

# ALPHONSE MINGANA AND THE LETTER OF PHILOXENUS TO ABU 'AFR

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IN 1925 Mingana published<sup>1</sup> a document concerning the conversion of a Turkish tribe in the time of the East Syrian Patriarch Acacius (485-495/6), a text which he found in the second part of a letter attributed to Philoxenus of Mabbug, and addressed to Abu 'Afr, the governor (*στρατηλάτης*) of Ḥirta d-Na'man. The first half of this letter, with accounts of various heretics, was already known from the excerpt in Add. MS. 14529 of the British Museum<sup>2</sup> (dated to the seventh or eighth century), published by Martin in his *Introductio practica ad studium linguae Arameae*.<sup>3</sup> Since the British Museum manuscript is concerned only with doctrinal matters, it is not surprising that the excerpt from the letter of Philoxenus does not contain anything about the conversion of the Turkish tribe, and this second part of the letter only came to light when Mingana found a copy of the complete letter in a manuscript in the Rylands Library, Rylands Syr. 59.<sup>4</sup> In his article Mingana gave an English translation of the whole of the letter, but printed the Syriac of the second half only.<sup>5</sup>

The manuscript Mingana used, Rylands Syr. 59, is a modern one, copied by the assiduous scribe Mattai bar Paulos of Mosul, and completed on 29 January 1909. According to oral information given to Mingana by the copyist himself,<sup>6</sup> the text had been transcribed from "a vellum manuscript found in Ṭur 'Abdin,

<sup>1</sup> In "The Early Spread of Christianity in Central Asia and the Far East: a new document", *BULLETIN*, ix (1925), 297-371 (reprinted separately, "with additions", Manchester, 1925; I give the latter's pagination in square brackets).

<sup>2</sup> Wright, *Catalogue of Syriac Manuscripts in the British Museum*, p. 920.

<sup>3</sup> pp. 71-78 (1873). French translation by Tixeront, *R.O.C.*, 1<sup>e</sup> ser. viii (1903), 623-30.

<sup>4</sup> Formerly no. 9 in Mingana's own collection, cf. "Early Spread...", p. 346 [52].

<sup>5</sup> Translation: pp. 352-67 [58-73]. Text: pp. 368-71 [77-80].

<sup>6</sup> "Early Spread...", p. 346 [52], cf. p. 349 [55].

which he [i.e. Mattai] would ascribe at the latest to the eleventh century ”.

The document's historicity was very quickly attacked<sup>1</sup> by the Bollandist Paul Peeters,<sup>2</sup> who hinted that the work was in fact a recent forgery : “ le jacobite du IXe siècle [Mingana spoke of a Jacobite writer of ‘ about 760-790 . . . living in or near Baghdad ’ as the author of the second half of the letter]<sup>3</sup> parle comme s'il avait lu les ouvrages de Bethune Baker et de J. Lebon.” In 1930 Mingana countered Peeters's attack by pointing out<sup>4</sup> that he had found “ two years previously ” another copy of the whole letter in a manuscript he had bought in Persia. This second manuscript is Mingana Syr. 71 (fols. 40<sup>r</sup>-47<sup>r</sup>) in the Selly Oak Colleges Library, Birmingham, and is dated in Mingana's Catalogue (vol. 1, col. 188) to “ about 1600 ”.

Peeters, however, was unimpressed by this new evidence adduced by Mingana, and his original article was reprinted, with a few additions, in his *Recherches d'Histoire et de Philologie Orientales* (1951).<sup>5</sup> There the matter rested, until in a recent article entitled “ Auteur et date de la Chronique d'Arbèles ”<sup>6</sup> Father J.-M. Fiey, O.P., again took up the controversy. In this article Fiey suggests that Mingana's “ newly found ” manuscript is in fact none other than his original manuscript copied by Mattai in 1909.<sup>7</sup> This supposition, however, rests on a confusion between the Rylands Library (Manchester) and the Selly Oak Colleges Library (Birmingham), for, not finding “ Mingana

<sup>1</sup> “ Un nouveau document sur l'histoire des Turcs ”, *Byzantion*, iv (1927/8), 569-74.

