# Dionysius Bar Ṣalībī's Works in the Mingana Collection of Syriac and Arabic Manuscripts, with special emphasis on his Polemical Treatise 'Against the Muslims'\*

[Obras de Dionisio Bar Ṣalībī en la Colección Minagana de manuscritos siriacos y árabes, con especial énfasis en su tratado polémico 'Contra los musulmanes']

## **Rifaat EBIED**

The University of Sydney Rifaat.ebied@sydney.edu.au

- **Resumen:** The purpose of this paper is to present a comprehensive survey of these seminal writings which have survived in the Mingana Collection of Syriac Manuscripts, arranged according to the subject matter, together with a brief analysis of their contents as well as a consideration of their value. Special emphasis will be laid on Bar Ṣalībī's *Polemical Treatises*, and in particular his *Treatise Against the Muslims*.
- Abstract: El propósito de este artículo es presentar un estudio global de estos escritos fundamentales que se han conservado en la Colección Mingana de manuscritos siriacos, dispuestos de acuerdo con la materia del tema, junto con un breve análisis de sus contenidos, además de una consideración sobre el valor de éstos. Hemos dedicado un especial énfasis a los *Tratados polémicos* de Bar Ṣalībī, en particular en su *Tratado contra los musulmanes*.

Palabras clave: Bar Ṣalībī. Colección Mingana. Manuscritos. Tratados polémicos.

Key words: Bar Ṣalībī. Mingana Collection. Manuscripts. Polemical Treatises.

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The rich collection of the Mingana Syriac and Arabic Manuscripts, preserved in the University of Birmingham Library<sup>1</sup>, contains numerous valuable, and in some cases unique, works by Dionysius Bar Ṣalībī, Metropolitan of Amid (d. 1171 AD) in a variety of fields: Homilies, liturgical works, canon law, commentaries on classical and patristic texts, polemical treatises, theological works and biblical commentaries. Many of these works have not been edited, on the whole remaining un-translated as an entirety, and have been so rarely the subject of extended analysis by scholars in general and historians in particular.

The purpose of this paper is to present a comprehensive survey of these seminal writings which have survived in the Mingana Collection of Syriac Manuscripts, arranged according to the subject matter, together with a brief analysis of their contents as well as a consideration of their value. Special emphasis will be laid on Bar Ṣalībī's *Polemical Treatises*, and in particular his *Treatise Against the Muslims*, which is fresh source for assessing the relationships between Christians and Muslims of the Levant in the 12<sup>th</sup> century.

The importance of inter-faith dialogue in the contemporary world is undisputed and cannot possibly be overstressed. Nor is it doubted that sound research in, and investigation of, surviving documents from the past, such as those of our author, can dispel misconceptions and stereotypes which have too often contributed to distrust and conflict between the adherents of Christianity, Judaism and Islam. Christians, Jews and Muslims have lived together for centuries, sometimes in concord, at other times in conflict. One of the most tense periods for these communities was in the twelfth century, precisely the period of literary activity of our author and

<sup>\*</sup> An updated version of a paper presented at the Sixth Woodbrooke-Mingana Symposium on Arab Islam (Cross-Fertilisation and Cooperation in the Islamic Milieu). Selly Oak, Birmingham, 16-19 September 2009.

A. MINGANA, Catalogue of the Mingana Collection of Manuscripts. Vol. I: Syriac and Garshuni Manuscripts, Cambridge, 1933. For the life, career and works of Alphonse Mingana, see Samir Khalil SAMIR, Alphonse Mingana 1878-1937 and his Contribution to early Christian-Muslim Studies, Selly Oak Colleges, 1990.

following the impact of the Crusades which upset the delicate balance of communities in the Middle East. To date, we only possess a partial knowledge of how adherents of these three global faiths in this medieval period encountered and perceived each other. Similarly, we have little understanding of what actually happened between these groups and particularly the manner of arguments that were employed by either side in their altercations and accusations against one another. This is largely because most of the relevant documents have remained inaccessible and on the whole remaining unedited and not translated.<sup>2</sup>

#### The Author of the Works

Bar Ṣalībī was one of the most varied, productive and prolific authors of Syriac literature who played a major role in the final stage of flourishing of the Syriac theological tradition (the Syrian renaissance of the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries). He was a distinguished hierarch of the Syrian Orthodox Church who earned the now familiar epithet "the eloquent doctor" and was hailed as the "star of his generation" by Michael the Syrian.

