

**Signatures of Authority:  
Colophons in Seventeenth-Century Melkite Circles in Aleppo\***

*Feras Krimsti*  
(*University of Oxford*)

***Introduction***

In the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries different Eastern Christian communities strove to unify their liturgical, dogmatic, theological, and canonical works. Manuscripts and printed books played an important role in this struggle, consolidating as they did liturgical practice and dogma. A number of influential Melkites (= Greek-Orthodox) from Aleppo eagerly participated in elaborating an authoritative church canon – some of them with their scribal skills. The role of scribes in this endeavour has received almost no attention in scholarship to this day. Using the example of a scribe with ties to the Melkite church hierarchy, Thalja ibn al-khūrī Ḥawrān al-Ḥamawī, this article discusses the role of colophons in bestowing authority to the manuscripts the scribe copied in the framework of the Melkites’ struggle for religious unification. Colophons, it will be argued, are neither abstract repositories of factual information nor are they so formulaic as to be effectively anonymous. It will be shown that they were used purposefully and that they consciously appeal to different social and political context(s). Thalja and the Melkites’ case is relatively well-documented and thus allows for exploring how precisely colophons can be historicised and contextualised.

While Louis Cheikho’s verdict “as for Thalja, we did not find any trace of him” has long become obsolete,<sup>1</sup> it is true that Thalja remains an elusive figure about whose life very little is known. There are even versions of his somewhat curious name: while the copyist himself only refers to himself as Thalja or Talja,<sup>2</sup> both in his manuscripts and in his letters, the Orientalist and Laudian Professor of Arabic in Oxford Edward Pococke (1604–1691), who had worked in Aleppo as the chaplain of the Levant Company between 1630 and 1636 and who had befriended

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Louis Cheikho [=Lūwīs Shaykhū], *Kitāb al-makhṭūṭāt al-‘arabiyya li-katabat al-naṣrāniyya* (Beirut: Dār al-Mashriq, 2000), 80.

<sup>2</sup> The origin of this name is unclear. Given its closeness to Arabic “snow” (*thalj*), it is conceivable that Thalja was born on a day when it snowed.

educated locals knowledgeable about Arabic book culture,<sup>3</sup> refers to him in one of his editions not only by the name Thalja but also by the name Michael.<sup>4</sup> Based on a marginal note, Thalja has also been attributed the name Yuwāṣāf.<sup>5</sup>

While the details of Thalja's biography are unknown to us,<sup>6</sup> he must have been born in Hama in the last quarter of the sixteenth century and died around 1650. He seems to have made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem at some point in his life. Much more is fortunately known about his brother 'Abd al-Karīm (1572–1635), who became bishop of Aleppo as Meletios Karma in 1612 and later, in 1634, even Patriarch of Antioch as Euthymius II.<sup>7</sup> There is evidence that Thalja also wrote and translated texts himself; he completed the translation of the *Synaxarion* that his brother was not able to complete before his death.<sup>8</sup> He addressed a tractate on the virtues and duties of priests to the successor of his brother, the Patriarch Meletios (al-Ṣāqizī).<sup>9</sup> Otherwise, some letters have survived: three letters to Edward Pococke and a letter with which Thalja informed Urban VIII and the Vatican about the Patriarch's death.<sup>10</sup> Despite such glimpses into

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<sup>3</sup> See Hilary Kilpatrick, "Arabic Private Correspondence from Seventeenth-Century Syria: The Letters to Edward Pococke," *Bodleian Library Record* 23 (2010): 20–40. On Pococke's early career, see Gerald J. Toomer, *Eastern Wisdom and Learning: The Study of Arabic in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996 [reprint 2007]), 116–26.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Edward Pococke, ed. *Contextio gemmarum, sive, Eutychie Patriarchae Alexandrini Annales*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Robinson, 1658), [Praefatio p. 10; no pagination]. The name Michael has been taken up by modern scholars, cf. Toomer, *Eastern Wisdom*, 69, 121, 136.

<sup>5</sup> British Library, Or. 4099, folio 282b. Cf. Nāwfiṭūs Idlibī, *Asāqifat al-rūm al-malakiyyīn bi-Halab fī l-'aṣr al-ḥadīth* (Aleppo: Maṭba'at al-iḥsān, 1983), 32, and Joseph Nasrallah, "Hiératicons Melchites illustrés," *Proche-Orient Chrétien* 6 (1956): 193–215, here 212.

<sup>6</sup> For Thalja's biography, cf. Joseph Nasrallah, *Histoire du mouvement littéraire dans l'Église melchite du Ve au XXe siècle*, vol. 4, *Période ottomane*, tome 1, 1516–1724 (Leuven: Peeters, 1979), 214, idem, "Hiératicons," 212–13, and Idlibī, *Asāqifat al-rūm*, 32.

<sup>7</sup> For Meletios' biography and his oeuvre, see Georg Graf, *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur*, vol. 3, *Die Schriftsteller von der Mitte des 15. bis zum Ende des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Vatican: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1949), 91–94, Nasrallah, *Histoire*, vol. 4, 70–76, idem, "Euthyme II Karmé (1572–1635), patriarche melchite: Son œuvre littéraire et liturgique," *Proche-Orient Chrétien* 9 (1959): 24–30, and Idlibī, *Asāqifat al-rūm*, 31–55.

<sup>8</sup> On Thalja completing the translation, cf. Idlibī, *Asāqifat al-rūm*, 32, Nasrallah, "Euthyme II," 27, and Charbel Nassif, "La révision liturgique du Métropolitel melkite d'Alep Malātyūs Karma et les réformes liturgiques dans les pays d'Europe de l'Est au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle," in *Europe in Arabic Sources: "The Travels of Macarius, Patriarch of Antioch": Proceedings of the International Conference 'In the Eyes of the Orient: Europe in Arabic Sources' (Kyiv, 22–23 September 2015)*, ed. Yulia Petrova and Ioana Feodorov (Kyiv: A Krymsky Institute of Orient Studies of the NASU, 2016), 117–34, here 121.

<sup>9</sup> For the tractate, which is sometimes said to have been addressed to Thalja's brother Meletios, see Nasrallah, "Hiératicons," 213, and Idlibī, *Asāqifat al-rūm*, 32.

<sup>10</sup> For the three letters to Pococke, see Kilpatrick, "Arabic Private Correspondence," 25–27; for the letter to the Vatican, see Idlibī, *Asāqifat al-rūm*, 32 (with an image of the letter *ibid.*, 54).

literary activities, Thalja was first and foremost a scribe (*kātib*) and many manuscripts bear his colophons.

Given the importance of colophons as authoritative textual elements in Arabic manuscript culture,<sup>11</sup> it is rather curious that they remained a “phenomenon without a name”, as Rosemarie Quiring-Zoche has observed.<sup>12</sup> This is no less true in the context of Melkite scribal culture as it developed in the late sixteenth century. Despite Thalja’s consistent use of colophons (and subscriptions) in at least 54 manuscripts,<sup>13</sup> he neither mentioned a technical term for them in the colophons and subscriptions themselves, nor did he reflect on them elsewhere. Only an analysis of their phrasing and uses – to which this article is devoted – makes their significance tangible. To a certain degree, Thalja used colophons in a way comparable to signatures, not in the sense of a codicological element but in a functional sense: as a textual element that provides evidence of an individual’s identity and that simultaneously certifies the text. Although a colophon can potentially transmit more complex information than a signature, its primary function is similar in that it validates the text at hand by means of a certifying conclusion. Colophons will therefore be studied in the present contribution as “signatures of authority”. It will be argued that they were used by Thalja as a tool both for self-authorisation and for the authorisation and certification of the content of his copies. One process thereby reinforced the other: the more successful the self-authorisation, the more authoritative the copy.

