

András Mércz
The Syriac correspondence of Andreas Masius and
Moses of Mardin

Theses of Doctoral (PhD) dissertation

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I. Brief summary of the research objective, and state of research

The objective of this dissertation is twofold. On one hand, the edition of the unique Syriac correspondence between a Flemish orientalist, Andreas Masius (1514–1573) and a Syrian Orthodox monk, Moses of Mardin (died after 1592) in order to make available a new source hitherto hidden in manuscript archives for a large number of researchers working on different fields of science. And on the other, to identify the most relevant issues raised in the letters and assess their importance for historical and cultural historical studies.

Letters are the most important sources for the early modern period therefore it is not surprising that text editions and studies on this subject could fill a whole library. The publication of scholarly correspondences has reached such a level that historians have come up with the idea of creating a huge database that would contain all the one to two million letters of early modern erudites. By now, the first steps have already been taken to realize this grandiose plan.¹ The correspondence of Moses and Masius is special for several reasons. Research to date has almost exclusively examined correspondences written in Latin characters, the considerable number of records written in Hebrew, Arabic, Turkish, Persian, Syriac, Ethiopian or Armenian were up to now neglected. Masius and Moses' Syriac correspondence is an unparalleled corpus which also provides a unique insight into the language learning process. The bulk of previous papers dealt with cases of the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries; 16th-century orientalism is a partly unexplored area.

There was a more or less constant scientific interest in Moses' and Masius' Syriac letters since their genesis. The correspondence became the subject of scholarly research already in the 17th century, and the last few decades witnessed a veritable effervescence around the subject. Four researchers set about the edition of the corpus. A versatile orientalist, Andreas Müller (1630–1694) published in 1673 two letters together with their Latin translation.² In the early 18th century, another German scholar, Gottlieb Siegfried Bayer (1694–1738) copied the letters kept in Berlin with the intention of a future publication which never materialised.³ A Dutch Theologian and Hebraist, Jan Wim Wesselius (1954–) published a preliminary report in 1990

¹ Howard Hotson and Thomas Wallnig. *Reassembling the Republic of Letters in the Digital Age. Standards, Systems, Scholarship*. Göttingen University Press, 2019.

² Andreas Müller, *SYMBOLÆ SYRIACÆ I. Epistolæ duæ Syriacæ amoebææ. Una Mosis Mardeni, Sacerdotis Syri; Altera Andreæ Masii, JCi & Consil. olim Cliviaci. Cum Versione & Notis* (Berlin: Ex Officina Rungiana, 1673).

³ Glasgow, University Library, Ms. Hunter 31.

on the correspondence and announced his intention to publish it, but it has not been realised.⁴ His most outstanding achievement was the discovery of two further letters; thus, the number of the items of the correspondence increased from eight to ten. And finally in 2017, Pier Giorgio Borbone wrote two papers on the subject containing an excerpt from one of Moses' unpublished letters and announced his intention to edit the whole collection.⁵

II. Data collection and research methodology

The correspondence comprises today ten letters. Eight of them were sent by Moses to Masius and one by Masius to Moses. The tenth letter was written by Moses to Jean de Renialme (1512–b. 1570) and Guillaume Postel (1510–1581), his common friends with Andreas Masius. All of the letters are preserved in autograph and partly also in copies in three manuscript archives. Eight autograph letters are kept at the State Library in Berlin. Two further autograph letters are preserved in Leiden at the University Library. Finally, Bayer's 18th century copy of six Berlin letters can be found in Glasgow. The documents were only very briefly described earlier, therefore they are presented in details in the thesis.

The corpus has been examined with different methods. Philological analysis based on inner and outer sources demonstrated that the correspondence consisted of at least 21 letters and not 16 as it was thought earlier. After a thorough examination of the provenience of the manuscripts, possible hiding places of the missing letters were determined. Attempts were made to find some of them in five archives but no new letters were discovered. The comparative analysis of the Berlin and Glasgow manuscript showed that the latter is a poor copy of the former, it does not add to our knowledge, therefore it was disregarded in the text edition. The codicological analysis revealed that the watermarks support one of Moses' astonishing remarks, namely that he sent his letters from the chancellery of the king, the veracity of which has not yet been verified due to lack of parallel source.

⁴ Jan Willem Wesselius, 'The Syriac Correspondence of Andreas Masius: A Preliminary Report', in *V Symposium Syriacum, 1988: Katholieke Universiteit, Leuven, 29-31 Août 1988*, ed. René Lavenant, *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 236 (Roma: Pontificium Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, 1990), 21–29.

