CHAPTER SEVEN

IBRAHIM AL-HAKILANI (1605–1664), OR: THE POWER OF SCHOLARSHIP AND PUBLISHING¹

Introduction. Cross-cultural contacts in the Mediterranean

In most studies of the Mediterranean, the battle of Lepanto (1571) marks the end of whatever cultural or other unity the Inner Sea still might have had since the Crusades first divided it into an Islamic and a Christian sphere of influence. The gradual closing of the ranks on both sides, evident since the 10th century, by the end of the 16th century had developed into a virtual military and political standstill, which seemed to preclude any possibility of cultural exchange, the continuity of commercial contacts notwithstanding.

However, I think we are wrong to view the Mediterranean in the 17th and 18th centuries as a region divided into two entirely self-contained cultures. Nevertheless, a general history of cultural life in the Mediterranean during this period remains to be written; but such a project does not seem feasible as long as those who have studied one or more of the numerous minor episodes of Christian-Islamic or, otherwise, European-Near Eastern contacts show little awareness of the basic fact that these very moments are part of a structure and a process of cultural exchange and even interdependence that continued to tie together the shores of this sea.

It seems desirable that historians who study the problem of cross-cultural contacts in the Mediterranean should cast their net wide indeed. If they want fruitfully to treat this topic, they will have to interpret the results of such other scholarly approaches to human reality as, e.g., cultural anthropology and oriental studies. Only by adopting an interdisciplinary and an integralist stance can they hope to discover the manifold examples of the above-mentioned fundamental unity. Ideally,

¹ I gratefully acknowledge my debt to Dr. Monique Bernard, who critically read the manuscript and helped with the transliteration of the Arabic, following the usage of the Encyclopedia of Islam.

a search for the factors that brought about this unity would include a comparative study of popular customs and of religious and social usages. Equally important is an analysis of commercial contacts and their impact, on the one hand, and of the structures of politics and of systems of scholarly patronage on the other. Such topics as piracy and its influence, and, partly connected with it, the role of the so-called renegades arise as well.

Essential is an awareness of the important function of Rome, of the papacy as a constant factor in the political, economic and cultural exchange between (Southern) Europe and, specifically, the Near East. In this context, research into the function of the many intermediate groups like the Greeks and the Jews is necessary, for they played a part in all these fields, from commerce to scholarship, and were seen and used as such by the papacy as well.

Against this general background, it is the specific purpose of this chapter to draw attention to a group of mediators of special interest to historians of the contacts between Christianity and Islam.² I am referring to the Lebanese Maronite community and, more precisely, to those members of it who, from the end of the 16th century onwards, came to Rome and, subsequently, to other capitals of Europe, as, for example, Paris. They have significantly contributed to the growth of oriental studies and thus to an ongoing European-Near Eastern debate during the following two hundred years. Also, however, the Maronites exemplify the continuous tensions between the two dominant cultures of the Mediterranean, the Christian-European and the Islamic-Near Eastern.

To illustrate the Maronites' role, specifically within the context of papal cultural policy in the 17th century, I will concentrate on an important early representative of this group, a man called Ibrahim al-Hakilani, that is from the Lebanese village of Hakil, who styled himself Abraham Ecchellense when he lived in Europe.

² For references to Arabic texts, I have used C. Brockelmann, *Geschichte der Arabischen Literatur* (= *GAL*), (Weimar 1898–1902), and supplement volumes, (Leiden 1937–1940). Other data are from G. Graf, *Geschichte der Christlichen Arabischen Literatur*, (Città del Vaticano 1944–1953), Vols. I–V, and M. Steinschneider, *Die europäischen Uebersetzungen aus dem Arabischen bis Mitte des 17. Jahrhunderts* (Vienna, 1904–1905), Vols. I–II. I have also consulted: W. Strothmann, *Die Anfänge der Syrischen Studien in Europa* (Wiesbaden 1971); J. Fuck, *Die Arabischen Studien in Europa bis in dem Anfang des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Leipzig 1955) as well as: C. Aboussonan, (ed.), *Le Livre et le Liban jusqu'à 1900* (Paris 1982).

The significance of Ecchellense has been noted before,³ and some elements for a reconstruction of his life and works have been available for some time, but no effort has been made to assemble these data, to enquire into the nature of Ecchellen's work and to integrate it all into a proper biographical sketch and, in doing so, correct a great amount of minor and major mistakes. A lucky find of some manuscripts included an extensive (auto-)biographical note, apparently supplied by Ecchellen himself to Carlo Cartari, a Roman patrician and the self-appointed chronicler of the Roman university. This provided me with an opportunity to systematize and synthesize the existing data about the career of this learned Maronite. Far more important, however, in interpreting Ecchellen's life and works against the background of 17th-century papal culture and propaganda policy, I can now try to illumine some of the problems of cross-cultural Mediterranean contacts and, specifically, the significance, within that process, of Rome's need to use the expert knowledge of the Maronites about the roots of the Church in the East for its efforts at religious reintegration and at strengthening its position in the West.⁴

The Maronites in history

Most readers will have some use of a few introductory remarks about the Maronites, a fascinating group that, from a religious community, developed into a nation with a definite culture of its own that has since become an integral part of the Lebanon.⁵

³ Most of the available information to date has been meticulously, though unsystematically gathered in a number of footnotes to: G. Levi della Vida, *Ricerche sulla Formazione del più antico fondo dei manoscritti orientali della Biblioteca Vaticana* (Città del Vaticano 1939) especially 6, note 2 and in Graf, *o.c.*, III, 354–359.

⁴ Archivio di Stato di Roma (= *ASR*), Fondo Cartari-Febei (= *FCF*), Vol. 64, ff. 23^r–27^r and 69^r–81^v.

⁵ I have used: A.S. Atiya, *A History of Eastern Christianity* (London 1968) part VI, the Maronite Church, 391sq. Older, Maronite historians, though offering valuable information, tend to be very apologetic; cfr. Stephan al-Dawayhi (1630–1704), *Tarikh al-ta'ifa al-maruniyya* (Beirut 1890) and Michel A. Gabriel, *Tarikh al-kanisa al-Antakiya al-suraniya* (Beirut 1900–1904). A rather slight study is: P. Carali, *Les Maronites au Liban* (Jounieh 1949). The most recent monograph to date, M. Moose, *The Maronites in History* (Syracuse 1986), is largely a rehash of older works and unnecessarily unsympathetic. More informative is: R.M. Haddad, *Syrian Christians in Muslim Society* (Princeton 1970). A decent survey of Maronite historiography gives: K.S. Salibi, *Maronite Historians of Medieval Lebanon* (Beirut 1959).

Reputedly, the rather legendary St. Maro(n) (350–433), a monophysite Christian monk, founded the monastery around which the community originated, in the Syrian valley of the Orontes, near Antioch. In the 6th century, the greater part of the group was slaughtered in an attack by Jacobite-Syrian Christians, a fact not normally mentioned in Maronite historiography, which likes to stress the unbroken continuity of their community from its beginnings to the present day.

Following the Arab invasions of the seventh century, the Maronite patriarch of Antioch fled to Byzantium. The remainder of the Maronites, who had migrated to North Lebanon, then chose to elect their own pontiff. One of his successors was St. John Maron who ruled from 685 to 707 and gave his name to the group. Again, the Maronite historical tradition has tried to rewrite the past, telling that the saint led his followers into safety from persecution by Islamic Arab conquerors or by Islamicised countrymen. Nowadays, the view is that the Maronites, Christianised tribes of the Lebanese region, fled the valley of the Orontes at the end of the 9th century before the onslaught of the Byzantine armies and hid in the mountains till, in later times, they spread again.

It is not easy to decide what is true and false in these various interpretations of early Lebanese history, precisely because they still play such a major part in the present-day politics of the country. According to many Muslims, the Christian Maronites, whose number probably amounts to 25 per cent of the Lebanese population, have an inordinate hold over the cultural and political life of the nation. To counter this criticism, which actually dates from the last century already, the Maronites continue to strive to create a non-Arab, Christian past for themselves that would make them the original masters of Lebanon, the founding fathers of the present state. The Islamic Arabs, of course, try to play down this tradition.⁶

However this may be, settling down in the mountain recesses of the Lebanon the medieval Maronites became, more than ever, a society of warrior-farmers, feudally organized, living in small villages around the patriarch's see in the Kadisha valley. They became known as the "Ahl al-Djabal", the 'people of the mountains'. Isolated from contacts with the Churches of Byzantium and Rome, the Maronites did not

⁶ On the general history of Lebanon see: P.K. Hitti, *Lebanon in History* (London 1957) and K.S. Salibi, *A house of many mansions. The History of Lebanon reconsidered* (Leiden 1988).

betray what they, in another attempt to create a millennial tradition, considered their Phoenician background: they engaged in trade all over the Eastern Mediterranean, established small communities as far as Cyprus and Baghdad, and also entered the new, Islamic rulers' bureaucracy, serving as administrators to the caliphs in Damascus and, again, Baghdad.

With the advance of the Crusaders, however, it became clear that the Maronites had not assimilated at all: they quickly joined the European invaders and became invaluable scouts and spies, knowing the lay of the land as well as they did. Inter-marriage with the 'Franks' produced the 'Pullani'-society, in which Eastern and Western influences mingled.⁷

Contacts with the West inevitably meant contacts with Rome and the papacy. A Romanization of the Maronite church took place and in 1182, the community formally abjured monophysitism, a belief they had held ever since the Council of Chalcedon (AD 451). Rome was not tardy in using this chance to extend its authority, even though the end of the Crusader kingdoms heralded the end of direct influence from Europe. The papacy continued to send out missionaries: first Dominicans and Franciscans, then, in the 16th century, members of the newly-founded Society of Jesus, and finally, in the 17th century, Capuchins. None of them could avoid the sometimes serious clashes with the local population who did not easily give up their spiritual and cultural independence.⁸

Though Maronite patriarchs attended the great western Church councils of the 15th and 16th centuries,⁹ Rome almost certainly did not realize that its policy of Romanization was not only superficial, being restricted to the Maronite (ecclesiastical) elite, but also incomplete, as western, Latin traditions were only partially accepted in Maronite liturgy and theology. The actual reunion of the Maronite with the Roman church, promulgated at a synod in 1736, introduced the papal name in their so-called Syrian liturgy and established the separation of men and women in monasteries; other minor changes were accepted as well. Before and after this event, the Maronites had gone to great

⁷ T. Anaissi (ed.), *Collectio Documentorum Maronitarum* (Livorno 1921), 91.

⁸ For these centuries, the contacts between the Maronites and Rome are documented in: A. Rabbath (ed.), *Documents pour servir à l'histoire du Christianisme en Orient* (Paris-Leipzig 1905–1910).

⁹ Anaissi, *o.c.*, 113–114.

lengths to establish their original, Latin orthodoxy and their adherence to Rome, an effort that has discoloured much of their otherwise valuable historical scholarship.¹⁰

The first great mission pope of the Catholic Reform period, Gregory XIII (1572–1585), wishing to bring the Maronites into closer contact with the Roman fold, not only increased the number of missionaries sent to the Lebanon,¹¹ he also established the Maronite College in Rome, to train young men from this community in the Roman obedience.¹² Great though the influence of this college and its alumni may have been, in the end it did not effectuate more than a constant, but theoretical reaffirmation of Rome's supremacy by a group who still maintained their religious and socio-cultural individuality and independence. Such fundamental things as the election of priests by the local community, the non-enforcement of celibacy in the lower echelons of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, the use of Arabic as the language of prayer and of the reading of Scripture, and of Syriac-Aramaic for the liturgy, as well as the fact that the election of the Maronite patriarch only was formally ratified by Rome all remained unchanged, up till the present day.

