commandment is apostolic and deals with the qualities of human nature: sorrow with those who mourn, joy with those who rejoice, and tears with those who weep [*Romans* 12:15]. However, remembrance of the virtues of that rich man [young man?] quickly dispelled my sadness and grief, as I have never known of or witnessed in this region a youth as virtuous, intelligent, devoted to worship, peaceful, welcoming of strangers, kind, and cheerful as himself, and, in particular, devoid of pride //5v// and vainglory. The flowers of these virtues – which he possessed in abundance – greatly comforted me, as he suffered no injustice whatsoever when he met his fate. He blossomed with the sweet scent of noble virtues and reached eternal life that does not perish.

Reflect for a moment on the examples that I shall present to you here. What man sails a ship amidst such furious waves, storms, and surges of the tempestuous sea and is vexed by and decries the gentle winds that push him towards the harbor of tranquility? What lost and bewildered man in a foreign land would detest and despise the guide that leads him back to the safety of his homeland? What man imprisoned in a dark, oppressive dungeon blames the one who sets him free and rescues him? Does the present life not resemble such a dark prison, an immense sea of turmoil, a foreign land devoid of consolation and solace?

For this reason, the prophets and messengers sought deliverance from this grim prison. What did the blessed Apostle Paul, the great apostle, seek except to depart from here and be with Christ? What did the king and prophet David request other than: 'Bring my soul out of prison' [*Psalms* 142:6]? Who did the Greek scholars consider more blessed than one who dies at a young age? They found Alexander to be extremely fortunate, not because he conquered and dominated the entire world, nor because the kings of the earth bowed at his feet, but because he died young, before the diseases of old age overtook him, before the hate of his enemies befell him and the affection of his loved ones waned, and before he experienced the upheavals of fortune and the fleeting glory of kingship. On account of this, the teachers of the Church do not deem //6r// a long-lived one him who has lived for many years, but the one who, in a short span of time, has exhibited many virtues. For it is said: he passed away at a young age, yet he achieved [what others will achieve in] many years, as his soul was pleasing to the Lord. Remember these things and cast away all sorrowful and oppressive thoughts from your hearts, and

thank the Lord, the Philanthrope [Most Generous], Who measures out to each one his portion and time of life.

I write these words to you from Antioch and, God willing, when I visit you in person, I will speak much more from my lips.¹⁰ Console and comfort the mother of the deceased as much as your strength allows, for the female nature is highly compassionate and prone to grief, and quick to turn to sadness and tears. Bestow upon her abundant blessings and grace from me in the Lord, and likewise to your beloved son Dimitrios and everyone in your blessed household, both old and young. Blessings upon you all, again and again.

Written on the 16th of July, in the year 1734 AD. //6v//

7. Copy of a letter from the Deacon Sophronios to the father Kyr Sylvester, patriarch of Antioch

To the holy father of fathers, the honorable shepherd of shepherds, our lord Kyr Kyr Sylvester, patriarch of Antioch, may his grace and esteem be abundant and lasting.

No tongue can describe, no pen can write, and – I dare say – no mind can comprehend the profound and excessive longing that now grips me to gaze upon your noble and venerable countenance, O, most exalted of humans. Time has thus compelled me now to voice these Davidic words, saying, just as the deer longs for the streams of water, so does my soul long for you [*Psalms* 42:1]. How I wish I had wings like a dove, so I could swiftly fly and traverse the distance between me and you, hastening to meet you, O preserved by God. However, since I am incapable of fulfilling such a wish that exceeds and surpasses my power, I have been compelled by necessity to compose this humble letter to your highness. By my stiff and helpless tongue, I praise the threshold of your exalted rank (O, most praiseworthy one).

Despite being assisted by philosophers and grammarians, I am not qualified to exalt your esteemed stature. For, just as spring is the most beautiful of the four seasons of the year, so does your eminence exceed in honor, majesty, and splendor among the four heads of the priests of the Eastern Holy Church. And just as the sun surpasses the moon and the stars in light and warmth, so does your blessedness surpass in warmth and excellence all the bishops of your time. And just as the sky encompasses all kinds of planets, along with the sun and the moon, you, O, zenith of the intellect,¹¹ hold within you all kinds of virtuous qualities, along //7r// with deeds and teachings.

¹⁰ Literally, 'coming out from the lips.'

¹¹ *Al-nāṭiq* (λογικός), in comparison with the sky.

I must therefore proceed with caution, lest I become overly verbose in my address, or rash in the peril of error and misunderstanding because of my lack of knowledge. At this point, I will abstain from dialogue and direct my humble words towards Your Grace, with sincere supplications and abundant prostrations, seeking your favor to implore the Sovereign God on my behalf to facilitate the easiest acceptance of Greek teachings. Do not forget me in your blessings and keep me informed of your health. All is in your hands; may you endure and be everlasting.

Written on the 30th of November, in the year 1732 AD, from Tripoli in *al-Shām* [Greater Syria].

8. Copy of a letter from the aforementioned deacon offering condolences and congratulations to the venerable bishop of Tripoli, Kyr Nektarios

[We] kiss the hands and feet of His Grace, the honorable and esteemed lord, our Bishop Kyrios Nektarios, the highly honorable, may His Holiness endure, Amen.

We wish to inform Your Grace that, on this date, we came to the city of Latakia, which collects the Easter duty (alms) of Adana, Payas, Antioch, and Idlib. In Latakia, we met His Holiness the most reverend Patriarch and, after a few days, we intend to go with our instructor the Daskalos¹² towards the well-guarded city of Tripoli the Fragrant, where we hope to meet with Your Grace. It is hoped that your noble generosity will not exclude this suppliant from the richness of your remarkable mind.

We have learned of two pieces of news on the same day, one eliciting joy and celebration, the other sorrow and distress. With the first, we rejoiced for your happiness and were delighted with your ease and the fulfillment of your high aim. With the second, we were deeply saddened by your grief and melancholy because of the passing of your brother, the honorable Sheikh Antonios. Yet, I do not grieve the departure of that noble and virtuous man, for he has left the transient world and reached the everlasting one. //7v// I do, however, grieve for your sorrow, as the bonds of brotherhood do not cease to ignite and burn with the flames of natural compassion.

In truth, the entire city of Tripoli should summon every region and town to share in mourning the loss of this fragrant and splendid rose, which sent forth its perfume from its lands, and in lamenting the departure and loss of this virtuous and intelligent man. For within your noble lineage, honored by presidency of the priesthood, he resembled a jewel, a lily, and a redolent rose, who perfumed and enriched all who approached him with the goodness of his virtues. He was an example and

¹² Kyr Iakobos of Patmos.

a model for every type of virtue, whether in intellect, refinement, chastity, benevolence, or humility. All this could be found in the person of this virtuous soul.

Blessed is he, for he has escaped the waves of this era, and his ship reached the peaceful harbor of salvation. As the wise one says: 'When a righteous man dies, he will be at rest' [*Wisdom* 4: 7]. Then he says: 'He was taken away and chosen lest wickedness should alter his understanding, or deceit beguile his soul.' [*Wisdom* 4: 11].

So, we hope that Your Grace does not grieve for his passing, for we are all destined to reach this place and path.

May your mouth bestow blessings. For my part, convey my greetings and condolences to his brother Gabriel and his beloved son the Deacon Mikhā'il, and to all who seek refuge in Your Grace.

In addition, please take care of the literature which we translated from Greek to Arabic and which we left with Your Grace when we traveled, so that it does not get lost and present difficulties for us to translate again. I kiss your hands over and over.

Written on the 5th of January, in the year 1735 AD. //8r//

9. [Letter from Yūsuf Mark]

From the supplicant who acknowledges his weakness and shortcomings to the one considered exemplary among the scholars of his era, and upon whom the commands of the distinguished and eminent of Syria and Egypt have been placed, excelling in perfection over the people of all time, my brother in God and my son in spirit, dearest to my heart, spirit within my body, mentioned in name above, may honor endure for him.

After invocations for [your] long life, our imminent meeting, and the imparting of my praise – not even a tenth of which the reed pen can convey – I inform you that, at the most blessed of times and in the happiest of states, I have received your letter, may God grant you happiness, Amen.

With regard to your news of the passing of the honored Bishop Cyril of Alexandretta, it need not be said that this was a sign that he should not live among the people of his diocese; 'Yea speedily was he taken away, lest that wickedness should alter his understanding, or deceit beguile his soul.' [*Wisdom* 4: 11]. The passing of such an honored person is 'precious in the sight of the Lord' [*Psalms* 116: 15], as the Prophet David said.

As for the signs of the spread of the plague¹³ in your vicinity, retreating and relocating to another place is preferable and is the right course of action. Do not forget the saying of the Prophet Isaiah: 'Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee: hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast' [Isaiah 26:20-21]. And the words of the Sovereign God: 'If you feel hardship in one town, move to another'.¹⁴ So, there is no harm in heading towards us, to honor us with your presence and allow us to rejoice.

I have received the missing quire and the insignias;¹⁵ may you be rewarded with goodness and be protected against harm. We still look forward to the arrival of the remaining items and correspondence, etc.

[Written] in the year 1743, on the 27th of August. //8v//

10. [Letter from Yūsuf Mark]

To the descendant of the family of pride, a treasure among those who have reached the pinnacle of knowledge, most radiant beauty, greatest in fortune, and sweetest in speech, the honored Deacon Mūsā. May blessings perpetually adorn his entirety and his features and may God's protection guard him in every moment and deed. May the flag of his knowledge always be raised high, and the splendor of his achievements be enhanced by the diminishing of hostility. May his pen never cease in its conviction against heretical deeds, in its transcendence of his enemies, and in steadfastness in his beliefs. May his praise remain associated with goodness and affection, and his generosity never cease. Amen.

While I was occupied with reciting righteous supplications, uttered by every limb and organ, and repeating entreaties in prayers and remembrances in holy liturgies, 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. When the fragrance of its words spread to us, those scents that entice every passerby,¹⁶ the ardor and longing that I felt beyond measure and power were cooled. My hopes of meeting you

¹³ For an eyewitness account of the plague that hit Syria in 1743, see A. Russell, *The Natural History of Aleppo, and Parts Adjacent*, London, 1756, p. 197–200. The plague also caused the death of two priests mentioned in the following letter.

¹⁴ Probably referring to *Luke* 9: 5.

¹⁵ He probably means the verses of poems.

¹⁶ Literally, 'everyone who comes and goes'.

receded, and my thunderstorm quelled¹⁷ when I learned about //9r// your journey to Aleppo and from there to wherever our lord, the most blessed patriarch, will be. I praised your commendable effort and your determined resolution. May God return you safely to us.

In you, these words were fulfilled: 'You love the righteous, and you are one of them. The companion of a people follows the congregation. And you detest those whose merchandise is disobedience. May God protect you from that merchandise'.¹⁸

As for myself, the coward who hesitates, the aforementioned [patriarch] sought me many times and extended to me noble appointments. However, fearing the hardship and the extreme cold of those lands, I excused myself and stayed back. Even after the arrival of Sulaymān, son of the Priest Salāma's brother, he insisted on me, but I declined, thereby fulfilling the saying: 'I love the righteous, though I am not one of them; perhaps I may attain their intercession. I detest those whose merchandise is disobedience, but I am a partner in their merchandise'.¹⁹

I was saddened by the passing of the priests who succumbed to the arrows of the plague, and the severity of the epidemic in Damascus after the departure of His Holiness the Patriarch. I ask the Almighty God to deliver you from being killed and bring you out of Damascus to your homeland safe and victorious, for He is the Hearer of supplicants.

I had hoped that you would send my books and your uncle's newly translated—or rather, newly composed—book with the return [messenger], along with a letter from you. The return [messenger] arrived, but without any books or letters, //9v// so I remained longing for your sake. During these endlessly rainy days it became difficult for them to get here, but God is the Best Planner.

Please convey my regards to your two brothers and anyone who is present in your neighborhood. Your brother Nawfal, your sisters, and all your relatives send you greetings. Our lord the bishop and all the priests extend their prayers and abundant blessings to you. My son, Mikhā'il, kisses your hands, and my mother prays for you. Blessings be upon you.

Written in December 1743.

¹⁷ See al-Maydānī, *Majma' al-amthāl*, Proverb 102.

¹⁸ This is the response to al-Shāfi'ī's assertion cited a few lines later, attributed to his disciple Ibn Ḥanbal.

¹⁹ This is al-Shāfi'ī's assertion to which his disciple Ibn Ḥanbal responds.

11. [Letter from Yūsuf Mark (?)]

To the most esteemed spiritual son and truthful brother, the honorable Deacon Mūsā. May the Lord God bestow the most perfect heavenly blessings upon him in soul and body, and upon his wife, his children, and all his endeavors. Amen.

It has been a while since I received any written communication from you, even though I have not ceased sending you regular letters from all sorts of places, roads, and lands. This lack of response is not in accordance with the principles of brotherhood and friendship. For if you have abandoned me, I will not abandon you, and if you have indeed forgotten me, I will not forget you, but further praise and honor you. I have learned from the joyful news and reports...²⁰ //11r//

12. Copy of the letter sent by the wise Aba Iakobos the Hieromonk from Tripoli to Patriarch Kyr Sylvester in Damascus, congratulating him on his arrival

To His Holiness the most blessed, Kyrios Kyr Sylvester, patriarch of the great city of God Antioch and all the East. As a revered father and master, I offer him my humble and obedient prostrations.

We wish to inform you that we have received your esteemed letter, from which we learned of the grandiose ceremony that took place upon your entry into Damascus, and the grandeur of the order and the high honor prepared for your eminence at that time. As we have heard from many, such customs and ceremonies were not witnessed before, for your predecessors. This, in my opinion, is a token of honor for you from the Almighty, whose care elevated and inspired the multitudes, making them welcome you. Upon my life, it seems that the glory that accompanied your entry into Damascus surpasses the glory and honor that befell Saint Athanasios of Alexandria upon his arrival there, as described in his funeral eulogies related through the mouth and honor of the theologians [Saint Gregory the Theologian]. [Your entry] exceeds even this. For this reason, I venerate you along with your admirers and, following in the footsteps of David, dance before your divine ark. I furnish this glory with the eloquence of speech and thought, [proceeding] to Damascus to enhance its joy and celebrations through the words of its inhabitants and its people. Further still, with the chosen vessel I say: 'Rejoice, O city of Damascus, rejoice, for [the time] has come and the one who is the cause and source of your joy has arrived. Rejoice, for you are now adorned like a bride with

²⁰ The end is missing. The expression "different roads and lands" may be referring to his trip to Wallachia in 1747. See Letter 28. F. 10r–10v are blank.

the beauty of your radiance. You have cast away the worn-out clothes of disgrace, humiliation, and orphanhood. Rejoice, for you have borne and endured numerous trials and tests, which the worshipers of the Dragon raised against you. Rejoice now and be glad, for you have surpassed the other lands of Syria, not for the sake of //11v// your abundant fruits, nor for your vineyards and fragrant trees, nor for your rivers, known in ancient times as the Golden Streams [Chrysorrhoeas], and your title bestowed by the authors, 'the Hollow Land [Coele] of Fragrances', but for the entry of your shepherd, like Christ, into you. Thus, he will not abandon you but will protect and fight for you tirelessly until he drives away and expels the ones who corrupt and misguide your inhabitants, and send them fleeing, and exterminate from you all the wicked and deceitful ones, those who hide their wolfish nature in the form of sheep [*Matthew* 7: 15]. As the saying goes: 'He will tend to your children with the pastures of piety and righteousness, and he will administer to them the remedies and healing potions of salvation'. This, along with the rest of the letter, should suffice to express my joy for you, etc.

[Written] in January, beginning of the year 1733.

13. Copy of a letter from Deacon Sophronios

[To] the pride of honorable companions, pillar of dear friends, honorably dutiful brother, Deacon Mūsā the noble, may God always keep him well.

After conveying [our] ardent sentiments and longing for you,

I wish to inform you that I have received your esteemed and praiseworthy letter. When it informed me of the health of your eminence, I greeted it joyfully for this news. Do not think that what I say is to make light of or entertain, for if you could see and hear me from a distance, you would have heard only sighs, groans, admiration and lamentation when I speak of you. How wrongly you have attributed to me in your letter the act of forgetting you! For I remember you to such an extent that I dare to confidently quote the words from the Book of the King and Prophet to Jerusalem before its exile: 'If I //12r// forget you, may my right hand forget me, etc.' [*Psalms* 137:5]. What an extraordinary delusion!

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, accompanied by disgrace and distress. Yet, despite all this, I do not care; rather, I am convinced that I should preserve the thought that, even if I am here without companions, in your quarter I have friendship and remembrance.

You mentioned in your letter that you have sent me several letters, but alas, only one has reached me: that directed by the venerable hand of your honorable uncle, Kyr Elias, pride of Syria and peak of the exalted Orthodox party. Yet, I acknowledge your abundant blessings, for while you are among the highest ranks in society, through your letters you still show your concern for those in the lowest state of recklessness. By God, you have excelled in eloquent speech by scattering your literary necklaces and clothing them in the robes of titles and linguistic wonders, not to mention the gracefulness of your flowing pen and embroidering of meaning with elegant and extensive rhetorical explanations. Indeed, this is the fruit of your dedication to studying literary works and your late-night immersion in the debates of the Church leaders.

As for our woeful fate, we have lost the slight proficiency we had in the Arabic language and are incapable of grasping the Greek treasures. This has righteously affected us because wisdom and knowledge, as Solomon the Wise says, never dwell permanently in wicked hearts such as ours. They find solace in worthy vessels, just like you.

It is hoped that you will compensate for our deficiencies with the virtues of your habitual tolerance. Please do not sever our connection with your esteemed news, and may your well-being endure, along with your generosity and elevation, etc.

Written in late April, in the year 1740. //12v//

14. From the aforementioned Deacon [Sophronios]

[To] the finest²¹ of esteemed brethren, the essence²² of honorable brothers, Deacon Mūsā the noble, may God grant him health and lasting goodness.

After extending greetings with the utmost respect and deepest submission,

We wish to inform you that it has been more than a year since we last received any letter or message from you. We wonder what has kept you so entirely distant from us. It seems that our memory has faded from your thoughts, and that you have been occupied with matters that have diverted your attention from us. And with this silence of yours, you distance yourself from us, perhaps to conceal certain thoughts. Please write to us now and let us know if you no longer wish to remember us, so that we can sever our hopes from you as we have done with others. There is

21 Literally: 'cream' (fig.)

22 Literally: 'butter' (fig.)

no good in a love that feels like an imposition; its troubles outweigh its joys. The one who knows needs not be known.

If not for the subtlety of your intellect, we would not have used symbols and signs with you. We advise you that the bearer of affectionate words heard from me that I have loved you for a long time and thus sought from me a letter addressed to you. If you truly love us, then demonstrate it in your actions so they can be observed. Otherwise, in honor of the love of strangers expected of all, show him a cheerful countenance.

To all those in your presence – priests, deacons, monks, and laymen – we send our warm fraternal greetings.

Written in early August, in the year 1740. //13r//

15. From the aforementioned [Sophronios], after his priestly ordination

We extend the warmest of fraternal greetings and sincerest respect to the honorable brother and deacon. May God grant him health and enduring wellness.

Following my veneration and glorification of your esteemed self, adorned with literary eloquence and golden virtues, I inform you that I have despaired from corresponding with you for some time, as a response to my previous letters to you was missing for nine months.²³ Several times, I convinced myself from your silence to turn away from seeking further written communication. However, by the grace of God, I unexpectedly received a letter from you recently, which predates your arrival in Ḥaṣbayyā and Marj'yūn. It thus did not cause delight as it is old and recounts events that have passed. Nevertheless, it is not entirely devoid of consolation. Given that time has not allowed us the opportunity for a detailed response, and that it is fitting to send congratulations and regards not only to friends but also to acquaintances, we therefore say to you: 'May you be well every year, Christ is risen'. This message extends to the enlightened writer and eloquent and distinguished speaker, the skilled teacher Anba Theodosius, and to the esteemed and beloved brother, Ḥājj Basil. I had intended to write letters to both of them, but the former entirely abandoned us, denied our friendship, and raised his eyebrows at us. God will judge this haughty grandeur and lofty conceit. Perhaps he will think of us someday and desist from concealing those ideas for which he shuns our companionship, and he will realize that his harboring of them will not yield any reward or recompense in the future, nor any immediate benefit. As for the latter, his letters tell me one thing, //13v// but his actions arm against me. It is thus more appropriate for this man of

²³ He is probably referring to Letters 13 and 14.

dignity to be reprimanded and chastised than to be offered companionship. For the [Holy] Book reprimands the instrument of evil; thus was the serpent reprimanded for becoming such an instrument. Even if we did not expect this behavior of them, then we still confer on them a brotherly kiss and handshake.