A rehtor, polemist, deacon, bishop and metropolitan, Bar Ṣalībī was born in Melitene (west of the Euphrates) at the beginning of the 12<sup>th</sup> century. His baptismal name was Jacob (James), but he is known as Dionysius, the name he assumed when he was elevated to the episcopacy of Mar'ash (Germanicia) in 1154. It was during that year that Mar'ash was attacked by Armenians and Bar Ṣalībī was carried off as a prisoner of war but he escaped on foot to the Monastery of Kalasyur.<sup>3</sup> He was appointed

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Cf. Rifaat EBIED, "Prejudice and polarization towards Christians, Jews and Muslims:'The Polemical Treatises' of Dionysius Bar Şalībī" in *Christians and Muslims in Dialogue in the Islamic Orient of the Middle Ages*, ed. by Martin TAMCKE, Beirut, 2007, pp. 171f; R. EBIED, The Syriac Polemical Treatises of Dionysius Bar Salibi, Metropolitan of Amid (D. 1171 AD)", *Parole de l'Orient* 31 (2006), p. 57.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> This event is recorded by Bar Hebraeus in his *Chronography*. Cf. Stephen Desmond RYAN, *Dionysius Bar Salibi's Factual and Spiritual Commentary on Psalms 73-82*, «Cahiers de la Revue Biblique» 57 (Paris, 2004), p. 5.

metropolitan of Amida in 1167, and remained there until his death on 2<sup>nd</sup> November 1171.

## The Works

Bar Ṣalībī's works have been considered a very valuable witness to the lost works of earlier authors.<sup>4</sup> They abound with allusions to, and citations from, such sources, some of which are no longer extant. Hence part of the value of his writings is that they distill the Syriac intellectual tradition of the first millennium.<sup>5</sup> To this end, J. Rendel Harris describes these works as "a magazine of early traditions".<sup>6</sup>

Works of Bar Şalībī have survived, either completely or partially, in the Mingana Collection in at least 30 (thirty) Syriac and Karshuni manuscripts. These are: Mingana Syriac MSS 4, 54, 71, 89 105, 137, 152, 155, 181, 183, 215, 225, 231, 234, 295, 317, 331, 332, 342, 343, 345, 347, 369, 386, 424, 460, 480, 513, 525, 549. In a number of cases multiple works and/or copies of writings of Bar Ṣalībī have survived in these manuscripts, and to the above list should be added a number of manuscripts which only contain quotations from our author on a variety of subjects.

Works of Bar Ṣalībī which survived in the Mingana Collection of Manuscripts can be divided into seven categories. These are: polemical treatises; biblical commentaries; homilies and liturgical writings; canon law; commentaries on classical and patristic texts; theological works; miscellaneous writings. There follows a brief survey and analysis of these works focusing on his polemical works in general and *Treatise Against the Muslims* in particular.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> S. D. RYAN, Dionysius Bar Salibi's Factual and Spiritual Commentary on Psalms 73-82, p. xvii

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Cf. R. EBIED, "The Syriac Polemical Treatises of Dionysius Bar Salibi, Metropolitan of Amid (D. 1171 AD)", *Parole de l'Orient* 31 (2006), p. 58.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> The Commentaries of Isho'dad of Merv 5, p. xxxi (quoted by S. D. RYAN, Dionysius Bar Salibi's Factual and Spiritual Commentary on Psalms 73-82, p. xvii).