Ecchellen's youth: 1605–1619

Abraham Ecchellense, as he is generally known, was born Ibrahim al-Hakilani on the slopes of the Lebanon, on February 15, 1605.¹³ His father was one “Giovanni Abraham”, a petty nobleman from an ancient family of warriors, as Abraham told his Roman biographer. His mother Mary was from the Schipani-family, formerly rulers of the town of Djubayl, the old Byblos, between Beirut and Tripoli, on the Syrian coast. Abraham felt the need to add that the city was well-known for its expert seafarers and famous architects—from this region came the stones of Solomon's temple and, we might add, the cedar wood for its ceiling and furnishings. It also was the home of St. Simeon, the

¹⁰ Atiya, *o.c.*, 392; Salibi, *o.c.*, *passim*.

¹¹ Anaissi, *o.c.*, 52sq.; 90; and G. Levi della Vida, *Documenti intorno alle relazioni delle chiese orientali con la Santa Sede durante il pontificato di Gregorio XIII* (Città del Vaticano 1948).

¹² P. Raphael, *Le rôle du Collège maronite romain dans l'orientalisme au XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles* (Beirut 1950).

¹³ Unless otherwise indicated, all biographical references are to Ecchellen's (auto-)biographical essay in: ASR, FCF, Vol. 64.

Stylobite. In the enumeration of these details, we can see what historical and social background the Maronites liked to present, linking their community to the tradition of Phoenicia and, of course, ancient Israel, the Holy Land, where Christianity originated.

However, Mary's grandfather had been deposed by the Ottemans, somewhere in the 1520's. Since then, the Schipani led a rather impoverished and imperilled life. As Abraham's father died when the boy was nine years old, his mother soon sent him away to be educated by a relative, who was the abbot of the famous monastery of St. Anthony. Abraham stayed with him for some six years, being taught Syriac, the sacred language of the Maronites and other Near Eastern nations.

In 1619, when Abraham was about fifteen years old, the then Maronite patriarch decided to select some youngsters for further education in the Maronite College in Rome; young Ecchellen was his first choice. Though Mary was rather loth to see her only son leave for Europe, she gave in to the combined pressure of the patriarch and the archpriest of Tripoli. Thus, on November 15, 1619, Abraham and five others sailed from the port of Sayda, ancient Sidon, accompanied by archpriest Abraham Anturini, venerably aged 91, and Giovanni Battista Corti who later joined the Society of Jesus. The small group arrived in Rome on January 8, 1620.

The first Italian period: 1620–1628

For five years, Abraham was a student, studying Italian and Latin, philosophy and theology. During these years, his talents must have become obvious already: he served as corrector of the Maronite *Breviarium*, which was printed in Rome in 1624. In 1625, Father Pietro Metosuta, another Maronite member of the Society of Jesus, died, leaving vacant the chair of Syriac and literary Arabic at the College. Abraham, though young, was asked to fill his position and accepted—eagerly, one may assume.

He immediately started working on a Syriac grammar; it was printed in 1628 by the newly-established Press of the equally new papal Ministry for the Propagation of the Faith, one of the pet projects of Pope Urban VIII. The booklet was almost universally used, even in his own country, Abraham proudly stated—and indeed, we know that as late as 1646 the Unshod Carmelites ordered as many as twelve copies for the missionaries they planned to send to the Near

East.¹⁴ It is, actually, very much a study tool for beginners, short, clearly structured, a soft-cover, small pocket book well suited to daily use.¹⁵ It was dedicated to Cardinal Ottavio Bandini, protector of the Maronites. In the introduction, not surprisingly Ecchellen extols Syriac as one of the most venerable languages of the world: he argued it could only be compared to Latin.

The idea to compose a short introduction to the fundamentals of Syriac, to be used beside the Latin grammar of Georgius Amira—or Umayra (? -1644), a Maronite scholar who lived in Rome from 1584 onwards, before becoming patriarch in 1633—had been sponsored by Francesco Ingoli, the powerful first secretary of the Congregation of the Propaganda. Two of the three readers who perused the book before the *imprimatur* was given, were oriental scholars: Abbot Hilarion Roncati, of the monastery of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, and Sergius Rizzi—Sarkis al-Ruzzi (?-1638)—the Syrian archbishop of Damascus, brother to two and nephew to one Rizzi-patriarch of the Maronite church, who permanently resided in Rome.

Also in 1628, Ecchellen published a *Khulasat al-lugha al-arabiyya*, or ‘Short Introduction to the Arabic Language’.¹⁶ The booklet may well have served a definite demand. For precisely the early decades of the 17th century saw an heightened awareness of the importance of Arabic, both as a language that could help Christians understand their own roots in the Near East and, indeed, as an important language in its own right.

In the mean time, Abraham increased his proficiency in philosophy, crowning his efforts with a promotion at the *Collegio Romano*, the Jesuit college which catered to the Roman and Italian nobility and, in the pontificate of Urban VIII, definitely became a centre of learned education, to the great chagrin of the authorities of Rome’s papal *Sapienza*-university.

On June 15, 1631, the newly created doctor left for Syria, arriving at Sayda on July 25. There, according to his own information, he went to see the man who was by then master of Greater Syria, the *amir* Fakhr al-Din II, Ma’n (1572–1635).¹⁷

¹⁴ BAV, *Manoscritti Borgiani Latini*, Vol. 62, f. 30A.

¹⁵ Abraham(i) Ecchellen(si), *Collegii Maronitarum Alumni Linguae Syriacae sive Chaldaicae Perbrevis Institutio ad eiusdem Nationis Studiosos Adolescentes* (Rome 1628).

¹⁶ Graf, *o.c.*, III, 356.

¹⁷ G. Mariti, *Storia di Faccardino* (Livorno 1787); F. Wüstenfeld, *Fakhr ed-Din der Drusen-*

*Mediterranean interlude—Ecchellen as
diplomat and merchant: 1628–1633*

To understand what other roles young Abraham had played while pursuing his academic studies in Rome, we should stop for a moment and consider the position and politics of Fakhr al-Din II, the grandson of the famous Fakhr al-Din I, from the tribe of the Druzes and from the house that had ruled Lebanon since the 12th century, priding itself on having been the champions of the Crusader kings.¹⁸

On the death of his father, Kurkmaz Ma'n, the second Fakhr was confirmed by the Ottoman government as *sandjak* of his family's fiefs of Beirut and Sayda, as well as acquiring the town of Safad in 1602. He quickly became one of the small group of petty rulers operating almost entirely independent from their nominal Ottoman overlords in Istanbul. However, he set out to increase his power and finally succeeded in defeating his main rival in two battles at Damascus and Hama in 1607.

In his fervour to gain control over Greater Syria and throw off the Ottoman yoke, Fakhr al-Din established diplomatic relations with Grand Duke Ferdinand I of Tuscany.¹⁹ This prince was quite eager to help the Druze *amir*: the prospect of commercial gain for the Florentine maritime interests which free harbours in the Levant would provide, as well as a vision of a new crusade, indeed, of Tasso's recently published great poem *Gerusalemme Liberata* (1590) come true, must have held enormous attraction. Fakhr al-Din also approached Rome for support, very probably using the Maronite College as an intermediate.

Actually, Fakhr himself had been educated in a Maronite family, members of which later held most of the high positions in his government.²⁰ The favour the *amir* showed the Maronites is, of course, easily explained. Not only could he well use their military might—according to some early 17th-century sources, the Maronite community

furst und seine Zeitgenossen (Göttingen 1886); P. Carali, *Fakhr ad-Din II, principe del Libano e la Corte di Toscana, 1605–1635* (Rome 1936–1938), Vols. I–II, and his: *Le Liban et l'Empire Ottoman au temps de Fakhreddin II al-Ma'ni, 1590–1635* (Heliopolis 1952).

¹⁸ On this group: N.M. Abu-Izzeddin, *The Druzes. A new study of their history, faith and society* (Leiden 1984), and R.Br. Betts, *The Druze* (New Haven 1988).

¹⁹ Carali, *Fakhr, o.c.*, 61. Also: P. Rietbergen, "The Making of a 'Syncretic Saint'", a.c., 215–219.

²⁰ Carali, *Fakhr, o.c.*, 40–41.

contributed some 25,000 men to his forces²¹—he also knew that their contacts with the Church of Rome could be turned to political profit. The idea, however vague, of a new crusade remained dear to the popes up till the end of the century. Long before his pontificate, Urban, too, was fascinated by this vision, as is shown by his own verse²² and by the crusading verse published by his entourage, such as the epic of the man who, later, was to become his court poet, Francesco Bracciolini's-1611 *La Croce racquistata*.²³

In 1613, Fakhr al-Din discovered the Ottoman government had decided to bring his quasi-independent rule to an end. To avoid disaster, he chose to take refuge in Tuscany. This unusual step was a highly published event in the Christian world. However, with the accession, in 1614, of a new grand vizier in Istanbul, Fakhr was allowed to return and his son Ali even was named governor of Southern Lebanon.

In 1615, the *amir* did return, for seven months, but only to bolster up his forces and encourage his people. He then again sailed for Europe, trying to enlist the aid of Spain and of the Knights of St. John, thus preparing a large-scale bid for independence. He finally broke his self-imposed exile in 1618. From then on, his power in Syria constantly grew. As he conquered Tripoli and extended his influence into Palestine, trying towards Jerusalem, he continued his efforts to interest the Mediterranean European powers in a combined attack on the Turks, to liberate the Holy Land. We should not be surprised that actual European support of this great game never materialized; to most rulers, it must have seemed too dangerous, in view of the power the Ottoman government could still wield, as well as because of the Turkish threat of the Eastern parts of Christian Europe.

It seems that young Ecchellen was mixed up in Fakhr al-Din's affairs and schemes at least from 1628 onwards²⁴—we then find him buying arms in Tuscany.²⁵ It was the very period in which Fakhr's pleading letters to Rome, sent via his then intermediary, Giorgio Maronio, Maronite archbishop of Cyprus, resulted in vague plans for papal assis-

²¹ Domenico Magri, *Viaggio al Monte Libano* (Rome 1624), 44.

²² See Chapter II of this book.

²³ *BAV, BL*, Vol. 3983.

²⁴ The following is a reconstruction of Ecchellen's activities on the basis of a great number of documents connected with Fakhr al-Din published by Carali in his study on the *amir*; however, some of the letters Carali quotes have not been dated correctly.

²⁵ Carali, *Fakhr, o.c.*, docs. CLII, CXLII.

tance in his struggle for greater independence. In sign of Rome's interest in his cause, Fakhr was sent a papal 'letter of consolation', a portrait of Urban VIII, a gift of blessed candles and, also, a translation of the Bible in Arabic.²⁶ Apparently, it was Cardinal Francesco Barberini, the new protector of the Maronite Nation, who was deeply involved in these schemes that, however, in the end proved abortive—as did a parallel and, indeed, linked scheme, whereby Louis XIII of France, with Fakhr's help, would conquer Palestine²⁷ and, one supposes, become the new king of Jerusalem. In obvious concordance with all these projects, in these very years the Congregation of the Propaganda—of which Cardinal Barberini's librarian Lucas Holstenius (1596–1661) was a member—decided to step up its missionary activities in the Near East.²⁸

Despite the unexplainable difference in dates, according to Ecchellen's autobiographical notes he first met the *amir* on his return to Syria in 1631, when Fakhr gave him a grand welcome, eager for information on the state of Christendom.²⁹

Being sympathetic to European culture and its products—probably both for the political advantages such an interest might bring and for its own sake—Fakhr asked for Ecchellen's opinion about the translation of one 'Mattia's' work on medicinal herbs, which had been produced on his request by a Jewish trader called David, and a French merchant, one monsieur Blanc. Obviously, this is Pietro Andrea Mattioli's *Dei discorsi nelli sei libri di Pedacio Dioscuride*, published in Venice in 1585. Ecchellen advised a thorough collation with the original, and promptly got the job, as well as Fakhr's friendship.³⁰ With financial assistance from the *amir*, with a sum of 300 *scudi* annually paid by the Congregation of the Propaganda in Rome, and investing some of his own money

²⁶ *BAV, BL*, Vol. 7817, f. 15^r, sqq.

