BACKGROUND OF THE HISTORY OF MOSLEM LIBRARIES—*Concluded*

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Christian scholars, schools, and libraries also played an important rôle in the transmission of Greek learning to the Arabs. In addition, they contributed their own interpretations, and the influence of Christian theology is to be traced in many Moslem doctrines. The statement of A. J. Butler, concerning the state of literature among the Copts of Egypt, that "every monastery and probably every church once had its own library of manuscripts,"[50] is applicable also to Syria, Asia Minor, Palestine, Iraq, and Persia. An interest in learning was not limited to any one Christian sect in the East. The use of churches and monasteries as schools had a direct influence on the development of Mosque schools in Islām.[51] The convents of the Darwīsh fraternities likewise are lineal descendants of the numerous Christian houses of retreat.

Christianity, in the East especially, very early made its peace with Greek philosophy, which it adapted to its own purposes. As in Islām, so too in Christendom there were always those who viewed pagan thought with suspicion, but in spite of them Christian theology developed under its influence. At the same time that fanatical mobs plundered the Caesarion and Serapium the Fathers of the Alexandrian church were making good use of the products of Greek speculation.

However, Christianity also developed its own distinctive literature and probably the earliest Christian libraries contained chiefly collections of such works. The nucleus of church libraries consisted of necessary service-books, to which were added other writings intended for edification and instruction. Frequent allusions, such as Jerome's advice to a correspondent to consult church libraries, imply that they were numerous.[52] Probably in most cases the books were housed in church buildings, and in those with a triple apse it seems likely that

[50] *Ancient Coptic Churches in Egypt* (Oxford, 1884), II, 239.

[51] See art. "Masdjid," *Ency. Islām*, p. 351.

[52] See *Epist. XLIX*, § 3: *Ad Pammachium.*

one of the lateral apses was used to house books.[53] Although the earliest Christian library of which there is any record is that established by Bishop Alexander (d. 250 A.D.)[54] at Jerusalem, doubtless there were earlier collections wherever there were schools. For instance, at Edessa there seems to have been a medical school in the second century.[55] Eusebius found the collection of historical references in the library at Jerusalem invaluable for the writing of his *Ecclesiastical History*. The library at Caesarea which was used by Jerome was even more important. Here one sees the influence of the Greek tradition, for Jerome says its founder Pamphilus (d. 309 A.D.) was "a man who in his zeal for the acquisition of a library wished to take rank with Demetrius Phalerus and Pisistratus."[56] This was the library which treasured the supposed Hebrew original of the First Gospel and most of the works of Origen, the teacher of Pamphilus.[57] Augustine's bequest of his private library to the church at Hippo is well known.[58]

The first imperial library which gave a place to Christian writings was that of Constantine, in which were preserved such as survived the destructive influence of Diocletian. This collection of about sixty-nine hundred volumes was added to by Julian and Theodosius the Younger. Later emperors also collected books. Some scholars, including Tischendorf, have believed that the imperial library or parts of it survived the Fall of Constantinople and was preserved in the Seraglio of the Turkish sultans.[59]

Nestorians from the beginning seemed to have been interested in books; they served as one of the chief bridges between Greek and Moslem learning, for without the books which they translated at Edessa and later at Nisibis and Jundīshāpūr, Arabic science would have been greatly impoverished.[60] Many of the best Arabic translations were made, either from the original Greek or from Syriac transla-

[53] J. W. Clark, *Care of Books* (Cambridge, 1901), p. 63.

[54] *Ibid.*, p. 62.

[55] Sarton, *op. cit.*, I, 310.

[56] *Epist. XXXIV: Ad Marcellum*, ed. Migne, XXII, 448.

[57] Clark, *op. cit.*

[58] *Ibid.*, p. 63.

[59] E. Edwards, *Libraries and Founders of Libraries* (London, 1864), pp. 19 f.

[60] Sarton, *op. cit.*, I, 381 f.; see also W. Wright's art. "Syriac Literature," *Ency. Brit.* (9th ed.).

tion, by Christians, chief of whom were Ḥunain ibn Iṣḥaḳ (Johannitius) and his pupils. They in turn were indebted to earlier translators —for instance, Sergius of Rāsᶜain and Jacob of Edessa.[61]

However, it was not only at the great schools that literary activities were carried on. Even the smaller monasteries contained libraries, and the tasks of copying and illuminating manuscripts continued for centuries. Individual monks also possessed their private collections. Margaret Smith, speaking of educated *Ṣūfīs* (Moslem mystics) and the influence upon them of Christian mysticism and pagan philosophy, says, "The libraries of their Christian teachers, the monks of Damascus and Nisibis and Edessa, must have contained much of Christian mystical literature of the Greek and Syriac speaking churches and this would have been at the disposal of their pupils if they so wished."[62]

