

## INTRODUCTION

# LIBRARIES IN THE SYRIAC TRADITION A SPECIAL VOLUME

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A one-day symposium on libraries in the Syriac tradition was held on May 20, 2010 at Beth Mardutho, Piscataway, N.J., to celebrate the opening of the Beth Mardutho Research Library. This was the First Hugoye Symposium. Since its inception in 1992, but even more so after its formal incorporation in 1998, Beth Mardutho has had a goal of building a library dedicated to Syriac studies.

The first step in building this library took place in 2000 when the eBethArké project was launched. Realizing that accumulating an exhaustive rare book collection in the field is almost impossible, the project aimed to assemble such a collection in digital form. In collaboration with The Catholic University of America's ICOR/Semitic library, Brigham Young University, and few other institutions,<sup>1</sup> a few hundred rare books were digitized. Beth Mardutho's collection is available online as open source at the URL <http://hmml.org/vivarium/BethArke.htm> (courtesy of HMML), and BYU's collection at the URL <http://lib.byu.edu/digital/cua>.

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<sup>1</sup> Duke University contributed to the digitization of a few dozen volumes; *Oriens Christianus* gave permission to digitize its back issues.

In early 2010 space was made available to Beth Mardutho in Piscataway, N.J., and I moved my private book collection of ca. 4,000 items there. I have been collecting books on Syriac since I was fifteen. My father, Anton Kiraz, had a small collection, including a manuscript of the ~~Qur'an~~ written by his uncle Giragos Kiraz, which became the nucleus of my collection. The collection included, *inter alia*, Barsoum's *al-Lu'lu' al-Manthur* and history of Tur 'Abdin, Jacob III's history of the church in India, and various books in Syriac and Arabic. My maternal grandfather, Abdul'ahad Khamis, had a valuable collection of manuscripts and rare books, which I remember seeing many times when I was a child, but its whereabouts are unknown (through my mother's efforts, I managed to inherit only one manuscript, the grammar of Timothy Isaac bar 'Abd Hayo (1643-1721)).

Around 1979, I stumbled across the book warehouse of St. Mark's Monastery in Jerusalem, and I asked the late Mor Dioscoros Luka Sha'ya if I could take duplicate copies. He was always supportive of my crazy passion for Syriac books, and he allowed me to take books as long as they were duplicates. I managed to get almost all the publications of St. Mark's Press, including *al-Hikma* and the *Patriarchal Journal* of Jerusalem, as well as a good portion of the *Patriarchal Journal* of Damascus (it was not until 2005 that I was able to complete these three periodicals). Mor Dioscoros also allowed me to acquire a sample of the movable types used by St. Mark's Press, which by then were no longer in operation. Over the years, my collection grew to what it is now, and in 2010 I moved it to the new space dedicated to Beth Mardutho.

In 2009 Beth Mardutho had completed the partial acquisition of the Abrohom Nuro (1923-2009) collection. Beth Mardutho began acquiring books from Nuro in 2003. For a period of five years, Beth Mardutho acquired ca. 1,000 volumes (Nuro's entire collection, according to a rough estimate count that I did on his request in 2009, is ca. 6,000 titles).

In 2010 I met with Peter Brown of Princeton for lunch to discuss options for supporting the new library location. He immediately offered to include it in a Mellon grant he was submitting with David Michelson. "What is the library called?" he asked. I was not ready for this, but spontaneously answered "The Beth Mardutho Research Library." So BMRL it was.

The library was officially opened on May 20, 2010 with a symposium on libraries in the Syriac tradition. There were about 100 attendees, half of whom were present at the library and the other half via cyber space. The event was broadcast live online courtesy of the Rutgers Center for Middle East Studies and the university's media center. During the symposium, Mor Cyril Ephrem Karim performed a dedication rite. A special ܡܠܚܡܐ was composed for the occasion, which also incorporated parts of a ܡܠܚܡܐ that was prepared by the late Mor Athanasius Y. Samuel and used for the opening of the Vööbus manuscript library in Chicago, IL. Ribbons were cut from ܡܠܚܡܐ ܡܠܚܡܐ by Mor Cyril, Sebastian Brock, Iain Torrance, and Andreas Juckel.

Later in 2010, Edward G. Mathews moved most of his collection, ca. 7,000 volumes, to BMRL. This enriched the library with about 1,000 volumes of Syriac related books as well as many more books on Armenian, monasticism, patristics, Byzantium, Judaica, Eastern Orthodoxy, and other related areas.

BMRL has become a collection of collections. Scholars who are looking for a future home for their private collections are now considering BMRL as a possible home. Three scholars have already made arrangements to have their collections housed at BMRL. May the Lord grant them ܡܠܚܡܐ ܡܠܚܡܐ in good health.

This special volume of Hugoye contains papers that were delivered during the First Hugoye Symposium in addition to other invited papers on the topic of libraries in the Syriac tradition.