And you, my brother, do not cease to write to us about the news of your noble disposition's health, and convey our greetings to all the beloved ones.

May your well-being endure.

Written in late March, in the year 1741, in Holy Jerusalem.

16. From the aforementioned [Sophronios]

The state of healthiness is highly valued among mankind, especially for the ailing who bear afflictions. So it is that²⁴ your companionship is esteemed among people, and particularly myself as I suffer from the agonizing affliction of your absence. Oh, how I wish I had never known you from the beginning, and that your love had never taken root in the depths of my heart. Like another Job, I would describe my love toward you with the words: 'I wish the day when I knew you never were, that the sun had not shined with its radiant rays, and that Orion had not entered it, traveling in a bright sky of clarity with the regularity of its cyclic course, for the cause of my ongoing sorrow is my love toward you, which began long ago and continues to burn brightly.' How wonderful it would be to see you! Oh, if only that day of noble meeting were near; may God grant it. How I wish it were near, etc. //14r//

17. [From] the humble Sophronios, bishop of Acre

May divine grace be bestowed upon our beloved spiritual son, the honorable deacon. May the Lord God bestow abundant heavenly blessings upon him in soul and body.

I must explain to your beloved self that the reason for my prolonged lack of correspondence is not due to forgetfulness but rather to excessive concerns and engagements that have occupied us. You may have heard about the changes in circumstances that we have experienced. Since we entered this very troubled bishopric, we have been constantly engaged in various struggles and hostilities. At times, we must deal with hostile outsiders, and at other times, with the deceitful and deviants from the righteous path.

²⁴ Literally, '[I swear] by my life'.

This is not to mention the situation of the church in Nazareth, which was taken over by the padres²⁵ by virtue of money, winning over our Christian brethren through deceit and trickery. Once Ḥanāniyā the interpreter arrived in Acre, we were only able to regain the church through persistent efforts, after Sheikh Ḍāhir al-'Umar²⁶ took eight sacks of money from the Greeks. Nevertheless, the Christians remain in the confession of the Franks, and such troubles continue to plague us daily. In the space of two months in Acre, I was unjustly fined five hundred piasters to the profit of a certain sheikh called Muḥammad al-'Alī. [This was] without cause or reason, but rather solely through the actions of the Catholic faction who persistently opposes us, both covertly and openly. May the Almighty deliver us from them. These are the circumstances that have hindered our correspondence with our beloved ones. We therefore request from them forgiveness and understanding in this matter.

We extend our blessings to the beloved brother and honorable Jerusalemite Mikhā'il and his household, as well as to all those who hold us in their hearts, etc.

Written in mid-January, in the year 1742, in Acre. //14v//

18. Copy of a letter from the aforementioned bishop [Sophronios]

May divine grace bless our beloved spiritual son, the honorable deacon and secretary. May the Lord God bless him in soul and body, and guide him in all righteous deeds, Amen.

I wish to inform you of my deep yearning for you; that your letters have reached me, and I have sent you responses. However, it appears that you have been occupied with the trials of life, preventing you from corresponding with me. Perhaps the excessive sorrow over the passing of your esteemed uncle Ḥannā Fakhr contributed to this, as this news deeply affected us all. Truly, this deceased man was a pillar and a cornerstone among the children of the Orthodox Church in Egypt. But how and why should we mourn forever? Does the great-voiced Paul not cry out to us not to 'sorrow, even as others which have no hope' [1 *Thessalonians* 4:13]? Suffice it to say that He who ascended to the third heaven did not ordain this in vain. Rather, for his knowledge of the repose of the departed and their liberation from the woes of the dense body in which we are bound to attain eternal life after death,

²⁵ I.e., Latin missionaries.

²⁶ Ḍāhir al-'Umar al-Zaydānī (1689/90–August 21 or 22, 1775), ruler of Galilee starting in the 1730s until his death. He was also beylerbey of Sidon from 1771 to 1775.

he instructed us not to grieve for them. Our sorrow should be like the sorrow of the Lord for His friend Lazarus, with but a few tears.

You do not need further reminding of these words, given your diligent study of the Divine Scriptures from your young age, especially in your service under the auspices of our lord, the honorable patriarch. Your good fortune is evident from all sides, as in the saying: 'Blessed are those who serve the blessed.'

If you inquire about us, praise be to God, we are well, vigilant day and night in the face of God's enemies, the dissenters and the heretics.

//15r// The Priest 'Abd al-Masīḥ [Christodoulos], a respected Orthodox man, polite in his words and virtuous in his conduct, will come to you bearing these letters. He has fallen into a predicament and was fined a sum of money through the accusations of enemies of the faith. Now, he seeks your assistance to issue him a *statikon* from our patriarch so he can collect alms for himself from the lands of Antioch. May God bless you if his request to you is granted, etc.

[Written at the] end of May, in the year 1742, in Acre.

19. Another letter from the aforementioned [Sophronios]

I wish to inform your beloved self that at the most opportune time I received your letter, sent with its bearer Ambrosius.²⁷ We rejoiced at your well-being, the balance of your temperament, and particularly your proximity to us in Beirut. How I wished that you could consider how close you were and come to us, relieving my heart from sorrow and making it leap for joy like the night of the crescent moon for the Arabs.²⁸ For the painful separation has lasted long, and the burning anguish of the heart endures, yet I continue to reassure my heart through the anticipation of meeting you, by the grace of the Mighty Creator.

I was eager to meet you and offer condolences regarding the passing of your departed uncles, Ḥannā and Jacob. We hope that your active spirit and discerning wisdom will prevent you from grieving for them as others who are without hope do [1 *Thessalonians* 4: 13]. This [biblical verse] should suffice for individuals like you who have been well educated in the study of the Divine Scriptures from a young age.

A week ago, a monk named Simon from Tripoli came to us. He informed us that he had left the company of Paisius of Sinai, but later we received a letter from the

²⁷ Probably the same Ambrosius mentioned in Letter 4 as Ambrosius the deacon, with whom Sophronios had sent letters to Mūsā in 1734.

²⁸ The sighting of the crescent moon marks the end of fasting and the beginning of Eid for the Muslims.

Priest Salāma, the honorable representative (*wakīl*), containing severe threats and strong warnings from our patriarch //15v// against the aforementioned individual, and indicating grave causes. However, after examining him, we found nothing of that sort. We kindly request that you intercede with our patriarch on his behalf so that the monk may return to his place of service, fearing that he might be subject to persecution and expulsion here and there. May blessings accompany your efforts.

This is not to mention the misfortune of the one who has brought your letter to us. A sign is enough to the wise,²⁹ etc.

Written in mid-July, in the year 1742, in Acre.

20. Another letter from Sophronios

We find ourselves in the midst of worries and distress from various directions, mainly due to turmoil in the Holy Church and its agitation by schismatics in these greatly troubled lands, and because of our modest living among those who have strayed from the right faith, whose hearts and necks have hardened. They have broken Christ's yoke, casting it aside, and have surrendered their necks to the yoke of the deceiver and Antichrist, who is the bishop of Rome, the archon of haughtiness, and the arrogant, diabolical throat.³⁰ While we were experiencing such upsetting circumstances, a merry ship arrived from Beirut. It was steered to us by the winds of love, and in its hold was the pure breeze of affection. When it reached the port of Acre, we found it a source of great joy because it brought to us Father Yūsuf Mark, newly ordained by our Most Holy Kyr Sylvester, Patriarch of Antioch, and the Deacon Sulaymān, the son of the Priest Salāma's brother.³¹ Do not even ask of the great joy and consolation that this brought us, for neither pen nor ink can render it. Through them, we were informed of your well-being, that you are in good health, by the grace of our Lord, and that you eagerly await our correspondence.

//16r// Moreover, [we have learned that] you entered into holy matrimony, which only increased our joy, and we prayed for you. And we were immediately moved to write this letter to you, firstly to wish you a blessed Easter, Christ is Risen, for many years; and secondly, to bless your marriage. May God make it fruitful, granting you righteous offspring. May He shower you with abundant blessings to

²⁹ Paraphrase of the well-known verse: *إِنَّ الْبَلِيبَ مِنَ الْإِشَارَةِ يَفْهَمُ*, "The wise understand with a mere hint".

³⁰ Which means that he speaks in the name of the devil.

³¹ Salāma Najjār was priest in Beirut in April 1749, when he received Patriarch Sylvester's letter. See MS Ḥarīṣā, Saint Paul 210, f. 157v.

become a refuge and shelter for the afflicted, a light for the blind, and a covering for the naked. May hungry souls be satisfied from your tables and goodness.³²

From now on, we expect your perseverance in prayers, virtuous deeds, charity, and all other noble virtues. Someone like you does not need reminding; the teachings of our Holy Father, His Holiness the Patriarch, are sufficient for you. We respectfully kiss the hand of His Holiness and convey greetings from the aforementioned Priest Yūsuf, along with Deacon Sulaymān Najjār. On the day of this letter, they are headed to Beirut, and we are deeply saddened by their departure. Please do not refrain from keeping us updated on your well-being. Extend our blessings to all your loved ones, again and again.

Written on the 23rd of April, in the year 1743, in Acre.

21. From the aforementioned father and Bishop [Sophronios] to His Beatitude Kyr Sylvester, patriarch of Antioch

Eloquent tongues and articulate and sharp intellects cannot adequately convey the magnitude of longing I have for Your paternal Beatitude, especially after the letter with which you honored me, brought by Mūsā Thamārī³³ after he visited Your Beatitude at the Holy Monastery of Ṣaydnāyā toward the end of last month. Upon reading it, my heart was filled with indescribable joy, and I recalled the old days and years gone by. I recited the words of David, saying: 'Who gives me wings like a dove to fly away and be at rest?' [*Psalm* 55:6]. I would fly to you, //16v// kiss those paternal hands, and draw from them holy blessings.

What we hope from Your Holiness is that as long as we are in these confines, surrounded by the storms of daily persecution, you do not cease to bestow your blessings and spiritual support, and especially your prayers. For it is evident that your prayers are favorably received by the Most Holy Trinity as a reward for your steadfast and fearless struggles in the name of the righteous and Orthodox faith, and, truly, the rigor of our struggle is a precious matter. Moreover, through the limited persecution that has befallen us in this region, we have come to understand the intensity and totality of that which Your Holiness has endured throughout this

32 This reflects the tradition of the Christians of Damascus to feed the poor on the day of their wedding. Against this tradition, Mikhā'il Brayk tells us that, in 1747, a well-known Christian – whose name Brayk does not mention – was so mean that he asked the *tūfekçi* (gunman) to send the poor away on his wedding day, and paid him one piastre. This became a new tradition, and the price of the service increased each time because it became a trend (Brayk, *Tārīkh al-Shām*, p. 15).

33 This could also be translated as 'my [spiritual] fruits'.

period. Through this struggle, you have become another Athanasios or Ignatius; even another Peter or Paul. You have adorned not just one pole of the earth but, like the illustrious Orion³⁴ traversing at high speed, you shined upon the entire Roman and Eastern domains. Moreover, the southern and northern regions rejoice in your stride traversing the galaxies darkened by the beastly errors of the West, taming the wild Thracian hypocrisy, and quelling barbaric ignorance. You will thus be adorned with the crown of reward on the day of conferring celestial rewards.

We offer our sincerest salutations and blessings through your sacred voice and extend our greetings to al-Ḥājī Basil, the honorable scribe, and the esteemed son Mūsā the scribe, and all those involved in serving Your Beatitude's eminence.

We kindly request that you do not cease to correspond with us for the sake of our peace of mind regarding your honorable well-being, and so that we may drink from the fountain of your munificent blessings. May God grant you long life.

Written on the 5th of November, in the year 1741, in Ascalon, Acre. //17r//

22. Copy of another letter from the holy father and bishop of Acre, Sophronios, to His Beatitude Kyr Sylvester, patriarch of Antioch

After respectfully kissing your noble hands, this servant wishes to inform Your Eminence that, at the most opportune time, your invaluable letter reached me. However, on the day it arrived, I was in the villages surrounding Acre, offering condolences to the Orthodox Christians for the various calamities which they have faced this year, such as the urgent incidents of the siege of Tiberias, along with the mounting fears and adversities that have befallen this region.³⁵ Your Eminence is undoubtedly aware of these events, as they have been reported in detail by the honorable Jerusalemites Farah al-Ṣarrāf and Mikha'il the scribe.³⁶ It is thus futile to repeat these descriptions and to disturb your calm ears with such reports.

As for our worldly matters, we have experienced a complete cessation in the income of the entire eparchy because of widespread plunder, destruction, and the burning of villages. Nevertheless, I do not concern myself much with these events. Our only hope in these matters is that the enemies of God, who have scattered,

³⁴ Or, perhaps, 'any constellation'.

³⁵ This is a reference to the first siege of Tiberias launched by Sulaymān Bāshā al-'Azm, Governor of Damascus (1741–1743), against Ṣāḥir al-'Umar, the Tiberias-based *multazim*. It lasted from September 3 to December 1742; cf. A. H. Joudah, *Revolt in Palestine in the Eighteenth Century: The Era of Shaykh Zahir al-Umar* (2nd ed.), Piscataway, NJ, 2013, p. 37.

³⁶ This is probably the same Mikha'il al-Ṭabīb, copyist of Sophronios's translation of the Σύνταγμα κατὰ ἀξίμων of Eustratios Argentis. See MS Vatican, Sbath 245, f. 107r.

may be defeated. They all hid in dens when the war and siege took place, but later emerged like serpents from their dens, resuming their persecution of the faith. May our Lord exterminate them from earth and wipe out their memory, for they are a deceitful house, as the Prophet said of them.

How astonishing that they appear strong before rulers and elders, and depraved in their diabolical schemes. Regardless, the archon of this world supports them every day in their endeavor for the eternal perdition of souls. As for our Orthodox community, by the grace of God they are now awake 'and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition' [*John* 17:12]; those who, out of malicious or evil purposes, move of their own accord //17v// towards those heretics. Due to these afflictions and the like, we require the support of your holy prayers – not for us, but for the safety of the Church and to curb the activities of the heretics who have strayed far from it.

As for ourselves, we do not care in the slightest. We wish that every day we could be like sheep ready for slaughter in the cause of the Orthodox faith. Only this way will the children of our Christian race, who have been devoured by the enemy, be saved. Therefore, it is my sincere hope that Your Beatitude, along with the patriarchs of Jerusalem, Alexandria, and Constantinople, will coordinate worldwide to suppress and send certain of these people, who are enemies of God, to exile and captivity. Be as zealous as Phinehas, Moses, and Elijah the Zealot in filling your hands with blessings for the Lord and disciplining the rest, for their rebellion has been aggravated by total debauchery, particularly here, because the schismatics among us are worse than all other dissidents in these lands and the Arab regions.

Please excuse the verbosity of my message, etc.

This was written in early January, in the year 1743, in Ascalon, Acre.

I wish you many years of health and happiness, and I pray that you will celebrate these holy seasons with joy and delight for many more years to come.

23. From Sophronios to Sylvester³⁷

We have learned that my statement to Your Beatitude in the previous letter – that I have books which rebuke the heretic enemies of God and that, if you wish, we can send some of them to Your Eminence – has made Your Holiness angry with us, as you considered our words to be boastful. I was taken aback by this, for such an illusion never crossed my mind, as the One who examines hearts and minds knows. We therefore request your forgiveness and pardon for what we unknowingly expressed. Greetings. //18r//

37 Written vertically to fill the rest of the page, without a title.

24. [From Sophronios to Sylvester]

After [extending my praise and greetings], I wish to inform Your Holiness that I sent two letters to Your Beatitude before this one, and that there was no response, because of my unworthiness. I am currently engaged in a great struggle, not only for a lack of correspondence from Your Beatitude but also for my efforts to avoid burdening you with anything, including false news spread by certain malicious individuals, especially seeing as my sole intention was to come very soon to Damascus to kiss your venerable hands. However, certain obstacles have prevented me from doing so.

On the Sunday of Thomas,³⁸ your spiritual sons, the Priest Yūsuf Mark of Tripoli and the Deacon Sulaymān Najjār,³⁹ visited me in Acre, and many others too, after their arrival. We inquired at length about your well-being and, after staying with us for a few days, the two returned safely, with your prayers, to their homeland.

Should you wonder about the situation in these lands, they are still in turmoil because of the waves and storms provoked by the papal schism. Praise be to God, each faction has settled down individually. Since your holy prayers reached us, none of our fellow Orthodox brethren have strayed from the path, and none of the misguided have returned to us. They occasionally challenge us with objections and questions, upholding the archon of darkness, Lucifer, and blaspheming the Almighty. We therefore ask Your Beatitude to assist us through your undenied appeals before God, so that the enemies of God and His Church may not boast at our expense. Our sole intention is to ask for your holy prayers and to receive your letters //18v// of consolation in times of sorrow.

I send you a basket of smoked fish with the carrier of letters of servitude, hoping it reaches you well. Please accept it from us, as the Lord accepted the widow's two mites. We extend our greetings through you to those dedicated to your service, and to the honorable Deacon Mūsā the scribe and the esteemed Deacon Thomas. May you live long.

Written in late April, in the year 1743, in Acre.

³⁸ This is the Sunday after Easter.

³⁹ He might be the same Sulaymān (Dī)mitrī Najjār, who wrote two copies of the *Octoechos*. One is MS Brummānā, Church of the Prophet Isaiah 4 (1797), while the second is a partial copy, MS Balamand, Monastery of Our Lady 200, dated '17_' (f. 178v). Sulaymān unfortunately forgot to provide the year. Nasrallah also mentions a copy of the same book by the same copyist, dated in the same way, '17_', preserved at the School of the Three Hierarchs in Beirut (*Catalogue des manuscrits*, III, p. 281). As this collection is now lost, the copy mentioned by Nasrallah could be the same as the one in Balamand.

25. [From Sophronios]⁴⁰

'If the dead, I would say as one poet once said, wear the garment of forgetfulness in the grave, even there, I shall not forget my friend.'⁴¹ Who deserves to be told these verses, I wonder? Patroclus by his friend Achilles the Mighty, or you by me? For my love for you is great, as you know; greater than any love from the beginning of time until now, deeply rooted in our hearts, not planted by hand. It is more precious to us than the treasures of the renowned King Cyrus.

Even if a brief silence occurs, do not assume it signifies indifference or forgotten love, for you are well aware that the path is severed. How can an ancient love be forgotten? As we said above, if it so happens that we reach not only the end of the inhabited world but – I dare say – the fire, I shall not forget your love, and it shall always remain intact in my mind. Neither forgetfulness nor place nor years nor the passage of time can erase it from the book of our mind. Your love is manifest. Your love is our longing, my every joy and delight. For this reason, I rejoice, and from my joy, I find patience in everything. I thank the Lord who has bestowed upon me one as dear as you.

But now, what has befallen me, my friend? My joy is even greater than before. I suddenly heard a voice, calling out to me like a bird of God, and a melody ablaze with your familiar joy; a melody that does not lie.⁴² //20r//

26. [From Yūsuf Mark, the beginning is missing]

... exquisite words, refined expressions, unique phrases, and selected rhymes. God blessed the breath of your mouth, how sweet it is, and the brilliance of your mind, how sharp its flame. Yet, my beloved, you have lavished your praise upon me so much that I almost gained ridicule; I am on the edge of a precipice because you have made me ride without a saddle. But as I suspect, the wine of your love for me made you inebriated to the point that you crossed the boundaries and adorned me with the noblest of necklaces. I seek forgiveness from God Almighty who says: 'Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you!' [*Luke* 6:26].