This article explores how colophons conveyed authority through a close study of a collection of 54 manuscripts copied by Thalja in the period stretching from 1599 to 1650.<sup>14</sup> A list of manuscripts bearing Thalja’s colophons discovered to this day has been included in the bibliography at the end of this contribution.

In what follows, a number of questions shall be addressed: What does Thalja’s case teach us about the reasons for the proliferation of colophons in manuscripts (and beyond) in

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<sup>11</sup> For examples of Arabic colophons, their contents, components, and formulae, see Adam Gacek, *Arabic Manuscripts: A Vademecum for Readers* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 71–76.

<sup>12</sup> See Rosemarie Quiring-Zoche, “The Colophon in Arabic Manuscripts: A Phenomenon without a Name,” *Journal of Islamic Manuscripts* 4 (2013): 49–81.

<sup>13</sup> Regarding the relation of colophon and subscription, see Gacek, *Arabic Manuscripts*, 258. Henceforth, I will refer to both with the term “colophons”, given that a distinction between both requires further study.

<sup>14</sup> The present endeavour of gathering Thalja’s copies relies on previous attempts by Graf, *Geschichte*, vol. 3, 93, fn. 1, and Nasrallah, *Histoire*, vol. 4, 215–16. (Cf. also idem, “Hiératicons,” 213–14.) Recently, Habib Ibrahim, “Talġat al-Nāsiḥ fiṣ du prêtre Ḥūrān al-Ḥamawī,” *Chronos* 39 (2019): 126–171, has also attempted to collect Thalja’s manuscripts and gathered 41 of the colophons. After comparing his findings with my own, I excluded no. 17 and no. 33 in his list because they cannot be attributed clearly to Thalja. I would like to thank Vevian Zaki for drawing my attention to further manuscripts with colophons by Thalja that I had not come across.

late sixteenth, early seventeenth-century Aleppo? How exactly are scribal practices connected to the struggle for liturgical unification in which Aleppo's Melkites were engaged? What does an analysis of colophons both in relation to the texts they close as well as to the social context they refer to tell us about their function as signatures of authority? And finally: how was this function reinforced through appeals to the imperial sphere and a transcending of local contexts?

***The struggle for liturgical unification in Aleppo's flourishing Melkite community and scribal/ colophonal practices***

The Melkite Christian community in Syria, and in Aleppo in particular, experienced what has been called a “cultural renewal,” “revival,” or a “renaissance”, in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.<sup>15</sup> The era is certainly better documented than earlier times in the history of Aleppo's Melkite community and available evidence points to flourishing religious, literary, cultural, and economic activities at the very moment when textual evidence increases. Manuscripts proliferated, and colophons with them. The first part of this paper accordingly sheds light on the religious and literary activities in Melkite church circles and how they touched on scribal practices. The seventeenth-century Melkite milieu offers a unique opportunity for understanding how and why a scribe like Thalja used colophons to produce authoritative manuscript copies.

The intensive phase of cultural production in Aleppo is not unrelated to wider demographic, social, economic, and political developments that deeply affected urban society: During the second half of the sixteenth century, Aleppo steadily developed into a leading commercial centre. The demographics point to a considerable subsequent increase in population numbers, notably in the seventeenth century.<sup>16</sup> The increase in the number of Christians was a consequence of a continuous inward migration to the city from other parts of Syria; Christian villages around Aleppo, in Central Syria, in the region north of Damascus and in Transjordan depopulated against the background of the increased urbanisation.<sup>17</sup> It is certainly not a coincidence that 'Abd al-Karīm, or the later Archbishop of Aleppo, Meletios Karma, and his

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<sup>15</sup> For this idea, see for example Hilary Kilpatrick, “The Arabic Culture of Christians in Syria in the 16th and 17th Centuries,” in *Contacts and Interaction: Proceedings of the 27<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Union Européenne des Arabisants et Islamisants, Helsinki 2014*, ed. Jaakko Hämeen-Anttila et al. (Leuven: Peeters, 2017), 221–31, here 225.

<sup>16</sup> On the hypothesis of a population growth in this period in Aleppo, see Bruce Masters, “Patterns of Migration to Ottoman Aleppo in the 17th and 18th centuries,” *International Journal of Turkish Studies* 4 (1987): 75–89.

<sup>17</sup> On demographics and geographical mobility as they affected the Arabic Orthodox Christians under Ottoman rule, cf. Constantin A. Panchenko, *Arab Orthodox Christians under the Ottomans: 1516–1831*, transl. Brittany Pheiffer Noble and Samuel Noble (Jordanville: Holy Trinity Seminary Press, 2016), 96; 117.

brother, the scribe Thalja originally came from Hama. Migration to Aleppo from rural Hama seems to have played a particularly important role according to *cizye* records.<sup>18</sup>

At the heart of Aleppo's cultural production to which the Bishop gave decisive impulses, was a liturgical project that has already garnered significant scholarly attention.<sup>19</sup> Liturgy played a crucial role in the life of the community given that it provided the privileged access to scripture for ordinary believers in the early modern world.<sup>20</sup> Having received his education and learned Greek in the Monastery of Saint Saba in Jerusalem, an intellectual centre for the future elites of the Greek Orthodox Church of Antioch,<sup>21</sup> Meletios Karma found the many versions of the Bible and liturgical texts that were circulating to be defective and full of mistakes. He consequently set out to revise the Arabic versions of the Sacred Scripture as well as the liturgical books that were in use in his community. It is noteworthy that comparable projects of liturgical reform were simultaneously undertaken in the Slavic world.<sup>22</sup>

Early on, Meletios entered into correspondence with the Vatican about this topic. He wrote to Pope Paul V, asking for books and specialists in Greek and Arabic who were able to help with the translation of the Bible and liturgy. He even prepared a specimen translation of Genesis 1–5 together with the Capuchin missionary Agathange de Vendôme (1598–1638) and sent it to the *Propaganda Fide*.<sup>23</sup> When a translation project launched by the Vatican did not produce any tangible results, Meletios turned to the translation of liturgy instead.<sup>24</sup> In 1631, he asked the *Propaganda Fide* to print the version of the *Euchologion* and *Horologion* he had

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<sup>18</sup> Cf. Masters, "Patterns of Migration," 79; 81.

<sup>19</sup> See Carsten-Michael Walbiner, "'Und um Jesu Willen, schickt sie nicht ungebunden!' Die Bemühungen des Meletius Karma (1572–1635) um den Druck arabischer Bücher in Rom," in *Studies on the Christian Arabic Heritage in Honour of Father Prof. Dr. Samir Khalil Samir S.I. at the Occasion of his Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. Rifaat Ebied and Herman Teule (Leuven: Peeters, 2004), 163–75, id., "Melkite (Greek Orthodox) Approaches," 53–56, Hilary Kilpatrick, "Meletius Karmah's Specimen Translation of Genesis 1–5," in *Translating the Bible into Arabic: Historical, Text-Critical and Literary Aspects*, ed. Sara Binay and Stefan Leder (Beirut: Ergon, 2012), 63–73, and Nassif, "La Révision".

