

A NOTE ON JACOB OF SARUG'S MEMRE ON JOSEPH[†]

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ABSTRACT

Among Jacob of Sarug's unpublished works is a cycle of ten memre on Joseph in Egypt. Many manuscripts seem to contain this cycle in whole or in part. However, these manuscripts actually contain several different works on Joseph all attributed to Jacob. This note identifies and distinguishes the genuine and the misattributed Joseph memre.

An essential starting point for anyone working with the unpublished memre by Jacob of Sarug is Arthur Vööbus's four volume survey of manuscripts.¹ In it he lists twenty-one manuscripts which contain memre on the Old Testament patriarch Joseph. Though it may seem that these manuscripts each contain all or part of the cycle of ten memre on Joseph by Jacob, this is not the case. The memre that he lists actually fall into four distinct

[†] I first presented this material at the 2008 Symposium Syriacum in Granada. I am grateful to the comments and the corrections I received then, as well as those I received from the anonymous *Hugoye* reviewers.

¹ Arthur Vööbus, *Handschriftliche Überlieferung der Memre-Dichtung des Ja'qob von Serug*, CSCO 344, 345, 421, 422 (Louvain: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1973–80).

1. [A 147; B₁ 501; B₂ 348] .¹ ⲛⲓⲁⲛⲉ ⲛⲓⲁⲛⲉ ⲛⲓⲁⲛⲉ ⲛⲓⲁⲛⲉ ⲛⲓⲁⲛⲉ
2. [A 148; B₁ 512; B₂ 357] .² ⲛⲓⲁⲛⲉ ⲛⲓⲁⲛⲉ ⲛⲓⲁⲛⲉ ⲛⲓⲁⲛⲉ ⲛⲓⲁⲛⲉ
3. [A 149; B₁ 84; B₂ 56] .³ ⲛⲓⲁⲛⲉ ⲛⲓⲁⲛⲉ ⲛⲓⲁⲛⲉ ⲛⲓⲁⲛⲉ ⲛⲓⲁⲛⲉ
4. [B₂ 219] .⁴ ⲛⲓⲁⲛⲉ ⲛⲓⲁⲛⲉ ⲛⲓⲁⲛⲉ ⲛⲓⲁⲛⲉ ⲛⲓⲁⲛⲉ
5. [A 150; B₁ 480; B₂ 330] .⁵ ⲛⲓⲁⲛⲉ ⲛⲓⲁⲛⲉ ⲛⲓⲁⲛⲉ ⲛⲓⲁⲛⲉ ⲛⲓⲁⲛⲉ
6. [A 152; B₁ 38; B₂ 25] .⁶ ⲛⲓⲁⲛⲉ ⲛⲓⲁⲛⲉ ⲛⲓⲁⲛⲉ ⲛⲓⲁⲛⲉ ⲛⲓⲁⲛⲉ
7. [A 153; B₁ 76; B₂ 51] .⁷ ⲛⲓⲁⲛⲉ ⲛⲓⲁⲛⲉ ⲛⲓⲁⲛⲉ ⲛⲓⲁⲛⲉ ⲛⲓⲁⲛⲉ
8. [A 154; B₁ 541; B₂ 381] .⁸ ⲛⲓⲁⲛⲉ ⲛⲓⲁⲛⲉ ⲛⲓⲁⲛⲉ ⲛⲓⲁⲛⲉ ⲛⲓⲁⲛⲉ
9. [A 155; B₁ 211; B₂ 143] .⁹ ⲛⲓⲁⲛⲉ ⲛⲓⲁⲛⲉ ⲛⲓⲁⲛⲉ ⲛⲓⲁⲛⲉ ⲛⲓⲁⲛⲉ
10. [A 156; B₁ 534; B₂ 377] .¹⁰ ⲛⲓⲁⲛⲉ ⲛⲓⲁⲛⲉ ⲛⲓⲁⲛⲉ ⲛⲓⲁⲛⲉ ⲛⲓⲁⲛⲉ

The cycle of Joseph memre is found complete in three Middle Eastern manuscripts, and partially in several manuscripts in European collections. *Damascus Patriarchate* 12/13,³ and *Damascus Patriarchate* 12/14,⁴ two of the most important collections of

³ Vööbus, *Handschriftliche Überlieferung*, CSCO 344, 138–41 (description); CSCO 345, 124–33 (contents; Joseph memre are items 213–222); also cataloged among the Za‘faran manuscripts in Mar Filoksinos Yohanna Dolabany, *Catalogue of Syriac Manuscripts in Za‘faran Monastery* (Damascus: Sidawi Printing House, 1994), 59–71.