#### I. Polemical Treatises

Bar Ṣalībī wrote seven polemical treatises which offer rare and illuminating insight into Christian-Jewish-Muslim relations, not from the perspective of Western Crusaders, but from 'within', from the frequently neglected viewpoint of the Oriental Orthodox tradition. In particular, his treatise *Against the Muslims*, written at a particularly turbulent time of heightened tensions, is fresh source for assessing the relations between Christians and Muslims of the Levant in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. It was a period of intense religious animosity throughout the Middle East. A hundred years after the arrival of the first wave of crusaders was sufficient time to allow attitudes and perceptions to be formulated and become entrenched. The value of this treatise for understanding polemic between Christians and Muslims is no more urgent in today's vexed international arena.<sup>7</sup> Manuscripts containing copies of **six** of these polemical treatises have survived in the Mingana Collection. These are:

## (a) Treatise Against the Muslims (Muhammadans)

Three versions, one of which is incomplete, of this Treatise have survived in the Mingana Collection. These are: Mingana MS 89, fols. 39a-84b [موجد المحدي (محمد المحمد) (محمد المحمد المحم محمد المحمد الم

The treatise comprises three discourses (*memrē*) divided into 30 chapters. Bar Ṣalībī divides his text into two synoptic columns, quoting the Qur'ān in Syriac translation in one column and commenting in the other. Only chapters XXV-XXX which contain the quotations from the Qur'ān (the third *memrā*) were reproduced and translated by A. Mingana based on one

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> R. EBIED, "Prejudice and polarization towards Christians, Jews and Muslims", in *Christians and Muslims in Dialogue in the Islamic Orient of the Middle Ages*, p. 176f.

manuscript.<sup>8</sup> The treatise was also the subject of study by Sidney Griffith<sup>9</sup> who notes that the work is "unique among the works of Christian writing in Syriac"<sup>10</sup> He also remarks that it is "unique not only among Syriac dispute texts, but among Christian works on Islam in general from the medieval period"<sup>11</sup>. More recently it was edited by Joseph P. Amar.<sup>12</sup> As Mingana pointed out,<sup>13</sup> Bar Ṣalībī's aims in citing the Qur'ānic quotations in Syriac are threefold. These can be summarized as follows:

- 1. To confirm a given Christian doctrine by listing all the Qur'ānic verses dealing with Jesus, Mary, the disciples and the Holy Spirit;
- 2. To draw attention to certain apparent contradictions of the Qur'ān where he includes all the passages in which he puts side by side the apparently contradictory statements made by the Prophet Muhammad;
- 3. To present to his readers the story of some Biblical incidents as narrated in it. Under this item are included all the passages dealing with the Patriarchs Abraham, Noah, etc. whose story is often narrated in a different way from that given in the Canonical Books of the Old and New Testaments.

Confirmation of Mingana's hypothesis and claim regarding the source of these Qur'ānic quotations in Syriac, containing "variant readings at odds

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> MS Mingana Syr. 89; see A. MINGANA, "An Ancient Syriac Translation of the Kur'an Exhibiting new Verses and Variants", *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 9 (1925), pp. 188-235.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Sidney GRIFFITH, "Dionysius bar Salibi on the Muslims", in *IV Symposium Syriacum* 1984, «Orientalia Christiana Analecta» 229 (Rome, 1987), pp. 353-365.

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> S. GRIFFITH, "Dionysius bar Salibi on the Muslims", in *IV Symposium Syriacum 1984*, p. 361.
 <sup>11</sup> S. CRIFFITH, Suriae Waiture on Muslims and the Palining Challenge of Islam, Margin

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> S. GRIFFITH, *Syriac Writers on Muslims and the Religious Challenge of Islam*, «Moran Etho» 7 (Kerala: St Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute, 1995), pp.23-24.

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Joseph P. Amar, Dionysius Bar Şalībī: A Response to the Arabs, «CSCO» 614, 615, Scriptores Syri 238 (Text), 239 (Translation) (Louvain, 2005).
 <sup>13</sup> A Margaretti A Statistical Content of the Araba and the Araba

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> A. MINGANNA, "An Ancient Syriac Translation of the Kur'an", pp. 188f; cf. R. EBIED, "Prejudice and polarization towards Christians, Jews and Muslims", in *Christians and Muslims in Dialogue in the Islamic Orient of the Middle Ages*, p. 178.

with the 'standard' text of the Qur' $\bar{a}n''^{14}$  will have to await a thorough investigation and scrutiny of the nature of these translations into Syriac.