<sup>20</sup> On the importance of liturgy, see Carsten-Michael Walbiner, "Melkite (Greek Orthodox) Approaches to the Bible at the Time of the Community's Cultural Reawakening in the Early Modern Period (17<sup>th</sup>–early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries)," in *Translating the Bible into Arabic: Historical, Text-Critical and Literary Aspects*, ed. Sara Binay and Stefan Leder (Beirut: Ergon, 2012), 53–61, here 54.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. the comments on Saint Saba in Bernard Heyberger, *Les chrétiens du Proche-Orient au temps de la Réforme catholique (Syrie, Liban, Palestine, XVII<sup>e</sup>–XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle)* (Rome: École française de Rome, 2014), 146–47, and Walbiner, "Und um Jesu Willen," 163.

<sup>22</sup> For a comparison of the liturgical reform in the Catholic Ruthenian church, the one undertaken by the Metropolitan bishop of Kyiv Peter Mogila (1596–1647) and the one of the Patriarch of Moscow Nikon (1605–1681), with Meletios' liturgical reform, see Nassif, "La Révision,"

<sup>23</sup> See in detail Kilpatrick, "Meletius Karmah's Specimen Translation." Cf. also Heyberger, *Les chrétiens*, 393.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Walbiner, "Und um Jesu Willen," 165–73.

prepared on the basis of Syriac, Arabic, and Greek manuscripts.<sup>25</sup> But these attempts to have his works printed remained unsuccessful too.

Behind Meletios' struggle stands the recognition that "the new medium of book printing offered the previously unavailable opportunity to multiply an identical text in hundreds, if not thousands of copies."<sup>26</sup> In the introduction to his version of the *Liturgikon* (revised in 1612), Meletios observes that many alterations he attempted to eradicate were introduced by ignorant copyists:

Because they [the prayers] were in Byzantine and Greek (*rūmī wa-yūnānī*), the Melkites (*al-rūm*) translated them into Arabic and Syriac. But afterwards, ignorant people (*min al-juhḥāl*) altered them when they copied them (*lama nasakhūhu*), by adding or omitting words. For this reason, I, the humble Meletios have examined the manuscript copies in Arabic and Syriac (*al-nuskha al-‘arabiyya wa-l-suryāniyya*) and I have compared them (*qābaltuhā*) to the Greek and Byzantine original (*nuskhat al-aṣl al-yūnāniyya wa-l-rūmiyya*), and I have found that they were lacking and full of variants. Based on the Greek, I have corrected them as best I could, and I have translated them into Arabic (*fa-akhrajtuhā ilā l-‘arabī*) making an effort and tiring myself. I was the Bishop of the city of Aleppo in these days.<sup>27</sup>

Meletios was keenly aware of the important role copyists could potentially play in the standardisation, transmission, and multiplication of texts. This awareness was probably also a result of his monastic training in the Saint Saba monastery in Jerusalem, which did not only distinguish itself by an immense literary activity, but also ranked first with regard to copying activities.<sup>28</sup> Vaillhé has drawn up a list of these copyists: fourteen of them were active in the sixteenth century; Meletios himself appears among them.<sup>29</sup> Meletios' energetic attempts to convince the Vatican to print his translations of the bible and liturgical works probably must be

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<sup>25</sup> On Meletios' *Euchologion*, see in detail Jean Baptiste Darblade, "L'Euchologe arabe melkite de Kyr Méléce Karmī," *Proche-Orient Chrétien* 6 (1956): 29–37, and Charbel Nassif, "Autour de l'Euchologe melkite de Malatios Karmé († 1635)," *Proche-Orient Chrétien* 68 (2018): 46–61.

<sup>26</sup> Walbiner, "Melkite (Greek Orthodox) Approaches," 56.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Nassif, "La Revision," 122 (Arabic original text in fn. 8), and partially by Nasrallah, "Euthyme II," 26, fn. 12.

<sup>28</sup> See Siméon Vaillhé, "Les écrivains de Mar-Saba (suite)," *Échos d'Orient* 2, no. 1 (1898), 1–11; 2, no. 2 (1898): 33–47, especially 2, 46–47.

<sup>29</sup> Meletios is mentioned in Vaillhé, "Les écrivains" 2, 47, for a copy dated to 1598. Another manuscript dated to 1604 is attributed to Meletios, when the latter was still named 'Abd al-Karīm, cf. Nasrallah, "Euthyme II," 29–30, and Idrībī, *Asāqifat al-rūm*, 31 (with an image of the folio that bears his colophon).

seen in this light. They were an attempt to gain control over the integrity of the Holy Scripture and liturgy.

Although Meletios' attempts to convince the Vatican were ultimately unsuccessful, they clearly show how much he appreciated the promise of stability only print could offer. However, given the Vatican's reluctance, it fell upon Meletios' brother to provide manuscript copies that were as authoritative as printed copies. The fact that to this day 54 copies of manuscripts bearing Thalja's colophons have either been found in libraries or are referred to in catalogues shows to what degree Thalja was committed to his brother's project. Many more manuscripts do not bear colophons but could have been copied by him, as their beautiful handwriting suggests.<sup>30</sup> These cannot be considered in what follows.

All 54 manuscripts clearly attributable to Thalja contain religious contents, on some level. Between 1599 and 1650, Thalja copied primarily liturgical works and lectionaries (23 copies, or 42.5 percent), spiritual, moral, and popular theological works and ascetic treatises (11 copies, or 20.3 percent), historical works (5 copies, or 9.2 percent), the psalter (4 copies,<sup>31</sup> or 7.4 percent), exegesis (3 copies, or 5.5 percent), sermons (2 copies, or 3.7 percent), hagiography (2 copies, or 3.7 percent), and medical works (2 copies, or 3.7 percent). He also copied the legend of Barlaam and Josaphat – a Christian work with a hagiographical dimension –, and even the Islamic Sufi work “The Perfect Man” (*Al-Insān al-kāmil*; 1 copy, or 1.8 percent each).

It is important to note that Thalja often produced the same work repeatedly. For example, he copied “The Garden of the Hermit and the Consolation of the Solitary” (*Rawḍat al-farīd wa-salwat al-wahīd*), a work of Christian spiritual and moral theology authored during the thirteenth century, three times.<sup>32</sup> Above all, the lectionary “The Pure Gospel and the Illuminative Lamp” (*Al-Injīl al-ṭāhir wa-l-miṣbāḥ al-zāhir*) was copied at least seven times under the same title; other lectionaries with diverging titles await thorough investigation but it is probable that they, too, are copies of the same work.<sup>33</sup> As a final example, the tenth-century

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<sup>30</sup> See for example Mosul, Saint Behnam Monastery, MBM 270.

<sup>31</sup> A psalter is also included in the liturgical work Balamand, Dayr Sayyidat al-Balamand, BALA 82. Oxford, Bodleian Library, Caps. Or. B. 7, contains an introduction to the psalter.

<sup>32</sup> London, British Library, Arundel Or. 6; Mishtāyah, Monastery of Saint George, HMIR 29; Hamburg, Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek, Or. 23.

