

The Scattered Pearls: A History of Syriac Literature and Sciences, by Ignatius Aphram I Barsoum (translated and edited by Matti Moosa). Second Revised Edition. [Gorgias Press 2003; ISBN 1-93196-04-9] xli + 604pp; hardcover.

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- [1] For over fifty years Patriarch Ignatius Aphram Barsoum's introduction to Syriac literature, *The Scattered Pearls*, has been an essential tool for specialist Syriac scholars, and yet it has not had as wide an impact outside the Middle East as it deserves because it has only been available in the original Arabic version (*Kitab al-Lu'lu' al-Manthur*) and in a Syriac translation (*Ktobo d-Berulle Bdire*), and before their republication by the Bar Hebraeus Press in Holland even copies of these editions were difficult to locate.¹ This complete translation into English by Matti Moosa, the first into any European language, is thus to be warmly welcomed because it will enable a far wider readership to gain access to the riches of Barsoum's work.

- [2] Patriarch Aphram Barsoum (1887-1957) was one of a group of Syrian Orthodox and Syrian Catholic scholars in the early twentieth-century Middle East (the other notable figures being Mor Philoxenos Yohanna Dolabani [1885-1969], Mor Gregorios Behnam [1916-1969], and from the Catholic side Patriarch Ignatius Aphrem Rahmani [1848-1929] and Ishaq Armalto [1879-1954]) who made significant contributions to Syriac studies not only because of their profound knowledge of their own traditions and manuscripts, but also because of their familiarity with the great manuscript collections of Europe and with the writings of the European orientalis. (Barsoum's publications included an edition of the Chronicle to A.D. 819 in the CSCO, and articles in western journals, as well as the numerous Arabic works listed on p.x of the

¹ The first Arabic edition was published in Homs in 1943. The second edition, from which this present translation was made, was published in Aleppo in 1956. A third edition or printing appeared in Baghdad in 1976, and a fourth was printed by the Bar Hebraeus Verlag in Glane/Losser in 1987. There were further reprints of the second edition at the Mardin Press in Aleppo in 1987 and 1996. A Syriac translation of the second edition was produced by Mor Philoxenos Yohanna Dolabani and published in Qamishli in 1967, and this was also reprinted by the Bar Hebraeus Verlag in Glane/Losser in 1992.

introduction.) As is clear from Part II of the Epilogue to this volume, entitled 'On the incoherence of some orientalist and their false charges against our learned men, and their refutation,' the orientalist tradition was not received uncritically. Some of Barsoum's criticisms were levelled at academic denials of the historicity of certain religious texts (such as the *Doctrina Addai*, and a number of hagiographical works), but others were directed towards erroneous claims and statements made by Europeans which were simply the product of their ignorance of Syriac texts and traditions, whether through inadequate reading and research, or uncritical reliance upon earlier scholarship, or through lack of access to Syriac manuscripts in the Middle East.

[3] These criticisms draw attention to the key methodological strengths and weaknesses of Barsoum's *Scattered Pearls*. In his very useful introduction Moosa declares (p.xiv): 'It is clear that the Western reader must accept *al-Lu'lu' al-Manthur* on its own terms, as the work of an Eastern scholar writing for an Eastern audience. He must also bear in mind that Barsoum is the Patriarch of Antioch, the head of the Syrian Church.' This is pretty loaded and controversial language, but I take the thrust of the first sentence to be that the balanced coverage of different literary genres and the critical analysis of sources is not always that which might be expected from an academic study produced by a university trained Syriac scholar, whether from the Middle East or elsewhere, and in this Moosa is certainly correct. The second statement also carries much force. Barsoum is sensitive to any implied criticisms of the antiquity of Syrian institutions or of the literary and theological genius of the great Syriac authors. (He is, however, perfectly happy to criticise the literary merits of certain minor Syriac poets and theologians.) As the patriarch of the Syrian Orthodox Church he also strictly limits his history to the writers of his own tradition, and so no mention will be found here of Maronite or Syrian Catholic writers, let alone those of the Church of the East or the Chaldeans. (For these traditions use might be made of the works of Alber Abuna [Beirut, 1970] and Pera Sarma [Tehran, 1962-1970], which could also profitably be translated into a European language, despite having been, with Barsoum, the key sources for Rudolf Macuch's *Geschichte der spät- und neusyrischen Literatur* [Berlin, 1976].)

