

A Project on the Antiochian Chalcedonian Orthodox Manuscripts: Syriac, Arabic, CPA, and Greek

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My paper will consist of a few short words about my project on the Orthodox Chalcedonian Manuscripts in Syriac, Arabic, Christian Palestinian Aramaic (CPA), and Greek.

1 - The Trilingual Icon

I want to show a beautiful icon from the very old Monastery of the Dormition of the Theotokos in Kaftun, northern Mount Lebanon,¹ to summarise how the three languages: Greek, Syriac, and Arabic were used all along in the Orthodox Chalcedonian Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East. This icon is painted on both sides (i.e. bilateral):

- The first side shows an icon of the Theotokos Hodigitria from the 11th century by an unknown iconographer. [Plate 1]
- The second side shows an icon of the Theophany (the Baptism of Jesus Christ) from the 13th century also by an unknown iconographer. [Plate 2]

What is distinctive about the second side of this icon (the Theophany) is that the inscriptions are written in three languages:

1st) In Greek: we have “*The Baptism*” and “*Jesus Christ*” (in the centre), “*Prophet Isaiah*” (in the upper right corner), and “*Prophet David*” (in the upper left corner).

2nd) In Syriac Chalcedonian: on the open scroll that Prophet Isaiah holds in his hand, we read a liturgical composite text taken from Isaiah 1:16, 55:1, and 12:3.

“Thus the Lord says: wash yourselves, make yourselves clean and put away the evil of your doings from before my eyes. And everyone who thirsts goes and draws the waters from the spring of salvation.”

3rd) In Arabic: on the open scroll that Prophet David holds, we read a liturgical composite text taken from the Psalms 114 [113A]:3-5, and 77 [76]:17 [16].

“The sea saw it and fled, and the Jordan turned back. The mountains feared like the ram, and the hills like the lambs. What ails you O sea that you fled, and you O Jordan that you turned back. The waters saw you O God, the waters saw you and were afraid.”

* I want to thank so much Dr. **Sebastian Brock**. Because of him, I had the great opportunity to continue my studies and research at Oxford University on this important project. Also, I would like to thank Fr. Dr. **Samir Khalil** for giving me the opportunity to be among you today. Further information about ‘**Antioch: A Centre for Antiochian Orthodox Christian Studies and Research**’ in general can be found on its website: www.AntiochCentre.net.

¹ Further information concerning the monastery and the bilateral icon of Kaftun see: LAMENS, “Notices” (1996) 21-27. MOUAWAD, “Les Mystérieux Monastères de Kaftun” (2001-2) 95-113. HELOU, “L’icône bilatérale de la Vierge de Kaftoun” (2003) 101-31. IMMERZEEL, “Medieval Wall Paintings” (2004) 11, 25, 31.

Here, I would like also to bring to attention to the recent and extremely important discovery of the ancient and wonderful wall paintings in the Church of Saints Sergius and Bacchus near the Monastery of the Theotokos in Kaftun. A project was set up to reveal and preserve these wall paintings hidden under plaster. These wall paintings contain a number of inscriptions in Greek, Syriac Chalcedonian, and Arabic.



Plate 1: Theotokos



Plate 2: Theophany

2 - The Project

In my research, I am trying, through my work on manuscripts, microfilms, microfiches, checklists, catalogues, and other published bibliographies, to determine the location of manuscripts which originated in the Chalcedonian Orthodox (or Rum Orthodox) patrimony of the Patriarchate of Antioch (commonly referred to as the Melkite or Greek Orthodox Church), along with any relevant material from the Patriarchates of Jerusalem and Alexandria, including Sinai.

These manuscripts are in Syriac, Arabic, CPA, and Greek, and date from the 5th to the 19th centuries. So far, based on catalogues, other publications, and on some of the manuscripts themselves or their copies, I have collected information from more than 50.000 manuscripts spread around the world. Of these, approximately, 4250 are definitely Rum Orthodox: 3250 are in Arabic, and 1000 are in Syriac and CPA.