<sup>2</sup> Peeters had already crossed swords with Mingana over the latter's edition of Ṭabari's *Kitab al-din wa 'l-dawla* (Manchester, 1923), in *Analecta Bollandiana*, xli (1924), 200-2. The implications of both Peeters and Bougyes that this work was a forgery of Mingana's are totally unfounded : the manuscript from which Mingana published the text was in the Rylands Library long before Mingana came to England, cf. H. Guppy, “ The Genuineness of aṭ-Ṭabari's Apology . . . ”, *BULLETIN*, xiv (1930), 121-3 ; also *L'Orient Syrien*, xii (1967), 267.

<sup>3</sup> “ Early Spread . . . ”, p. 349 [55].

<sup>4</sup> “ Remarks on the Early Spread of Christianity in Central Asia ”, *BULLETIN*, xiv (1930), 123-4.

<sup>5</sup> Vol. i, pp. 208-13.

<sup>6</sup> *L'Orient Syrien*, xii (1967), 265-302. Fiey suspects that Mingana himself is the author of this notorious chronicle. His arguments that the work is a modern, rather than a medieval, compilation do not seem to me to be very convincing.

<sup>7</sup> “ Auteur et date . . . ”, p. 270.

syriac 59<sup>1</sup> of 1909 in the *Catalogue of the Mingana Collection of Manuscripts* [in the Selly Oak Colleges Library], Fiey assumes that the only copy of the Letter in that Catalogue, Syr. 71 of “about 1600”, must be the “missing”<sup>2</sup> one of 1909, redated by Mingana.

A visit to the libraries concerned, however, confirms the correctness of Mingana’s statements about the two manuscripts: Mattai’s manuscript of 1909 still exists as Rylands Syr. 59 (the Letter occupying fols. 105<sup>r</sup>-113<sup>v</sup>),<sup>3</sup> and Mingana Syr. 71 in the Selly Oak Colleges Library is genuinely a second copy of the text, and, to judge from the script, Mingana’s date of c. 1600 seems a reasonable one.

Mingana Syr. 71, containing as it does the complete Letter, with the second section on the conversion of the Turkish tribe, thus by its date shows that neither Mattai nor Mingana can be its author, and that any imputations to this effect are quite unjustified.

The Syriac text printed by Mingana comes from fols. 110<sup>v</sup>-113<sup>v</sup> of Rylands Syr. 59, and a collation of the two reveals that the printed text has on two occasions lost several words through homoioteleuton (Mingana’s English translation, however, presupposes the presence of these missing words). These are:

p. 368 [77] line 6 ] *pr.*      *ܐܡܪ ܕܡܝܢ ܝܫܘܥ ܡܫܝܚܐ*  
 ms.                      *ܕܡܠܟܘܬܗ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ*

p. 369 [78] line 14 ] *pr.*      *ܐܠܠܗܐ ܡܩܪܐ ܫܝܬܐ*  
 ms.                      *ܐܠܠܗܐ ܡܩܪܐ ܫܝܬܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ*

Apart from these omissions the printed text contains three misprints: p. 369 [78], line 9 ] *ܡܫܝܚܐ* ms.

<sup>1</sup> Mingana himself called it “Syriac MS. 59 of the John Rylands Library . . . formerly . . . part of the writer’s collection of Syriac MSS. where it was numbered: Mingana 9” (“Early Spread . . .”, p. 346 [52]).

<sup>2</sup> “Auteur et date . . .”, p. 268, n. 14: “. . . ce manuscrit n’a jamais été vu par personne et a disparu mystérieusement.” Unseen only because no one took the trouble to look at it!

