

Eighteenth-Century Melkite Psalters: Literacy, Catechesis, and Prayer*

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This article examines four eighteenth-century Melkite Psalters printed at Aleppo (1706), Shuwayr (1735), Bucharest (1747) and Beirut (1752). It analyses their printing context, structure, content and para-texts. In the Melkite tradition, the Psalter served both liturgical and educational purposes, functioning as the primary manual for teaching children to read. The 1724 schism in the Antiochian Church, which divided it into Catholic and Orthodox branches, shaped two distinct editorial paths. Greek-Catholic editions at Shuwayr incorporated post-Tridentine catechetical appendices influenced by Bellarmine's model, while Orthodox versions maintained ties with the Romanian Principalities. The study reveals how Latin theological categories such as the sevenfold enumeration of sacraments and Augustinian formulation of original sin penetrated Orthodox catechetical literature, illustrating the phenomenon of theological "pseudomorphosis," later criticised by the twentieth-century patristic renewal.

Keywords: *Melkite Psalter, Arabic printing, Antiochian Schism (1724), Catechesis, Byzantine Liturgy, Pseudomorphosis, Romanian Principalities*

In the Churches of Byzantine tradition, the Psalter holds a preeminent place in the spiritual and liturgical life of the faithful. It occupies a singular position at the intersection of private devotion and communal liturgical practice. On the one hand, it serves as the indispensable companion to personal prayer, guiding the believer – whether a monk, a cleric, or a layperson – in a daily discipline of meditation upon the sacred text. On the other hand, it provides the structural framework of the Liturgy of the Hours, whose cyclical recitation of the entire Psalter over the course of a week punctuates the life of religious communities. In this

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dual vocation, the Psalter functions as the foundational matrix of Eastern Christian spirituality, the text through which the full spectrum of human experience – praise, lamentation, repentance and thanksgiving – finds its liturgical and devotional expression.¹

In the eighteenth-century Near East, the Psalter was not confined to its spiritual and liturgical function; it also acquired an educational and catechetical dimension. For generations of Christian children, this book served as the primary manual for learning to read and as a guide for catechesis. The Psalter occupied a central place not only in the Melkite tradition but also across various Christian Churches, as shown by the print runs of Protestant and Armenian editions. This wide confessional diffusion invites a broader reflection on its status: one may even ask whether the Psalter functioned as an instrument of “confessional consolidation,” given that multiple confessions attributed significant importance to the same text. This dual function – liturgical and didactic – also helps explain the abundance of editions and the multiplication of editions among the earliest Arabic printing presses.²

Within the framework of the TYPARABIC project, which has produced a catalogue and studies on the Christian Arabic books printed in Romania, Lebanon, and Syria, we identify four principal Psalter editions from the eighteenth century: Aleppo (1706), Shuwayr (1735), Bucharest (1747) and Beirut (1752). The Aleppo Psalter was reprinted in 1709, while the one of Shuwayr was reprinted six times, in 1740, 1753, 1764, 1770, 1780 and 1797.³

¹ Job Getcha, *Le typicon décrypté* (Paris: Cerf, 2009), 15–22.

² Aurélien Girard, “Introduction. Livres et confessions chrétiennes orientales (XVI^e–XVIII^e siècles). Proposition pour une histoire comparée et connectée,” in *Livres et confessions chrétiennes orientales. Histoire connectée entre Empire ottoman, monde slave et Occident (XVI^e–XVIII^e siècles)*, eds. Aurélien Girard, Bernard Heyberger and Vassa Kontouma (Turnhout: Brepols, 2023), 9–84, here 35, 64; Nicholas Orme, *Medieval Schools. From Roman Britain to Renaissance England* (New Haven-London: Yale University Press, 2006).

³ It should be noted that a Melkite Psalter was printed at Padua in 1709 by the Damascene priest Filibbus Ghaylān. Another edition of the Psalter was published in London in 1725 by the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge. It was prepared by Salomone Negri (c. 1665–1727), a Melkite native of Damascus and a teacher of Arabic. See John-Paul Ghobrial, “The Life and Hard Times of Solomon Negri: An Arabic Teacher in Early Modern Europe,” in *The Teaching and Learning of Arabic in Early Modern Europe*, eds. Jan Loop, Alastair Hamilton and Charles Burnett (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2017), 310–32; Charbel Nassif, “Preliminaries to the Study of the Arabic Melkite Psalter of Padua (1709) Commissioned by Filibbus Ghaylān,” in *The Role of Italian Presses in Early Arabic Printing. Third Volume of Collected Works of the*

This study asks how the printing of Melkite Psalters in the eighteenth-century Near East came to serve not only liturgical purposes but also educational and catechetical ones. The article proceeds in four stages. It first traces the origins of Arabic printing for the Christians from the Romanian Principalities to the Near East. It then presents each of the four Psalter editions – Aleppo (1706), Shuwayr (1735), Bucharest (1747) and Beirut (1752) – through an analysis of their structure, content and para-texts. The third section explores the educational and catechetical function of these Psalters, highlighting the influence of post-Tridentine models on both Catholic and Orthodox editions. Finally, an excursus examines the catechism appended to the Beirut Psalter (1752), revealing how deeply Latin theological categories, such as the sevenfold enumeration of sacraments and Augustinian formulations of original sin, had penetrated Orthodox catechetical literature.

1. From Romania to the Near East: The Origins of Arabic Printing

The history of Arabic printing⁴ in the Near East is set within the context of close relations between Melkite Christian communities and the Romanian Principalities. From 1685, the Melkite Patriarch of Antioch Athanasios Dabbās forged ties with the Prince of Wallachia, Constantin Brâncoveanu, who financed the printing of the first two liturgical books in Arabic: a *Liturgicon* at Snagov in 1701 and a *Horologion* at Bucharest in 1702. These publications responded to a longstanding need among the Melkite clergy: to make prayer texts accessible to the Arabic-speaking faithful in their own language.

In 1705, Dabbās brought from Bucharest to Aleppo the typographical equipment used for these printings, thereby inaugurating the first Arabic printing press in the Near East. Between 1706 and 1711, twelve religious works were printed there in Arabic characters – Psalters, Gospels, Epistles, Prophecies, books of homilies and liturgical texts – confirming the essentially liturgical and pastoral vocation of this enterprise.

The division of the Melkite Patriarchate of Antioch in 1724 into two branches, Greek-Catholic and Greek-Orthodox, had direct repercussions

TYPARABIC Project, eds. Ioana Feodorov and Octavian-Adrian Negoită (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2026), 51–78.

