Russia and the Melkites of Syria: Attempts at Reconverting into Orthodoxy in the 1850-s and 1860-s

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Abstract

Having entered into union with Rome in the 18th century, the Melkite Arab community of Syria preserved their Eastern rites and traditions. The attempts at Latinization in the mid-19th century brought a split in the community and provoked a diplomatic effort by Russia to bring the Melkites back to Eastern Orthodoxy. The raise of Arab nationalism in the 1850-s and traditions of church independence created a fertile soil for separatism. The relative weakness and inconsistency of Russian support, and especially a lack of material resources and strong diplomatic pressure from France, resulted in most of the newly converted Melkites returning to Rome by the early 1860-s. The article argues that Russian church policy in 19th century Middle East, strongly bounded by the limits of Orthodox canon law was largely ineffective. The Melkite affair was the last attempt to integrate the Arab Christians in the traditional system of the “Greek” Patriarchates. Thereafter Russian diplomacy took the course of Arabizing the Patriarchate of Antioch. The episode did, however, contribute to the elaboration of a new Vatican policy towards the Eastern Catholics: respect for their rites and traditions.

Keywords

Melkites – Uniates – Syria – Lebanon – Christian East – Orthodox church – Greek Catholicism – Christian Arabs – Ottoman Empire – Russian policy – Eastern Question

1 Introduction

The Melkite Arab community in Syria and Lebanon has since the Middle Ages occupied a special place in the history of Eastern Christianity. The first attempts at bringing the Eastern Christians of the Levant into union with the See of Rome date back to the 13th century. At that time, the Melkite church of Antioch, though strongly suppressed by the Crusaders, tried to find its own way between Byzantine rule, the Latin authorities and Muslim conquerors.¹ The struggle between the pro-Roman and pro-Byzantine camps continued throughout the 14th and 15th centuries, up to the Council of Ferrara-Florence (1439). Keeping close to the patriarchs of Constantinople, the Melkite patriarchs before the mid-15th century usually preferred to avoid open union with Rome.² The first commemoration of the Pope in the Melkite liturgy dates from 1440. After the fall of Constantinople, the Melkites preserved the Byzantine rite and evidently enjoyed a certain level of independence, continuing to elect their own bishops and priests.

A new wave of proselytism in the Orient began in the 16th century, during the Counter-Reformation, when the See of Rome started its systematic work of incorporating Eastern Christians into its religious and political sphere. The activities of Gregory XIII marked the inception of an active policy in the Middle East. By that time, Rome already had strong support in Lebanon from the Maronites, being already Latinized by the 16th century. At the same time, the first steps towards conciliation with the Ottoman Empire were made by François I of France; the Catholics of the Orient now received diplomatic support from the French crown.³

The second half of the 17th century represents the golden age for the various Catholic missions to the East (those of the Jesuits, Capuchins, and Carmelites). The number of Franciscans in the Holy Land increased from 125 in 1680 to 214 in 1727.⁴ Little by little, the missionaries began to study Arabic. In 1680, of the 71 friars at the Custody – the first missionary institution in the Middle East at

1 J. Hajjar, *Les Chrétiens uniates du Proche-Orient*, Paris, 1962, pp. 164–169; A. D'Avril, "Les Grecs Melkites: étude historique," *Revue de l'Orient Chrétien*, 3 (1898), pp. 1–30.

2 Hajjar, *Les Chrétiens uniates du Proche-Orient*, 192–194; G. Levenq, *La première mission de la Compagnie de Jesus en Syrie (1625–1774)*, Beirut, 1925; V. Laurent, "L'âge d'or des missions latines en Orient (xvii-xviii siècles)", in: *L'Unité de l'Église*, Paris, 1934; C. Korolevskij, *Histoire des Patriarchats Melkites*, vol. III, Rome, 1911.

3 B. Homsy, *Les capitulations et la protection des chrétiens au Proche-Orient aux XVI, XVII et XVIII siècles*, Harissa, 1956.

4 B. Heyberger, *Les chrétiens du Proche-Orient au temps de la Réforme catholique (Syrie, Liban, Palestine, xvii^e–xviii^e siècle)*, Rome, 2014, p. 286.

that time – only 16 knew the language; by 1760 their number had increased to 27. The Jesuits by 1773 were not so numerous. The maximum number of Carmelites in this period was 30 (in 1783).⁵

Nevertheless, the success of the Uniate movement was more than rapid, especially in the beginning of the 18th century, when the majority of Greek Catholics joined it. In 1724, Patriarch Cyril Tanas was elected with the strong endorsement of the French ambassador, and became the first Greek Catholic (Melkite) Patriarch of Antioch. Rome's confirmation was received a few years later, in 1729.⁶ From then on, Syria was regarded by the Western church and its diplomats as a future Catholic country, and the 'Greeks Schismatics' were treated as a minority to be assimilated. According to a report from 1760, in Damascus there were 10 Latin Catholic, 18 Greek Catholic (Melkite), three Maronite, two Syrian Catholic and 12 Greek Orthodox priests.⁷ The town of Aleppo by the middle of the 18th century was mainly inhabited by Uniates. The Orthodox in the villages, however, remained quite numerous.

In the 17th century, the Orthodox patriarchs of Antioch established close relations with the Russian Tsar and received regular donations from Russia.⁸ In the first half of the 18th century, however, the Orthodox church of Syria was in poor condition. The Uniate movement was progressing, and the Russian government at that time was not interested in actively supporting Eastern

5 Heyberger, *Les chrétiens du Proche-Orient*, pp. 292–294.

6 C. Korolevskij, *Histoire des Patriarchats Melkites*; J. Nasrallah, *Notes et documents pour servir à l'histoire du Patriarcat Melkite d'Antioche*, Jerusalem, 1965; Hajjar, *Les Chrétiens uniates du Proche-Orient*, pp. 242–243; A. Girard, "Quand les « grecs-catholiques » dénonçaient les « grecs-orthodoxes » : la controverse confessionnelle au Proche-Orient arabe après le schisme de 1724", in: *Discours et représentations du différend confessionnel à l'époque moderne*, eds. Chrystel Bernat et Hubert Bost, (Bibliothèque de l'École des Hautes Études – Sciences religieuses), Turnhout, 2012, pp. 157–170; *idem*, "Les melkhites de Syrie au sein du catholicisme au XVIII^e siècle: politique romaine, tensions intercommunautaires et doctrine confessionnelle", in: *Religions and Politics in Europe's Orient (s), 16th–21st c.*, eds. D. Stamatopoulos, T. Anastassiadis (forthcoming).

7 Heyberger, *Les chrétiens du Proche-Orient*, p. 294.

8 Patriarch of Antioch Makarios Zaim travelled to Russia twice (1654–1656 and 1666–1668), every time bringing back generous donations. His first journey was described by his son, Paul of Aleppo (English translation: C. Balfour, *Travels of Macarios, Patriarch of Antioch*, 2 vols, London, 1936). See: V. Grumel, "Macaire, Patriarche Grec d' Antioche," *Échos d'Orient* 27 (1928), pp. 68–77; K. A. Панченко, *Ближневосточное православие под Османским владычеством. Первые три столетия* [C. A. Panchenko, *Near East Orthodoxy under Ottoman Rule. The first three Centuries*], Moscow, 2012, pp. 371, 382–383; English translation: C. A. Panchenko, *Arab Orthodox Christians under the Ottomans 1516–1831*, Jordanville, NY, 2016; C. Walbinger, "Macarius ibn al-Za'im", in David Thomas and John Chesworth (eds.), *Christian Muslim relations. A bibliographical history, vol. 10: Ottoman and Safavid Empires (1600–1700)*, Leiden-Boston 2017, pp. 343–354.

