Identities in early Arabic journalism: The case of Louis bnj
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The Bee in conflict with the Maronites (1874)

“Mār ʿAbdā al-Mushammar is one of the backward saints of the Maronites. He has a monastery in Lebanon, where childless women go to with the hope of getting offspring. Someone who went to this monastery with his wife told me that the monks there order the childless woman to sleep on her own in the cave of the saint, in the deep-black darkness without a light. In the middle of the night the alleged Mār ʿAbdā visits her, and while he is busily at work (as reported by someone who knows about this) he pours his abundant fertile blessings on her. The woman becomes pregnant and nine months later she has offspring which is largely similar in appearance to Mār ʿAbdā.”

The passage above is taken from a pamphlet entitled Tarjamatā al-ʿallāma al-khūrī al-usqufī Yūsuf Dāwud wal-sayyid al-fāḍil Yūsuf al-Dibs (‘The biographies of the erudite priest Yūsuf Dāwud and the honorable Yūsuf al-Dibs’, henceforth abbreviated as Tarjamatā), which was written by Ţābūnjī in 1874. In this highly aggressive text he criticized a number of Maronite religious practices and beliefs, and it immediately sparked a religious conflict with far-reaching consequences for Ţābūnjī. Within a few days after its publication he had to flee Beirut, whereupon he traveled to California and subsequently to London. While abroad, Ţābūnjī wrote a treatise entitled Le Decalogue sur le Liban (henceforth abbreviated as Decalogue), in which he gave a detailed apologetic account of the circumstances surrounding this conflict. This treatise criticized the same Maronite beliefs and practices that he attacked in the Tarjamatā, such as pilgrimages to monasteries. These two texts form the main sources for the present chapter.

I will follow a similar approach to that which I used in the previous chapter. From the texts of the conflict I will focus on those passages and sentences that give information about identities, and I

1 Ţābūnjī 1874: 19.
will subsequently analyze how Šābūnjī makes these identities relevant and consequential. The first section of this chapter gives an account of the conflict, which had apparently remained unstudied until now. The second section discusses references to identities in the Tarjamatā, and the third section does the same with respect to the Decalogue. The most prominent identities that are addressed in these texts are religious identities. In the fourth section I will relate my findings about Šābūnjī’s references to identities with the phenomenon of sectarianism, which tore apart Mount Lebanon in the nineteenth-century. This phenomenon was a major concern for Arabic intellectuals and journalists of the period.

5.1 Conflict with the Maronites

The events
After his contributions to al-Najāḥ ended in the summer of 1871, Šābūnjī went on a trip around the world, returning to Beirut at the beginning of 1874. During Šābūnjī’s absence a theological dispute had taken place between the Syriac Catholic bishop of Mosul, Yūsuf Dāwud (1829-1890), and the Maronite archbishop of Beirut, Yūsuf al-Dibs (1833-1907). Writing in Latin, Yūsuf Dāwud published a book in Rome in 1870 in which he claimed that, until the thirteenth century, the Maronites maintained Christological doctrines that were in conflict with Catholic doctrine. Dāwud thereby denied the so-called ‘perpetual orthodoxy’ of the Maronites, the idea that the Maronites had always conformed to the Catholic Christian faith. Al-Dibs responded to Dāwud in 1871 with an Arabic treatise entitled Rūḥ al-rudūd (‘The spirit of the refutations’), in which he dismissed Dāwud’s claims and defended the perpetual orthodoxy of the Maronites. In turn, Dāwud wrote a second critical book about

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2 For biographical information about Dāwud and al-Dibs, see Dāghir 1956: 355-360. For an account of this dispute, see Suermann 1998: 13-14 and Vosté 1948: 236-244.
3 For Dāwud’s book, see in the bibliography David 1870.
4 For al-Dibs’ book, see in the bibliography Dibs 1871. He wrote the book in Arabic and a second person translated it into Latin. The book was subsequently printed bilingually.
Maronite doctrines in 1873. However, Dāwud was instructed by higher church authorities not to publish this text in order to preserve the peace and well-being of the Catholic church. Dāwud’s text would eventually be published in 1908, after the death of both opponents.5

Both Louis Śābūnjī and Yūsuf Dāwud were clergymen of the Syriac Catholic church, and both had been students at the school of the Propaganda Fide in Rome in the year 1855.6 It can therefore be assumed that Śābūnjī knew his colleague and co-religionist. As soon as he returned to Beirut in February 1874, Śābūnjī interfered in the conflict.7 He publicly took sides with Yūsuf Dāwud and against Yūsuf al-Dibs in the Tarjamatā pamphlet, published in March 1874 and printed at the American mission in Beirut.8 The pamphlet does not address the theological issues that divided Dāwud and al-Dibs. Instead, the treatise is an attempt at disqualifying al-Dibs’ intellectual, scientific, and educational capacities and credentials. Besides questioning al-Dibs’ authority, Śābūnjī also criticized particular Maronite practices and beliefs that he deemed backward. These include the practice of visiting the Maronite Mār ʿAbdā al-Mushammar monastery, which was referred to at the start of this chapter. As will be showed below, the result is a vehemently anti-Maronite publication. Vosté, the biographer of Yūsuf Dāwud, rightly classified this text as scandalous, violent, and defamatory.9 One year later the Tarjamatā was placed on the Vatican’s list of prohibited books, the Index Librorum Prohibitorum.10

Unsurprisingly, the publication of the Tarjamatā did not receive a warm welcome in Beirut. There is some uncertainty about the details, but based on a number of sources,11 most importantly

5 See in the bibliography: Dāwud 1908.
6 Vosté 1948: 220.
7 In the Tarjamatā (p. 16) Śābūnjī wrote that he was in Beirut since a month.
8 This information is omitted in the pamphlet, but is given in various other sources.
10 Bujanda 2002: 794.
11 Besides the Decalogue, these are Vosté’s account (1948: 241) and a contemporary newspaper article called ‘A Missionary Press Closed’ (see alphabetically in the bibliography).
التعلمة الكبرى. الابنون السيسي يهود
الفسطاط صاحب فيلهلم مدرسة برونهنا

النهاية الأولى
من
المجلة الفنية

وقت الله تعاي مذخرة تعلى مرارة دينكم وتعال
من عدة دين فقط فثابر على الدين وقف أول

قال الملك دارون جالاً في الغار عن رحمة خوري يوسف دارون
وسن ينسوءه في الحاضر

الرحمة والشفاء النفوذ والمسلم من يثنا

(1874)

Tarjamatā al-ʿallāma al-khūrī al-usqufi Yūsuf Dāwud wal-sayyid al-
fiḍil Yūsuf al-Dibs (1874), Beirut, p.1.
Şābūnjī’s own account in the *Decalogue*, the following reconstruction can be made. On 12 March 1874 the *Tarjamatā* was published, and the Maronite authorities responded immediately, on the same day. They contacted the Ottoman authorities, who went to Şābūnjī’s house, arrested him, and confiscated all the copies of the pamphlet. Simultaneously, a number of Maronites were mobilized and started to protest in the streets against Şābūnjī’s writings. Şābūnjī was questioned for a few hours, and after his release he spent the night at the seat of the Papal delegate in Beirut for reasons of safety. The Papal delegate, Luigi Piavi, assisted Şābūnjī in escaping from Beirut.\(^\text{12}\) Piavi planned to go to Aleppo the next day and Şābūnjī decided to join him. That night some Maronites sacked and plundered Şābūnjī’s house. The American missionary press was possibly also attacked by a Maronite crowd.\(^\text{13}\) In addition, according to both Şābūnjī and Vosté, a prize was set on his head, though it is unknown by whom. The next day, 13 March 1874, Piavi and Şābūnjī boarded the ship *Orontes*. The former traveled to Aleppo, while the latter traveled all the way to California, via İskenderun and Alexandria.