⁴ The first Arabic book printed in the world is a *Horologion* (*Kitāb ṣalāt al-sawāʾi*). It was printed at Venice in 1514 for the Melkites of Syria. See Charbel Nassif, “*Kitāb ṣalāt al-sawāʾi* (1514): Le premier livre arabe imprimé au monde,” in Rami Wakim and Charbel Nassif, *Facsimile Kitāb ṣalāt al-sawāʾi* (Raboueh: Patriarcat grec melkite catholique, 2024).

on the history of Arabic printing, which was henceforth driven by two distinct confessional dynamics. On the Greek-Catholic side, ‘Abdallāh Zākhir, who had worked at the Aleppo press, was compelled to leave the city in 1722 on account of his philo-romanism. After several sojourns in various Lebanese monasteries – notably at Louaizé and Aïntoura, with the Jesuits – he definitively settled in 1731 at the Monastery of Saint John the Baptist at Khinshāra, the mother house of the Basilian Shuwayrite Order. There, he completed the installation of a printing press in 1733.⁵ This press, active from 1733 to 1899, produced thirty-three works serving the Melkite Greek Catholic Church and the other Eastern Catholic Churches, of which twenty-two date from the 18th century.⁶

On the Greek-Orthodox side, the connection with the Romanian lands continued. Between 1745 and 1747, the Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch, Sylvester,⁷ had four works printed at the Monastery of Saint Sabbas at Iași in Moldavia, thus perpetuating the relations between the Patriarchate of Antioch and the Danubian Principalities. It was in this same impetus that the Orthodox printing press of Beirut was founded in 1750. Sylvester had the typographic tools delivered to him from Wallachia, and Sheikh Yūnis Niqūlā al-Jubaylī, the administrator (*epitropos*) of the

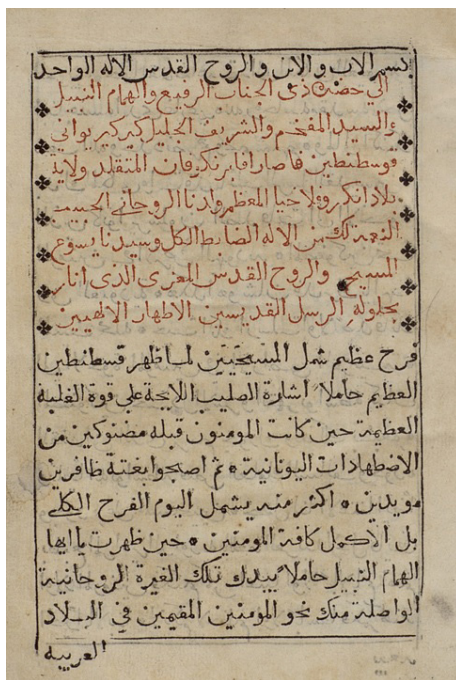


Fig. 1. *Lettre dédicatoire à Brâncoveanu, Psautier d'Alep, 1706 - BAR*

⁵ Aurélien Girard, “Des moines et des livres: une imprimerie arabe chez les basilien shuwayrites (melkites grecs-catholiques) au XVIII^e siècle,” in *Icons, Ornaments, and Other Charms of Christian Arabic Books: Second Volume of Collected Works of the TYPARABIC Project*, eds. Oana Iacubovschi, Samuel Noble and Ioana Feodorov (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2024), 111–35.

⁶ It should be mentioned that numerous Orthodox monasteries in Lebanon and Syria preserve liturgical books printed at Khinshāra, which indicates that the Orthodox also benefited from this press for their liturgical life.

⁷ Mihai Țipău, *Sylvester of Antioch. Life and Achievements of an 18th-Century Christian Orthodox Patriarch* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2024), 173–227.

Orthodox Monastery of Saint George in Beirut, installed the press in one of the rooms of the monastery's clerical buildings.⁸ This initiative was made possible through the activity of the priest and scholar Yūsuf Marqus,⁹ a disciple of Patriarch Sylvester, who had supervised the casting of Arabic type at the Monastery of Saint Spyridon in Bucharest, the Wallachian *metochion* of the Patriarchate of Antioch (since 1746), and had brought them to Syria around 1749. From this press emerged at least a Horologion (1751), a Psalter (1752), and probably a reprint of the Psalter, as well as a book of the Divine Liturgies (1753). The press ceased operations around 1753.¹⁰

⁸ Two documents dated 1749, preserved in MS Harisa, Saint Paul 210, f. 157v, indicate that Yūnis Niqūlā was appointed *wakil* in Beirut around August 1747 or shortly thereafter. See Habib Ibrahim, *The Correspondence of Mūsā Ṭrābulṣī (1732–1787): Critical Edition, English Translation, and Introduction* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2025), 59; Ṭipāu, *Sylvester of Antioch*, 123–24.

⁹ Yūsuf Marqus al-Ṭrābulṣī (c. 1705–1773/74) was an Orthodox priest, scholar, and polemicist from Tripoli who played a significant role in the intellectual and ecclesiastical life of the Patriarchate of Antioch. After early years as a tutor and manuscript copyist in Latakia and the Kūra region of Lebanon, he was ordained priest in 1743 and around 1746 composed *al-Shudhūr*, a polemical treatise against Latin doctrines whose authorship was temporarily usurped by Daskalos Theodosios. Between 1747 and 1749, he served as Patriarch Sylvester's secretary in Bucharest, where he witnessed the failed attempt to cast new Arabic typefaces and helped prepare a printing press that was eventually transferred to Beirut. Settling permanently in Beirut, Yūsuf opened a school of linguistic and theological sciences, continued his anti-Latin polemics, and supported colleagues until his death during the Russian occupation of Beirut. See Ibrahim, *The Correspondence of Mūsā Ṭrābulṣī (1732–1787)*, 34–47.

¹⁰ For an overview of the history of Arabic Christian printing in the Ottoman world, see Ioana Feodorov, *Arabic Printing for the Christians in Ottoman Lands. The East-European Connection* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2023). See also Ioana Feodorov, "Livres arabes chrétiens imprimés avec l'aide des principautés roumaines au début du XVIII^e siècle: Un répertoire commenté," *Chronos* 34 (2016): 7–49; Virgil Căndea, "Dès 1701: Dialogue roumano-libanais par le livre et l'imprimerie," in *Le livre et le Liban jusqu'à 1900*, ed. Camile Aboussouan (Paris: AGECCOOP, 1982), 283–91; Ioana Feodorov, "Sylvester of Antioch's Arabic Books Printed in 1747 at Bucharest," *Scrinium* 19 (2023): 5–27.

2. Presentation of the Psalters

This section offers a detailed presentation of each Psalter,¹¹ focusing on its content, structure, and the claims advanced in its prefaces and, where applicable, postfaces.

2.1. The Aleppo Psalter (1706)

This Psalter, entitled *Kitāb al-Zabūr al-sharīf al-manṭūq bi-hi min al-Rūḥ al-Qudus ‘alā fam al-nabiyy wa-l-malik Dāwūd wa-‘iddatu-hu māya wa-khamsūn mazmūr^{an} wa-yatlū-hu ‘ashar taṣābīḥ* (*The Book of the Holy Psalter, Spoken by the Holy Spirit through the Mouth of the Prophet and King David, Numbering One Hundred and Fifty Psalms, Followed by Ten Canticles*), was printed at Aleppo in 1706. The choice of the Psalter as the first work issued from this press underscores its paramount importance in religious and civil life, situating it in logical continuity with the printings of the *Liturgicon* at Snagov (1701) and the *Horologion* at Bucharest (1702). The work, comprising 294 pages (14 unnumbered pages and 280 numbered), contains the 151 Psalms,¹² distributed across 20 *kathismata*,¹³ and the ten biblical canticles. It opens with two distinct unnumbered prefaces.

