
BOOK REVIEWS

Lucy-Anne Hunt. *The Mingana and Related Collections. A Survey of Illustrated Arabic, Greek, Eastern Christian, Persian and Turkish Manuscripts in the Selly Oak Colleges, Birmingham: s.a. [1997?], 93 pp.*

The short book under review here (henceforth, the Survey) was conceived by its author to complement already published catalogues of Eastern manuscripts held at the Library of the Selly Oak Colleges, Birmingham. A bibliography of those catalogues is given in the first chapter of the Survey (pp. 2–4) entitled “Introduction”. It is accompanied by a description of the library collection by language. The following collections are thus described: Arabic manuscripts (Muslim and Christian), Persian, Turkish, Syriac, Greek, Armenian, and Ethiopian manuscripts and scrolls; papyrae; fragments of Jewish manuscripts (mainly from the Cairo Genizah), fragments from Georgian manuscripts from Sinai, etc. The author of the Survey explains (p. 3) that an addition to existing descriptions was necessary because at the time of the initial cataloguing of the Birmingham manuscript collections, questions of manuscripts artistic virtues were given short shrift. Moreover, a portion of the manuscripts remained uncatalogued up through the present (their total number is not given). Some of them (Turkish, Persian and Arabic) are described for the first time in the Survey (in the tenth, concluding chapter). The author says the following about the principles of describing manuscripts in the Survey: “The basic description follows a format frequently used in manuscript cataloguing: the measurements, binding, state, date, content of the text, palaeography, codicology and a list of the illustrations, and summary bibliography” (p. 3).

The second chapter — “Background to the Mingana and related collections” (pp. 4–9) — describes how the manuscript collection took shape. The key role in the collection's creation was played by the chocolate magnate and philanthropist Dr. Edward Cadbury, as well as Alphonse Mingana, for whom the industrialist funded several trips to the East to collect manuscripts. In Lucy-Anne Hunt's own words, “... the collection of manuscripts was as diverse in its coming together as it is in its content. The driving spirit behind it was the philanthropic support

of missionary activity in the Middle East by Dr. Edward Cadbury, motivated by the desire to stimulate at Woodbrooke research of the highest order into Theological and Mission Studies. Alphonse Mingana was the instrument in the attempt to realise that dream, through his travels to collect manuscripts and his work in cataloguing them” (p. 9).

The third chapter — “Islamic Arabic manuscripts” (pp. 10–35) — contains descriptions of 80 manuscripts (Qur'āns, commentaries on the Qur'ān, works on the Qur'ān and the Islamic tradition, legal texts, works on dogmatics, mysticism, philosophical, historical and devotional texts, texts on grammar, works of literature, biographies of Muḥammad, geographical text, texts on astronomy and astrology, magical text, and some other miscellaneous manuscripts). All of these manuscripts have already been described in the printed catalogue, and the Survey always provides references to their call numbers. The present edition repeats (following the earlier, already published catalogue), for the most part, only the author's name, the title of the work, and the date of copying (if available). The additional material consists of a scrupulous enumeration of various types of illuminations (such information was absent in the earlier catalogue). Unfortunately, the technical language employed for description gives only a general sense. In 1993, I noted the imprecision of the terminology and its lack of universal applicability¹.

On the other hand, some of the 80 descriptions in this section are accompanied by illustrations (12 black-and-white and 2 colour). A juxtaposition of the illustrations with the descriptions of the corresponding manuscripts helps one to gain a better sense of things, aiding the development and emergence of a national terminology (in this case, English-language) with an eye to its future internationalisation, so to speak. The inclusion of illuminated manuscripts in a separate catalogue provides specialists in the field with a convenient guide where they can find a list of illuminations of all kinds in each manuscript. At the same time, the technical language employed to describe the artistic elements in conjunction with the selected illuminations serves up yet another portion of food for thought on the unsatisfactory state of national and international terminology.

¹ Val. V. Polosin, “K opisaniiu arabskikh illuminovannykh rukopisei”, in *Peterburgskoe vostokovedenie*, issue 3 (St. Petersburg, 1993), p. 154. The English version of this work was published, see *idem*, “To the method of describing illuminated Arabic manuscripts”, *Manuscripta Orientalia*, 1/2 (1995), p. 16.