As for the condition of our lord His Holiness, he has fully accomplished all his tasks in these lands, thanks be to God. Yesterday, his honorable lordship, Gregory

⁴⁰ This seems to be a letter from Sophronios.

⁴¹ 'Though the dead forget their dead in the House of Death, I will remember, even there, my dear companion', cf. Homer, *Iliad*, Book 22.

⁴² F. 19r–19v are blank.

Bek [Ghikas], informed him that he is allowing him to leave on the third anniversary of the Dormition of Our Lady, etc.

From the one who prays for you, your old beloved,
The Priest Yūsuf Mark,
[Written] on the 29th of July 1748.

27. [From Yūsuf Mark]

To him who is my son in spirit, a brother to me and the apple of my eye, the honorable Deacon Mūsā, may the Lord God bestow upon him, his wife, his children, and all his deeds complete apostolic blessings. Amen.

After waiting for news from you for a long time, the burning desire to see your handwriting ignited in my heart. Neither the abundance of work nor other preoccupations deterred me from corresponding with you, to inquire about your well-being and send you my wishes for this blessed feast and the new Easter that brings forth the dawn of Christ's true resurrection. Thus, //20v// you celebrate it again and again, vanquishing your enemies and thriving with virtuous deeds. May God make this upcoming feast a joyful one for you, and may you likewise celebrate other feasts in all the pleasant days of your long life. Amen.

As for the printing press, for which we started engraving typefaces, by the grace of God, before this glorious Easter, the iron engraving is almost complete, and after that, we will begin with the fine copper engravings. 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.

As for Abu Barāqish, humiliation has clothed him,⁴³ retrogression (*al-idbār*) has shaken its dust upon him,⁴⁴ accession (*al-iqbāl*) has abandoned him behind his back, and time has looked upon him with disdain. He is cheaper in Constantinople than dates in Kerman, more insignificant than roses in the month of Ramadan,⁴⁵ and heavier than fur in June. This is the outcome of oppression and aggression, the harvest of deception and falsehood.

⁴³ According to Muslim spirituality, human life is a cycle of accession/abundance (*iqbāl*) and retrogression/need (*idbār*), in both of which men should comply with the will of God.

⁴⁴ Expression meaning 'refused him'.

⁴⁵ Perhaps the author is referring to the quantity of rosewater that is sprinkled on doorsteps and across gardens throughout the days of the month of Ramadan.

Please convey my blessings to your son and those who are in your presence, and to anyone who inquires after us. Mikhā'il the monk, your disciple, sends his regards. May blessings forever be upon you, along with our prayers.

Written on the fifth Sunday of the Holy Lent, from Bucharest, in the year 1749.
//21r//

28. [From Yūsuf Mark]

To the honorable spiritual son and most esteemed and beloved Deacon Mūsā, may the Lord God bestow upon him, his wife, and all his deeds complete heavenly blessings. Amen.

We wish to inform you that we previously and continually sent you letters from Aleppo and Istanbul, informing you that the letters sent to us by the hand of the monk Mikhā'il the younger had not arrived, and that we had not received any other from you.

We have safely reached the city of Bucharest and have had the privilege of kissing the hands of His Holiness, the all-honorable Patriarch [Sylvester]. We saw that His Holiness has started engraving new type for the printing press produced by Jirjis Abū Sha'r and his companion, better than the previous ones. Prior to this date, they completed the printing of the Letter of the Council of Constantinople.⁴⁶ I composed an opening text for it and apologized for any misspelling, as ordered by His Holiness the Patriarch. Once they finished it, they shut down the printing press. Today, they finished engraving the new typefaces and began casting them; perhaps it will be running during Lent.

As for myself, at the beginning of the Nativity Fast, His Holiness sent me to the Greek grammar school to learn alongside Deacon Parthenios the younger. He sent me four Wallachian children, students of your brother Buṭrus, to teach them Arabic grammar. We request your prayers [in this endeavor].

His Holiness, the all-honorable Patriarch – God be praised – is in excellent health, and he enjoys great respect in these regions. All the people, particularly the dignitaries, men and women, visit him frequently to receive his blessings and seek his intercession. The love of the respectful Bek,⁴⁷ may God protect him, for him is

⁴⁶ Translated into Arabic by Athanasios Dabbās. Only one copy of this book has been identified by the TYPARABIC project team (see Feodorov, "Sylvester of Antioch's Arabic Books Printed in 1747 at Bucharest", p. 6, 18–27). It is preserved in the Austrian National Library and belonged to Giovanni Marghich. We are preparing a new edition of this Arabic book.

⁴⁷ He means Constantin Mavrocordat.

beyond measure. On every Sunday and special movable feast,⁴⁸ he invites him to celebrate the liturgy for them and to attend his Divine Liturgy. This is what we have observed.

Before my arrival in Bucharest, a swarm of locusts descended upon this city, and their numbers were beyond estimation. The venerable revered lord asked His Holiness⁴⁹ to consecrate water and sprinkle it on the places where the locusts were present. When he prayed, he expelled all the locusts from the area, both flying and crawling. As I was informed, the flying locusts had been [so dense as to] cover up the sunlight, while the crawling locusts were piled up the height of a cubit on the ground. He continued to drive them away from place to place and from village to village for about a month. When the people of those lands witnessed this miracle, they held him in great esteem. This is what news we have for you.

Deacon Parthenios sends you his warmest regards, asking for your satisfaction and adhering to your commands, accepted through his love of your brother Buṭrus. As he did not write to you himself and felt bashful, he joins me in sending this letter, etc.

Written on the 21st of November, [on the feast of] the Presentation of the Lady to the Temple – may you continue to be well – in the year 1747, from Bucharest. //21v//

29. [From Yūsuf Mark]

To the esteemed and revered son, most truthful dear one, my cherished and my soul, Deacon Mūsā the most honorable, may the Lord God bestow upon him, his wife, his children, and all his endeavors the most complete heavenly blessings. Amen.

I wish to inform you that, while my every joint and limb was immersed in uttering righteous prayers, your noble letter arrived, to which is due all respect and veneration. I read it, understood its contents, and thanked the Lord for your well-being. We understand that the [basket of] fish reached you and His Holiness the all-honorable Patriarch, though he did not inform me of its arrival (let it be safe). I have received the package and passed it on to its recipient the bishop of Sidon, along with the letter, which I read out and explained to him. The bishop is presently unwell, though he is improving. As I understand, he is willing to come to your location to meet with the blessed Patriarch.

⁴⁸ The word *اناقل* does not exist in Arabic. The root *نقل* means 'to move'. I therefore think that the author is creating a word to render a liturgical terminology.

⁴⁹ Literally, 'our Lord'.

Moreover, I have received the pair of towels that you sent. Dear brother and beloved son, you have always been generous towards me, and my conditions were never favorable to repay your kindness. I could only do so through prayer and remembrance during the Holy Liturgies, which I pray God accepts from me. I had hoped we could meet during the silk season, as you promised, especially as they say that this year is a favorable season. Now you have informed me that you have an obligation for which you must return to the office, of which I pray to God that He relieves us and replaces it with something more profitable. My hope has been dashed and my yearning has intensified to the point that it burns within me.

I have received the silk fabric,⁵⁰ and I still await information as to its cost. May God reward you with goodness and protect you from harm. Our thanks to you extend much further than the towels, for you are continually gracious to your loved ones and those who pray for you.

I previously received another letter from you, in which there was a letter to your son-in-law, the Jerusalemite George, which we have also sent to him. We also sent the letter for your brother 'Abduh with our relative Ḥannā Bustrus⁵¹. I received a letter from the Priest Mas'ad from Egypt, requesting a list of the patriarchs who have occupied the See of Antioch, from the first patriarch until the present. He is in the process of composing a remarkable chronicle, and therefore we ask you to search for the relevant information, which is almost certainly accessible to you, and write it down and send it to us so we can pass it on to him. Soon, I will receive a collection [of treatises] from him concerning the righteousness of our baptism and the invalidity of the Frankish baptism. The patriarch of Alexandria sent it to him from Constantinople //22r// in Greek, and he translated it into Arabic and greatly praised it. Perhaps you know more about it. With this, I conclude my words and greetings, etc.

Written on Thursday of the Ascension, in the year 1754. May your happiness continue to increase, and your hardships dissipate.

As of this date, our dear and beloved relative Kyr Yürghākī is on his way to you. We will miss him while you enjoy his company. The pain of separation from you is renewed but rejoice [for now] and be happy with his arrival. May our Lord keep you both safe and bring you together in wellness and peace.

[Written in] the year 1754.⁵² //23v//

⁵⁰ See كُرْمَسُوت in R. Dozy, *Supplément aux dictionnaires arabes* II, p. 460.

⁵¹ Ḥannā Bustrus received a letter of congratulation for the marriage of his son Mikhā'il from Patriarch Sylvester in April 1749. See MS Ḥariṣā, Saint Paul 210, f. 157v.

⁵² F. 22v–23r are blank.

30. Copy of a letter from the noble friend Khalīl the Jerusalemite, ibn al-Ṣabbāgh, originally from Damascus

To the unique brother and exceptional friend, the honorable Deacon Mūsā, may he live long and be protected from all harm.

We extend abundant greetings and good wishes with the ever-heartfelt longing to see your face and hear the delightful news of your well-being which, with the help and guardianship of God, remains protected.

Aside from this, the dreadful catastrophe that befell us, with the loss of the great ship laden with goods and all other kinds of assets, cannot have escaped your notice. It sank when it reached the port, which was greatly troubling to both those who were onboard and those who were not. I refer here to the passing of your esteemed uncle of good memory and praise, Ilyās Fakhr. For he resembled in his course a great ship carrying all kinds of blessings, realms of knowledge, important benefits and precious jewels of immeasurable value.

We suffer and bemoan the loss of this blessed man of God in action and words, who emulated the divine teachers and holy fathers in his life and conduct, and resembled Elijah in his zeal and ardor. What a pity for the passage of time, what sorrow for him as the days go by! Truly, he was a tree planted in the house of God, whose fruits all passersby could partake of, and all Christians would pick from its ripe clusters.

He was unique in his time and exceptional in his pride, surpassing his predecessors through his efforts and wisdom. He strengthened the Eastern lands with his teachings and exemplary life. He adorned the Church of Christ with his sweat, his labors, his sermons, and the beauty of his writings. He is blessed and fortunate for the precious treasure which was reserved for him, to whom the holy apostle says: 'He has finished his course, has kept his faith, and now departed to claim his reward from the righteous Judge' [2 *Timothy* 4:7-8], along with the rest of his beloved ones, who partake in the imperishable crowns [1 *Corinthians* 9:25] on that dreadful day. There, he will display his virtue, increase his honor, and magnify his pride with those delights that never diminish and rewards that never waver.

However, since the wise said: 'When a righteous man dies, he leaves regret behind him' [*Proverbs* 11:3], we are indeed saddened, for after his [Fakhr's] ascent, he did not show us his successor, Elisha, as [the prophet Elijah] did before him. We beseech God, who chose him from His Church, to reveal to us his successor through the sending of the Spirit that rested upon him, so this can be a consolation to the nations. Our hope is that God the Exalted will not forsake His people or break His promise to His Church, and that He will make you His successor in race and labor, out of His grace and generosity. May your life continue to endure, and may our Lord

compensate us all for his departure, as He is munificent and generous by nature, He who is 'able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham' [*Matthew* 3:9].

Look, my brother, to this era of ours in which two revered teachers – Eustratios [Argentis], of blessed memory, and your late uncle of great honor and praise – flourished. In this time too, death has befallen them both, and they have drunk from the cup of demise. We beseech the Almighty to envelop them in His mercy and unite them with His assembly. Amen, etc. [Written] in the year 1758. //24r//

31. [From Dīmītrī, brother of Khalīl Šabbāgh]

To the most esteemed brother and trustworthy friend, the honorable Deacon Mūsā, may God protect him.

[We] extend abundant greetings and sincere regards to this cherished being; may you remain well protected from misfortune.

If you should kindly inquire after your eternal friend, he is, by the grace of God and the blessing of your prayers and those of the exceedingly blessed and revered [patriarch], in good health and peace. However, his situation has not been concealed from you during this time; his journey to Izmir and the numerous hardships and fears he faced, including the dangers of death at sea and, following that, his arrival in the aforementioned town, which is afflicted by severe inflation, and where he has been staying to the present day. He has also encountered difficulties that have caused his soul to separate from his body. These include being taken away from his homeland, prevented from seeing his family, and unable to be in the company of or correspond with his friends and close companions. As if this were not enough, he was also robbed of the endurance of friendship and growth of affection which he had hoped for. He remains without any friends – distant or close, old or new. What, then, do you make of his state after such events and calamities have befallen him?

When the enemy saw his condition, he pitied him, yet none of his friends stood by him. He used to say about you, brother, that your love is everlasting, whether you are near or far. He never thought that your love would die before that of the others. This was when your beloved resided in Beirut, and he learned from others of your arrival in your homeland, my brother, and he saw letters from you addressed to both close and distant friends. This intrigued him, and he wrote two letters to you, reminiscing about your past friendship and rekindling the warmth of a love that had diminished. Yet he did not receive any response from you, even though you understood that his intention was to wish you continued health and everlasting well-being, and to inquire about the state of your health and the well-being of the most holy master [the Patriarch]. Moreover, he wished to know what you did regarding the

written commitment⁵³ he sent to you with your letters to Constantinople. It was in view of these circumstances and this aim that he waited for your answer.

What a pity for great walls built on love to be so easily brought down and dismantled by a tool of destruction. For his belief, owing to his distant state and the veil that prevented him from being seen, is that when what brothers have comes to an end, that which you have does not, and when what they have departs, //24v// that which you have remains. However, a person does not always attain what he wishes, and winds do not always blow as the ships desire.⁵⁴ Therefore, it was necessary for him to write these words to you so that if any spark of love remains, it may ignite into the blazing flame of affection that it once was. But if there is no trace left, you will not face any significant difficulty in responding to him. However, by the grace of God Almighty, we hope for a reunion.

If any misdoing occurred that prevented your correspondence, do not take it to heart, for he is only human – glory be to the One who is free from flaws and errors – and inform him so that he may reconcile with himself. The torment that he has endured because of that described above will suffice, for no human body can endure such pain and remain alive. The joys of life are in seeing loved ones, being in their constant company, hearing their sweet conversations, and receiving their letters whenever they are away.

If they withhold their communication, this in itself can separate them from a brother, strip them of a friend, and deprive them of these joys. Seeing as this is the case here, you, O brother, should not have allowed time to turn you against him.

The intention of this brother is that you do not banish him from your noble thoughts, and that you continue to send your honorable messages through your esteemed uncle. If you have a cherished person in Constantinople, please send messages through him and urge him to send them on, for he greatly thirsts for that sweet water. You should also inform him about your situation and that of Damascus, the Christians there, and how they behave with the honorable representative (*wakil*). Inform him too about the news of the Patriarch; I heard that he went to the lands of Bughdān [Moldavia], though I do not know if this is to be believed. Send me news of the written commitment I sent: if you received it from Deacon Simon, or if it remains with him. If he did not give it to you, then send it to me by the honorable hand of your respected uncle.

⁵³ We do not know what sort of commitment he refers to. See Haddad, “La correspondance”, p. 283.

⁵⁴ Paraphrase of the famous verse attributed to al-Mutanabbī:

ما كلَّ ما يَتمنى المرء يدركه ... تجري الرياح بما لا تشتهي السفن

‘Not everything a person wishes for can be attained ... the winds blow contrary to what the ships desire’.

Pass on my heartfelt greetings to your esteemed brother Mikhā'il, and to all loved ones, friends, and anyone who enquires about us. May God Almighty protect you.

The one who prays for you, al-Ḥājj Dīmītr[i], brother of Khalīl Ṣabbāgh.

Written on the 13th of April, Good Friday – may you live to celebrate it again and again – from Izmir, in the year 1747. //25r//

32. [Athanasios al-Dimashqī]

Divine grace and heavenly blessings be upon the soul and body of the one who is unique in excellent qualities and exceptional in the various forms of perfection, the virtuous sheikh, expert, and perfect teacher, distinguished by his noble character and virtuous, blessed ethics, honorable father, the admirable, esteemed and praiseworthy Mūsā. May the Lord God bestow the most perfect heavenly blessings upon him and his family. May He shower him with divine protection, safeguarding him from all heavenly and earthly trials. May He grant him exceptional divine grace through the intercession of Our Lady, the Mother of God and Pure Virgin, and all the saints and chosen ones of the Almighty who have risen to the highest ranks of paradise. Amen.

[We] extend sincere blessings, heartfelt prayers, abundant longing, and profound anticipation to behold your radiant countenance and to hear your pleasant and magnificent words.

We wish to inform you that, while we were eagerly awaiting news of your well-being and anxiously anticipating a letter from you reassuring us of your devout love, at a most auspicious time and favorable hour the letter⁵⁵ of your esteemed affection, sent by land, arrived and, soon after, another one sent earlier by sea. The sweetness of their content filled me with joy, and I felt relieved from the worries and anxieties that had been weighing on me through news of your desired well-being and your longed-for health, and through my delight in your precious and cherished words. I thus raised my hands in prayer and supplication to the One who possesses great majesty and exalted highness, imploring His all-encompassing goodness and all-embracing generosity to grant me the longevity of your love and to extend your life even longer. May He keep you safe and sound for us as long as night follows day and the moon follows the sun.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ The word طرس also means 'palimpsest', probably referring to the use of a recycled support on which Mūsā wrote his letter.

⁵⁶ We translated the words ملوان and نيران explicitly.

However, since sorrow is the sister of pleasure and wherever one goes, the other hastens to accompany it, I have also been struck by grief, preventing my joy from reaching its fullest extent (although it knows no limit or end). You informed me of the troubles that have befallen you and the adversities of this treacherous world with the passing of our esteemed brother, our uncle Mikhā'il, the Jerusalemite. My sorrow and grief are not due to his loss, for indeed, in my view, he is not lost but rather found, as he has journeyed from sorrow to joy and transitioned from suffering //25v// and pain to delight and celebration. My sorrow is instead for your grief, and my sadness for your distress, for even though you are aware of this – as we hope so – the [human] nature inevitably demands its due. So, we hope that your love will not allow it [nature] to control you, but rather, offer gratitude to the Almighty at all times, and praise Him with heart and tongue for the benevolence He showed the deceased through His knowledge that he would gain something much greater [in Heaven] than that which he had here.

We thus ask the Almighty, in whose hands all souls lie, to place him among the holy fathers and to grant him rest in the eternal dwellings with the righteous and the blessed, in the gardens of paradise and the embrace of the father of fathers, Abraham. As for you, may He preserve your life, prolong your days, bring us joy through your well-being, and not deprive us of your presence. May He soothe the burning of your heart with His divine comfort, grant you the grace of complete patience, and make this the end of your sorrows and the conclusion of your trials, for He is the All-Hearing, the Responder, and does not disappoint those who seek Him.

Let it be known to your beloved self that the letter that you kindly sent through our father, on behalf of His Holiness, has reached us. We resolved to fulfill our wish to go and kiss his pure hands, but our noble fathers, first, out of their great affection for us and secondly, out of their need for us, did not permit us to go. Nevertheless, they promised to fulfill our desire and entrusted our matters to the purest Kyr Anthimos. He also promised us as they did and assured us that he would exert all his effort and diligence on our behalf. He even said: 'If I do not fulfill my promise to you, then go wherever you wish'. Thus, I agreed with their words, as they begged this of me in hope and earnestness. I have kept the aforementioned letter with me for the time being, and I hope, with your prayers, that God will bring forth what is good.

Furthermore, it should be known to you that, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, the Giver of Gifts, I was elevated to the honorable rank of priesthood within the sacred and revered church of the Holy Sepulcher. I remain steadfast in fulfilling the duty of praying for your eminence.

As for my condition, if you should inquire about it, I am in good health, by the grace of the Almighty. May your love endure through days and nights.