<sup>33</sup> Aleppo, Greek Orthodox Diocese, Ms. 6 and Ms. 8; Balamand, Dayr Sayyidat al-Balamand, Ms. 3; Kousba, monastery of our Lady of Hammatoura, HMTR 24 (this manuscript includes also an exegesis of John Chrysostom); Mardin, Chaldean Cathedral, CCM 55; Nicolas Karam 7; Oxford, Queen's College, Ms. 351. Cf. (with varying titles) London, British Library Or. 4099 and Arundel Or. 19.

historical treaties “The History, Compiled through Investigation and Verification” (*Al-Tārīkh al-majmū‘ ‘alā al-tahqīq wa-l-taṣdīq*), which comprises the annals of Sa‘īd ibn Baṭrīq (Eutychius of Alexandria), was copied at least five times, so that this single work represents the entire category “historical works” mentioned above.<sup>34</sup> These examples would seem to corroborate the hypothesis that one of the purposes of Thalja’s scribal activities was textual standardisation, through the dissemination of by and large identical copies.

Finally and most importantly, Thalja copied also the fruits of Meletios’ retranslation and revision work; particularly the liturgical *Horologion* mentioned above was copied at least four times by Thalja.<sup>35</sup> Thinking about Thalja’s copying activities therefore requires contextualising them with Meletios’ liturgical project. The colophons Thalja uses to mark his copies acquire significance in the framework of the Melkites’ struggle for authoritative scriptures, lectionaries, and liturgical books for the use of the community, as shall be demonstrated in the following.

### ***Thalja’s colophons and their social contexts***

As “signatures of authority”, Thalja’s colophons require context, just like a signature is only a name when it is taken out of context: colophons are fundamentally linked to the text they close and validate as well as to their social context. While the question of the contents of the texts Thalja copied has been discussed in the preceding paragraph, in what follows, the focus lies on the second claim. How do references to the social context of a manuscript in Thalja’s colophons endow them with authority?

The strong link between signature and colophon in the milieu investigated here is evinced by letters penned by Thalja in his function as the Patriarch’s scribe. He signs the letter informing the Vatican of the death of his brother with the words “servitude of the poor servant, the scribe (*al-kātib*) Thalja, brother of the Patriarch of Antioch Euythmius, who has passed away”.<sup>36</sup> Except for the opening with “servitude” (*‘ubūdiyya*), the self-identification in the signature is virtually indistinguishable from Thalja’s colophons.

While Thalja’s colophons are certainly formulaic to a certain degree, they are individualised in others. The name of the scribe is by no means a necessary component of colophons. Against this background it is if not unusual, at least noteworthy that Thalja does

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<sup>34</sup> Oxford, Bodleian Library Marsh 435, Arch. Seld. A. 74, Pococke 351; Aleppo, Maronite Diocese, AMA 1365; Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Arabe 292.

<sup>35</sup> Balamand, Dayr Sayyidat al-Balamand, BALA 82; Oxford, Bodleian Library, Caps. Or. B. 7; a horologion mentioned by Ma’luf in Nasrallah, *Histoire*, vol. 4, 216; Vatican, Vatican Library Borg. ar. 178. For Meletios’ work on the Horologion, see Nasrallah, *Histoire*, vol. 4, 81–82.

<sup>36</sup> Propaganda Fide, SOCG, vol. 180, no. 99.

mention his own name – consistently, it seems, for it is reasonable to assume that the 54 manuscripts identified to this date as his copies constitute the greater part of his work. Thalja does not refer to himself only by his name, however. He adds the *nisba* al-Ḥamawī and often the *nasab* “son of the [late] priest Ḥawrān” (*ibn [al-marḥūm] al-khūri Ḥawrān*), thus pointing to familial origins in Hama. Although the second identifier is not always used, it appears frequently enough from the earliest to the latest stages of Thalja’s career.<sup>37</sup> The reference to Thalja’s origins is at the same time a reference to a scribal lineage. It is likely that both Meletios and Thalja started their instruction with their father, who was a priest in Hama.<sup>38</sup> Veritable copyists’ dynasties can be traced back to sixteenth-century Qāra and Hama.<sup>39</sup> Hama was not a peculiar case in this regard; scribal families have emerged as an important factor in the transmission of the craft in different contexts around the same time.<sup>40</sup> Therefore, Thalja mentioning Hama or his father is a strategy of self-authorisation.

Alternatively, Thalja identifies himself in a number of colophons by calling himself the brother of the Bishop or Patriarch. It is noticeable that the earliest colophon in which a reference to the Bishop is made is dated to 1612 – the year when Meletios was consecrated:

The most glorious “Large Comprehensive Book” was completed by the hand of the poor before the almighty God, Talja al-Ḥamawī. He wrote it for his brother, then Bishop in the city of Aleppo, in the year seven thousand one hundred and twenty since Adam.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> See for example: London, British Library, Arundel Or. 6, folio 161b, Arundel Or. 19, folio 152a and 334b; Oxford, Bodleian Library, Arch. Seld. A. 74, folio 229b, Caps. Or. B. 7, folio 240a, Marsh 581, folio 51a, Pockocke 363, folio 47b; Elie Karam 1 (cf. Nasrallah, *Catalogue des Manuscrits du Liban*, vol. 3 (Beirut: Imprimerie Catholique, 1961), 299–302); Aleppo, Fondation Georges et Mathilde Salem, GAMS 778, 435a; Shwayyā, Monastery of St. Elias, SHWA 53, folio 175a; Hama, Greek Orthodox Diocese, HAMA 8, folio 96b and 300b; Dayr ‘Atīyya, makhtūṭ al-Maryamiyya; Khonchara (Bikfayyā), Shuwayrite Basilian Order, OBC 750, folio 257a.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. also Heyberger, *Les chrétiens*, 145.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Heyberger, *Les chrétiens*, 147, and Nasrallah, “Hiératicons,” 197.

<sup>40</sup> See notably the scattered references to the sons and offspring of Ottoman scribes who followed in their fathers’ footsteps according to the *reis ül-küttab* biographies presented in Christine Woodhead, “Scribal Chaos? Observation on the Post of *Re’isülküttab* in the Late Sixteenth Century,” in *The Ottoman Empire: Myths, Realities and ‘Black Holes’: Contributions in Honour of Colin Imber*, ed. Eugenia Kermeli and Oktay Özel (Istanbul: The Isis Press, 2006), 155–72, here 160–71. The importance of scribal families in the Church of the East has been highlighted in Heleen Murre-van den Berg, “‘I the Weak Scribe’: Scribes in the Church of the East in the Ottoman Period,” *Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 58, no.1–2 (2006): 9–26, here 10; 17–18.

<sup>41</sup> Aleppo, Melkite Catholic Diocese, GCAA 146, folio 366b.

Colophons in two further manuscripts that refer to the brother also date to the years in which Meletios was a bishop.<sup>42</sup> The one and only case where the ties to Meletios are mentioned after his death concerns a *Synaxarion* copied in 1650:

[This book] was completed in December by the hand of the poor Thalja al-Ḥamawī, the brother of the Patriarch Euthymius, in the year 7158 since Adam.<sup>43</sup>

The reference to the long-deceased Patriarch, who had striven for the unification and retranslation of liturgy, was arguably inserted by Thalja here in order to heighten the authoritativeness of the liturgical work.

The collaboration in the creation of “authoritative copies” between the two brothers finds its most striking expression in a textual element that appears besides Thalja’s colophon at the end of two manuscripts.<sup>44</sup> A curse (*la’na*) by the Bishop directed against whomever alienates the manuscript copy from the community to which it is endowed or who changes the text accompanies Thalja’s colophons. The curse was written by Thalja’s hand, but signed by the Bishop. One of the curses reads:

Glory to God, always!