²⁷ Paris, *Bibliothèque Nationale, Fonds Français*, Vol. 9542, f. 1^{r-v}, 20 July 1629, Theophile Minuti to Peiresc.

²⁸ *BAV, BL*, Vol. 7817, f. 21^r, sqq.

²⁹ *ASR, FCF*, Vol. 64, f. 69^v.

³⁰ [Abraham Ecchellen] *Epistola apologetica (Prima, Altera), in qua diluuntur calumniae ac imposturae quamplures adversus Syriacam Libelli Ruth editionem et eius Latinam versionem, a magistro Valeriano de Flavigny congestae*, [Paris 1647, 1648] (= *Epistola*). This apologetic work actually consists of three pamphlets, of which the first two (1–112; 115–165) are directed against De Flavigny—see below—, and the third (167sqq.) against his Parisian colleague Sionita—also see below: *Epistola apologetica tertia in qua respondetur libello Gabrielis Sionitae*. For the facts cited here: 184–185.

as well,³¹ Ecchellen then proceeded to establish a Maronite school in the Lebanese mountains; the patriarch and a synod especially convened for the purpose gave the enterprise their blessing and support.³²

In 1631, Fakhr al-Din sent Ecchellen to Florence as his special envoy.³³ His mission was a complicated one. Grand Duke Ferdinand had sent a gift of books and medicine, and the *amir* planned to thank him with two bales of silk farmed in his own gardens. Ecchellen was to be the gift bearer.³⁴ However, he also had to sell some 44 more bales of Syrian silk and invest the proceeds in Tuscan government bonds, as a security for Fakhr's younger sons; after a lot of trouble with some greedy Florentine merchants, the sale realized some 22,766 *scudi*.³⁵ Ecchellen also was empowered to buy supplies of powder and arms, and of iron to be used in the founding of cannon.³⁶ However, I think his mission had a cultural side as well, for from 1631 onwards we find a Tuscan physician, Mattia Naldi, as well as Tuscan artists—an architect, a sculptor and an engineer—working in the Lebanon. While the latter constructed Fakhr's famous palace in Beirut as well as a bridge in Sayda,³⁷ the former composed a long propagandistic poem on the Lebanon, first extolling its natural beauty and then glorifying it as the 'theatre of history'. There, a long time ago, the Crusaders had protected the Faith. There, now, the lambs once again were devoured by the ferocious beasts of the wilderness: a new Bouillon was needed.³⁸ This, of course, was a veiled invitation to the French king to take the lead in a new crusade.

In autumn 1631, Ecchellen returned to Syria, only to be sent on another mission,³⁹ now to buy, or rather free slaves on the markets of Northern Africa and conduct a number of other commercial deals⁴⁰—perhaps the sale of silk? Possibly, this time he went by way of Cyprus, where he may have visited the Maronite merchant community, acquiring the knowledge which later enabled him to provide a memorial on

³¹ Cfr. also Anaissi, *o.c.*, 112.

³² *ASR, FCF*, Vol. 64, f. 70^r.

³³ Carali, *Fakhr, o.c.*, docs. CXLII–CLV.

³⁴ *Idem*, docs. CXXXIX, XXL.

³⁵ *Idem*, docs. CXLIII, CXLV, CXLVII.

³⁶ *Idem*, doc. CXLI.

³⁷ *Idem*, 125–127 and docs. CL, CLVII.

³⁸ The poem is titled "Il Monte Libano, Canzone"; it can be dated to the late 1620's or early 1630's. It is in: *BAV, Manoscritti Chigiani*, Vol. R I 18, fols. 340^r–341^v.

³⁹ *Idem*, doc. CLVII.

⁴⁰ *Idem*, docs. CLI, CLII, CLIX.

the condition of the island that was part of a proposal for a Christian re-conquest of this strategically important stronghold in the eastern Mediterranean.⁴¹ He certainly went by way of Leghorn, there to buy a ship that, after having been used for all his planned transactions, would then be sailed back to Syria.⁴²

After a great many complications with the Tuscan authorities, who did not trust his credentials, Ecchellen travelled to Algiers and Tunis in the Spring of 1633, to transact his slave-freeing business.⁴³ While in Tunis, he also engaged in some literary-epigraphic discussions over supposedly Punic inscriptions, which he recognized as ancient Egyptian, with a fascinating Christian 'renegade' residing there, one Thomas d'Arcos. The latter remains an elusive orientalist, who according to his lively letters to the Provençal erudite Peiresc produced quite a number of interesting works of which, however, nothing seems to have been preserved.⁴⁴

Sometime during fall 1633, Ecchellen returned to Florence.⁴⁵ There, according to his own story, he heard that Fakhr al-Din had been captured by the Turks, brought to Istanbul and been beheaded with his entire family. Whether the *amir*'s reported conversion to Christianity, in 1633,⁴⁶ had had anything to do with Sultan Murad's decision to destroy the power of this over-mighty pseudo-vassal, is not clear. Obviously, Istanbul was worried by Fakhr's actions as well as by his ideas. The fact that the Syrian prince gave the Knights of St. John free access to his ports, supporting them liberally, and also entertained close contacts with other European powers with Mediterranean interests, hardly can have endeared him to the Porte.

⁴¹ Cfr. Archivio di Stato di Firenze, Fondo Mediceo (= *ASF, FM*), M 4, Inserta IX, f. 21 and M 4274, bis, Inserta VI, f. 3.

⁴² Carali, *Fakhr, o.c.*, doc. CLVII.

⁴³ *ASF, FM*, Vol. M 6, ff. 330, 348, 351, 365. Cfr. the introduction to the 1647-edition of the *De Proprietatibus*.

⁴⁴ Ph. Tamizey de Larroque (ed.), *Les Correspondants de Peiresc. Vol. XV. Thomas d'Arcos. Lettres inédites écrites de Tunis à Peiresc (1633–1636)* (Algiers 1889), 27.

⁴⁵ Carali, *Fakhr, o.c.*, doc. CLII; cfr. also *ASF, FM*, M 6, ff. 381, 548, 553, 573.

⁴⁶ Carali, *Fakhr, o.c.*, 410.

The second Italian period: 1633–1640

With Fakhr's death, there came an end to Ecchellen's career at the side of a man who might have altered the course of Mediterranean history. The discrepancy between the autobiographical notes and the other sources may indicate that at a later stage of his life, Abraham wished to hush up these early political activities.

Now, stranded in Tuscany, he probably found himself quite lucky with the grandducal offer of a chair of Arabic and Syriac at the university of Pisa—the government of Florence continued to be interested in the affairs of Syria and the Lebanon, scheming with Fakhr's erstwhile friend Abu Nader to retain some influence, there. From the sideline, Francesco Barberini was watching as well, concerned about the education of Maronite boys at schools and colleges that served to stress the need to keep to the Roman obedience.⁴⁷

It is not clear whether this was the precise period Ecchellen started collaborating with the Tuscan mathematician Alfonso Borelli. At the request of the Grand Duke, they produced a translation of books Five, Six and Seven of the *Konika* of Apollonius of Perge, based on the Arabic version of Abu al-Fath al-Isfahani, a manuscript of which had been brought to Florence by the Syrian patriarch Ignatius Ni'matullah. Certainly, the work was of long gestation. Only in 1661, the *Apollonii Pergaei Conicorum Libri V, VI et VII* were published; added to it was a compilation and translation of writings by Archimedes, from the Arabic edition of Thabit ibn Kurra (836–901).⁴⁸

Obviously, Ecchellen must have acquired some fame in his own chosen field, oriental linguistics, for in 1636, Pope Urban VIII asked him to come to Rome, offering him a chair of Arabic and Syriac at the papal university. Abraham now entered the service of the Congregation of the Propaganda as well, being nominated a member of the committee instituted to produce a new Arabic version of the Bible. In this function, he succeeded his fellow countryman Yuhanna al-Hawshabi al-Hasruni.⁴⁹ He soon became friends with his older colleague Lucas Holstenius.

Ecchellen, like his Maronite and Syrian compatriots resident in Rome, must have worked hard: we constantly find them asking the

⁴⁷ *BAV, BL*, Vol. 7817, f. 32^r, sqq.

⁴⁸ Graf, *o.c.*, III, 361.

⁴⁹ Raphael, *o.c.*, 96–97. Al-Hasruni also had collaborated with Gabriel Sionita—see below—on the publication of al-Idrisi's *Geography*.

authorities of the Vatican Library for permission to use its holdings. Eventually, the Propaganda enlisted the Library's support for the printing of the manuscript, with a request for the use of its extensive collection of oriental type.⁵⁰

Ecchellen's first French period: 1640–1642

However, after four strenuous years in Rome, a very gratifying request arrived from Paris. The French king, Louis XIII, and his all-powerful first minister, the Cardinal-Duke of Richelieu, asked the Congregation of the Propaganda to 'lend' them Ecchellen's services for one year.⁵¹ The Maronite was to work on the Parisian edition of the Polyglot Bible, a version of Holy Scripture in seven languages, soon to become one of the great feats of 17th-century European scholarship and typography. The Pope could not very well afford not to support such a nobly religious venture and, hence, had to let Ecchellen go, however much he might resent this French initiative that robbed him of the glory which such a project would have brought him, the more so as, obviously, this was one more move of the French authorities to replace Rome as the normative capital of European culture.

The story of Ecchellen's first year in France is a complicated one.⁵² The arrival of the young Maronite scholar soon proved too much for his already famous compatriot, Gabriel Sionita or, to give him his original name Djabra'il al-Sahyuni (1577–1648).⁵³ From the age of seven, he had been a pupil at the Maronite College in Rome, too. Proceeding to the chair of Arabic and Syriac at the *Sapienza*, he then had been asked to come to Paris to take the professorship of Semitic

⁵⁰ This can be deduced from: Chr. M. Gräfinger, *Die Ausleihe Vatikanischer Handschriften und Druckwerke (1563–1700)* (Città del Vaticano 1993), 435, 437, 439, 448 et cetera.

⁵¹ *ASR, FCF*, Vol. 64, f. 70^v.

⁵² The following story has been reconstructed on the basis of a compilation of 94 letters documenting the work of a group of scholars—several of whom, such as Jean Morin, Pietro della Valle, et cetera at one time or another having been connected with the Barberini-court—who had studied the relationship between the Eastern and Western Churches: (J. Morin), *Antiquitates Ecclesiae Orientalis Clarissimorum Virorum Card. Barberini, L. Allatii, Luc. Holstenii, Joh. Morini, Abrah. Ecchellensis, Nic. Peyrescii, Pet. a Valle, Tho. Comberi, Joh. Buxtorfii, H. Hottingeri, etc. Dissertationibus Epistolicis enucleatae. Nunc ex ipsis autographis editae. Quibus praefixa est Jo. Morini Cong. Orat. Paris. PP. Vita* (London 1680) (= *Antiquitates*); I have also used: *Epistola, o.c.*

⁵³ Raphael, *o.c.*, 73sq.; Graf, *o.c.*, III, 351–353.

languages. Thus, his career prefigured that of Ecchellen's. Moreover, not only had he published one of the earliest Arabic grammars in the West—it appeared in Paris in 1619—he also had edited al-Idrisi's *Geography*, that monument of Arab geographical literature, the *Nuzhat al-mushtak fi dhikr al-amsar wa al-aktar*. In 1635, he published a Syriac-Chaldean grammar.⁵⁴ In the same year, he had translated Cardinal Bellarmine's catechism into Arabic—clearly as part of another French move to wrench the initiative from Rome and bolster up their own bid for power in the Christian worlds of South-Eastern Europe and the Near East for, besides Sionita's Arabic version, between 1628 and 1635 the French also published Greek, Armenian and Serbo-Croat editions of this text.