The first preface (Fig. 1), comprising six pages, is a laudatory letter dedicated to Prince Constantin Brâncoveanu. Patriarch Dabbās expresses therein his profound gratitude for the constant interest that the sovereign shows towards the Arab Christians.

He recalls that Brâncoveanu has already come to the aid of the Arab Christians, whom he describes as “bowed down under the yoke of

¹¹ The Maronite bishop Sarkīs al-Rizzī, a former student of the Maronite College in Rome, who was once a hermit in Qozhaya before becoming the bishop of Damascus in 1596, brought back from Italy a printing press with Syriac characters and installed it at the Monastery of Saint Anthony – Qozhaya. A bilingual Syriac-Garshuni Psalter was printed there in 1610. Cf. Joseph Moukarzel, “Le psautier syriaque garchouni édité en 1610: Enjeux historiques et présentation du livre,” *Mélanges de l’Université Saint-Joseph* 63 (2010–2011): 511–66.

¹² Psalm 151 is attributed to David but does not appear in the canonical list of Psalms. It is present in the Septuagint and in the Peshitta, the most ancient Syriac translation of the Bible. It was also found at Qumran. For further discussion, cf. Thomas Conley, “Notes on the Reception of Ps. 151 in Byzantium,” in *ΣΥΝΔΕΣΜΟΣ: Studi in onore di Rosario Anastasi* 2 (Catania: Università di Catania, 1994), 109–21.

¹³ *Kathismata* (κάθισμα, seat or sitting) are the divisions of the Book of Psalms used in the Byzantine rite. The Psalter is divided into twenty *kathismata*, each containing several psalms. Every *kathisma* is further subdivided into three sections called *staseis* (στάσεις, standings). The faithful may sit while the psalms of a *kathisma* are being read – hence the name *kathisma*.

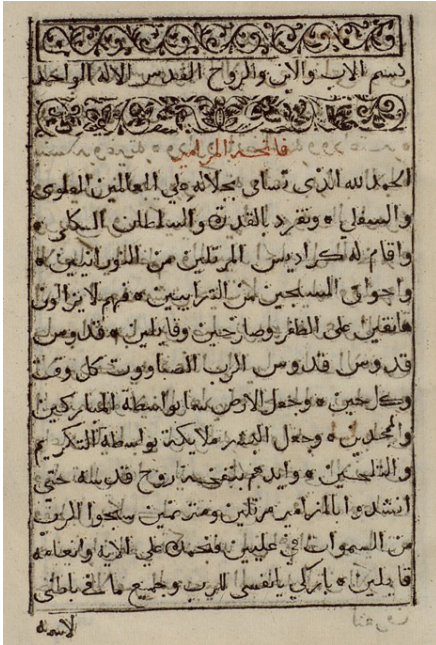


Fig. 2. First Preface, Aleppo Psalter, 1706 - BAR

captivity and oppression” (*al-mad-nūqīn taḥta dhull al-asr wa-l-qahr*), by having the *Liturgicon* printed for them.

The Patriarch underscores the highly symbolic import of this generosity: by offering the *Liturgicon* for the divine service of the fathers and the Psalter for the instruction of children, Brâncoveanu establishes himself as the providential protector of two generations. Dabbās specifies that, sustained by divine grace, he was able to perfect the casting of Arabic typefaces in order to print this new Psalter, which he offers in homage to the Prince of Wallachia. Dabbās draws a comparison between Brâncoveanu and Moses: just as the latter delivered to the Hebrew people the two Tables of the Law, so

Brâncoveanu offered to the Orthodox nation two “tables” of the Church, namely the *Liturgicon* and the Psalter.

In the second preface, of four pages (Fig. 2), entitled *Fātiḥat al-mazāmīr* (*Preface to the Psalms*), Patriarch Dabbās begins with a glorification of God, recalling that praise and psalmody unite angels and men. Drawing upon a verse from the Gospel of Matthew (4:4): “Man shall not live by bread alone,” he affirms that knowledge of the sacred texts is essential to enable the soul to discern good from evil, and that this is realized only if man nurtures the desire for it from his youth. Through the printing of this Psalter, Dabbās pursues a threefold objective: first, spiritual, using the Psalms as a “ladder” towards the glorification of God in churches and monasteries; second, educational, making the Psalter the foundation of school instruction for children from their earliest years; and finally, social, using the technology of printing to produce books at a cost far lower than that of manuscripts, thereby ensuring access to knowledge and piety for both the poor and the rich, so that poverty should no longer be an obstacle to the learning that God demands, as He says in the Book of Proverbs (4:1): “Hear, ye children, the instruction of a father, and attend to know understanding.” Finally, the Patriarch announces in

the preface that he revised the grammar of the Psalter before its printing applying a moderate correction (*iṣlāḥ mutawassiṭ*), except for its structure, which he did not change at all. Nevertheless, he revised the syntax of the twenty *kathismata*, whose Arabic formulation was judged linguistically poor (*khasāsatu ‘arabiyyati-hā*).¹⁴ Concerned with the proper diction of the text, in the absence of orthographic signs in Arabic, he also provides a reading instruction: the presence of a cross at the beginning of a sentence indicates to the reader that he should adopt an interrogative tone.

It is striking that Athanasios Dabbās made no mention of the Horologion printed at Bucharest in 1702. Perhaps the Horologion should be considered as intended primarily for monastic use, whereas the Liturgicon and the Psalter were intended for parochial use, instruction being conducted at that time in churches.

2.2. The Shuwayr Psalter (1735, 1740)

The Shuwayr printing press, founded by ‘Abdallāh Zākhir in 1733, operated following the schism of the Antiochian Patriarchate that occurred in 1724.¹⁵ This Psalter is entitled *Kitāb al-zabūr al-ilāhī li-Dāwūd al-nabī wa-‘iddat mazmūrāti-hi mi’a wa-khamsūn mazmūran munqasima ḥasab tartīb al-abā’ al-qiddisīn al-sharqīyīn ilā sab‘at aṣḥār mu‘ayyana li-sab‘at aṣḥār al-sabba wa-mutaḍammīna ‘ishrīn kātizmā khushū‘iyya thumma talā l-aṣḥār al-madhkūra ‘aṣḥar tasābiḥ nabawīyya qad i’tādat al-kanīsa an turattila-hā ba’d al-mazāmīr fī l-aṣḥār qad ṭubī’at al-ān ‘alā al-tartīb al-madhkūr* (*The Book of the Divine Psalter of David the Prophet, Containing One Hundred and Fifty Psalms, Divided According to the Arrangement of the Holy Eastern Fathers into Seven Hours Designated for the Seven Hours of Praise, and Comprising Twenty Devotional Kathismata; Then Following the Said Hours are Ten Prophetic Canticles which the Church Has Customarily Chanted After the Psalms During the Hours; Now Printed According to the Aforementioned Arrangement*). Comprising 347 pages, it was printed in 1735 by Zākhir, who had previously worked at the Aleppo press before establishing that of Shuwayr.