Orthodoxy in the Levant. Patriarchs Athanasios and Sylvestros undertook long, but ultimately unsuccessful attempts to guarantee their incomes from Russia.⁹ From 1735 they were forced to be content with the modest annual sum of 100 rubles, and 35 for some of the monasteries.¹⁰ During the 18th century, Sylvestros reported about two Greek Orthodox schools in Syria. One of these was founded in 1725 in Aleppo with a Greek teacher, Jacob of Patmos. After a temporary closure, it re-opened in Tripoli in 1728.¹¹

2 The Instruments of Church Policy in the Levant

The Russo-Ottoman wars of the late 18th and early 19th century did not leave much scope for intensive ecclesial or humanitarian contacts between Russia and the church of Antioch. A new period of interaction started after the treaty of Adrianople (1829). The Catholic and Protestant missions again began to be active in the Middle East from the beginning of the 1830s. The first Protestant bishop, Michael Alexander, took up his residence in Jerusalem in 1841, while the Catholic patriarch, Giuseppe Valerga was installed there in 1847. In the meantime, the Jesuits restarted their activities in 1831, working along with the Lazarists, who had assumed control of the Jesuit institutions after the

- 9 See letters addressed to the Russian Holy Synod by Patriarch Athanasios (September 26, 1723, Российский государственный исторический архив [Russian State Historical Archives] (hereafter RGIA), f. 796, op. 5, d. 211, ff. 11–11v); by Sylvestros (June 1725, RGIA, f. 796, op. 6., d. 328; September 29, 1725, *ibid.* f. 796, op. 7, d. 133, ff. 2–4; June 1731, *ibid.*, f. 796, op. 12, d. 434, ff. 7–12v). See also: Н. П. Чеснокова, “Жалованные грамоты греческим иерархам в контексте конфессионально-политических связей России и Православного Востока в XVIII веке [N. P. Chesnokova, “Acts donated to the Greek hierarchs in the context of the relations between Russia and the Orthodox East in the XVIII-th century],” in: *Кантевские чтения [Kapterev Readings]* 17 (2019), pp. 195–196.
- 10 Probably the numerous letters and requests of the Patriarchs prompted the issuance of the “Palestinian states,” a law through which the Russian government limited the annual sums paid to each of the Eastern Orthodox institutions enlisted. These figures of donations did not change till 1914 (for the second half of the 19th century 1 ruble=2,75 francs).
- 11 In his attempts to enlighten the Orthodox Arabs in the spirit of Greek education, Patriarch Sylvestros tried to attract the Russian learned pilgrim Vasilii Grigorovich-Barskii to the Christian East. He left a precise description of the Eastern Mediterranean, its churches and Monasteries: *Странствования Василия Григоровича-Барского по святым местам Востока с 1723 по 1747 г.* [Travellings of Vasilii Grigorovich-Barskii about the Holy Places of the East between 1723 and 1747], ed. N. Barsukov, St. Petersburg, 1886. Part. 1, pp. 44–143. During his stay in Moldavia Sylvestros requested money from the Russian government for an Arabic typography in Jassy, but was refused (Patriarch Sylvestros-to Empress Elisaveta Petrovna, December 25, 1844, RGIA, f. 796, op. 26, d. 159, ff. 1–2).

suppression of the Society in 1773.¹² Both France and Rome backed all Catholic activities in Syria and Lebanon; generous financing was provided from both official and private sources.

Also after 1830 the 'Eastern Question' – the competition of the great powers for domination in the Middle East – came to the fore. Russia was also involved in this rivalry, exerting pressure over the competitors by economic means, or through military and political demarches. Ideological groundwork for the future division of the Ottoman territories was an important part of Russian policy (as it was for other antagonists), that is, creating spheres of influence and clienteles among the local population. Russia continued its traditional support of the Orthodox inhabitants of Turkey, both financially and politically.¹³ Already by the treaty of Kuchuk-Kainarji (1774), Russia de facto received the right to protect the Orthodox population of the Ottoman Empire, and widely used it up to WWI.

In practice, what did this look like in the new situation of the 1830s and 1840s? In the '30s, with Maxim Mazloum's (1833–1856) election as Melkite patriarch for the three Sees (of Jerusalem, Antioch and Alexandria), the movement towards union with Rome became again rather intensive, enjoying protection

12 C. Verdeil, *La mission jésuite du Mont-Liban et de Syrie (1830–1864)*, Paris, 2011; J. Bocquet, *Missionnaires français en terre d'islam. Damas 1860–1914*, Paris, 2005; P. Corcket, *Les Lazaristes et les Filles de la Charité au Proche-Orient*, Beyrouth, 1983; *Les Jésuites en Syrie 1831–1931*, Fasc. 1–XII, Paris, 1931. On the suppression of the Jesuit order, see: P. Shore, *The years of Jesuit suppression, 1773–1814: Survival, setback and transformation*, Leiden – Boston, 2020. On the Protestant, mainly American missions see: U. Makdisi, *Artillery of Heaven: American Missionaries and the Failed Conversion of the Middle East*, Cornell, Ithaca, NY, 2008.

13 For a general overview of Russian policy in Syria and Palestine in the 19th century see: T. G. Staurou, *Russian Interests in Palestine, 1882–1914: A study of religious and educational enterprise*. Thessalonike, 1963; D. Hopwood, *The Russian presence in Syria and Palestine, 1843–1914: Church and politics in the Near East*. Oxford, 1969; E. Astafieva, "How to transfer 'Holy Russia' into the Holy Land? Russian policy in Palestine in the late imperial period", in: *Jerusalem Quarterly* 71 (2017), pp. 7–18; A. Anastasiades (ed.), *Voisinages fragiles. Les relations interconfessionnelles dans le Sud-Est Européen et la Méditerranée Orientale, 1954–1923: contraintes locales et enjeux internationaux*. Athènes, 2013; L. Meaux, *La Russie et la tentation de l'Orient*, Paris, 2010; Н. Н. Лисовой, *Русское духовное и политическое присутствие в Святой Земле и на Ближнем Востоке в XIX-начале XX в.* [N. N. Lisovoi, *Russian spiritual and political presence in the Holy Land and the Near East in the XIXth and the beginning of the XXth century*] Moscow, 2006; М. И. Якушев, *Антиохийский и Иерусалимский патриархаты в политике Российской империи 1830-е-начало XX века* [M. I. Jakushev, *The Patriarchates of Antioch and Jerusalem in the policy of the Russian Empire, 1830-s to the beginning of the XXth century*] Moscow, 2013.

from the Egyptian government of Muhammad Ali.¹⁴ The local Orthodox population, especially in places where they did not have their own church and a priest, found little inconvenience in attending Uniate services, in particular those that followed the Eastern rite.

By the mid-1840s, the Russian government had not formulated any new strategy towards the Christian East: the usual method remained sending donations to the Eastern Orthodox patriarchs. In addition to money, they also received support in-kind donations including icons, vestments, silver vessels and cloth.¹⁵ With a clear understanding of the advantages of receiving material aid without any strings attached, they sent regular requests to the Holy Synod of Russia, repeatedly complaining of their poverty and the danger posed by Catholic and Protestant proselytism. On September 21st 1838, for example, the patriarchs Methodios of Antioch and Hierotheos of Alexandria addressed a joint letter to the Russian Synod asking for help against the Catholics.¹⁶ The situation was reported to Tsar Nicolas I, and support was provided in two ways. First, a large quantity of liturgical items was gathered for shipment (estimated to value about 11,450 silver rubles in total). The patriarchs also received sizeable sums of money: 3,000 rubles for Alexandria, and 2,500 for Antioch. Countess Anna Orlova-Chesmenskaia donated 3,000 rubles to each.¹⁷

Further, the Russian ambassador to Constantinople was instructed to negotiate with the Sublime Porte about changing the form and the colour of vestments of the Uniate clergy, to make them different from those of the Orthodox: thus, the parishioners in the villages could distinguish between them. The “affair of the *kamilaukas*” (the caps of the clergy) lasted for many years. On May 31st 1839, thanks to the intermediation of the Russia ambassador, Butenev, a firman on the costume was issued.¹⁸ However, on the demand of the French consul it was not implemented.¹⁹ The matter of the caps was a matter of discussion in later years: in 1844, the Russian delegate to Jerusalem, archimandrite Porfirii Uspenskii, reported that the Uniate patriarch Maxim had managed to win over the Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Rifat Pasha,

14 J. Hajjar, *Un lutteur infatigable, le Patriarche Maxime Mazloum*, Harissa, 1957; A. D'Avril, “Les Grecs Melkites,” p. 20–21.