⁵ Pier Giorgio Borbone, 'From Tur 'Abdin to Rome. The Syro-Orthodox Presence in Sixteenth-Century Rome', in *Syriac in Its Multi-Cultural Context: First International Syriac Studies Symposium, Mardin Artuklu University, Institute of Living Languages, 20-22 April 2012, Mardin*, ed. Herman G.B. Teule et al., *Eastern Christian Studies* 23 (Leuven-Paris-Walpole, MA: Peeters, 2017), 277–87; Pier Giorgio Borbone, "'Monsignore Vescovo Di Soria", Also Known as Moses of Mardin, Scribe and Book Collector', *Hristianskij Vostok* 8, no. 19 (2017): 79–114.

III. Structure and main theses of the thesis

The essay consists of four major parts. The first chapter overviews the history of the research. It presents in details the literature on the five most important figures of the correspondence, and describes the work of the four most important Orientalists who worked with these letters. A tabular overview shows the current state of scholarship on the publication and translation of the correspondence. The second part presents the corpus. It reassesses the original number of letters, describes in detail the manuscripts containing the letters which are kept in Berlin, Leiden and Glasgow, and then considers where some of the lost letters may have been found. The final two chapters examine the content of the correspondence. A historical approach is applied to discuss biographical questions and issues concerning the early Syriac printing, and for the presentation of the new findings on the provenance of important manuscripts. Finally, it treats the liturgical significance of the correspondence based on the anaphoral fragments preserved in the letters. The edition of the Syriac texts and the English translation is added to the Annex.

From among the results of the dissertation, eleven can be highlighted. Two concerns the corpus and nine the content of the letters. As for the latter, seven new findings belong to the domain of historical research and two is related to liturgy.

Current research estimated that originally 16 letters belonged to the corpus. Philological analysis based on inner and outer sources proved that the correspondence consisted of at least 21 letters, five more than it was thought earlier. Since the autograph letters came down to us, the copies of six Berlin-letters have not received much attention earlier. For the critical edition, it was necessary to consult them in order to assess whether they could contain any valuable information which has been lost in the autograph letters due to the water stains. The comparative analysis of the Berlin and Glasgow manuscript showed that the latter is a poor copy of the former, it does not add to our knowledge, therefore it was disregarded in the text edition.

As for the content of the correspondence, it has been examined as a historical source and seven questions were investigated closely. Two of them concerns biographical questions. Three new findings can be formulated regarding the early history of the Syriac printing. And finally, two discoveries were made on the provenance of valuable Syriac manuscripts.

Two biographical questions were scrutinized. Firstly, concerning Widmanstetter and Masius' friendship the current state of research holds that they were good friends who

cooperated in their Syriac studies. Nevertheless, there are a few passages in Masius' writings where he expressed his opinion about Widmanstetter's achievement in a rebuking manner. The interpretation of these passages is polarising. New information found in the letter help us to review this question. The dissertation confirms the deterioration of their relationship. Based on a wide range of other sources, it was established that their scholarly cooperation ended due to professional rivalry; Widmanstetter practically poached Moses from Masius.

Moses' religious affiliation is the second controversial biographic issue, which has not been fully clarified yet. Originally, he was Syrian Orthodox, but many signs indicate, that he might have converted to Catholicism. The most concrete evidence for his possible conversion to Catholicism is the Catholic profession of faith he made before the Pope and the cardinals during his second stay in Rome in 1552. There are, however, many uncertainties concerning this document and its exact status is unclear. It has been proved that his Catholic profession of faith was rather due to an external compliance pressure than to an inner conviction.

Three important statements have been made on the early history of the Syriac printing based on the correspondence. Former studies named different persons as the initiator of Syriac printing. According to the most accepted opinion Ignatius 'Abdullah, Syrian orthodox patriarch came up with the idea of Syriac printing and he was the one who sent Moses to Europe to arrange the project. It was argued here that the idea came not from the Syrian Orthodox Patriarch but from Moses and Cardinal Marcello Cervini.

Based on the evidence currently available, it is sure that a Syriac font was under preparation in Rome in 1552, but it is not clear what stage the work was at when Moses left Rome. Fresh evidence gained from the letters suggests that only the punches were prepared in the Eternal City, and they were brought by Moses to Vienna where the types were casted.

And thirdly, the background of the bigger *serto* types of the Viennese printing press were scrutinized. In Vienna three typesets were made: one *estrangelo* and two *sertos*. Making one *estrangelo* and one *serto* font was absolutely reasonable for such a highly prestigious edition. However, it is unclear why the bigger *serto* was made. Preparing typesets costed an enormous amount of money, and, since it was apparently hardly used, its creation seems to be totally unnecessary. Based on the letters, it was demonstrated that they were prepared on Moses' own costs and he wanted to bring them with him but Widmanstetter intervened and stopped him.