The lowly among the heads of the priests, Meletios, Bishop of Aleppo and its vicinity  
This saintly book is an eternal endowment and everlasting inalienable property for the Church of Our Lady and the Bishop’s residence, for the Greek Orthodox community in the guarded city of Aleppo. No one has the power to change the endowment deed in any way [...]. Whosoever is against what we wrote and transgresses the limits (*wa-kullu man khālafa mā saṭarnāhu wa-ta’addā mā ḥaddadnāhu*), whoever he is, this person himself incurs the wrath of God, where his body is concerned, his stature, all his behaviour. [...] His fate will be the one of those who crucified Jesus. Whosoever comes into possession of this book “The Collector”, by means of abduction or who pilfered or stole or plundered, and who does not set it free and return it to the place to which it was

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<sup>42</sup> Oxford, Bodleian Library, Marsh 408, folio 163a (year 1623); Elie Karam 1 (2 colophones) (year 1623) (cf. Nasrallah, *Catalogue*, vol. 3, 299–302).

<sup>43</sup> Khonchara (Bikfayyā), Shuwayrite Basilian Order, OBC 750, folio 211a (colophon dated to 1650). The manuscript includes a second colophon on folio 257a, datable to 1648, where the Patriarch is not mentioned).

<sup>44</sup> Aleppo, Fondation Georges et Mathilde Salem, GAMS 778, folio 435b; Aleppo, Melkite Catholic Diocese, GCAA 146, folio 1b.

endowed, this one is like the thief [himself]. Woe to the one, woe to him who is content with that! It was written in the year [seven] thousand one hundred and twenty since Adam, which corresponds to the year one thousand and twenty AH.<sup>45</sup>

Such curses functioned as guarantors of textual integrity.<sup>46</sup> The decisive line in the curse for the present argument threatens “whosoever is against what we wrote and transgresses the limits” with damnation and a fate similar to those who crucified Jesus – obviously a warning against anyone tinkering with the text.

Rooted in the scribal circles of Hama and intimately connected to the Bishop’s influential person as they were, Thalja’s colophons and his activities as a copyist became authoritative. It was later sufficient for other scribes to mention in their colophons that they had copied “from Thalja’s writ” (*min khaṭṭ Thalja*) if they wished to emphasise the soundness of their own copies. We encounter such a reference in a copy of “The Garden of the Hermit and the Consolation of the Solitary” by an unnamed scribe:

[This book] was copied from a writ (*nuqila min khaṭṭ*) by Thalja b. al-Khūrī Ḥawrān al-Ḥamawī in the year one thousand six hundred thirty-six since the coming of the Messiah Our Lord Jesus Christ, praised be he forever.<sup>47</sup>

Thalja’s writing had already become authoritative; and the colophons played an important role in this process by allowing a clear attribution.

Against this background it seems surprising, at first view, that Thalja’s copying activities did not remain uncontested: an anonymous reader commented in the margin of a copy of the *Synaxarion* that “without a doubt the copyist of this manuscript [Thalja] was mad or drunken” (*lā shakk anna nāsikh hādhā l-kitāb kāna majnūn aw sakrān*), given the mistakes he made.<sup>48</sup> Since the manuscript in question has been preserved in a Catholic monastery, one might well assume that the context of this denunciation is polemical. Rather than pointing to a loss of authority then, the comment suggests that Thalja’s copies remained authoritative – so much so

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<sup>45</sup> Aleppo, Melkite Catholic Diocese, GCAA 146, folio 1b.

<sup>46</sup> On curses and oaths in Christian endowment deeds and manuscripts, see Ḥabīb Zayyāt, “Al-la’ nāt wa-l-ḥurūm fī waqfiyyāt al-makhtūṭāt al-naṣrāniyya,” *Al-Mashriq* 36 (1938): 466–68.

<sup>47</sup> Oxford, Bodleian Library, Pococke 160, 128b.

<sup>48</sup> Khonchara (Bikfayyā), Shuwayrite Basilian Order, OBC 737, 3a.

that an anonymous Catholic felt it was necessary to undermine what he perceived as an Orthodox scribe's authority by resorting to accusations of drunkenness and madness.

Thalja was a major voice in all things regarding Arabic manuscript culture; his learned network extended far beyond his own community and included even the Vatican and European Orientalists. As a notable example, Edward Pococke corresponded with Thalja, sent him inquiries about manuscripts and requested information about books. Thalja obviously belonged to a group of locals from Aleppo who worked together with Europeans and functioned as manuscript brokers, Niqūlāwus b. Buṭrus (c. 1611–1661) and Shāhīn Kandī figuring prominently among them in the second half of the seventeenth century.<sup>49</sup>

Thalja's manuscripts gaining such a recognition and wide circulation is part of the flourishing scribal culture in the Melkite milieu. But colophons started to play a decisive role outside the scribal milieu too. Evidence for how influential colophons as signatures of authority became beyond the sphere of manuscript copying can be detected in the work of Aleppo's Melkite icon and miniature painters, a circle that was just as closely "collaborating" with the Patriarch and his entourage as Thalja and his fellow copyists;<sup>50</sup> in fact the circles overlapped. A decisive figure in this context was Yūsuf al-Muṣawwir,<sup>51</sup> a painter of icons, miniaturist, translator of Greek into Arabic, and a copyist and scribe. Yūsuf may have received his training from Meletios himself or from the Cypriot Euthymius al-Ṣāqizī, a painter of icons who had left Mar Saba and come to Aleppo together with Meletios.<sup>52</sup> This Euthymius eventually succeeded Meletios as the Patriarch. Yūsuf al-Muṣawwir founded a dynasty of painters that started with his son Ni'ma.<sup>53</sup>

Colophonous signatures appeared early on in the work of these painters and miniaturists, indeed it seems that they did so for the first time in the visual arts produced by Aleppo's Melkites. A manuscript of the above-mentioned lectionary "The Pure Gospel"

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<sup>49</sup> On Niqūlāwus b. Buṭrus, see Kilpatrick, "Arabic Private Correspondence," 23–25, and in detail id. and Gerald J. Toomer, "Niqūlāwus al-Ḥalabī (c. 1611–c. 1661): A Greek Orthodox Syrian Copyist and his letters to Pococke and Golius," *Lias* 43, no. 1 (2016): 1–159.

<sup>50</sup> For the notion of a "collaboration" of Yūsuf al-Muṣawwir with the Patriarch Meletios, and above all with his successor Makarios al-Za'im, cf. Sylvia Agémian, "Tradition byzantine et notes arabes dans l'art de Yūsuf al-Ḥalabī," *Revue Roumaine d'Histoire de l'Art: Série Beaux-Arts* 13 (1976): 125–135, here 134, and ead., "Yūsuf al-Ḥalabī, peintre melkite du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle," *Revue Roumaine d'Histoire de l'Art: Série Beaux-Arts* 18 (1981): 55–65.

<sup>51</sup> On Yūsuf al-Muṣawwir and his art, see especially Agémian, "Tradition Byzantine," ead. "Yūsuf al-Ḥalabī." Cf. Heyberger, *Les chrétiens*, 147, and Nassif, "Le Révision," 129–30.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Agémian, "Yūsuf al-Ḥalabī," 55–56, and Iḍlibī, *Asāqifat al-rūm*, 36.