⁴ Vööbus, *Handschriftliche Überlieferung*, CSCO 344, 141–43 (description); CSCO 345, 134–49 (contents; Joseph memre are items 221–230). Vööbus only records the titles (,ⲉⲛ ⲛⲓⲣⲁ ⲛⲓⲣⲁ ⲛⲓⲣⲁ ⲛⲓⲣⲁ). However, thanks to notes

Jacob's memre, both contain the complete cycle, as does *Mardin* 136.⁵ Nine of the ten memre on Joseph (1–3, 5–10) are included in *Vatican Syriac* 117, a large-folio paper codex of 555 leaves written in three columns in a clear serito hand of the twelfth or thirteenth century.⁶ This is the most complete copy of the cycle in a European collection. However, the manuscript suffered quite severe water damage en route from the Monastery of the Syrians in the Nitrian desert to Rome in 1707.

Another Vatican manuscript, *Vatican Syriac* 252, originally contained the last four memre of the cycle.⁷ This vellum manuscript is written in three columns in a fine estrangela hand dated to 932. By the time it reached the Vatican Library only sixty-five folios of it remained. Again the manuscript is water damaged, but in this case the combination of water damage and age conspire to severely obscure the text. Moreover, since the manuscript was first catalogued by Assemani, folios 51–56 have been lost. These folios form the middle of a quire, the outermost leaves of which survive as folios 50 and 57. Since Assemani noted that the first of the four Joseph memre began on f. 53, and that the next memra in the collection, "On Cain and Abel," begins on f. 60r, it is clear that only half of the folios on which the Joseph memra were copied now survive.

The remaining manuscripts in European collections contain only a single memra from the cycle. Memra eight is found in

taken by Andrew Palmer, I am able to provide the foliation, titles and length for each memre: 1. "Envy of brothers and their deceit," f. 334b1–336b2 (440 lines); 2. "Joseph is sent to the brothers and thrown in the pit," f. 336b1–338a2 (350 lines); 3. "Joseph is sold by the brothers," f. 338a2–339b2 (360 lines); 4. "Potiphar's wife," f. 339b3–341a3 (352 lines); 5. "Joseph is sent to prison on a false charge," f. 341a3–343a1 (350 lines); 6. "Joseph interprets dreams in Prison," f. 343a1–344b2 (358 lines); 7. "Joseph has an audience with Pharaoh and interprets his dreams," f. 344b2–346a1 (302 lines); 8. "The famine," f. 346a1–346b2 (126 lines); 9. "The brothers come to buy grain," f. 346b2–350b2 (958 lines); 10. "Jacob comes with the brothers to Egypt," f. 350b2–352b1 (412 lines).

⁵ Vööbus, *Handschriftliche Überlieferung*, CSCO 344, 154–56 (description); CSCO 345, 184–91 (contents: items 224–232a).

⁶ Joseph Simon Assemani, *Bibliothecae Apostolicae Vaticanae codicum manuscriptorum catalogus*, pt. 1. vol. 3 (Rome, 1759; repr. Paris: Maisonneuve Frères, 1926), 87–107 (the Joseph memre are items 173–181).

⁷ Assemani, *Bibliothecae Apostolicae Vaticanae*, pt. 1. vol. 3, 539–40.

another Vatican manuscript, *Vatican Syriac* 464, a paper codex dated to 1234 containing a collection of the writings of Ephrem, Isaac of Antioch and Jacob of Serugh.⁸ The ninth memra is contained in both of our two oldest manuscript witnesses of Jacob's cycle on Joseph. *British Library Add.* 14,584 is a vellum codex of 94 leaves, dated by Wright to the sixth or seventh century.⁹ Its memra on Joseph (fol. 105b–118b)¹⁰ is included as the fourth of a collection of eleven memre by Jacob of Serugh. *British Library Add.* 14,604, a vellum codex of 117 leaves dated by Wright to the seventh century,¹¹ includes this same memra on Joseph and his brothers (f. 69a–89b) among a varied collection of memre, homilies, and excerpts from Syriac and Greek patristic authors.

