

TWO SYRIAC MANUSCRIPTS FROM ST. PETERSBURG COLLECTIONS

Natalia Smelova

The subject of the article concerns two Syriac manuscripts kept in the collections of the National Library of Russia and the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg. One of the manuscripts, which is of Jacobite (Monophysite) origin, represents fragments of the *Homiliae Cathedrales* by Severus, Patriarch of Antioch (512–518); the other is a Melkite collection of the *theotokia*, hymns to the Mother of God, the *Theotokos*.

Both manuscripts are written on parchment and undated, and both are lacking colophons. The *Theotokia* manuscript and a part of Severus' Homilies (24 folios) are kept in the National Library of Russia, where they were brought by C. Tischendorf, professor in the University of Leipzig, following his expedition to the Near East in 1859 (Tischendorf 1860: 65). However, there is no direct evidence of their origin. Both manuscripts are described in the Catalogue of Syriac Manuscripts in Leningrad (Pigulevskaya 1960: 100–103, 152), but the description of their contents is quite brief and partly incorrect.

In this article I shall propose a solution to the problems of dating and provenance of the two manuscripts and demonstrate their significance. I shall also try to examine the nature of contacts between Monophysite and Melkite communities in the Middle East between the 8th and 11th centuries. This will explain my selection of the two manuscripts, which belong to different branches of Syriac Christianity and which contain different genres of ecclesiastical literature.

The manuscript of the *Homiliae Cathedrales* of Severus of Antioch contains parchment folios which are damaged and which are kept separately in two different collections in St. Petersburg. As I stated, 24 folios are held in the National Library of Russia (NLR Syr. New Series 10). In the 19th century when they were bound, the original sequence of homilies was broken and they were rearranged. The current size of folios after they were trimmed in the process of binding is 27x18 cm. At the same time the manuscript underwent some basic conservation.

The other part of the manuscript, which comprises 53 loose folios, is held in the Manuscript Department at the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences (Syr. 35). The folios are badly damaged; they have never been restored and are currently in a critical condition. They were purchased by N. P. Lihachev, outstanding historian and palaeographer, and had been kept in the Institute of Book, Document and Writing founded by Lihachev in his own house until 1938, when it was demolished. In the same year the fragments of the Homilies, along with other oriental manuscripts, enriched the collections of the Institute of Oriental Studies (Meshcherskaya 2002: 47–48). Unfortunately, I could not find any evidence of where and when the manuscript was purchased.

The partially surviving manuscript, of which only the two above-mentioned parts are known, is a Syriac translation of Severus' Homilies, revised by James of Edessa. In total, 125 homilies were originally delivered and recorded in Greek during the period of Severus' patriarchate in 512–518. Nothing survived from the original text apart from the whole of homily 77 (Kugener & Triffaux 1922: 765–864) and a number of fragments of other homilies in the *catenae* ascribed to the Greek Church Fathers Gregory of Nyssa and Hesihios of Jerusalem (Nau 1929: 3–30).

It was already in the first half of the 6th century that the Homilies were translated into Syriac by Paul, Bishop of Callinick (Baumstark 1922: 160; Brière 1960: 17–33; Wright 1894: 94–95). After about one hundred and fifty years the translation was revised by James, Bishop of Edessa in 700/701. (Baumstark 1922: 248–256; Brière 1960: 33–50; Wright 1894: 141–154). Owing to his outstanding knowledge of Greek, James of Edessa could clarify some obscure passages in the previous translation and make it closer to the original Greek text, which was still in existence in the Jacobite milieu of his time (Graffin 1978: 243–255).

The Syriac translation of the whole corpus of 125 homilies revised by James of Edessa was published in the *Patrologia Orientalis* in 1906–76 mainly on the basis of two manuscripts: the British Library Add. 12159 (868 A.D.) (Wright 1870–72, vol. 2: 534–546) and the Vatican Library Vat. Sir. 141 (Assemani 1719–28, vol. 1: 570–571; Assemani 1758–59, vol. 3: 233–241).