15 RGIA, f. 796, op. 8, d. 24207.

16 RGIA, f. 796, op. 8, d. 24207, ff. 10–11.

17 A report of Metropolitan Serafim of St. Petersburg to the Holy Synod, January 27, 1839. *Ibid.*, ff. 36–37. The success of the first request encouraged the Patriarch to address the Russian Synod with a second (January 31, 1839), but this time it was left without attention. Decision of the Holy Synod, April 3–July 13, 1839. *Ibid.*, ff. 45–48v.

18 See a French translation of the firman: *Ibid.*, ff. 50–53.

19 Letter of Patriarchs Methodios and Hierotheos to the Russian Holy Synod, September 24, 1839. Russian translation. *Ibid.*, ff. 95–97v.

and new protests from the Greek side in favour of the already-enacted firman followed.²⁰ The Russian ambassador Vladimir Titov again tried to influence the situation in favour of the Greeks. Needless to say, the decision to change the shape and colour of the cap provoked indignation among the Uniates.²¹

3 First Attempts to Support Orthodox Education in Syria: Consul Constantin Basili

With the opening of a consulate in Beirut (1840), Russia started exercising control over the distribution of donations assigned for the Orthodox in Syria and Palestine. Improved organization of Orthodox schools was supposed to provide for the education of the local clergy and prevent the population from sending their children to the French Catholic schools. Over the course of more than 40 years, the Russian government tried to support the educational institutions of the Greek Patriarch of Antioch, without organizing any Russian schools in his canonical territory. The Russian consul in Beirut, Constantin Basili, felt sure that a well-organized central school could better help counteract Catholic propaganda, instead of a large number of elementary schools throughout the villages of Syria. A sum of 286 silver rubles (=4,862 Turkish piastres) was assigned for the Orthodox school in Beirut.²² According to Basili's reports of 1842 and 1843, 140 boys were studying in the school, including some Muslims, Maronites and Uniates. The teacher of Old Arabic was a Maronite. Basili made a point of noting the competitiveness of the school vis-a-vis the Jesuit seminary in Antour and other Catholic schools.²³

The petitions sent by the Eastern patriarchs to the Russian Synod, as well as to the influential church politician and writer Andrei Nikolaevich Muraviev during the year of 1842, resulted in an additional subsidy of 3,000 rubles for supporting the Orthodox schools in Syria.²⁴ All the letters contained lengthy

20 *Материалы для биографии епископа Порфирия Успенского*, изд. П. В. Безобразов [Materials for the Biography of Bishop Porfirii Uspenskii, ed. P. V. Bezobrazov], vol. II, St. Petersburg, 1910, pp. 121–122.

21 Porfirii Uspenskii to Archbishop Innokentii, March 2, 1848; *Материалы*, p. 229.

22 See the official correspondence on this matter from 1840–1841: RGIA, f. 797, op. 10, d. 26564.

23 Report of the Russian chargé d'affaires in Constantinople to the Director of the Asian Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. March 23, 1842, no. III. *Ibid.* ff. 51–53v; C. Basili to A. Butenev, February 23, 1843 No.45. *Ibid.*, ff. 59–63v.

24 Patriarch of Constantinople Constantios to Andrei Muraviev, February 5, 1842. RGIA, f. 797, op. 12, d. 29813, ff. 2–4v (about the Jesuits and the Sisters of Vincent Paul); Consul Basili to Andrei Muraviev, January 14/26, 1842. *Ibid.*, ff. 5–6v; Patriarch Methodios to

complaints about the Catholic agitation, educational and philanthropic work. Consul Basili suggested the money be used for organizing another school in Damascus, for about 15 children.²⁵ The final target of the school was that one or two of the 15 boys would become educated priests in their country. Basili was well-disposed to Patriarch Methodios of Antioch and had great confidence in him, especially in comparison with the higher clergy of the Greek Jerusalem Patriarchate, who, according to Basili, took no care of the education of young Arabs.²⁶

Consul Basili had strong confidence in the Greek patriarch Methodios. Thanks to the consul's recommendations, the Russian Holy Synod gave permission that a Bishop from the Patriarchate of Antioch could gather donations in Russia for the Orthodox church in Syria and Lebanon.²⁷ The Bishop of Heliopolis, Neophytos, arrived in Moscow in 1842, and stayed there for ten years. His mission was followed by the foundation of an Antiochine compound in Moscow (1848). Thereafter the Orthodox See of Antioch was ensured with a stable annual income from Russia until 1914.

4 Archimandrite Porfirii Uspenskii and His Mission to Syria and Palestine

Rivalry among the great powers in the Middle East, including that of their foreign church missions, propelled the elaboration of a Russian project in the region. The idea of founding a Russian ecclesiastical mission in Jerusalem was first mooted at the beginning of the 19th century, and revived in 1838 by Andrei Muraviev in a special note addressed to the Russian government. On June 13th 1841 a report on the same topic was presented to Tsar Nicolas I by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Chancellor Karl Nesselrod. He stressed that the poor state of the Orthodox church in the East was caused not only by the Muslim rulers, but by Catholic and Protestant missionaries and a lack of material and moral means with which to resist them. Nesselrod suggested appointing a learned churchman as an ecclesiastical envoy to Jerusalem. This person was Archimandrite Porfirii Uspenskii, at that time Russian priest to the mission in Vienna. The task of Porfirii's first mission (1844) was mainly to gather information about

Andrei Muraviev, January 13, 1842. *Ibid.*, ff. 7–8v. RGIA, f. 797, op. 12, d. 29862 (about the assigning of 3000 silver rubles for foundation of schools in Syria).

25 Report of Consul Basili, November 10, 1842. RGIA, f. 797, op. 12, d. 29862, ff. 27–31v.

26 See for example a letter of C. Basili to C. Serbinovich, November 11/22, 1841. RGIA, f. 1661, op. 1, d. 473.

27 RGIA, f. 797, op. 12., d. 30535.

the state of Orthodoxy in Syria and Palestine. In 1847 he was appointed chief of the First Russian Ecclesiastical Mission to Jerusalem (1847–1853).²⁸ Among his tasks this time was to open a dialogue with the non-Orthodox churches of the Orient (the Copts, the Uniates, the Armenians), aiming at their conversion to Orthodoxy.

The contacts with the Uniates yielded some positive results. The most significant was the conversion of Metropolitan of Amida (Diarbekir) Makarios in 1846. In 1847, Makarios sent some young people from his flock to study in Chalki Theological school near Constantinople. Later (in 1864) he left for Russia to gather donations.²⁹ Another candidate for conversion was Metropolitan Athanasios, from Tripoli.³⁰ Porfirii's success in these conversions was only possible thanks to the assistance of two people, the referent (logothetis) of the Patriarch of Antioch in Constantinople, Nikolai Shamie (a rich merchant and Russian subject), and the Bishop of Halep, Cyril.³¹

28 *Россия в Святой Земле. Документы и материалы*. Ред. Н. Н. Лисовой [*Russia in the Holy Land. Documents and Materials*, ed. N. N. Lisovoi], 2 vols, Moscow, 2000, 2017. On Porfirii's activities in the Holy Land, see: A. A. Дмитриевский, *Епископ Порфирий Успенский, как инициатор и организатор первой русской духовной миссии в Иерусалиме* [A. A. Dmitrievskii, *Bishop Porfirii Uspenskii as an Initiator and Organizer of the First Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in Jerusalem*], St. Petersburg, 1906; *idem*, *Русская духовная миссия в Иерусалиме* [*Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in Jerusalem*], Moscow – St. Petersburg, 2009; И. Просвирнин, “Памяти епископа Порфирия Успенского. 1804–1885” [I. Prosvirnin, “In memoriam of Bishop Porfirii Uspenskii. 1804–1885,”] *Богословские труды* [*Theological Works*] 26 (1985), pp. 315–325; T. G. Stavrou, “Russian Interest in the Levant, 1843–1848: Porfirii Uspenskii and the Establishment of the First Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in Jerusalem,” *Middle East Journal* 17 (1963), pp. 91–103; Н. Ротов, *История Русской Духовной Миссии в Иерусалиме* [N. Rotov, *History of the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in Jerusalem*], St. Petersburg, 2019.