The contents of these manuscript witnesses can be conveniently tabulated as follows:

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
BL Add. 14,584 (6 th /7 th C)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Y	-
BL Add. 14,604 (7 th C)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Y	-
Vatican Syriac 252 (932)	-	-	-	-	-	-	Y?	Y?	Y	Y
Damascus Patriarchate 12/13 (1031)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Damascus Patriarchate 12/14 (11 th C)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Vatican Syriac 117 (12/13 th C)	Y	Y	Y	-	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Vatican Syriac 464 (1234)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Y	-	-
Mardin 136 (1725)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y

⁸ Arn. van Lantschoot, *Inventaire des manuscrits syriaques des fonds Vatican (460–631): Barberini oriental et Neofiti*, Studi e Testi, 243 (Città del Vaticano: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1965), 4–6 (memra 8 on Joseph is item 12 h, found on f. 196r–205r).

⁹ William Wright, *Catalogue of Syriac Manuscripts in the British Museum Acquired Since the Year 1838*, 3 pts. (London: British Museum, 1870–72; repr. Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2004), 506–7.

¹⁰ The title is simply, *ܡܡܪܐ ܕܝܫܘܥ*.

¹¹ Wright, *Catalogue of Syriac Manuscripts in the British Museum*, 724–26.

Two previously unidentified fragments of the Joseph cycle belong with those discussed above. The first of these is found in *Vatican Syriac* 543, an eighteenth century collection of extracts from the works of Ephrem, Jacob of Serugh and other authors. Van Lantschoot has done an admirable job of identifying many of these quite fragmentary excerpts, linking them both to printed editions and, where unpublished, to other manuscript witnesses.¹² The excerpt from the homily on Joseph proved elusive however, and he gives only the incipit, which does not match with any in the known Joseph corpus.¹³ In fact, this is an extract from the first memra by Jacob.¹⁴

Another unidentified fragment is found in *Birmingham Mingana Syriac* 546.¹⁵ The seventeenth memra in this collection is attributed to Jacob (f. 85a–86a), and simply bears the title, ܐܬܬܐ ܕܝܫܘܥ.¹⁶ Though the incipit of the work suggests that this is a new work, all that is original about the piece is a brief introduction, following which we are presented with a series of extracts from Jacob's second memra on Joseph.¹⁷

MANUSCRIPTS FOR WHICH THE ATTRIBUTION IS UNCERTAIN

Five manuscripts elude our attempts at classification. *St. Mark's Convent* 156 (also known as *Damascus Patriarchate* 12/16), is part of a vast twelfth century compilation of Jacob's memre, among which are two memre on Joseph.¹⁸ *St. Mark's Convent* 163, a late

¹² Lantschoot, *Inventaire des manuscrits Syriaques*, 65–68.

¹³ ܐܬܬܐ ܕܝܫܘܥ ܕܝܫܘܥ ܕܝܫܘܥ (the last extract treated in item 14 (f. 62r–64r) of the catalog entry).

¹⁴ The extract corresponds to *Vatican Syriac* 117, f. 413r, beginning in the third column, penultimate line.

¹⁵ Alphonse Mingana, *Catalogue of the Mingana Collection of Manuscripts*, 1010–13.

¹⁶ I am grateful to Steven Ring for inspecting this manuscript and providing me with a copy of his notes and images of the relevant folios.

¹⁷ I am preparing a paper on these two extracts.

