

The Journal of the Canadian Society for Syriac Studies

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FROM THE EDITOR



J CSSS 13 (2013) contains all the papers given at the CSSS Symposium XII entitled *Syriac Manuscripts and Archives: Production, Contents, and Illuminations*, which took place on the 10th of November 2012 at the University of Toronto.

The first article by Dr. Mark Dickens of Alberta takes us to Turfan, China, whose fascinating archives are the subject of his article “Scribal Practices in the Turfan Monastic Community.” It describes the methods and practices followed by several generations of Asian monks in producing manuscripts in at least three languages over four centuries. Much light is shed on scribal practices in copying Syriac manuscripts, including punctuation, vocalisation, pointing, rubrics, marginalia, quire marks, corrections, distinguishing marks and illustrations. While certain features, including copying errors, are common to all medieval scribes, there are other features, e.g. phonetic spellings, which are frequently found among Asian scribes, for whom Syriac was a holy but nonetheless foreign language.

Unlike the essentially liturgical Turfan manuscripts, the 16th-17th century manuscripts produced in Rome and now housed at the Laurentian Library, Florence, are technical in nature. The article “Syriac MSS produced in Rome” by Pier Giorgio Borbone of Pisa surveys this collection, which includes calendric, grammatical, lexical, and biblical codices, and reveals a clear interest in things Syriac in

Rome at that time. This interest may be seen as the main factor in the rise of the study of Syriac in early modern Europe. Trained scribes (including an abdicated Syriac Orthodox patriarch) and European orientalists were responsible for this quite special collection of some thirty codices.

The single manuscript presented by Nicholas al-Jeloo of Sydney in his article “A Hitherto Uncatalogued Syriac Manuscript from the Urmia Museum, Iran,” is a happy addition to the meagre collection of manuscripts belonging to the Church of the East. As the author says, wars and persecutions were behind the loss of the literary heritage of this ancient Church, but the many colophons he includes in his article indicate that classical Syriac was the language of its scribes and copyists as late as the 19th century, the date of this manuscript.

“Codex Guelph. 3.1.300: The Note of the Restorer” by Emanuela Braida of Toronto discusses Garshuni colophons added to a 7th century illuminated Gospel lectionary brought to Rome during the 17th century. In addition to precious details that these colophons give concerning the place and time of the writing and the repairing of this quite ancient codex, we also discover that the Garshuni language of the restorer, a Lebanese resident of the Pontifical Maronite College in Rome, was heavily influenced by Italian!

The article “The Manuscripts of the Church of Telkeppe,” i.e. Tell-Kēf, by Khairy Foumia of Michigan, surveys more than two

hundred codices, most of them liturgical, owned by the Chaldean Church of the Holy Heart of Jesus. Besides one undated manuscript written with a splendid Estrangela script used before and during the Mongol period, there are some Gospel lectionaries decorated with vibrantly coloured miniatures. The miniatures remind one of Byzantine art, but also of the primitive art of Syriac amulets, though they are far more attractive than the drawings of those charms.

Remaining with the subject of art and manuscripts, “Reconciling Ornament, Codicology and Colophon in Syriac Lectionaries British Library Add.7170 and Vat. Syr.559,” by Rima Smine of Leiden, discusses two codices that share identical decorative programs but whose dates of completion diverge considerably. Careful examination of the illuminated manuscripts and their epigraphy leads to the conclusion that while the same workshop produced both codices, Vat. Syr.559 was executed in stages and only given its final form decades after its near twin was completed.

Syriac Churches have lost much of their written patrimonies due to the ravages of war and time, and with this harsh reality in mind, Khalid Dinno and George Kiraz undertook two campaigns to digitize the archives of the Syriac Orthodox Church. The article “Accessing the Archival Heritage of the Syrian Orthodox Church: A Preliminary Report,” by Khalid Dinno, scratches the surface of this rich repository to reveal how such documents help us to reassess the current scholarly understanding of the Ottoman *millet* system and provide a foundation for the writing of the history of this ancient Church at the end of the Ottoman period.

Finally, *JCSSS* 13 wants to commemorate a scholarly prelate, Bishop Julius Mikhael al-Jamil, native of Qaraqosh, Iraq, who passed away in 2012. The prelate left his mark on Syriac Studies mainly in the Arab world but also more recently in Europe.

A.H.
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