

An Interesting Fragment of an East Syrian Festal Hymnary of the Fourteenth (?) Century

by

William F. Macomber, S.J.

In their recent description of the Syriac manuscripts of the Freer Gallery of Art¹ Price and Seymour include a small fragment, MS. 37.41A, that they discovered between the pages of MS. 37.41, a 13th century manuscript of the New Testament. They give the measurements of the small scrap and note that it is written in a Jacobite script, mostly in a brown ink (i.e. a black ink that has aged to a brown colour), but with a few words in red. They note also that the name of St. Peter occurs several times, even in such a limited amount of text.² Fortunately, they provide excellent photographs of the two sides of the fragments, in which enough words are legible to allow an identification of the text.

Let it be said, first of all, that the script of the fragment is not Jacobite, but East Syrian (Nestorian). To convince oneself, it is sufficient to compare the photographs with the plates of Hatch's dated samples of Syriac writing.³ I would say that the script of our fragment shows greatest affinity to that of plate CLXXV, which reproduces a page of Vatican Syriac 22, an East Syrian lectionary of the Pauline Epistles copied in 1301 A.D. at Shingalla in India. However, dating a script from a photographic reproduction is a risky undertaking; a 13th or 15th century dating cannot be excluded. The photographs also reveal that the material of the fragment is paper. Since one margin is visible, one can identify the lower photograph as of the *recto* side and the upper as of the *verso*.

The presence of words in red ink (unfortunately not always clearly distinguishable in the photographs) suggests that we have to do with a liturgical manuscript. The frequent occurrence of the name of St. Peter (Peter three times and Simon Cephas once) suggests that it is a service book that contains the office for the commemoration of Sts. Peter and Paul, a suggestion that is confirmed by the presence four times of the name of St. Paul.

¹ J. R. Price and P. M. Seymour, 'Syriac Manuscripts in the Freer Gallery of Art. Washington, D.C.', *Oriens Christianus* 55 (1971) 161-3.

² *Ibid.*, p. 163.

³ W. H. P. Hatch, *An Album of Dated Syriac Manuscripts*. Cambridge, Mass. (U.S.A.), 1946.

On line 7 of the *verso* one also finds in red ink the word *da-ṣlota*, "of prayer". For one who is familiar with the East Syrian liturgy, this brief rubric suffices to identify our fragment as a collection of the type of anthems or *troparia* that the East Syrians call 'onyata⁴ and that these particular 'onyata belong to either compline or a nocturn of the commemoration of Sts. Peter and Paul; only in these offices, in fact, are there found long series of 'onyata that terminate with the rubric *da-ṣlota*, which introduces a reference to one of the 28 so-called *gale d-'udrana*, "hymns of assistance", or to one of their variants.⁵ After this there frequently occurs the rubric *d-'annide*, "of the departed", which introduced as reference to one of the hymns of the funeral office,⁶ but this is lacking in our fragment. Next comes the rubric *šabbah*, "glorify", which means that the "Glory be to the Father..." should now be chanted as the introduction to the final 'onita of the office in question; in our case we do find at the edge of *verso*, line 8, *bh*, probably in red ink, which must represent the end of the expected rubric. What follows in our fragment is *b-Mabbu' hayye*, "in (the melody of) Font of life". This is the *incipit* of one of the most commonly used type melodies (called in Syriac a *reš gala*, which corresponds to a *heirmos* of the Byzantine liturgy) of the East Syrian liturgy;⁷ it is precisely what one would expect to find at this point.