[4] The other side to Barsoum's focus on Syrian Orthodox traditions and authors is that he is able to write about these with

real authority, based on a life-time's study of primary materials. Among his quoted sources are the literary histories and bibliographies of Assemani, Wright, Duval, Chabot, and Baumstark, as well as the catalogues of all the major European collections of Syriac manuscripts, and yet Barsoum is frequently able to correct their statements about the details of the lives of key Syriac authors on the basis of Syriac sources available to him (although rarely referenced), as well as to call attention to Syriac texts either unknown to western scholars or previously thought lost. He is also interested in the continuity of the Syriac literary tradition down to his own day, and so includes many authors omitted from the western literary histories which frequently come to an abrupt halt in the late thirteenth or fourteenth centuries. Because he had himself catalogued many of the Syrian Orthodox manuscript collections (a list of his unpublished catalogues is included in the table of his sources), Barsoum is frequently able to identify which of these libraries preserve manuscripts of specific works and authors. (Frustratingly, if unsurprisingly, no catalogue numbers or shelf marks are provided for these Syrian Orthodox manuscripts, but these can sometimes be determined by cross-referencing the *Scattered Pearls* with the three handwritten catalogues of Dolabani published by the Mardin Press in Aleppo in 1994, or with the catalogue of the Patriarchal manuscript collection published by Dolabani, Lavenant, and Brock [PdO 19 (1994) 555-661].) Any scholar or student interested in post-sixth-century authors in particular would thus be well advised to consult Barsoum as a matter of course, although never to the exclusion of the established bibliographies of Baumstark and Duval etc. Barsoum's *Scattered Pearls* is an essential supplement and corrective to such works, but does not replace them (and neither was it intended to do so).

- [5] The first 218 pages of the *Scattered Pearls* (which Moosa first translated as his 1965 PhD thesis at Columbia University) contains a history of Syriac literature divided by genre and theme. Some of these sections provide very cursory accounts of their subject; the Bible is covered in one and a half pages, for example, and Theology in two and a half pages. 'Church Liturgies,' however, which are so frequently marginalised in other literary histories, are here given 64 pages, with very full listings of anaphoras, plus tables of categorised liturgical manuscripts from libraries in both the Middle East and

Europe. Also noteworthy are the sections on 'Centres of Learning,' 'Syriac Libraries,' and 'Syriac Calligraphy,' the last of which is accompanied, in an appendix, by a lengthy list of celebrated Syriac scribes. All of these sections can be rather tantalising, however, because the very interesting raw data they contain is rarely provided with any references to sources. Yet in many of these short chapters Barsoum includes the names of Syriac authors and works which have evaded the nets of western scholars, and so even an apparently superficial section can contain material not readily to be found in other bibliographies.

- [6] For most readers I suspect it will be the second section of the *Scattered Pearls* pp. 219-524 in Moosa's translation, which will be found to be most helpful. This contains the biographies of 294 Syriac writers² ordered chronologically from Wafa the Aramaean poet (who is said to be pre-Christian) down to Fr. Ya'qub Saka who died in 1931. These entries are very readable, and the combination of biography and bibliography can be highly illuminating. Given the wealth of material that is now available elsewhere on the great Syriac authors of the fourth and fifth centuries, there is little in the accounts of the writers of these periods that will excite the scholar, and some detail and arguments that will seem rather dated. It is in his account of authors of later periods, whose texts are still read and studied in the Syrian Orthodox monasteries and seminaries, that Barsoum really comes into his own. (There are 57 listed authors, for example, who post-date Bar Hebraeus.) Many of these figures are little known to western scholars, and it is clear that many would repay closer study.

- [7] As someone who prior to the publication of Moosa's English translation had always previously made use of Dolabani's 1967 Syriac translation of Barsoum's *Scattered Pearls*, I thought it might be interesting to compare the two versions. Dolabani was very knowledgeable about the Syriac manuscripts in Syrian Orthodox church libraries and in private collections belonging to individual priests and families. Occasionally therefore he adds references in brackets within the main text, or in footnotes, to additional Syriac texts which he knows to have been written by certain authors, or to

² Taking into account the typographical slip by which Bardaisan and the Odes of Solomon are both numbered 3, and the unnumbered entry for Dionysius Saliba is introduced by Moosa after 233 from its original place in an addendum in the Arabic text!

the present (i.e. 1967) location of manuscripts referred to by Barsoum. For example, on p.28, in reference to the library of Dayr al-Za'faran (cf. Moosa p.15 §18), he notes that the majority of its books had been removed to the episcopal library of Mardin, which then contained more than a thousand volumes, and on p.34 (cf. Moosa p.20 para. 2) he notes that the Kharput manuscript referred to by Barsoum had recently been transferred to Dayr al-Za'faran. Again, on p.581 (cf. Moosa p.519), he adds that the monk 'Abd al-Nur also translated the Psalm Commentary of Daniel of Salah into Arabic. The number of such references should not be exaggerated, but they are clearly of some academic interest.

