

MĪHĀ'ĪL BURAYK

al-Dimashqī al-Ḥūrī al-Rūm al-Urtūduksī

(b. <1720; d. >1782)

LIFE

From the dates of *Ta'riḥ al-Shām*, M.B.'s¹ best known work and the only extant source on his life, one can conclude that he was born before 1132/1720 in Damascus and died there sometime after 1195/1782. Unfortunately telling very little about his life in this work, M.B. introduces himself as a priest (*ḥūrī*) of the Damascus-based Antiochian patriarchate (*al-Baṭrakīyah al-Anṭākīyah*) of the Greek Orthodox Church (*Kanīсах al-Rūm al-Urtūduks*), who was educated in church schools in Damascus. On 26 Jumada II 1154/8 September 1741, he was appointed as a deacon (*shammās*) by the archbishop. Ten days later, he was ordained as a priest (*qissīs*) and within two weeks was permitted to hear confessions.² In 1163/1750, during the archbishop's stay in Russia, M.B. was entrusted with overseeing his residence and the operation of the city's Orthodox cathedral. When the archbishop returned, Burayk was given the titles of priest (*ḥūrī*) and *brūtūbābās* (Greek, *protopapas*), the highest rank within the priesthood (*al-kahanah*).³ At the same time, he was charged with preaching at the Bāb al-Mulūkī church. In 1182/1768, he was put in charge of the monastery (*dayr*) at Ṣaydnāyā, one of the most important monasteries in Syria. He served in this position for only a year before resigning due to overwork.

WORKS

① *Ta'riḥ al-Shām*

Using both the Christian (*masīḥī*) and *hijrī* calendars, M.B. lists events organized chronologically and focuses on Damascus and its hinterland. Like his Muslim counterparts, he regularly notes the comings and goings of the hajj caravan – the lynchpin of Damascus' economic and political importance – and, like them, complains about rises in the price of staples and the outbreaks of factional fighting between rival militias that plagued the city throughout the eighteenth century. In 1172/1758, for example, he describes three days of factional fighting in the Mīdān neighborhood in the southern part of the city and compares this bloodshed to one of the battles for Belgrade between the Ottomans and the Austrians. This comment is indicative of one of the most important distinguishing features of M.B.'s chronicle. Unlike his Muslim counterparts in Damascus, he is cognizant of happenings in Europe and of the nuances of inter-European society and politics. He distinguishes between Serbs, Austrians, the French, Poles and Russians. In 1168/1755, he reports on the Lisbon earthquake. Though he never expresses anything but loyalty to the Ottoman state, his comments on the Russo-Ottoman War of 1181-88/1768-74 indicate that he hoped for a Russian victory.⁴

HISTORIANS OF THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

C. Kafadar H. Karateke C. Fleischer

Two issues dominate the narrative and have made this work an invaluable source for historians of Ottoman Syria. In the introduction to his chronicle, M.B. explicitly mentions the spread of Catholicism in Syria and the rise to prominence of the °Az̄m family as the reasons for writing his chronicle and for starting in 1132/1720.⁵ M.B. wrote at a time when the Orthodox Church in Syria was shaken by a Uniate (Catholic) schism and his pro-Orthodox sentiments are important for historians as the majority of Christian historians of this time came from the Maronite or Greek Catholic churches.⁶

M.B.'s chronicle also covers a seminal stage in the political history of Damascus, namely the period of the rise and decline of the °Az̄ms. Members of this family were the first Syrians to be appointed by Ottoman authorities to the governorship of the province of Damascus. The fact that several members of the °Az̄m family were appointed in succession and for lengthy tenures marked a dramatic change in Ottoman provincial administration.⁷ As'ad Pasha al-°Az̄m, who ruled for an unprecedented 14 consecutive years (1156-70/1743-57), emerges in M.B.'s account as a protector of the Christian community. M.B. remarks that he has read histories of Damascus from the time of the Muslim conquest and Christians were "never treated with the honor, dignity, and respect they received during the last ten years under the rule of As'ad Pasha."⁸