**Şābūnjī’s polemical texts**

The *Tarjamatā* suffers from some confusion as to its correct title. Its first page states that it is the first part of a larger document entitled *al-Naḥla al-fatiyya* (‘The Young Bee’). Confusingly, Şābūnjī regularly uses the term *al-Naḥla al-fatiyya* when he literally quotes from the *Tarjamatā*.\(^\text{14}\) Similarly, in his bibliography of Şābūnjī, Ṭarrāzī mentions *al-Naḥla al-fatiyya* but omits any reference to the *Tarjamatā*.\(^\text{15}\) My conclusion is thus that *al-Naḥla al-fatiyya* is an

\(^{12}\) Luigi Piavi (1833-1905), also known as Ludovico Piavi, Louis Piavi, and Louis de Ravenne, was the Apostolic delegate in Beirut. In 1889 he became the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem. While in Beirut, he maintained contacts with the Propaganda Fide (Kildani 2010: 419-423).

\(^{13}\) See ‘A Missionary Press Closed’ (1874).

\(^{14}\) This is particularly the case in the *Decalogue*, for instance pages 4 and 6. The quotes that appear there are taken literally from the *Tarjamatā*, even though the *Decalogue* refers to the source text as *al-Naḥla al-fatiyya*.

\(^{15}\) Ṭarrāzī 1913b: 79. This also suggests that Ṭarrāzī compiled his bibliography on the basis of firsthand information rather than on literature study.
alternative, shorter title for the Tarjamatā, and that Šābūnjī never published a separate text with the title al-Naḥla al-fatiyya. The Decalogue is the subject of similar confusion. Its French title conceals the fact that the text is entirely in Arabic. In addition, the Decalogue makes no mention of Šābūnjī as its author, but instead identifies Mūsā Ḥallāq as its author. Based on internal evidence, a comparison of the handwriting, and the mentioning of a publication entitled Mūsā al-Ḥallāqa in Ṭarrāzī’s bibliography of Šābūnjī, it can be assumed that Šābūnjī wrote the text himself.16

The Tarjamatā initiated Šābūnjī’s polemic against the Maronites. The document starts with two lines of poetry, in which Šābūnjī compares Yūsuf al-Dibs with pitch-black tar (see the image for the original Arabic). He puns on dibs, which means fruit molasses, and contrasts it with the similar substance honey.

“My bee brought you a product / that sweetens the bitterness of your dibs, and soothes / those who have only dibs. So let him take / some honey, because al-Dibs is pitch-black tar.”17

The largest part of the Tarjamatā consists of a comparison between Yūsuf al-Dibs and Yūsuf Dāwud, and in all respects al-Dibs is represented as the lesser of the two. For example, Šābūnjī writes that Dāwud knew Arabic, Latin, Italian, French, modern Greek, ancient Greek, Hebrew, Chaldean, Syriac, and some English and Turkish. By contrast, al-Dibs allegedly only knew a little Syriac and a little Arabic, and nothing else. Šābūnjī substantiates this claim by referencing a list of grammar and spelling errors found in al-Dibs’ Rūḥ al-rudūd. Another example relates to their education: Dāwud received his education from the best teachers in Rome, whereas al-Dibs received his education from “some subdeacons from Mount Lebanon, in the school of ‘Ayn Waraqā”.18 The principle that

16 The first reason is that the Decalogue includes information that only Šābūnjī would know. The second reason is that the Decalogue is a handwritten document reproduced in lithography. For the third reason, see Ṭarrāzī 1913b: 79.
17 Šābūnjī 1874: 1.
18 Šābūnjī 1874: 13. Note that Šābūnjī studied at the same college in Rome.
underlies this comparison is that ‘Ayn Waraq is nothing in comparison with Rome. As will be shown in this chapter, Šābūnjī regularly represents Mount Lebanon as a backward area; the reference to ‘Ayn Waraq in contrast with Rome reflects this representation.

Also discussed in the Tarjamatā, and again in the Decalogue, is the alleged transformation of al-Najāh magazine into a Maronite medium, broadcasting al-Dibs’ opinions. As discussed in the previous chapter, Šābūnjī founded al-Najāh together with Yūsuf Shalfūn in January 1871, but Šābūnjī was pressured by the Bustānīs and the local Ottoman authorities to abandon it. Šābūnjī then traveled abroad while Shalfūn continued the magazine on his own. During Šābūnjī’s absence from Beirut, al-Dibs used al-Najāh as a medium to attack Dāwud, allegedly referring to the latter as “a hurricane from the direction of Mosul, threatening Lebanon.”

Throughout the Tarjamatā Šābūnjī describes diverse Maronite practices and beliefs as backward and uncivilized. His criticism ranges from denouncing the dirty clothing of Maronite monks to rejecting the sanctity of Yūḥannā Mārūn –the founder of the Maronite community– and declaring the nullity of various Maronite pilgrimages. Šābūnjī argues that “the leaders of the Maronites should abolish these monasteries if they really want civilization” because “these monasteries are dirty huts, place of refuge for lazy and backward persons who want to fill their stomachs with beans, lentils and hummus.” The recurrent point that Šābūnjī stresses is that the Maronite authorities, and most of all Yūsuf al-Dibs, obstruct the Maronites from acquiring civilization and advancement, as they do not make use of their power and authority to stop these manifestations of backwardness.

The Decalogue also includes various passages that attack Maronite authorities, practices and beliefs. The Decalogue was written in order to demonstrate that Šābūnjī was treated badly in the aftermath of the publication of the Tarjamatā. From internal

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19 Šābūnjī 1874: 17 and Ḥallāq 1874: 39-43. As far as I know, no copies of al-Najāh from the year 1873 are preserved.
evidence it seems that the Decalogue was written in 1874 while Šābūnjī was in London.\textsuperscript{21} One of the most interesting of the ten chapters describes Šābūnjī’s interrogation by the Ottoman authorities after his arrest. A short summary of this chapter suffices here; a more detailed account follows in the remainder of this chapter. The governor and three Maronite government officials take turns questioning Šābūnjī about particular sentences from the Tarjamatā that are deemed slanderous towards the Maronites. Topics that are discussed include the comparison of Yūsuf al-Dibs with pitch-black tar and the accusations of extramarital sex during the Mār ‘Abdā al-Mushammar pilgrimage. To each question Šābūnjī gives a conclusive answer, and the outcome is that the governor is convinced of Šābūnjī’s good faith. Now in agreement with Šābūnjī, the governor states that: “among every people there are scum who should be avoided by sensible people. I fear for your life from this Maronite riffraff. Because of their strong ignorance and fanaticism they may kill you, believing that it is one of the religious duties of their rite to do so.”\textsuperscript{22} It is impossible to reconstruct the exact words of the governor, but it is difficult not to see Šābūnjī’s fingerprint in this representation of the governor’s words.

Another chapter of the Decalogue vividly tells about a Maronite plot aimed at killing, or at least damaging, Šābūnjī. This plot manifests itself, according to Šābūnjī, in various forms. He claims that one of the Maronite interrogators passed on details about his traveling schedule and his whereabouts to his co-religionists, facilitating the plundering of his house and the protests against him in the streets. The plot continues on board of the ship Orontes. Two Maronites are sent on board in order to kill him at night. They are caught, and a second team of two Maronites, sent for the same purpose, are caught as well. However, Šābūnjī is prepared to face danger because, as the Decalogue confidently states, “the priest [Šābūnjī] carried an American pistol and twelve bullets in his pocket, and he was determined not to lie dead on the

\begin{footnotes}
\item[21] The author mentions that he is “walking in comfort and safety through Oxford Street” (Šābūnjī 1874: 18). In addition, his handwriting is recognizable, particularly in the words that he records in Latin letters.
\item[22] Ḥallāq 1874: 13.
\end{footnotes}
ground until twelve Maronites would have been sacrificed for his life.”\(^{23}\) Despite the many Maronite threats, Ṣābūnjī remains unharmed.