It is evident, therefore, that our fragment derives from an East Syrian hymnary. The East Syrians, however, have three different kinds of hymnaries, a ferial hymnary called the *Kaškol*,⁸ a dominical hymnary known as the *Ḥudra*⁹ and a festal hymnary called the *Gazza*.¹⁰ The first can be eliminated without further ado, for it contains exclusively ferial offices. The *Ḥudra*, on the other hand, cannot be automatically eliminated, because it contains, besides the offices for Sundays and certain privileged ferias, at least parts of the offices for the principal feasts and commemorations. What the *Ḥudra* lacks for these occasions is the nocturn(s); it contains only vespers, compline, the vigil office and matins,¹¹ but formerly it seems to have con-

⁴ An 'onita (singular of 'onyata) consists of a poetical strophe of ecclesiastical composition of widely varying length and metrical pattern, which is introduced by an appropriate psalm versicle or by "Glory be to the Father..." The Syriac name signifies "response"; the strophe is conceived of as a response to the psalm versicle. A series of 'onyata chanted according to the same melody is called a *gala*, "a hymn".

⁵ Cfr. J. Mateos, *Lelya-Sapra. Essai d'interprétation des matines chaldéennes* (Orientalia Christiana Analecta 156). Roma, 1959, pp. 17-27.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 19, 481.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 5-9.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 9-12.

¹¹ Thus the Mar Eša'ya *Ḥudra* (10/11th c.), Br. Mus. Add. 7177 (1484), Borgia Syr. 150 (15th), Vat. Syr. 83 (1538), 86 (16th) and 87 (15th). Cfr. W. F. Macomber, 'A List of Known Manus-

tained a small number of 'onyata for the nocturns as well.¹² The full office of the nocturns for those feasts and commemorations that do not fall on Sunday is found in the Gazza.¹³

Is it possible to decide whether our fragment comes from a manuscript of the Ḥudra or of the Gazza? For this it will be necessary to identify one or more of the particular 'onyata that can be discerned in the photographs, to see whether they belong to compline or to a nocturn. To do this, I have compared the few words that are legible in the fragment with the full office for the commemoration of Peter and Paul, as it has been published by the Chaldeans,¹⁴ the Nestorians¹⁵ and by Martin.¹⁶ By great good fortune, one 'onita in verso, lines 5 to 7, but one 'onita only, can be identified with one that is found in the Chaldean breviary¹⁷ and in the text of Martin;¹⁸ the Nestorian breviary lacks it. Its lacunae are easy to fill up from the published texts. I have here my decipherment of all the legible portions of the text of the fragment, together with my conjectured restitutions and a translation¹⁹.

Recto

celestial ... [By the prayers of] [ܡܫܠܐ] ܕܥܡܪܘܢܐ
..... O our Lord, thy Church which [ܡܫܠܐ] ܕܥܡܪܘܢܐ ܕܥܡܪܘܢܐ ..
thou hast chosen [for thyself] ܡܫܠܐ ܕܥܡܪܘܢܐ
..... By the prayers of Paul [ܡܫܠܐ] ܕܥܡܪܘܢܐ
have mercy, O our Lord, on thy wor- [ܡܫܠܐ] ܕܥܡܪܘܢܐ

cripts of the Chaldean Ḥudra', *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* (= *OCP*) 36 (1970) 125-8, nrs. 3, 12, 15, 16, 21, 25.

¹² In some MSS. of the Gazza, like Vat. Syr. 590, as many as three 'onyata at the beginning of some of the groups of 'onyata that have the same *reš qala* are set apart and are occasionally noted specifically as being "of the Ḥudra" (e.g. ff. 1r^o and 4r^o), while the rest are noted as being "of the Gazza" (e.g. ff. 3v^o and 4v^o).

¹³ Thus the nocturns for Easter and Pentecost are found in the Ḥudra because they are moveable feasts that always fall on Sunday. The nocturns for Christmas and Ascension, on the contrary, must be sought in the Gazza because Christmas is fixed and Ascension always falls on Thursday.

¹⁴ *Breviarium iuxta ritum Syrorum Orientalium, id est, Chaldaeorum* (= *BC*), pars III, *A Pentecoste ad Dedicacionem*. Paris, 1887, pp. 453-70.

¹⁵ *Ktaba da-Qdam wa-d-Batar, wa-d-Ḥudra, wa-d-Kaškol, wa-d-Gazza, w-qala d-'Udrane, 'am Ktaba d-Mazmore* (= *BN*), vol. I. Trichur, 1960, pp. 678-701.