## (b) Treatise Against the Jews

Three copies, one of which is incomplete at the end, of this Treatise are extant in the Mingana Collection. These are: Mingana MS 89, fols. 29a-38b لنهم المحلم ال

The text of this work, which is divided into eight chapters (*Kephalia*), was reproduced from a single manuscript (Harris Cod. Syr. 83) as Part I by J. de Zwaan in 1906.<sup>15</sup> Part II, the translation, was never published.

## (c) Treatise Against the Nestorians

Four copies of this Treatise are extant in the Mingana Collection. These are: Mingana MS 89, fols. 85a-92b (مان محمد المحمون); MS 215, fols. 116a-185a مان محمد محمد المحمون المحمد المحمون); MS 215, fols. (المتحج المحمد المحمد المحمد المحمد المحمد); MS 549, fol. 27 (مان محمد محمد محمد محمد المحمد)); MS 549, fol. 27 (مان محمد محمد محمد محمد المحمد). One of these MSS (295) is incomplete at the end and contains only the first three chapters of the treatise and another (549) is a fragment of the work containing chapters 8 and 9 only.

The first part of the Treatise is divided into two *memrē*, subdivided into twelve and thirty-nine *kephalia* respectively. The second part of the work consists of questions and answers between Nestorians and Jacobites. The

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> These remarks were also echoed by Rendel HARRIS in his article, "The new Text of the Kuran", *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 10 (1926), pp. 219f.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> J. DE ZWAAN, *The Treatise of Dionysius bar Salibhi against the Jews. Part I: The Syriac Text* (Leiden, 1906).

Treatise has not yet been edited or translated. The sole analysis of its contents, based on one manuscript, Paris MS Syr. 209, was given by F. Nau in 1909.<sup>16</sup>

## (d) Treatise Against the Armenians

Two copies of this Treatise have survived in the Mingana Collection. These are: Mingana MS 215, fols. 305b-329b محمد المحمد محمد المحمد ا المحمد الم

This is a controversial work in which Bar Ṣalībī outlines the ecclesiastical habits of the Armenians and answers all their objections. He refers to them as a people "dense of mind, stiff-necked, and disobedient to the truth".<sup>17</sup> A facsimile reproduction of the text of this work was published by Mingana in the *Woodbrooke Studies* Series in 1931.<sup>18</sup> A brief consideration of the contents of the work was given by P. van der Aalst in 1959.<sup>19</sup>

## (e) Treatise Against the Armenian Patriarch Kewark

Two manuscripts containing the text of this treatise have survived in the Mingana Collection, viz. MS 215, fols. 329b-359a (المحصر المحصر)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> F. NAU, "Analyse du Traité écrit par Denys bar Salibi contre les Nestoriens", *Revue de l'Orient Chrétien, Deuxiéme série* 14 (1909), pp. 298-320.

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> S. D. RYAN, Dionysius Bar Salibi's Factual and Spiritual Commentary on Psalms 73-82, p. 1.

A. MINGANA, The Work of Dionysius bar Salibi against the Armenians, in Woodbrooke Studies IV, fasc. 9 (Cambridge, 1931), pp. 1-111 [reprinted from the Bulletin of the John Rylands Library 15 (1931)].
 P. WUNDER ANGER "Decision of Salibi and Cambridge". Banda and the Company of the Salibi and Cambridge.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> P. VAN DER AALST, "Denis bar Salibi polémiste", *Proche-orient chrétien* 9 (1959), pp. 10-23.