In the following pages the two texts are discussed chronologically, starting with the Tarjamatā. The original texts of Yūsuf Dāwud and Yūsuf al-Dibs remain undiscussed. They are of limited value with respect to understanding Ṣābūnjī’s polemical texts because Ṣābūnjī does not discuss the theological issues that they were debating.

### 5.2 The Tarjamatā

In the previous chapter, it was demonstrated how Ṣābūnjī and the Bustānīs shared an understanding of the East –that it is religiously blessed– and how Ṣābūnjī made use of this shared knowledge in order to attack the Bustānīs. Ṣābūnjī argued that ‘real civilization’ should be built on religious foundations. He thereby invoked the mantra of progress and civilization, but only did so in order to reinforce another, more fundamental, norm, namely the normativity of being religious. In the present chapter, the mantra of progress and civilization plays a more important role.

The most important collective identities that Ṣābūnjī refers to are firstly Maronites, and secondly Lebanese. The terms ‘Lebanon’ and ‘Mount Lebanon’, used by Ṣābūnjī and his peers, should not be seen in the light of the present boundaries of the state of Lebanon. Two points should be made beforehand. Firstly, both the terms ‘Lebanon’ (Lubnān) and ‘Mount Lebanon’ (Jabal Lubnān) point to the geographical Mount Lebanon, and not to the Beqaa valley or the anti-Lebanon ranges. Secondly, the city of Beirut was conventionally understood as *not* belonging to Mount Lebanon. This is also reflected by the Ottoman administrative divisions of the area in the nineteenth century. From 1842 until 1918 Mount Lebanon formed a separate area in the Ottoman Empire, first as a dual Qaimmaqamiyya and later as a Mutasarrifate. Beirut was never part of these polities. Instead, it was the capital of

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\(^{23}\) Ḥallāq 1874: 28.
the Eyalet of Sidon from 1842-1865, a port city in the Vilayet of Syria from 1865-1888, and the capital of the Vilayet of Beirut from 1888-1918. In conformity with Şabūnjī’s usage I also use the phrases ‘Lebanon’, ‘Mount Lebanon’, and ‘Lebanese’ as applying to the mountain only.

**Pre-modernizing the Maronites**

The mantra of progress and civilization is explicitly and repeatedly invoked in the *Tarjamatā*. Its temporal aspect, where past means backwardness and present and future mean progress, is regularly articulated by Şabūnjī. He sketches a chronology that ranges from the ‘dark Middle Ages’, a concept that he refers to a few times, until the nineteenth century (qtd 1):

> “The sun of knowledge and reliable history has now risen on the horizon of the nineteenth century, through the determination of those with intelligence. The sons of this enlightened era should move along with its light.”

Şabūnjī contrasts the knowledge and reliable history of the present era with the ‘fantastic story’ of the alleged sanctity of Yūḥannā Mārūn, the first Patriarch of the Maronites who lived in the seventh century. He explains (qtd 2):

> “The Maronites still fanatically hold on to the myth of Yūḥannā Mārūn, even now. This is clear proof that they have not yet reached the high level of historical knowledge, through which civilized and enlightened nations can separate good from corrupted [history].”

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24 Şabūnjī 1874: 8 and primarily 16. Interestingly, the Middle Ages in the Arabic context did not usually carry such negative connotations. Şabūnjī repeats here an essentially European idea about the Middle Ages. On the representation of the Middle Ages in Europe, see Raedts 2011.

25 Şabūnjī 1874: 20.

26 The seventh-century Yūḥannā Mārūn is not identical to the fifth-century Mārūn, after whom the Maronites are named.

27 Şabūnjī 1874: 9. Note the charged term ‘myth’ which Şabūnjī uses.
Of special relevance in this last quote is the usage of the words ‘still’ and ‘not yet’ which invokes complex social knowledge that links proper or normative behavior, thoughts, and values with the passage of time. Firstly, the Maronite belief in the sanctity of Yūḥannā Mārūn is represented as outmoded and not in conformity with the spirit of the nineteenth century. Hence, the Maronites who hold on to this myth are represented as backward and pre-modern, as living in the past and lagging behind those who do follow the normative beliefs and practices. Secondly, a correct understanding of history is couched as advanced, just as its prerequisite, possessing particular forms of knowledge. These ‘forms of knowledge’ are not specified beyond being ‘high leveled’. The Maronites lack both, which again implies that they are not as advanced as the nineteenth century demands of them.

By pointing out to his reading public that the beliefs and practices of the Maronites are backward, Ṣābūnjī appropriates the right to paternalize them. He pretends to speak on behalf of those who are progressed and civilized, thereby assigning himself the role of the progressed party. In this framework Ṣābūnjī looks down –the direction of the conceptual barbarians– on the Maronites, and finds them living in a different time, quite literally, as he speaks about the ‘dark Middle Ages’. He then paternalizes the Maronites by presenting them with a course of action, or a narrative of reform, which boils down to dismissing a number of beliefs and practices. Ṣābūnjī thereby shows the Maronites the correct path up, towards the enlightenment and advancement that is characteristic of the nineteenth century. Importantly, the opposition between the backward Maronites and the advanced Ṣābūnjī reflects Ṣābūnjī’s point of view. His text is an attempt at establishing his authority in the eyes of his reading public, by convincing them that his perspective on these matters is correct.

Another passage explicitly represents Ṣābūnjī and Yūsuf Dāwud as advanced and progressed, as opposed to the backward and fanatical Maronites (qtd 3):

“When the successors of the Maronite sect rise to the top of knowledge and science, and when they shake off the
backwardness of their ancestors and the spirit of fanaticism of their fathers, then they will remember Yūsuf Dāwud and the one who sought to assist him [Ṣābūnjī]. They will erect statues for these two, higher than the air and overlooking the hills of Keserwan [a Maronite area of Mount Lebanon] in defiance of the fanaticism of their ancestors.”

In this quote Ṣābūnjī frames the concepts of knowledge, science, backwardness, and fanaticism again in temporal terms. Rather than speaking about the ‘dark Middle Ages’, he refers to the past by mentioning ‘their ancestors’. The past lives on in the present because the Maronites are ‘still’ in a state of fanaticism and ignorance, but the future becomes different –better– if the Maronites become advanced. He thereby attempts to stimulate the Maronites to take action now.

From a structural perspective, the backwardness of the Maronites is meaningful in contrast to the advancement of others. In the last quote Ṣābūnjī represents individuals –Dāwud and himself, who both deserve prominent statues– as advanced, and not collective identities. In various other quotes he juxtaposes the Maronites with other collective identities. For example, Ṣābūnjī explicitly states that the Chinese and the Americans are more civilized and intelligent than the Maronites. The Americans are unequivocally referred to as “the people who have reached the highest top of civilization and enlightenment”. In other examples Ṣābūnjī implicitly refers to collective identities as more advanced than the Maronites. This applies, for instance, to the Europeans. Ṣābūnjī states that the writings of Europeans are “the source of sciences and reliable history”, and for this reason he laments al-Dibs’ ignorance of European languages. Similarly, the Syriacs (al-Suryān) are also represented as more advanced. Ṣābūnjī points out that the Syriac church authorities have taken the necessary steps

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28 Ṣābūnjī 1874: 18. Keserwan is a predominantly Maronite area in Mount Lebanon.
29 Ṣābūnjī 1874: 8 and 18.
30 Ṣābūnjī 1874: 20.
31 Ṣābūnjī 1874: 5.
towards civilization, unlike the Maronite church authorities.\textsuperscript{32} This last example articulates an us-versus-them dichotomy; it can be assumed that the readers saw Ṣābūnjī as one of the Syriacs.