My ultimate aim is to compile a catalogue of this corpus of manuscripts with repertories, inventories, indices, and bibliographies.

Here I should mention that there are a lot of mistakes and errors in some of the notes and information on the manuscripts to be found in the catalogues and other bibliographies.

3 - The Bodleian Library

To give you one result of the research, I will mention only the Syriac, Arabic, and CPA manuscripts in the Bodleian Library in Oxford.

a - Syriac Manuscripts:

Among the collection of the 205 manuscripts, I found 53 which are definitely Rum Orthodox. The rest belong to the Syriac Orthodox, the Church of the East, the Maronite, and some of which cannot easily be classified under any of these patrimonies.

The proportion of Rum Orthodox manuscripts in the Bodleian Library happens to be considerably higher than that for most other British libraries.

These 53 manuscripts are written in the Syriac Chalcedonian Script that began to appear in the 10th-11th century.

As for the contents of these manuscripts, all of them are liturgical. Such as: Horologion [1] (the most used and the less likely to survive), Menaion and Anthologion [25], Octoechos [9], Triodion (Triodion I) [2], Pentecostarion (Triodion II) [5], Antiphonarium [1], Alleluarium, Exapostolarion and Troparion [2], Lectionary and Epistolarion [5], Psalterion and hymns [3]. All of them show the particularities of the Rum Orthodox Antiochian liturgical tradition.

From the colophons, rubrics, and notes of these manuscripts we can learn a great deal of different and helpful information of importance; for example:

* These manuscripts date from between the 12th and the 16th centuries when the usage of the Syriac language began to decrease in the Rum Orthodox Antiochian Patriarchate. We have from the: 12th c. [1], 13th c. [2], 15th c. [7], 16th c. [14].

They use different eras: Era of Adam [Annus Adami, AA], Era of the World (i.e. Era of the Creation) [Annus Mundi, AM], Era of the Greeks (i.e. Seleucid Era) [Annus Graecorum, AG], Era of the Incarnation [Annus Incarnationis, AI], and Era of the Hijrah [Annus Higræ, AH].

* They mention numerous towns, villages, churches and monasteries; mainly from Mount Lebanon and the Syrian Kalamun (between Damascus and Homs). The places mentioned are: where they were copied, or where they were located.

These manuscripts were written in or for places like: Balamand (Monastery of the Theotokos), Hardin (Monastery of St. Thomas), Kaftun (Monastery of the Theotokos, and Church of Sts. Sergius and Bacchus), Kfur al-'Arbeh (Church of St. George), Amiun, Btorram, Baalbeck (Church of St. Barbara), Ras Baalbeck (Church of St. Elian), and Tabshar (Church of St. George) in Lebanon. Or in places like: Bludan (Monastery of St. George), and Yabrud in Syria.

These enable us to draw up a map of the derivation of the manuscripts.

* Also, they mention names of scribes: laymen, monks, deacons, priests, bishops, and patriarchs. We have from the:

- 12th c.: Priest Ibrahim [1 manuscript], Priest Sa'id [1]. [2 names]

- 13th c.: Priest Sham'un ben Freij ben Siar ben La'azar ben Khuri [1]. [1 name]

- 15th c.: Priest Musa ben Ya'qub from Mount Lebanon [1], Priest Tuma ben Ibrahim ben 'Issa from Fahrah [1], Deacon Ya'qub ben Deacon Yuhanna from Hardin [3], and Deacon Saliba ben Srur ben Sa'id from Kfur (al-'Arbeh) [3]. [4 names]

- 16th c.: Bishop Gerasimos of Baalbeck [1], Bishop Yuhanna of Yabrud ben Priest Ibrahim [1], Hieromonk Saba in Kaftun [1], Hieromonk Dawud ben Salam from Ras Baalbeck [1], Deacon Makarios in Kaftun disciple of Yuakim Bishop of Beirut [1], Deacon Gerasimos ben Yusef ben Musa from Saidnaya [1], Monk Ibrahim ben Dawud from Qara [1], Zosima ben Priest Dawud from Btorram [1], and Yuhanna ben Priest Dawud from Btorram [3]. [9 names]

* We can also find further information in colophons, such as notes about:

1st) Wakf (donation, dedication, legacy)

2nd) For overeager and acquisitive collectors and scholars, almost all contain anathemata and curses against anyone who steals the manuscripts.