With regard to other news from here, there is much to share, but not all of it is certain. I know that when the Holy Fast began, a certain individual by the name of Yuwānī⁵⁷ arrived in the Imperial [City of Constantinople]. He received a gracious reception from the dignitaries and high-ranking officials of the Empire. //26r// His entry was accompanied by a grand procession, much like that of kings, and he took up lease of a *saray* and a palace. An agreement was reached between both parties that the Sublime [Ottoman] State would pay one hundred money bags per year and, as long as this continued, peace would prevail. If the agreement were to break, then war would be resumed. As we witnessed, there is at present great enmity and hatred between the Greeks and the Russians. First, [this] holds no advantage or benefit for anyone, only the ruin of the Christian people and the confiscation of their wealth. Secondly, corruption has reached an unbearable level, even akin to other nations – though whether this is for certain or not, I cannot say. Yet, aside from this, a tranquil and peaceful state now prevails. The Christians are under great protection and, according to recent news, all the lands which he [Yuwānī] conquered have been returned to the Sublime State, except for Crimea.⁵⁸ We hope that the Lord will bring good news to our ears. This is what we wanted to share with you.

We congratulate you on the Resurrection of our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ. May your years be numerous, your days joyful, and may you celebrate this honorable Easter for many years to come in health, happiness, and prosperity, along with your beloved and protected children, as well as those whom you love and who seek refuge with you. May you be well every year.

Written on the 12th of April 1776.

You should also be aware that holy Kyr Abramius⁵⁹ is now patriarch of the Holy See of Jerusalem.⁶⁰ He is not like previous patriarchs of blessed memory, whose

57 This is most probably Ivan Abramovich Gannibal (1735–1801), who was a distinguished Russian naval commander. He played a key role in the 1770 capture of the Ottoman fortress of Navarino and later oversaw the founding of the city of Kherson in 1778. Gannibal received several imperial honors and reached the rank of *général en chef* before retiring in 1784.

58 The agreement between the Ottoman Empire and the Russian Empire was that the Ottomans would pay three installments: the first in early January 1775, the second in January 1776, and the third in January 1777. According to a document that dates from September 1776, published by Ertan Ünlü, only the first installment was fully paid, toward the end of 1775. See Ertan Ünlü, “Küçük Kaynarca Sonrası Osmanlı-Rus Müzakerelerinden Bir Kesit: 1776 Tarihli Mükâleme Belgesi”, *Belgeler*, 42, 2023, p. 290. Was the first installment paid to Ivan Gannibal in 1775, thus indicating that Athanasios is relating events from the previous year? This is possible.

59 Abramius II was patriarch of Jerusalem from June/July 1775 to November 1787.

60 Athanasios, the author of this letter, translated in 1780 Makarios Kalogeras's book *Ευαγγελική Σάλπιγξ*, 1765. The Arabic title is *Al-Baḡ al-Injīlī*. In the preface of his translation, Athanasios

philosophy rendered them pillars of the Church, such as Chrysanthos,⁶¹ Ephraim,⁶² and others. Instead, he is known for his very pious way of life, characterized by fasting, prayer, and asceticism. He is a lover of scholars and treats them with great respect. May our Lord grant him a long life and may he benefit us through his righteous prayers.

In addition to our greetings, our teacher, Kyr Anthimos, wishes to convey to you his blessings and prayers. May the grace and prayers of our Lord Jesus Christ be upon you, and may His blessings encompass you again and again.

From the one who cherishes and prays for you, Papa Athanasios of Damascus.
//26v//

33. [Papa Athanasios from Constantinople]⁶³

[To] the eloquent, sharp-witted, articulate, and distinguished one, pride and honor of the Fragrant City [*al-Fayḥā*]⁶⁴ and treasure and excellency of Damascus [*Jillaq*],⁶⁵ the most perfect master (in name and in practice), Mūsā al-Nawfalī,⁶⁶ may the Lord God bless him, his wife, his children, and all those belonging to him, and bestow abundant blessings [upon him] through the intercessions of the Fortress who mediates [on our behalf] to Him and all His saints. Amen.

[We] extend fragrant greetings that spread their scent and distinguished salutations whose dew has sprinkled among the people, and [our] deep longing and heartfelt desire to see your radiant and splendid countenance – may the Lord of creation preserve and protect it from all calamities.

I wish to inform your eloquence that at the happiest moment and most auspicious hour, I received a letter filled with your kindness and was delighted by your beautiful words. As I was glad to hear of your well-being, I offered abundant thanks to the Almighty for your good health and the pleasant times you enjoy. I ask Him – may His glory be everlasting – to let me hear joyful news from you, free from any

indicates that Abramius encouraged him to translate this work. Athanasios wrote an introduction to the translation that is preserved in the MSS, after the preface. See, e.g., MS Greek Orthodox Diocese of Homs 23.

⁶¹ Chrysanthos Notaras was patriarch of Jerusalem from February 1707 to February 1731.

⁶² Ephraim II was patriarch of Jerusalem from 1766 to April 1770. He is the author of the Greek preface of the Εὐαγγελικὴ Σάλπιγξ and the biography of Makarios Kalogeras.

⁶³ Athanasios is the author; cf. Haddad, “La correspondance”, p. 283–284.

⁶⁴ This word, meaning ‘the fragrant city’, is the epithet of Tripoli, the native city of Mūsā.

⁶⁵ Another name for Damascus.

⁶⁶ ‘Nawfal’ means ‘generous and beautiful’.

evil or harm, and to 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. May the Lord God watch over them with His compassion and shadow them with His care.

I am now aware of all that you informed me, especially the disturbances and troubles caused by the one who loves to create discord.⁶⁷ The reality is – as your eloquence has said – if a man does not die once, he will not live forever, and if there is no destruction, there will be no rebuilding. However, all these matters are ultimately under the control of the One who is above every being, and we ask Him to guide [us] to a better outcome.

You were most likely informed of the presence of this individual in these parts toward the end of August, and of my confrontation with him and the conversation that took place between us. Following this, I did not confront him, because he is a respected man and his group is influential. Everyone who interacts with them will find their match. However, I do not blame him for what he had to say to me because, if he can express anger towards the people of Damascus, criticize their conditions, and disparage their qualities after they wrote a petition against him, how much more angry will he be with me after he has heard what I had to say //27r// against him?

But (as my conscience attests, without exaggeration) even before he came from Chios⁶⁸ and up until now, I have not ceased – with God's help – to praise his virtues. He had the intention (as he mentioned in the company of people who later relayed it to me) to cause me harm⁶⁹ in the usual manner, as you know. However, the Lord, who thwarts the schemes of leaders, did not allow him to achieve his goal, as He knew that my zeal is solely for His Holy Church. Instead, He made him come from Sāqiz [Chios] and meet me at the residence of a most glorified and respected man, may God preserve him. I have explained in part to the honorable Jerusalemite man⁷⁰ the accusations that this individual levelled against me and the rebuttals with which I resisted him – from this, you will understand the situation more clearly. And we hope that through his efforts and fervent zeal, this holy seat will be delivered from bondage during his time, and that our Lord will grant him a helping hand and support him in all his endeavors.

67 As Haddad pointed out, the person referred to is the patriarch of Antioch, Daniel of Chios (1767–1791). See Haddad, "La correspondance", p. 285.

68 The copyist wrote 'Shīr'.

69 The usage of the verb اذى with the preposition الى is incorrect. Perhaps the copyist misunderstood the verb.

70 Haddad identifies him with Jirjis Barṣūn, mentioned later in the letter. See "La correspondance", p. 285.

I have also become aware of the letters that arrived from Tripoli informing you of the situation with the Patriarch. It appears that someone sent a letter to the Patriarch informing him (as Papa Nicephorus,⁷¹ the son of the pasha, told me) that the people of Damascus sent a complaint to us about the petition we gave you. We took little notice of such notions and did not send them a response. I am not certain whether this report is accurate [or not]; if they had seen in it something contrary to the people of Damascus, they should have reported that he stayed with us for only thirty days, to clear their conscience, and testified to those thirty days only, not nine years. In brief, the matter concerning this man has now become apparent, revealing the wise from the foolish and the zealous from the indifferent. Everyone will receive their reward in accordance with their intentions and efforts. No one will be crowned unless they struggle with the necessary effort [*Philippians* 3:14; 1 *Corinthians* 9:25]. So, 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 their own relatives and co-religionists are also fighting against them.

May He, in His goodness and generosity, grant them relief and comfort in place of their suffering.

As for what you mentioned about the person who accompanied us, I am indeed very surprised. I never expected him to deny all the kindness I showed him, to the point where I served him myself and placed him above myself. Despite all this, not only did he fail to express //27v// gratitude but he also criticized me. Yes, if I were in a place that belonged to me alone, I would have welcomed him and sat with him as I did in Damascus. But now I am staying in the house of another and have someone else with me. How can I take two people with me? May God increase his goodness. If you should doubt anything of which I have informed you, then address our follower, Jirjis Barṣūn, who can tell you everything that happened. I should have completely turned away from him by now since his ingratitude has become

71 From MS Vatican, Sbath 133, we learn that in 1778 Papa Nicephorus was in Constantinople with Patriarch Daniel of Chios. There, he found the manuscript MS Vatican, Sbath 133, with an Aleppian enemy of our millet', presumably a Rūm-Catholic Aleppian. Together with MS Sbath 133, Papa Nicephorus bought other manuscripts that the Aleppian claimed the Muslims had stolen during the war. He dates his note May 1779. As the manuscript was copied in 1774, the war in question might have been the Ottoman–Iranian War of 1775–1776. Papa Nicephorus also bought in Constantinople MS Damascus 211 from *al-aghyār*, 'those who are different'. The note is again dated May 1779. We understand that both books were bought from the same man. In the same manuscript, there is a note by 'Isā Iskandar al-Ma'lūf identifying Nicephorus as the brother of Athanasios, which is clearly a wrong identification, since Athanasios calls him, in the letter, 'the son of the pasha'.

evident. But out of respect for your love and my duty, I have shown him renewed kindness – even greater than before – and consoled him as much as I could.

This is what I convey in response to your eloquent letter. I ask that you continue to correspond with me to assure me of your well-being.

Send my blessings, prayers, and heartfelt greetings to our beloved, the honorable Abū Yūsuf Dīmītrī, and equally to your son, the honorable Deacon Jirjis, and his brothers, as well as all the residents of your noble household. Send my greetings also to our dear brother, your most virtuous and pious brother-in-law Deacon Yūsuf, and his honorable father, as well as to everyone who inquires after us. May God preserve and keep you safe for many years.

Written in haste on the 5th of October, in the year 1777.

Attached is a letter from His Holiness in response to your letter, which [I hope] will find you well. Please inform us of its arrival along with news of your well-being. If you can bear a little effort and endure the minor inconvenience of coming here in person, as I mentioned to the Jerusalemite, it would be better than sending your letter. That way, I can see you, enjoy your company, and we can both find relief from our fatigue and exertions. Your reward – God willing – will be granted both physically and spiritually with the full recompense from the Giver of Rewards, glory be to Him, and this will strengthen you.

I also inform you that when I composed your letter on behalf of His Holiness and he read it, he reproached me for not informing you about the arrival of your first letter which was regarding me. I explained to His Holiness that it had slipped my mind, and that my thoughts were preoccupied at the time. I ask for your pardon and forgiveness. //28r//

34. [From Athanasios al-Dimashqī]

Divine grace and heavenly blessings be upon the soul and body of the spiritual son, the sagacious father and master, most honorable and beloved Deacon Mūsā, and [upon] his wife, his children, and all his spiritual and physical deeds. May all heavenly blessings be complete, Amen.

After extending blessings and prayers, and inquiring about your health and well-being, we inform your esteemed wisdom that should you inquire after us – praise and thanks be to God – we are, as of this day, in health and security; long may this continue for your noble self. We constantly raise our hands in supplication and prayer to our God, the Glorious One, to grant you peace of mind, well-being, and the fulfillment of all your hopes. We ask Him to accept our supplications and requests, for He is the Responsive and Sovereign God.

You may well be aware of our safe arrival in these parts and our meeting with our Christian children, which caused us immense joy, both spiritually and physically. Matters, thank God, are progressing well and better than expected.

For our part, we realize that we have only just now come to know them, and likewise they us. Therefore, love, peace, and harmony must prevail as we humbly accommodate each one according to his way, so that we might – with God's grace – if possible, win them all. If there are one or two who are unwilling to change their usual resolve, then may God enlighten their minds.

Our utmost desire when we arrived was to write to you so that you could be reassured of us, as is rightly due, for we cannot forget your immense kindness and the sweetness of your speech – especially during that brief yet cherished last moment. The only obstacle to [our] writing sooner was an illness that affected us for several days, after which we were busy fulfilling our duties to our Christian children, preaching and teaching during this fasting season, which we pray brings you health and well-being for many years to come. As you mentioned before, barren land requires frequent plowing, and we hope through God, who grants growth, that our efforts will not be in vain. We pray that the outcome will be good.

We have also been informed of the departure of the venerable Patriarch from your side, but we still do not know where he is currently residing //28v// or what his destination is. We are saddened by his hardship at his old age, but these are the games of the devil, from whose traps we pray that God will deliver us and bring us safely to the harbor of tranquility. This, in brief, is all [we wished to say] for now. Should it occur to your noble mind to send a response, even if brief, the comfort it would bring us would not be insignificant: you would be showing us great favor in this, as you did in other matters. We continually ask God to keep us reassured about you and to hear nothing but what pleases our hearts and brings joy to our eyes, for He is the most generous among those beseeched.

We send blessings and prayers to your well-protected children, the residents of your blessed household, and all the beloved who inquire about us. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, along with our humble blessings, envelop you eternally, Amen.

Written on the 25th of June, in the year 1787. //29r//

35. [Letter from Yūsuf Mark]

To the pride of beloved sons, most esteemed spiritual son, my soul, the revered master Mūsā <...>⁷² may the Lord God bestow upon him, his children, his wife, and all his deeds the most complete heavenly blessings, Amen.

I wish to inform you that while I was besieged by the treacheries of life, imprisoned and oppressed, your letter reached me and alleviated my sorrow and distress. I praise God for your well-being, safety, and the abundant love you have shown me, which flows like a river, and your kindness which overwhelms me month after month. Indeed, I am indebted to your love for the remainder of my life and for eternity [for the following]:

1. That which you sent me was the reason for my recovery from my illness.
2. You assisted me in copying my work against my opponent.
3. You mentioned working on the opening formula (*ḥamdala*) for this text, which is my ultimate goal. It should include: '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'.⁷³
4. You sought the favor of our lord Patriarch regarding my journey.
5. Through you, His Holiness became aware of my exertion and hardship.
6. I have not neglected to respond to enemies of the Church with the utmost seriousness and effort.
7. His Holiness has come to know of my passionate love and loyalty to him.

How can I repay the debt of love I owe you, my dear and cherished one? I will remember you and plead for you in my prayers and liturgies for as long as I live, and I have instructed that thanks be given after I am gone.

As of this date, I have written a letter to our lord Patriarch, recounting to His Holiness what happened between my son and a rogue from Aleppo. As he mocked our lord Patriarch in the verses of the damned priest, Niqūlā [al-Ṣā'igh] of Aleppo, my son could not bear it. He reprimanded him to make him stop, but he did not, and he insulted our lord Patriarch. My son then insulted the Pope and struck him [the rogue] with a staff in the *qaysāriyat* [bazaar] of Sheikh Shāhīn Talhūq, injuring

⁷² The lower part of three words is still visible. These words were cut off during binding so that they are not readable anymore.

⁷³ A work by Yūsuf Mark entitled *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*, composed in 1763–1764, is preserved in different manuscripts, along with its refutation by Yūsuf Bābīlā, entitled *Sharḥ al-'aqīda al-'adīmat al-dark bi-daḥd ajwibat al-khūrī Yūsuf Mark*. See MS Aleppo, Greek Catholic Archdiocese 53, and, probably, also MS Aleppo, Maronite Archdiocese 1194.

him. Witnesses claimed that my son wounded him with a knife and insulted the Emir Ḥusayn, the governor of the land at that time, who is the brother of the emir Maṣṣūr.⁷⁴ People from the Maronite Yārid family then accompanied him [the rogue] to bribe the emir to capture, beat, and stone my son. But neither my son nor I were caught. It has now been six days since we went into hiding, and the search is ongoing. The emir is now demanding fifty *quruṣ* as a bribe and twenty for [my] exile, and we do not know what the outcome will be. We ask for your prayers. For the rest of our news, read the letter to our lord Patriarch and the letter to our lord Bishop Kyr Makarios,⁷⁵ and kiss his hands for us.

Send my blessings to Yūrghākī, for I am not in the right mind to write him a letter appropriate to his status. We also send blessings to his honorable uncle, the Jerusalemite Abū Nawfal, his children, and his household. When the time is right, please kiss the hands of our lord Patriarch Kyr Kyr Sylvester, His Beatitude, on my behalf, along with several prostrations. May you stay well.

Written on the 21st of August 1764. //29v//

36. [From Yūsuf Mark]

To the pride of sons, dearest of the noble and beloved, the esteemed spiritual son, the light of my eyes and the soul of my soul, the most honorable deacon, may the Lord God bless him, his wife, his daughter, and his two sons. [May He] make the difficult easy for him, and may he own without ever being in debt, Amen.

If you should inquire as to our longing for you, words cannot describe it; our praise for you is sweeter and kinder than the breeze. At the most opportune time, your dear letter reached us and quenched our thirst with the sweetness of your words. We thanked God Almighty for your good temperament.

We received the gift of a sample of cinnamon. May God protect you from all harm and adversity. Since we do not have such a thing here, send us an *uqīya*⁷⁶ as

74 The closest source to that period, *Kitāb al-ghurar al-ḥisān fī akhbār ābnā' al-zamān* (ca. 1800) of Emir Ḥaydar Aḥmad al-Shihābī, talks about two brothers of Miḥmī the Emir, Maṣṣūr and Aḥmad (ed. Rustum and al-Bustānī, p. 59 sq.). We did not encounter in this source the name Ḥusayn. See also W. Harris, *Lebanon: A History, 600–2011*, New York, 2012, p. 119.

75 This should be Makarios Ṣadaqa, a former student and friend of Yūsuf, mentioned in Letter 57 by his lay name Mūsā Ṣadaqa. In 1763, Makarios was appointed as bishop of Sidon and *wakīl*. Sylvester intended to appoint Makarios in his place as patriarch of Antioch, but the bishops did not accept him.

76 A historical unit of weight in Arabic. It is the equivalent of ca. 200 g in Lebanon, Palestine and Syria.

requested. Seeing as it could be either good or bad [in quality], you should taste it without delay. If it turns out to be good, send us two *uqīya*. May God protect you from harm and unpleasantness, and may you be the beneficiary of the utmost grace and credit. Let us know who to repay for it; we are most grateful to you.

We sent on the letter addressed to the Jerusalemite Khalīl Šabbāgh that we received before this, and now you have informed us about a [second] letter to the aforementioned, though we have not received it. You asked whether the Daskalos has completed the collation [Arabic translation] of the *Octoechos*⁷⁷ with the Greek. [We are] in great trouble,⁷⁸ for it has been three months since he succumbed to the ailment of forgetfulness, and he no longer knows whether he is asleep or awake. I feel deeply saddened for him, even though⁷⁹ I was serving him and eager to see him in a good mood whenever he visited Beirut, while he was staying in Beirut and during his stay at the monastery. This is in addition to the care shown by our lord the bishop toward him, who continued to pay him a salary that I shared with him [the bishop, paying] as much as I could. We also directed him to the monastery in the hope that he might recover. Yet now he sends us a letter inquiring as to when he departed for the monastery, when he arrived, and why he went there. When he finishes eating, he forgets whether he has had lunch, and when he returns from the bathroom, he says: 'I intend to go to the bathroom'. This has been going on for many days; do not even ask about his condition. May the Lord have mercy on him and heal him.