It must be noted that Ṣābūnjī does not argue that all Maronites are backward; he does acknowledge that there are some Maronites who are civilized and advanced. It is this subgroup of Maronites, the so-called ‘enlightened Maronites’, that Ṣābūnjī addresses.\textsuperscript{33} He tries to convince them that their leaders, and most prominently Yūsuf al-Dibs, form an obstacle for the Maronites on their path towards progress and advancement. In spite of this apparently anti-essential image of the Maronites, Ṣābūnjī does reproduce the idea that the Maronites in general are backward. The explicit mentioning of the enlightenment of individual Maronites underlines that they are \textit{unlike} the other Maronites. In other words, their enlightenment sets them apart from the ‘normal’ Maronite. From this perspective, referring to enlightened Maronites also reproduces the idea that the Maronites in general are \textit{not} enlightened.

In short, Ṣābūnjī invokes a norm that stipulates that backwardness should be averted and progress should be acquired. This norm is framed in temporal terms. Ṣābūnjī argues that the Maronites fail to act in accordance with what is demanded of people who live in the nineteenth century. It is in this way that Ṣābūnjī represents them as if they are living in a different, pre-modern, time. Simultaneously, each reference to advancement and backwardness reminds the reader of this norm. As a social construct, each of these reminders reflect, reproduce, and reify this norm in the social consciousness of Ṣābūnjī and his readers.

\textbf{Othering the Lebanese}

Ṣābūnjī not only represents the Maronites as backward and in need of advancement, but also the inhabitants of Mount Lebanon. One amusing passage saliently illustrates this (qtd 4):

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{32} Ṣābūnjī 1874: 16. He does not specify what the Syriac church authorities precisely did.
\item \textsuperscript{33} Ṣābūnjī 1874: 15, 18, 19.
\end{itemize}
“I was once on my own in the church of the village Mayrūba where I saw with my own eyes and heard with my own ears terrible errors by men and children. The priest Yūsuf, one of the students of the school in Ghazīr, taught them the Christian teachings in the village church. And when he asked them ‘God is how many?’ [艨لة kam wāḥid?] I heard someone say ‘two’ and another yelled ‘four!’ and I heard an old man chattering with a weak voice, saying ‘no, it’s ten’. So, until today there are people in the Kfardebian district [a part of Mount Lebanon], who do not know the truth about God.”

This quote is one of many which illustrate Šābūnjī’s claims that Mount Lebanon is a backward area and that its inhabitants are backward too. In another example he writes that the “mist of ignorance has entirely enshrouded the hills of Lebanon for centuries”. In reference to the inhabitants of Mount Lebanon he regularly uses terminology such as “the simple cave dwelling inhabitants of Lebanon”, and “the inhabitants of the bleak highlands of Lebanon”. In this last example Šābūnjī implies a connection between the place of habitat and personal characteristics, suggesting that a rough place is indicative of a rough character. There are various other quotes that demonstrate how Šābūnjī represents Lebanon as backward and peripheral. One more example was already briefly addressed above. In the comparison between the education that Yūsuf al-Dibs received in Mount Lebanon and Yūsuf Dāwud in Rome, Šābūnjī’s remarks that al-Dibs is less educated, because “between Rome and Lebanon there is a difference as between the sky and the earth.”

The negative depiction of the inhabitants of Mount Lebanon suggests that Šābūnjī does not count himself as one of the Lebanese. This suggestion becomes unambiguous when speaking about ‘their’ mountains. Again remarking about its uninviting topography,

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34 Šābūnjī 1874: 11.
35 Šābūnjī 1874: 10-11
36 Šābūnjī 1874: 10, 8.
37 Šābūnjī 1874: 13.
Ṣābūnjī writes that “I have visited their mountains, climbed its bleak highlands, and crossed its valleys, but I only encountered drought, thorns and spikes.”

Interestingly, an us-versus-them dichotomy is also discernible in the conflict between Yūsuf al-Dibs and Yūsuf Dāwud, which preceded the publication of Ṣābūnjī’s Tarjamatā. Al-Dibs called Dāwud a “hurricane from the direction of Mosul, threatening Lebanon”. Al-Dibs thereby stresses Dāwud’s identity as an outsider from Lebanon. Interestingly, both Ṣābūnjī and Dāwud were understood as non-Lebanese outsiders, in the eyes of different persons. In addition, both belonged to the Syriac Catholic Church. This observation leads to the question of whether the conflict is also a manifestation of an opposition between Maronites from Mount Lebanon and Syriac Catholics from elsewhere. More research is needed in order to answer this question. After all, there was a Syriac Catholic community in Beirut, and the prominent Syriac Catholic Sharfa monastery was also located in Mount Lebanon.

**Normative orthodoxy and normative advancement**

As pointed out above, Ṣābūnjī criticizes the Maronites for failing to act in line with what he saw as the spirit of the nineteenth century. This claim is mostly substantiated by arguing that the Maronites fanatically hold on to myths that are handed down through the ages. This demonstrates, Ṣābūnjī’s argument goes, that they are unable to distinguish fact from fiction. However, Ṣābūnjī also criticizes the Maronites on religious grounds. He argues that the Maronites maintain various practices and beliefs that go against Christian, and specifically Catholic, orthodoxy. These deviations include, among others, the alleged sanctity of Yūḥannā Mārūn and the pilgrimages

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38 Ṣābūnjī 1874: 12.
39 Quote found in Ṣābūnjī 1874: 17. The original source, an issue of al-Najāḥ magazine, has not been found and has likely not survived.
40 In the late eighteenth century the Syriac Catholic Patriarch Mīkhāʾīl Jarwa (1731-1800) took refuge in Mount Lebanon, fleeing Syriac Orthodox (Jacobite) oppression in other parts of Syria. There, with the help of local Maronites, he founded the Sharfa Monastery in 1786 (Chalfoun 1980: 222).
to Maronite monasteries. It is in this light that Ṣābūnjī also claims to speak on behalf of the Catholics.

Throughout the Tarjamata there is an interconnection between the charges of being backward and the charges of being un-Catholic. An important topic that Ṣābūnjī addresses, the belief in the sanctity of Yūḥannā Mārūn, illustrates this nicely. Ṣābūnjī couches this belief as backward because it “is clear proof that they [the Maronites] have not yet reached the high level of knowledge, with which they can separate good history from corrupted history”.41 In addition, he also couches this belief as un-Catholic because “the Popes of the Vatican did not confirm him [Yūḥannā Mārūn] in this position [as saint], and until now they have never referred to him as a saint”.42 Ṣābūnjī thereby invokes background knowledge about Maronites, namely that they are Catholics who should not accept canonizations that are not confirmed by the Pope. Both charges articulate norms; the former quote reflects and reproduces the norm of becoming and acting advanced and civilized, and the latter quote reflects and reproduces the norm of only accepting canonizations that have been confirmed by the Pope.

Significantly, these two norms do not apply to the same people. The norm that the Pope should be followed in issues of canonization is only applicable to Catholic Christians. This is therefore a particular norm. By contrast, the normativity of becoming advanced is not limited to Catholic Christians, but applies to everybody who lives in the nineteenth century. This is thus a universal norm. It is because of this universality that Ṣābūnjī’s charge –that people who are unable to distinguish fancy myths from reliable history are backward– can be applied to Catholics as well as Muslims and Protestants. In spite of this dissimilarity Ṣābūnjī combines these two norms in his polemic against the Maronites. In this way he suggests that failing to follow the Pope is not only un-Catholic, but is also a reflection of the Maronites’ failure to adhere to the normative advancement of the nineteenth century. From this perspective, the discord about the position of Yūḥannā Mārūn ceases to be a purely religious issue, but touches upon

41 Ṣābūnjī 1874: 9.
42 Ṣābūnjī 1874: 8.
universal norms that regulate what is demanded and expected of people who live in the present. On the basis of the same logic, Ṣābūnjī represents the Popes as advanced; the fact that they did not canonize Yūḥannā Mārūn demonstrates that they are able to distinguish fancy stories from true history.