¹⁸ Vööbus, *Handschriftliche Überlieferung*, CSCO 344, 147–51 (description); CSCO 345, 158–65 (contents; Joseph memre are item 299 [ܐܬܬܐ ܕܝܫܘܥ “on Joseph”] and item 300 [ܐܬܬܐ ܕܝܫܘܥ ܕܝܫܘܥ “10. On

eighteenth century collection, also contains two memre attributed to Jacob.¹⁹ *Ms. Midyat Gülçe* 11, a varied nineteenth century collection, contains yet another pair of memre on Joseph attributed to Jacob,²⁰ while *Ms. Midyat Melki* 13 contains a single memra on Joseph and his brothers.²¹ Finally, *Deir Zafaran* (A) includes a pair of memre on Joseph copied in a seventeenth or eighteenth century serto hand.²² While it is likely that these five manuscripts do indeed contain memre from Jacob's cycle on Joseph, we await better access before they can be incorporated elsewhere in our schema.

LOST AND MISATTRIBUTED MEMRE ON JOSEPH

Thus far, we have only accounted for fifteen of the twenty-one manuscripts known to Vööbus. The Joseph memre in the remaining manuscripts are either lost or misattributed. The Joseph memra once contained in *Vatican Syriac* 116 is now lost. The table of contents of this ninth century codex list twenty memre by Jacob

Joseph”]); Mar Gregorios Yohanna Dolabani, *Catalogue of Syriac Manuscripts in St. Mark's Monastery* (Damascus: Sidawi Printing House, 1994), 353.

¹⁹ Vööbus, *Handschriftliche Überlieferung*, CSCO 344, 76–7 (description); CSCO 345, 38–41 (contents; Joseph memre are item 19 [ܐܠܗܐ ܕܝܫܘܥ, “On Joseph by Mar Jacob”], and 20 [ܐܠܗܐ ܕܝܫܘܥ ܕܡܪܝܢ, “On the sons of Jacob by Mar Jacob”]); Dolabani, *Catalogue of Syriac Manuscripts in St. Mark's Monastery*, 348–49. The manuscript also contains a sogitha on Joseph in the metre of Ephrem (item 2) and a memra, “On Benjamin and Joseph by Jacob in [the metre of] Balai” (item 21). Note *St. Mark's Convent* 165, item 14 (entitled, ܐܠܗܐ ܕܝܫܘܥ “On the revelation of Joseph”) is on the dream given to the New Testament Joseph (Matt. 1).

²⁰ Vööbus, *Handschriftliche Überlieferung*, CSCO 344, 164–65 (description); CSCO 345, 201–3 (contents; Joseph memre are items 19 [ܐܠܗܐ ܕܝܫܘܥ ܕܡܪܝܢ], and 20 [ܐܠܗܐ ܕܝܫܘܥ ܕܡܪܝܢ, “On the sons of Jacob by Mar Jacob”]).

²¹ Vööbus, *Handschriftliche Überlieferung*, CSCO 421, 116 (description); CSCO 422, 201–3 (contents; Joseph memre are items 19 [ܐܠܗܐ ܕܝܫܘܥ ܕܡܪܝܢ], and 20 [ܐܠܗܐ ܕܝܫܘܥ ܕܡܪܝܢ, “On the sons of Jacob by Mar Jacob”]).

²² Vööbus, *Handschriftliche Überlieferung*, CSCO 421, 155–57 (description); CSCO 345, 76–77 (the manuscript contains only the Joseph cycle);

of Serugh, but only six survive.²³ The eighth of the lost memre was entitled, "Concerning Joseph, and concerning his brothers."²⁴

British Library Add. 14,590, dated by Wright to the eighth or ninth century, originally contained a collection of memre attributed to Ephrem (all but one of which are lost) and Jacob of Sarug.²⁵ Among the eighteen memre attributed to Jacob is a single memra on Joseph in heptasyllabic meter (f. 61b–68a). The incipit (ܐܚܝܬ ܝܫܘܥ ܕܡܡܪܐ ܕܝܥܩܒ) is sufficient to identify this memra as the second in the cycle attributed to both Ephrem and Balai and published by Bedjan and Lamy.²⁶

Three other manuscripts attribute to Jacob parts of a collection of four memre on Joseph otherwise attributed to Narsai.²⁷ The two memre on Joseph found in *Bodleian Library* 135, a seventeenth century manuscript containing a collection of 101 memre attributed to Jacob of Serugh, are, in fact, an interesting and unique West Syrian version of the first two homilies of the Ps. Narsai cycle.²⁸ Likewise, *Berlin Or. Quart.* 802 (Sachau 59), an East Syriac manuscript dated to the beginning of the eighteenth century, attributes the first, second, and third memre of the Ps. Narsai collection to Jacob of Sarug.²⁹ Finally, in the new catalogue of *Rylands Syriac* 18 (olim 52A), made subsequent to Vööbus's study,

²³ Assemani, *Bibliothecae Apostolicae Vaticanae*, pt. 1. vol. 3, 86–7.