On the same date as his letter, I and our lord the bishop sent him some letters and supplies. We sent him [a letter of] consolation and entrusted him to request whatever he needed in terms of supplies and necessities. When he returns [from the monastery], he locks himself alone in a room, as is his usual habit. May the Lord heal him of this ailment through the blessings and prayers of our Lord the Holy Kyrios Kyr Sylvester, the most reverend. If possible, please request his prayers for him and for all of us. Do not cease to inform me of your well-being. If possible, could you inform me of the amount of the bail that the Padres [missionaries] paid to be released from prison? We would be most grateful for that. Extend our blessings and prayers to your children and their mother, and to whoever seeks refuge with you. //30r//

⁷⁷ *Book of the Eight Tones*: A liturgical book containing prayers for each weekday in eight tones. Each week a different tone is used in sequence; after the eighth tone, the cycle returns to the first.

⁷⁸ The answer is not clear. We do not understand whether Theodosius finished the correction or not. But it seems he did not.

⁷⁹ The author probably wanted to say مع ذلك, 'even in this situation'.

Copies of letters that we received from the loyal and pure friend, the Deacon and writer Yūsuf Mark the Tripolitan⁸⁰

37. [First letter from Yūsuf Mark]

An eager man kisses the soil⁸¹ with his whole mouth | one considered among the followers and servants.

If I could come to you, I would visit you | walking on my head, not on my feet.⁸²

That would be little in comparison to my love for you | and I swear by God, it would not cause me any pain.

Pride of his peers and jewel of his contemporaries, a dear brother and a great friend, highly esteemed and honored by God.

The first angel parted the sea for me, bringing the joy of the children of Israel through the hands of Mūsā. He evoked the words of a certain [author]: 'I received the letter which pleased my heart and dispelled its sadness. It was like Moses had been restored to his mother, or Joseph's robe when it reached Jacob'.⁸³

I became to him as a certain [poet] described: you have written to me longing for my presence, and the lord of bounty's call is answered. I accepted the letter and said: 'I hear and obey [you], my lord, and I am at your service'.⁸⁴

Moreover, my infrequent correspondence with your Excellency is due to my verbal clumsiness, yet you:

[You] whose thoughts produce [words] like ready coins,

What compares to saying to a man you teased with riddles: 'He met with a gift!'⁸⁵

And I must add:

[You] from whose capability a rival's steps stop far too short,

⁸⁰ Here starts the second group of letters from the original collection.

⁸¹ This first part of the verse is a quotation from Ibn al-Wardī's poem.

⁸² This verse is a paraphrase of al-Ḥallāj's poem.

⁸³ This is a paraphrase of the story of Ni'ma and Naomi from the *Thousand and One Nights*:

ورود الكتاب فلا عدمت أناملاً | كتبت به حتى تضمخ طيباً
فكان موسى قد أعيد لأمه أو ثوب يوسف قد أتى يعقوب

Rendered in a poetic way, slightly different than Arabic, in Burton's translation:

"Thy note came: long lost fingers wrote that note, * Till drop they sweetest scents for what they wrote: | 'Twas Moses to his mother's arms restored; * 'Twas Jacob's eye-sight cured by Joseph's coat!'" See Richard Burton (trans.), *The Book of the Thousand Nights and a Night: A Plain and Literal Translation of the Arabian Nights Entertainments*, t. 4, London, Burton Club, 1885, p. 14.

⁸⁴ This couplet was written by Ṣafī al-Dīn al-Ḥillī (1276–1349).

⁸⁵ Al-Hariri, *Maqāmāt*, n. 36.

Which compares to what you say to him who joins you in riddles: 'Hold off!
Hold off!'⁸⁶ //30v//

38. Copy of a letter from the aforementioned [Yūsuf Mark] that he sent to Trebizond

To the esteemed and honorable brother and revered friend, may God watch over him, Amen.

After offering the reverence due to Your esteemed Excellency, which remains guarded by the watchful eye of God,

I wish to inform you that, at a most favorable time and noble hour, your dear letter reached me, dated the 5th of July, from the land of metal,⁸⁷ Gümüşhane, mature in its benefits like a grapevine bearing its fruits, pure in flavor and sweetness, free from bitterness and acidity. What a bountiful spring it is! How can it quench those who drink from it and guide them to your judgment? What fruits are ready to be plucked by the bearer of these living and breathing tidings?

For when I read his words, I saw myself as the talkative adulteress who led the wise man astray [*Proverbs* 5 & 7]. My heart overflowed with indescribable joy upon receiving your letter: an embodiment of your noble spirit and an expression of your overwhelming love. I cannot tell you how eagerly I was waiting to breathe in the fragrant news of your robust health and sound well-being. It felt like a peaceful sign showing me your path, like Moses leading the lost Israelites. I am deeply, profoundly grateful for this abundant brotherly love and compassion, for you, amidst your many burdensome duties and extensive travels, did not forget the longing of your brothers and admirers.

I have thus composed this humble letter for you, which [my] sweat has poured into, for how could it not be so when it is destined for such a unique person as you? My words to you are like comparing a mosquito to an elephant; I trembled in fear and awe just thinking about and calculating the day when you would start reading it.

My reason for writing to you is to highlight the wonders of longing and love kindled //31r// by the flames that consume me day by day with your painful separation, O dearest beloved and companion. Thus, I longed, in the words of David, to have wings like a dove so I could fly away [*Psalms* 55: 6], visit the pure spring of your presence, and return. But since that is not possible, let us, O noble and sublime

⁸⁶ *Idem*.

⁸⁷ This is a translation of the Greek name *Argyrópolis* and the Turkish name *Gümüşhane*, which means 'the city of silver'.

one, converse through letters, quenching the thirst of longing which we cannot currently alleviate through direct interaction and face-to-face meetings as before.

[Written on] the 31st of August 1737.

39. Another letter [from Yūsuf Mark] sent to the lands of Erzurum

To the esteemed and beloved brother, the most glorious and affectionate, may God Almighty protect him and grant him a beautiful life.

[We] extend the noblest and most illuminating greetings and the sincerest regards, spreading the fragrance of a pure and loyal heart, and lavishing the finest praise upon this noble soul, upon the esteemed traits that remain a beacon of hope and the loftiest of virtues. [This] is by the grace of God Almighty, who endowed human nature with reason, speech, and hands, so that by the first, they can preserve love, by the second, express it, and by the last, enjoy it.

Given that this grace granted us is not insignificant, and that, as St. Gregory of Nyssa said, 'People ought to reveal the secrets of their thoughts through correspondence', I [wish to inform you that] I received your esteemed letter written from the lands of Erzurum on the 17th of October.⁸⁸ I rejoiced greatly upon receiving it and it healed [the pain] in my chest. Our eager heart was quenched as though it were a remedy given to a patient, for I was confined to my bed on that day. When I read it, my anxiety dissipated and my pain was forgotten, as I had been eagerly awaiting your joyful news, like a deer longing for streams of water [*Psalm* 42:1]. However, most honorable friend, it is not fitting that you should arm yourself against us and wage war on us with your words and pen to this extent, using such eloquent titles, grammatical //31v// precision and concise explanations.

Perhaps you forgot that we have little experience in this field. Did you think that you were debating with Al-Ḥarīrī⁸⁹ when you released your stallion into the arena of this art? For when I read your letter and listened to your eloquent speech, I was astonished and bewildered in thought. I was so impressed that I recited

⁸⁸ He does not specify whether it is *tishrīn al-awwal* (October) or *al-thānī* (November). In this case, it is presumably *tishrīn al-awwal*.

⁸⁹ Al-Ḥarīrī (1054–1122) was a scholar of the Arabic language. He is famous for his *Maqāmāt*. In other letters, Yūsuf reports that he copied *al-Maqāmāt* 49 and 51.

Al-Ḥarīrī's rhymed verse:⁹⁰ 'Blessed are you, how abundant your harmfulness!'⁹¹ To this I add: 'My soul is your ransom, you who possess loyalty in its highest form'. And: 'You have reached the pinnacle of faithfulness, my brother, like Al-Samaw'al who sacrificed his son Sharīḥ'.⁹² 'For any prey will do in times of need'.⁹³

Do not cease to send me your letters and engage in this blessed war against me. Keep me informed of your well-being and share news about yourself from any place or town, for 'it is not beyond God to bring the world together as one'.⁹⁴ I beseech Him to unite us with you in wellness and safety. I bow respectfully before His Holiness our Patriarch, the Triune Glory. Kiss his hands on my behalf and convey my regards to those who follow him.

Written on the second⁹⁵ Sunday of Pentecost, in the year 1738 AD.

40. Letter [from Yūsuf Mark], sent to Ḥamā

[To] the writer of decisive and binding records, eloquent in speech and artful in script, the honorable brother and revered deacon, may his virtues endure.

After [extending] the most fragrant greetings, whose eloquence illuminates the stars, whose clarity and fluency make the branches blossom, bloom, and bear fruits for this exalted self of noble nature and gracious character,

Let it be known that the water of the meadow danced, its birds sang musically and melodiously, and its flowers bloomed in all types and colors. When I asked why, I was told that a letter had arrived, its author a fountain [of linguistic expressions].⁹⁶

⁹⁰ We believe that شجع in this context is a scribal error, therefore read it as سجع. However, this reading is still problematic because we have not found the complete rhymed verse in Al-Ḥarīrī's work.

⁹¹ This citation from *Al-Maqāma al-dīnāriya* expresses the capacity of a poet to praise and criticize the same thing (in this case, two twin dinars).

⁹² Al-Maydānī, *Majma' al-amthāl*, n. 4432. Al-Samaw'al is known for his loyalty to Imru'u al-Qays who handed him the armors of Kinda's kings. He chose his son Sharīḥ's death over handing the armors to al-Ḥārith, king of al-Ḥirā.

⁹³ Al-Maydānī, *Majma' al-amthāl*, n. 3010.

⁹⁴ Abū Nuwās said this in praise of Faḍl ibn Rabī', so the conversation is about the singular individual who represents everyone, because he embodies all virtues and merits. Yūsuf Mark seems to be saying that all the virtues of previous authors were collected in Mūsā.

⁹⁵ It is not clear whether this is the next day – that is, Monday of the Pentecost – or the second Sunday.

⁹⁶ We believe the ء in ماء was mistakenly added and thus the word should be corrected to ما to rhyme with لم. In both cases, we do not know what he is referring to. Is he comparing Mūsā to the flowing water? Or is he saying that the name of the correspondent is not written?

I sensed that it was a message in the spirit of Mūsā, embellished with linguistic gems. I began to contemplate its truths, inquire about its details, and immerse my thoughts in the depths //32r// of its rich sea that has neither beginning nor end. {Perhaps I might catch its pearls and gems, or perhaps I will not quench my thirst nor find any guidance during my nocturne walk}.⁹⁷ At that moment, I confessed that I am neither a knight in this arena, nor do I have any skill in fastening its knots. Likewise, I was told that a bird singing a melody that is not its own⁹⁸ lacks harmony,⁹⁹ so I thought that dodging it is praiseworthy, even if praise does not find me. I told my companion: 'If you wish to make a bow but lack the skill, do not ruin the bow – leave it to a master bowyer'.¹⁰⁰

I thus delayed my response until I could pluck the beautiful flowers [of your letter]. News then reached me that Father Papa-Theophanis, who was previously *economos* of Şaydnāyā, was about to write to His Holiness the supreme Patriarch to request permission to stay in Latakia¹⁰¹ during the winter, as his journey to Constantinople was hindered. I therefore took the initiative to conjure up this humble and modest letter from a languid mind. For the praise you give me descends from you, and the praise I give you, from me.¹⁰² This is simply virtue and etiquette, as Chrysostom says: 'Even though some may flee from deserving praise due to their righteousness, the soul itself approves and rejoices in it, knowing what it truly is'.

I converse with the soul that delights in the truth of the discourse, and I say this not out of vanity or emptiness.

As for *Mulḥat al-i'rāb* [*The Beauties of Grammar*], I have completed the text and it will soon reach you through His Eminence the bishop, so make it into one volume. Given that the text is repeated in the Commentary,¹⁰³ make the second text, together

97 Adapted from Al-Ḥarīrī's *al-Maqāma al-raqtā'*: *فَقُلْتُ: آتِيهِمَا لَعَلِّي أَنْقَعُ صَدَى. أَوْ أَجِدُ عَلَى النَّارِ هُدًى*. We believe the new word *سري* used instead of *ناري* is the *maṣdar* of *سرى*, which means 'to walk at night'.

98 Using a different language than its own.

99 These are three popular proverbs. The most common way to say the last one is: طائر يغرد خارج السرب ('a bird singing outside the flock').

100 Attributed to Al-Ḥuṭay'a (7th c.)

101 Yūsuf Mark was in Latakia too. This is confirmed by Letter 42, where he says that until that day he was still there. Cf. Haddad, "La correspondance", p. 270.

102 The common proverb *الكلام صفة المتكلم* 'Speech is an attribute of the speaker', comes from Ibn Taymīya's *Kitāb majmū' al-rasā'il wa-al-masā'il*, vol. 3, ed. M. Riḍā, s. l., s. d., p. 163.

103 Haddad thinks that this Commentary is the work composed by Yūsuf that he mentions in Letter 49. Thus, Haddad dates Letter 49 to 1740. However, we think that this Commentary is Al-Ḥarīrī's famous commentary on his work, *Mulḥat al-i'rāb*. We also think that the work mentioned in Letter 49 is a later project that was accomplished in 1742 or 1743.

with the Commentary, another volume, rendering it lighter to carry and quicker to memorize without the need for another book, etc.

May your presence, your honor, your rank, and your veneration endure forever.

Written on the 19th of August, in the year 1739 AD. //32v//

41. [From Yūsuf Mark]

[To] the inscriber of orders and prohibitions transmitted by His¹⁰⁴ noble mouth to the head of the Apostles, most splendid brother and eminent deacon, may he live long.

{Praise be to God Almighty, who endowed human nature with reason, speech, and hands, so that by the first, they can preserve love, by the second, express it, and by the last, enjoy it. This grace is neither insignificant nor small in the eyes of God and was granted to us by Him in order that, as Gregory the Star of Nyssa said, people reveal the secrets of their thoughts through correspondence}.¹⁰⁵ We thank the Almighty for His favor.

Your noble letter reached me, which healed the wound of my heart and caused me joy that words could not possibly express. Since you mentioned that you had sent me a letter in response to what I requested and as guidance for what I sought (it did not reach me, but I am certain of your letter based on your communication, and even so, may God keep you safe and bless you), and since I felt some resentment toward you because of this [not receiving a letter], I ask for your forgiveness and pardon, for the condition of love is the sincerity of intention, and the truth of speech is the goodness of a person.

I have sent Your Eminence a letter through Deacon ‘Abd Allāh al-Shaghri, as well as the text of the *Mulḥat al-i’rāb* [*The Beauties of Grammar*]. They will hopefully reach you and bring you the honor of reading them. When you send me the books that you promised – God willing – along with some necessary drafts, I will send you the Commentary of Al-Ḥarīrī’s *Mulḥat* and the text embedded within it as a second section. I remain committed to serving your faithful love. If possible, please expedite their delivery, for I have resolved, with God’s will, to travel to the Egyptian lands, as my income from [this] office is meager and most of the notables have given me only empty promises.

For this reason – God willing – I plan to leave before Easter. If not, it will be after Easter, may God’s will be.

¹⁰⁴ We think this is a reference to Jesus Christ.

¹⁰⁵ This section matches Letter 39 almost exactly.

We ask for your prayers.

Written on the 6th of February, in the year 1740. //33r//

42. [A letter from Yūsuf Mark]

[To] the writer of decisive and binding records, which he had never done before, the dear brother and honorable esteemed deacon, may God Almighty preserve him.

[We] extend our greetings, adorned with the fragrance of joy and illuminating human minds with their brightness, and [our] salutations, shining like suns and moons in the sky of prosperity and diffusing their radiance and fragrance among the two horizons in the presence of the one mentioned above.

I wish to inform Your Eminence that I have sent two letters. The first one, containing Al-Ḥarīrī's *Mulḥa*, was by the hand of Deacon [ʿAbd Allāh] al-Shaghri, and the second one I sent to Tripoli by the hand of a sincere admirer whom I advised to send it on to you in Beirut. This is an expression of the ardor of the longing which burns in the depths of my heart. Hopefully, both letters will reach you during joyful times and you will send us a response to them, along with the materials requested from you, my brother.

Up to now, we have been residing in the vicinity of Latakia. If our situation improves due to the income we expect to receive during the Holy Week from our students' payments, perhaps we will remain as we were before [teaching here in Latakia]. If not, then after Easter, with God's will, we will travel to Damietta. Once our journey is confirmed, we may require a [letter of] recommendation from your uncle Khawāja Ḥannā Fakhr to avoid the dangers of murderous and oppressive individuals. If you write to him and see a suitable opportunity, do recommend me to him.

Regarding the Explanation of *Al-Mulḥa*, to this date it is not yet accomplished. Unfortunately, it was postponed because of the severe cold this year and my increasing affliction with various illnesses. I thank the Almighty for His blessings.

43. [Another letter from Yūsuf Mark]¹⁰⁶

Given my longing for you, which knows no bounds, and my immense affection for you, whenever I encounter someone heading to your vicinity, I send with them a

¹⁰⁶ Written vertically in the margin. The structure of the text leaves no doubt that this is a new letter, even though the opening was not copied.

brief letter to you. When, two days from its date,¹⁰⁷ the fragrance of your letter wafted from the direction of the south¹⁰⁸ and the scent of its goodness spread throughout our region, [our] hearts were invigorated. I read it and realized that you had surpassed the limits in lauding me with praise, praise that descends from you.

As for the things that I requested from your faithful beloved, I understand that I will not get these soon. I fear that my journey [to Damietta] will be confirmed and that others will benefit from them.

I will now remain until the second week after Easter to assess the situation, may God's will be.

I prostrate myself before the holiness of His Grace, Bishop Kyr Ioannikios [of Beirut], the branch of the pure and lofty perfumed tree, and kiss his pure hands.

[Written] on the 20th of March, in the year 1740. //33v//

44. [From Yūsuf Mark] to Beirut

To the one through whom time can be both amiable and unkind, through whom fortune both comes and goes, the most noble and revered brother and ever honorable Deacon [Mūsā].

{[We] extend many splendid greetings and fragrant salutations that come and go with the scent of musk, and praises as sweet as garden flowers, and prayers that flow like the rivers of the Tigris to that noble and well-mannered person},¹⁰⁹ may God protect him from every harm and affliction.

I wish to inform you that in joyful times I had the honor of receiving your letter. This brought me immense pleasure and happiness, especially as I received the three manuscript quires.¹¹⁰ I sang their prose and poetry and felt blessed to have a part of them. It was as if their writer was interacting with me, reciting the strokes

¹⁰⁷ This probably means that the previous letter was written on March 18.

¹⁰⁸ This means that the letter came from Beirut, which is more to the south of Latakia than Damascus. We know from the previous letter that Mūsā spent some time in Beirut. Ioannikios, mentioned later in the letter, is probably the bishop of Beirut (1732–1774). See Nasrallah, Haddad, *HMLĒM* IV.2, p. 194–195, 122. One of Sylvester's disciples, Ioannikios was also originary from Cyprus. He was one of his deacons during his journey back from Constantinople and probably earlier in the Romanian Principalities. Sylvester consecrated him bishop of Beirut while still in Erzurum, on his way back to Damascus, around 1732 (?). See Brayk, *Sharṭūnīyāt allaḏīn tamaḏhabū awwalan bi-maḏhab al-Lātīnīyī*. He is also attested in the renovation of the Monastery of Mar Ilyās Shwayyā after the earthquake that hit the Middle East in 1759.

¹⁰⁹ We find this praise in MS Greek Orthodox Diocese of Homs 37, f. 12r.

¹¹⁰ Literally, 'with their lines'.

of his pen and elucidating the pearls of his words. I felt as if I were in the gardens of 'Alīyūn,¹¹¹ turning over the branches of jasmine trees and inhaling the fragrance of roses or other perfumed flowers. I also heard about your commendable and characteristic good deed in favor of chief¹¹² Dāwud, and thus in my favor, by providing two certificates (*statikon*), one in Greek and the other in Arabic. I am very grateful for your kindness and applaud your successful efforts and keen attention to the needs of your loved ones.