¹⁶ (J. P. P.) Martin, *Saint Pierre et Saint Paul dans l'Église nestorienne*. Paris, 1875, text pp. 2-67 (published from Br. Mus. Add. 7178 [1544], ff. 146r^o-177r^o).

¹⁷ *BC* III, 460 : 23-4.

¹⁸ *Op. cit.*, text p. 42 : 12-4/translation p. 114 : 3-5.

¹⁹ Conjectured restitutions, in both the text and translation (more daring in the latter), are set off by square brackets, while words in the translation added to complete the sense are put in parentheses. Words of the text in red ink are underlined with a solid line, whereas a dash under an individual letter indicates an unsure reading.

shippers. By [the prayers of]
 ... keep all [harm] from thy servants
 By the prayers of Paul
 [frustrate] the desire of the
 Wicked One so that he may not
 [By the prayers] of Simon Cephas,
 [O Lord], those who attri-
 bute passions to the divine essence.²⁰ By
 the prayers of keep, O our
 Lord, all our community [By] the
 prayers of Peter ...

..... ܠܗ ܕܡܢ ܚܘܒܝܗ ܕܠ
 ܕܩܘܠܘܬܐ ܕܦܘܠܘܫ
 [ܕܩܘܠܘܬܐ] ܕܠܗ ܕܡܢ ܚܘܒܝܗ ܕܠ
 ܕܦܘܠܘܫ ܕܩܘܠܘܬܐ ܕܦܘܠܘܫ
 ܕܩܘܠܘܬܐ ܕܦܘܠܘܫ ܕܩܘܠܘܬܐ ܕܦܘܠܘܫ
 ܕܩܘܠܘܬܐ ܕܦܘܠܘܫ ܕܩܘܠܘܬܐ ܕܦܘܠܘܫ
 ܕܩܘܠܘܬܐ ܕܦܘܠܘܫ ܕܩܘܠܘܬܐ ܕܦܘܠܘܫ

Verso

..... take their delight in
 ... [Variation in] (the melody of) Cle-
 ment and full of mercy. *And a (rejoicing)*
mother of children.²¹ Peter
 and Paul [let us] prais
 [Christ], who has glorified
 Peter, Prince of the Apostles, [and Paul,
 Doctor of the Gentiles, pray and beseech
 Christ, that he have pity on us in his
 lovingkindness. (*Hymn*) of prayer: [and
 variant of the 16th hymn].²² *Chant the*
Gloria Patri in (the melody of) Font of
 life. this our community and
 preserve them the Calumni-
 ator, the enemy of our nature
 thy [Church] at all times
 Paul

..... ܕܩܘܠܘܬܐ ܕܦܘܠܘܫ
 [ܕܩܘܠܘܬܐ] ܕܩܘܠܘܬܐ ܕܦܘܠܘܫ
 ܕܩܘܠܘܬܐ ܕܦܘܠܘܫ
 ܕܩܘܠܘܬܐ ܕܦܘܠܘܫ ܕܩܘܠܘܬܐ ܕܦܘܠܘܫ
 ܕܩܘܠܘܬܐ ܕܦܘܠܘܫ ܕܩܘܠܘܬܐ ܕܦܘܠܘܫ
 ܕܩܘܠܘܬܐ ܕܦܘܠܘܫ ܕܩܘܠܘܬܐ ܕܦܘܠܘܫ
 ܕܩܘܠܘܬܐ ܕܦܘܠܘܫ ܕܩܘܠܘܬܐ ܕܦܘܠܘܫ
 ܕܩܘܠܘܬܐ ܕܦܘܠܘܫ ܕܩܘܠܘܬܐ ܕܦܘܠܘܫ
 ܕܩܘܠܘܬܐ ܕܦܘܠܘܫ ܕܩܘܠܘܬܐ ܕܦܘܠܘܫ
 ܕܩܘܠܘܬܐ ܕܦܘܠܘܫ ܕܩܘܠܘܬܐ ܕܦܘܠܘܫ
 ܕܩܘܠܘܬܐ ܕܦܘܠܘܫ ܕܩܘܠܘܬܐ ܕܦܘܠܘܫ

