

Some Oriental manuscripts in the Friedsam Library of St. Bonaventure University

by

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The Friedsam Library of St. Bonaventure University in Olean, New York¹, includes among its holdings one manuscript written in Syriac and Karshuni and four manuscripts in Arabic. These items were brought to my attention while I was seeking to compile a checklist of Syriac manuscripts in the United States and Canada². Through correspondence with Father Willam F. Macomber, S.J., I learned that there was a Maronite breviary at St. Bonaventure. In response to my request for additional information, Father Irenaeus Herscher, O.F.M., Librarian, kindly offered to send me all five of the manuscripts in the collection to which the Syriac item belongs³. These manuscripts had not been described as to content, and Father Herscher asked for such information as would be useful in identifying them. Although I do not read Arabic, I was able to secure the services of Mr. John David, Sr., Cantor for Saint Thomas Syrian Orthodox Church of Sioux City, Iowa, and Rabbi Isaac Jerusalmi, Ph. D., Assistant Professor of Bible and Semitic Languages at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Cincinnati, Ohio. These gentlemen were kind enough to translate the colophons and enough of the contents to indicate the general nature of the Arabic literature.

A large number of manuscripts, many of them quite significant for research purposes, lie uncatalogued and undescribed in public and private libraries in this country, and there is a continuing need for published information on these materials. The following descriptions are obviously less than definitive, but they should serve to make more widely known some of the Oriental materials available for study in but one American library.

¹ Zip Code Number 14761.

² A description of this project was presented in a brief paper read before the joint meeting of the American Oriental Society and the Mid-West Section of the Society of Biblical Literature in Chicago on April 13, 1965. See, 'The Search for Syriac Manuscripts in America', *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Volume 85, Number 2, for 1966. A preliminary checklist appears in two installments in *Orientalia Christiana Periodica*, Volume 32, 1966.

³ Father Herscher has written me that the materials came to St. Bonaventure University most probably through Father Nemath Chemaly, a Syrian priest who died several years ago in Olean. The Friedsam Library also holds some Persian manuscripts, information on which may be obtained from Father Herscher.

SYRIAC AND KARSHUNI MANUSCRIPT 1⁴

This Maronite breviary was written in 1772 and contains prayers for the days of the week. It now consists of sixty-one folios, with folios one and eight of the first quire and folio eight of the last quire missing. The binding is of thin dark brown leather over cardboard. Its paper leaves have uniformly rounded corners and measure $4 \frac{5}{16}$ inches in height and $3 \frac{1}{8}$ inches in width. The Jacobite script, apparently the work of one scribe, is in brown ink, with headings and divisional markings in red. There are no illuminations or ruled lines. Vowel points, marginalia, and interlinear corrections occur occasionally throughout the text. There is one column which contains sixteen to twenty lines per page. Stains, apparently from frequent handling, and evidences of moth or worm damage are found on several of the folios, although the text is usually clear. The first section is in Karshuni, with the Syriac text beginning on folio 7a. Various lines through the text are also written in this linguistic fashion. Two colophons are in Karshuni⁵. The first may be translated:

This order was finished on the fourteenth day of Nisan in the year 1772 and the major part was written on the day of the Messiah [?] the Festival by the lowest of men W R D L H M, the priest Marcus, son of Kuyuns H N', the first Mar Georgus of H R D K. Glory to God forever. The last colophon is a prayer which begins on folio 61b and is incomplete:

A prayer which the priest recites upon the head of anyone who asks that he pray on his behalf. Lord God, who spread his hand and blessed children who came to him that he might pray concerning them, who stretched his hand and blessed his disciples upon Mount Zion, on the Mount of Olives, and blessed them, and granted power to his priests that they might pray...

ARABIC MANUSCRIPT 1

The smallest of the four Arabic manuscripts is a book of Maronite Christian prayers for special holidays written in 1832. It measures $4 \frac{1}{2}$ by $3 \frac{1}{4}$ inches and is bound in dark red leather. Both the front and back of the binding have been artistically and minutely tooled, each bearing a gold diamond-

⁴ The identification numbers used here have been arbitrarily chosen by the present writer and do not represent the catalogue designations of the Friedsam Library.

⁵ Professor Jerusalmi examined this manuscript and Arabic Manuscript 3. The translations of these Karshuni colophons were made by him.

shape design in the center. There are now eighty-six paper leaves of an original ninety, the first four folios missing. A few leaves are attached to the inside cover of the binding, and on these the name of Antoine Youssef Mar'a and the year 1896 are written in penciled Arabic. The script, apparently by one scribe, is very neat and clear, in brown ink, with occasional headings and words in red. Karshuni headings appear on folios 13a and 61a. The paper is of good quality, but small moth or worm holes are at the top of each folio. There is one column of twelve lines per page.