To conclude, by invoking the mantra of progress and civilization Ṣābūnjī casts his criticism of the Maronites in universal terms. As such, the various Maronite beliefs and practices that he targets are unacceptable, because they conflict with Catholic doctrine, but also because they conflict with the spirit of the age.

5.3 The Decalogue

In the previous pages I have shown how the Tarjamatā referred to Maronites and Lebanese, and less prominently to Catholics, Chinese, and Americans, as part of Ṣābūnjī’s polemic against Yūsuf al-Dibs. Ṣābūnjī was specifically concerned about the normativity of acting in conformity with what was expected of those who lived in the enlightened era that is the nineteenth century. He depicts not only Yūsuf al-Dibs but also the Maronites and the Lebanese as failing to abide by this norm, and he illustrates this by discussing a number of allegedly backward Maronite practices, values, and beliefs.

The events that followed the publication of the Tarjamatā are reported in the Decalogue. In this text, being Maronite is again the most important collective identity that the text refers to. In general, the Decalogue attaches much more value to religious identities than the Tarjamatā did, in which the normativity of being advanced takes precedence over the normativity that is associated with religious identities. In addition, the Decalogue also represents the Maronites as hostile, aggressive, and dangerous.

The Decalogue criticizes the Maronites along the same lines as the Tarjamatā did. Firstly, the temporal factor returns; Ṣābūnjī contrasts the Middle Ages with “the period of knowledge and freedom” of the present. Secondly, the spatial scale of civilization,

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43 ‘al-ʾaṣr al-mustanīr’ (Ṣābūnjī 1874: 20).
44 Ḥallāq 1874: 7, 46.
ranging from the backwardness of the barbarians to the civilization of the “people of Europe” is also present. From this point of view the Maronites and the Lebanese are again represented as backward, ignorant, fanatical, and “under the veil of misguidance”. Șăbūnji qualifies the Maronites who protested against him as “ferocious beasts who climbed down from the caves of Lebanon”. In reference to an alleged error made by the Maronite Patriarch Būlus Masʿad (in office 1854-1890), Șăbūnji ironically remarks that he should be forgiven for doing this “because he is from the area of ‘Ashqūt [a village in Mount Lebanon], and a word to the wise is enough”. Some minor themes also return in the Decalogue, such as the idea that Yūsuf Dāwud and Louis Șăbūnji deserve statues because of their involvement in Maronite affairs.

The aforementioned themes have been sufficiently addressed in the previous discussion on the Tarjamatā and will not be discussed any further. Instead, I will devote attention to references to religious identities, because these identities play a much more important role in the Decalogue. I will explore how references to religious identities contribute to religious polarization. The principles of relevance and consequentiality, discussed in the methodological chapter, help explain how referring to one’s religion contributes to religious polarization and to sectarianism.

As pointed out in the second chapter, the first half of the nineteenth century witnessed the emergence of sectarianism, or the politicization of the religious community. This development reflects the presence of strong feelings of identification with one’s own religious community, and of its distinctiveness from other religious communities. In other words, sectarianism is premised by, as well as fueled by, religious polarization. In addition, sectarianism

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45 Ḥallāq 1874: 2, 22.
46 Ḥallāq 1874: 49.
47 Ḥallāq 1874: 15.
48 Ḥallāq 1874: 16. Șăbūnji accused the Maronite Patriarch Būlus Masʿad of filing a complaint about Șăbūnji with the Ottoman authorities; Șăbūnji argued that he should have filed his complaint with the church authorities.
49 Ḥallāq 1874: 49.
also nurtures religious polarization, as each political claim that favors the own religious community highlights the differences with other religious communities. In the fragmented religious social fabric of Mount Lebanon, this further poisoned interreligious relations and led to sectarian violence. In turn, this violence catalyzed religious polarization, increasingly stressing interreligious relations.

Below, I will show that religious polarization does not necessarily take place within a political context, within a political struggle for hegemony. Ṣābūnjī's references to religious identities also contribute to the poisoning of interreligious relations. Firstly, attention is devoted to the Maronites whom Ṣābūnjī accused of complaining about him to the Ottoman authorities. These Maronites include Yūsuf al-Dibs and the aforementioned Patriarch Būlus Masʻad. Secondly, two narratives stand out in the Decalogue, which retell the sequence of events surrounding Ṣābūnjī’s interrogation by the Ottoman authorities, and his subsequent escape from Beirut. In these narratives, I will argue, religious identities play an important role.

**Religious polarization**

One of the chapters of the Decalogue mentions those Maronites who have filed complaints about Ṣābūnjī with the Ottoman civil authorities in Beirut. These are also the persons whom Ṣābūnjī accused of continuing the –allegedly sorry– state of the Maronites. The first person mentioned is the Maronite Patriarch Būlus Masʻad and the second is Yūsuf al-Dibs. Ṣābūnjī argues that the Patriarch should have complained to the Papal delegate in Beirut, and not to the civil authorities. This act, Ṣābūnjī contends, contradicts Catholic doctrine. Al-Dibs is targeted because of his allegedly backward behavior. As an illustration, Ṣābūnjī argues that a number of Maronites asked al-Dibs for permission to write a scholarly reply to the Tarjamātā. However, al-Dibs refused this permission, and this illustrates al-Dibs’ “stupidity and ignorance”.

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50 Ḩallāq 1874: 15-17.
51 ‘al-ḥamāqa wal-jahl’(Ḩallāq 1874: 16-17).
The third person Ṣābūnjī mentions is Asʿad Malḥama, a Maronite notable in Beirut “who counts himself among those who are more civilized than the people in Paris”.

According to Ṣābūnjī he is one of the Maronites who had sent their childless wives to the Mār ‘Abdā al-Mushammar monastery. Malḥama allegedly offered 10,000 Ottoman lira in exchange for the closure of the American press which printed the *Tarjamatā*. In addition, he had allegedly seized French money that was intended for the victims of the sectarian conflict of 1860. In short, the *Decalogue* represents Malḥama as a corrupt, backward, and naïve embezzler. Finally, Ṣābūnjī mentions Naʿūm Qīqānū, Bishāra Firʿawī, and Khalīl Ghānim as Maronite plaintiffs. These are all Ottoman government officials who played a role in the narrative of Ṣābūnjī’s interrogation, discussed below. They were present at the interrogation and asked him thorny questions about the contents of the *Tarjamatā*. Ṣābūnjī also states that, when he stayed in London a few months after the interrogation, the Maronite Patriarch sent these three Maronites there in order to complain to the English authorities about Ṣābūnjī.

Ṣābūnjī strongly criticizes the act of complaining to the civil authorities, and he does so by claiming that it is not *comme il faut* to do so. Instead, their complaints should have been directed towards the Catholic authorities in Beirut, and specifically to the Papal delegate Luigi Piavi. Referring to a decree of Pope Pius IX (in office 1846-1878), he emphasizes that the Maronites did not act in accordance with the official Catholic doctrine. On this basis he argues that this deviation from Catholic doctrine resulted in a state of ‘reserved excommunication’ (*al-ḥirm al-maḥfūz*) which can be undone by the Pope alone. Significantly, he then concludes that “it is imperative for all Catholics to avoid the company of the Maronites until they acquire the absolution from the Pope”.