¹⁴ اننا قد اصبحنا اعراب المزامير قبل طبعه اصلاحا متوسطا ما عدا تركيبه فاننا ما غيرنا منه شيئا الا الكسومات العشر فاننا اصلحنا تركيبها لخساسة عربيتها

¹⁵ Joseph Abou Nohra, “La première imprimerie au Liban à caractères arabes (1733): Les origines et le rayonnement culturel,” *Parole de l’Orient* 28 (2003): 703–19; Ronney El Gemayel, “‘Abd Allāh Zākhir,” in *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History*, vol. 12, eds. David Thomas and John Chesworth (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 101–7; Charbel Nassif, “Les gravures des livres imprimés au XVIII^e siècle au Monastère Saint-Jean-Baptiste à Khinshāra – Mont Liban,” *Collectanea Christiana Orientalia* 21 (2024): 73–96.

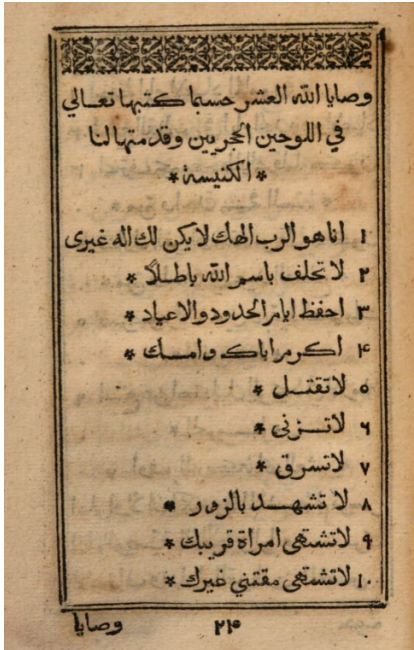


Fig. 3. The Ten Commandments, *Shuwayr Psalter* (1740), NLA Vienna

It is the second book printed by this press. After the preface, we find the 150 Psalms distributed across 20 *ka-thismata* and the 10 canticles.

In the preface entitled *Fī bayān sharaf sifr al-mazāmīr wa-fāydati-hi* (*On the Merits of the Book of Psalms and Its Benefit*),¹⁶ which precedes the title page and comprises the unnumbered pages, Zākhīr considers that although the entire Bible is inspired by God and useful, the Church accords a unique place to the Book of Psalms. Unlike other books that treat specific subjects, the Psalter is a universal compendium of all the Scriptures, for it condenses the sacred history of the Old Testament (*al-umūr al-māḍiya*), the prophecies – particularly concerning the life, death and resurrection of Christ (*al-nubuwwāt*

al-ilāhīyya) – and the moral teachings (*al-taʿālīm al-adabīyya wa-l-hikam al-mufīda*). Moreover, the Psalms serve for praise, to glorify the power and goodness of God, for repentance, to express contrition and ask pardon for sins, and for supplication, to find help in adversity, in the face of human trials and the malice of enemies (*al-tasābīḥ al-shukrīyya wa-l-ibtihālāt al-khushūʿiyya*). It is the Holy Spirit himself who, through the mouth of David, teaches the Church how to pray and to appease divine wrath. The author also draws upon the great theologians to legitimize the excellence of this book, citing notably Saint Basil the Great (329–379), who underscores the joy and divine melody of the text, Saint John Chrysostom (c. 344/349–407), who sees therein a salutary instruction for the soul, and Cassiodorus (c. 485–585), who compares the Psalter to the heavenly Paradise.

Zākhīr notes that ignorant scribes have caused alterations in certain phrases, due to their inability to understand their meaning. This version has been corrected and collated against the Greek original with absolute

¹⁶ Yulia Petrova, “Prefaces of the 18th-Century Christian Arabic Books Printed in Khinshāra: Structural and Thematic Features,” in Iacubovschi, Noble and Feodorov, *Icons, Ornaments, and Other Charms of Christian Arabic Books*, 187–201.

rigour by bilingual experts. He adds that since this book also serves for teaching children to read, the editors having made the deliberate choice to retain certain vowel letters (weak letters) even where strict grammar (the jussive) would require their suppression. This sacrifice of grammatical rule is a voluntary concession to facilitate the education of beginners.

The preface makes no mention of any contribution or benefit derived from foreign support, unlike the edition of the Aleppo Psalter. It rather highlights an asserted monastic autonomy, resting upon the local technical expertise embodied by ‘Abdallāh Zākhir. We note that Zākhir mentions Cassiodorus, who is a Latin writer and author of a commentary on the Psalms. The joint mention of Eastern and Western patristic traditions in this edition attests to the Roman allegiance of the author. By citing figures such as Cassiodorus alongside Saint Basil or Saint John Chrysostom, Zākhir anchors the Shuwayr Psalter in a Catholic perspective, thereby marking a break with the strictly Byzantine framework of previous editions.

The 1740 edition includes a noteworthy addition. The preface situated after the title page (pp. 2–12) is identical to that of the first edition. The Psalter comprises 366 pages followed by an untitled appendix of 16 unnumbered pages containing the fundamental elements of the Christian faith: the Ten Commandments of God, the seven Commandments of the Church, the three Evangelical Counsels and the seven Sacraments. This addition also includes the four Cardinal Virtues, the three Divine (Theological) Virtues, the ten Moral Virtues and the seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit. The appendix further details the seven Corporal Works of Mercy, the seven Spiritual Works of Mercy, the conditions for good works to be meritorious of eternal life, the seven Capital Sins and their opposing virtues, the six Sins against the Holy Spirit, the four Sins that cry out to Heaven for vengeance, the four Last Things of man, the five conditions necessary for a good confession and the signs of election. Through this new edition, the Byzantine Psalter demonstrates how the printing press also served to disseminate Catholic doctrine among the Eastern communities united to Rome. This appendix is the sign of a pedagogical Latinization that will be further elaborated upon.

2.3. The Bucharest Psalter (1747)

The title of this Psalter (Fig. 3) is identical to that of the Aleppo Psalter (1706): *Kitāb al-Zabūr al-sharīf al-mantūq bi-hi min al-Rūḥ al-Qudus ‘alā fam al-nabiyy wa-l-malik Dāwūd wa-‘iddatu-hu māya wa-khamsūn*

*mazmūran wa-yatlū-hu ‘ashara*¹⁷ *taṣābīḥ*. It was printed by Patriarch Sylvester at Bucharest in 1747. The preface was signed by Sylvester, but in reality, he is not its true author. He has taken over the preface of the 1706 Psalter composed by Dabbās, introducing only minor modifications. In the Aleppo Psalter, Dabbās presented himself thus:

Thus says the Holy Father, the most precious vessel, he who equals Moses in his calling, Aaron the father of priests in his priesthood, Elijah in his asceticism and zeal, David in his humility and gentleness, and Solomon in his governance and wisdom, the Father of Fathers and Chief of Chiefs, *Kyrios Kyrios* Athanasios, the Magnificent Patriarch of Antioch and the illustrious and venerable Lord. He who brought joy to Damascus when he resided there, and who honoured Aleppo the Gray when he settled there. He has edified the Orthodox community by becoming its pastor and has illuminated the believing souls, whose guide he remains. May God have mercy on us through his prayers, and may He grant us the abundance of his blessings and invocations.¹⁸

This entire laudatory paragraph was replaced by the expression “this poor one” (*hādhā al-faqīr*) in the 1747 Bucharest Psalter. This stylistic choice by Sylvester marks a sharp contrast with the highly ornate and solemn presentation of Dabbās. The latter mentions that the cost of the printed book is lower than that of a manuscript (*aqall min thaman al-khaṭṭ*), whereas Sylvester simply indicates that the cost is low (*thaman qalīl*), without mentioning manuscripts. Patriarch Sylvester, in evoking the enterprise of printing the Psalter, adds: “When I entered into the lands of the Moldavians and Wallachians.” Sylvester omits, however, the allusion to the Book of Proverbs as well as the linguistic corrections undertaken by his predecessor. He concludes by specifying that this book was printed under the reign of Constantine Mavrokordatos, son of Nicholas, at Bucharest, while asking God to preserve and strengthen his power. The preface of the Bucharest Psalter mentions no work of correction. This Psalter may be considered a reprint of the Aleppo Psalter. The Psalter contains only the Psalms, the 20 *kathismata*, and the ten biblical canticles.