As for my departure from this country, it is currently difficult because of travel restrictions from Latakia, as the *miri* [land] system is lacking here.¹¹³ However, when God eases the way for the people of this land to travel freely, I will travel as well, God willing.

Additionally, you will soon receive the Commentary on *Milḥat al-i'rāb*,¹¹⁴ sent with His Holiness Bishop Nicephorus. Please excuse that it was copied by a child. For, despite that, I reviewed it myself and compared it to the original copy. The reason it was copied by a child is that I was ill at the time. I hope that my apology is acceptable to you.

We are saddened by the departure of His Holiness the Bishop, and we miss him dearly. He is now headed your way to keep you company.

God willing, you will send us the rest of the books you promised. Do not delay [in sending] us your cheerful messages, etc.

Written on the day after the Sunday of the Fathers that precedes the Pentecost, in the year 1740.¹¹⁵ //34r//

111 This is one of the Qur'ānic names for Heaven or Paradise.

112 Haddad understands the word *ra'īs* as 'supérieur' (head of a monastery?), p. 272. As we are not sure who this Dāwud is, we prefer to use the general word 'chief'.

113 As early as 1728, concerns about the safety of travel to and from Latakia were already being voiced. In his reports, the French consul in Tripoli described Latakia as an "outlaw port", warning that French captains who called there were at the mercy of freebooters and pirates. See Stefan Winter, *A History of the 'Alawis from Medieval Aleppo to the Turkish Republic*, Princeton and Oxford, [2016], p. 138.

114 On this work, see Letters 39–41.

115 May or June 1740.

45. [From Yūsuf Mark] to Beirut

The healing of hearts is the meeting of the beloved.

To the Sibawayhi¹¹⁶ of his time, surpassing his peers, the most honorable brother and revered deacon, may God protect him.

{After extending musk-scented peace and amber-fragranced greetings}¹¹⁷ and conveying the utmost longing and desire to see you always,

I wish to inform you that at the most blessed time and the most honorable hour, I received your precious letter. My heart rejoiced at your well-being and sincere friendship, especially since it brought me immense joy and dispelled my sorrow by the delight of holding in my hands the book of *Al-Silāḥ* [*The Weapon*], which casts away doubt and jest and establishes truth and righteousness with its accurate and ingenious proof. It stands unique through the ages, overthrowing the judgments of tyrants, reinforcing the guardianship of the four patriarchs, and calling for justice with the sharp sword.¹¹⁸ It is the *Jalā' al-abṣār min ghishā' al-akdār* [*Book that Clears the Sight from the Veils of Darkness*].¹¹⁹ I appreciated your effort in sending it at such times. May God bless you and elevate your fortune and prominence. You advised me to handle it with care, to avoid any damage or errors or alterations to its orthography, and thus to prevent its succumbing to any errors. I will be extremely cautious, relying on God, Helper of Mankind. You also suggested that I should not give it to children for copying, because their work is full of errors, but I better copy it myself. Your advice is excellent. Yet can the thirsty scorn at fresh water, or can the yearning avert his ears from wonderful news, which will likely remove the ignorance of this time, thus exposing truth and clarity?

Poem:

{Knowledge and truth have existed eternally,
While ignorance, like sin, is characterized by nonexistence.
Whoever lacks knowledge, his mind always darkens,
And we see him resemble animals and beasts}.¹²⁰

¹¹⁶ Sibawayhi was a prominent Persian grammarian in Basra in the 8th century, author of the first book on Arabic grammar. His renowned work, commonly referred to as *Al-Kitāb*, 'The Book', is a seminal five-volume commentary on the Arabic language.

¹¹⁷ This expression is included in MS Greek Orthodox Diocese of Homs 37, f. 13v.

¹¹⁸ This could be a longer version of the shorter title that follows, or just a piece of praise written by Yūsuf.

¹¹⁹ This is a translation by Sophronios of Kilis of Nektarios's Περὶ τῆς ἀρχῆς τοῦ Πάπα ἀντίρρησις, composed in 1671. For more information, see the introductory study.

¹²⁰ From the poem of Germanos Farḥāt: اللّٰهُ قَدْ خَلَقَ الْإِنْسَانَ مُرْتَسِمًا بِشَبْهِهِ, 'God created man, imprinted with His likeness'.

On the same day as this letter, I sent a message to your uncle informing him of the arrival of the book and my readiness to copy it. Do not delay in sending me the books you promised, and you have my deepest gratitude for what has passed and what is yet to come, etc.

Written on the 29th of June, in the year 1740. //34v//

46. [From Yūsuf Mark]¹²¹

To the esteemed and honorable brother and revered companion, the most noble deacon, may God Almighty preserve him.

After extending greetings and salutations with the utmost respect and reverence, and prayers known to the All Knowing,

I wish to inform your esteemed self that at the most blessed time and noble hour, your dear letter reached me, and I quenched my thirst with its delightful content, praising the Almighty for your well-being.

I have personally handed your letter to your brother Khawāja Niqūlā.

Previously, I sent you a letter informing you that Nektarios's book had arrived. I am now working on making two copies of it: one for your esteemed uncle and one for myself.¹²² I pray to God for ease, as He is capable of all things and worthy of answering prayers.

I have not forgotten the books you promised to send me, and I am diligently mindful of your warning about spelling and grammatical errors, so that the book is not criticized. Do not cease to send me letters from our beloved, for it is indeed right to heal with responses.

Give my regards to all family and loved ones. May you continue to have long life, honor, and prosperity.

[Written on] the 27th of July, in the year 1740. //35r//

¹²¹ This letter had a title indicating the place from which it was sent but it was cut off during the binding. Yūsuf was most probably still in Latakia, while Mūsā was in Beirut. This letter is related to Letters 67–68 where Mūsā is requested to send the books of Nektarios to a good scribe, namely Yūsuf.

¹²² One of these two copies (MS Beirut, Bibliothèque orientale 955) was identified by Haddad, p. 272, n. 17. Another copy by Yūsuf, not mentioned in this correspondence, is the *Tuhfat al-yad* (A Handcrafted Masterpiece) of Ilyās Fakhr, composed in 1728 and preserved in Damascus, MS Greek Orthodox Patriarchate 4 (1744), copied in Amyūn near Tripoli. It was probably written at the request of Mūsā for his friend Khalil Šabbāgh, the first owner of the manuscript that same year (see Letter 30).

47. [From Yūsuf Mark], from Amyūn¹²³ to Damascus

[To] the brother of the Apostles¹²⁴ and the namesake of prophets, the dear brother and honorable esteemed deacon, may his rank always increase, and may he be protected and delivered from all harm.

After extending bright salutations, splendid greetings, and the most agreeable and pleasing prayers,

I wish to inform you that this is the third letter [I have] sent to you, and I have yet to see a response from your noble self. Today I have been preoccupied and troubled, but when I saw the letter-bearer heading towards you, I seized the opportunity and wrote you this humble letter to inquire about your well-being. As it was once said:

{The mere sight of you was not enough for me, but today I am content with [just] hearing about you}.¹²⁵

Moreover, up until now your letters have not reached me, {and I am filled with a longing and yearning that cannot be described by any observer, nor can its truth be expressed by any knowledgeable person. Not seeing you has set my heart ablaze, leaving it restless and without resolve, bereft of all patience and endurance, repeating day and night}.¹²⁶

As I am steadfast in my affection for you, do not let our estrangement be so prolonged.

{A servant who remains loyal throughout time, * even if circumstances change, and if it was reported that I said anything against you, * they lied, for a servant is not one to talk}.¹²⁷

With this, I conclude my message and end my words by extending prayers and peace to you.

Written on the 9th of March, in the year 1741. //35v//

123 In the al-Kūra region near Tripoli.

124 In a specific context like this, أصفياء could mean 'the chosen disciples of Christ'. However, أصفياء could also mean 'chosen friends'.

125 See Biṣṭāmī, *Manāḥij al-tawassul*, Al-laṭīfa 13.

126 Adapted from Biṣṭāmī, *Manāḥij al-tawassul*, Al-laṭīfa 15.

127 See Biṣṭāmī, *Manāḥij al-tawassul*, Al-laṭīfa 13.

48. [From Yūsuf Mark], from Amyūn to Damascus¹²⁸

From the one who loves unconditionally, of which the proof will endure throughout his life, age and era, having no way to forget him, as it would be impossible and inconceivable, to the one whose delightful essence is gentler than the breeze, sweeter than any scent, and more wonderful than health to the sick, whose commendable qualities are more fragrant than musk carried by the wind, and merrier and smoother than the prime of youth – qualities that even the most eloquent cannot describe – and whose presence heals the afflicted and the distressed, who strives for good conduct and who embodies the finest manners and virtues. I mean my brother, the apple of my eye¹²⁹ and the soul within my body, the noble and most honorable Deacon Mūsā. May God fulfill his desires and protect him from all misery and sorrow.

Should you inquire about my state, [I would say] praise be to God for all His blessings and [favorable] conditions. We send you our noble greetings and express our pure longing and yearning while residing in the city of Tripoli the Fragrant under the care of the esteemed and lofty stronghold, His Beatitude Patriarch Kyrios Kyr Sylvester. We are presently engaged in teaching Christian children at the episcopal residence. Bishop Kyr Nektarios has shown me warmth and various acts of kindness, and everything we observe from his generosity is firmly established in the eyes of His Holiness the Patriarch, in accordance with your lofty efforts, as I know. As of this date, I have been planning to move the family from Latakia to Tripoli. We ask the Almighty for a successful outcome.

While we were delighted in recalling your noble deeds, your esteemed letter arrived, which deserves to be kissed and revered. We opened it, read it, and understood its contents. It spoke of various kinds of love and joy and conveyed what calms the souls and gladdens the hearts, exuding the fragrance //36r// of sweet perfume. {What a letter it was, more cherished 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. When the fragrance of its words spread to us, those scents that entice every passerby, the flames of longing that I felt were cooled},¹³⁰ and we experienced joy and delight beyond measure and power. We thanked God for your health and safety and for the peace and honor bestowed upon your children, and we asked Him – and no one else,

¹²⁸ The title was nearly cut off entirely during the binding. We can still make out a little from the lower part of the letters. While Damascus is almost certainly correct, Amyūn is less certain.

¹²⁹ Literally, 'a part of my liver'; an expression used to describe children in Arabic writings.

¹³⁰ This passage is almost identical to that in Letter 10.

praise be to Him – to perpetuate His abundant blessings and generous grace upon you. Amen.

As for [our] correspondence, it was you who limited it, not I. Yet your love has not waned; [it is] as it always was and increases over time like a fine aged wine and refined gold, gaining in splendor and sweetness. Do not think that I have grown weary or bored, as some have said:

'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'.¹³¹

[And] with that:

Remain well as long as the breeze stirs branches where doves sing.¹³²

Peace be upon you, etc.

Written on the third Wednesday of Lent, in the year 1742 AD.

49. From the aforementioned [Yūsuf Mark], after his arrival in Damascus and his priestly ordination at the hands of the most blessed Patriarch Kyr Sylvester

[To] the joy of the eyes, the fruit of the heart, and the pride of the beloved, the honorable Deacon [Mūsā], may he be honored and blessed forever.

After offering prayers and due thanks and praise to you, we wish to inform you that, as of today, we have arrived in the city of Beirut, in the best of health and safety. We have reunited with relatives and loved ones, who are in excellent health and send you their warmest greetings. We are, however, in a state [of distress] because of our separation from you, but He who decreed our separation will grant us a reunion soon, as He is capable of all things. In brief, understand from your heart what is hidden in ours. //36v//

¹³¹ We do not know who the author of this poem is. The earliest testimony that we found is in Muḥammad Ḥusayn Khān's *Riyāḍ al-firdaws (The Gardens of Paradise)*, Lakhna'u, Naval Kišor, 1866, p. 42.

¹³² Attributed to Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm al-Imādī (1664–1723).

50. Another letter [from Yūsuf Mark]

[To] the highest among those who possess perfection, the one who embodies both eloquence and generosity, the apple of the eye, the honorable deacon, may he remain supported and blessed, Amen.

After performing the obligatory sincere prayers for you, uttered by every limb and organ, while clinging to the hem of your virtues and inhaling the sweet scent of your remembrance,

I wish to inform you – may God Almighty bestow abundant grace and blessings upon you – that I have previously sent you a letter, as well as a letter to our most blessed Patriarch. Additionally, letters from our master the bishop have been sent to our most blessed and reverend Patriarch, etc.

[Written] on the Sunday of All Saints, in the year 1743.

51. Another letter [from Yūsuf Mark]

To the esteemed brother in God and spiritual son, the honorable Deacon [Mūsā], may God Almighty protect him and bestow upon him abundant blessings.

After offering prayers that ascend to the heights of acceptance and praise that reaches its intended destination¹³³ to you,

We wish to inform you that a long time has passed since we received any letters from you, especially in response to the letters that we sent to you previously via Beirut, nor have you sent us the items that we requested. This is contrary to what we expected. As known, your love is sincere and free from hypocrisy, but due to the passage of time and the cessation of your letters, my steps have nearly faltered. God willing, you will soon send us a letter along with the requested items and the booklets we collected against the opponent of the late bishop, as we intend to arrange and compile them into a single book for the benefit of the Orthodox. We are also preparing other testimonies to include in the book.

Please let me know if Deacon Theodosius¹³⁴ is working on translating my book into [Classical] Greek [*al-yūnānī*] or spoken Greek [*al-rūmī al-dārij*] for the benefit

¹³³ Probably inspired from the title of Ibn al-Jawzī's book: معارج القبول بشرح سلم الوصول, *The Ascents of Acceptance: A Commentary on the Ladder of Attainment*.

¹³⁴ This is probably the same deacon Theodosius who helped Sylvester to correct the Canon law collection (*Al-Nāmūs al-sharīf*), proofread and copied by Ilyās Fakhr, which is preserved in Beirut, MS Bibliothèque orientale 517. See the colophon on f. 176r. He is referred to as the Daskalos in other letters.

of the Christian youth¹³⁵ interested //37r// in learning this language. God willing, this will be accomplished, and you will add a Turkish translation to it as you promised me. Al-Ḥarīrī's *Maqāmāt* will reach you through your brother-in-law¹³⁶ Khawāja George Yaʿīsh. We urge you to copy it and send it to me promptly, etc.

52. Another letter [from Yūsuf Mark]

[To] [the highest among those who possess perfection, the one who embodies both eloquence and generosity],¹³⁷ sincere brother and compassionate friend, the revered deacon, may his life last long.

[We] extend greetings infused with longing and passion, ever bound by the bonds of love, without end to its duration or its length, from one whose tears flowed until he swam in their sea and for whom the periods of separation have lengthened from months to years. How could it not be so when the one who prays for you is [abandoned] in the crucible of detachment? Yet [he] continues to extend his hands in supplication to the Almighty, asking Him to return to us the stars of fortune in the temple of virtue and grace, the one who has educated many outstanding men in the field of his expertise. May God grant his beloved prolonged enjoyment of his presence, engage the tongues of the people in his praise, and bless the eyes of those who seek refuge with the splendor of his radiance, Amen.

Setting aside the absence of letters from yourself and my yearning to hear the sweetness of your words, I request that you kindly use your good influence to gain the favor of our most blessed Patriarch on my behalf, so that he permits [my] lack of attendance this winter, as the timing is not suitable for me. I have also apologized to His Holiness in the report I sent to him and, fearing that he might become upset with me and reject my excuse, I seek your help in ensuring that my apology is accepted and that I regain his favor. It would be most helpful if you could read the letter that I sent him because the matter is, as I have described it, stemming from the obstacles of illness, physical weakness, mental stress, and cold days. //37v// I also know myself well enough to recognize that I am not worthy of this honor, but since our master has spoken of it, I say, as one of the fishermen disciples said: 'At your word, I will let down the net' [Luke 5:5], which has so far caught nothing of virtues,

¹³⁵ This expression could simply mean 'the Christians'. Yūsuf Mark is probably following the example of Germanos Farḥāt, who composed a simplified book of Arabic grammar for Christians (*Baḥṭh al- maṭālib wa-ḥaṭḥ al-ṭālib*).

¹³⁶ Or son-in-law.

¹³⁷ Same as in Letter 50.

but remains barren, wallowing in the mire of vices and their filth. I therefore ask for your prayers.

Written on the 5th of November, in the year 1742. //37v//

53. Another letter [from Yūsuf Mark]

May God water the land where your face is the sun and bless the country where you are the full moon in the sky. May He drench the earth with the generosity of your hand, for in every region, the raindrops of your bounty are felt.

To the esteemed presence, most beloved among brothers, friends, and spiritual sons, the honorable deacon, may God bestow upon him abundant blessings and grace.

After extending pure greetings, fragrant scents, sincere yearnings, and earnest prayers by night and day,

I wish to inform you – may the Lord bless you – that at the happiest of times, I received your letter of affection and praised the Almighty for your health and safety. The quires also arrived safely. May God reward you generously and protect you from harm. We are also reassured by the safe arrival of the *Maqāmāt* book, free from any damage. I hope you will make an effort to copy it and send it back to us, as I mentioned to you. The box containing the three Chinese bowls also arrived safely without any damage. You remain a source of nourishment for those in need. However, you did not inform me of their price. Please let me know their cost, as I require other items and am hesitant to impose on your kindness. If you treat me this way, it hinders me from fulfilling my needs, and results in loss rather than gain. I request that you inform me [about the price] of everything you send to me.

You have my deepest thanks and prayers. ‘I will thank you for as long as I live, and if I die, I have instructed others to continue the gratitude on my behalf’. //38r//

54. [From Yūsuf Mark]

To the pride of the beloved, my spiritual son and apple of my eye, the honorable deacon, may the Lord God bestow heavenly blessings upon him, his wife, his son, and all his deeds, Amen.

I wish to inform you that I previously sent you several congratulatory letters for the birth of your child, telling you all the news. However, a considerable amount of time has passed since I have received any response or communication from your beloved self. May God turn into good that which obstructs you.

I inform you that I have been staying in the land of Wallachia, overseeing the establishment (*naqsh*¹³⁸) of a new printing press, with [newly-]carved type. The previous printing press, for which the depraved Abū Sharr, or rather, Abū Barāqish, under his new name, had carved the type turned out to be useless, and all the effort and expense which had gone into it were in vain. When His Holiness the Patriarch realized that it was of no use, and after discovering his (Abū Barāqish's) treachery, foolishness, and misdeeds, which he had concealed through his pretenses, he [the Patriarch] withdrew his involvement in the printing press. He handed over all its machinery and tools to me and left me in Bucharest with the monk Mikhā'il and the Deacon Parthenios, along with a local servant, in the monastery newly established under the Antiochian Apostolic See. The Deacon Theophanis became abbot of the monastery, while another bishop, Kyr Makarios,¹³⁹ also took up residence in the monastery.

As for His Holiness the most venerable, he traveled to Constantinople accompanied by Abū Barāqish, who fell at the feet of his holiness, weeping and lamenting, so that he would not expel him after discovering his disloyalty and the ugliness of his deeds. This is in addition to the vileness and obscenity that he showed, //38v// and his threat to complain about His Holiness to the Sublime State. He was dissatisfied with the four hundred and twenty piasters [that he had received] from him, not to mention the gratuity (*bakhshish*) and expenses previously given to him by His Holiness and the esteemed Bek, and what he had taken in Iași, and that which he added to his ledgers a few days later through the intervention of al-Ḥājī Gabriel al-'Ashshī. I wrote him a copy of a document from His Holiness stating that he did not require [his services] anymore. Thus, his intention is now to conceal what has been revealed and evade what has been exposed. Yet, what is written is written; as some said: 'How much treachery you try to hide while your situation is apparent, and how much you claim righteousness while your right is invalid'.¹⁴⁰

However, His Holiness the Patriarch has since begun to lament his feigned tears, and I fear that he [Abū Sha'r] might deceive him, knowing the delicacy of his heart and his deep compassion. I do not know what will happen in Constantinople.