29 Bishop Makarii brought to Russia some classical Arabic books. One of them was given by him to Grand Duke Constantin Nikolaevich during his stay in Petersburg in 1866–1867. See С. А. Франсузов, “Первая арабографичная книга, напечатанная в мире Ислама, в собрании Института восточных рукописей РАН” [S. A. Frantsuzov “The First Book in Arabic letters printed in the world of Islam, in the collection of the Institute of Oriental manuscripts of the Russian Academy of Sciences”], *Вестник православного Свято-Тихоновского гуманитарного университета* [*Messenger of St. Tikhon Orthodox Humanities University*], ser. 3, Philology, 61 (2019), pp. 104–122.

30 Porfirii Uspenskii to A. S. Sturdza, December 2, 1847; *Материалы*, p. 221.

31 The assistance of N. Shamie was especially important: he organized and influenced all the negotiations between Bishop Macarios and the Ecumenical Greek Patriarchate. See his correspondence with Porfirii: Санкт-Петербургский филиал архива РАН [St. Petersburg Department of the Archives of the Russian Academy of Sciences], f. 118, op. 1, d. 105. In 1850, he was awarded golden medal by the Russian government (RGIA, f. 797, op. 16, d. 38156).

5 Uniatism and Anti-Uniatism After the Crimean War

The movement to (re-)convert non-Orthodox Eastern Christians into the Orthodox church grew strongly after the Crimean War. The Tanzimat in the Ottoman Empire created a fertile soil for national ideas, including ecclesial autonomy. The church struggle finally became a national and a political one, having lost already its theological or dogmatic content. The Tanzimat in the Empire, promoted by the Hatt-i-sherif of 1856, was followed by changes at all levels of society. A church council took place in Constantinople in 1858–59, whose duty it was to elaborate a new basis of life for the non-Muslim millets. This was followed by reforms in the Patriarchate of Constantinople in 1860, and introduction of the laity into church administration.³²

The Arab Christians were also hoping for a national revival, and seeking to create a local (national) administration. Unlike the Balkan Slavs, the Orthodox Arabs were still at a lower level of education and national consciousness, unable to organize an efficient counter-movement to the Greek higher clergy. It took many years before Arab proto-nationalism would develop. The foundation of an Arab millet seemed an attractive alternative for the Melkites: here, they counted on Russian backing. Until the mid-19th century the Greek-Catholics still enjoyed a great degree of independence from Rome: they elected their clergy and preserved the Eastern rite. For most of them, conversion to Orthodoxy would not change the everyday and liturgical rhythm. Moreover, unification with their Orthodox co-religionists in a future Arab millet held out favourable prospects for political protections. They would lose the financial and diplomatic support of France, but hoped that Russia would replace it. As an Orthodox community they would, at the same time, be able to count on more support from the Turkish governors. In the turbulent situation of the Tanzimat, an incautious pressure upon the Melkites or violation of their rights could serve as a spark in the powder keg.

6 The Melkites of Syria and Calendar Reform, 1857–1859

Attempts at Latinization of the Melkites and removal of their autonomy had already taken place in the 1830s: in 1837 a rescript was sent from Rome ordering the subordination of their clergy to the Latin one. The council

32 Δ. Σταματόπουλος, *Μεταρρύθμιση και εκκοσμίκευση: προς μία ανασύνθεση της ιστορίας του οικουμενικού πατριαρχείου το 19^ο αιώνα* [D. Stamatopoulos, *Reforms and secularization: towards a revision of the history of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in the 19th century*], Athens, 2003.

that met in Jerusalem in May–June 1849 again concentrated on this issue. On June 9th 1856, Maxim Mazloum was succeeded by another Melkite patriarch, Clement Bahouth, who was expected to carry through the new policy and convoke a council presided over by an apostolic delegate.³³ In January the following year, the Vatican demanded that the Syrian Melkites introduce the Gregorian calendar. Patriarch Clement tried to push this reform through without first consulting his clergy, and met with strong resistance from his flock.³⁴ Unable to handle the situation, he resigned and retired to the Deir Mouhaliss monastery near Saida.³⁵ A split then emerged among the Melkites which lasted for nine years:³⁶ between an ‘Eastern’ party (*Sharki*), which was inclined to join Orthodoxy; and a Western party (*Hardi*), which was ready to show obedience to the new order of the Pope and preserve the privileges of the French protectorate. The majority (including the bishops) hesitated and tended to remain with Rome. Meanwhile the ‘Eastern party’ expelled the bishop of Sura, who was insisting on the introduction of the Gregorian calendar. In July 1859, the Melkite bishops convened a council in Zahle, where they proclaimed their principles, aimed at creating a separate millet.³⁷

The ‘Eastern’ party had two leaders, both strongly reliant on Russian support. In Damascus it was the local notable Khuri Khanna Ferdj Mesamiri. As the Melkite church in Damascus remained in the hands of the ‘Western’ party, he offered a room in his house for serving the liturgy; later he was ordained priest and made bishop with the name Ioannikios. The ‘Eastern’ party in Egypt was led by Archimandrite Gabriel Djibara, a former Basilian monk. (After the closure of the Melkite chapel in Egypt in 1857, Gabriel left for Syria and became the *de facto* the head of the Beirut community.) During the whole course of the affair these figures played a double game. On one hand, they tried to make use of diplomatic support and financing from Russia, promising complete obedience to Russian policy. On the other hand, the Russian help was just a means to an end – that of creating a separate church.

33 Hajjar, *Les Chrétiens uniates du Proche-Orient*, pp. 274–284.

34 A. D’Avril, “Les Grecs Melkites,” pp. 29–30.

35 N. Mukhin-to A. Butenev, August 2/14, 1858. RGIA, f. 797, op. 27, 2 otd., 2 st., d. 427, ff. 27–30.

36 Hajjar, *Les Chrétiens uniates du Proche-Orient*, pp. 288–289.

37 A. Beger to A. Lobanov, Beirut, August 18/30, 1859. RGIA, f. 797, op. 27, 2 otd., 2 st., d. 427, ff. 36–37.

7 The Melkite Movement as a Challenge for Russian Policy

As early as 1857, the 'Eastern' Beirut Melkite community asked the Russian consul about joining the Russian church directly, subordinating themselves to bishop Cyril Naumov, the newly appointed chief of the Russian mission in Jerusalem. From the perspective of Russian policy in the Middle East, to create a clientele of several thousand Syrian Arabs under its protectorate was an opportunity. It was also a great challenge, and the cautious first reaction of Russian diplomats was more negative than positive. It was clear that any sudden creation of a Russian bishopric inside the territory of another Orthodox church was a flagrant violation of canon law, and would provoke an open conflict with the Greek patriarchs. Serious complications in the relations with France could be also expected. In June 1857, the Russian ambassador in Constantinople, Butenev, received instructions from the Minister of Foreign Affairs to maintain the position of a neutral observer. Moreover, preliminary discussions for further Russo-French cooperation in the church-question took place in Egypt.³⁸

The Russian church was also invited to express its opinion, and could not hide behind its usual official position of non-interference in the affairs of the other churches. Slow and passive in taking decisions, the Russian Synod finally outlined its position. Almost two years after the start of the conflict Tolstoy, ober-procurator of the Holy Synod, addressed a note to the Minister of Foreign Affairs Gorchakov (October 31st, 1858). The main idea was that Russia could in no case endorse the creation of a separate Melkite Orthodox church, independent from the Greek Patriarchate of Antioch. Equally, the creation of a Melkite church dependent on the Russian bishop in Jerusalem was not possible, because it would provoke a conflict with the Greeks and threaten the unity of Orthodoxy.³⁹ The only course of action available, Tolstoy concluded, was to convince the Melkites to come to an agreement with the Greek patriarchs and to join the Greek church: here, the Russians were ready to mediate.⁴⁰ Subordination to the Greeks, however, foretold great difficulties. The Arabs had a strong dislike for the Greek higher clergy, with '*ksenokratie*' (foreign rule) in their church a source of deep resentment.