3rd) Additional historical information provided at a later date (e.g. earthquakes, famine, plagues, etc.).

4th) Additional material of sociological and demographical changes.

There is a good example in the Syriac and Arabic colophon of one of these manuscripts:

This is a Triodion (part II) and Pentecostarion [Lazarus' Saturday – All Saints' Sunday]. ⁽²⁾ It was copied by Priest Ya'qub ben Deacon Yuhanna from Hardin, in the Monastery of St. Thomas in Hardin in Mount Lebanon, on Friday 24 August 7000 (AA) and 1803 (AG) [i.e. 1492 AD]. It was a wakf to the Monastery of the Theotokos in Balamand near Tripoli.

This manuscript is one of many other Rum Orthodox manuscripts written in this Monastery. Hardin was populated by Rum Orthodox and Syriac Orthodox until the 16th-17th c., after which time it was populated only by Maronites.

5th) Also we can find additional information such as precise dates of death, ordination of priests and consecration of bishops. And many other pieces of information not mentioned by historians.

There is a good example in the Arabic colophon of one of these manuscripts:

This is an Alleluarion and Troparion. ⁽³⁾ It was copied by Deacon Makarios the disciple of Yuakim Bishop of Beirut, in the Monastery of the Theotokos in Kaftun in Mount Lebanon, on Monday 16 October 7099 (AA) [i.e. 1590 AD]. We read in a later hand that this manuscript belonged to Hieromonk Yuasaf, the disciple of Yuakim Bishop of Beirut who died on 17 May 7100 [i.e. 1592 AD]. He also tells us that Bishop [i.e. Archbishop from 1586] Anastasios of Sinai ⁽⁴⁾ died on the Feast of the Cross [i.e. 14 September 7101 AA; 1592 AD]. And that Patriarch Yuakim died [i.e. in fact he was assassinated] on the Feast of Sts. Sergius and Bacchus [i.e. 7 October 1592 AD]. And that the dethroned Patriarch Mikhail died on the Feast of the Nativity [i.e. 25 December 1592 AD].

We know that Patriarch Mikhail Sabbagh [VI or VII, from 1575] ⁽⁵⁾ (i.e. Makarios Sabbagh from Hama, Bishop of Euchaita) was enthroned in 1577. It happened that a quarrel, based on very nasty rumours, occurred between him and Metropolitan Dorotheos ben Daw (i.e. Metropolitan of Tripoli from 1580). Dorotheos dethroned Mikhail and took the Patriarchate in 1581, taking the name of Yuakim [V or VI]. ⁽⁶⁾

So now we know the specific dates of their death and that all of them died on the same year.

That also leads to the importance of making more accurate lists of patriarchs and bishops of the Antiochian Rum Orthodox Church and their towns, following the example of the great work of Jean Maurice Fiey for the bishops' lists of the Syriac Orthodox Church and the Church of the East. ⁽⁷⁾

b - Arabic Manuscripts:

Among the collection of Arabic Christian manuscripts, ⁽⁸⁾ I found 57 which are definitely Rum Orthodox. The rest belong to the Copt Orthodox, Syriac Orthodox, the Church of the East, the Maronite, and some of which cannot easily be classified under any of these patrimonies.

As for the contents of these manuscripts, most of them are liturgical. Such as: Horologion [6], Octoechos [1], Lectionary [5], Psaltirion [13], and Euchologion [1]. All of them show the particularities of the Rum Orthodox Antiochian liturgical tradition. As for the rest, they are: Biblical [6], Patristic and Dogmatic [7], Spirituality [6], Hagiography [6], Canonical [2], and Historical [4].