Now, Sionita—together with the Oratorian priest Jean Morin, whom Ecchellen had got to know in Rome, in 1639⁵⁵—was one of the intellectual fathers of the Parisian 'Biblia Polyglotta'-enterprise which, however, was directed by a French patrician, named Michel le Jay, who also paid for it. Though it did reproduce, basically, Christopher Plantin's great Antwerp Polyglot Bible of 1569–1572, it was planned and finally published with some notable additions. Amongst these were the so-called 'Samaritan Pentateuch', edited by Morin on the basis of a manuscript recently acquired in the Near East by the Provençal nobleman Nicholas Fabri de Peiresc—one of Pope Urban's and Cardinal Barberini's good friends—as well as a Syriac edition of the Old Testament and, finally, an Arabic version of it.

Originally, Ecchellen, probably unaware of the petty scheming amongst these Bible-entrepreneurs, was asked to act as reader of Sionita's translations, a proposal readily accepted by the elder Maronite as his work was not universally applauded by the scholarly world. Actually, being accused of laziness and incompetence, Sionita was overjoyed to have the quality of his products confirmed by his rising young colleague⁵⁶—or so he hoped. Ecchellen's authority in these matters was the stronger as he brought with him a rare manuscript, containing a Syriac version of the Old Testament given to him by the above-mentioned Sergius Rizzi.⁵⁷ The Maronite prelate had compiled this ver-

⁵⁴ The manuscript text is in: *BAV, Barberini Orientali*, Vol. 55.

⁵⁵ On Morin's background and friendship with Ecchellen: *Antiquitates*, o.c., 21, 39, 69–70.

⁵⁶ *Antiquitates*, o.c., 298–299, Morin to Ecchellen, August 3, 1641; cfr. *Epistola*, o.c., 126sqq.

⁵⁷ *Epistola*, o.c., 126sqq.; *Antiquitates*, o.c., 70.

sion on the basis of a great number of Arabic and Syriac manuscripts which he had collated with the Vulgate; much care had been taken to present the vocalization signs according to the old usage, as they were of crucial importance to the understanding of the text; the proper sequence of verses, chapters and of the Books themselves, had been realized through a typographically intricate presentation.⁵⁸ One copy of the work had been given to the Vatican Library, on the basis of whose holdings it had been produced; another one now came to Paris with Ecchellen, which seems to evince the young scholar was taken seriously by his elders. It was now used to collate Sionita's versions.

However, the conflict between Le Jay and his senior co-editor Jean de Vitry on the one, and Sionita on the other hand, already nascent since 1638, escalated when Le Jay announced he wanted to fire Sionita.⁵⁹ The latter now began to publicly attack them, but included Ecchellen as well. Among other things, Abraham was accused of having produced little or nothing during his stay in Paris.⁶⁰ This, however, was manifestly untrue. Although the Propaganda Congregation had given Ecchellen one year's leave of absence, only, the Maronite, according to his public defence published later, prepared no less than four chapters of Esther, four of Ruth and of the first Book of Kings, as well as Baruch, Judith, Maccabees and Tobias.⁶¹ From other sources we know he even achieved a lot more than that,⁶² though the two works he published in Paris in 1641 at least partly must have originated in Rome.

Both these publications seem to reflect a particular concern of Ecchellen's, setting the tone for his future intellectual and scholarly endeavours. First, a book appeared titled *Sanctissimi patris nostri B. Antonii Magni monachorum omnium parentis Epistolae viginti*. Dedicated to Francesco Barberini, as Cardinal-*Padrone* and one of Rome's acknowledged patrons of the arts and sciences, it contained the Latin translation of the twenty-one known letters written by this fourth-century saint and Church Father to his disciples. Ecchellen had used an Arabic manuscript, written in Egypt around the year 800, which was now in the possession of the Maronite College in Rome.

⁵⁸ *BAV, VL*, Vol. 7763, f. 41^r, a letter from Rizzi to the Vatican Library.

⁵⁹ Le Jay's version of the problems is given in his letters to the Dupuy-Brothers: Paris, *Bibliothèque Nationale, Fonds Français*, Vol. 9, 169^r sqq.

⁶⁰ *Epistola, o.c.*, 143sqq.

⁶¹ *Idem*, *ibidem*.

⁶² *ASR, FCF*, Vol. 64, ff. 81^r–83^r contain a list of Ecchellen's publications.

In his introduction, he addressed some issues that were to remain important to him. In this particular case, a defence of the monastic tradition, so fundamental to Maronite culture, was quite to the point, indeed, as Rome still sought to combat the onslaughts on this very tradition by both Calvinists and Lutherans who, according to Ecchellen, even dared argue that no such tradition had existed in the first years of the Church. He quoted the Fathers as well as early Islamic writers to establish the fact that a monastic way of life had existed in Egypt even before Christ's birth. Moreover, the Prophet Muhammad himself had admonished his followers to respect this old tradition. Not surprisingly, in the privilege Ecchellen's printer obtained for the booklet, its importance in the war against heretics and latitudinarians now being waged by the Roman Church was specifically mentioned. In all this, we may assume some influence of one of Ecchellen's by now close Roman friends, Lucas Holste, who, as a scholar, was much interested in the original unity of the Western and the Oriental Churches and as one of Cardinal Barberini's most influential advisers, was instrumental in implementing Rome's religious policy in this field.

In the booklet, Ecchellen also expounds his method. A translation should be literal rather than literary, especially since so many Latinists have a tendency to use the limited vocabulary of the Classics to translate texts from another culture—this, of course, was a very important remark, relating to discussions which have dominated Europe's description and understanding of non-European languages well into the 19th century. However, as Ecchellen had not made a copy of the original text, and the Maronite College refused to send him the original manuscript, he did not reproduce the Arabic version alongside his translation.

Ecchellen's second publication of 1641 was the *Synopsis Propositionum Sapientiae Arabum Philosophorum inscripta Speculum Mundum repraesentans*. This was the Latin translation of an Arabic version of an originally Persian collection of theses proposed by Husayn ibn Mu'in al-Din al-Maybudi, around AD 1485.⁶³ The 26 propositions that constitute the text deal with every field of science and learning, from God's knowledge of Man and Creation, via stellar movements and cosmography to alchemy.

⁶³ Graf, *o.c.*, III, 356; Brock, *o.c.*, II, 210. I assume it probably goes back to: *BAV, Barberini Orientali*, Vol. 92/2.

The edition, dedicated to the Cardinal-Duke of Richelieu, rather flatteringly compared the French first minister to King Solomon, as both were the recipients of Arab wisdom—the Queen of Sheba being presented as an early representative of Arab culture. Moreover, Ecchellen hailed Richelieu as a champion of the collaboration between Occident and Orient, and does not fail to remind him of that courageous small Christian group living in Syria, descending from the ancient Franks, of whom the late Fakhr al-Din had been the exemplary leader; as an aside, Ecchellen recounted how the *amir*, while teaching him the Arab way of lance fighting, had deplored Europe's lack of interest in a common attack on Islam—presumably as embodied in the Ottomans—to regain the country where Christianity had originated.

This heavily political dedication obviously meant to appeal to some vague notions that France's political leader was known to entertain. Yet, after his own, earlier experiences with the lukewarm French support of the plans of Fakhr al-Din, Ecchellen cannot really have thought the Cardinal still intended to organize a crusade, but fact was that France showed quite a serious interest in extending its influence in the Levant, both commercial and political. Religion was one means to this end, and Richelieu had personally financed Sionita's Arabic translation of the Catechism, which then had been freely distributed in Syria and Lebanon.

Undeniably, Ecchellen had used his year in Paris as best he could; though it is difficult to determine the quality of Ecchellen's personality, and his real stance in this row, at least in that respect, Sionita's accusations against him were entirely ungrounded. In his letters to his friend and helper Lucas Holstenius, who furnished him with Roman material that could not be had in Paris, Abraham tried to analyse the current problems, offering some of the explanations cited above: Sionita was lazy, indeed, and did suspect him of trying to gain all the credit for the Arabic and Syriac versions of the *Polyglotta*; moreover, many Frenchmen were jealous of both of them; but he, Ecchellen, enjoyed Richelieu's respect.

Ecchellen also wrote Holste that pamphlets presenting the various points of view had appeared, to yet increase the tumult. But though even the papal *nuncio* had intervened on his behalf and the prime minister did indeed back him as well, the situation remained highly unpleasant.

Of course, work suffered from it, too, though he and others continued to watch to its quality. They now discussed the question whether

or not all manuscript versions in Arabic and Syrian existing in Rome should be consulted, after copies have been made with Barberini's consent; in view of expediency, Ecchellen favoured a limited approach, using the Arabic Bible manuscript of the convent of San Pietro in Montorio, only.⁶⁴

Meanwhile, the importance of the Paris Polyglotta already was being internationally acknowledged. Much support was given by English scholars. Amongst others, Ecchellen's friend Edward Pocock (1604–1691), professor of Arabic at Oxford, had offered his help to the Parisians, afterwards using their version of the *Pentateuch* as the basis for his part of the London Bible.⁶⁵ In 1657, Bishop Brian Walton finally produced an English *Polyglotta*.

In November 1641, Ecchellen again wrote to Holste,⁶⁶ asking him to present his edition of the letters of Antonius Magnus to Cardinal Barberini and announcing his return. The troubles with the Polyglotta had been solved by him to everybody's content; obviously, he referred to a contract that he had signed with Le Jay and Sionita as long ago as August, 15, which gave him the final responsibility for the Arabic, Latin and Syriac translations and edition of the books Baruch, Esther, Judith, Maccabees, Ruth and Tobias, to be produced on the basis of manuscripts from the Maronite Colleges in Rome and Ravenna as well as the Old Testament manuscript formerly belonging to Rizzi.⁶⁷

The third Italian period: 1642–1644

Early February 1642, Ecchellen left Paris for Rome, against Richelieu's express wishes—the Prime Minister offered him a professorship at the Collège Royale and a stipend of 600 *scudi* a year—but on Cardinal Barberini's clear orders. His friend Jean Morin praised his work in a letter of recommendation to the Roman orientalist scholar Abbot Hilarion Rancati,⁶⁸ indicating everybody hoped for Ecchellen's speedy return to France and remarking, rather disparagingly “*quae enim ad litteras spectant multo commodius Parisiis quam Romae instruuntur et conficiuntur*”, thus

⁶⁴ Ecchellen to Holste, March 29, and November 22, 1641, in: *BAV, BL*, Vol. 6499, fols. 1^r–2^v; 3^r.

⁶⁵ *Idem*, *ibidem*.

⁶⁶ *Idem*, f. 3^r, Ecchellen to Holste, Paris, November 22, 1641.

⁶⁷ *Epistola*, *o.c.*, 146.

⁶⁸ *Antiquitates*, *o.c.*, 300–301, Morin to Roncati, January 16, 1641.

implicitly referring to the cultural rivalry between the two towns and their courts that manifested itself all through the first half of the 17th century and must have been the very reason why the Cardinal-*Padrone* wished to attach the rising young scholar once more to the Roman Curia. When Morin, trying his best, warmly recommended his friend to the Cardinal,⁶⁹ suggesting Ecchellen really should be allowed to return to France, Barberini replied that he needed Ecchellen's expertise to help defend the ancient traditions of the Church against the attacks of all sorts of free thinkers.⁷⁰

We know little to nothing about Ecchellen's activities during the next two years. He probably resumed his former tasks at the college of the Propaganda, but he also must have started working on some projects that matured in later years, viz. a follow-up on his edition of the letters of Antonius Magnus and an edition of the Arabic version of the constitutions of the Council of Nicea.⁷¹

Meanwhile, Paris still beckoned, perhaps the more so when, after the death of Urban VIII, the Barberini were temporarily out of favour. In 1644, we find Ecchellen writing to Jean Morin in answer to a series of detailed questions about Maronite liturgy, the disposition of Maronite churches and a number of other characteristics of the Oriental Church.⁷² Obviously, Morin was already collecting some of the material which, some ten years later, was published in his great compilation of texts on Eastern liturgy and ritual, about which they continued to correspond.⁷³ As an afterthought, Ecchellen complained that old friends like Le Jay had 'done nothing for him', and that he was now 'writing to Mazarin', viz. to Giulio Mazarini—Cardinal Jules Mazarin in his French guise—, who was then at the first height of his power as France's new prime minister. Apparently, his scheme was successful. Assisted by another Cardinal Mazarini, the prime minister's brother Michele, Ecchellen now obtained a position as royal interpreter for Arabic and Syriac. The lordly stipend of 900 *scudi* annually that, to

⁶⁹ *Idem*, 302–303, Morin to Barberini, January 16, 1641.