<sup>3</sup> This is the foliation now to be found in the manuscript: Mingana, however, gave it as fols. 99<sup>r</sup>-107<sup>v</sup>, evidently counting from the beginning, on fol. 6<sup>v</sup>, of the main work contained in this manuscript (Bar Ṣalibi, *Penitential Canons*). Fols. 1-5 are filled up with miscellaneous short texts.

p. 370 [79], line 2                      [ܦܫܘܢܐ] ܦܫܘܢܐ ms.

line 19                                      [ܦܫܘܢܐ] ܦܫܘܢܐ ms.

and at p. 371 [80], line 8, a word has been omitted :

[ܦܫܘܢܐ] + ܦܫܘܢܐ ms.

In all these cases Mingana Syr. 71 not surprisingly agrees with Rylands Syr. 59 against the printed text. But Mingana Syr. 71 also exhibits a small number of variants, which, incidentally, show that it can hardly have been the *Vorlage* of Rylands Syr. 59. Apart from abbreviations, I give a complete list of these variants (Mingana Syr. 71 to the right of the bracket) :

p. 368 [77] line 2                      [ܕܕܝܘܢܐ] ܕܕܝܘܢܐ .

Rylands Syr. 59 in fact has here ܕܕܝܘܢܐ written in a second hand above a very thorough erasure, which may well have once contained ܕܕܝܘܢܐ. This anachronistic slip must, of course, have originated at a time when the Patriarchate was still seated at Baghdad, and thus it usefully shows that the text itself cannot postdate the thirteenth century, for Denḥa I (†1281) was the last Patriarch resident at Baghdad until 1830 (Iohannan VIII Hormez).<sup>1</sup>

lines 10.15.25                      [ܦܘܠܘܢܐ] ܦܘܠܘܢܐ

p. 369 [78] line 1                      [ܡܐܠܐ] ܡܐܠܐ

p. 370 [79] line 6                      [ܡܠܘܚܘܢܐ] ܡܠܘܚܘܢܐ

7                                      [ܡܠܘܚܘܢܐ] ܡܠܘܚܘܢܐ

11                                      [ܡܘܢܐ] ܡܘܢܐ

The first letter is perhaps designedly ambiguous. In Rylands Syr. 59 there is an erasure immediately after the second *riš*.

*ibid.*                                      [ܡܘܢܐ] ܡܘܢܐ

14                                      [ܡܘܢܐ] ܡܘܢܐ (end of line)

In Rylands Syr. 59 there is not even a space left.

17                                      [ܡܘܢܐ] ܡܘܢܐ

<sup>1</sup> The date of Mingana Syr. 71, of course, precludes the possibility that the slip belongs to the nineteenth century.

In Rylands Syr. 59 Mattai seems to have written  
 ܐܘܠܡܐ first, but then changed this to ܐܘܠܡܐ.

*ibid.* ܐܘܠܡܐ ] ܐܘܠܡܐ

ܐܘܠܡܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ ] ܐܘܠܡܐ 18

In Rylands Syr. 59 Mattai appears to have written ܐܘܠܡܐ first of all, and then altered this to ܐܘܠܡܐ. Mingana's suggestion that Arabic *sanim* "big-humped" is meant is thus probably correct.

p. 370 [79] line 20 ܐܘܠܡܐ ] ܐܘܠܡܐ

21 ܐܘܠܡܐ ] ܐܘܠܡܐ —

p. 371 [80] line 9 ܐܘܠܡܐ ] *om.* ܐ

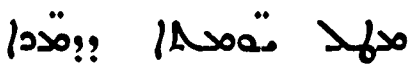
Thus far it has been possible, thanks to an anachronistic slip, to take the document back to at least the thirteenth century. According to Mattai, the copyist of Rylands Syr. 59, the text of the letter was taken from an eleventh-century manuscript from Ṭur‘Abdin. Now while, of course, it is impossible to verify the first half of Mattai's statement, about the date of the *Vorlage*, it is possible to show that the second half, about its provenance, is extremely plausible. This can be done by an examination of the contents of both Rylands Syr. 59 and Mingana Syr. 71.