The last years of the chronicle are occupied with the waning importance of Damascus as it was attacked by Egypt in the south and as the center of gravity in Syria more generally shifted from the interior to the coast. M.B. witnessed the dramatic events of the 1770s in Syria including the Egyptian invasion of 1186/1772, the rise of Zāhir al-°Umar in the Galilee, and the emergence of Aḥmad Pasha al-Jazzār (d. 1219/1804) in Sidon. These events also signaled the end of the °Az̄ms' dominance in regional politics. Another Damascene chronicler, who is presumed to be Christian but whose identity remains uncertain, picked up where M.B. left off and compiled a chronicle of the years 1192/1782 to 1257/1841.⁹

In his commentary on both the state of Syrian Christianity and the rise of the °Az̄ms, M.B.'s account is also important for his use of the term "Arab" as an ethnic identifier. He explicitly identifies both the °Az̄ms and an Orthodox patriarch as Arabs at a time when this term was most often used to refer to the Bedouin and not to represent any sense of ethnic solidarity. As an Orthodox Christian and a native Damascene, M.B.'s chronicle offers an important perspective on the better part of a century of significant change in Damascus in particular and in Ottoman Syria in general.

Qusṭanṭīn al-Bāshā al-Mukhallisī's edition of *Tā'riḥ al-Shām* was published in 1930 with an introduction in French, notes, and bibliographic references.¹⁰ Bāshā's edition was republished with additional notes and indices by Aḥmad Sabānū in 1982. In addition to reprinting Bāshā's original introduction as an appendix, Sabānū added six documents related to the affairs of the Greek Orthodox community in Syria within the context of the Ottoman Empire. A separate chronicle by an unknown author

HISTORIANS OF THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

C. Kafadar H. Karateke C. Fleischer

which picks up where M.B. left off and covers the next 60 years is sometimes mistakenly attributed to M.B.¹¹ This chronicle was re-edited by Aḥmad Sabūnū who acknowledges that the author is unknown.¹²

② *Kitāb ḥulāṣat al-wāfiyah fī ta'rīḥ al-baṭārikah Anṭākīyah (Ta'rīḥ al-ābā' baṭārikah Anṭākīyah or al-Ḥaqā'iq al-waḍī'iyah fī ta'rīḥ al-kanīṣah al-Anṭākīyah al-Urtūduksīyah*, also known as *Asāmī baṭārikah Anṭākīyah al-ʿuzmā min ʿahd Butrus al-rasūl*

A history of the patriarchate of Antioch from the time of St. Peter to the end of the tenure of Daniel (1181/1767). It is divided into three parts. M.B. acknowledges that the first part, from St. Peter to Makārīyus Zaʿīm (d. 1083/1672), was written by Zaʿīm's son Paul (d. 1080/1669). The second part covers Zaʿīm's tenure, those of his immediate successors, and the conflicts that led to a schism in 1136/1724 between those who pledged loyalty to Rome (known today as Melkites) and those who remained loyal to the Orthodox Church. This part of the text was written by a Damascene priest from the Farah family. The third, and final, part is M.B.'s own composition and covers the period 1136-81/1724-67. M.B.'s manuscript found its way into the hands of a Russian Orthodox envoy to the Middle East, Porfirii Uspenskii, who had it translated into Greek and Italian before translating and publishing it in Russian in 1874.¹³ There are two editions of this work, the first published in Cairo in either 1902 or 1903 by Salīm Qabʿīn in which, according to Joseph Nasrallah, is deficient in several regards.¹⁴

③ *Kitāb jāmiʿ tawārīḥ al-zamān wa-zahrah aʿājīb al-kawn wa-al-awān*

A history of the world from the birth of Adam to the birth of Jesus in six generations following a Christian interpretation of the chronology of the Jewish Bible: The first generation covers 5508-3266 B.C., from Adam to the Flood; the second, 3266-2041 B.C., from the Flood to Abraham; the third, 2041-1611 B.C., from Abraham to Moses; the fourth, 1611-1096 B.C., from Moses to Saul; the fifth, 1096-581 B.C., from Saul to the destruction of the first temple and the beginning of the Babylonian Exile; and, finally, 581 B.C.-0, from the Babylonian Exile to the birth of Jesus.