⁷⁰ *Idem*, 306–307, Barberini to Morin, February s.d., 1642.

⁷¹ M. Breydy, 'Abraham Ecchellensis et les Canons Arabes de Nicée', in: *Parole d'Orient*, X (1981–1982), 223–225. The Nicea-text used by Ecchellen may have been: *BAV, Barberini Orientali*, Vol. 111.

⁷² *Antiquitates*, o.c., 326–334, Ecchellen to Morin, April 22, 1644.

⁷³ J. Morin, *Commentarius de Sacris Ecclesiae Orationibus* (Paris 1655). Cfr. the letters in *Antiquitates*, o.c., 449–470, 473–475 and 478–480, from 1654 and 1655; cfr. also *Epistola*, o.c., 277–285, Ecchellen to Morin, July 13, 1654, on questions of Maronite ritual.

his obvious content, he negotiated, indicates that this cannot have been a mere sinecure. It also necessitated a second transfer to France.⁷⁴

In Paris, the two projects Ecchellen had undertaken in Rome were published in 1645 and 1646. Quite probably, they had been financed by the man to whom Abraham dedicated them,⁷⁵ Cardinal Barberini, whose ideas they fitted very neatly indeed. Barberini himself, in these years, lived in Paris, where he had taken voluntary exile.

In his introduction to the 1645 *Concilii Niceani Praefatio una cum titulis et argumentis Canonum et Constitutionum eiusdem, qui hactenus apud Orientales nationes extant, nunc primum ex Arabica lingua Latine redditi ab Abrahamis Ecchellensi ... cum eiusdem notis*, Ecchellen explicitly states that the present decrees and dogma's of the Church are in complete accordance with the early Christian ones, notwithstanding the arguments of latitudinarians and heretics. He first raises an issue which, I think, from then on became the basic reason behind his future projects, when he argues that in almost every field of culture and scholarship, Arabic texts have retained much that has been lost in the West; just so in theological and canonical matters, for a comparison between the Greek and Latin versions of the Council's decrees on the one hand, and the Arabic manuscripts on the other has shown that the Oriental tradition is much stronger; in a series of extensive notes, Ecchellen elaborates this point, specifically drawing attention to the 44th Nicean canon which gave the patriarch of Alexandria the title of *metropolit*e, thus establishing him as the virtual head of the Christian Church, a role which was then assumed by the Roman pontiff.

In 1646, Ecchellen published his *Sapientissimi patris nostri Antonii Magni abbatis regulae, sermones, documenta, admonitiones, responsiones et vita duplex*, which, obviously, was the fruit of his previous Roman research.⁷⁶ According to the preface, the author had promised Cardinal Barberini to continue his Antonine studies. For this purpose, he had consulted manuscripts both in the Vatican Library and the Maronite College, but also a text provided by Giovanni Battista Maro, a scholarly monk of the Roman church of Sant'Angelo in Pesceria—a Maronite, it would seem—as well as some texts brought to the Roman monastery of San

⁷⁴ On the financial side of his Parisian stay: Ecchellen to Holste, September 16, 1645, in: *BAV, BL*, Vol. 6499, f. 4^r.

⁷⁵ Ecchellen to Holste, 16 September 1645, in: *BAV, BL*, Vol. 6499, f. 4^r.

⁷⁶ On the printing of this text: Ecchellen to Holste, September 16, 1645, in: *BAV, BL*, Vol. 6499, f. 4^r.

Pietro in Montorio by a Franciscan monk, formerly papal commissioner of the Holy Land, one Andreas Arcuensis. The latter, very old manuscripts collected, under the title *Clavis Ianuae Paradisi*, both a *Vita* of Saint Anthony and the texts of some monastic hymns invoking the saint. Ecchellen's scholarly attitude was such that he could plainly state there was no proof of the sermons etcetera actually having been written by Saint Anthony; a very old tradition, however, which was explicit in the manuscript, connects these writings with the saint and should therefore be accepted.

The second French period: 1644–1651

While in Paris, Ecchellen basked in Mazarin's favour. It became manifest in the professorship of Arabic and Syriac at the Collège Royal which, according to Ecchellen's own saying, was specifically created for him by the prime minister and the Grand Chancellor of France, Pierre Seguier. It brought him another 360 *scudi* a year. This largesse, of course, was bound to once more create professional jealousy, and so it did.

Other professors at the Collège started vilifying their Maronite colleague, targeting their attack on his Polyglot past.⁷⁷ One Valerian de Flavigny, who held the chair of Hebrew, maintained that the Hebrew version of the Bible, being the oldest, was the only trustworthy one, characterizing the Vulgate as a work that was a "*rivulus turbidissimus, cisterna dissipata* [which] *aquas continere non potest*." Having based his own translations on, amongst other texts, the Vulgate, Ecchellen took his pen and wrote a flaming defence, arguing that as the Hebrew version had been authenticated after the Babylonian exile by Ezra and a council of elders, so the popes and the Council of Trent had authorized the Vulgate—and, moreover, one could not very well maintain that the Synagogue had received the Holy Spirit's support to the same measure as Holy Church, or could one? Besides, the Hebrew version was far from purely Mosaic, or even prophetic: the text had been corrupted, both intentionally, by the rabbinical tradition, and unintentionally, by the many copyists. Then, of course, there was the problem created by the invention and introduction of a system of dots

⁷⁷ The story of this episode in: *Epistola*, o.c., 3–165, as well as in Ecchellen's autobiographical notes in: ASR, FCF, Vol. 64.

by the post-Talmudic rabbis of Tiberias, which had greatly complicated the text. According to Ecchellen, Flavigny knew next to nothing of the manifold problems involved in deciphering Hebrew, Arabic and Syriac texts with or without the vocalization and other signs involved.

In two long letters to the public,⁷⁸ Ecchellen presented his arguments, which created a huge row with Flavigny. As a Frenchman and a nobleman, a canon of Reims cathedral, a doctor of the Sorbonne and a professor at the Collège Royal, this worthy felt insulted as never before in his life, and finally tried to drag Ecchellen to court, a move, however, which caused the entire Sorbonne to square behind the foreigner. Whether the account given by the Huguenot scholar Pierre Bayle, writing some decades later, can be trusted, remains unclear;⁷⁹ he maintains it all went back to a mistake made by Flavigny's printer, and soon acknowledged by the learned professor, though Ecchellen went on attacking him.

In the meantime, the now ageing Sionita saw his chance to settle an old account and entered the arena with a pamphlet that accused Ecchellen of privateering—in the Mediterranean—and profiteering—in accepting a salary of some 3000 *livres* annually without producing anything worthwhile for the *Polyglotta*.⁸⁰ This, of course, was a hit below the belt, and Ecchellen hardly can be blamed for retaliating in kind, with a letter that not only set things straight biographically

⁷⁸ [Abraham Ecchellen] *Epistola apologetica (Prima, Altera), in qua diluuntur calumniae ac imposturae quamplures adversus Syriacam Libelli Ruth editionem et eius Latinam versionem, a magistro Valeriano de Flavigny congestae*, [Paris 1647, 1648]. The first two pamphlets in this apologetic work (1–112; 115–165) are directed against De Flavigny.

⁷⁹ Up till now unnoticed is the additional, rather gossipy material provided by: P. Bayle, *Dictionnaire Historique et Critique* (Basle 1741, sixth edition), Vol. II, 335–336, as well as the summary of this article in: L. Moreri, *Le Grand Dictionnaire Historique* (Paris 1759), Vol. IV, *in voce* Ecchellensis; my attention to this source was kindly drawn by my colleague Mrs. Dr L. van Lieshout. I have not introduced Bayle's data in my text because his comments on Ecchellen's behaviour in the Flavigny-case seem inspired by religious-political reasons, mainly; Bayle obviously did not take kindly to the fact that in the famous debate between Arnauld and Claude, the former used some small piece of evidence produced by Ecchellen, concerning Melchite religion; Claude, in his turn, tried to discredit his opponent's source by accusing Ecchellen of having disrupted life in the Maronite College in Rome, having cheated on Fakhr al-Din, having been imprisoned in Florence, et cetera; all of these quite improbable opinions are uncritically reproduced by the self-confessed critical Bayle.

⁸⁰ *Epistola, o.c.*, 183–185.

speaking, but also managed to take Sionita to task about his defective knowledge of Arabic and Syriac, especially where the sticky problems of vocalization were concerned.⁸¹

Cardinal Mazarin, who at this time was bolstering up his power by establishing himself as one of France's foremost patrons of the arts and sciences, in return for his protection expected Ecchellen to help him build the great library which was one of the most clamorous manifestations of his cultural leadership and constituted a sort of long-term propagandistic investment; for as with the Barberini Library in Rome, scholars who were enabled and encouraged to consult the treasures of Mazarin's library often published the contents of the precious manuscripts contained therein in editions which, of course, then spread the collector's fame even more widely.

This precisely was what Ecchellen himself did in publishing one of the results of his perusal of Mazarin's Arabic and Syriac manuscripts and mentioning the Cardinal's name in the title. He had discovered an Arabic text, the *Tā'lim al-muta'allim*, by Burhan al-Din al-Zarnudji, an essay on science and scholarship written, perhaps, in the year AD 1203;⁸² this, I think, must have fitted in nicely with his earlier publication on the Arabic philosophy of science, of 1641.

Though, in cases such as these, it sometimes was Ecchellen's wont to rather stress the fact that a text he thought valuable was in Arabic than describing its author as an adherent of Islam, he now identified the writer as a Hanafite lawyer who intended his work as a practical guide for medresse-students; Ecchellen also noted that the writer, not unlike St Thomas Aquinas, emphasizes Man's obligation to use God's most precious gift, that of the intellect, through which one may attain true knowledge.

In his introduction, Ecchellen discourses on the attributes and attitude that constitute the scholarly mind, and the methods by which knowledge can be gained, providing a running commentary on the

⁸¹ *Ibidem*.

⁸² Brock, *o.c.*, I, 462; suppl. I, 837. On the importance of this text: K.A. Totah, *The Contribution of Arabs to Education* (New York 1926), esp. 67–76. Other editions are the Latin one by C. Caspar, published in Leipzig in 1838, as well as the editions of Constantinople 1875, and Cairo 1914 and 1925. An English translation was produced by: G. von Grünebaum and Th.M. Abel, *Az-Zarnudji Tā'lim al-Muta'allim—Tārikh al-Ta'allum. Instruction of the Student: the Method of Learning* (New York 1947).

Prophet Muhammed's *dicta* in this field. He explains that, notwithstanding the Prophet's rather negative attitude to the world of learning, philosophy and logic are important elements of Islamic culture, more specifically referring to the efforts of the Caliph al-Ma'mun (AD 786–833) to further the cause of scholarship by, amongst other things, promoting the translation of early Greek and Christian scientific texts—here, of course, Ecchellen referred to the activities of the famous 'House of Wisdom', established at Baghdad by this caliph.