According to their colophons these two manuscripts originated from the region of the Euphrates in Syria around the city of Callinick (contemporary Al-Raqqah). Later, both manuscripts were kept in the Monastery of the Virgin (the Monastery of Syrians, Dayr al-Suryan) in the Nitrian Desert in Egypt – one of the greatest West Syrian depositories of manuscripts during the Middle Ages and modern times (Evelyn White 1932: 439–458; Wright 1870–72, vol. 3: XI–XV). From there they were delivered to the Vatican Library (Vat. Sir. 141) in 1707 by Elias Assemani and to the British Museum (Add. 12159) in 1839–1850 (Wright 1870–72, vol. 3: XI–XV).

The manuscript from St. Petersburg was unknown to the editors. The folios of both parts are mixed but they do, however, fill the lacunae of each other. They contain the fragments of the homilies 59, 62, 63, 69, 70, 76, 79, 81 and the full text of the homilies 64–68, 71–75, i.e., the second volume of the corpus. The redaction of the text corresponds to that published in the *Patrologia Orientalis*. Some features of the orthography of the St. Petersburg manuscript are rather characteristic of the Vat. Sir. 141. One can take as an example the *scriptio plena* of the words: *mṭwl* (Add. 12159: *mṭl*), *kwl* (Add. 12159: *kl*), 'yk zn' (Add. 12159: 'kzn'), *ḥnn* (Add. 12159: *n*) etc.

From the point of view of palaeography the manuscript of St. Petersburg is closer to the Vat. Sir. 141. It is written in *estrangela* with Greek uncials in the margins and could be dated to the early 8th century. While the manuscript BL Add. 12159 written in *serto* has a date of 868 in the colophon (Brière 1960: 47–48), that of the Vatican Library is undated. However, according to the indirect evidence of its colophons, it was written between 700/701 and 832/833 (Brière 1960: 38–40); thus it is earlier than the Add. 12159. In comparison with the Vat. Sir. 141, the writing of the St. Petersburg manuscript is more elegant and precise, and allows one to suppose that the manuscript is earlier than all other known manuscripts containing the Syriac text revised by James of Edessa.

A codicological study of the St. Petersburg fragments resulted in a reconstruction in the original codex of the *Homiliae Cathedrales*. There are six incomplete quires and six other which survived entirely. Each quire comprises ten bifolia – a structure which is usual for Syriac manuscripts, and for the above-mentioned Add. 12159 and Vat. Syr. 141 in particular. The dimensions of the fragments 27.4 x 18.7 cm (max.) are similar to those of the Vatican manuscript (27.4 x 19.3 cm). However, the writing area and number of lines per column are quite different in the two manuscripts. The columns of the Vat. Sir. 141 are larger than those of the St. Petersburg fragments; the former has 40 or more lines per column while the latter has between 34 and 38 lines. One can observe that the arrangement of the text on the pages of the Vat. Sir. 141 is less strict (this is evident in the inner columns) than that of the fragments.

Besides, I could ascertain that one of the folios in the NLR Syr. New Series 10 (fol. 24) belonged originally to another manuscript, which is much older than that of Severus' Homilies, and contains another patristic text which I could not yet identify. On the basis of an analysis of the handwriting, the arrangement of the text and width of the columns, I propose to date the folio to the 6th century approximately.

Thus I suppose that the 8th century manuscript from St. Petersburg is the earliest presently known manuscript containing a Syriac text of the Homilies of Severus of Antioch revised by James of Edessa. It is probably of the same origin,

the Euphrates valley, as the two relatively contemporary manuscripts – Vat. Sir. 141 and BL Add. 12159. It seems possible that our manuscript was also transported to Egypt, to the monastery of the Virgin (Dayr al-Suryan), and from there it could have been purchased by C. Tischendorf and N. P. Lihachev.

The manuscript of the *theotokia* is held in the National Library of Russia (NLR Syr. New Series 11). It comprises 15 parchment folios bound in the 19th century in accordance with the original sequence, the dimensions being 22 x 13 cm.