¹⁷ In the Aleppo Psalter: *‘ashar*.

¹⁸ وبعد فيقول الاب الاقدس والانا الانفس المضاهي موسى بدعوته وهرون اب الاحبار بحبريته، وإلياس بنسكه وغيرته، وداود بقضاعه ووداعته، وسليمان بتدبيره وحكمته، أعني به اب الابا وريس الروسا كيريو كير اثناسيوس البطريرك الانطاكي المعظم، والسيد الجليل المفخم، الذي أسعد دمشق حيث كان سليلها، وشرف حلب الشهبا حين صار نزيلها، وعمر الملة الأرثوذكسية إذ غدا راعيها، وأنا الانفس المومنة فهو لا يزال هاديها، رحنا الله بصلواته واعاد علينا جزيل بركته ودعواته

2.4. The Beirut Psalter (1752)

This Psalter bears the same title as those of Aleppo and Bucharest: *Kitāb al-Zabūr al-sharīf al-manṭūq bi-hi min al-Rūḥ al-Qudus ‘alā fam al-nabiyy wa-l-malik Dāwūd wa-‘iddatu-hu miyya wa-khamsūn mazmūran wa-yat-lū-hu ‘ashara*¹⁹ *taṣābiḥ*. It comprises 392 pages. It is a complete liturgical and educational work. The content of the work opens with pedagogical elements, notably the alphabet followed by the initial prayers that inaugurate the Liturgy of the Hours in the Byzantine rite and which every Melkite faithful should know by heart (pp. 1–3), before presenting an abridgement of the catechism entitled *Kitāb Muqtaṣar al-ta’līm al-masīḥī* (Fig. 4, pp. 3–35). The latter, structured in the form of 45 questions and answers, covers the fundamentals of the Christian faith, such as the sign of the Cross, the Trinity, the Incarnation, the Creed, as well as essential prayers such as the Our Father and the Hail Mary. It also expounds the divine law through the Ten Commandments and the precepts of the Church, the sacramental life with the seven Sacraments and the Gifts of the Holy Spirit, as well as the pillars of Christian morality including the virtues, the works of mercy, the beatitudes, and the doctrine concerning sin (original, mortal and venial).

After the catechism, we find the title page, which mentions that the Psalter was printed under the leadership of Patriarch Sylvester through the care of his delegate (*wakīl*) Sheikh Yūnis Niqūlā.²⁰ The preface, comprising four unnumbered pages, was composed by Sophronios, Metropolitan of Acre.²¹ It opens with a glorification of the Trinity and gives thanks to

¹⁹ In the Aleppo Psalter: ‘*ashar*.

²⁰ Two documents dated 1749, preserved in MS Harisa, Saint Paul 210, f. 157v, indicate that Yūnis Niqūlā was appointed *wakīl* in Beirut around August 1747 or shortly thereafter. See Ibrahim, *The Correspondence of Mūsā Trābulṣī*, 59.

²¹ Sophronios ibn ‘Īsā al-Kilzī was born around 1705 in Kilis, a city in southeastern Turkey. He served as secretary and deacon to Patriarch Sylvester of Antioch and accompanied him on his first journey to Greece and the Romanian Principalities between 1725 and 1732. During this period, he likely began learning Greek grammar at the patriarch’s request. After returning to Syria in 1732, Sophronios became a disciple of Kyr Iakobos of Patmos, a Greek master who had established a school in Tripoli and later in Damascus. Under his tutelage, Sophronios developed a strong command of both Arabic and Greek. He spent much of his time translating anti-Latin polemical works from Greek into Arabic, including texts by Nektarios of Jerusalem and Eustratios Argenti. Around 1740–1741, Sophronios was ordained priest and then consecrated bishop of Acre by the patriarch of Jerusalem. In 1750, Sophronios was sent to Aleppo, where tensions with the Catholic community escalated. After a tumultuous period that included the imprisonment of Catholic clerics and his own subsequent arrest, he was released in January 1752 and retired to Constantinople. After years of retreat, Sophronios became patriarch of Jerusalem (Sophronios V, 1771–1775) and later patri-

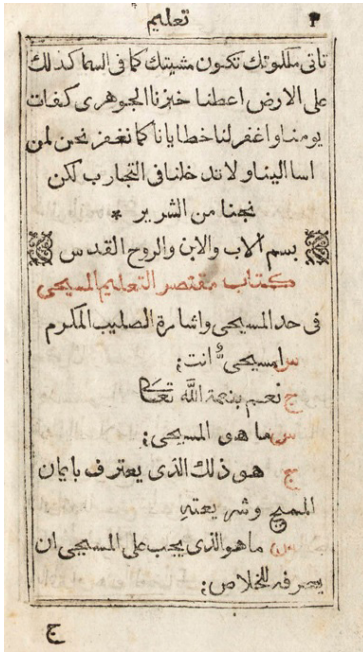


Fig. 4. *Beginning of the Catechism, Beirut Psalter, Uppsala University*

God for having inspired the Prophet David. The Metropolitan explains that, at the request of the priest Yūsuf Marqus of Tripoli, he examined the ancient translation of the deacon ‘Abdallāh ibn Faḍl al-Anṭākī (11th century). He found that centuries of manual copying by scribes who were sometimes ignorant had introduced numerous errors of meaning, due to the graphic resemblance of certain Arabic words. He notes that some had already undertaken certain corrections, but their work was not exhaustive. Moved by zeal to restore the text’s integrity, Sophronios undertook a meticulous correction by collating the Arabic version against the Greek original. This work was carried out in collaboration with the deacon Ilyās Fakhr, logothete of the See of Antioch, while taking care to preserve the terms familiar to the faithful so as not to disconcert them.

The final edition aspires to be a “word for word” correspondence with the Greek. Superfluous additions were removed and lacunae filled, in order to offer a reliable version for prayer and the glory of God. The core of the work consists of the Psalter, comprising the 151 Psalms distributed across *kathismata*, completed by the ten biblical canticles, with a new pagination (367 pages).

The postface (Fig. 5), comprising 4 pages (pp. 363–67), begins with a verse from the Epistle of James (3:14): “Do not boast or deny the truth.” It recalls that if the Old Testament was originally in Hebrew, the Greek version of the Septuagint, translated under Ptolemy II by seventy-two scholars, among whom Saint Simeon the Just,²² now holds authority;

arch of Constantinople (Sophronios II, 1774–1780). He died on October 19, 1780. See Ibrahim, *The Correspondence of Mūsā Ṭrābulṣī*, 18–34.