Short as it was, in Ecchellen's opinion this particular tract provided a succinct guide to a very important topic, useful for Christians, too. The analogy seems obvious, the more so when Ecchellen points to some Arabic manuscripts which he deems of great interest to European culture, viz. the as yet unpublished *Decades* of Livy, in the royal library of the Escorial, the *Konika* of Apollonius of Perge, in the grandducal library of Tuscany, and some Aristotelian and Euclidian treatises in Mazarin's collection. As we will see, he already was outlining his own publication program for the years to come.

In his dedication to Pierre Seguier, Ecchellen also mentioned the friendship shown to him by men like Le Jay, Gaulmain, Mondin and Thevenot—whom we shall meet again—indicating, of course, the circle of Parisian orientalists who must have been his natural milieu. The importance of the text and of Ecchellen's translation was obvious, as appears from the fact that in 1709 it was again published, now in Utrecht, by the famous Dutch orientalist Hadrianus Reland, as: *Enchiridion Studiosi, Arabice conscriptum a Borchaneddino Alzernouchi, cum duplici versione Latina, altera a Frederico Rostgaard, sub auspiciis Josephi Banesii, Maronitae Syri, Romae elaborata, altera Abrahami Ecchellensi.*

Mazarin's maecenate glory was again extolled in Ecchellen's next Parisian publication, *De proprietatibus ac virtutibus medicis animalium, plantarum ac gemmarum tractatus triplex, auctore Habdarrahmano Asiutensi Aegyptio...ex ms. codice Bibliothecae Eminentissimi Cardinalis Mazarini.* Two months before this book appeared, Mazarin had acquired some one hundred Arabic manuscripts, and Ecchellen had started to work on an inventory; while cataloguing these texts, he discovered this particular treatise, which he collated with another one from the library of the Oratorians. To the edition, he added two further treatises, both from the rich manuscript collection of his friend Melchisedech Thevenot (1620?–1692). Whereas the first one dealt with the curative possibilities of animal products, the second discussed the medicinal properties of plants and the third those of gems; the three of them are now known to be the

Diwan al-hayawan of one and the same 15th-century author, Abdarrahan bin Abu Bakr Djalal al-Din al-Suyuti (1445–1508).⁸³

In his notes Ecchellen, as well as using other manuscripts from the Mazarin-collection, also drew upon his personal experience, as when he tells that he owed his knowledge of gems partly to the Polish court jeweler, Giovanni Battista Iona, who for long years had lived in Cairo. In the dedication to Francois Vautier, a famous lawyer as well as medical doctor, formerly court physician to Queen Maria de'Medici, Ecchellen found an opportunity to draw attention to the Arab or rather Islamic world view, when he wrote: “tota scientiae ratio bipartita distinguitur apud Arabes sapientes (...) in illum scilicet, quae ad animos pertinet, sive legem, atque in illam, quae ad corpora spectat, sive medicinam”, thus once again stressing the importance of learning from Arab culture, to strengthen the Christian position.

Questioned about what occupied Ecchellen's attention between 1646 and 1651, the sources again remain silent, although we know he contributed a piece on the Eastern pre-sanctification liturgy to the great work of a Roman contemporary and, indeed, colleague of his, Leone Allacci's *De Ecclesiae occidentalis atque orientalis perpetuae consensione*, another of Rome's propagandistic offensives against the Protestant influence in the Orthodox world, which was published in Cologne in 1648.

However, we may infer that Ecchellen must have been studying quite a number of topics if we are to believe a list he gave to Carlo Cartari, though most of the items on it have not resulted in a publication or, for that matter, in manuscripts that have come down to us.⁸⁴ Still, certain questions which he may have been pondering did, in one way or another, return in works published after 1651, but it seems that several important projects which Ecchellen may have been working on in these very years did not come to full fruition.

Thus, for example, his plan to edit various writings of St. John Maro, the real founding father of the Maronite Church. Ecchellen never realized the publication of the saint's treatises, nor did he manage to edit, as he planned, the tracts he had discovered on such topics as the Jacobite liturgy, Church hierarchy, monophysitism, monotheletism and Nestorianism—the last three, obviously, aimed at a proper definition of the Maronite stance especially as to the true nature of the Christ.⁸⁵

⁸³ Brock., *o.c.*, II, 143, 158.

⁸⁴ *ASR, FCF*, Vol. 64, ff. 83^{r-v}.

⁸⁵ *Idem*, f. 84^r, according to a later note from Ecchellen, dated November 12, 1657.

Another theme that had interested Ecchellen for a long time, seems to have occupied his thoughts in Paris as well. Among the projects he listed, one was described as *Paralleli seu collatio dogmatum orientalium nationum cum dogmatibus Ecclesiae Romanae et protestantium ubi ad oculum demonstratus orientales in nullo convenire articulo cum Protestantibus, ex iis qui ipsos inter et Ecclesia Romana controvertentur uti iactant*. This, of course, ties up with his Nicean publication, as well as with a letter which he wrote, and published, on request of Barthold Nihusius, a learned Dutch convert who, as a priest, first worked in the Netherlands and then became auxiliary bishop of Mainz, *De usu communionis sub unius specie apud Orientales*.⁸⁶ Nihusius had enlisted Ecchellen's help against the many efforts made in the 1640s and '50s by Dutch, English and German Protestants especially, to come to terms in one way or another with other non-Roman, Christian Churches. In this cause, Hugo Grotius wrote his tract on the truth of Christianity (1622; 1640) to propagate the Protestant version of the Christian faith in the Arab-speaking world; his text had been translated into Arabic by Ecchellen's friend Edward Pocock; he himself contributed an Arabic rendering of the Anglican catechism and liturgy to this cause, whereas Johann Heinrich Hottinger gave the Near East his Arabic translation of the *Confessio Helvetica*.

Whereas this policy of the Protestant nations naturally chagrined Rome, it also grated on the mind of Ecchellen and his likes, the more so as the Maronite must have interpreted these overtures as proof that his Church still was considered different, not in communion with Rome, whereas precisely part of his own scholarly work had been directed towards establishing the historicity of this very union.

In 1655, Ecchellen's work in this field reached its final attainment with the publication, in Mainz—perhaps through Nihusius?—, of a text whose title was its programme: *Concordia nationum christianorum, per Asiam, Africam et Europam, in fidei catholicae dogmatibus, apud borealis Europae Protestantes deseri, contra fas, pronuper coeptis, indicata ab Abrahamo Ecchellensi, Maronita, et Leone Allatio, Graeco. Juncta sunt Bartholdi Nihusii duo ad Protestantium eorundem Academicos programmata*. In it, he argued that the representatives of the Eastern Churches, in complete accordance with the teachings of, not to say subservient to the Roman primate, proclaimed Rome's right to rule the Christian world, indeed the World.

⁸⁶ *ASR, FCF*, Vol. 64, f. 83^v.

Some projects that may have been started in Paris, whether during his first or his second stay, never were finished, either. Amongst them was, perhaps, Ecchellen's Latin translation of the 'Geography' of Abu al-Fida Isma'il bin Ali (1273–1331), prince of Hamsa.⁸⁷ The existence of this important text among the *Vaticani Orientali* manuscripts was known to that inveterate hoarder of geographical information, Lucas Holste who, already in 1628, had asked Barberini to find him a man well-versed in Arabic to provide a Latin translation of the very long, descriptive title of Abu al-Fida's treatise, which he wanted to include in his projected 'History of Ancient Geography'.⁸⁸ Apparently, Barberini had asked a Maronite scholar who at that time was studying the Vatican Arabic manuscripts, Vittorio Scialac Accurra, or rather Nasrallah Shalak al-Akuri, the founder of the Maronite College in Ravenna,⁸⁹ though coming up with a paraphrase of sorts, he finally noted: 'This book cannot be understood, either in its entirety or in parts.'⁹⁰ In the same year, Ecchellen, then still a pupil at the Maronite College, had been consulted when Accurra sold a collection of Arabic manuscripts to the *Vaticana*.⁹¹

Whether, at a later stage, he was tempted to try his hand where his learned compatriot had failed, we do not know. Fact is that a translation, in his hand, of the greater part of Abu al-Fida's *Geography* now exists among the Barberini manuscripts.⁹² However, since we know that Thevenot used parts of Ecchellen's translation for his famous collection of *Relations de divers Voyages* (Paris, 1666)—specifically for the parts about Hind and Sind, or "Les climats Alhend et Alsend de la Geographie d'Abulfeda"—it is equally possible that Ecchellen only started working on this project when he met Thevenot during his first Parisian stay.

⁸⁷ A definite edition was published by: J.F. Reinaud, ed., *Geographie d'Aboulfeda*, Vols. I–III (Paris 1848–1883), which does not acknowledge Ecchellen's translation; nor did F. Wüstenfeld, ed., *Abulfedae Tabulae Quaedam Geographicae nunc primum Arabice editit, Latine vertit, notis illustravit* (Göttingen 1833).

⁸⁸ L. Holste to N. de Peiresc, February 11, 1628, in: J. Boissonnade, ed., *Lucae Holstenii Epistolae ad Diversos* (Paris 1817), 80.

⁸⁹ Raphael, *o.c.*, 61, note 2; Ricerche, *o.c.*, 285. Accurra was a professor at the *Sapienza* from 1610–1631. He wrote a hitherto unknown *Nationis Maronitarum Defensio*: see *BAV, Manoscritti Borgiani Latini*, Vol. 30, ff. 1–263^v.

⁹⁰ *BAV, Vat. Lat.*, Vol. 7763, ff. 42^{r-v}; he translated Abu al-Fida's work as the *Liber Dispositionis Regionum*.

⁹¹ *BAV, Vat. Lat.*, Vol. 7763, f. 93^r, Ecchellen's account, together with Georgius Maronius, Maronite archbishop of Cyprus. The list of manuscripts is on ff. 89^{r-v}.

⁹² *BAV, BL*, Vol. 317, ff. 1^r–64^r. Ecchellen gives as his title: *Liber Directionis Regionum*.

Though Ecchellen's full manuscript never got to the stage of publication, in 1650 part of the Abu al-Fida 'Geography' was translated and published in London by the Englishman John Greaves as the *Chorasmiae et Mawarabnahrae (...) descriptio*, while such oriental scholars as the Dutchmen Thomas Erpenius and Jacob Golius and the Englishman Edward Pocock used it, too. A full edition was only published in the 19th century.

Ecchellen stayed in Paris till 1651, at last even occupying quarters in the building of the newly established Bibliothèque Royale.⁹³ But then a summons came from Rome. Once again, the cardinals of the Congregation of the Propaganda, now headed by Cardinal Capponi, had decided that Ecchellen's qualities were needed in the papal capital rather than in Paris; they may well have thought that a man of his experience might be better employed in the service of the pope—working for the Propagation of the Faith as well as spreading the fame of the Eternal City as a centre of learning—than in the service of the French king who, to many policy-makers at the Curia, did not exactly behave as the head of a state which prided itself on being the Church's obedient eldest 'son'. Consequently, Ecchellen was recalled to assist in the preparation of the Roman Arabic version of the Bible, as well as to act as interpreter for Arabic and Syriac.

Before leaving France on March 21, 1651, Ecchellen witnessed the publication of yet another result of his diligent research, the *Chronicon Orientale (...) cui accessit eiusdem supplementum Historiae orientalis*, a volume in folio—beautifully illustrated by the Royal Printing Office with engravings for the *incipit*-letters—apparently sponsored, once again, by Chancellor Seguier. Ecchellen tells his readers that he is on the brink of returning to Italy, which has made the writing of a long introduction impossible; however, the extensive notes give a great deal of information; they have been assembled from various manuscript sources, such as texts in the Royal Library, thanks to the friendship of the Du Puy-brothers, and in the libraries of Guilbert Gaulmain, Mazarin and Seguier, but they are based on data collected by Thevenot as well.