²⁴ ܐܚܝܬ ܝܫܘܥ ܕܡܡܪܐ ܕܝܥܩܒ ܕܡܡܪܐ ܕܝܥܩܒ.

²⁵ Wright, *Catalogue of Syriac Manuscripts in the British Museum*, 752–54.

²⁶ Paul Bedjan, *Histoire complète de Joseph par Saint Ephrem: Poème en douze livres*, 2nd ed. (Paris and Leipzig: O. Harrassowitz, 1891); Thomas Joseph Lamy, *Sancti Ephraem Syri Hymni et Sermones*, 4 vols. (Mechliniae: H. Dessain, 1882–1902). On this work see Robert Phenix, *The Sermons on Joseph of Balai of Qennesbrin*. Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008).

²⁷ Paul Bedjan, *Homilae Mar Narsetis in Joseph* (Paris and Leipzig: O. Harrassowitz, 1901).

²⁸ Payne Smith, *Catalogi codicum manuscriptorum bibliothecae Bodleianae: pars VIIa, Codices Syriacos, Carshunicos, Mandaecos, complectens* (Oxford, 1864), 430 (item 99; f. 395a–401b and 402a–410b). Note that Sebastian Brock also includes the incipits for these memre in his most recent list of incipits for Jacob (Brock, "Index of First Lines," nos. 360 and 243).

²⁹ E. Sachau, *Verzeichniss der syrischen Handschriften der Königlichen Bibliothek zu Berlin*. Die Handschriften-Verzeichnisse der Königlichen Bibliothek zu Berlin 23.i–ii (Berlin: A. Asher, 1899).

Scholars have been reticent to tackle this task in part because there is no complete copy of the cycle in any Western library, and the usefulness of the two most complete manuscripts is limited by the water damage they suffered *en route* to the library. Thus, access to the Middle Eastern manuscripts is a prerequisite for any proposed edition and full study of this important cycle of memre—and such access has been difficult to obtain. It was therefore wonderful to learn in early 2010 that the manuscript library of the Church of the Forty Martyrs in Mardin has been digitized.³⁵ Through the kindness and foresight of Archbishop Philoxenos Saliba and Chorbishop Gabriel Akyüz, and the fine efforts of the Hill Museum and Manuscript Library, this significant collection of manuscripts is now accessible to scholars throughout the world. More particularly, *Mardin* 136 and the forty other Mardin manuscripts that contain works of Jacob are now available to researchers on Jacob's corpus.

The availability of these Mardin manuscripts relates directly to a second point raised by this note, namely that further study is needed to better delimit the scope of the Jacob corpus, both in terms of identifying all the surviving works as well as weeding out spuriously attributed texts. Vööbus's otherwise remarkable quartet of volumes are rendered less valuable because he collected, sorted and organized Jacob's works by manuscript and title rather than by incipit.³⁶ Moreover, we are still left with the task of distinguishing authentic from spuriously attributed works. Brock has taken significant steps towards responding to these two needs by organizing Jacob's work by incipit, and also by pointing out numerous memre which are also attributed to other authors. However, there is clearly a need to build upon the valuable work of Vööbus and Brock and produce a *Clavis* to the work of Jacob of Sarug. Again, the preparation of such a work will require access to the many important manuscripts of Jacob's work in Middle Eastern collections—another reason to welcome the news that the Mardin manuscripts are now available for study.

³⁵ "Where We're Working: *Church of the Forty Martyrs, Mardin, Turkey*," *Illuminations: Newsletter of the Hill Museum and Manuscript Library* Winter 2010: 8–9.

³⁶ A failure already noted by Brock ("Published Verse Homilies," 1987: 297).