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52 Ḥallāq 1874: 13. The idea that underlies this remark is that the people in Paris are apparently very civilized.
53 Ḥallāq 1874: 17.
54 The decree that sanctions this type of excommunication was issued on 23 August 1873. For this issue, see Herbermann 1913: 691.
55 Ḥallāq 1874: 18-19.
Ṣābūnjī also implicates the Papal delegate Luigi Piavi in his confrontation with the Maronites. He alleges that Piavi had informed the Maronite Patriarch Būlus Mas‘ad and Yūsuf al-Dibs of their reserved excommunication. In this way Ṣābūnjī suggests that Piavi is on his side in his conflict with the Maronites.

On the surface, it can be argued that Ṣābūnjī advocated a Catholic bond in which both Maronites as well as Syriac Catholics are united. However, his adopted method of persuading the Maronites to join this unity does not bear witness to any willingness to realize such a unity. To the contrary, his aggression towards, and rejection of, the Maronites nurtures religious polarization rather than conciliation and unity. This polarization is most clearly discernible in Ṣābūnjī’s appeal for shunning the Maronites. In addition, he indiscriminately implicates all the Maronites by speaking of ‘the company of Maronites’ rather than specifying particular subgroups or individuals such as Yūsuf al-Dibs. This and similar negative generalizations about the Maronites widens the discursive gap between the Maronites and other Catholics. It is because of these negative generalizations that I argue that Ṣābūnjī reproduced what Makdisi calls the culture of sectarianism, without making any political claims. 56 His representation of the Maronites contributes to a tense atmosphere in which religious separation and polarization thrives. In turn, this religious polarization facilitates prioritizing the religious community within a political context.

There are various other passages in the Decalogue that refer to Maronites in various contexts. One example deserves some attention, as it involves Aḥmad Fāris al-Shidyāq (1804-1887), a Maronite who had converted to Islam. 57 Referring to the publication of the Tarjamatā, al-Shidyāq wrote in his newspaper al-Jawā‘ib that Ṣābūnjī “dared to defame a community of more than 100,000 persons”. 58 Ṣābūnjī interpreted this statement as al-Shidyāq’s taking a position in favor of the Maronites and in

56 Makdisi 2000.
57 Karam 1965: 800. The year of al-Shidyāq’s birth might also be 1801 (Ṣulḥ 1980: 23).
58 Reference found in: Ḥallāq 1874: 32.
opposition to him. This evoked Ṣābūnjī's wrath; he questioned al-Shidyāq’s religious identity and criticized his conversion. Ṣābūnjī writes about al-Shidyāq that (qtd 5): “he is still half Muslim half Maronite, and his name also indicates this: half Muslim (Aḥmad) and half Maronite (Fāris al-Shidyāq)”. In addition, he called al-Shidyāq’s newspaper al-Jawāʾib half Maronite, thereby suggesting that al-Shidyāq opposes Ṣābūnjī because of this Maronite identity. Interestingly, in the previous chapter Ṣābūnjī also attacked Buṭrus al-Bustānī’s conversion along the same lines. In both cases Ṣābūnjī demands that a change of religion should be reflected in someone’s outward behavior. The underlying idea is that individual members of a religious community should be recognizable as belonging to their community. In extension, religious communities should be recognizable vis-à-vis other religious communities. Criticizing religious conversion along these lines highlights the differences between the religious communities, stresses religious divisions, and thereby contributes to religious polarization.

The interrogation
The second chapter of the Decalogue, entitled ‘On the judicial hearing and its description’, consists of the account of Ṣābūnjī’s interrogation that took place on 12 March 1874. This chapter occupies a substantial part –about one-fifth– of the Decalogue. There can be no doubt that the apologetic account is written in order to convey to its readers that Ṣābūnjī was treated unjustly by the Maronites. Ṣābūnjī’s interrogators ask several questions, and to each question Ṣābūnjī gives a decisive answer.

In addition to Ṣābūnjī, five individuals are present, four of whom take part in the interrogation. The first person is the Ottoman governor of Beirut, Ibrāhīm Pasha. The second person is Khalīl Ghānim, the Maronite police commander who arrested Ṣābūnjī. The third and the fourth persons are Naʿūm Qīqānū and

59 Ḥallāq 1874: 34.
60 Ibrāhīm Pasha was governor (mutaṣarrif) of Beirut in the period between June 1873 and September 1874, when he was dismissed on charges of corruption. Previously, he had held the position of mutaṣarrif of the Ḥawrān and of Damascus, and of president of the Commercial Court in Beirut (Gross 1979: 153-154, 201).
Bishāra Firʻawn. Also present was a ‘Maronite translator of the Vilayet of Syria’, whose name is not given. Apart from the governor they are all Maronites. More importantly, Khalīl Ghānim, Naʻūm Qiqānū and Bishāra Firʻawn are identified as Maronites who complained about Šābūnji. Khalīl Ghānim is even accused of having had an organizing role in the looting of Šābūnji’s house.61 To the reader Šābūnji’s position is clear: he is the defendant and the underdog in the face of at least three antagonists.

The interrogation is opened by the governor, who asks Šābūnji whether he is the author of the pamphlet. Following this, the Maronites, and predominantly Khalīl Ghānim, inquire about specific quarrelsome and slanderous passages contained in the Tarjamatā. In response to each question Šābūnji outwits his interrogators, and as a result the Maronites “became embarrassed and lapsed into silence”.62 Throughout the interrogation Šābūnji continues to criticize the Maronites. He argues that the pilgrimage to the Mār ʿAbdā al-Mushammar monastery is futile because “If God wants to reverse the laws of nature and make barren women pregnant through the intercession of Mār ʿAbdā al-Mushammar, then he can do that without the need to go to his monastery (...) after all God is no Maronite monk”.63 With answers such as these Šābūnji further dissociates himself from the Maronites. By the end of the interrogation, Šābūnji has convinced the Ottoman governor. In reference to the protesting Maronites, the governor observes that “among every nation there are some who are scum”.64 He then orders that Šābūnji should be protected against any angry Maronites. In order to settle the affair they then decide to write a communiqué in which Šābūnji “reconsiders those words that the Maronites assume are insulting to them”.65 The account of the interrogation comes to an end, and Šābūnji is transferred to the

61 Ḥallāq 1874: 22.
62 This phrase returns three times in the account of the interrogation, on pages 5, 7, and 8.
63 Ḥallāq 1874: 6.
64 Ḥallāq 1874: 13.
65 Ḥallāq 1874: 13. According to Šābūnji, the text of the communiqué was deliberately left vague. See the appendix for the Arabic text of the communiqué.
The Bee in conflict with the Maronites (1874)

The account can be understood as a short story, a narrative. The task of the protagonist, Ṣābūnjī, is to convince the governor of his good faith. This task is impeded by the presence of a third party, the Maronites, who have conflicting interests. They also attempt to win over the governor. In this way Ṣābūnjī sketches a tense opposition between Ṣābūnjī and the Maronites. In addition, as a defendant in opposition to a numerical majority of antagonists, he is at a disadvantage. This disadvantage is also highlighted by the initial behavior of the governor, who joins the Maronites in asking Ṣābūnjī thorny questions, which suggests that he is in league with the Maronites. Nevertheless, in the end the governor decides in favor of Ṣābūnjī. In this way the narrator attributes more authority to Ṣābūnjī’s arguments than to those of the Maronites. The convinced governor thus symbolizes Ṣābūnjī’s superiority over the complaining Maronites, and his superiority is furthermore emphasized because of his initial disadvantage.