The biographies of two Nestorian monks, Rabban Bar ᶜIdta and Rabban Hormizd, translated by Budge, furnish interesting pictures of the intellectual life of the inmates of monasteries in Iraq during the years just previous to and contemporary with the rise of Islām. Some prided themselves on possessing neither furniture nor books in their cells, but others prized their books highly, as is shown by a pathetic and curious story of an old monk who had been persecuted by wicked brethren at the monastery of Mār Addōnā and fled forgetting his books.[63] The education of Bar ᶜIdta is told in considerable detail, how weekly he took one book from the library and spent his time in pondering and memorizing it. This he continued to do for years, at the same time copying manuscripts which he sold to buy his food. The studies of young monks, who showed a scholarly turn of mind, were directed by the head of the institution who called at their cells nightly to see that they occupied themselves properly and to advise and consult with them.[64]

Egypt also was full of monasteries in which distinctly Christian and sometimes more secular studies were pursued. It was realized early by those who governed religious communities that without books

[61] Wright, *op. cit.*, pp. 833 f., 839 f.; *Ḥunain ibn Iṣḥāḳ über die syrischen und arabischen Galen Übersetzungen*, zum ersten mal hersg. und übers. von G. Bergstrasser, in *Abhandlungen für die Kunde des Morgenlandes*, hrsg. von der Deutschen Morgenlandischen Gesellschaft, Vol. XVII, No. 2 (Leipzig, 1925).

[62] *Studies in Early Mysticism in the Near and Middle East* (London, 1931), p. 255.

[63] *Histories of Rabban Hormizd etc.*, II, Part I, 246.

[64] *Ibid.*, pp. 173 ff.

their members would soon lapse into ignorance. Hence the rule of Pachomius (292–345 A.D.), whose monastery was near Denderah in upper Egypt, provides that the books of the monastery be kept in a cupboard (*fenestra*) in the thickness of the wall. They were to be loaned one each to a monk for the period of a week, and he was expected to use it with care. The officer known as the "second" was to have charge of the books and was expected to count them every evening and lock them up.[65] The translation of the Septuagint into Syriac and the correction of the Syriac version of the New Testament, much of which was done at the celebrated Ennaton Monastery, are instances of the sort of activities which engaged the monks. Unfortunately some of their work was marred by their prejudices; especially was there dishonesty in handling the texts of the Fathers.[66]

Anyone interested in Eastern libraries cannot fail to admire the *Excursus on the History of the Library of the Syrian Monastery of Scetis* in Hugh G. Evelyn White's recent *History of the Monasteries of Nitria and Scetis*.[67] This monastery was founded in 535 A.D. There are only a few bits of information on the library during its early years, as, for example, a Syriac codex now in the Vatican, which bears a date equivalent to July 30, 576, as the time when it was purchased for the monastery. For the long period from the ninth century to the present the author has been able to build up a surprisingly detailed account of this remarkable library. Precious manuscripts from it have found their way into several European collections, notably that of the Vatican. The suggestion that very little is known about the Arabic books it contains is tantalizing.[68]

One longs to be able to reconstruct such a history of some Moslem library. With the exception of the Azhar University in Cairo, no Mohammedan institution has had such a long life. Unfortunately, all the facilities for the study of the Azhar are not accessible to Western scholars and no Moslem thus far has troubled to collect the necessary details. It is to be hoped someone will be inspired to do so. Probably

[65] Clark, *op. cit.*, pp. 64 f.

[66] E. J. Butler, *Arab Conquest of Egypt*, pp. 94 f.

[67] Pp. 439 ff. This volume is Part II of his *Monasteries of the Wādi'n-Natrūn*, published by the Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York, 1932). Part III, *Architecture and Archeology* (1933), contains considerable interesting material on the libraries of this and other monasteries; see Index.

[68] *Ibid.*, Part II, p. 458.

an examination of the books in the several departments of this celebrated mosque school would also yield information on other libraries, for manuscripts have a way of traveling and often bear the seals or the signatures and notes of previous owners and readers.