<sup>53</sup> On Ni'ma al-Muṣawwir and his art, see especially Sylvia Agémian, "Ne'meh al-Muṣawwir, peintre melkite 1666–1724," *Berytus: Archaeological Studies* 39 (1991): 189–211.

produced and illuminated in 1649 by Yūsuf al-Muṣawwir closes with a colophon in which he identifies himself also as the copyist of the manuscript and as the student of the Patriarch Euthymius al-Ḥamawī (Meletios).<sup>54</sup> The colophon, in contents as much as in style (on which further below), is highly reminiscent of Thalja's. Even more astonishing is the fact that the painter occasionally furnished his icons with signatures reminiscent of Thalja's colophons; an icon depicting the Archangel Michael bears on its front the words "by the hand of Yūsuf" and "priest in the year 1653."<sup>55</sup> Textual elements on Yūsuf's icons can be quite noticeable: the icon "Descent into Limbo" (1645) bears an endowment deed in red script on a golden background on the top left and right.<sup>56</sup>

The practice of including such textual elements became firmly established with Yūsuf's son Ni'ma. Endowments appearing on his icons and paintings frequently end in phrases reminiscent of Thalja's colophons. The text on his "Last Judgment", for example, ends in the phrase: "The lowly servant, the priest Ni'ma, son of the deceased priest Yūsuf al-Muṣawwir al-Ḥalabi painted [this icon] with his withering hand in the year 1694 since the awesome incarnation."<sup>57</sup> Many more of Ni'ma's works bearing such authoritative signatures (following endowments, or independent of them) could be mentioned.<sup>58</sup>

The evidence therefore points to flourishing scribal practices; the colophon played a decisive role as a signature of authority. Its transposition into the field of art demonstrates how influential these textual entities had become. Together, the Patriarch, the scribes – Thalja occupying a privileged position among them – and artists worked towards an authoritative textual-liturgical and pictorial corpus.

### ***Appeals to Ottoman scribal culture in Melkite colophons?***

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<sup>54</sup> Cf. Agnès-Miriam de la Croix and François Zabbal, eds., *Icônes arabes: Art chrétien du Levant* (Méolans-Revel: Éditions Grégoriennes, 2003), B 40.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Alexandra Bersch, ed., *Der Glanz des christlichen Orients/ The Splendour of Christian Orient/ Bahā' al-sharq al-masīhī* (Frankfurt: Ikonen-Museum, 2002), no. 2 (no pagination). The painter's signature/ colophon is not visible on the image of the icon itself, it is mentioned in the appendix of the catalogue which provides explanations for the works. The same icon is depicted in de la Croix and Zabbal (eds.), *Icônes arabes*, A 38, no. 8, but the inscription is not visible either.

<sup>56</sup> The writing on the icon is particularly well readable in Raphaëlle Ziadé et al., eds., *Chrétiens d'Orient: 2000 ans d'histoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 2017), 162. For a detailed description of the icon, including the wording of the endowment, see Virgil Căndeia, ed. *Icônes melkites: Exposition organisée par le Musée Nicolas Sursock du 16 mai au 15 juin 1969* (Beirut: Musée Nicolas Sursock, 1969), 129–30 (no. 1); image in appendix.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Căndeia (ed.), *Icônes Melkites*, 134 (no. 3); image in appendix.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Căndeia (ed.), *Icônes Melkites*, 139 (no. 4); 139–40 (no. 5); 140–46 (no. 6); 146–48 (no. 7); 148–50 (no. 8); images in appendix.

In his colophons, Thalja calls himself explicitly “the copyist” (*al-nāsikh*) or, alternatively, “the scribe” or “secretary” (*al-kātib*). The way he refers to his profession is significant, given that a change can be detected if one goes through the colophons in chronological order. At the earliest stage of Thalja’s scribal activities, documented by two manuscripts with colophons datable to 1599 and 1602 respectively, the word *nāsikh* is used.<sup>59</sup> The earliest evidence for the use of the word *kātib*, on the other hand, is a manuscript dated to 1623.<sup>60</sup> Thalja’s brother Meletios had then been a bishop for more than a decade and was consolidating his power in this position. But why did Thalja drop the term *nāsikh* definitively and why did the word *kātib* instead become part of the formal repertoire of all his later colophons? In this final section, the ramifications of the latter designation shall be examined, and the question how a reference to Ottoman scribal culture might have imbued Thalja’s colophons with additional political authority shall be discussed.

It is plausible that the conscious self-identification as a “scribe” or “secretary” sheds light on the familiarity of Christian scribes with Ottoman chancery practices. While information about contacts between Orthodox and Ottoman officials in Aleppo is scarce for the period that is considered here, it has been observed that the form of Patriarchs’ and hierarchs’ letters to the pope and cardinals seem to reflect Ottoman scribal practices.<sup>61</sup> Thalja himself and his brother Meletios clearly were in contact with influential Muslims and men of learning among them. Meletios, for example, in his letter accompanying his specimen translation to the Vatican mentions that he had submitted previous translations to Muslim *sayyids* who were not satisfied with the linguistic rendition. It is also known that, during a confrontation with the Patriarch Cyril IV Dabbas, Meletios sought refuge in the house of an unnamed Ottoman official.<sup>62</sup> Thalja’s own contacts with Muslims can be inferred, on the one hand, from a letter by al-Darwīsh Aḥmad to Edward Pococke, obviously a connoisseur of classical Arabic culture with whom Pococke probably learned Arabic. Al-Darwīsh Aḥmad mentions Thalja as the owner of a book he copied.<sup>63</sup> On the other hand, Thalja’s copy of “The History, Compiled through Investigation and Verification”, which Pococke acquired, has a number of readers’ comments

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<sup>59</sup> London, British Library, Or. 4099, folio 281b; Aleppo, Greek Orthodox Diocese, Ms. 159 – as per catalogue: Ghassān Ward, *Al-Makhḥūḡāt al-‘arabiyya fī maktabat muṭrāniyyat Ḥalab li-l-rūm al-urthūdhuks* (Beirut: Markaz al-dirāsāt al-urthūdhuksī al-anṭākī, 1989), 54.

<sup>60</sup> Joun, Basilian Salvatorian Order, OBS 114, folio 238a.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. Kilpatrick, “The Arabic Culture,” 227–28.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. Idlibī, *Asāqifat al-rūm*, 42, and Heyberger, *Les chrétiens*, 42.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. Kilpatrick, “Arabic Private Correspondence,” 21; 25.

that must have been inserted by a Muslim reader.<sup>64</sup> Although Thalja's acquaintance with Muslims from Aleppo neither proves nor disproves an awareness of Ottoman scribal practices, both facts are hints that he may have received impulses from outside the group of his coreligionists when refining his scribal skills.

The impulse probably came not directly from Ottoman colophonal practices; colophons, frequently written in Arabic, seem to have been included only in a minority of Ottoman Turkish manuscripts.<sup>65</sup> Instead chancery practices had an impact on Thalja's colophons. The second half of the sixteenth and beginning of the seventeenth centuries saw a rapid expansion of the Ottoman scribal service in the imperial capital.<sup>66</sup> The Ottoman central chancery increased significantly in number; its steadily growing importance is reflected by the increase of vezirial patronage for important post holders among the *divan katipleri*.<sup>67</sup> Much less is known about lower or middle-ranking officials in the imperial scribal service.<sup>68</sup> In addition to the *divan* in Istanbul, scribes worked in field chanceries and for provincial governors. "Faultless production and careful recording" were the scribe's responsibility.<sup>69</sup> The same would probably have been the case in Aleppo too.

Can such a concept of scribal authority be detected in Thalja's scribal practices, beyond his self-identification with the word *kātib*? Mastery of epistolography and the art of literary composition were a fundamental part of an Ottoman scribe's training too.<sup>70</sup> As has already been observed, Thalja's letters reflect the conventions of Ottoman chancery writing,<sup>71</sup> notably regarding the disposition of the text on the page and the upward curving of the lines as well as the rhetoric in general.