#### (f) *Treatise Against the Chalcedonians (Melchites)*

## II. Biblical Commentaries

Bar Ṣalībī is regarded as a very important figure in the history of Syriac Bible interpretation, being credited with the largest and most complete

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> A. MINGANA, "A Treatise of Bar Ṣalībī against the Melchites", *Woodbrooke Studies I*, Fasc. 1 (Cambridge, 1927), pp. 2-95 [reprinted from the *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 11 (1927), pp. 110-203].

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> P. VAN DER AALST, "Denis bar Salibi polémiste", *Proche-orient chrétien* 9 (1959), pp. 11-17.

commentary on the Old and New Testaments preserved in Syriac. Part of the value of his commentary is the recovery of earlier sources. Moreover, he is credited with an innovation in the layout of his commentary since there are no exact precedents for his methodology in former Christian or Jewish biblical commentaries. In his commentaries on the Old Testament books, he divides his work into two separate commentaries, factual (or literal) and spiritual and he presents them in synoptic columns in a mirror arrangement.<sup>22</sup> Copies of commentaries by Bar Ṣalībī on the Old and New Testament are extant in the following Mingana manuscripts:

- (a) The Old Testament commentaries:
- (b) The New Testament commentaries:
- Mingana MS 54 (fols. 1-343b) comprises a commentary on the four Gospels (محمد محمد المراجة المحمد المحمد

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> See Rifaat EBIED, s.v. 'Dionysius Bar Salibi' in *The Encyclopedia of the Bible and its Reception* (forthcoming), to be published by Walter de Gruyter. For a comprehensive survey of published commentaries of Bar Salībī on books of the Old and New Testaments, see S. D. RYAN, *Dionysius Bar Salibi's Factual and Spiritual Commentary on Psalms 73-82*, pp. 14-22.

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- Mingana MS 105 (fols. 34b-37a) contains an Introduction to the four Gospels ما أمحم حمارا بصمحلا بحصا حمدالا بهجم حكفا حسنا محمعاتا ساندا أس ...) .... سما أمحم حمارا بصمحل بحما معارا بهجما حمدالا بيجما حد الحمدي
- Mingana MS 332 (fols. 8b-11b) comprises a treatise on the number of similarities and dissimilarities between the four Gospels and a short introduction to each one of them لمد المنا المعلم المنا المعلم المنا المعلمين معلمين المعلمين المعلمين المعلمين المعلمين المعلمين
- Mingana MS 89 (fols. 10b-18b) contains a commentary on the Book of the Acts and on the Apocalypse المحيان المنابع المحية ا
- Mingana MS 525 (fols. 1-146a) contains a commentary on the Book of the Acts and on the Catholic and Pauline Epistles (ها الله المربي المحمور المربي المرب

**III.** Homilies and Liturgical Writings

Bar Ṣalībī made many seminal contributions to the study and revision of the Syrian Orthodox Liturgy. He is credited with writing treatises and commentaries on the Eucharist, the Holy Chrism (*Myron*), Baptism, the Holy Cross, etc. He is also credited with authoring several Anaphoras and explanations of the West Syrian Liturgy. The following works, in both Syriac and Karshuni, are extant in the Mingana Collection of Manuscripts:

- Mingana MS 183, fols. 50a-53b: The Anaphora of Bar Ṣalībī;
- Mingana MS 231, fols. 2b-8a: Another copy of The Anaphora of Bar إلىعوزا بعربطا بعالميدي (المعوزا بعربطا بعالميد);
- Mingana MS 137, fols. 1-67: The explanation (*Tafsīr*) of the Syrian Orthodox Liturgy معين العربي بديسموه علين العربي بديسموه علي العربي ...)
  (مد هان العمين العربي العمين العربي العربي العربي العربي العربي العربي ...)
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- Mingana MS 225, fols. 12a-59a محمد المحمد المحمد المحمد المحمد (مصلان) (مصلان أمصل إمل المحمد المحمد محمد المحمد ال

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> See S. D. RYAN, Dionysius Bar Salibi's Factual and Spiritual Commentary on Psalms 73-82, p. 9 [quoting Peter KAWERAU, Die jakobitische Kirche im Zeitalter der syrischen Renaissance, Idee und Wirklichtkeit (Berlin, 1960), p. 83].