138 Literally, 'sculpting', 'carving'.

139 On Makarios, see Țipău, *Sylvester of Antioch*, p. 159.

140 Mark paraphrases the poem: *كَمْ تَسْتَرِ الْبَلْوَى وَسَرَكَ ظَاهِرْ كَمْ تَدْعِي حَقًّا وَحَقًّا بَاطِلْ*, 'How much affliction you try to hide while your secret is exposed; how often you claim a righteousness while your right is invalid'. See Ibn Farḥūn al-Qaysī, *Al-Zāhir fī bayan mā yujtanab min al-khabā'ith al-ṣighār wa al-kabā'ir*, ed. Muḥammad Ismā'īl, Beirut, 1997, p. 11. The same paraphrase is found in Sophronios's preface to his translation of Nektarios's *Περὶ τῆς ἀρχῆς τοῦ Πάπα ἀντίρρησεις*. See MS Beirut, Bibliothèque orientale Ar. 955, f. 5r.

Your brother Buṭrus¹⁴¹ can tell you one by one what ugly traits and behavior he revealed.

We ask God Almighty for assistance in completing what we have started, and from your beloved self we ask good prayers. Had I been more fortunate, you would have been with me in these lands. May our Lord facilitate [our] meeting in the Arab lands, for He is capable of all things and can answer [all] pleas.

Convey blessings and prayers on our behalf to your dear child and his mother. Your brother [Buṭrus], the monk Mikhā'il, and the Deacon Parthenios send you abundant [wishes of] peace and prayers. His Holiness the Patriarch sends you blessings and inquires after your well-being.

Yours, the Priest Yūsuf Mark. Written in mid-October, in the year 1748. //39r//

55. [From Yūsuf Mark]

To the pride of sons and treasure of the beloved, the cherished spiritual son and soulmate, the honorable deacon, may blessings and grace continue to be upon him, his wife, and his two children, and all that he desires and creates with his hands, Amen.

[We] extend prayers marked by the sincerest of praise and the distinct and precious essence of he whose rhymes overcome his poetic visions and whose contemplations overflow with meaning. Let knowledge always shine from his mouth and wisdom flow from his pen. I mean the person addressed above, may his days and nights be filled with joy.

Should you inquire after the greatest longing to which no pen can do justice, the matter – following the obligatory prayers – is that while we were engaged in prayer and praise, your second letter arrived, shortly after the first. I have read them both, understood their contents, and praised the Lord who honored Damascus and its surroundings and favored only you with the [gifts of] composition, penmanship, fortune, [textual] structure and meanings. The collection of Ibn 'Afīf¹⁴² has arrived, may your lofty rewards continue.

You mentioned that you, accompanied by your best man and esteemed brother, are visiting the revered residence of Ṣaydnāyā. My heart soared to you, and in my mind, my children and all my family were together there with you. How could we

¹⁴¹ That Mūsā has a brother called Buṭrus is attested in different sources. See our introductory study.

¹⁴² Ibn 'Afīf is most probably the poet Muḥammad ibn Sulaymān, known also as Shābb al-Ẓarīf (1263–1289).

be blessed with such success and visit that honored place with you, and be a companion to you and that dear brother? May you remember us as we remember you.

We ask the Almighty to always keep you in the intercessions of those whose protection you seek, in comfort and joy, free from troubles and adversities. We congratulate you on our Lord's Ascension to the Heavens and the sending of the Holy Spirit to the disciples. May these blessed holidays and every holiday be upon you for many years to come. Amen.

Written on Ascension Thursday. May you continue in prosperity and ascension.
<The Priest Yūsuf Mark>.¹⁴³ //39v//

56. [From Yūsuf Mark]

Send my book to your uncle the Jerusalemite¹⁴⁴ by reliable hands.

Concerning the Daskalos's review of my book, from now on we have no time for hope and futile demands, especially since his hope is in vain and he has deviated from what I had hoped and expected from him regarding the annotation of the *Octoechos* manuscript.¹⁴⁵ He insisted on receiving a copy of the two tones, and that I send them to him before completing their transcription, without sending me any others. Moreover, he claims at every mention of the book *Al-Shudhūr* [*The Excerpts*]¹⁴⁶ that it is his composition, accusing me of lying [regarding my authorship], even though I have spent [working on it] forty-five days from sunrise to sunset, without rest, and under the supervision of your uncle who provided me with the necessary books, while he [the Didaskalos] did not lend a hand. How can this be when two months have passed since the objection [against Gennadius], and he has managed to avoid the bishop, who asked him about it many times?¹⁴⁷ Moreover,

¹⁴³ The end is unfortunately lost, and thus the date.

¹⁴⁴ Haddad identified the uncle in question as Ilyās Fakhr, who was both a co-sponsor and revisor of the polemical books that were copied by Yūsuf. In this particular instance, the term "al-Maqdisī" is employed, as we previously explained, to denote the fact that he had undertaken a pilgrimage to the Holy Land.

¹⁴⁵ On the progress of the *Octoechos* revision, see Letter 35.

¹⁴⁶ This is the book *Al-Shudhūr fī naqd hadhayān al-'adīm al-nūr* preserved in MS Vatican, Sbath 258. See our introductory study.

¹⁴⁷ In this context, the interpretation of the phrase يتدخل عليه is challenging, and the identity of the bishop in question remains ambiguous. The issue under discussion is rooted in the fact that Iakobos resided in Jerusalem after the year 1740. In that place, he was in close proximity to his disciple Sophronios, who subsequently assumed the role of bishop of Acre. Consequently, it would be a more tenable hypothesis to posit that the bishop who commissioned the Daskalos to compose the refutation of the objection was Sophronios. This has led to a confusion in Haddad's study, where he

when I needed to verify whether a testimony from the *Al-Durr al-Muntakhab* [Selected Pearls]¹⁴⁸ was correctly translated from the Greek [original], he granted me the opportunity to review it after many days and much pleading, and we accurately corrected it and exposed its flaws. Had I not succeeded in persuading him, he would not have reviewed that paragraph.

Firstly, I did not attribute the book to myself, nor did I put my name on it, to avoid being harmed by the people of Aleppo, for I nearly got harmed and lost my life on the road, as the bishop informed me in person in Constantinople. Secondly, I attributed it to the bishop because the objection //40r// was particularly directed at him. However, when Bishop Sophronios arrived in Aleppo and your uncle informed him about it, he ordered that it be attributed to me and copied in my name, as it was rightfully supported by your uncle's testimony of my efforts. Your uncle then sent me a letter informing me that he had written my name on it and attributed it to me because neither the bishop nor anyone else participated in its composition. He said Bishop Kyr Sophronios had advised this as necessary, reassuring me that he was not to blame for it. Had it not been for Bishop Sophronios, the book would have remained attributed to Bishop Gennadius, as I had done.

When I returned from Constantinople, I was informed in Tripoli and Latakia about his [the Didaskalos's] claim to have authored the book, and not once did I reproach him for this. On the contrary, I increased my love and affection for him, as you can see even now. Yet, all I have seen from him is arrogance, pride, and disdain for the loved ones. May God be gracious and forgiving to him. If I were to make a comparison between you and him, 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 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! You can feel it yourselves. Once we complete the book *The Desired Matter and Refutation of the Subjects*,¹⁴⁹ send him a letter to request that he review it, and may goodness prevail. //40v//

stated that the objection was written against Sophronios, consequently identifying the anonymous bishop as Sophronios, while Yūsuf clearly names him Gennadius. It is evident that the author of the letter clearly distinguished between two different bishops: Sophronios is addressed by his name, while Gennadius is designated as 'the Bishop'.

148 *Al-Durr al-muntakhab* is a selection of homilies by John Chrysostom printed in Aleppo by Athanasios Dabbās in 1707. In his aforementioned work, which is preserved in MS Vatican, Sbath 258 and refers to the Greco-Latin Paris edition in 8 volumes (f. 13r), Yūsuf proves that the Catholics had altered the text of *Al-Durr al-Muntakhab*. For this reason, he checked the Greek text.

149 The book *Bughyat al-murād wa fī naqd al-mawādd* is not found in any manuscript. As Yūsuf is requesting that Mūsā sends a letter to his uncle to read the book, he could be referring to a book

57. [From Yūsuf Mark, Beirut]

To the dean of eloquent speakers and orators, the treasure of grammarians and philologists, the model of teachers and most virtuous among the distinguished, the most noble Deacon Mūsā, may he remain honored in every age and era, excelling in virtues and divine grace, and blessed in every way, along with his wife and children.

[We] present worthy prayers and salutations through which the depths of longing are revealed in strands of meaning and acts of passion are manifested in the one who feels it, sent from he whose love rises up among mankind with distinction, and whose affection is elevated by the enduring bond of your friendship – a bond which he considers most precious. [He is] a lover whose feelings are not a subject to be defined by predicates, nor his acts of passion conveyed except by those who have experienced it. The character of such love can only truly be understood by those who have suffered it, even if it were to fall under intense scrutiny.

To the leader whose status God has elevated above all others, who has been adorned with the banners of knowledge and refinement to the extent that everyone acknowledges he is the science of everyone and the knowledge of the learned, distinguished by his grace with the passing of days and defined by his kindness to all people.¹⁵⁰

I wish to inform you that after sending you the account statement, which confirms that there is no disagreement or reversal between us and whatever you see is entirely correct, I have received your dear letter. May God protect you from ailments. Along with it came the [Book of] Psalms and ten [Canticles],¹⁵¹ the document of friendship,¹⁵² *Al-Sha'la*,¹⁵³ and a jar of syrup. As for the physician, he should not send me a bill without having sent me the bitterness of the crow¹⁵⁴ and nothing

written (or translated) by Ilyās Fakhr that he had corrected. This could be Ilyās Fakhr's refutation of a pro-Latin work he previously translated, which was transmitted under the title: *'Aqd al-ittihād fī sharḥ wa-tafsīr al-khams al-mawādd*.

150 The play of words using all grammatical cases – *rafʿ*, *naṣb* and *jazm* – cannot be rendered in English.

151 We believe this is a scribal error. The book in question is: *المزامير والتسبيحات العشرة*, *Psalms and Ten Canticles*. In the Christian Orthodox liturgy, these are the Songs of Moses, Deborah, Hannah, Isaiah, Hezekiah, Jonah, and Habakkuk.

152 Probably a scribal error.

153 He could be referring to the traditional cloth called by this name.

154 In Arabic literature, the crow's gallbladder is considered a treatment for the eyes, among other benefits. See, e.g., ʿĪsā Ibn ʿAlī, *Book on the Useful Properties of Animal Parts*, Lucia Raggetti (ed.), Berlin/Boston, 2018, § 59.8, p. 378.

delights me more than a letter which is as beautifully written //41r// and grammatically correct as his. Convey to him my blessings and this message.

I informed you of the arrival of the olives and requested the [same] quantity from you for fasting – may you remain free from blame and reproach – and that you send us green ones. If you send *al-balūṣqa*¹⁵⁵ and the fish container and we receive others, then we will send them back to you.

We heard about your meeting with the esteemed and beloved friend, Khawāja Mūsā Ṣadaqa. We are waiting for him to pass by us for we know that he never leaves Beirut,¹⁵⁶ especially now that the fava beans are plentiful and can be eaten by hand without a spoon.¹⁵⁷

Convey to him our blessings, and to your son whom God protects, to his mother and sister, and especially to your elder brother and his dear son and his mother. [Convey our blessings also] to the rest of the loved ones, particularly Deacon David, for whom I am amidst the sea of sorrows for his lost son. May our Lord console him and alleviate his distress.

My children and their mother kiss your hands, and our son-in-law and his brothers send their regards and pray for your well-being and blessings upon you.

Prior to today, we received letters from Egypt and Damietta informing us of the arrival of the Patriarch of Alexandria in this city, bringing with him decrees and letters about the dire situation of the perpetrators of falsehood and wickedness. He sent letters to Ibrāhīm Kaykhīya¹⁵⁸ and the rest of the rulers through his representative (*wakīl*) in Alexandria. When the Papists heard, they approached the sheikhs of the Al-Azhar Mosque. They [then] went to Ibrāhīm Kaykhīya, who turned them away, saying: 'I cannot contradict the sublime orders of the sultan', before sending [someone] to consult with the patriarch in Alexandria.¹⁵⁹ Soon we shall hear what misfortune befalls them.

This is what news we have. May God protect you from all calamities. //41v//

155 This word is unknown. Haddad mentions the olives and the fish but does not speak about *al-balūṣqa* (p. 278–279). It might mean 'a recipient'.

156 This could also mean that he frequently visited Beirut.

157 This could be a popular proverb at that time.

158 On this person, see Jirjī Zaydān, *Tārīkh Miṣr al-ḥadīth*, t. 2, p. 50–54. According to Zaydān, he was assassinated in 1168 A.H. (October 1754–October 1755). Haddad believed this letter to have been written in ca. 1755, which coincides with this period.

159 This obscure sentence was ignored by Haddad, who summarized as follows: 'A pursuit of the Catholics is on the horizon'.

58. [From Beirut]¹⁶⁰

From the one who loves unconditionally, of which the proof will endure throughout his life, age and era, to the one whose presence is gentler than the breeze and sweeter than perfume, whose praiseworthy attributes are more fragrant than musk carried by the wind, adorned with the most graceful and commendable morals, endowed with sound judgment and eloquent speech, may his wishes be fulfilled, his person preserved, and his enemies subdued.¹⁶¹

When the esteemed letters, originating from the grace of His Holiness and your generous brotherhood, reached me, every cloud of doubt was dispelled, I was refreshed by the essence of their profound message in all its sweetness, and I offered my abundant prayers, praise, and gratitude to you. They reached my hands in early July. Enclosed within [this letter] is my submission to His Holiness, which [I hope] you will find in good order. Earlier, in mid-June, I sent you a letter which contains enough to obviate the need for further explanation. I therefore ask you to inform me whether it has reached you or not.

From these parts, your dear friends al-Shaykh Abū Murād and al-Shaykh Abū Fāris Raḥḥāl¹⁶² send you many serene greetings and pure salutations.

Do not forget to provide me with your delightful letters and charming messages and humor me with the slightest hint of what happened with the monk sent to you from Beirut. //42r//

59. [From Yūsuf Mark, Beirut]

To the dearly cherished, beloved, most gracious and loyal friend, the honorable [Mūsā], may his presence endure, and may he be preserved and delivered from all evil.

We wrote this out of [our] extreme longing and abundant desire to receive your splendid and radiant letters, which benefit us with your good news and state of affairs in recent times. This is because I sent you a letter especially for your affection in mid-June, and after I received the noble blessing of His Holiness and your esteemed letter in early July – after expressing much praise and gratitude to you – I sent you another letter and enclosed within it a declaration to His Holiness, in mid-July,¹⁶³ which contains enough to obviate the need for further explanation.

¹⁶⁰ We understand from the next letter that it was sent in mid-July 1743.

¹⁶¹ The beginning of this letter is similar to that of Letter 46.

¹⁶² Probably the same deacon Raḥḥāl from Letter 58.

¹⁶³ Referring to the previous letter.

Until now, I have not received the slightest indication from you as to whether they reached you or not. This has caused me considerable distress, though perhaps this obstacle is for the best.

I therefore kindly request from your esteemed self and your acknowledged virtuosity that you take the time to inform me, with the slightest indication or a brief message (as I am aware of your many pressing engagements), firstly of your well-being, and secondly whether my letters have reached you. If they have not, especially the declaration to His Holiness, I will return an apology to him and seek his forgiveness.

The passing of the late bishop has deeply affected my heart. May our Lord count him among the righteous and grant you a long life for many years and ages.

Convey my warmest regards to so-and-so and so-and-so,¹⁶⁴ and may your life continue through the years and decades.

[Written in] <mid-August>,¹⁶⁵ in the year 1743. //42v//

60. [From Yūsuf Mark]

To my beloved, unique and loyal friend, the truthful and honorable brother, of whom I am ever fond, resembling Moses in name and determination, may you remain honored and supported by dignity.

As for the fact that I perpetually picture your pleasant profile and remarkable friendship from the depths of my eyes, and that the deep longing for our past love is forever embedded in my heart, and the intense desire to see the joy of your agreeable face remains eternal, and the wound left by the sword of your eloquence continues to torment my heart: perhaps your heart bears witness to this, without a doubt. May you always be preserved by the power of the Creator and protected by His veil.

I wish to inform you of the arrival of your delightful letter, dated the first of September, which dispelled all my sorrows. I drank deeply from the refreshing spring of your good news and inhaled profusely the fragrant scent of its breeze, finding it more satisfying than all that I had written to you before. [These consisted] not only of the one accompanying the missive to His Beatitude and the one before your letter dated the 8th of the third decade¹⁶⁶ of August, but also the one which

¹⁶⁴ The names are not provided.

¹⁶⁵ This was cut during binding.

¹⁶⁶ Presumably the 28th.

did not reach you, as it was intercepted¹⁶⁷ by someone. I praised the Almighty and thanked Him for your continued support and good health.

I was, however, greatly saddened by the repose of the God-loving and most revered father.¹⁶⁸ But what can be done? May his memory remain with you.

I hope you will also inform me of the current condition of His Beatitude, so that my joy may increase with the reassurance of his well-being, after offering a profound bow at his sacred feet //43r// and a kiss for his pure and holy hands. I am now, thanks to God and the esteemed gaze of His Beatitude and the blessing of his received prayers, in excellent health and on good terms with loved ones.

You cannot imagine the remarkable affection and assistance that Abū Murād shows me, with his pleasant conversation and unique presence, whether in person or at a distance. As for the dear brother Deacon Raḥḥāl al-Adhīb, your noble beloved, not only does he do all this, but he also adds the best part, which is the most complete and beautiful deed of being a remarkable soul, unique in his gentle nature. He has taken it upon himself to care for all my needs, dutifully attending to my residence and other requirements, treating me as his dear son among those he cherishes and is most comfortable with, while his affection for me continues to blossom and flourish. May our Lord grant you and him all that is good.

Everyone sends you the best of greetings and finest of regards. //43v//

61. [From Yūsuf Mark]

To the most complete presence, whose suns of fortune have shone brightly on the horizons of perfection, and whose seeds have blossomed in the gardens of generosity and prosperity, the Deacon Mūsā. His virtues have multiplied, and his bounties have magnified: the unique and munificent spiritual son, the destination of visitors, and the source of envy. May the Lord God bless him, his wife and his two children, and may he possess without ever being in debt,¹⁶⁹ Amen.

It was at the most blessed time that your letter reached us. We quenched our thirst with the sweetness of your message, and we praised God for your well-being, which is the highest aim and noblest request. We are now aware that the silk has reached you and has met your expectations, and we hope, God willing, that the details of its price will be pleasing to you. We are also aware that our brother, Father Mikhā'il, did not want to take payment for the incense. May God increase his

¹⁶⁷ Literally 'assassinated by someone's hands.'

¹⁶⁸ From Letter 9 we learn that the person in question is Bishop Cyril of Iskenderun (Alexandretta).

¹⁶⁹ This expression is also used in Letter 35.

and your goodness. We are grateful to him for this and other things. May our Lord enable us to repay him with goodness and protect you and him from all harm.

Written in late September, in the year 1755.

Yours, Father Yūsuf Mark. //44r//

62. From the aforementioned [Yūsuf Mark] as well

After extending the finest greetings and purest salutations with heartfelt longing,

I wish to inform you that in the most blessed times and happiest hours, your letter arrived, and I was delighted by the pleasant content of your message and the good news of your well-being. I thanked the gracious God that you are happy and at peace, as this is our hope and utmost prayer. The enclosed letters [also] arrived and were sent to their intended recipients.

Henceforth, do not refrain from [sending us] letters informing us of your good news and prosperous conditions. We extend abundant and additional greetings to all those in the esteemed presence of our master and to those who inquire after us. From this side, your uncle, your brother, your cousins, and all the family and relatives send their regards to you. May your life be prolonged.

63. [From Sophronios]

[From] the humble Sophronios, bishop of Acre.

May blessings and grace descend upon my beloved and spiritual son, the honorable Deacon Mūsā, and upon his wife, his children, and all his endeavors.

We wish to inform your beloved self that your letter reached us through the honorable Yāqjī Sulaymān Ghāṣir. We rejoiced at your safety, having been eager to hear from you, for some time ago, we had heard that you had married and retired from the service of our much-blessed master the Patriarch, and that you //44v// were residing in Damascus, Syria. Day after day, we were hoping to renew our correspondence as before, missing the warmth of that old love, as the foundations had been shaken and were on the point of collapse after such a long silence. It seems that your focus has been diverted towards your spouse, household and children.