The amount of the text of the 'onita that can be read in our fragment is so great that the possibility of coincidence is clearly excluded. It is confirmed, however, by the *reš qala* that can be deciphered in *verso*, line 2 : "[in] (the melody of) Clement and full of mercy"; this is precisely the one indicated by both Martin and the Chaldean breviary. In both of these sources this particular 'onita occurs near the end, but not at the end as here, of a nocturn — the second of two in the case of Martin's text, whereas in the Chaldean

²⁰ I.e. the Monophysites.

²¹ Ps 113, 8 (112, 9 in the Septuagint and Vulgate).

²² *Per se* the hymn of assistance to be indicated should be the one that has the same *reš qala* as the group of 'onyata that immediately precedes it. The one I indicate here has "Clement and full of mercy" as the *incipit* of its initial 'onita. Cfr. BC I, 139*; BN I, 156 (bis). No matter see how space can have been left over for an indication of the 'onyata for the departed that normally follow. All of our sources except Borgia Syr. 87 have some such indication in the present case.

breviary it is near the end of the only nocturn.²³ We may conclude, therefore, that our fragment represents part, not of compline, but of a nocturn, and that it derives, consequently, from a manuscript of the *Gazza*, not of the *Ḥudra*.

I have called this fragment in my title "interesting". Its interest is evidently not constituted by its size or its textual contents. Its date, on the other hand, is already an element of interest. If my 14th century dating is correct, it would make this older than any of the manuscripts of the *Gazza* indicated by Baumstark²⁴ save Urmia College MS. 130 (11th century) and Séert, Chaldean Episcopal Residence MS. 32 (14th century),²⁵ which have both presumably been destroyed²⁶.

Its principal interest, however, at least in my opinion, is constituted by the fact that I have only been able to identify one of its *'onyata*. In the *verso* side, parts of four *'onyata* can be recognized: the one that I have identified (lines 5 to 7), the one that comes between it and its *reš qala* (lines 2 to 5), the one that precedes the *reš qala* (one word and one letter in line 1) and the one that follows the rubric *šabbah* (lines 8 to 12). The situation of the *recto* side as revealed in the photographs, is unclear. However, Martin P. Amt of the Freer Gallery of Art informs me that there are no words or letters of this side written in red ink. This means that all 11 lines most probably derive from a single long *'onita*. From my translation it is clear that the contents of the entire side is homogeneous, a series of invocations of the intercession of Sts. Peter and Paul. The only doubt is whether there may not be two *'onyata*, one invoking St. Paul's prayers and the other St. Peter's, with the separating psalm versicle in red ink falling in the part of the page that has been lost.

Thus we have parts of at least five *'onyata* in our fragment, only one of which can be found in published sources. In addition, I have also investigated such manuscripts of the *Gazza* as are available to me in Rome, Vatican Syriac 590²⁷ (16th century), and Vatican Borgia Syriac 86²⁸ and 87²⁹ (both

²³ It is the 82nd out of 114 *'onyata* before the hymn of assistance in the 2nd nocturn of Martin's text and the 31st out of 39 in *BC*.

²⁴ A. Baumstark, *Geschichte der syrischen Literatur*. Bonn, 1922, p. 304, n. 2.

²⁵ Baumstark's *a priori* skepticism concerning the date of the Urmia MS. is hard to justify. There is a two volume *Gazza* MS. now at the Chaldean Church in Mardin, probably identical with Diabekir MSS. 43 and 44, that could be as old as the 14th century.

²⁶ Cfr. J. M. Vosté, 'Notes sur les manuscrits syriaques de Diarbékir et autres localités d'Orient', *Le Muséon* 50 (1937) 347, and W. F. Macomber, 'The Oldest Known Text of the Anaphora of the Apostles Addai and Mari', *OCP* 32 (1966) 335, n. 2.

