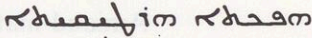



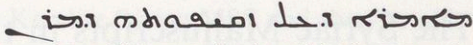
DANIEL L. MCCONAUGHY

The Syriac Manuscripts in the Coptic Museum, Cairo

In December, 1985, after just having arrived in England from an itinerary that took me from Egypt to India in search of Syriac manuscripts, I was sharing my finds and experiences with Dr. Sebastian Brock at the University of Oxford. It was Dr. Brock who mentioned to me that there were Syriac manuscripts in the Coptic Museum in Cairo which he had not been able to see for himself during a previous visit of his own; so when I was able to return to Egypt in January, 1986, I made the Coptic Museum, in Old Cairo, a priority to visit. There I was cordially and warmly received and helped by the Director, Dr. Gawdat Gabra, and Madam Semiha, the lovely keeper of the manuscripts. Dr. Brock's lead bore fruit, and I was able to examine the Syriac manuscripts. All of the manuscripts are enclosed between pieces of glass or clear plastic except MS 1032.

The following description of the Syriac manuscripts is but a small addendum to the large collection of manuscripts at the Coptic Museum, among which number the famous Nag Hammadi Coptic papyri.

- MS 2585 *Theological fragments.* Three parchment fragments: fragment 114a is $6\frac{3}{4}$ " \times 6" and seems to be an anti-Nestorian work. A rubric reads:  and further down we read:  Fragment 114b measures $1\frac{3}{4}$ " \times $3\frac{1}{4}$ " and fragment 114c measures $2\frac{1}{2}$ " \times 3". They are written in an Estrangelo script of the 8th or 9th century.
- MS 2586 *Matthew 25:44-26:31 in the Harklean version.* Part of a parchment page written in two columns measuring $6\frac{1}{4}$ " \times $4\frac{1}{2}$ " (almost half a folio). This fragment is a missing portion to British Museum Add. 17, 124, dated 1234 A.D.
- MS 2587a-c *Liturgical fragments.* Fragments a and b are paper and measure $6\frac{1}{2}$ " \times 9" and are in a very late Estrangelo script (12/13 century?). The fragments of part c are also paper and 5" \times 5" and 2" \times 3" and are in a very late Serta script.
- MS 2598 *Various paper fragments.* One page has, "end of *memra* concerning the Martyr Stephen by Mar Jacob (of Serug)."
- MS 2600 *Two paper folios.* $3\frac{1}{2}$ " \times 4" in a later (14th century?) West Syrian Serta script. 18-20 lines/page.

- MS 2601 *Liturgical fragments*. Five paper folios measuring $5\frac{3}{4}'' \times 7\frac{1}{2}''$ and written in a late (18th/19th century) Serta script. 27-29 lines/page.
- MS 2602 *Jacob of Serug*: 
Ten parchment folios in a clear Estrangelo hand belonging to British Museum Add. 14,586 dated to the 7th or 8th century. A note at the end of Add. 14,586 reads: "The quire missing after fol. 73 (Also a torn conjugate pair of leaves once enclosing folios 8-13) was found loose by Mr. Evelyn-White at the Convent of the Syrians in the Nitrian Desert in the spring of 1921. F.C.B." The folios are in good condition, and, for the most part, are quite legible, except for the "torn conjugate pair of leaves."
- MS 2690 *Liturgical text*. Two parchment folios, $6\frac{1}{4}'' \times 8''$ written in a West Syrian Serta of the 10th or 11th century. 19-20 lines/page.
- MS 2693 *The History of the Man of God from Rome (Alexius Romanus)*. An extremely ancient parchment fragment from the first part of this work. This folio is in a very rare format; it is written in three columns. It measures $9\frac{1}{2}'' \times 11\frac{1}{2}''$ and is written in the most archaic type of Estrangelo script, dating to the 5th or 6th century, reminding one of British Museum Add. 12,150, dated 411 A.D. There are 36-38 lines/page. The text corresponds to the text of page 7, line 15 to page 11, line 16 of Arthur Amiaud's *La Légende Syriacque de Saint Alexis: L'Homme de Dieu* (Paris, 1889). However, none of the descriptions of the MSS cited by Amiaud match this folio. It is certainly one of the oldest if not the oldest monument to this hagiographical text.
- MS 1032 *Book of the Service of the Mass* in Garshuni. This paper MS of 311 folios measuring $6'' \times 8''$, is from the 19th century and was taken from El Moallaka Church in Cairo. Though the bulk of the codex is in Garshuni, there are Syriac sections: folio 1a has the dedication in Syriac. Folios 288a-300b contain various prayers and *sedre*.

Without a doubt, some of these MSS are fragments from the great storehouse of Syriac manuscripts, Deir el-Suryan, such as MS 2586 and MS 2602. There are probably others as well.

Ancient manuscripts often travel along many circuitous and hidden routes. As time passes, unknown manuscripts will emerge from their hiding places into the view of scholarship, bringing startling surprises and unknown sources¹. Egypt is an incredible treasure house of antiquity and still yields her

1 The author had the excitement of discovering a missing folio of the Old Syriac (Sy^o) text of

treasures and secrets to those who probe, especially on the less travelled byways. Father Samuel, a monk and scholar at Deir el-Suryan, told me of excavations of some of the ruins of monasteries in the Wadi-el-Natron that would be taking place in the near future. Possibly these will yield more riches of ancient manuscripts.

Luke 16:13-17:1. See: D. L. McConaughy, "A Recently Discovered Folio of the Old Syriac (Sy^c) Text of Luke 16,13-17,1," *Biblica* 68,1 (1987) 85-90. (Includes facsimiles.)