² Bod. Dawk. 12. SMITH, No. 87, in *Catalogi* (1864) col. 299-301.

³ Bod. Dawk. 34. SMITH, No. 92, in *Catalogi* (1864) col. 305-8. NASRALLAH, *Chronologie 1500 à 1634* (1956-57) 5-6.

⁴ NASRALLAH, *Chronologie 1500 à 1634* (1956-57) 6, note 14. NASRALLAH, *Histoire IV:1* (1979) 48.

⁵ KARALEVSKIJ, "Antioche" (1924) 637-39, 700. NASRALLAH, *Chronologie 1250 à 1500* (1968) 2, 40. NASRALLAH, *Chronologie 1500 à 1634* (1956-57) 38-46, 74. NASRALLAH, *Histoire IV:1* (1979) 68-9. RUSTOM, *The Church of the City of God 3* (1988) 23-30.

⁶ KARALEVSKIJ, "Antioche" (1924) 637-39, 700. NASRALLAH, *Chronologie 1500 à 1634* (1956-57) 46-8, 74. RUSTOM, *The Church of the City of God 3* (1988) 30-2.

⁷ FIEY: *Pour un Oriens Christianus Novus* (1993).

⁸ URI: *Bibliothecae Bodleianae*, I (1787). NICOLL: *Bibliothecae Bodleianae*, II (1835).

These manuscripts date from between the 13th and the 18th centuries. We have from the: 13th c. [1], 14th [2], 15th c. [1], 16th c. [17], 17th c. [19], 18th [1]. They use different eras: Era of Adam [AA], Era of the World [AM], and Era of the Hijrah [AH].

They mention numerous toponyms; mainly from Northern Lebanon. These places mentioned are: where they were copied, or where they were located. These manuscripts were written in or for places like: Tripoli, Naos (near Kosba), and Kaftun (Monastery of the Theotokos, and Church of Sts. Sergius and Bacchus) in Lebanon. Or in places like: Daraiya (near Damascus), and Aleppo in Syria. That enables us to draw up the map of the derivation of the manuscripts.

Also, they mention names of scribes. We have from the:

- 15th c.: Hieromonk ben Jerjes ben Elias from Naos (near Kosba) in the district of Tripoli [1 manuscript]. [1 name]
- 16th c.: ‘Abd al-Nur ben Elias ben Ibrahim al-Malaki [2], Sem‘an ben ‘Abd al-Masih from Tripoli [1], and Nasrallah ben Yuhanna ben al-Kalh from Tripoli [3]. [3 names]
- 17th c.: Taljeh ben Priest Hauran from Hama [5]. [1 name]
- In addition to Aslan ben al-Rumi [1].

We can also find further information in colophons, such as notes about: wakf, anathemata and curses, historical information, material of sociological and demographical changes, and many other pieces of information.

There is important information in the Arabic prologue of one of these manuscripts. This manuscript is an Epistolarion; probably from the 17th c. ⁹ It was translated from Syriac into Arabic. The main reason for the translation was to make it possible for those who did not know Syriac to understand the text. That shows the decreasing use of the Syriac language in the Rum Orthodox Antiochian Patriarchate in the 16th-17th c.

c - CPA Manuscripts:

Also, among the collection of manuscripts, there are fragments on vellum written in Christian Palestinian Aramaic; they are palimpsests. They contain fragments of biblical texts. These definitely belong to the Rum Orthodox patrimony.

4 - Hope

It is my hope that my project on the contents and the colophons of these manuscripts will aid scholars in the study of the palaeography, history, toponymy, archaeology, theology, liturgy, hagiography, and biography of the Rum Orthodox patrimony.

⁹ Bod. Or. 333. NICOLL: No. 18, in *Bibliothecae Bodleianae*, II (1835) 21-22.

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