- Mingana MS 225, fols. 98a-100b: A commentary on the Holy Chrism (معلاه);
- Mingana MS 342, fols. 34a-42a: The explanation of the Sacrament of the Holy Chrism (المحت منا منحت ستا محت مبعا);

## III. Canon Law

Bar Şalībī assembled and systematized collections of laws relating to specific topics, e.g. penitential canons on the obligations of bishops and priests, on penitence absolution, on the sins of the laity, etc. Works in this category have survived, in both Syriac and Arabic, in the following manuscripts in the Mingana Collection:

- Mingana MS 234, fols. 1b-6b نحب نعب معد: محمد محمد العب المحد: محمد العب المحد: محمد العب المحد المحد المحد المحد المحد محمد المحد المحد محمد المحد المحد المحد المحد محمد المحد المحد محمد المحد ا محمد محد المحد محد المحد الم

- Mingana MS 345, fols 28-33: A treatise on how to deal with penitents (بمحط، بعمل: حي مناط مالحما الا لمحص لالم
- Mingana MS 345, fols. 35-88 and 89: A treatise containing the penitential canons and a fragment on penitence and absolution (معلاه) (معلاه) (بحب بالمعال هديا منا بالحب بالمعال).
- Mingana MS 345, fols. 95-105: A Treatise on the obligations of bishops and priests and the canons dealing with them (محملا المعصوما مالمحمد).
- Mingana MS 105, fols. 33a-34a: A short commentary on the Canons of Eusebius بنمنا ا، مصل همها بنصط حز رخب مدي مناطريس بنما ا، محل مساطريس بنما ا، محل مساطريس بنما ا، محل ا، محل ا ا، محل ا، محمد معامل ا، محم
- Mingana MS 480, fol. 23a: A short treatise on the number of Eusebian Canons that belong to each Evangelist (محمد وحسوا وحمل وحسوا وحمل منتبا).

#### IV. Commentaries on Classical and Patristic Texts

Bar Ṣalībī wrote a commentary on the works of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite. A copy of this commentary is preserved in Mingana MS 539, fols. 3b-235b ستار الست العمة العمة المناه المالية مالية المالية المالية المالية المالية المالية المالية المالية المالية مالية المالية المالية المالية المالية م مالية مالية مالية المالية المالية المالية المالية المالية المالية المالية مالية المالية المالية المالية المالية م

- VI. Theological Works
- Mingana MS 152, fols. 304a-305a: Seven Letters in Syriac attributed to Bar Ṣalībī .(هحنه (محنه)
- Mingana MS 460, fols. 11a-12b: A short treatise on the history of the twelve Apostles (محب اللالىمية); and on the seventy Disciples (محب الله المحب محمد).

## V. Miscellaneous Writings

The remaining works of Bar Ṣalībī which are extant in the Mingana Collection do not fall into any specific category and are, therefore, classified as "Miscellaneous Writings". These are as follows:

- Mingana MS 215, fols. 56a-59a: A treatise on a) The meaning of all the objects found in a church, and church possession; b) The vestments of the priests; c) Images and genuflections; d) All the precious stones منه وزار المحمد معنه وزار المحمد منه وزار المحمد معنه وزار الم

## Conclusion

All in all, then, the foregoing survey of Bar Ṣalībī's works which have survived in the Mingana Collection of Syriac and Arabic (Karshuni) manuscripts represents a vast literary corpus on a variety of topics and subject matter by our author. It is, therefore, a witness to the prolificacy and the considerable literary activity of this Syrian Patriarch in spite of his copious ecclesiastical activities and responsibilities during a turbulent time of heightened tensions in the region in which he was living. It is also a witness to the erudition of Alphonse Mingana to whom scholars are indebted for having laboured and exerted tremendous efforts in acquiring,

collecting and finally cataloguing these seminal manuscripts, some of which contain unique copies of the works of Bar Ṣalībī.

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