The text in question is a rather simple world chronicle, produced in the Eastern part of the Mediterranean, which takes history up to the Roman emperors, continuing with lists of the caliphs, the local rulers

⁹³ *ASR, FCF*, Vol. 64, f. 81r.

of Egypt and Syria, and the patriarchs of Alexandria. Ecchellen did not know the name of the author—we now know it was written in or around the year AD 1259 by Petrus Abu Shakir ibn Rahib Abu Karam ibn Muhaddib⁹⁴—but the manuscript had disclosed that he was an Egyptian Copt, a monk and a patriarch of Alexandria himself.

Up till 1626, the manuscript had been in the possession of a Maronite priest called Elias, from Ehden in Lebanon—probably the eponymous abbot of the order of St. Anthony, whom Ecchellen would have met in the early 1630's—, who had discovered and copied the text in Cairo. Ecchellen had purchased his copy and now gave the text to the world, with a quite specific purpose that, once again, neatly dovetails with his earlier ventures.

Europe, according to him, knows far too little about the Near East, a region that is of the utmost importance to it; the people of the Orient are seen as uncivilized, ignorant, even by such learned worthies as the late Joseph Justus Scaliger, who read a great number of Arabic texts but understood little ...⁹⁵

To redress this situation, Ecchellen accompanied his edition of the chronicle with a true work of his own, actually the first large-scale text he ever wrote, a *Historia Araborum ab eorum origine usque ad Pseudopropheta Mahometum (...) in duas divisa partes*. This, in fact, is a description of early Arab culture, especially in the fields of chronology and historiography, as well as a survey of pre-Islamic Arab religion and philosophy, obviously meant both to correct ideas and views created and spread by such orientalist as Scaliger, and to enlighten the European public about the value of Arab civilization, which existed in its own right despite being 'tainted' by Islam.

Back to Rome for the last time: 1651 and onwards

Ecchellen arrived in Rome on May 12, 1651. The Congregation of the Propaganda gave him 120 *scudi* a year for his job as interpreter and assistant, rather paltry in comparison to his lordly Parisian earnings, plus the promise of the chair of Arabic at the *Sapienza* on the

⁹⁴ Cfr. L. Cheikho (ed.), *Petrus ibn Rahib. Chronicon Orientale. Interpretationem olim ab Abrahami Ecchellensi institutam, tum a I.S.Assemano revisam, iterum ad fidem Arabici textus recognovit P.L. Cheikho* (Beirut-Paris-Leipzig 1903). On Rahib's authorship: VI.

⁹⁵ A. Ecchellen, *Chronicon Orientale*, o.c., 275sqq.

retirement of the incumbent, Father Filippo Guadagnolo.⁹⁶ Perhaps Ecchellen complained, or else the authorities may have felt that something more rewarding was, indeed, called for: on March 5, 1652, the cardinals of the Propaganda decided to once again endow a chair of Syriac at the *Sapienza*, with Ecchellen as the new holder.

With this combination of tasks, the Maronite must have been quite fully occupied, but it did not keep him from his research, as became clear in 1653, when the famous Press of the Propaganda published his *Ope Domini Nostri Iesu Christi incipimus scribere Tractatum (...) auctore Hebediesu, metropolita Sobiensi, Latinitate donatum et notis illustratum*. The work was dedicated to Cardinal Antonio Barberini, Chancellor of the Church, Cardinal-prefect of the Propaganda, Grand Almoner of France and Bishop of Poitiers. This choice, of course, had its political reasons, as always, but it was an appropriate one as well, because of Ecchellen's purpose with the publication of this particular text.

It all went back to a manuscript belonging to the Roman monastery of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, where the abbot, Don Hilarion Rancati, ranked as a competent oriental scholar as well as a patron of letters. He had drawn Ecchellen's attention to a list of Chaldean writers compiled, as Ecchellen wrongly thought, by a late 15th-century convert from Nestorianism to Christendom, one Hebediesu;⁹⁷ men like Leone Allacci, of the Vatican Library, and Giovanni Battista Maro, canon of Sant'Angelo in Pesceria had urged Ecchellen to edit and publish the text since it would serve an important goal, viz. to show the full extent of scholarly literature in Chaldean and Syriac that could support the appeal to tradition now necessary to Rome in its struggle against heretics and free thinkers.⁹⁸ Consultation of this corpus also would help to purge Greek and Latin texts of the many corrupted passages they contained. Finally, a better understanding of the Oriental scholarly production would show that however many the differences between the Roman and the Oriental Churches—differences that were constantly being magnified by the papacy's critics—there was, in the Near East, a region with its own culture, its own languages, and yet in fundamental union with Rome.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ On Guadagnolo: *ASR, FCF*, Vol. 64, ff. 64^v–66^r and 236^r–239^v.

⁹⁷ A. Ecchellen, *Ope Domini, o.c.*, 16–17; for the correct attribution: Graf, *o.c.* III, 357.

⁹⁸ *Idem*, 129sqq.

⁹⁹ *Idem*, 20–23.

Actually, Hebediesu's bibliography, to which Ecchellen added a number of titles by Arabic writers whom he deemed important, only seems to have been the excuse for a longish apologetic introduction and a series of very extensive notes, loosely connected to the listed items. Thus, there is a fifty-page discussion with such scholars as Arnold Boot and James Ussher on the origin of the vocalizing signs in Syriac, and the way this problem interferes with a proper reading and interpretation of the Syriac version of the Old Testament.¹⁰⁰

Clearly this reached back to the controversy between Ecchellen, Sionita and Flavigny, but also to the Maronite's efforts to strike at those heretics who tried to combat Rome by appropriating the Eastern tradition. Besides its other effects, this 1653-publication of Ecchellen's apparently did engender a debate among orientalists, for we find Ecchellen's old friend Jean Morin writing to him on such questions as whether in Hebrew and Samaritan vocalizing signs existed from the beginning, and whether the Arabs always used them as well. Another question of his was how Jewish women and children, not being schooled in grammar, ever could have read the sacred texts if they did not know the vocalizing rules? Would it be possible to use some verses of the Syriac Pentateuch—bought in 1629 by Nicholas de Peiresc from a Maronite monastery, soon to become one of the touchstone manuscripts for biblical scholarship¹⁰¹—to indicate what the actual pronunciation of words might have been?¹⁰² Ecchellen's answer, in which he entered into numerous grammatical details, took some nine months, not surprisingly, for from another source we know that his last publication had landed him in some quite unexpected troubles.¹⁰³

Apparently, the reigning Pope, Innocent X had taken umbrage at the way Ecchellen had mentioned Antonio Barberini's French connections, congratulating him on having been named grand almoner of France, and stressing his pastoral and fiercely anti-heretical activities in his see. The short of it was that Ecchellen was in disgrace and even considered returning to Paris. It is not clear what was the outcome of this episode, but in the end the Maronite scholar did not leave the Eternal City.

¹⁰⁰ *Idem*, 82–248.

¹⁰¹ See: Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, *Mss. Fonds Français, Vol. 9452*, ff. 1^r–3^r. for the acquisition, as well as: Rietbergen, The making of a 'Syncretic Saint', a.c., passim.

¹⁰² *Antiquitates, o.c.*, 422–423, Ecchellen to Morin, October 8, 1653.

¹⁰³ *Idem*, 446–448, Father René Goetzalde, S.J., from Rome, to Morin in Paris, April 20, 1654.

Ecchellen, the Vatican Library and European Oriental studies

When, in 1655, Innocent died and was succeeded by Cardinal Fabio Chigi, who assumed the papal name of Alexander VII (1655–1667), things in Rome began to change, at least in the field of culture.¹⁰⁴ In contrast to the previous pontiff, the new pope again was a patron of the arts and sciences on the grand scale, like Ecchellen's first Roman patron, Urban VIII, and his nephew Francesco Barberini.

Alexander's vision of a *Roma Restaurata* not only extended to grandiose building programs but also encompassed the world of learning. Actually, one of his major obsessions was the need to restore Rome to its erstwhile position as the leading intellectual centre of Europe, the capital not only of the Papal States and of the Christian world but also of the Republic of Letters.¹⁰⁵ Combating the heretics and all those who, within the Church, wished to detract from Rome's authority was his main policy aim, as it had been Ecchellen's ideal, too. This battle, of course, had to be waged on the field of scholarship, with the intellect and books as the chosen weapons. Hence the position of the papal university was considerably strengthened once more, the salaries of the professors were raised and publication facilities were created.

In this climate, Ecchellen started upon his last great work. His last, for another project, the publication of a *Biblioteca Orientalis, in qua non solum ingens recensetur Chaldeaorum, Syrorum et Arabum librorum copia, verum etiam eorum qui in hasce linguas sunt translati*, which he mentioned in his 1658-list for Carlo Cartari, never materialized. He planned to add the catalogue to a *Tractatus de Scriptoribus Orientalibus*, which should serve in the battle with the Occidental heretics. Yet, though a printed version was not realised, a manuscript catalogue survives.¹⁰⁶

However, the very fact that we now know this project did exist may, once again, underline Ecchellen's importance within the group of Maronite orientalists who, over two centuries, contributed so much to the establishment and growth of that field of scholarship in Western Europe. Surely it is not by chance that the enterprise which assured the immortality of that other great Maronite oriental scholar, Giuseppe

¹⁰⁴ Cfr. Rietbergen, *Pausen*, o.c. (Nijmegen 1983), chapter II.

¹⁰⁵ P.J.A.N. Rietbergen, 'Papal Patronage and Propaganda. Pope Alexander VII (1655–1667), the Biblioteca Alessandrina and the Sapienza-complex', in: *Mededelingen van het Nederlands Instituut te Rome*, New Series XV (1986), 157–177.

¹⁰⁶ *BAV, Vat. Lat.*, 13200.

Simonio Assemani (1687–1768), was a *Biblioteca Orientalis* as well,¹⁰⁷ though it concentrated on the holdings of the Vatican Library instead of giving what, perhaps, even Ecchellen would not have been able to provide, a general survey of all works published in Near Eastern languages. However, even as a catalogue of the books and manuscripts in the papal collections, only, Assemani's *Biblioteca* could not have been compiled without recourse to the older Maronite's bibliographic and inventorying labours at the *Vaticana*.¹⁰⁸

For when Ecchellen had returned to Rome, he apparently felt that his future scholarly work in his chosen field inevitably would have to be based mainly upon the rich oriental holdings of the papal library. A catalogue of these treasures did not, however, exist, though books and manuscripts had been pouring in since the late 15th century, as the result of donations by successive popes, cardinal-librarians and other benefactors, but also as the outcome of the papal right of spoils, or via such exotic ways as the confiscation, by the papal inquisitor on Malta, of Turkish manuscripts captured by the Knights of St. John.¹⁰⁹

From the early decades of the 17th century onward, the Maronite orientalist in Rome had realized the importance of this collection, using it for their research and trying to get the library's management to employ one of them to ensure its proper safeguarding and making it available to the scholarly world.

The above-mentioned Abbot Vittorio Accurra, professor of Syriac at the *Sapienza* from 1610–1631 and, hence, though his chair had been abolished for some decades, Ecchellen's immediate predecessor and himself the author of a lengthy 'Defense of the Maronite Nation', had been working for the Vatican Library. So had the Maronite archbishop Sergio Rizzi who was sorting out the Syriac and Arabic manuscripts for his Syriac edition of the Bible, all the while coveting the as yet non-existent post of *scrittore* for Arabic and Syriac for his scholarly nephew Giuseppe Luna—Yusuf al-Hilali—as much as Accurra wanted it for himself.¹¹⁰

It seems that, from 1653 onwards, Ecchellen was continuing this cataloguing tradition, working on a provisional list of the Vatican's Near

¹⁰⁷ Giuseppe Simonio Assemani, *Biblioteca Orientalis Clementino-Vaticana* (Rome 1719).

¹⁰⁸ Ricerche, *o.c.*, 26.

¹⁰⁹ E. Rossi, *Elenco dei Manoscritti Turchi della Biblioteca Vaticana* (Città del Vaticano 1953), X.