The title, which was made with cinnabar, is *ktbynn t'wtwqy*, “we write *theotokia*”, but it lacks the final part and a colophon. The manuscript is written in *estrangela*, in its late form which was in use in Melkite communities. N. V. Pigulevskaya proposed a date of the 10th or 11th century. However, in my judgment, palaeographic features suggest an earlier dating, probably the 9th century. This conclusion was supported by one of the most prominent specialists in Syriac palaeography, S. P. Brock, in a conversation. The manuscript consists of two quaternions (quires of four folded folios), from which the second lacks the last folio.

In the catalogue of Syriac manuscripts the text is described as the *Akathistos* to the Virgin Mary (Pigulevskaya 1960: 152). A revised closer reading of the text has revealed that in fact it contains *theotokia*, short hymns in honour of the Mother of God, translated from Greek into Syriac, which are normally designed to accompany *stichera* and *kathismata* of the Byzantine *Oktoechos* (Smelova, forthcoming). *Theotokia* in the St. Petersburg manuscript are divided into eight general parts entitled *ql'* (lit. ‘voices, sounds’), meaning here “modes”. Each mode consists of a different number of strophes: from 5 to 9. There are, in all, 52 readable strophes. The text has an obvious octonary structure that demonstrates its generic connection with the Byzantine *Oktoechos* in the sense of a hymnographical structure which follows the eight week liturgical cycle (Wellesz 1961: 44, 69–70; Cody 1982: 89).

I have studied a large number of sources which contain different Syriac translations of *theotokia*. Mostly they are 11th–13th century Melkite manuscripts of the *Oktoechos* held mainly in the British Library and the Monastery of St. Catherine on Mount Sinai, as well as Jacobite (Monophysite) Bet Gazo liturgical books from the same period in the Vatican Library, British Library, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Cambridge University Library, etc. However, the St. Petersburg manuscript is the most representative collection of Syriac *theotokia*: it is the only separate and almost complete collection of hymns to the Mother of God arranged in eight modes known to me.

Codicological characteristics also support identification of the manuscript as a separate collection of hymns to the Mother of God. Although it is impossible to

exclude completely the possibility that this collection formed an attachment to another liturgical book (*Menaia*, *Heirmologion* or *Psalter*), its codicological structure (two well-defined quaternions) is more characteristic of a separate manuscript.

A textological study of Syriac *theotokia* revealed at least two different translations. The first one is found in Melkite liturgical books, Syriac *Oktoechoi* (BL Add. 14508, Add. 17133, Add. 14710, Add. 17240; Sin. Syr. 25, Sin. Syr. 208, Sin. Syr. 210 etc.) and, apart from minor scribal errors, represents the same Syriac translation as that in our manuscript. This translation is also found in the 9th century fragment of the Syriac *theotokia* (Syr. Sp. 68) of the first mode discovered in 1975 in the monastery of St. Catherine on Mt. Sinai and published by S. P. Brock (Brock 1995: 66, 268–269).

A different translation has been identified in the Jacobite collections of hymns which previously were mistakenly described as “*Oktoechos* of Severus of Antioch” (Cody 1982: 102–103). These manuscripts are, in fact, West Syrian collections of hymns of different kinds (Vat. Sir. 94, BL Add. 17140, Add. 14714, Add. 17253, Paris Syr. 337, Cambridge Add. 1993 etc.). The most usual hymnographic types are *m 'nyt'* (lit. ‘hymns’), which are attributed to Severus of Antioch and which appear in manuscripts from the 8th century onwards, and *tkšpt'* (lit. ‘supplications’), preserved in manuscripts since the 11th century (the earliest example is in Vat. Sir. 94, between 1010 and 1033). It is among these *tkšpt'* hymns that we can find a Jacobite translation of some of the same *theotokia* which in NLR Syr. New Series 11 are preserved in Melkite translation.

Besides, the example of the *theotokia* of the first and second modes preserved both in Jacobite and Melkite collections demonstrates that, along with their own translation, West Syrians used translations borrowed from Melkites.

The question of provenance of the St. Petersburg manuscript of the *theotokia* so far remains open. However, I have a hypothesis that it originates from the monastery of St. Catherine on Mt. Sinai. This is supported first of all by the fact that it was produced in the Melkite milieu, and St. Catherine’s monastery was one of the main strongholds of Chalcedonians speaking the different languages of the Christian East; still it remains the largest repository of Melkite manuscripts in the Middle East. Secondly, the fragments of Syriac *theotokia* found in the monastery in 1975 and most probably copied there represent the same text as the St. Petersburg manuscript.

