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Carl Griffin

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Syriac Studies Reference Library Now Completed

On June 20, 2001, representatives of BYU's Maxwell Institute, The Catholic University of America (CUA), and Beth Mardutho, a Syriac studies institute, met together to discuss the digital imaging of key holdings in the Semitics/ICOR Library of CUA's Mullen Library. CUA's Semitics/ICOR Library houses one of the largest collections in the world of early and rare books on the Christian East. All parties shared a particular interest in early Syriac printed works, both for their continuing value to contemporary Syriac Christian communities as well as to Syriac scholars. Many early printed catalogs, text editions, grammars, lexica, and other instruments and studies have never been superseded or replaced. Their rarity and inaccessibility to scholars has long been a serious problem for the field of Early Christian Studies. The faculty and staff of Catholic University recognized this need as well and generously agreed to work with BYU and Beth Mardutho to provide digital access to their collection. BYU and Beth Mardutho entered into a three-way agreement with CUA to scan a broad selection of their Syriac book holdings, with BYU focusing on titles of primarily academic interest and Beth Mardutho on materials of broader interest to the Syriac churches. The results of this Institute project are now available free of cost on the Web as the *Brigham Young University & The Catholic University of America Syriac Studies Reference Library* (<http://www.lib.byu.edu/dlib/cua/>).

The Semitics/ICOR Library houses some 45,000 books and periodicals, 20,000 of which were the bequest of CUA's first great Semitist and orientalist, Professor Henri Hyvernat. Much of the cataloging of these early works has never been transferred to computer, and many early Syriac titles had never been cataloged at all. Fr. Matthew Streett, a doctoral candidate in Biblical Studies at CUA, was appointed Project Bibliographer and compiled a 400-page bibliography of Syriac materials in the CUA collections. With this finding aid in hand, BYU and CUA collaborated with Dr. David Taylor, University Lecturer in Aramaic and Syriac at the University of Oxford, to determine which items were of the highest academic value and should be targeted by the project.

A staff of fourteen technicians was assembled from the CUA Libraries, the CUA School of Library and Information Science, and from graduate academic departments and programs with an interest in Syriac, with additional assistance from members of the Syriac Christian community. A total of 667 books, articles, and other media were scanned. Imaging for BYU was done with a Zeutschel Omnican 10000 TT color book scanner tethered to a Windows PC, with a second PC used for proofing and data backup on DVD. The Zeutschel book scanner is capable of producing very high-resolution scans with high-color accuracy, yet with a minimum of stress to the book or manuscript. Images were captured at 600dpi in 24-bit color. While many of the published images have been downsized, the resulting images are still at very high resolution and of superb quality.

The images scanned for BYU were returned to BYU's Harold B. Lee Library and turned over to specialists in the L. Tom Perry Special Collections imaging lab. There the more than 30,000 images were individually split and cropped, straightened, renamed, resized, sharpened, converted to PDF, and tagged with metadata. Indexing hierarchies were created and the images are being distributed via the Web using CONTENTdm digital collection management software. The images scanned by Beth Mardutho are also being published on the Web as part of its eBeth Arké project (<http://www.bethmardutho.org/ebetharke/>).

The completed *Syriac Studies Reference Library* was announced to scholars on June 25, 2007, at the North American Syriac Studies Symposium in Toronto, where it was enthusiastically received. It will be officially launched this fall to the public, but the beta Web site is available online now to interested parties at <http://www.lib.byu.edu/dlib/cua/>. 

By Carl Griffin