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Editions: (1) *Tarih al-Shām (1720-1782)* [Documents inédits pour servir à l'histoire du Patriarcat Melkite d'Antioche, vol. II], ed. Qusṭanṭīn al-Bāshā al-Mukhallisī (Harisa, 1930). (2) Ed. Aḥmad Glassān Sabānū (Damascus, 1982).

HISTORIANS OF THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

C. Kafadar H. Karateke C. Fleischer

② *Kitāb ḥulāṣat al-wāfiyah fī ta'rīḥ al-baṭārikah Anṭākīyah*

Manuscripts: (1) Beirut, Bibliotheque Orientale, Université Saint-Joseph, Ms. 14, fol. 1-82, 15 lines, [TBC], copied in 1885; (2) Beirut, Bibliotheque Orientale, Université Saint-Joseph, Ms. 154, fol. 1-40, 16 lines, nesih, copied in 1889. (3) Beirut, American University of Beirut, Ms. 139, [TBC], 17 lines, nesih, copied in 1767. (4) *Kitāb baṭārikah abrashīya madīnat Allah Anṭākīya al-^cuzma min ^cahd baṭārikah al-qiddīs Buṭrus al-rasūl ilā-l-ān*: St. Petersburg, National Library of Russia, Ms. 184, fol. 1r - 73v, [TBC], nesih. (5) St. Petersburg, Institute of Oriental Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences, B 1229, fol. 41b-116b, [TBC].

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Translations: Porfirii Uspenskii. "Vostok' Khristianskii." *Trudy Kievskoi Dukhovnoi Akademii* (1874), 346-457; also (Kiev, 1874).

③ *Kitāb jāmi^c tawārīḥ al-zamān wa-zahrah a^cājīb al-kawn wa-al-awān*

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¹ Alternatively, "Breik". See Hayat Bualuan, "Mikha'il Breik: A Chronicler and Historian in 18th Century Bilad al-Sham," *Parole de l'Orient* 21 (1996): 257-70 and Abdul-Karim Rafeq, *The Province of Damascus* (Beirut, 1970).

² M.B., *Ta'rīḥ al-Shām*, ed. Aḥmad Ġassān Sabānū (Damascus, 1982), 34.

³ M.B., *Ta'rīḥ al-Shām*, 38 and Dana Sajdi, *Peripheral Visions: The Worlds and Worldviews of Commoner Chroniclers in the 18th Century Ottoman Levant*, Ph.D. Dissertation (Columbia University, New York, NY, 2002), 143.

⁴ M.B., *Ta'rīḥ al-Shām*, 102.

HISTORIANS OF THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

C. Kafadar H. Karateke C. Fleischer

⁵ M.B., *Ta'riḥ al-Shām*, 17-18.

⁶ Sajdi, *Peripheral Visions*, 19.

⁷ Rafeq, *Province of Damascus*, 4-10.

⁸ M.B., *Ta'riḥ al-Shām*, 73.

⁹ Miḥā'il al-Dimashqī, *Ta'riḥ hawādiṯ al-Shām wa-Lubnān*, ed. Aḥmad Ġassān Sabānū (Damascus, 1981).

¹⁰ M.B., *Tā'riḥ al-Shām*, ed. Qusṭanṭīn al-Bāshā (Beirut, 1930).

¹¹ M.B., *Tārīḥ ḥawādiṯ al-Shām wa-Lubnān, 1782/1192- 1841/1257*, ed. Luwīs Ma'ālūf (Beirut, 1912).

¹² Anonymous, *Tā'riḥ hawādiṯ al-Shām wa-Lubnān wa-Tārīḥ Miḥā'il al-Dimashqī* (Beirut, 1981).

¹³ J. Nasrallah, "Historiens et chroniqueurs melchites du XVIII^e siècle," *Bulletin d'Etudes Orientales*, 13 (1949-51), 150-151.

¹⁴ Nasrallah, "Historiens," 150. The second was edited by Nā'ila Taqī al-Dīn Qā'idbayh with an introduction by Burayk scholar Hayat Bualuan and published in Beirut in 2006.

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