His interrogators are repeatedly and explicitly referred to as Maronites, in sentences such as “Khalīl Effendi Ghānim the Maronite stood up and interrupted the priest [Ṣābūnjī]”. The reader is therefore continuously reminded that his interrogators were Maronites, and not government officials, police investigators or otherwise people involved in maintaining public safety in Beirut. In other words, Ṣābūnjī makes their religious identity relevant and consequential for the benefit of the narrative. By contrast, the religious identity of the Ottoman governor is never mentioned, which means that it is not relevant to the story. In terms of Membership Categorization Analysis, the references to their Maronite identity carry situated functions within the communication between author and reader. Throughout the Tarjamatā and the Decalogue the Maronites are represented in a highly negative way, and this previous reading experience teaches the readers how to interpret other references to Maronites. From this perspective, the references to the Maronite identity of his interrogators bring their backwardness and fanaticism into the
minds of the readers. In other words, these explicit references stress their Otherness from Ṣābūnjī. A second aspect also deserves attention. From a theoretical perspective, the explicit and repeated references to the religious identity of the Maronites make the readers aware that being Maronite plays a decisive role in the narrative. Without saying it out loud, Ṣābūnjī suggests that being Maronite determines one’s position against Ṣābūnjī in the conflict. In this way he reproduces the idea that someone’s loyalties, values, and behavior are derived from one’s religious identity, and not from some other aspect. For example, Khalīl Ghānim was a police officer, and as such was assigned to maintain the peace in Beirut. It is conceivable that he received information that Ṣābūnjī was fomenting trouble and that this was the reason for Ṣābūnjī’s arrest. However, the narrative precludes this possibility; by making his religious identity relevant and consequential Ṣābūnjī suggests that his actions are the consequence of his Maronite identity. The underlying idea is, again, that the membership to a religious community reverberates in one’s outward behavior, and that religious communities should be distinguishable from other religious communities. Making religious identities relevant and consequential along these lines therefore contributes to religious polarization.

The Escape
In the second narrative to be discussed, the escape narrative –the link between religious identity, on the one hand, and loyalties, values, and behavior, on the other– is more emphatically articulated. The escape narrative, which appears in the sixth chapter of the document entitled ‘On the journey and its dangers’, recounts the events surrounding Ṣābūnjī’s perilous journey on the day after the interrogation. After hearing that his life is truly in danger, Ṣābūnjī decides to join Luigi Piavi and leave Beirut. Together, they board a carriage to go to the harbor, but the carriage belongs to a Maronite company, with a Maronite driver, and is drawn by two Maronite horses (this issue is discussed in detail below). Unfortunately, the horses refuse to move, forcing Piavi and Ṣābūnjī to walk to the harbor. On the way, they are impeded by the
actions of a Maronite servant of Piavi, Dāwud Shidyāq, who later turns out to be a Maronite conspirator. Earlier, he had circulated Šābūnji’s time of departure among his co-religionists, who have now filled the surrounding alleys in protest against Šābūnji. Ottoman soldiers and guards of the French consul then escort the two travelers to the harbor, while Maronite protesters threaten and insult Šābūnji.

The two arrive at the English ship Orontes, where Šābūnji has a shoe thrown at him. Soon after, Maronite leaders send two ‘highland Maronites’—invoking ideas about the inhospitality of Mount Lebanon—to the ship in order to kill Šābūnji at night. Rumors about this reach the ship, and Piavi orders Dāwud Shidyāq, who is not yet exposed as a conspirator at this stage, to investigate the matter. Shidyāq conspires with the two Maronites and informs Piavi that they belong to the Greek Orthodox church. Šābūnji doesn’t believe this “because they looked like Maronites”. Shidyāq talks to them again, and then reports that they belong to the Greek Catholic church. This change aroused suspicion, and Piavi then sends an Armenian to investigate the matter again. He, in turn, somehow finds out that they indeed are Maronites and not authorized passengers.66 They are sent off the ship, together with Dāwud Shidyāq. Thirty minutes later Maronite leaders—who remain unnamed—again send two persons on board to kill Šābūnji, but these, too, exhibit suspicious behavior and are sent off board.

While Šābūnji is underway, the Maronites in Beirut cable their co-religionists in İskenderun and inform them about Šābūnji’s route. The result is that, when the Orontes arrives in that city, “the news about Šābūnji’s presence had reached every corner” of the city. He is therefore advised by the captain not to disembark. Instead, Šābūnji boards a second ship, the French Ilissus, bound for Beirut and then Alexandria. This information is also telegraphed by the Maronites to their co-religionists in Beirut. In spite of this, Šābūnji is able to continue his journey and arrives safely in Alexandria, where he stays with a friend. The Maronites even threaten him in Alexandria, but, as previously mentioned, the

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66 It is not specified how the Armenian found out that the two were Maronites.
Catholic priest is not afraid to use his American pistol against the Maronites in case of necessity. From Alexandria he travels to California, and the account of the escape ends.

What Ṣābūnjī suggests is that the Maronites of the Eastern Mediterranean, or perhaps even of the entire world, were closely scrutinizing his movements. Ṣābūnjī argues that the Maronites were telegraphing between Beirut and İskenderun and back to Beirut. The information that Ṣābūnjī was present in Alexandria was allegedly also known by the Maronites, just as his presence in England. Ṣābūnjī even writes that the Maronite Patriarch Būlus Mas’ad sent a delegation to England in order to prevent him from publishing there. Ṣābūnjī thereby sketches an image of an international Maronite network that is closely monitoring him. This stresses, firstly, Ṣābūnjī’s role of victim in a Maronite complot and, secondly, an alleged consensus among the Maronites to condemn him.

The religious identity of the characters is frequently mentioned in the escape narrative, just as in the interrogation narrative. Ṣābūnjī continuously articulates the norm that one’s religious identity reverberates in someone’s behavior and character. In other words, the message that the narrative conveys is that it is your religious identity that makes you who you are. This can be seen in the representation of Luigi Piavi’s servants. The Maronite servant turns out to be a conspirator against Ṣābūnjī, while the Armenian servant is reliable. The implicit message that informs the comparison is that the Maronite is unreliable because he is a Maronite, while the Armenian servant is reliable because he is not a Maronite.

Similarly, the two Maronite assassins who are sent on the ship are firstly –erroneously– reported to be Greek Orthodox and secondly, again erroneously, as Greek Catholics. It is clear how the reader would interpret these references to religious identities: the two men are dangerous because they are Maronites, and not because they are assassins, criminals, or lowlifes. According to the same logic, Greek Catholics and Greek Orthodox do not pose a threat towards Ṣābūnjī. In other words, the situated function of references to Maronites is to indicate danger, and the situated
function of references to Greek Catholics and Greek Orthodox is to indicate safety.

**Emphasizing the word ‘Maronite’**

A focus on the layout of the text gives an unexpected perspective on how religious polarization is nurtured in the *Decalogue*. The *Decalogue* is a reproduction of Šābūnjī’s handwritten text, printed in lithography. Interestingly, the text contains information that would have been lost if printed with typesetting in movable type. For example, the frontispiece of the *Decalogue* features a bee and decorative Arabic calligraphy in which he paraphrases Matthew 7:2.67 Because it is a lithography, Šābūnjī’s handwriting is also recognizable, especially in the non-Arabic expressions.68 The most significant aspect of the lithography is the presence of emphasis on particular words and phrases, done by adding a line above the words. This method of emphasis is not limited to Šābūnjī’s text, as it also occurs, incidentally, in the magazine *al-Muqtaṭaf* in 1877.69 Various different words and expressions are emphasized in this way, but the only word that is repeatedly stressed is ‘Maronite’.

The following image is part of the interrogation narrative, page 5 of the *Decalogue*. In it, the Maronite identity of his interrogators is stressed.