Two findings concern the field of provenance studies that help us to piece together the way of several manuscripts to Europe. The *Bibliotheca Palatina* or *Palatinate library* of Heidelberg was the most important library of the German Renaissance, numbering approximately 5,000 printed books and 3,524 manuscripts. Current state of research holds that

15 Oriental manuscripts of the Vatican Library which belonged once to the collection of the illustrious Palatina Library were all Guillaume Postel's manuscripts. The dissertation demonstrated that two of them (Vat. Sir. 16 and Vat. Sir. 193) were Moses' manuscripts and argued that a third one (Vat. Sir. 5) was possible also brought to Europe by Moses.

Secondly, it was also determined which manuscript was used as a source for the *editio princeps* of the Syriac New Testament printed in Vienna in 1555. Current research knows about the Ms Austrian State Library, Sir 1 which is a copy prepared by Moses in 1554 in Vienna. It has not yet been investigated which manuscripts Moses used for this work. In the dissertation it was argued that Moses prepared the copy from Vat. Sir. 16.

Last but not least, the content of the correspondence was examined as a liturgical source, since it contains many fragments of Masius' lost manuscript of the anaphora of St. Basil. The anaphora of Saint Basil is one of the most significant Eucharistic Prayers of all Christendom: it has a central position in the Antiochene and Alexandrian liturgical tradition. Furthermore, it was the principal liturgy in the Byzantine and Armenian Rite for centuries; thus, it played a pivotal role in the development of Oriental liturgies. It has a version in virtually all the languages of the Christian East – Greek, Armenian, Syriac, Coptic and Ethiopic. A critical edition or a thorough analysis has been published on all other versions of the anaphora except the Syriac. Fragments found in the letters were compared to a great number of other manuscripts. It has been pointed out that Masius' copy cannot be identified with any other manuscripts known today. The study also showed that the manuscript Masius held in his hands was a copy of the earliest version of the anaphora: Ms. Borg. Sir. 159 and Ms. Atchaneh 5/11.

IV. Relevant publications

Papers:

Andreas Masius' Copy of the Anaphora of Saint Basil in Light of his Correspondence with Moses of Mardin. In: Ephrem A. Ishac – Thomas Csanády – Theresa Zammit Lupi (ed.): *Tracing Written Heritage in a Digital Age*. (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2021) pp. 311–330.

The Coat of Arms of Moses of Mardin. *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies* 22 (2019) pp. 345–393.

Szír kereszténység és a Biblia. [Syriac Christianity and the Bible] *Tiszatáj* (2019. május) pp. 72–83.

Les traductions du *Commentaire sur le Paradis* de Moïse bar Kepha à la lumière du Mouvement Uniate. *Parole de l'Orient* 42 (2016) pp. 343–361.

Mōšē bar Kēpha *Paradicsom-kommentárja* és az európai szír tudomány kezdete. [Moses bar Kepha's Commentary on the Paradise and the beginning of the Syriac studies in Europe] In: Kis Anna Flóra – Schönleber Mónika (ed.): *FARĪQ Tanulmánykötet. A Fiatál Arabisták és Iranisták Konferenciájának előadásai*. (Piliscsaba, 2013) pp. 197–206.

Conference presentations:

Translating Syriac in the 16th century. Andreas Masius' translation of the Syriac Anaphora of St. Basil in the light of his correspondence with Moses of Mardin – Paper presented at the Text and Transmission Joint Research Seminar of the KU Leuven and UGent (Leuven, 17.02.2020)

Andreas Masius' manuscript of the Anaphora of Saint Basil in light of his correspondence with Moses of Mardin – Paper presented at North American Syriac Symposium VIII (Brown University, Providence, 16–19.06.2019)

Le système de relations d'un chrétien oriental en Europe au XVI^e siècle – Paper presented at a conference entitled *Frontières et émigration* (Toulouse, 28–29.03.2019)

Mardini Mózes és Andreas Masius levelezése [The correspondence of Moses of Mardin and Andreas Masius] – Paper presented at Scriptorium Symposium II (Pannonhalma, 07.05.2018)

The Syriac Correspondence of Moses of Mardin – Paper presented at a symposium entitled *Syriac and Its Users in the Early Modern World c. 1500 – 1750* (Oxford, 15.03.2018)

Moses of Mardin and the first printing of the Syriac New Testament – Paper presented at the XII Symposium Syriacum (Rome, 19-24.08.2016)

The translations of Moses bar Kepha's Commentary on the Paradise in the light of the uniate movements – Paper presented at the III Symposium Syro-Arabicum (Kaslik, 07.02.2015)

Az európai szír tudomány kezdete [The beginning of Syriac studies in Europe]– Paper presented at the conference of the doctorants of the Pázmány Péter Catholic University (Piliscsaba, 27.06.2014)