THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE SYRIAN ORTHODOX PATRIARCHATE PRESS

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Introduction

This paper concerns the printing activities of the Syrian Orthodox Christians. On this topic, information is available, but scattered in various sources, and there is no work concentrating solely on this subject. This paper aims to make good this deficiency.2

There are several works on the printing activities of the non-Muslim communities in the Near East and Western Asia. For the most part, these deal with people involved in missionary activities. Concerning the rest, there exist few extensive research works, and there is little public awareness of them. The printing efforts of the Syrian Orthodox Church have thus failed to attract attention.

The Syrian Orthodox Church, being based on traditional religious values, failed to keep abreast of the latest developments in politics, culture, law and economics. It struggled to survive the demands of the modern world. The press was one of the efforts that the Church did make, but it did not arouse much interest and because it was considered unimportant, no research was undertaken on it.3 This article utilises diverse documents and sources, including documents from the Ottoman archives, church histories and related documents, biographies of prominent clergymen, travel books, and memoirs.

1 We are grateful to Prof. Dr. Shabo Talay for reading a draft of this paper and correcting several mistakes. The original Turkish text was translated into English by İrem Wedekind (Heidelberg). All remaining faults and errors are our responsibility.
3 For evaluations of this subject, see Aziz S. Atiya, A History of Eastern Christianity (London: Methuen, 1968).
Apart from a short-lived press in Istanbul in the 1840s, the printing activities of the Syrian Orthodox Church started with the Patriarch Petrus IV, who made it a priority to complete the tasks that previous patriarchs had initiated or planned. He renovated a large part of the Deyruzafranan Monastery at Mardin, added wings to the building, and moreover, constructed an additional building for the printing press that he had brought with him. Apart from the activities already initiated, he faced numerous problems inherited from the late Patriarch Jacob II’s period.

Journey to the Land of the Printing Press

Patriarch Petrus IV was the first patriarch to make a long journey abroad, to Britain and India, in order to find solutions to the problems within the community. He entered into international negotiations and established this as a tradition.

Despite the fact that the Patriarch was accompanied by Mor Ignatios ‘Abd Allāh Saṭṭūf al-Ṣadādī (later Patriarch Mor Ignatios ‘Abde d-Alaho II), the Archbishop of Jerusalem, he felt obliged to request an exit permit from the sultan. His wish was granted only after a year’s delay (1874). On 14 August 1874, they left Istanbul for Britain. They arrived in Paris on 17 August and London on 24 August.

The Patriarch and the Archbishop stayed in London for several months, working intensively. They had meetings with numerous people, including clergymen and ministers. Their acquaintance with Mrs Elizabeth Finn, wife of the consul general in Jerusalem, helped them greatly in establishing contact with people in London. Later, they had meetings with people of higher rank, including the Archbishop of Canterbury (see Fig. 1), which they had arranged before they left Istanbul. These in turn arranged their

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5 Apart from that, the lack of agreement among the Syrian Orthodox Community in India became an important issue. Upon the death of the Patriarch Jacob II, many letters reporting the turmoil in India were delivered to Patriarch Petrus IV; this informed his decision to go to India. He planned a trip from Jerusalem to Istanbul and to India, hoping to solve the problems within the community. Accompanied by ‘Abd Allāh Saṭṭūf, the Archbishop of Jerusalem, he headed for Istanbul. This was followed by journeys to Britain and India in 1873.
6 For relations with the English Church, see William Henry Taylor, Antioch and Canterbury: The Syrian Orthodox Church and the Church of England 1874–1928 (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2005), 15–47.