¹¹⁰ Ricerche, *o.c.*, 362sqq.

Eastern manuscripts. In 1658, this resulted in a rigidly thematic catalogue that was to remain the basis of future inventories.¹¹¹ The importance of Ecchellen's contribution to the proper functioning of the *Vaticana* as a great research library did not go unnoticed. Whether it was Pope Alexander himself who realized Professor Ecchellen's worth, or his nephew, the Cardinal-librarian Flavio Chigi, we do not know, but on May 21, 1660, Abraham Ecchellense was nominated to the newly-instituted position of *scrittore* for Arabic and Syriac at the *Biblioteca Vaticana*; it was a function complementing the six traditional ones already connected with the library, viz. the two *scrittorie* for Hebrew, Greek and Latin, respectively; its institution meant a clear recognition not only of the new nominee's personal merits but, one may say, of the importance of the Near East for the cultural history of the European-Christian world in general and the papacy in particular.

In his new function, Ecchellen soon was assisted by the three Nairone-brothers, Fausto, Giovanni Mattia and Nicola, members of the Nimruni-family, who were related to him through his wife.¹¹² For after his return to Rome in 1651, Ecchellen, probably realizing he had come to stay, had married, choosing one Constantia, the daughter of Michael ibn Nimrun, originally from the Lebanese village of al-Bani but since long settled in Rome. Constantia bore him four children, three sons and a daughter. It seems Ecchellen now became a prominent member of the Roman Maronite community, not least through the patronage he obviously enjoyed from a number of powerful friends and, indeed, from Alexander VII himself. Thus, one finds the Maronite patriarch in the Lebanon writing to him on several occasions, not only thanking him for intervening with the Pope in favour of the Maronite cause, but also for his charity towards needy fellow Maronites.¹¹³

Like Ecchellen, the Nimruni-brothers had been educated at the Maronite College in Rome, and now, in various ways, stepped into the tradition of oriental scholarship of their community. But while Fausto (1625–1712) was being groomed as Abraham's successor at the

¹¹¹ *BAV, Vat. Lat.*, Vol. 13200, f. 63sqq.

¹¹² The exact relationship between the Nairone-brothers and Constantia Ecchellen is unclear; they may either have been her brothers, or her cousins, as the name of Michael an-Nimruni al-Bani is given both of her father and of the father of the three brothers.

¹¹³ On Fausto, or rather Murhidj ibn Nimrun al-Bani, see: *Nouvelle Biographie Generale*, XXVII, 141–142. His scholarly production is not overwhelming, but he did publish a *Dissertatio de origine, nomine ac religione Maronitarum* (Rome 1679).

Sapienza,¹¹⁴ and young Nicola was employed as a copyist in the Vatican Library, it was Giovanni Mattia who began to act as Abraham's amanuensis and collaborator. Together, they tried to solve the problems created by the influx of books and manuscripts resulting from Ecchellen's successful efforts to get the oriental holdings of the Neophyte College in Rome transferred to the *Vaticana*.¹¹⁵

The descriptions of the 1658 Ecchellen-Nairone catalogue of Vatican Near Eastern manuscripts, which was the first result of this collaboration,¹¹⁶ show that at least in the fields of Arabic and Syriac the two were certainly among the leading scholars of their day—so much so that Assemani paraphrased their text almost *verbatim* in his own *Biblioteca Orientalis*; however, Coptic was not their strong point, and the Turkish section is rather weak as well.¹¹⁷

All this should not make us forget that Ecchellen's purpose was not a mere catalogue, but a research tool, to be used for his own and others' scholarly work, and more specifically for the last great book he was preparing, as well as for his projected *Biblioteca*.

In 1661, the Press of the Propaganda printed Ecchellen's last work, which had been in the making for some six or seven years.¹¹⁸ Actually, it consisted of two separate studies, often found bound together as their purpose was, in fact, the same. They were *Eutychius patriarcha Alexandrinus vindicatus et suis restitutus orientalibus, sive responsio ad Johannis Seldeni Origines, in duas tributa partes, quarum prima est De Alexandrina Ecclesia Originibus, altera De Origine Nominis Papae, quibus accedit Censura in Historiam Orientalem Johannis Henrici Hottingeri Tigurini, omnia ex orientalium excerpta Monumentis*. The book was dedicated to Alexander VII, quite properly so, I think, because the subject matter was as dear to him as it had been to Urban VIII: the defence of papal primacy against the onslaughts of the usual suspects, heretics and free thinkers; their attacks had become more frequent and violent in the late 1640s and the 1650s; they now were felt to form a real threat to Rome's

¹¹⁴ Ricerche, *o.c.*, 411, 415.

¹¹⁵ *BAV, Vat. Lat.*, Vol. 13.201.

¹¹⁶ Ricerche, *o.c.*, 26.

¹¹⁷ As is shown by letters from Ecchellen to Jean Morin: *Antiquitates, o.c.*, 449–470, 473–475, and 478–480, of July 13, 1654, January 11, 1655 and April 25, 1655, respectively.

¹¹⁸ On Eutychius and his works: L. Cheikho (ed.), *Eutychii Patriarchae Alexandrini Annales* (Beirut 1906), which gives the Arabic text, as well as P. Cachin, K. Montgomery Watt (eds.), *Eutychius of Alexandria. The Book of the Demonstrations* (Louvain 1960–1961), Vols. I–II.

supremacy, the more acutely experienced by Alexander since Jansenism was spreading in the Low Countries and France, and Gallicanism was openly favoured by Louis XIV, with whom he was on far from amiable terms.

The dedication is a complicated and cunning verbal mixture of the allegorical elements used in visual propaganda during Alexander's pontificate—the mountains, the star and the oak of the Chigi coat-of-arms as the link between Heaven and Earth, between Divine Wisdom and its representative, the Church—and of Ecchellen's own obsession, the contribution of the Near East to European-Christian culture. It shows when the author addresses the Pope as follows: "*cedat igitur veritati mendacium; tuos montes adorent Sinai, Sion, Carmelus, caeteraque praeclara montium iuga; thura offerat Libanus, eiusque sublimae, ac incorruptae cedri, incorruptae fidei symbolum, vis immortalibus sese submittant quercibus*". The writers and wisdom of the Near East can help to defend the Roman tradition; the Maronites have honoured the primacy of the popes over the past eleven hundred years; in the end, the Chigi-star will prove to be a loadstar leading towards the cradle of Christ. This certainly was a neat introduction to Ecchellen's most extensive polemic ever.

In both studies, he attacks John Selden's (1584–1654) interpretation of two texts by Sa'id ibn al-Bitrik, also known as Eutychius, orthodox patriarch of Alexandria from AD 933 to 940.¹¹⁹ In each, Ecchellen gives the Arabic text, followed by Selden's Latin translation and his own version, and then goes on to comment on specific points and problems, which range from Selden's inadequate command of Arabic and his incorrect translations to his lack of knowledge of other, circumstantial evidence like a number of pertinent inscriptions on monuments in Alexandria, et cetera.

The reason behind the entire exercise was, of course, to disprove Selden's claims against the continuity between the patriarchate of Alexandria and the Roman papacy as the leading sees of the Christian world. To the discussion, Ecchellen brought an impressive array of manuscript sources that had provided him with his data, enumerating some 68 codices, of which a goodly fifteen were in his own possession.

¹¹⁹ Anaissi, *o.c.*, 127–128, a letter from the patriarch to Echellen, March 15, 1660.

Conclusion

With these rather lengthy apologetic studies, the list of Abraham Ecchellen's publications ends. Whether he continued working on the many projects that still were on his mind in 1658, we do not know. Still, the oeuvre as it stands shows a definite consistency, that marks Ecchellen as a major mediator between Mediterranean cultures who, at the same time, used his position to strengthen the power of Rome, of the papacy, precisely because he believed it to be the one uniting factor between these cultures.

He was educated in the culture of the Christian-Syrian-Arab world. It meant he was deeply attached to a religion that, though originating in his own region, now had its centre in Western Europe and was steeped in a civilisation that for long had disregarded its origins, looking upon the inhabitants of the Near East as the arch-enemies of Christendom, as people who were both infidels and barbarians. Ecchellen was greatly sensitive to the fact that the Christian part of the Near Eastern cultural complex was an integral component of Christianity as such, and may have felt that Christian civilization, precisely because of its growing Eurocentricity, had to be counterbalanced by re-introducing it to its roots; he also realized that the Arab-Islamic part of the Near Eastern cultural complex had preserved and developed a tradition of knowledge and scholarship that Christianity, and Christian-European culture could not let go unheeded.

Ecchellen's lifework aimed to bring about this re-introduction through making available to Europe some of the products of a culture that not only was its nearest neighbour but also, albeit partly, had grown from the same roots. Cultural diversity—Ecchellen never denied that many elements in the praxis of the Oriental churches differed considerably from the Roman canon—within fundamental theological unity would enable the Roman Catholic Church to stand strong against the waves of dissidence, heterodoxy and heresy.

Yet, one should also see Ecchellen's significance in another light. In his life and works he seems the personification of the Maronites, a group that, while trying to achieve a certain synthesis between the two dominant Mediterranean cultures, the (Christian-)European and the (Islamic-)Arab, was at the same time torn between them. Even in the 21st century, a synthesis as visualised by Ecchellen may remain a dream only, as seems to be shown by the history of Abraham's very own Lebanon.

Abraham Ecchellen died on July 15, 1664. Even if no monument to his memory was erected in Rome—though in Paris his name adorns the façade of the Mazarin's proud foundation, the Collège Royal—his work was continued. His nephew, Fausto Nairone, immediately wrote to the then grand duke of Tuscany as the head of the family who had always taken care of the Maronites in general, and of Abraham in particular;¹²⁰ he requested Grand Duke Leopold to recommend his brother Giovanni Mattia for the succession to Abraham's function as *scrittore* at the Vatican Library, while asking for himself the professorship at the *Sapienza*; whether or not through grandducal intercession, both wishes were granted by Pope Alexander,¹²¹ who, two years later, also selected Fausto as first custodian of his newly-established university library, the *Biblioteca Alessandrina*, especially charged with the care of its oriental holdings.¹²² Meanwhile Ecchellen's own manuscripts had entered the *Vaticana*, there to remain a separate collection till in the 18th century all Oriental *fondi* were united by Assemani; as indicated above, in compiling the catalogue of the new *fondo*, he heavily relied on the previous, Ecchellen-Nairone inventories.¹²³ Thus, Ecchellen indirectly helped organize and open up to the scholarly community one of the most important European repositories of Near-Eastern manuscripts.

Ecchellen's scholarly merits were made clear for the last time in a work published, on the wishes of his one-time patron, Francesco Barberini, in 1682. The *Antiquitates Ecclesiae Orientalis* brought together a great many letters exchanged by some dozen scholars from all over Europe who, between 1628 and 1651, had corresponded on topics relating to the study of Eastern Christianity—with each other and with Barberini, who, in many ways, had facilitated their work. Among such of his peers as, e.g. Leone Allacci, Jean Morin and Pietro della Valle, Abraham Ecchellen stands out conspicuously as a man who, at a time that Europe was entering a phase wherein growing 'Orientalism', now to be defined as a taste for the merely exotic, went hand in hand with a growing disdain for the very cultures that he, while standing in the Christian Maronite tradition, yet had sought to bring closer to the European mind.

¹²⁰ The letter was printed in: A. Fabroni, ed., *Lettere inedite di uomini illustri*, Vol. II (Firenze 1775), 147–149.

¹²¹ Ricerche, *o.c.*, 6, note 3.

¹²² P.J.A.N. Rietbergen, 'Creating a University Library: Pope Alexander VII and the Biblioteca Alessandrina', in: *The Journal of Library History* 22/2 (1987), 190–205.

¹²³ Ricerche, *o.c.*, 27.