²² Eveline van Staaldoune-Sulman, “Simeon the Just, the Septuagint and Targum Jonathan,” in *Septuagint, Targum and Beyond: Comparing Aramaic and Greek Versions from Jewish Antiquity*, Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism 193, eds. David Shepherd, Jan Joosten, and Michaël van der Meer (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 317–38; Constantin Horia Oancea, “Simeon the God-Receiver (Luke 2:21–35) as a Translator of the Septuagint: Investigating the Sources of a Popular Hagiographic Legend in Orthodox Christianity,” *Religions* 15 (2024): 1409, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15111409>.

every version in another language must therefore conform to it. The reader, whether a priest or a layperson, who finds that certain terms appear different, is advised to understand that they are closer to the correct Greek, and to consult experts in grammar rather than display obstinacy, which would amount to opposing the Holy Spirit. The translator did not only render the Greek text word by word but also consulted Greek commentaries on the Psalms. The editor expresses the wish to subsequently print a commentary on the Psalms, which would confirm the correctness and veracity of his linguistic choices, “so that truth may appear openly.”²³ For the faithful who do not master Greek, the editor

recommends respectful silence and the customary recitation of the office, without sowing doubt or criticizing the new

correction. Nevertheless, certain archaisms have been retained because they are too deeply rooted in the oral tradition, as in the Cantic of the Three Young Men. Finally, on the technical and typographical level, the use of the Greek semicolon (⁂) is introduced to signal interrogative sentences and help the reader adopt the proper tone.

3. The Melkite Psalters: Tools of Education and Catechesis

While discussing Ibn al-Faḍl’s Arabic versions of the Book of Psalms, Alexandre Roberts notes that the Psalter was a fundamental text for Byzantine primary education. Just as early memorization of the Qur’ān was a standard marker of a Muslim boy’s precocious talent, learning the Psalter by heart was an early sign of a Christian child’s brilliance.²⁴

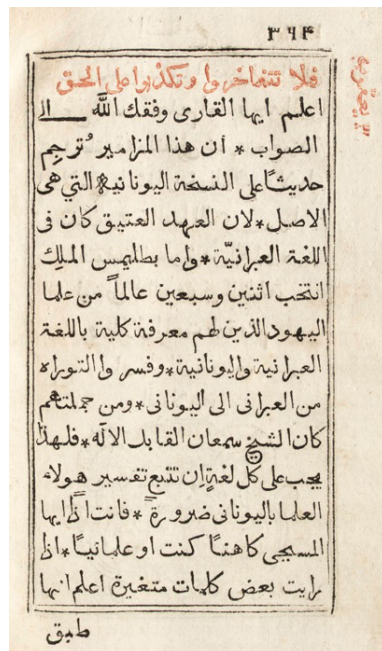


Fig. 5. Postface, *Beirut Psalter*, 1752

²³ ويظهر الحق جهراً. This book was never printed, but in 1753 the explanation of the seven penitential psalms by the Jesuit Pierre Arnoudie was published at the Khinshāra press: *Kitāb tafsīr sabʿa mazmūrāt min mazāmīr Dāwūd al-nabī al-mulaqqaba bi-mazāmīr al-tawba*.

²⁴ Alexandre M. Roberts, *Reason and Revelation in Byzantine Antioch: The Christian Translation Program of Abdallah ibn al-Faḍl* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2020), 37.

The four editions of Aleppo, Shuwayr, Bucharest and Beirut share a common ideological and structural foundation. Beyond their liturgical and spiritual dimension, they are all invested with an educational function: the Psalter is not merely a book of prayer but asserts itself as the fundamental manual for teaching children to read. This function is clearly mentioned in the prefaces of the Aleppo, Shuwayr and Bucharest Psalters.

In the second preface of the Aleppo Psalter (1706), Dabbās considers the Psalter “a sturdy staff for faithful children and young ones” (*‘ukkāz wathīq li-l-awlād wa-l-atfāl al-mu’minīn*).²⁵ The Bucharest Psalter (1747) reproduces, for the most part, the elements mentioned in the preface of the Aleppo Psalter (1706). The Shuwayr Psalter (1735) clearly highlights the role of printing the Psalter in promoting universal access to reading: “It has recently been printed to facilitate its acquisition by all, and to prevent anyone from justifying their neglect of teaching their children to read with the claim: «I am unable».” It also mentions not taking into consideration certain grammatical rules in order to facilitate the teaching of reading to children:

Know also that, since this divine Psalter is used by the faithful to teach children Arabic reading, we did not wish to omit from the weak verbs [i.e., verbs containing long vowels] in the jussive mood and in the non-conjugated state with attached pronouns the vowel letters that they contain. Rather, we have retained these letters in the aforementioned case, following the customary practice of scribes who are not versed in the conventions of the Arabic language. This is so that reading these verbs may not prove difficult for children who are learning, nor for others who cannot pronounce them correctly when these letters are elided by the teachers. Especially since the retention of these letters in the jussive has been attested in various dialects of the Arabs. Therefore, do not attribute this to shameful ignorance; rather, consider it a concession and a facility for those who cannot read such forms correctly when they are reduced to one or two letters.²⁶

The Beirut Psalter (1752) makes no explicit mention of the educational objective in either the preface or the postface; nevertheless, the work

²⁵ This phrase was removed from the Bucharest Psalter (1747).

²⁶

ثم اعلم أنه إذا كان هذا الزبور الإلهي يستعمله المؤمنون لتعليم أولاد القراءة العربية لم نرد أن نحذف من الأفعال المعتلة حالة الجزم وعدم الإسناد إلى الضماير المتصلة ما يوجد فيها من أحرف العلة بل أثبتنا هذه الأحرف في الحالة المذكورة حسب العادة الجارية من الكتبة الذين لا يفهمون اصطلاحات اللغة العربية وذلك لكي لا تتعسر قراءة هذه الأفعال على الأولاد المتعلمين ولا على غيرهم من الذين لا يحسنون النطق بها في حال حذف هذه الحروف من المعلمين لا سيما أن إثبات هذه الحروف في حالة الجزم قد سمع في لغات العرب فلا تتسبب ذلك إلى الجهل الشين بل اعتدته تنازلاً ومراعاة لعدم فهم الذين لا يحسنون قراءتها إذا تكون على حرف واحد أو على حرفين

begins with the Arabic alphabet, in a practice-form disposition.²⁷ This is therefore a manifest indication that the objective of printing this Psalter is equally educational.

The catechetical dimension appears clearly starting with the second edition of the Shuwayr Psalter (1740), as well as in the Beirut Psalter (1752), through the catechisms that conclude the former and inaugurate the latter. The history of the Arabic catechism is intimately linked to the post-Tridentine Catholic Reform and the influence of Jesuit models: the catechism of Robert Bellarmine, structured in simple question-and-answer format, established itself as a reference. The first Arabic edition of this catechism was produced at Rome in 1613.