- [8] A comparison of the lists of biographies of Syriac authors in the two texts also reveals that there is a significant number of additions in the Syriac translation, and I think it might be helpful to list the additional entries, with Dolabani's numbering:

- 10. Basilios, bishop of Homs (d. 359)
- 11. Philon, bishop of Carpasia (d. 394)-an ascetic whom Barsoum suggests may have been the author of the *Liber Graduum*.
- 22. Gregory of Cyprus (C. 7, but said to be C. 4).
- 23. Xystus (C. 4)
- 110. Athanos of Amid (C. 7)
- 111. Philogrios (C. 7)
- 119. Theodotos (d. 729)
- 202-203. Abu al-Faisal Saad and Abu Nasr Yahya ibn Jrair of Tagrit (C. 11).
- 271. Presbyter John of Basibrina (C. 15)
- 272. Hasan bar Zurqo of Mosul (C. 15)
- 279. Presbyter Isa of Beth Shaddad of the Jezira (d. 1495)
- 281. Deacon Nur ad-Din of Mardin (d. 1500)
- 289. Monk Abd al-Aziz, called Bar Sallaki (C. 16)
- 291. Rabban Jacob of Qastro d-Qasro (d. 1575)
- 303. Presbyter Lahdo of Habbob (C. 18)
- 306. Presbyter Isho Arboyo (fl. 1816)
- 309. Monk Isho Gribo (d. 1916)
- 313. Deacon Nimatallah Danno (d. 1951)
- 314. Patriarch Ignatios Aphram Barsoum (d. 1957)

Some of these are authors whom Barsoum had mentioned in the thematically organized first half of his book but had not included in this section, but the majority are additions by Dolabani

himself. The most detailed, and perhaps most interesting, of these entries are those assigned to the post-fourteenth century authors, and fortunately the substance of these passages can be gleaned from Macuch's work, mentioned above, since he was dependent on the Syriac translation of Barsoum rather than the Arabic original. In his introduction (p.xviii) Moosa asserts that 'there is little in Bishop Dolabani's translation that merits inclusion here.' As I have indicated, I think Dolabani's work does in fact continue to be of some independent value, and it would have been nice to see the relatively small amount of additional material incorporated into this present translation, but this is far from being a serious defect.

- [9] This second corrected edition of Moosa's English translation³ reads very well, and the text is remarkably free of the typographical slips which plague most lengthy books. Moosa has provided an excellent critical introduction to Barsoum's work which could almost be published as a review in its own right. He has also added occasional explanatory notes throughout the volume, and an absolutely essential index which is absent from all of the Arabic and Syriac editions of the *Scattered Pearls* that I have seen. (The multiplicity of names and titles given to various people has occasionally resulted in individual authors being given multiple entries in the index, each with distinct sets of page references. I noticed 'Basil' and 'Basilius,' 'Amid' and 'Diyarbakir,' 'Anton of Takrit' and 'Anton Rhetor,' and in one unfortunate case 'Areopagite' and 'Dionysius the Areopagite' and 'Pseudo-Dionysius'! Let the reader beware! If a third edition is ever planned it might also be useful to replace the large numbers of page references listed under the headings of named libraries of Syriac manuscripts with a separate index of numbered or categorised Syriac manuscripts mentioned in the text. These are, however, simply minor corrections.)

- [10] Matti Moosa should be warmly congratulated for having made this excellent translation of Barsoum's pioneering work available to a new generation of scholars and students. As Moosa himself acknowledges, the *Scattered Pearls* should be used discerningly, but it is a truly essential complement to existing works of Syriac reference

³ The Columbia University thesis of 1965 made available the first section of Barsoum's work, and this translation of the complete text was first published by the Passeggiata Press (Pueblo, Colorado) in 2000.

and belongs on the shelves of all libraries and readers with an interest in Syriac.