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67 Šābūnjī’s text reads “With the measure you use, it will be measured back to you even more. And if you resume the attack the enemy steps towards you and then back”. The relevant part of Matthew reads “and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you” (New King James Version). This fragment is reproduced on the cover of this study because of its ornamental value and because of its quarrelsome content that, I argue, characterizes Šābūnjī.

68 The Latin alphabet is used for the title and for a number of expressions, such as ‘Force brutale’, ‘In English Bank notes’, and ‘Robert Burn Duc [sic] de Richelieu’. The handwriting of these expressions corresponds with Šābūnjī’s handwriting, for instance in his letters to Wilfrid Blunt.

69 See for instance Šarrūf 1877-1878: 58, 147.
In this example both the translator of the Vilayet of Syria and Bishāra Firʿawn are emphatically classified as Maronites. The former “became embarrassed and lapsed into silence” after Ṣābūnji’s response to an earlier question of ‘Khalīl effendi Ghānim the Maronite’ concerning a derogatory statement about al-Dibs’ clothing in the Tarjamatā. The latter inquires about Ṣābūnji’s criticism of the Mār ‘Abdā al-Mushammar pilgrimage (this has been omitted from the scan). In isolation, it is not immediately obvious why extra emphasis has been laid on their Maronite identity. However, the earlier representations of the Maronites as backward and fanatical gives the readers information as to how other references to Maronites should be interpreted. This quote also underlines their backwardness and incompetence; the ‘embarrassment’ and ‘silence’ of the Maronite translator stand in marked contrast to Ṣābūnji’s eloquence and superiority.

The following image is also part of the interrogation narrative, page 9. The quote is relevant because it places emphasis on Maronite things and concepts, and not only on Maronite persons.

The quote refers to the “Maronite stupidities” that al-Dibs and his collaborators published, and to their “backward Maronite [journal] al-Najāḥ”. Ṣābūnji thereby directs further attention to their backwardness and Otherness, and distances himself further from them.

Finally, a third image from the start of the escape narrative, page 23, deserves attention. It is relevant because it shows an accumulation of Maronite persons and things.

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70 See the appendix for its translation.
In these few lines Ṣābūnjī argues that his departure from Beirut was purposely obstructed by Luigi Piavi’s Maronite servant, who hired a Maronite carriage from a Maronite company, in order to go to the port. This Maronite carriage was operated by a Maronite servant of the Maronite Rizq Allāh Khaḍrā, who was not only an enemy of Ṣābūnjī but also a friend of the Maronite Yūsuf al-Dibs. On the next page of the Decalogue, omitted in the image, it turns out that the two horses are also Maronites, as they didn’t budge, but instead “prostrated in adoration and reverence for their master Mārūn”. In only seven lines the term Maronite occurs eight times, and each time it is emphasized.

With these repeated references Ṣābūnjī does not simply talk about any company, any carriage or any two horses. He talks about a Maronite company which is therefore different from other companies, a Maronite carriage which is therefore different from other carriages, and Maronite horses which are therefore different from other horses. This usage again reflects and reproduces the hostility and the Otherness of the Maronites. At the same the usage stresses Ṣābūnjī’s position as the underdog in the midst of the Maronites. They are spoiling Ṣābūnjī’s life in Beirut, and they are encroaching on him from all sides (literally, “from the back and the front, and from the right and the left”). In spite of the humorous and ironic undertones, each time that Ṣābūnjī uses the term Maronite he simultaneously invokes notions of backwardness,

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71 Ḥallāq 1874: 24.
72 Ḥallāq 1874: 24.
fanaticism, and hostility—in short, of Otherness. Each reference thereby contributes at an atmosphere of religious polarization.

5.4 Sectarianism and religious polarization
Throughout the Tarjamatā and the Decalogue, the Maronites are represented as essentially backward and fanatic. In the Decalogue they are also depicted as hostile, aggressive, and dangerous. From a theoretical perspective, Ṣābūnji represents behavior, values, and opinions as deriving from one’s religious identity, thereby essentializing religious differences. The link between religion and behavior is nicely illustrated by the escape narrative from the Decalogue. In this passage the situated functions of references to religious identities are to indicate either danger, in the case of references to Maronites, or safety, in the case of references to non-Maronites, such as Greek Catholics or Greek Orthodox. Ṣābūnji’s aggressive condemning tone, in combination with the essentialization of religious differences, contributes to an atmosphere of religious polarization.

The essentialization of religious differences at the same time also reflects and reproduces a normativity about how the different religious communities should interrelate, according to Ṣābūnji. To be more precise, this essentialization reflects the normativity of maintaining the distinctiveness of the different communities and thereby of maintaining the borders that separate them. The representation of Buṭrus al-Bustānī’s conversion in the previous chapter, and Ahmad Fāris al-Shidyāq’s conversion in the present chapter, illustrates this norm. Ṣābūnji represented their conversion as an abnormal deviation, thereby highlighting the norm of maintaining strict borders between different religious communities.

I argue that Ṣābūnji’s writings in this conflict not only nurture religious polarization, but also contribute to the reification of the culture of sectarianism that Makdisi describes. Sectarianism, the political mobilization of religious identities, is premised by religious polarization. As social constructs, religious identities are constructed in discourse through communication with others, by agents such as Louis Ṣābūnji. From a discursive point of view,
sectarian violence as well as Şâbûnjî’s polemical writings are two sides of the same coin; they all contribute to an atmosphere of greater religious separation, segregation, and polarization. Put differently, each act of violence, as well as each of Şâbûnjî’s negative references to Maronites, reflect, reproduce, and reify us-versus-them dichotomies that form the basis for –political– sectarianism. For this reason, the polarization of interreligious relations that is seen throughout the Tarjamatâ and the Decalogue facilitates sectarianism, in spite of the fact that Şâbûnjî never attached any political significance to religious identities and communities.\(^{73}\)

In the conflict with the Bustânîs, Şâbûnjî represented the East as essentially religious, thereby criticizing the Bustânîs of being un-Eastern. In the conflict with the Maronites, the East and its meaning did not play any role. Instead, Şâbûnjî invoked the mantra of progress and civilization. He criticizes the Maronites for maintaining backward beliefs and practices, and for this reason they fail to conform to the norms of the enlightened era that is the nineteenth century. Especially in the Tarjamatâ, Şâbûnjî represents the Maronites as though they are living in the ‘dark Middle Ages’, and therefore in a different, pre-modern, time. This representation of the Maronites is paralleled by Şâbûnjî’s representation of the inhabitants of Mount Lebanon, who are also depicted as backward. Şâbûnjî thereby underlines that he does not count himself as one of the Lebanese. Rather, the Syriac Catholic clergy stand in contrast to the Maronites and the Lebanese. In the Tarjamatâ Şâbûnjî writes that they are advanced and act in conformity with the norms of the present era, without exactly pointing out what they did.

Finally, I would like to add one remark about the mantra of progress and civilization in relation to identity. The conflict shows that realizing progress and avoiding backwardness was a fundamental concern for Şâbûnjî and his peers. In terms of collective identity, it was a fundamental concern to belong to the group of progressed and civilized people. This group encompassed

\(^{73}\) A possible explanation for this lack of political significance is that the Syriac Catholic church could not realistically participate in any struggle for political hegemony because of its numerical insignificance.
Ṣābūnji himself, the Americans, the Chinese, Syriac Catholic clergy, a few Maronites, and no Lebanese – at least he never suggests that there are exceptions to the rule that the Lebanese are backward. Each reference to any of the identities explored in this chapter also highlights the need to be civilized and progressed. It is in this sense that Ṣābūnji’s references to identities such as Maronite and American at the same time also function as vehicles for this fundamental concern: belonging to the group of progressed and civilized people.