38 *Александрийский патриархат и Россия в XIX веке. Исследования и материалы.* Изд. подг. О. Петрунина, Л. Герд, К. Вах [*The Patriarchate of Alexandria and Russia in the XIX-th century. Studies and Materials*, eds. O. Petrunina, L. Gerd, C. Vakh], Moscow, 2020, pp.113–122; A. Lobanov to A. Gochakov, June 29/ July 9, 1859. RGIA, f. 797, op. 27, 2 otd., 2 st., d. 427, ff. 6–9.

39 RGIA, f. 797, op. 27, 2 otd., 2 st., d. 427.

40 A project of the secret reference to A. Lobanov-Rostovskii, July 19, 1859. RGIA, f. 797, op. 27, 2 otd., 2 st., d. 427, ff. 11–13.

8 Bishop Cyril Naumov and the Melkite Affair

Russian diplomats in Beirut, Damascus and Alexandria vacillated between their own sympathies for the Arabs' cause, and the restrictions imposed from above. The Melkite Orthodox movement found its most ardent supporter in Bishop Cyril Naumov, the new chief of the Russian mission in Jerusalem. On his way to Palestine, he passed through Damascus (on November 28th, 1858) where he was accompanied by two Syrian prelates, the bishop of Arcadia and the ex-Bishop of Baias. Cyril was solemnly received by the city's Orthodox and Greek Uniate communities and used the opportunity to establish contacts with the 'Eastern' party leaders.⁴¹ After installing himself in Jerusalem he received a sum of money from Empress Maria Alexandrovna for supporting Orthodoxy in the Middle East. A sizeable part of this money was channelled into the Melkite cause. Once in Jerusalem, Cyril could not follow all the details of the movement in situ, and had to act via those representatives of the 'Eastern' party who visited him there. Unsurprisingly, the information he received was not always reliable.

Bishop Cyril understood that material help was the strongest argument in the negotiations. The Russians had to withstand severe competition from the Latins in building and supplying churches, and in organizing schools. Cyril tried to act through individuals among the Arabs who seemed ready for a dialogue with the Greeks, such as Bishop Gerasimos, or with certain groups, such as the community of Deir-el-Qamar, to whom he promised the construction of a church. Another church for 300 Melkites from the 'Eastern' party was built in the village of Maara, starting in December 1859.⁴² In this situation, the visit of Grand Duke Constantin Nikolaevich to Beirut and Jerusalem in May and June 1859 contributed significantly to a surge of optimism among the 'Eastern' party.⁴³

Bishop Cyril summarized the results of the Russian diplomatic and ecclesial mission among the Melkites in a report addressed to the ober-procurator of the Holy Synod on May 30th, 1860.⁴⁴ Thanks to Metropolitan Agapios, he had met Archimandrite Gabriel Djibara in person during his visit to Beirut the previous year. In March 1860, Djibara visited him in Jerusalem, and this served as an important step towards elaborating the conditions for integrating the Damascus and Egyptian communities into the Orthodox church. By that time,

41 A. Lobanov to A. Gorchakov, December 13, 1858. RGIA, f. 797, op. 29, 2 otd. 2 st., d. 371, ff. 2–3.

42 Report of the Russian Vice-Consul in Damascus, December 20, 1859. RGIA, f. 797, op. 27, 2 otd., 2 st., d. 427, ff. 110–116v.

43 A. Beger to E. P. Kovalevskii, June 6/18, 1859. RGIA, f. 797, op. 27, 2 otd., 2 st., d. 427., ff. 4–5v.

44 Bishop Cyril Naumov to A. P. Tolstoy, May 30, 1860. *Ibid.*, ff. 219–224v.

a number of schools in the Orthodox communities, as well as the Beirut and Damascus schools, were supported with donations from the Russian Empress. Finally, a large plot of land was acquired in Shuafat near Beirut, with a view to constructing a theological school for the Orthodox Arabs.

The next visit of Cyril to Beirut (September 18th – October 13th, 1860) took place on the occasion of the Russian Commissioner Evgenii Novikov's arrival at Beirut. Despite the obvious decline of the Melkite movement at that moment (Patriarch Clement had just returned to Beirut), the Bishop still assessed its perspectives positively. Many of the Melkites visited his service on board the Russian ship *General-Admiral* and expressed their will to remain within Orthodoxy.⁴⁵

9 Metropolitan Filaret Drozdov and His Position in the Melkite affair

The opinion of the main authority of the Russian church in the mid-19th century, Metropolitan of Moscow Filaret Drozdov, was received at the end of 1859.⁴⁶ After analyzing the reports of Ambassador Lobanov, he found the whole affair rather dubious. The reports contained many contradictions: the council in Zahle proclaimed the will of the Melkite bishops to create an independent church; this was also the position of Gabriel Djibara. But at the same time, Djibara applied for subordination of the Melkites to the Russian church. The Melkites could not be received into the Orthodox church without the agreement of the Greek patriarchs. Taking into account the goodwill of Patriarch Kallinikos, Filaret saw a possible solution of the question in implementing the eighth canon of the Third Ecumenical council, namely to appoint an *αὐτοκέφαλος* bishop for the Melkites (on the example of the church of Cyprus). In his opinion this was the only possible variant that the Russian church could support: bishop Cyril Naumov should not participate in the negotiations in Constantinople, and the Russian side should limit its activities to the 'soft' intermediation of the diplomats.

10 The Eastern Patriarchs: Were They Ready to Accept the Melkites?

As time passed, the question of the conversion of the Melkites to Greek Orthodoxy did not much progress. Wishing to receive Russian diplomatic

45 Bishop Cyril to A. M. Gorchakov, November 8, 1860. RGIA, f. 832, op. 1, d. 106, ff. 82–85v.

46 Metropolitan Filaret Drozdov to A. P. Tolstoy, December 15, 1859. RGIA, f. 832, op. 1, d. 106, ff. 18–26. A copy: RGIA, f. 797, op. 27, 2 otd. 2 st. d. 427, ff. 72–80.

support sooner, Gabriel Djibara managed to convince the consul in Egypt, Lagovskii, that the Melkites of Egypt were unanimously ready to petition the Patriarch of Alexandria Kallinikos to be received into the Greek church. On the basis of this intelligence, Ambassador Lobanov started negotiations with Patriarch Kallinikos (who was in Constantinople at that time) about the conditions of this conversion. Kallinikos seemed to have been flexible on this delicate issue.⁴⁷

Patriarch Hierotheos of Antioch, also residing in Constantinople, seemed rather undisposed to the affair. He was jealous and suspicious of the Arab bishops, and busy mostly with his own material interests. According to some unofficial sources, Hierotheos' negative attitude owed to his assistant Spartalis, who was in turn closely connected with the French consul.⁴⁸ The Arab Bishops of the Zahle council were more anxious to acquire their own millet than to subordinate themselves to the Greeks.⁴⁹

The hostility of the Greek patriarchs and lack of unity among the Arabs themselves led to procrastination and a decline in the movement by early 1860. On February 16th, Ambassador Lobanov reported the readiness of four Melkite communities to return to the church of Rome (those of Beirut, Zahle, Saida and Baalbek). In Syria, only the Damascus community was still willing to join the Greek patriarchate.⁵⁰ The main problem was the properties: most of those Melkites who left Rome lost their churches and monasteries. The bishops of Beirut, Zahle and Saida, in managing to prevent their flock from splitting in two, at the same time preserved their churches, monasteries and other properties. But in Cairo, Alexandria, Sur, Damascus and other towns where the bishops remained faithful to Rome, the communities were divided in two. As for Damascus, Lobanov stressed that a church should be built for the 'Eastern' Melkites there.⁵¹

In his further discussions, Ambassador Lobanov aimed at reaching an agreement concerning the right of the Melkites to elect their own bishops and to own their church properties. Frustrated by the scepticism of Patriarch Hierotheos, the Russian ambassador tried to negotiate with the Patriarch of Alexandria, who seemed much more flexible. At this stage, the most delicate question – that of re-baptism – was preliminarily put aside, and only a renouncement of the *Filioque* was required.⁵²

47 A. Lobanov to A. Gorchakov, November 7, 1859. *Ibid.*, ff. 56–63.

48 Report of the Russian Vice-Consul in Damascus, December 20, 1859. *Ibid.*, ff. 110–116v.

49 A. Beger to E. Kovalevskii, September 1/13, 1859. *Ibid.*, ff. 46–47v; A. Lobanov to A. Gorchakov, August 22, 1859. *Ibid.*, ff. 40–43v.

