

# The Digitizing of Selected Syriac MSS in the Vatican Apostolic Library

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## Introduction:

[1] In an effort to facilitate access to important Syriac manuscripts, the Center for the Preservation of Ancient Religious Texts (CPART) of Brigham Young and the Vatican Apostolic Library (VAL) have begun work on a joint project which involves digitizing 28 selected Syriac manuscripts in the possession of the VAL.

[2] The agreement was signed on March 20, 2000 and according to the terms of this agreement, CPART and the VAL will electronically co-publish the texts and electronic images of these manuscripts.

[3] The manuscripts to be digitized were chosen from a short list of manuscripts prepared by Sebastian Brock and include the following:

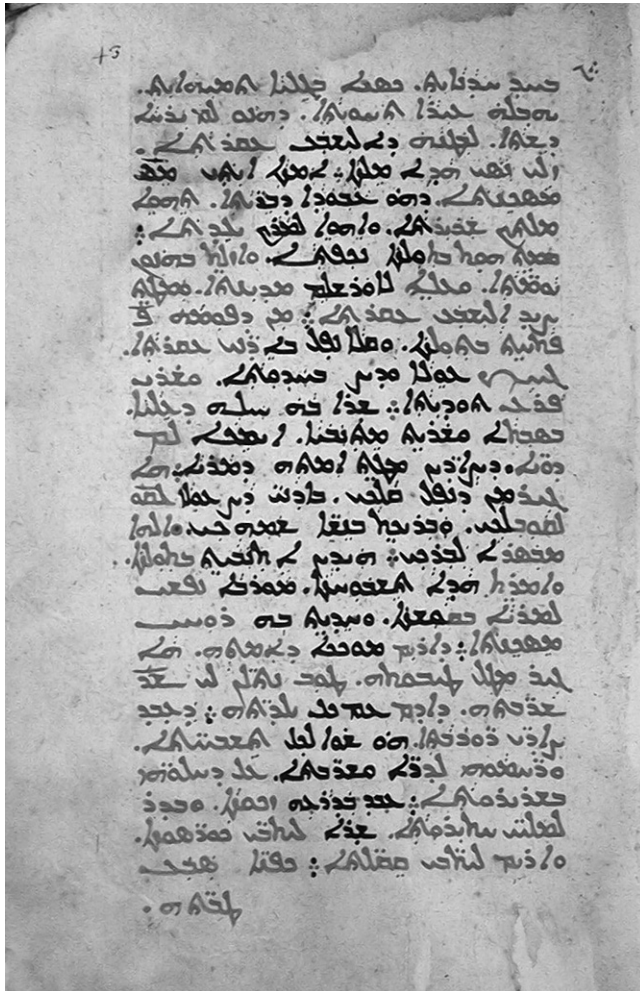
Vat. Syr. 37	*Lives of Saints
Vat. Syr. 42	East Syriac Euchologion (1202 AD)
Vat. Syr. 59	West Syriac funeral services (1266 AD)
Vat. Syr. 68	West Syriac Beth Gazo (1465 AD)
Vat. Syr. 83	East Syriac ḥudra (1537/9 AD)
Vat. Syr. 110	Ephrem, commentary on Genesis (523 AD)
Vat. Syr. 111	Ephrem, Hymns on Church etc. (522 AD)
Vat. Syr. 112	Ephrem, Hymns on Paradise (551 AD)
Vat. Syr. 113	Ephrem, Hymns on Faith (552 AD)
Vat. Syr. 114	*Jacob of Serugh, verse homilies (523 AD)
Vat. Syr. 120	*Isaac of Antioch, verse homilies (6th century)
Vat. Syr. 124	Isaac of Nineveh (14th century)
Vat. Syr. 125	Isaac of Nineveh
Vat. Syr. 135	*Philoxenos etc. (7th/8th century)
Vat. Syr. 140	Severus, Against Julian (528 AD)
Vat. Syr. 141	Severus, Cathedral homilies (tr. Jacob of Edessa)
Vat. Syr. 147	*Moshe bar Kepha etc. (1234 AD)
Vat. Syr. 151	*Timothy II, On Sacraments (1631 AD)

Vat. Syr. 157	Isho'yahb III, Letters (10th century)
Vat. Syr. 161	*Acts of Persian Martyrs
Vat. Syr. 163	Chronicle of Edessa
Vat. Syr. 165	Thomas of Marga, Monastic history (1663 AD)
Vat. Syr. 189	*John of Dalyatha (11th century)
Vat. Syr. 191	*Ibn Sina (Syriac translation)
Vat. Syr. 367	Isaac of Nineveh (8th century)
Vat. Syr. 586	*Questions and answers on Aristotle, Categories (13th century)
Borgia Syr. 13	Melkite Euchologion (12th century)
Borgia Syr. 60	East Syriac Beth Gazza
	*indicates a text that has not yet been published

### Phase 1:

- [4] During the first phase of this project, the manuscripts are being digitized in the VAL by CPART and VAL staff. In all cases, high-resolution images are being created in grayscale using a Kodak MegaPlus camera with an array of 2x3k. These images are stored in TIFF format and are 6 megabytes each. In addition to these high-resolution grayscale images, low-resolution color images are being created of many of the manuscripts. In the case of certain mss, however, such images are not made. For example, Vat. Syr. 110 and Vat. Syr. 111 are sixth century manuscripts of Ephrem, and the ink is so monotone (and on many folios very faded) that color pictures do not add anything substantial to the viewing of these texts.
- [5] The images thus obtained are stored both on CD's and on AIT tapes for archival purposes. In most cases, the mss are clear enough that even the low resolution images allow a user to read the texts easily.
- [6] In those cases where the ink is very faded, or the manuscript otherwise damaged, we have been using filters, or else choosing specific wavelengths of light in order to get clearer grayscale images.
- [7] Ultimately, these electronic images will constitute a backup system for these valuable texts, but this is not the primary purpose of the project. The primary purpose of the project is the electronic

publication of these texts, as will be explained in the following paragraphs.



Sample of an from Vat. Syr. 83

**Phase 2:**

- [8] The texts of these 28 mss will be keyed into computer files and then marked and put into WordCruncher, the search engine which CPART used to create its Dead Sea Scroll database (published in 1999 by Brill). This phase will be quite labor intensive, and it is anticipated that it will take approximately two years to complete.

**Final publication:**

- [9] After the texts have been prepared electronically in WordCruncher, they will be published on CD's along with the electronic images. It is anticipated that at the beginning of each page, there will be an icon which, when activated, will display the image of the original manuscript for that page. The publication will be a joint publication of the VAL and CPART/BYU.
- [10] At the time of this writing, we are in the middle of phase 1, i.e. digitizing the manuscripts in the VAL. We expect that this first phase will be completed before the middle of July. We hope that we will be ready for final publication during the summer of 2002.