²⁷ Ff. 138v^o-162v^o.

²⁸ Pp. 342-404.

²⁹ Pp. 290-305. These two manuscripts are two volumes of one collection that was probably

late 19th century, but the former was copied from a much older manuscript, as many spaces have been left blank where the text was missing or illegible); none of them has any of the four unidentified 'onyata.

This, I submit, is rather remarkable. In the case of Borgia Syriac 87 and the Chaldean and Nestorian breviaries, it is not quite so surprising; the first has one nocturn with only 22 'onyata, while the other two also have one nocturn, but with 40 'onyata each. Vatican Syriac 590, on the other hand, has 108 'onyata, Borgia Syriac 86 has 153, both in a single nocturn, while British Museum Additional MS. 7178, the manuscript from which Martin published this text, has a total of 168, divided into two nocturns.³⁰

It is noteworthy that all of the 'onyata of the Chaldean and Nestorian breviaries (which are not identical, even though the total number is the same — each has 13 that the other lacks) are found in the London manuscript, and this is true of all but one of those of Borgia Syriac 87, all but 6 of those of Borgia Syriac 86 and all but 18 of those of Vatican Syriac 590. In other words, were we limited to these six sources, we could have the impression that the London manuscript reproduces almost intact a more ancient large collection of 'onyata, and that the other sources are only more or less radical abridgments of the same collection.

The Freer fragment comes to modify this impression. The theory of an original large collection from which existing sources would have made selections can still be maintained, but, if it be true, the original collection must have been considerably larger than the 168 'onyata of British Museum Additional 7178 plus the 24 new ones found in the other three manuscripts (not 25 because one 'onita is found in two of them). If I had been able to identify non of the 'onyata of the Freer fragment, we might suspect the presence of a completely independent collection, but with my identification such an extreme hypothesis seems untenable. The fragment, therefore, suggests the possibility that there was originally a very large collection of 'onyata in the Gazza, probably more than 200, and that all existing manuscripts derive from it.

By way of conclusion, I may note one other question that the Freer fragment raises, but to which no definitive answer can be given. I refer to the fact that the pair of 'onyata that have as their *reš qala* "Clement and full

made for the purposes of study rather than for liturgical use. All of Borgia Syr. 86 and part of 87 seems to derive from the one ancient source, whereas the rest of 87 derives from many sources the office of Peter and Paul, in particular, seems to come from a Catholic MS. later than 1700 because that part includes several offices composed by Patriarch Joseph II (1696-1712).

³⁰ The division, however, is not a normal one; the first nocturn does terminate with a hymn of assistance, but this is not followed by a *qanona*, *tešbohta*, *karozuta* and *madraša*, as is regularly the case. Cfr. Mateos, op. cit., pp. 10-1.

of mercy" is the final group before the hymn of assistance in the fragment, whereas it is far from being final in any of the other sources that have it. It is the 29th out of 35 groups of *'onyata* having the same *reš qala* in British Museum Additional 7178 (13th out of 19, if we limit ourselves to the second nocturn), 25th out of 30 in Borgia Syriac 86, 23rd out of 29 in Vatican Syriac 590 and 15th out of 19 in the Chaldean breviary; Borgia Syriac 87 and the Nestorian breviary lack it altogether.

Various tentative explanations may be offered. One could be that we have here the end of the first nocturn, which would have been followed by a second that probably contained many *'onyata* groups that are not represented in any of the other sources thus far examined — unless, of course, the second nocturn was much shorter than the first, unlike the London manuscript. Another possibility is that there may have been but a single nocturn that was much shorter than what is found in our other sources — a somewhat less probable hypothesis, perhaps, since the whole tendency of development seems to have been towards abridgment, such that the older manuscripts tend to have longer nocturns than the more recent. A third possibility might be that the order of the groups of *'onyata* in the manuscript from which our thus far examined, all of which preserve faithfully the order of the London codex, omitting here and there some of the groups, but never changing the order.