50 *Ibid.*, ff. 121–122.

51 A. Beger to A. Lobanov, January 14, 1860. *Ibid.*, ff. 126–128v.

52 A. Lobanov to A. Gorchakov, Pera, February 25, 1860. *Ibid.*, ff. 135–137.

Meanwhile, the tactics of the Melkites did not change: their bishops were still waiting and insisting on the creation of a separate millet. In March 1860, Gabriel Djibara visited Cyril Naumov in Jerusalem and explained their plan to him: after receiving a firman from the Sultan about forming a separate church, the Melkites were ready to continue their negotiations about canonical integration into the Greek church. But it was clear that after receiving autonomy the Melkites would not continue with the second part: subordination. The Russian representatives tried to convince Archimandrite Djibara that they would support the movement only if the Melkites first reach a canonical agreement with the Greeks and *then* apply for the Sultan's firman.⁵³ By the Summer of 1860, the bishop of Beirut Agapios seemed to have passed to the side of the Eastern party and sought support from the Russian consul. At this point most Orthodox-minded Melkites were asking their bishops to demonstrate their position definitively. The number of Melkites ready to join Orthodoxy was estimated at between 15,000 and 20,000 souls.

On April 14th, the Beirut Melkite community presented its written address officially renouncing their union with Rome. On May 12th, an identical declaration was received from the Damascus community. Both were triggered by the encouragement of bishop Cyril Naumov, who had arrived in Damascus for negotiations. The declaration stipulated complete autonomy for the Melkites, preservation of the right to elect their higher clergy, and only nominal subordination to the Greek Patriarchate of Antioch. It was time for the Russians to act, and Ambassador Lobanov supposed that this could be done mainly by offering the Melkites financial aid in building churches.⁵⁴

On the eve of the massacre in Syria in July 1860, however, the Russians still did not have a clear understanding of the Melkites' aspirations: the statistical data was unreliable, and the leaders of the Damascus and Egyptian 'Eastern' Melkites were obviously exaggerating the picture in their favour. In June 1860, Khuri Khanna, the representative of the Damascus Melkites, arrived in Constantinople for negotiations with the Greek patriarchs.

11 The French Response to the Melkite Movement, 1858 to Summer 1860

French diplomats and the Latin church authorities intervened immediately after the start of the conflict. In Egypt, the chapel of the rebels was closed on

53 A. Beger to A. Lobanov, March 13, 1860. *Ibid.*, ff. 159–165v; A. Lobanov to A. Gorchakov, March 22, 1860. *Ibid.*, ff. 150–158v.

54 A. Lobanov to A. Gorchakov, June 21, 1860. *Ibid.*, ff. 172–183v.

the insistence of the French consul Sabatier.⁵⁵ The French consuls tried to obtain the Vizir's rescript against the rebels, but the Porte provided the decision to the flocks, and said that the affair should be solved according to the will of the majority.⁵⁶ The French consul in Beirut, Autray, was initially against strict measures for introducing the calendar reform. He instead organized a solemn reception of Patriarch Giuseppe Valerga in Saida, where the Uniate bishop was restored to his place. This brought the Catholics some hope that the problem could be solved. The spiritual authorities were even less flexible than the diplomats: both the apostolic vicar Paolo Brunoni and Valerga expressed their indignation about the Melkites.

The new French consul at Beirut, Count Bentivoglio, took vigorous measures against the movement: he spoke to the vali Hurshid-Pasha and placed pressure on the bishop of Beirut, Agapios, threatening him with deportation to Rome for further interrogation.⁵⁷ In March 1860, the French consul managed to persuade the Turkish vali to support the Uniate bishop in Saida and return the church and bishops' residence to the Roman party. This led to further complications. At the same time, Bentivoglio demanded a definite answer from Bishop Agapios. The ambiguous behaviour of this bishop irritated both the French and the Russian consuls. Feeling unsafe, Agapios asked the Russian consul Beger for support against Rome. These events raised Russian hopes for a successful solution.⁵⁸

At the end of 1859, another Catholic diplomat entered the scene, the Austrian Consul to Beirut Weckbecker. He sought to mediate between the Melkites and Roman Curia with a view to securing speedier reconciliation, and was negotiating with the most flexible among the Arab bishops, Agapios. Whereas other bishops demanded appointment of two lay representatives to supervise patriarch Clementos, Agapios was ready to elaborate a compromise suitable for Rome.⁵⁹ France's diplomatic position was that the intervention of the Austrian consul was quite inappropriate.

12 The Melkite Affair After July 1860

The massacre of the Christians by the Druzes in Syria and Lebanon of July 9th–18th 1860, and the French expedition to Syria that remained in the country

55 *Александрійський напутархат*, pp.113–122.

56 A. Lobanov-Rostovskii to A. M. Gorchakov, June 27/July 9, 1859. RGIA, f. 797, op. 27, 2 otd., 2 st., d. 427, ff. 6–7.

57 A. Beger to E. Kovalevskii, April 21, 1860. *Ibid.*, ff. 166–169.

58 A. Lobanov to A. Gorchakov, June 21, 1860. *Ibid.*, ff. 172–183v.

59 A. Lobanov to A. Gorchakov, January 19, 1860. *Ibid.*, ff. 95–102.

until June 1861, radically changed the trajectory of the Melkite affair.⁶⁰ The decisive change came with the arrival of Patriarch Clement to Beirut. Backed by the French consul, in September 1860 he ceremonially entered the Melkite church in the town, and the vekil of Metropolitan Agapios (at that time in a monastery in Lebanon) had nothing to do but to leave the keys of the church in the door. Little by little the Melkite families started attending services, and the pro-Orthodox party hesitated: it kept contacts with the Greek Metropolitan, but was mostly inclined to return to Rome.⁶¹ Count Bentivoglio was soliciting permission from the Roman Curia for allowing at least temporary use of the old calendar by the Melkites, as that would keep them in the Union. Meanwhile, the Russian Commissioner Novikov arrived in Beirut for working, along with representatives of the other powers, in the Commission for supporting the Christians of Syria and Lebanon.

The chief of the Russian mission in Jerusalem Bishop Cyril also visited Beirut between September 18th and October 13th 1860. His efforts were aimed at convincing the Melkites to keep closer to the Greek patriarchate and to smooth the bad impression made by the arrival of patriarch Clement. In his report he tried to stress the positive sides of an unfavourable situation. The flock, he said, saw that most Greek Uniate bishops returned to Rome and Patriarch Clement: thus, the purely spiritual question had been distinguished from the administrative one. In his opinion, the persistence of Patriarch Valerga, who did not accept the Melkites with their old calendar, could also prevent them from returning to the Union. For his part, Bishop Cyril helped to supply the church in Sura with everything necessary, as well as the church in Damascus; the Bishop of Saida received a regular subsidy as well.⁶² The Russian agitation among the Greek Catholics, and their desire to secure their independence provoked complaints from the side of their 'natural allies' the Maronites, who addressed the French consul Bentivoglio at the end of 1860.⁶³

60 *Further Papers Relating to the Disturbances in Syria: June 1860*, London, 1860; B. Poujoulat, *La vérité sur la Syrie et Expédition française*, Paris, 1861; Ch. H. S Churchill., *The Druzes and the Maronites under the Turkish rule from 1840 to 1860*, London, 1862; K. Edwards, *La Syrie 1840–1862*, Paris, 1862; A. Jobin, *La Syrie en 1860 et 1861*, Paris, 1880; *Souvenirs de Syrie (Expédition française de 1860) par un témoin oculaire*, Paris, 1903; I. Abkarius, *The Lebanon in Turmoil: Syria and the Powers in 1860*, New Haven, 1920; К. Базили, *Сирия и Палестина под турецким владычеством* [C. Basili, *Syria and Palestine under Turkish Rule*], Moscow, 1962.