Accordingly, it is possible to surmise that our manuscript was acquired by C. Tischendorf in the Monastery on Mt. Sinai, and was also produced there for liturgical use. Until transference of St. Catherine’s relics to the monastery and the development of her cult there, it was a major centre of veneration of the Mother of God on account of the Burning Bush (the earliest evidence that the monastery was dedicated to St. Catherine dates from the 14th century (Scrobucha 1966: 65)). It is

possible that the particular veneration of the Virgin Mary was accompanied by a special liturgical celebration. The St. Petersburg collection of Syriac *theotokia* could be a witness to such celebration in Syriac.

In conclusion I would like to remind that a substantial part of Syriac literature (both Melkite and Jacobite) appeared as a result of a period during which the Syrians translated quite actively. As a consequence, a number of works originally created in Greek, but which were later lost, are extant only in Syriac translation (as in the case of the Homilies of Severus of Antioch). It is quite telling that the texts of both manuscripts, Severus' Homilies and the *theotokia*, are translated from Greek.

Creating their hymnography, the Jacobites were following the pattern of Byzantine Chalcedonian liturgy and they often borrowed Melkite translations of Greek liturgical literature. It is remarkable that Melkite translations of *theotokia*, which were produced most probably not later than the 9th century and which were appropriated by Monophysite communities at the beginning of the 11th century, are placed in the Jacobite liturgical collections next to hymns by Severus of Antioch translated from Greek in the 6th century. This translation was edited around 675 by the very same James of Edessa who, in 700/701, edited a translation of Severus' Homilies. Although the texts discussed in this article originated in different environments, they were indirectly brought into contact when the Syriac translation of Severus' hymns edited by James of Edessa and the Syriac translation of the *theotokia* were both included in Jacobite liturgical collections. Thus we can see how closely interconnected were the two Syriac literary and liturgical traditions – Melkite and Jacobite.

The two St. Petersburg manuscripts represent the tip of the iceberg of Syriac ecclesiastical literature. Yet even these two manuscripts, that accidentally found themselves in the same collection, bear the mark of an intense period of translation, which sometimes brought together the two different trends of Syriac Christianity.

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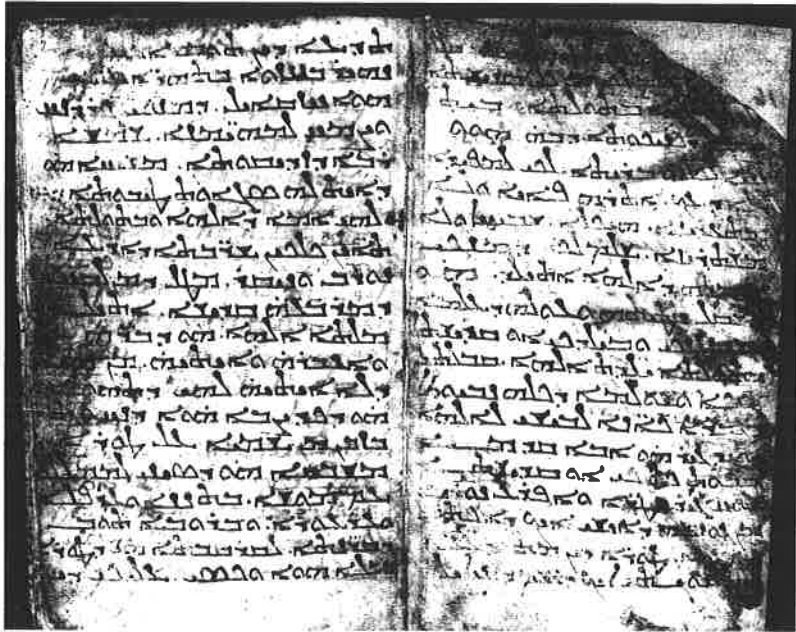


Plate 1. NLR Syr. New Series 11. Fol. 1v-2r.



Plate 2. NLR Syr. New Series 10. Fol. 23v-24r.