Numerous items in these two manuscripts<sup>1</sup> also occur in Mingana Syr. 369, a manuscript written over a period of a number of years, 1474-81, by at least three (contemporaneous) scribes of the famous Jacobite monastery, Deir ez Za‘faran, a few miles South East of Mardin, and at the South West extremity of Ṭur‘Abdin. I list the items concerned in tabular form (the letters for the Mingana manuscripts are those of the Catalogue):

<sup>1</sup> In Rylands Syr. 59, from fol. 86 onwards: the colophon to the main work contained in the manuscript (entitled, fol. 6<sup>b</sup>, ܐܘܠܡܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ ] ܐܘܠܡܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ) is to be found on fols. 84<sup>v</sup>-85<sup>r</sup>, where the date, 29th Kanun II 1909, is given. In this colophon Mattai, the scribe, mentions the visit of Patriarch Ignatius II to England, and his audience with the "king of the English, Edward", before travelling on to India and Malabar. The remainder of the manuscript (fols. 86<sup>r</sup>-118<sup>v</sup>) is also written by Mattai, but the contents of these pages, discussed here, are totally unrelated to the earlier (main) part of the manuscript.

<i>Subject</i>	<i>Mingana Syr. 369</i>	<i>Mingana Syr. 71</i>	<i>Rylands Syr. 59</i>
Letter of Philoxenus	—	H	105 <sup>r</sup> -113 <sup>v</sup>
Various explanations <sup>1</sup>	—	I	113 <sup>v</sup> -115 <sup>r</sup>
Parrot and <i>Trisagion</i>	F	K	—
Three Isaacs	G	L	—
Apocalypse of Peter	H <sup>2</sup>	—	—
6 Biblical questions	I	M	—
Moral Tales	J	N	86 <sup>r</sup> -95 <sup>v</sup>
Diocles	K	O	95 <sup>v</sup> -100 <sup>r</sup>
Egyptian monk's question	L	P	100 <sup>r</sup> -101 <sup>r</sup>
On faithful dogs	M	Q	101 <sup>r-v</sup>
Bar Şalibi (Astronomical)	N	R	—
Controversy with Nestorian	O	S	115 <sup>r</sup> -116 <sup>r</sup>
Ephrem on Trinity	P	T	104 <sup>v</sup> -105 <sup>r</sup>
Repentant demon <sup>3</sup>	Q	U	101 <sup>v</sup> -104 <sup>v</sup>
Prayer before an audience	R	W	—
Various	S-Z <sup>4</sup>	—	—
Service for dying	aa-bb	X <sup>5</sup>	—
Various prayers	cc-ff	—	—
Sayings of Fathers	gg	Y	—
On BGDKPT	jj	aa	—
Judas' 30 pieces of silver	ll	bb	—

Evidently there is a very close relationship between these three manuscripts, but what is the precise nature of this relationship? On internal evidence, it is very unlikely that the later of the two Mingana manuscripts, 71, is copied from the earlier, 369<sup>6</sup>;

<sup>1</sup> The first, in both manuscripts, begins . In Rylands Syr. 59, however, the section as a whole is much shorter than in Mingana Syr. 71.

<sup>2</sup> By a different hand from that of G and I in this manuscript.

<sup>3</sup> All three manuscripts exhibit the same lacuna near the end of this piece.

<sup>4</sup> By two (?) separate hands, different from those of Basil and Behnam who wrote the rest of the manuscript.

<sup>5</sup> From the data in the Catalogue, it would appear that sections bb-ff of Mingana Syr. 369 were not to be found in Mingana Syr. 71. In fact, however, 71 has the beginning of "bb", and may once have contained "cc-ff" of 369, for between Mingana Syr. 71, fols. 127 and 128 an unknown number of leaves has been lost (Mingana Syr. 71, fol. 127<sup>v</sup> = Mingana Syr. 369, fol. 82<sup>r</sup> (i.e. "bb"), while 71, fol. 128<sup>r</sup> = 369, fol. 96<sup>v</sup> (i.e. "ff"); note that "gg" in the latter manuscript begins mid fol. 96<sup>v</sup>, not 96<sup>r</sup>, as stated in the Catalogue).