A table of contents, five pages in length, appears at the end of the manuscript. The final line on the last page of the original writing states:

In my own hand, I am the sinner George Abraham, on the fifteenth day of Shbat in the year 1832.

Several pages follow on which a more recent hand has penciled various scribblings and some drawings of a curved sword.

ARABIC MANUSCRIPT 2

This manuscript is a book of predictions written in 1885. The binding of thin dark red leather over cardboard, crudely assembled, is 5 inches high and $3\frac{7}{8}$ inches wide. There are now one hundred and forty-three paper folios, but eleven leaves of the first quire have been torn out and are missing. The quires originally contained 42, 14, 16, 28, 16, 14, and 24 folios, another evidence of the haphazard manner in which it was put together. Folios 10b, 26b, and 27a are blank, except for a penciled border of two lines which is found on most of the other pages of the text. The ink is black, except for a few headings in purple. Throughout the text there are several charts, but no illumination or page numbers. There is a single column of eight to twelve lines per page. In the upper right hand corner of the last leaf there is an octagonal impression, measuring about $1\frac{1}{4}$ inches in height by about $\frac{3}{4}$ of an inch in width.

On the first folio, which was originally blank, a larger and later hand has written out the Arabic alphabet and numbers. Folio 3a carries the statement that the owner is Youssef Murad of Zibdi. The text begins on folio 4a, and the title states that it is «A Book of Predictions for finding Everything in the Name of the Merciful God». On the last page of the original text is given the date of the fifteenth of Ab and the year 1885. On two of the last four pages of the manuscript, which were originally blank, a later hand, apparently the same as that which wrote on the first leaf, has written some instructions for the use of the book in making predictions.

ARABIC MANUSCRIPT 3

The third Arabic item contains a series of comments by a Christian author on various aspects of life, such as doubt, fear, passion, avarice, freedom, conscience, and education. It measures $7\frac{1}{8}$ inches in height and $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches in width and is bound by badly worn cardboard covers. The spine is a strip of black leather. There are eighty-nine paper folios with uniformly rounded corners. Several leaves have been torn out from the front and back. The first of two flyleaves bears some Arabic notations and a few French words, presumably translation. On the second flyleaf is written the Syriac alphabet, followed by some notes in Karshuni. The sixteen leaves in the first quire are on paper heavier than that used in the rest of the manuscript. The small, very neat and usually clear script is in brown and sometimes black ink, with one column and twenty-three to twenty-five lines per page. Headings are often placed within elaborate designs. The pages are numbered in the upper outside corners, and an incomplete table of contents appears at the end. The last numbered page is 171. A note on the last leaf, which is not numbered, refers briefly to the «temporal» and «non-temporal» lending of money. There is no colophon.

ARABIC MANUSCRIPT 4

The largest of the group of Arabic documents, measuring $7\frac{3}{4}$ inches in height by $5\frac{3}{4}$ inches in width, is an undated Christian book of stories in sixteen parts. The black cardboard covers are all well worn, but the remains of a floral design in relief are still discernible. The black leather strip which serves as the spine has six flowing lines of gold running horizontally, interspersed with five small floral-design impressions. The original manuscript seems to have been rebound. The pages of the text, much darker than the more recently added flyleaves, are discolored from frequent handling and many of them are torn. There has been some reinforcing, and the pages have been numbered with a heavy blue pencil by a quite different hand. In addition to two leaves at the front and one folio after the end of the text, added when the book was rebound, there are one hundred and ten folios of writing.

The opening lines are in red and state simply, «First Part: In the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit». On folio 9a the second part begins, and the remaining sections start on folios 17a, 26a, 33a, 39b, 46a, 60b, 67a, 72b, 79a, 86b, 93b, 99b, and 105b. Section fifteen is a story of the Virgin Mary.

The text after the initial heading is in brown ink by at least two hands, and the restorations are in black ink by still another scribe. There is one column, usually of twenty-one lines per page. The inside front cover has one line in black ink at the top and the last page carries one line in purple ink. Several of the folios used in the rebinding have been torn out and are missing. The first half of the manuscript is made of heavier paper than that of the last half, which is so thin and of such poor quality that the ink from one side shows through on the other. The text, however, can be read without difficulty on most every page. There is no colophon⁶.

⁶ Pictures of the manuscripts were made by Mr. Beaty McDonald, Head of Photographic Services, Morningside College.