61 A. Lobanov to A. Gorchakov, November 1, 1860. *Ibid.*, ff. 241–249v.

62 Bishop Cyril Naumov to A. Gorchakov, November 8, 1860. RGIA. F. 832, op. 1., d. 136, ff. 82–85v.

63 Bentivoglio to Thouvenel. December 16, 1860, Ministère des affaires étrangères, Correspondence des consuls (hereafter: МАЕ, СРС), 64, Turquie, Beyrout, 13, f. 67–67v.

After the election of the new Patriarch of Constantinople Joachim II on October 4th, 1860, negotiations on accepting the Melkites into Orthodoxy could be continued. In November the same year the two representatives of the Eastern party (Khanna Khuri and Gabriel Djibara), on behalf of the Egyptian and Syrian communities, after signing a written renunciation of the Roman church and accepting the Orthodox *Credo*, were received into the Orthodox church.⁶⁴ The four Greek patriarchs agreed that the Melkites were to be accepted without re-baptism, but by anointing only, and their clergy, respectively, without re-consecration. The two representatives tried to express their doubts, but finally could do nothing else but to agree to these conditions. Their flocks (especially the Beirut community), were not happy, however, and found the terms a humiliation. The representatives of the Damascus community (70 families, about 600 souls in total) were ready to sign the agreement. The Ottoman authorities seemed favorable to the case, but the attempts of the Russian consul in Beirut, Beger, to get the support of the Turkish governor Fuad-Pasha failed. This was due to all Greek Melkites still formally belonging, in the eyes of the Ottoman authorities, to the Roman church. Bishop Agapios of Beirut – without allowing anointing for himself, however – at first gave some hopes for supporting the Eastern party, especially in case of persecution from the Roman side.⁶⁵

On returning to Beirut before Christmas, Khuri Khanna Mesamiri and Gabriel Djibara, with the help of the Greek bishop and the Russian consul, started the conversion of their flocks to Orthodoxy. It was decided to do it voluntarily and little by little. Beger rented a special house which served as a temporary church, and equipped it with everything necessary for the liturgy. The example of the Beirut community was followed by some of the inhabitants of Hasbia, Ramsia and other towns of Lebanon. An exceptional permission was received from the new Ottoman governor Akhmed-Pasha for service in the temporary church without an official firman. After the withdrawal of French troops from the country, the case of the Orthodox Melkites was supported by the Ottoman authorities. In the meantime, Agapios returned to

64 A. Lobanov to A. Gorchakov, December 6, 1860. RGIA, f. 797, op. 27, 2 otd., 2 st., d. 427, ff. 254–255v; November 30, 1860. RGIA, f. 832, op. 1., d. 136. ff. 67–74v. The Russians at this stage of the affair were working mainly as mediators. All requests to the delegates for immediate travel to Russia and soliciting of donations were refused.

65 A. Beger to A. Lobanov, December 2, 1860. RGIA, f. 797, op. 27, 2 otd., 2 st., d. 427, ff. 261–165v.

Beirut and headed that part of the Melkites who did not leave the Union, but for the moment were allowed to follow the Julian calendar.⁶⁶

One of the most difficult questions is how many converted Melkites there were at this time. According to a French report from Beirut (December 16th, 1860), the Christians in Lebanon were about 150,000 souls: the men at arms were 35,000; among them, the Maronites were 20,500, Greek Catholics 8,500, Greek Orthodox 6,000.⁶⁷ In the same report, however, Bentivoglio does not put a precise number on the converts, mentioning only that among the Orthodox there were some Melkites.

In the following years, the converted Melkite communities shared the life of the rest of the Orthodox population of Syria. Russian support did not materialize on the scale hoped for, namely to sponsor the creation of a separate Arab church under a Russian protectorate. First, the Russian government was still very cautious about any steps against the Greek patriarchates which could threaten the fragile integrity of the Orthodox church. Second, after joining Orthodoxy the converted Melkites became directly subordinated to the Ottoman authorities without any exceptions, i.e. the Russian protectorate did not offer them any extraterritorial advantages. Third, the material support which Russia could offer was much less than the financing of the Uniates coming from France. The latter was for many the strongest motive for leaving Orthodoxy and returning to Rome.

On September 21st, 1861, Consul Beger reported the start of the construction of a new church in Beirut. The council on the construction was composed from ex-Uniates, some of them employees of the Russian consulate. By that time, Khuri Khanna had been ordained as Bishop of Palmyra Ioannikios and appointed administrator of all Orthodox Melkites in Damascus. During his trip around Lebanon he organized temporary churches for the converts in the villages of Shuara, Zhuara and also in Zahle; another church was founded by Archimandrite Djibara in Deir-el-Qamar.⁶⁸ As in other European countries, the Russian church raised money for the suffering Christians in Syria and Lebanon. 200,000 Turkish piastres from Russia were used in 1862 for constructing a hospital and an orphanage in Beirut for the Orthodox Christians.⁶⁹

66 A. Beger to A. Lobanov, January 1 and 14, 1861. *Ibid.*, ff. 266–269; 276–278. A. Beger to E. Kovalevskii, June 29, 1862. *Ibid.*, ff. 283–285v.

67 Bentivoglio to A. Walewski, December 16, 1860. MAE, CPC 64, Turquie, Beyrouth 13, f. 65–65v.

68 RGIA, f. 797, op. 27, 2 otd., 2 st., d. 427, ff. 287–289.

69 A. Beger to A. Lobanov, May 3/15, 1862. *Ibid.*, ff. 299–300.

The total sum of Russian donations gathered for the newly converted Melkites between 1861 and 1864 was estimated 21,783 Rub 86 $\frac{3}{4}$ kopeks; 300 rubles more were received by May 1864. Another assessment (from September 1864) gives the total sum of 43,783 rub 86 $\frac{1}{4}$ kopeks (comprising a 10,000-ruble donation; 12,000 sent by Metropolitan Filaret Drozdov; and the remainder from private donations).⁷⁰ This money was used for various purposes, including the construction of a new church in Damascus. The Turkish government granted Bishop Ioannikios 100,000 piastres (=5,000 rub) and a plot of land for the construction; he borrowed another 150,000 piastres from his compatriots against 2% interest.⁷¹

In May 1864 Ioannikios again asked the Russian embassy for permission to gather funds in Russia for the church in Damascus; alternatively, he was ready to receive in situ a donation of 200,000 piastres. The chargé d'affaires E. Novikov and N. Ignatiev (ambassador since June 1864), after consulting the higher authorities in St. Petersburg, refused.⁷² After a few wasted months fruitlessly waiting in Constantinople, Ioannikios returned to Damascus, and in December 1864 declared his return to the Uniate church.⁷³ Apart from frustration with the Russians, the decision was strongly influenced by his negotiations with the French consul Eugène Hecquard, who was working to organize a Melkite school in Damascus (20,000 francs and 30 bursaries for the pupils). Also in 1864, Hecquard was advocating for preservation of the Greek rite for the Melkites.⁷⁴

The French consul's preparation for Ioannikios' return to the Union had started in the Spring. According to his report dated April 12th, 1864, the majority of Damascus Christians belonged to the Greek rite; the Catholics were about 6,000, and the Greek Orthodox were fewer.⁷⁵ The Greek Catholics at that moment

70 An extract from the papers of the Holy Synod, September 28, 1864. RGIA, f. 796. Op. 145, d. 850, ff. 25–26.

71 A proposal of Ober-Procurator Akhmatov to the Holy Synod, April 15, 1864. RGIA, f. 796, op. 145, d. 850, ff. 1–2v.

72 E. Novikov to N. Ignatiev, May 13, 1864. *Ibid.*, ff. 29–33.

73 Letter of Bishop Ioannikios to his flock, December 13, 1864. RGIA, f. 832, op. 1, d. 106, ff. 166–167v. He explained his returning to the Union by the breach of the promises given by the Russians: first, they had promised that the Melkites would have their own churches and high clergy, separate from the Greek one; second, they did not fulfill their promises concerning building of new churches and paying salaries to the Melkite clergy. Ambassador Ignatiev explained Ioannikios' behavior as purely materially motivated (N. Ignatiev to A. Gorchakov, December 29 1864/January 10 1865. *Ibid.*, ff. 160–161v).