<sup>6</sup> I base this conclusion on a collation of two texts, the *History of Diocles* (369, fols. 40<sup>v</sup>-43<sup>v</sup>; 71, fols. 101<sup>r</sup>-106<sup>v</sup>), and the *History of the thirty pieces of*

rather, both manuscripts probably derive from a common *Vorlage*, and since Mingana Syr. 369 was written at Deir ez Za'faran, it is extremely likely that Mingana Syr. 71<sup>1</sup> was either itself written in that region, or was copied from a manuscript deriving from that region. Again, it has already been seen that the textual relationship between Mingana Syr. 71 and Rylands Syr. 59 in the Letter of Philoxenus makes it very improbable that the latter is a transcript of the former: rather, both manuscripts will derive from a common *Vorlage*. Whether this *Vorlage* for the Letter of Philoxenus (i.e. Mattai's "eleventh-century" manuscript) was the same Ṭur 'Abdin manuscript which provided the items common to all *three* manuscripts Mingana Syr. 369, 71 and Rylands Syr. 59, is unfortunately uncertain, due to the absence of the letter from Mingana Syr. 369.<sup>2</sup> All that can be said with certainty is that the items common to all three manuscripts will derive from a common Ṭur 'Abdin manuscript, and this manuscript *may* also have contained matter common to the pairs, Mingana Syr. 71 and Rylands Syr. 59, and Mingana Syr. 369 and Mingana Syr. 71.

*silver* (369, fols. 130<sup>r</sup>-131<sup>r</sup>; 71, fols. 134<sup>v</sup>-136<sup>v</sup>). While the texts of the two manuscripts are very close, their few variants are best explained by supposing that the two texts derive from a common *Vorlage*, rather than the one from the other. Diocles is also found in Rylands Syr. 59, which shows especially close affinities with the text of Mingana Syr. 71. I hope to re-edit this work.

<sup>1</sup> While the manuscript seems to have been written by two scribes, they must have belonged to the same time and place, since the division of labour occurs, *in medias res*, between fol. 76<sup>f</sup> and 76<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> Fiey ("Auteur et date . . .", pp. 269-70) points out that Mattai's Ṭur 'Abdin manuscript must have been brought to Mosul, for Mattai, according to the testimony of his widow and friends, never went to Ṭur 'Abdin himself. In fact several parallels to this situation can be found in other manuscripts written by Mattai: Mingana Syr. 8 [of 1911], fol. 247<sup>r</sup> (*Catalogue* I, col. 37), Mattai states that his *Vorlage* was a vellum manuscript brought from Deir ez Za'faran by the monk Ephrem Barṣaum; Mingana Syr. 67 [of 1911], fol. 181<sup>r</sup>, he states that his *Vorlage* was about 1,100 years old, and had been brought from Deir ez Za'faran by (the same) Ephrem Barṣaum, and had been returned thither by him; Mingana Syr. 152 [of 1889], fol. 293<sup>r</sup> (*Catalogue* I, cols. 354-5), he states that his *Vorlage* was a very old manuscript from Deir ez Za'faran, for the time being housed in the church of St. Thomas at Mosul (the present Jacobite cathedral, see Fiey, *Mossoul Chrétienne* (Beyrouth, 1959), pp. 147 ff.).

Criticism and comment on the actual contents of this interesting letter are beyond the scope of this article, which is primarily intended to vindicate Mingana's integrity and reputation as far as this particular document is concerned. So far from being a twentieth-century forgery, the Letter of Philoxenus has turned out to date from at least the end of the thirteenth century, and may well be considerably earlier.