As for us, our thoughts have been immersed in the tumultuous concerns of serving as representative [of the Church]; we beseech the Almighty to grant us the liberation and relief from these futile burdens. We hope to regain the composure and tranquility to engage in matters beneficial to the soul, so we are able to translate the book entitled *In Defense of the True Faith* for you, and to present it as a gift [task] to the printing press that was recently established through the efforts of our

most pure and holy master the Patriarch. We were delighted when we heard this good news from the mouth of your beloved and our dear friend al-Ḥājj Mikhā'il 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 representative vicar (*muṭrān wakīl*) in Damascus would have multiplied. May God bless you and keep you safe, and guard over [the words of] your mouth. May those who harm you //45r// live not, and [may He] protect you from the machinations of enemies who are stringing their bows with a substance that is bitter to all of us.

We have written in Greek to His Eminence, our dear and esteemed brother Bishop Kyr Nicephorus of Payas, about the matter between Mikhā'il Tūmā and the representative (*wakīl*) of the Franks, and other matters that you are aware of.¹⁷⁰

We send blessings to everyone in your prosperous household, including the children and [the rest of] the family, as well as to your honorable brothers and to al-Ḥājj Ḥannā and his brothers.

From here, the Daskalos and the fathers, along with al-Ḥājj Mikhā'il Tūmā, al-Ḥājj al-Yāzījī, al-Ḥājj Farah al-Ṣayrafī and the rest offer you peace. Blessings be upon you twice and thrice.

Written on the 11th of August, 1747.

64. [From Sophronios]

[From] the humble Sophronios, bishop of Acre,

May divine grace and heavenly blessings rest upon our beloved spiritual son, indeed our true beloved, the honorable Deacon Mūsā. May the Lord God bestow upon him, his *ḥarīm*,¹⁷¹ his children and all his endeavors the fullest heavenly blessings, Amen.

On the 5th of November, we received your letter written on the 5th of October. We were immensely delighted at it, not only because it informed us of your health and well-being, which we had eagerly waited for some time, but also because it was accompanied by a letter from the holy Father of all, most esteemed Lord, and highly revered Effendi, the blessed Patriarch of Antioch. Even though I had been ill and bedridden for four //45v// months, upon receiving [the letter], my weakened body and spirit burdened by faults and sins were somehow revitalized. I remembered those old days and past years when we were united and spoke directly; when life

170 Probably بِعَرَفَ : 'he may inform you about'.

171 Referring to his mother and wife, or his wife and daughter.

was joyous, and we moved about freely. But now, all that has passed like a dream or a vision of the night.¹⁷² Old age has caught up, grey hairs have appeared, and sickness has set in. I should cry out with the psalmist: 'My days are consumed like smoke, and my bones are burned as in a hearth' [*Psalm* 102:3], and 'There is no health in my bones because of my sins, which have risen above my head like a heavy burden' [*Psalm* 38:4-5], destined for eternal fire if the Lord does not have mercy on me. Oh, that before the end of life we might prepare a little oil for the extinguished lamp, so that we do not remain outside the door when the long-awaited and beloved bridegroom arrives [*Matthew* 25:1-13], whose delightful presence is the Kingdom of Heaven, and from whom separation is eternal destruction.

Our patriarch instructed me in his letter to go to his See in order to travel around teaching. This is something I would willingly undertake, but who can constantly bear the arrows of the archbishops and their jealousy? If His Eminence had directed me to Aleppo, until his happy arrival there, rather than the bishop of Sidon, this would, in my view, have been the best course of action. Yet evidently, the Lord did not will it and thus did not inspire him to do so. Enclosed you will find his response that you should send to His Eminence. Blessings and prayers be upon you.

We send brotherly kisses and ample, heartfelt greetings to our esteemed brother Kyr Nicephorus, representative [of the patriarch] and bishop of Payas, as well as to the esteemed Mikhā'il Tūmā the Jerusalemite, his brother Ḥannā, their brother-in-law, and all our beloved. Additional greetings to your relative, the teacher Dawūd Musalmūna, //46r// the Jerusalemite. All the beloved here, along with our master the Daskalos, send you blessings, peace, and prayers.

Written on the 5th of November, in the year 1749, in Holy Jerusalem.

65. [From Sophronios]¹⁷³

[From] the humble Sophronios, bishop of Acre and its surroundings.

May divine grace bless our beloved spiritual son, the honorable and esteemed Deacon and secretary Mūsā. May the Lord God bless him in soul and body, and guide him in all righteous deeds, Amen.

I wish to inform your beloved self of my deep yearning for you; that your letters have reached me, and I have sent you responses. However, it appears that you have been occupied with the trials of life, which prevented you from corresponding

¹⁷² 'Aḡhāth ahlām', see Qur'ān, *Sūrat Yūsuf* 44.

¹⁷³ Haddad mentions that this letter is the same as Letter 18. Nevertheless, we have preserved the ending of the letter here, as well as some details that were omitted in the first instance.

with me. Perhaps the excessive sorrow over the passing of your esteemed uncle Ḥannā Fakhr contributed to this, as this news deeply affected us all. Truly, this deceased man was a pillar and a cornerstone among the children of the Orthodox Church in Egypt. But how and why should we mourn forever? Does the great-voiced Paul not cry out to us not to 'sorrow, even as others which have no hope'? [1 *Thessalonians* 4:13] Suffice it to say that He who ascended to the third Heaven did not ordain this in vain. Rather, for his knowledge of the repose of the departed and their liberation from the woes of the dense body in which we are bound to attain eternal life after death, he instructed us not to grieve for them. Our sorrow should be like the sorrow of the Lord for His friend Lazarus, with but a few tears.

You do not need further reminding of these words, given your diligent study of the divine Scriptures from your young age, especially in your service under the supervision of our lord, the honorable patriarch. Your good fortune is evident from all sides, as in the saying: 'Blessed are those who serve the blessed'.

If you inquire about us, praise be to God, we are well, vigilant day and night in the face of God's enemies, the dissenters and the heretics.

The Priest 'Abd al-Masīḥ [Christodoulos], a respected Orthodox man, polite in his words and virtuous in his conduct, will come to you bearing these letters. He has fallen into a predicament and was fined a sum of money, over five hundred piasters,¹⁷⁴ consequent to accusations from enemies of the faith. Now, he seeks your assistance to issue //46v// to him a *statikon* from our patriarch so he can collect alms for himself from the lands of Antioch. May God bless you if his request to you is granted, {and may he find complete assistance and support through your diligence before our master the patriarch. Please recommend him to the esteemed representative (*wakīl*), the honorable Mikhā'īl¹⁷⁵ the Jerusalemite, the money changer (*al-ṣarrāf*) Farah the Jerusalemite, and all the beloved ones.

We send blessings to those mentioned, especially to your honorable brother Mikhā'īl the Jerusalemite, as well as to Ḥannā, the brother of the representative, and all his [other] brothers and loved ones. Blessings be upon you all.¹⁷⁶

[Written in May, 1742].¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁴ This sum is not indicated in Letter 18.

¹⁷⁵ On Mikhā'īl the *wakīl*, see our introductory study.

¹⁷⁶ This passage is not present in Letter 18.

¹⁷⁷ The date is preserved in Letter 18.

66. [From Sophronios]

[From] Sophronios, by the mercy of God archbishop of the city of Constantinople, the New Rome, and Ecumenical Patriarch.

May divine grace and heavenly blessings descend upon the soul and body of our spiritual son, the honorable and sagacious Deacon Kyr Mūsā. May the Lord God bestow upon him, his wife, his children, and all who belong to him the fullest heavenly blessings, protect him from all tribulations and adversities, and shower him with abundant grace and gifts through the intercession of Mary Mother of God, the refuge of humankind through whom the source of salvation traversed,¹⁷⁸ and all the saints. Amen.

The reason for issuing this blessed letter to you, O eloquent one, is firstly to extend our blessing to you and to inquire as to your well-being, and secondly to inform you, our spiritual son, that we continually ask about your health and well-being, praying to the Almighty for your protection, preservation, and deliverance from all harm and physical or spiritual injury. We ask the Almighty to accept and answer your prayers.

While we were diligently praying for your affection, we received your beloved letter and praised the Almighty for your health. Before that, we also received the general petition from the Christians through our spiritual son, Father Athanasios. We have understood everything that you described and have grasped your perspective. Indeed, we sympathized with your misfortune and felt for your condition, as we comprehend everything that you have endured, first from your beloved letter, and secondly from the report of our aforementioned spiritual son. Your sorrow and grief have filled us with sadness, as we have heard news contrary to our wishes. However, we ask God Almighty to make the outcome of matters favorable.

Regarding the petition, we have kept it with us to read to our Holy Synod, and then we will act according to that which the Holy Spirit inspires us to do. However, we advise our blessed spiritual children, the Christians, to be patient and endure a little longer because they are always in //47r// our thoughts, and we can never abandon them. Whatever the Holy Synod decides, we will inform them. Let this be known to you.

Send our collective blessings and prayers to them and may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ always be upon you. Blessings be upon you with [our] prayers twice and thrice.

Written on the 5th of October, in the year 1777, the eleventh indiction. Signed in Greek.

178 Play on words: مَرِّمَ and مَرِّمَ .

67. Copy of a letter from His Holiness Samuel, patriarch of Constantinople

[From] Samuel, by the mercy of God archbishop of Constantinople (the New Rome), and Ecumenical Patriarch.

May divine grace and heavenly blessings descend upon and bless the beloved body and soul of our spiritual son, the honorable secretary Mūsā. May the Lord God bless him, his *ḥarīm*, his children, and all his endeavors with the fullest heavenly blessings.

I wish to inform your beloved self that in late April we received your letter of late March, notifying us in Turkish of the passing and departure of our brother and companion in the service of the divine mysteries, the ever-remembered and blessed Kyrios Kyr Sylvester, patriarch of Antioch, from the mortal world to the eternal one, on the 13th of March. When this news reached our ears, we were deeply upset and overwhelmed with indescribable sorrow and distress at his loss and departure. May our Lord God lay him to rest alongside the righteous in the heavenly abode, grant you a long life and health, and guide us in all that leads to the salvation and benefit of His people and His holy, universal, and Apostolic Church.

After understanding the content of your letter and the letter from the esteemed representative (*wakīl*), our spiritual son al-Ḥājj George, we immediately set to work with determination and diligence, consulting and examining along with our two brothers who share in the service of the divine mysteries, His Beatitude Matthaïos, patriarch of Alexandria, and His Beatitude Parthenios, patriarch of Jerusalem, as well as the other bishops of the Holy Synod of Constantinople, to elect a suitable and beneficial person for this Holy Apostolic Antiochian See, as it is our duty to protect and struggle for the Holy Church. The choice fell upon our brother, the esteemed bishop of Aleppo, Kyr Philemon, and he was appointed to the patriarchal office. We hope in God Almighty and His glory that he will conduct himself with peace and love, in the spirit of warmth and calmness he previously showed the people of Aleppo. We thus inform your beloved self of this to prevent and suppress any potential disturbances or concerns, so that you and the aforementioned representative George may focus on what benefits this See //48r// and remain dedicated to your service and secretarial office. Extend from us abundant blessings and grace to our children the Orthodox priests and all the Christian people in general.

We send also a letter of blessing regarding this matter, to be read to them collectively in Damascus and other churches.

Here, all the brothers send you blessings and grace, and from us as well, twice and thrice.

Written in late April, during the Holy Week of Diakainesimos¹⁷⁹ – may you be safe every year – in the year 1766 AD.¹⁸⁰

Other letters in Greek from the Patriarchs of Constantinople were not included in this [Mūsā's] collection. //47v//

68. <Copy of a letter from> Kyr Ilyās Fakhr, Logothetes of the Antiochian See

After extending perfect greetings with the utmost glory and honor,

I wish to inform you that I received your greetings in a letter from His Holiness the Patriarch, and it became known to me that you are engaged in serving His Holiness as a secretary. Having seen your work, I found your hand and text most agreeable. May God bless you and preserve your life.

I was very glad of your service to His Holiness. God willing, you will benefit from His Holiness in honor, good conduct, and knowledge, and you will become a disciple.¹⁸¹ His Holiness is a relative to your father by natural kinship, so there is no need for recommendations for serving His Holiness, walking in the path of righteousness, preserving his secrets, and being mindful of God in private and public, etc.

My son, when you write letters on behalf of His Holiness the Patriarch, distance them a little from the top, at least from the middle of the paper, and the upper signature – I mean, the Patriarch's name – make it a continuous line, not an interrupted one in the middle, under the phrase 'Glory be to God always.'

I wish I could be near you to teach you the rules of writing and the art of composition, for it seems to me that you possess the potential and readiness for it, but perhaps I will prepare some useful specimens for you.

Extend my greetings to everyone serving His Holiness, the most blessed Patriarch.

Written on the 29th of November, in the year 1732 AD.

¹⁷⁹ Εβδομάδα Διακαινησίμου: Renewal Week is the period of seven days beginning on Easter Sunday and continuing up to the following Sunday, which is known as the 'Sunday of Thomas'.

¹⁸⁰ The date is also written in full letters.

¹⁸¹ An Ottoman Turkish word borrowed from the Persian چراغ, meaning 'apprentice' or 'pupil'.

69. [From Sophronios]¹⁸²

I have learned that our master [Patriarch Sylvester] intends to have the book of Nektarios copied by someone in that region, but my son, you need to supervise and guide him. People like them are ignorant of the language and of their [own] ignorance.¹⁸³ Due to their lack of knowledge of the language and spelling, they write differently from what is in front of them in the original copy, thinking that they have not made any mistakes. For example, they might write a tied *tā'* (ٲ) instead of an extended *tā'* (ت), or an extended *tā'* instead of a tied *tā'*, or المؤمنين ['the believers', Accusative] instead of المؤمنون ['the believers', Nominative], and vice versa, or similar errors that change the meaning. Thus, all our efforts will be wasted. Understand this well, and you will require no further recommendation in this matter. //48r//

70. [From Sophronios]¹⁸⁴

I have reviewed the papers of the miserable Ambrosius the apostate, enemy of the faith and heretic. His excuse regarding my book is a lie, because I sent it to him at the house of Dhīb al-Idilbi in Aleppo where he was staying, and when I asked him about it the next day, he said it had arrived. I need you to write to him exactly this but know that he is a liar and cannot be trusted. If he kept it with them [at the house of Dhīb al-Idilbi], let us know so we can retrieve it from them.

Regarding what he wrote to you concerning the validity of his priesthood and that he was not stripped of it: yes, that is true, but he cannot exercise it unless he truly repents and performs his penance as prescribed by St. Basil the Great, not according to the rules of the community of innovators [in faith]. He likened himself to the Apostle Peter, who denied his Lord and then repented and became the chief of the Apostles and Rock of the Faith. However, Peter repented and wept bitterly for his fall; he did not flee to the mountain tops and hide. Instead, he professed his faith openly and traveled the inhabited world preaching, becoming the leader of the apostles, and finally died a martyr. David sinned and wept for his double sin, humbling himself with fasting, weakening himself from not consuming oil and constant prayer, until he became a prophet. Thus, he deserved to have the Lord speak of him: 'I have found David's heart after My own heart' [Acts 13:22; see 1 Samuel 13:14]. He

¹⁸² Written by the same hand, but vertically and without a title.

¹⁸³ What he would call in Letter 71 'a twofold ignorance'.

¹⁸⁴ Without any title or greetings, a new letter starts here.

also said: 'I will not destroy this city for My own sake and for My servant David's sake' [*Isaiah* 37:35]. [You must] similarly write to him and admonish him. //48v//

71. [From Sophronios]¹⁸⁵

Regarding the book by the late Nektarios of blessed memory, which we translated into Arabic, if it is needed over there for countering adversaries, then keep it. Otherwise, consult with His Holiness the Patriarch and send it to Latakia to Yūsuf Mark, but send it with someone reliable. Be sure to take a copy of the small book by Nektarios that we previously translated, entitled *Qaḍā' al-ḥaqq wa-naql al-ṣidq* [*Judgment of Truth and Conveyance of Honesty*],¹⁸⁶ for it contains [texts] beneficial for refuting the adversaries regarding baptism, ordination, and other sacraments, as well as some of their vile rituals.

You mentioned that His Holiness the Patriarch intends to give it to one of the scribes there to make a copy because you are busy. However, my son, we fear it may be altered, as such scribes are distorters¹⁸⁷ and ignorant, and do not understand the correct spelling and rules of Arabic, which would make my efforts useless. Indeed, their ignorance is twofold, for they ignore their ignorance. They write a tied *tā'* (ة) instead of an extended *tā'* (ت), or المؤمنين [‘the believers’, Accusative] instead of المؤمنين [‘the believers’, Nominative]. Conversely, they write المؤمنين when it should be المؤمنین and other similar mistakes. Should one of the adversaries notice this, they will mock us and discredit the book because of its poor grammar. On the other side, Ibn Zākhīr al-Ḥalabī is particularly well-versed in Arabic grammar and syntax, and they scrutinize such matters closely.

If you oversee the scribe and ensure he pays careful attention to these matters, there should be no cause for concern. Perhaps if you alert him properly, he will take care to be consistent, and the result will be good. Prayers. //49r//

¹⁸⁵ Haddad believes that this letter was written by Ilyās Fakhr, which has led to confusion about the authorship of the book mentioned here, traditionally attributed to Sophronios in the manuscripts. It has been suggested that Ilyās Fakhr heavily revised Sophronios's translation and subsequently attributed the new version to himself. However, we see no reason to attribute this letter to Ilyās Fakhr.

¹⁸⁶ The original Greek title of this book, composed in 1671, is: Περὶ τῆς ἀρχῆς τοῦ Πάπα ἀντίρρησεις.

¹⁸⁷ The word ‘*mussākh*’ was used by Germanos Farḥāt at the end of his introduction to *Baḥṭh al-maṭālib*:

احذر يا من دُعيت إلى نسخ هذا المؤلف من أن تُحَرِّف عباراته، ولو لم تفهمها لأنك دُعيت لأن تنسخ لا لأن تُمسَخ
Beware, you who have been called upon to copy this work, lest you alter its phrases, even if you do not understand them, for you were called to copy, not to distort.

72. [From Yūsuf Mark]¹⁸⁸

To the dear esteemed son, the honorable Deacon Mūsā, may God bless him.

After extending perfect greetings with the utmost glory and honor,

I wish to inform you that it has been a long time since I received a letter from you. May God have prevented it for good reasons. As for me, my son, my condition has worsened because of frequent writing, diminished strength, and poor eyesight.

In recent times, my son, we were struck by one of life's arrows with the loss of your maternal uncle's daughter Badī'a at the age of seven. She passed away on the night of Easter Sunday, after enduring a severe illness with angina-like symptoms on Holy Saturday. She suffered with the Lord Jesus Christ and died with him on Saturday. Do not ask, my son, about the sorrow and grief we feel, for she was a good, well-mannered, and devout girl. Oh, what a painful calamity it is to lose the joy of our hearts, Badī'a, the obedient and attentive one. However, we have hope in God that she has reached the church of the firstborn whose names are written in the Heavens [*Hebrews* 12:23], listening to the hymns of the celebrants there.

Calamity in green gardens is more intense than in arid gardens.¹⁸⁹

May our Lord compensate her parents with her brother and sister and those who will be born after them. Praise be to God in both times of joy and sorrow. God's will is accepted without question. 'The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away'. Blessed be His name forever. [*Job* 1:21]

188 Haddad attributes it to Ilyās Fakhr. The same specimen was used for the death of Jacob, son of the author of a letter preserved in MS Greek Orthodox Diocese of Homs 37, f. 21v-22r (dated August 13, year not mentioned).

189 This verse from the letter M of Abū Tammām's 'Chapter of Lamentations' in his *Dīwān* is also a selected verse in the 'Chapter of Lamentations' of *Ḥamāsāt al-ẓurafā'* by al-Zawzanī (d. 1093/1094)..