But even were the copying of manuscripts itself is concerned, the script and layout of Thalja's colophons provide further evidence for a clear awareness of and an appeal to Ottoman

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<sup>64</sup> Pococke 351.

<sup>65</sup> See Jan Schmidt, "Colophons in Islamic Ottoman Manuscripts," in *Colofoni armeni a confronto: Le sottoscrizioni dei manoscritti in ambito armeno e nelle altre tradizioni scrittorie del mondo mediterraneo*, ed. Anna Sirinian, Paola Buzi, and Gaga Shurgaia (Rome: Pontificio Istituto Orientale, 2016), 407–16.

<sup>66</sup> See for example Woodhead, "Scribal Chaos," and ead., "From Scribe to Litterateur: The Career of a Sixteenth-Century Ottoman Kātib," *British Society for Middle Eastern Studies Bulletin* 9, no. 1 (1982): 55–74.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. Woodhead, "Scribal Chaos," 155–59.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. Woodhead, "From Scribe to Litterateur," 55.

<sup>69</sup> Woodhead, "From Scribe to Litterateur," 59.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. Woodhead, "From Scribe to Litterateur," 60–61.

<sup>71</sup> Cf. Kilpatrick, "Arabic Private Correspondence," 31.

scribal practices in which calligraphy played a pivotal role:<sup>72</sup> almost all of Thalja's colophons are couched in a script strongly reminiscent of Ottoman *divani*, with the individual lines curving up toward the left.<sup>73</sup> The colophons in figures 1 to 3 are especially illustrative examples:

Figure 1: Colophon by the scribe Thalja. Oxford, Bodleian Library, Arch. Seld. A. 74, folio 229b (1028 AH = 1618/19 AD)

Figure 2: Colophon by the scribe Thalja. Oxford, Bodleian Library, Caps. Or. B. 7, folio 240a (7143 since Adam = 1635 AD)

Figure 3: Colophon by the scribe Thalja. Oxford, Bodleian Library, Pococke 351, p. 428 (1047 AH = 1637/38 AD)

Stylistic exceptions are very scarce among Thalja's colophons. One of these few exceptions can be dated to 1599 and therefore to the initial stages of Thalja's scribal activities. It was written years before his brother became the Bishop Meletios, when the scribe was only starting to work on and refine his skills.<sup>74</sup> In other instances, the brevity of the colophons (and sometimes only subscriptions) accounts to some degree for a less elaborate style and layout.<sup>75</sup>

Ottoman *divani* is a stylised script which was ideal for official documents. It was in use since the second half of the fifteenth century, but regularly employed for official documentation by the Ottomans only since the beginning of the sixteenth century.<sup>76</sup> Since it was difficult to imitate, it provided an additional protection against forgery and ensured confidentiality. Due to its complicated nature, it was virtually impossible to insert words or letters to a line of text.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> For the training of an Ottoman calligrapher, see M. Uğur Derman, *Letters in Gold: Ottoman Calligraphy from the Sakıp Sabancı Collection, Istanbul* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1998), 40–43.

<sup>73</sup> On this characteristic of the *divani* script, cf. Derman, *Letters in Gold*, 18.

<sup>74</sup> London, British Library, Or. 4099, folio 281b.

<sup>75</sup> Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Arabe 165, folio 209a, Arabe 292, folio 214b; Oxford, Bodleian Library, Marsh 435, p. 426.

<sup>76</sup> Cf. Derman, *Letters in Gold*, 38.

<sup>77</sup> On the uses of *divani* script and its confidentiality, cf. Derman, *Letters in Gold*, 18.

Ottoman scribes and calligraphers in the Imperial Council had to take an oath not to use this script outside the council.<sup>78</sup>

By appealing to the Ottoman chancery style and using a script highly reminiscent of *divani* in most of his colophons, Thalja arguably inscribed his own activities in Ottoman institutional practices. The colophon's character as a signature of authority is reinforced by its shared stylistic features with official Ottoman scribal practices related to the chancery. It remains an open question how the use of the script in colophons took root in the Melkite scribal milieu. It is not likely that Thalja himself introduced this practice. In the scribal circles of Hama, it seems to have become simultaneously pervasive.

Thalja was not the only scribe in Aleppo who imitated the practices of Ottoman professional scribes in his colophons. Frantsouzoff has observed a noticeable change in style in the second colophon of a gospel book copied by Būlus, or Paul of Aleppo (1627–1669).<sup>79</sup> He has pointed to the spectrum of scripts Arab calligraphers and scribes were able to execute, notably in imitation of Ottoman calligraphy, which was well known not only from the imperial monogram, the sultan's *tuğra*, but also from official correspondence. The style of Paul's colophon is very similar to Thalja's. This closeness is not especially surprising given that Paul was a student of Thalja's.<sup>80</sup> Another *divani* style colophon similar to Thalja's by the hand of Paul, written in 1642, is included in a manuscript of the "Explication of Orthodox Belief" (*Sharḥ al-amāna al-mustaqīma*).<sup>81</sup> Furthermore, the colophon in the copy of "The Pure Gospel" produced and illuminated in 1649 by Yūsuf al-Muṣawwir, which was referred to above, is couched in the same artful style. A copy of "Barlam and Josaphat" by Yūsuf also bears a colophon in *divani* script;<sup>82</sup> it is noteworthy that Yūsuf here identifies himself as the student of Patriarch Euthymius (Meletios) (fig. 4).

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<sup>78</sup> Cf. Derman, *Letters in Gold*, 39.

<sup>79</sup> St. Petersburg, Ms. B 1214, folios 144b–145a, according to Serge A. Frantsouzoff, "Le Patrimoine manuscrit de Paul d'Alep conservé à St. Pétersbourg," in *Macaire III Ibn al-Za'īm et Paul d'Alep: Relations entre les peuples de l'Europe Orientale et les chrétiens arabes au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, ed. Ioana Feodorov (Bucharest: Editura Academiei Române, 2012), 31–49, here 34–35. Images of the folios in question are provided *ibid.*, 45, fig. 9.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. Nasrallah, *Histoire*, vol. 4, 215, Idlibī, *Asāqifat al-Rūm*, 32, and Heyberger, *Les chrétiens*, 144.

<sup>81</sup> St. Petersburg, Ms. B 1220, 68b, according to Frantsouzoff, "Le Patrimoine manuscrit," 35 and 47, fig. 11 (image of the colophon).

<sup>82</sup> Zūq Mikā'īl, Monastery of Saint Michael, CSBA 1, folio 157a.

Fig. 4: Colophon by Yūsuf [al-Muṣawwir]. Zūq Mikā'īl, Monastery of Saint Michael,  
CSBA 1, folio 157a.

To summarize, colophons were able to function as tools of authorisation by appealing to Ottoman imperial practices, particularly scribal practices. Script and layout thus bestowed additional authority on the copied text.

### ***Conclusion***

Colophons do not exist in a void, as ahistorical entities whose textual function is all there is to them and which have been exhaustively treated when they are properly documented. In Meletios' reform project, they played a crucial role in contributing to the creation of a unified religious corpus and the consolidation of Melkite communal identity in Aleppo. By multiplying the biblical and liturgical translations accepted, revised and composed by his brother, Thalja translated his brother's ambition to disseminate them into reality at a time when the Vatican could not be convinced to endorse and print Meletios' revised translations. As scribal signatures colophons played a key role in imbuing manuscripts with authority via simultaneous processes of scribal self-authorisation and textual authorisation that reinforced each other.