The Shuwayr press published two catechisms: the first, more detailed, published in 1738, is entitled *Murshid al-masīhī* and is presented in a continuous form; the second, entitled *Mukhtaṣar al-ta'lim al-masīhī*, printed in 1756, adopts the question-and-answer form. We have seen that the catechism of the Orthodox Psalter of Beirut (1752) is likewise composed in a question-and-answer form. Orthodox circles also drew upon Bellarmine's text to compose their own catechisms, such as that of Iakovos of Patmos, translated into Arabic by Sophronios, later Archbishop of Acre, in 1724, as well as the Orthodox Confession of Peter Mogila, composed in 1640 and translated into Arabic in 1675.

4. Excursus: On the Catechism of the Orthodox Psalter of Beirut

Aurélien Girard has already noted that this anonymous catechism corresponds to the edition of the *Kitāb muqtaṣar al-ta'lim al-masīhī* found in the manuscript Beirut, Bibliothèque Orientale 972. This manuscript mentions the name of the author, who is Ilyās Fakhr (1697–1758). Fakhr was a polemicist from Tripoli, a very active Orthodox who had first embraced Catholicism, and was close to Patriarch Sylvester of Antioch, having acted as his secretary and counsellor, and who also revised this Psalter, as mentioned in the preface.²⁸ However, certain sections of the manuscript text were not published in the Beirut Psalter of 1752, such as the explanation of each article of the Creed (fol. 12v–17v), which also includes in the margins the corresponding scriptural references. The published text was

²⁷ Ioana Feodorov, "New Data on the Early Arabic Printing in the Levant and Its Connections to the Romanian Presses," *Revue des études sud-est européennes* LVI (2018): 209–10.

²⁸ Ronney El Gemayel, *Hāshiyah Wajīzah of Ilyās Fahr (d. 1758): An Arabic Byzantine Antiochian Ecclesiology Responding to Uniatism* (PhD, diss. Pontificio Istituto Orientale, Rome, 2014). I am grateful to Fr Ronney for the access to his thesis.

thus much simpler, but it also lost the anti-Catholic, indeed anti-Protestant, polemical attacks present in the manuscript version.²⁹

Indeed, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Orthodox manuals and catechisms largely adopted the categories and formulations of Latin theology. Among the representative texts of this period of Latin influence, one may cite the Confession of Peter Mogila (1640), Metropolitan of Kiev, strongly influenced by Roman Catholic scholasticism, and the Confession of Dositheus (1672), Patriarch of Jerusalem, composed in reaction to the Calvinism of Cyril Loukaris but adopting Latin formulations.³⁰ Several factors explain this situation: in the face of the Protestant Reformation, Orthodox theologians often – though not always consistently – aligned themselves with Roman Catholic positions in order to distinguish themselves from Protestantism. Furthermore, many Orthodox theologians of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were trained in Catholic or Protestant institutions (Rome, Padua, or German universities), for want of Orthodox institutions of university level. Moreover, as Georges Florovsky notes, the Orthodox Church had not produced systematic manuals comparable to those of Latin scholasticism; the Orthodox theology of this period was “a theology of translation,” adopting the structures and arguments of Latin scholasticism without subjecting them to critical examination in the light of the patristic tradition. It was only from the twentieth century onward that the Orthodox effected a return to patristic sources with theologians such as Georges Florovsky (1893–1979)³¹ and Vladimir Lossky (1903–1958). Thus, certain elements mentioned in this brief catechism are rather Latin elements adopted by the Orthodox.

²⁹ Aurélien Girard, “The Arabic Press of Saint John the Baptist of Shuwayr (Mount Lebanon) and Western Catholic Publishing (18th Century), from Technical Invention to Translations: The Example of Catechisms,” in *The Role of Italian Presses in Early Arabic Printing. Third Volume of Collected Works of the TYPARABIC Project*, eds. Ioana Feodorov and Octavian-Adrian Negoită (Berlin-Boston: De Gruyter, 2026), 79–121; Ioana Feodorov, “Was Peter Movilă’s Confession of the Orthodox Faith a Source for the Teachings on the Orthodox Faith Printed in the 1752 Beirut Psalter?” in *Arabic Christianity between the Ottoman Levant and Eastern Europe*, eds. Ioana Feodorov, Bernard Heyberger and Samuel Noble (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2021), 193–223.

³⁰ Vassa Kontouma, “La Confession de foi de Dosithée II de Jérusalem: Versions de 1672 et 1690,” in *L’Union à l’épreuve du formulaire: Professions de foi entre Églises d’Orient et d’Occident (XIII^e–XVIII^e s.)*, eds. Marie-Hélène Blanchet and Frédéric Gabriel (Leuven: Peeters, 2016), 341–72.

³¹ Georges Florovsky, “Western Influences in Russian Theology,” in *The Collected Works of Georges Florovsky*, vol. 4: *Aspects of Church History* (Belmont, MA: Nordland Publishing, 1975), 157–82.

4.1. Number of the Sacraments

The Roman Catholic catechism asserts the existence of seven sacraments. In the Byzantine tradition, however, one speaks more commonly of the “Holy Mysteries” (τὰ ἅγια μυστήρια) rather than “sacraments” in the Latin sense. This terminological difference reflects a deeper theological distinction. Until the 8th century, there was no technical term to designate sacraments as a specific category of ecclesial acts. The term *mysterion* was used primarily in its broader and more general sense of “mystery of salvation,” and only in a subsidiary sense to designate the particular actions through which salvation is bestowed. The early Church did not operate with a fixed sacramental taxonomy but rather understood all liturgical and ecclesial life as participating in the one great mystery of Christ’s saving work.³²

The schema of seven sacraments appears for the first time, quite significantly, in the Profession of Faith required by Pope Clement IV from Emperor Michael VIII Palaeologus in 1267. This Profession had been prepared, of course, by Latin theologians, and was imposed upon the Byzantine emperor in the context of the Union of Lyon (1274).³³ It was only in the seventeenth century, when Latin influence reached its zenith in the Orthodox East, and in reaction to the Protestant Reformation, that this sevenfold enumeration became fixed and definitive in Orthodox theological manuals. Prior to this period of Western influence, Orthodox authors varied considerably regarding the number of sacraments: John of Damascus, in the eighth century, speaks of two principal mysteries, namely Baptism and the Eucharist; Pseudo-Dionysios the Areopagite, writing in the fifth or sixth century, enumerates six hierarchical acts in his *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*; Theodore the Studite, in the ninth century, likewise provides a list of six sacraments. By contrast, Joasaph, Metropolitan of Ephesus in the fifteenth century, counts as many as ten. Moreover, those Byzantine theologians who do speak of seven sacraments often differ among themselves as to which rites they include in their enumeration.³⁴

This fluidity demonstrates that the sevenfold scheme, while eventually adopted by Orthodox theology, was never the object of dogmatic definition in the Byzantine tradition. The Orthodox Church has consistently maintained that the entire life of the Church is sacramental, and that the

³² John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1979), 191–92.

³³ Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 192.

³⁴ Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church* (London: Penguin Books, 1963), 281–83.

“seven” figure, while convenient and traditional, should not be understood as an exhaustive or exclusive limitation of divine grace operating through the Church’s liturgical life.³⁵

4.2. Original Sin and the Damnation of the Unbaptized

We reproduce two questions and answers concerning original sin and the damnation of the unbaptized:

Q: What is original sin?

