
PRESENTING THE MANUSCRIPT

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THE PROVENANCE OF THE MANUSCRIPT MINGANA ISLAMIC ARABIC 1572: DISPERSED FOLIOS FROM A FEW QUR'ĀNIC QUIRES

This paper studies the provenance of the Qur'ānic fragment MS Mingana Islamic Arabic 1572 [1] which consists of nine parchment folios, once belonging to two codices. The manuscript is part of the Mingana collection, held in the Special Collections of the University Library of Birmingham [2] and its digital images can be accessed in the Virtual Manuscript Room, a project created in Birmingham by the Institute for Textual Scholarship and Electronic Editing [3]. As far as we know, the provenance of MS Mingana Isl. Ar. 1572 is unknown. The aim of the present study is to track down its provenance by means of identifying its common origin with other fragments,

namely MS NLR Marcel 17 (St. Petersburg, National Library of Russia) and MS BnF arabe 328c (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France), whose origin from Fustāṭ is well documented. In the reconstruction of the original quires, made up of the Birmingham and St. Petersburg manuscripts, a further piece can be added to the picture, that is a fragment recently added to the collection of the Museum of Islamic Art in Doha. Moreover, the history of the negotiation for the purchase of seven out of the nine Birmingham folios, can be traced through the study of the correspondence between Alphonse Mingana and the dealer, Erik von Scherling of Leiden.

The Mingana Collection and Its Origins

The Mingana collection, named after the scholar who sought and acquired it, was built up mainly between 1924 and 1929, during three journeys to the Middle East, sponsored by Edward Cadbury (1873—1948). The three expeditions in search of manuscripts took place in spring 1924 in Mosul, in autumn 1925 in Kurdistān, Dimashq, Baghdād, Kirmānshāh and Mawṣil and finally in Miṣr in winter 1929 [4]. These expeditions are very well documented in the papers of Alphonse Mingana (1878—1937). In fact he used to report to Edward Cadbury about his achievements in collecting manuscripts, such as with the example in his letter dated 13th December 1929, from Victoria Hotel in Cairo:

I have just now finished packing two large boxes [of mss.] containing about three hundred Arabic mss. I have had no time to number them. I shall insure them to-morrow and send them [through Cook's] to England to your address, as agreed [5].

Thanks to the work and the three expeditions of Mingana, the Arabic manuscripts collection grew to a significant extent, as confirmed, for example, by Edward

Cadbury in his letter addressed to Mingana on 26th March 1930:

It is very good news about the MSS. and I shall be glad to discuss the matter with you and also the Catalogue. The Arabic collection seems to be likely to grow rapidly! It is extraordinary how you get into touch with so many MSS [6].

On 25th April 1932 a new library, built in Selly Oak, was opened to house the whole collection. On that occasion the newspapers carried the event, highlighting the importance of the manuscripts:

The value of the library did not lie in the accumulation of its treasures or the attraction of its fine home; it depended on the use to which its treasures were put. A library of that kind marked a datum line in the intellectual history of the community [7].

Once back in Birmingham after his three expeditions to the East, Mingana remained the driving force behind the acquisition of many manuscripts, through the dealers