In the monasteries of the Egyptian desert the libraries were housed quite regularly along with other valuables in the keep (*kaṣr*), a great fortified tower usually situated near the principal church intended both as a place of refuge and as a treasure-house. As in Moslem libraries, the books were usually kept in cupboards or wall niches, and the stipulations for their care and use are reminiscent of those in the above-mentioned *Rule of Saint Pachomius*. The collections were built up by the industry of skilled copyists among the monks, by purchase, and chiefly by gift. In 927 A.D. the Abbot Moses of Nisibis of the Syrian monastery went to Bagdad to petition the caliph al-Muḳtadir to remove a tax which had been placed on Christian monks. He utilized this opportunity for travel to collect a large number of books, some of which he bought while others were presented to him.[69] Off and on in subsequent years more books were received from Syria and Iraq. These, as well as the records of visitors, show that contacts were maintained with the homeland.

For our purpose, possibly the most interesting aspect of the history of the Syrian monastery is the fluctuating fortunes of the library, dependent both on internal conditions, such as whether the abbot was a man of intellectual interests, the abilities of the monks, and the wealth of the institution, and on external, especially political circumstance. In times of peace and prosperity the library received notable gifts from wealthy patrons, and monks had the leisure for study. During the period of unrest and strife which characterized the reign of the Fāṭimid al-Mustanṣir, this monastery as well as others suffered from the ravages of certain Arab and Berber tribes. These were especially severe following the overthrow of the Turkish leader Nāṣir al-Dawla in 1069 A.D., at which time the libraries of the caliph's palace and the House of Science at Cairo were also plundered.

The whole story of the library of the Syrian monastery contains many illuminating parallels to that of Moslem libraries, and one

[69] *Ibid.*, pp. 337 f., 443–45.

realizes that Eastern libraries, whether Christian or Mohammedan, were very similar. The chief differences are the smaller numbers of books in Christian libraries, the more limited nature of the collections, and, above all, their much more restricted use. Reputable visitors might peruse the almost exclusively religious writings, and very occasionally books were borrowed by other monasteries for copying, but there is nothing suggestive of the public nature of Moslem libraries.

Before leaving the subject of Christian libraries, it may be of interest to notice that scholarly individuals and not necessarily always ecclesiastics, also owned excellent collections of books. John Moschus, who with his pupil and friend Sophronius visited Egypt in the latter part of the sixth century, mentions several libraries in monasteries and private homes. That of the student Cosmas he considered the finest private library in Alexandria. This man was very poor; he possessed no furniture save a table and a bed, but his house was filled with books. His library was open to all comers, who were privileged to read there. Cosmas spent his time in study and arguments with the Jews, and admitted he had seldom quitted his library in thirty-three years.[70] Probably the Moslem custom of bequeathing books to mosques was learned from such Christian scholars as the Syrian bishop of Amida; Moro Bar Kustant, who while living in Alexandria during the first half of the sixth century formed a library. On his death it was transferred to the treasury of the church of Amida.[71]

With all their absorption in theological matters, there were probably many Christians who heeded the advice of Archbishop Theon of Alexandria to the chief chamberlain and librarian of the emperor, contained in a letter written about 290 A.D. He reminds him that the library is the most important of all the imperial treasures, for no Christian should despise secular literature and the librarian must know all about books. They should be arranged systematically with a catalogue and care is to be exercised that all copies are faithful and true. It is the librarian's duty to restore damaged manuscripts and, unless the emperor has so specified, it is not essential that all books

[70] Butler, *op. cit.*, pp. 99 f.

[71] *Ibid.*, p. 101, from Zachariah of Mitylene, p. 209.

be written in gold on purple vellum.[72] We shall see how similar these duties are to those of Moslem librarians.

Coming into such a world where books had long been valued and preserved, where reading and study were marks of culture, and where through the centuries there had been a tradition of libraries, is it any wonder that the Arabs soon felt it both incumbent upon them and desirable to have their own written literature and libraries? Hitherto memory had been considered an adequate storehouse for poetry, tribal history, and other information which merited preservation. Professional reciters could be depended upon to keep and dispense, on the spur of the moment, anything which the individual might not know himself. All this changed when the Arabs came into contact with the outside world. The memory was still relied on to a degree almost unbelievable to us today, but new information poured in which could only be retained in written form. If Moslems were to make use of the diversified knowledge to which they fell heirs, they must have books, preferably in the Arabic language, and these books must be preserved in safety and rendered accessible to readers. Hence the rise of libraries.

The cultural history of Islām is incomprehensible unless one is constantly reminded of the debt to its forerunners and contemporaries of various nationalities, religions, and civilizations. But that which makes Moslem history fascinating and significant is the use made of this diversified heritage.

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

[72] *Ibid.*, pp. 104 f.