Appearing both throughout and at the end of manuscripts, Thalja's colophons signal the partial or definitive closure of the copying process and allow for socially and intellectually situating the copied text portion. This communication of the colophon with the social world is crucial. The colophon afforded the reader of the manuscript the opportunity to link Thalja with a scribal lineage and with the illustrious figure of the Bishop and later Patriarch. Slotting highly individual and context-sensitive information into the formulaic structure of the colophon served the purpose of professional and religious self-authorisation, which in turn imbued the text itself with authority and thus certified it. Later references in secondary notes in manuscripts shed light on the authoritativeness of Thalja's colophons, which was both taken for granted and challenged. These scribal colophon practices were so effective that they spread into adjacent fields of cultural production, notably icon and miniature painting, pointing to a veritable institutionalisation by a variety of individuals.

It would accordingly be wrong to treat colophons as abstracted palaeographical entities. Any attempt to contextualise and historicise colophons must additionally include considerations on how they appeal to dominant political discourses of power, both in phrasing and layout. In the case examined here, the self-identification of Thalja as a "scribe" (*kātib*) instead of a "copyist" (*nāsikh*) points to an additional process of self-authorisation and textual authorisation

via references to the Ottoman chancery service. By means of this self-identification on the content level as well as an alignment of the layout and script of colophons with Ottoman chancery writings in *divani* script, the colophon was moulded into a signature of authority in yet another sense, a political one. Colophons thus emerge as condensations of both social constellations and political power relations, which can be read most successfully against their historical background and which in turn shed light on that very background.

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Ms. 46: *Al-Abraksīs wa-l-rasāʿil*; Ms. 145: *Bustān al-ruhbān*; Ms. 159: *ʿIzzāt*; [*Sharḥ al-injīl al-Dhahabī al-Famm*, not in the catalogue; maybe identical with Sbath 778]

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Ms. Theology 112 (A27/7): *Bahjat al-mu`min*

**Cambridge, University Library:**

Ff. 6.38: *Al-Insān al-kāmil fī ma`rifat al-awākhir wa-l-awā`il*

**Dayr `Aṭīyya:**

*Makhṭūṭ al-Maryamiyya: Kitāb al-nubuwwāt*

**Diyarbakir, Meryem Ana Kilisesi:**

DIYR 192: *Zabūr Dāwūd al-Nabī*

**Hama, Greek Orthodox Diocese:**

Ms. 6: *Qundāq al-kāhin*, Ms. 8: *Al-Abraksīs*

**Hamburg, Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek:**

Or. 23: *Rawḍat al-farīd wa-salwat al-wahīd*

**Jerusalem, Cathedral of Saint James:**

Ms. 6: *Tafsīr injīl Yūḥannā al-Bashīr al-Thāwulūghūs li-abīnā al-jalīl fī l-qadīssīn Yūḥannā Famm al-Dhahab*

**Joun, Basilian Salvatorian Order:**

OBS 114 N.C.: *Tafsīr sittat ayyām al-khalīqa fī khalqat al-insān*; OBS 189: *Sullam al-faḍā`il*

**Khonchara (Bikfayyā), Shuwayrite Basilian Order:**

OBC 750 and OBC 737 (originally forming one manuscript): *Al-Sinksār*

**Kousba, Monastery of our Lady of Hammatoura:**

HMTR 24: *Abraksīs/ A`māl al-rusul/ Rasā`il Būluṣ/ Tafsīr al-Dhahabī l-Famm*; HMTR 28: *Al-Injīl al-sharīf al-tāhir wa-l-miṣbāḥ al-munīr al-zāhir*

**London, British Library:**

Arundel Or. 6: *Rawḍat al-farīd wa-salwat al-wahīd*; Arundel Or. 19: *Kitāb al-Injīl sayyidinā Yasū` al-masīḥ/ Abraksīs/ Zabūr Dāwūd*; Or. 4099: *Muṣḥaf al-injīl al-muqaddas*

**Mardin, Chaldean Cathedral:**

CCM 55: *Al-Injīl al-sharīf al-tāhir wa-l-miṣbāḥ al-munīr al-zāhir*

**Mishtāyah, Monastery of Saint George:**

HMIR 29: *Rawḍat al-farīd wa-salwat al-wahīd*

**Mosul, Saint Behnam Monastery:**

MBM 258: *Zabūr Dāwūd al-Nabī*

**Oxford, Bodleian Library:**

Arch. Seld. A. 74: *Al-Tārīkh al-majmū` `alā l-tahqīq wa-l-taṣdīq*; Caps. Or. B. 7: liturgical manuscript collection; Marsh 408: *Bahjat al-mu`min/ Fuṣūl muntakhaba fī ma`ānī shattā min kalām Yūḥannā al-qass al-dimashqī*; Marsh 435: *Al-Tārīkh al-majmū` `alā l-tahqīq wa-l-*

*taṣḍīq*; Marsh 581: *Muḥāwarat jaddāliyya fī amr al-dīn jarrat bayna l-ab al-mukarram Jurjī rāhib dayr al-qaddīs Sam ‘ān wa-bayna thalātha anfār min al-muslimīn* (etc.); Pococke 351: *Al-Tārīkh al-majmū‘ ‘alā l-taḥqīq wa-l-taṣḍīq*; Pococke 363: *Taqwīm al-ṣiḥḥa bi-l-asbāb al-sitta*

**Oxford, Queen’s College:**

Ms. 351: *Al-Injīl al-sharīf al-ṭāhir wa-l-miṣbāḥ al-munīr al-zāhir/ Rasā’il Būluṣ/ Abraksīs*

**Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France:**

Arabe 165: *Kitāb al-mi’at maqāla wa-ghayrihā/ Kitāb fī l-falsafa wa-fī l-manṭiq wa-fī ‘ilm al-kalām li-Yūḥannā al-qass al-dimashqī/ Risāla mukhtaṣara li-Būluṣ usquf Ṣaydā*; Arabe 292: *Al-Tārīkh al-majmū‘ ‘alā l-taḥqīq wa-l-taṣḍīq*

**Qatar, National Library, Heritage Collection:**

Ms. 02212: *Zabūr Dāwūd al-Nabī*

**Shwayyā, Monastery of St. Elias:**

SHWA 53: *A ‘māl al-rusul/ Kitāb al-Abraksīs ma’a rasā’il al-qadīs Būlus*

**Sinai, Saint Catherine’s Monastery:**

Ms. 343: *Sullam al-faḍā’il*

**Vatican, Vatican Library:**

Borg. ar. 178: *Kitāb Ūrūlūjiyūn al-ṣalawāt al-mafrūḍa fī l-sab’a awqāt*

**Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek:**

Cod. Mixt. 288: *Mazmūrāt*

**Zūq Mikā’il, Couvent Notre Dame de l’Annonciation des Sœurs Basiliennes Chouérites:**

Ms. 2: *Al-Injīl al-muqaddas*; Ms. 31: *Barlām wa-Yuwāṣaf*

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**Other manuscripts and archival sources:**

**Mosul, Saint Behnam Monastery:**

MBM 270: *Kitāb al-mi’at maqāla*

**Oxford, Bodleian Library:**

Pococke 160: *Rawḍat al-farīd wa salwat al-wahīd*

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