R: It is that in which every human being is born; it is an inheritance from our father Adam, the first father. It is also called ancestral sin.

Q: How is this sin effaced and how does it leave us?

R: It is effaced and leaves us through holy baptism. That is why whoever dies without being baptized goes to eternal hell and is deprived of the Kingdom of Heaven, for he died without baptism.³⁶

These formulations call for several critical remarks. John Meyendorff has shown that the Augustinian formulations of inherited guilt do not appear in Orthodox texts until the modern period, under Latin influence.³⁷ It was only with John Romanides’s work, *The Ancestral Sin*, published in Greek in 1957, that the distinction between the Eastern patristic conception and the Augustinian doctrine was clarified.³⁸

Indeed, the Greek Fathers do not teach the inheritance of personal guilt. According to John of Damascus:

And so, God made man innocent, straightforward, virtuous, free from pain, free from care, ornamented with every virtue, and adorned with all good qualities [...]. He moreover made him sinless and endowed with freedom of will. By being sinless I do not mean being incapable of sinning, for only the Divinity is incapable of sinning, but having the tendency to sin not in his nature but, rather, in his power of choice.³⁹

³⁵ On the absence of dogmatic fixation of the number of sacraments in the Byzantine tradition before the seventeenth century, see Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 191–96; Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1973), 135–51.

³⁶ *Kitāb al-Zabūr al-sharīf al-manṭūq bi-hi min al-Rūḥ al-Qudus ‘alā fam al-nabiyy wa-l-malik Dāwūd wa-‘iddatu-hu miyya mi’a wa-khamsūn mazmūran wa-yatlū-hu ‘ashara taṣābīḥ* (Beirut: Saint-Georges Printing Press, 1752), 21–22.

³⁷ Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 143–46.

³⁸ John S. Romanides, *The Ancestral Sin*, trans. George S. Gabriel (Ridgewood, NJ: Zephyr Publishing, 2002). Original Greek edition: *Tò προπατορικὸν ἀμάρτημα* (Athens: Apostoliki Diakonia, 1957).

³⁹ John of Damascus, *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, trans. Frederic H. Chase Jr. (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1958), II, 12, 235.

Maximus the Confessor insists on the fact that sin is always personal: nature in itself does not sin, but a free person can sin. He sees the consequence of Adam's sin as corruption and possibility, not as the automatic inheritance of guilt.⁴⁰ Photios explicitly rejects the idea of a sin inherent in the nature of man, as such.⁴¹

On the other hand, the Byzantine tradition postulates the necessity of baptism for full entry into the Kingdom, but it does not define the automatic eternal damnation of those who die unbaptized. It distinguishes the privation of the Kingdom from personal guilt and entrusts the final judgement to the mercy of God. Saint Gregory of Nazianzus expresses himself thus:

Others are not in a position to receive it [baptism], perhaps because of their tender age, or by reason of some completely involuntary circumstance which does not permit them, despite their desire, to obtain grace [...], they will be neither endowed with glory nor punished by the just judge. They do not have the seal, but they have not acted wickedly, and they have suffered the harm rather than caused it; for he who does not deserve to be punished does not therefore deserve to be honoured, and he who does not deserve to be honoured does not therefore deserve to be punished.⁴²

Gregory of Nyssa, in his treatise *On Infants Who Have Died Prematurely*, likewise declares that these children do not undergo punishment, though they do not enjoy full beatitude.⁴³ Orthodoxy has, moreover, never developed a doctrine equivalent to the Limbo of medieval Latin theology.

The presence of these teachings in an Orthodox Psalter reveals the extent of the penetration of Latin theological categories into the Melkite Orthodox world in the eighteenth century. This phenomenon, which historians of Orthodox theology have termed "pseudomorphosis," affected all the Orthodox Churches to varying degrees and was not called into question until the twentieth century, by the patristic renewal.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Maximus the Confessor, *Quaestiones ad Thalassium*, Qu. 42 (PG 90, 405C–408D). See Jean-Claude Larchet, "Ancestral Guilt According to St Maximus the Confessor: A Bridge Between Eastern and Western Conceptions," *Sobornost* 20/1 (1998): 26–48.

⁴¹ Photios, *Amphilochia*, Qu. 84 (PG 101, 485–89).

⁴² Grégoire de Nazianze, *Discours 38–41*, trans. Claudio Moreschini (Paris: Cerf, 1990), 40, 23, 247–49.

⁴³ Gregory of Nyssa, *De infantibus praemature abreptis* (PG 46, 161–92).

⁴⁴ On the pseudomorphosis of Orthodox theology, see Georges Florovsky, *Ways of Russian Theology*, vol. 1 (Belmont: Nordland Publishing, 1979), 33–85. This concept is borrowed from Oswald Spengler and adopted by Florovsky to describe the adoption by Orthodox theologians of scholastic categories foreign to their own tradition.

Conclusion

The four books examined in this article show how the printing press transformed the Psalter from a purely liturgical text into an instrument of religious education and confessional consolidation. Despite divergent editorial strategies and confessional allegiances, these editions share a common pedagogical vocation. The Psalter served not only as the foundation of the Liturgy of the Hours but also as the primary manual for teaching Arabic-speaking Christian children to read. The prefaces of the Aleppo and Shuwayr Psalters make this educational function explicit, while the Beirut Psalter opens with the Arabic alphabet, a clear sign of its didactic purpose. This dual function explains why so many editions and reprints were released throughout the century. The 1724 schism shaped two distinct trajectories. On the Greek-Catholic side, the Shuwayr press operated with local monastic autonomy, incorporating catechetical content drawn from post-Tridentine models, notably Bellarmine's question-and-answer format. On the Greek-Orthodox side, the Bucharest and Beirut Psalters perpetuated the ties between the Patriarchate of Antioch and the Romanian Principalities, while also revealing how deeply Latin theological categories had penetrated Orthodox catechetical literature. The catechism appended to the Beirut Psalter, with its sevenfold enumeration of sacraments and its Augustinian formulation of original sin, illustrates the phenomenon of theological "pseudomorphosis" that would only be challenged by the twentieth-century return to patristic sources. The corrections undertaken by the editors – whether Dabbās's "moderate correction," Zākhir's collation against the Greek, or Sophronios's meticulous revision for the Beirut edition – reveal a twofold concern: fidelity to the Greek Septuagint and adaptation to the linguistic capacities of Arabic-speaking readers. Zākhir's deliberate retention of vowel letters in the jussive, explicitly justified as a pedagogical concession, shows that editors were prepared to sacrifice strict grammatical correctness for the sake of accessibility. A comparative textual study of these Psalter editions together with the editions of Padua (1709) and London (1725) remains to be undertaken. Such an investigation would allow us to measure the actual extent of the recorded corrections, to identify specific lexical and syntactical variants, and to verify whether the editors' claims match the textual evidence. It would also shed light on the transmission of 'Abdallāh ibn al-Faḍl's eleventh-century translation and its successive revisions across confessional lines. In sum, these editorial choices show how the printing press contributed to structuring an Arabic religious education in print

and to consolidating confessional identities through the sacred text. Standing at the crossroads of liturgy, catechesis, and literacy, the Psalter became a privileged vehicle for shaping the faith and language of Melkite communities on both sides of the 1724 divide.