74 Rapport of Eugène Hecquard to Édouard Drouin de Lhuys. Damascus, June 24, 1864. MAE, CPC 67, Turquie, Damas, 8, ff. 195–199; The same idea was supported in a letter of Consul M. Outray, dated April 29, 1865 (MAE, CPC 67, Damas, 9, f. 311).

75 E. Hecquard to É. Drouin de Lhuys, MAE, CPC 67, Turquie, Damas, 8, ff. 169–175.

were still divided on the pretext of the calendar question: one part had its church in the centre of the town, and the other in the Deir Mahalle (St. Savior) monastery. After a detailed explanation of the difficulties of the Melkites in Damas, and the conflicts among the monks there, the consul proposed the creation of a seminary at the convent, with an initial donation of 300,000 francs from the French government. In his opinion this would return the party under Bishop Mesamiri, to the Union. Hecquard's further steps were aimed at preventing an agreement between the notables of Damascus with the Russian consul for protection by the Russian government. By the end of June 1864, instructions were given by the prefect of the Propaganda Fidei to the apostolic vicar in Syria, concerning organization of a seminary for the Melkites, and a priest was sent as teacher (Mgr Soubiranne). The importance of preserving the 'Greek rite' was especially stressed, and precise knowledge of this practice was mandatory for the appointee⁷⁶ Meanwhile, the secularization of the opposition party in the Deir-Mahalle convent was planned. The problem of the return of some of the Melkite bishops to the Union completely depended on receipt of money from France, as the consul confirmed after consultations with Patriarch Valerga.⁷⁷

This was followed by the loss of many converted families from orthodoxy, and considerable loss of confidence on the part of the Russian government in the reliability of the Arabs. In this situation the question was whether the converts should still be given special support, or whether the Russian donations should instead be used for financing all the Greek Orthodox of the patriarchate. The figures gathered about the number of the Orthodox Melkites at the beginning of 1865 were rather modest. In Lebanon they were only 1,420 souls, and the Russian government was financing building of churches for them in Beirut, Bruman and Zhuar. Perhaps another 500 could be counted, who were still waiting for construction of their churches; for the moment they were attending Uniate churches. 1,500 people more in the villages near Saida and Zakhle could not be counted, because no money could be found for supplying them with churches.⁷⁸

The second leader of the Melkites, Gabriel Djibara, remained allied to Orthodoxy and to Russia. The plot of land in Shuaifat bought – by Bishop Cyril Naumov, with 41,500 Turkish lyras – for the construction of a theological school stayed empty, due to lack of money. Meanwhile a school at St. George monastery near Zuk-el-Garb in Lebanon was founded by Djibara. It opened in 1864 with donations gathered inside the country, with 109 pupils (100 were paid for by their families, and nine studied for free). The director

76 E. Hecquard to É. Drouin de Lhuis, June 24, 1864. *Ibid.*, ff. 195–199.

77 E. Hecquard to É. Drouin de Lhuis, August 12, 1864. *Ibid.*, ff. 211–216.

78 A. Beger to N. Ignatiev, March 10, 1865. RGIA, f. 796, op. 145, d. 850, *Ibid.*, ff. 67–68.

of the school was Gabriel's nephew Christophor Djibara, future representative of the Patriarchate of Antioch in Moscow. One of the available means for supporting this school could have been the sale of the empty plot.⁷⁹

The case of the Melkite schism was more or less closed by the end of 1864, the same year Patriarch Youssef Sayyours was elected. In the long and difficult struggle against the Latinization of his church he managed to preserve its identity and autonomous organization.⁸⁰ The British occupation of Egypt and the activities of the Russian Palestinian Society (since 1882) forced the Vatican to start a new policy towards the Oriental Uniate churches under Pope Leo XIII.⁸¹ The administrative status of the Melkites was defined only in 1909.

Inside the Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch the struggle continued between the Greek higher clergy aiming at preservation their position, and the Arab flock pushing to appoint their compatriots to the episcopal Sees. After the death of the Greek bishop of Beirut in 1865, Patriarch Hierotheos appointed the Greek, Joseph of Arcadia as his successor; Djibara thus lost any hope of receiving the Bishop's title.⁸² Djibara remained the leader of the Orthodox Melkites until the end of his life. In 1870 he found himself in a rather hopeless state and unable to be useful to his flock. He addressed the Russian Synod with a request for material aid for completing the construction of the churches in Baalbek, Shuara and Zahle, where in the absence of their own places of worship the parishioners had returned to the Union. The churches in Beirut and other places built by the Russians needed upkeep. A printing press in Beirut for publication of anti-Catholic books was also needed. The Russian consul in Damascus, Ionin, granting Djibara's request, estimated this expense at 12,000 rubles, and stressed that Patriarch Hierotheos was absolutely deaf to all requests.⁸³ For the Russian government, the Melkites' affair seemed obviously closed: the Russian Synod answered that no more aid could be found. Prompted by the defeat of France by Prussia in 1870, the Russian consul in

79 Extract from the report of A. Beger, February 10, 1865. RGIA, f. 832, op. 1, d. 105, ff. 35–38.

80 Further attempts for subordinating the Melkites and the other Eastern Uniate churches were undertaken by Pope Pius IX in 1867 (the bull *Reversus*), and during the First Vatican Council (1867–1870). All decisions limiting the traditional rights of flocks to elect bishops and introduction of the Latin rite in Syria were postponed for future times. Hajjar, *Les Chrétiens uniates du Proche-Orient*, pp. 288–308; C. G. Patelos, *Vatican I et les évêques uniates. Une étape éclairante de la politique Romaine à l'égard des orientaux (1867–1870)*, Louvain, 1981.

81 On the new policy of the Vatican towards the Christian East, see: L. Pettinaroli, *La politique Russe du Saint Siège (1905–1939)*, Rome, 2015.

82 A dispatch of General Ignatiev, May 18/39, 1865. *Ibid.*, ff. 40–40v; Extract from the report of A. Beger, May 19, 1865. RGIA, f. 832, op. 1, d. 105, ff. 42–45.

83 A Proposal to the Holy Synod, May 8, 1870. RGIA, f. 796, op. 151, d. 1449, ff. 1–8.

Beirut, Petkovich, proposed supporting the rapprochement of the Uniates and Maronites with the Orthodox church, but this also failed to get any positive answer from St Petersburg.⁸⁴ Another appeal from the same year, for financing the few newly-converted families and the church in Damascus with 1,500 rubles, was more successful.⁸⁵

13 Conclusion

The separatist movement of the Syrian Melkites and their conversion to Orthodoxy was in general unsuccessful. Russia could not compete with French influence in Syria and Lebanon due to financial and political reasons. The Russian patronage of the Orthodox church in the Orient was different from that of France to the Catholics, and provided support to the traditional structures, i.e. to the Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch. The national movement of the Melkites was doomed to failure from the very beginning. Unlike the Bulgarians, the Arab laity in the early 1860s did not demonstrate solidarity as against the Greek higher clergy. Further, the Union and its French backing had a deep-rooted tradition in the country; its tendency to re-absorb the Orthodox by the Catholics was stronger than its opposite. The subsequent activities of the Russian government concentrated on replacing the Greek bishops in Syria and Lebanon by Arab ones and the Arabization of the Orthodox church. This process was completed by the beginning of the 20th century, and from then until 1914 the Orthodox church of Antioch was financed and controlled by Russia.

84 D. Petkovich to N. Ignatiev, January 12/24, 1871. RGIA, f. 797, op. 41, 2 otd. 3 st., d. 44, ff. 8–10.

85 Report of T. Juzefovich, August 9, 1871. RGIA, f. 797, op. 41, 2 otd., 3 st., d. 191, ff. 2–3v. Extract from the decision of the Holy Synod, November 3/15, 1871. *Ibid.* ff. 7–8.