

## COLPORTEURS AMONG MOSLEMS

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To the readers of this magazine, colportage among Moslems is so familiar a subject that it is needless to set forth the natural divisions: the need of it, its difficulties, its advantages over other missionary methods, and its achievements. Rather, year by year it well repays time and trouble to cull from the annual reports and other publications of the ecumenical Bible Societies fresh illustrations of all these phases of Bible work within Islam.

Here, for example, is a glimpse into the difficulties that face colportage among Indian Moslems, as told in the British and Foreign Bible Society's popular report entitled "Every Man's Book." Colporteur Jaydar is telling of his visit to Rajapur in Eastern Bengal. "As I preached in the market-place and was selling Gospels," he says, "a Muhammedan man interrupted me and told me to leave the place at once. He said, 'So many of us here are starving and you are trying to sell us books about a false religion.' When I showed no inclination to go he began to use force and I told him that since I had paid for my stand in the market-place I was entitled to sell my books. The man then called a policeman and I was taken to the *Thana* and questioned by the sub-inspector, who patiently heard my story. Although the sub-inspector was himself a Muhammedan he rebuked the man and accepted from me a copy of the Gospel. Some weeks later I visited this place again and while preaching this same sub-inspector approached me and said, 'The book that you gave me is the best book, and I do not think that a greater man than Christ has ever been born; you really pray to the true God.' He also recommended those people listening to my preaching to buy a book for themselves."

Damascus is notorious for the bigotry of its inhabitants. Evidence that anyone trying to sell the Scriptures there is as much in danger today as in the past appears from Colporteur Michel's story, as told in the American Bible Society's report on Syria. In a single day's work in Damascus he was "beaten up" seven times. One young Moslem cursed him "roundly and soundly" for offering him the Scriptures. Apparently the colporteur's soft reply annoyed the young man still more, for he snatched a kilo weight from the barrow of a nearby fruit seller and threw it at the Bibleman. Fortunately it missed its aim and did not even injure the passers-by.

In spite of such tales as these, however, the advantage of the book, as such, in reaching a very large class of Moslems—not only the literate, but also, through reading aloud, even the illiterate—is shown by many of the colporteurs' reports to their employers. It is by no means uncommon for a merchant, sitting in his little shop waiting for his next customer, to hail the colporteur passing by with his wares displayed. Such a merchant, in Old Cairo, calling to the passing colporteur to stop, examined all his books and finally chose St. John and St. Luke. His remark as he paid for them speaks for all his sort: "I am a Moslem, but I want to know what Jesus says."

The reverse of the same trend may be seen in this instance of the Bible's power as a prophylactic against apostasy: "While canvassing a village," writes one of the Egyptian colporteurs, "I met a Christian to whom I offered a book. He replied, 'I have no wish for the book or for the Christian religion, but want to turn Moslem. I will have nothing to do with that narrow gate, but am going to the broad one and will be happy.' I reminded him of what Christ had done and suffered and taught, and proposed that we should go to his house. Arrived there I read a chapter from the Bible, and we stood up and prayed, and after prayer he turned away from his former intention of embracing Islam. Finally, I spent the night at his house and departed on the morrow, happy at having been able to help him."

One note is sounded in quite recent reports, that bodes ill for the advantage of the book if the trend is continued. The radio may have been a bit slow in taking hold, in some Moslem lands, but no one can dispute their devotion to it today. "They tell me here in Kuwait Suq," writes Mr. Pennings, veteran missionary to the Arabian stations on the Persian Gulf, "that the sale of Arabic books, that is of the older, more solid type, has fallen off *almost completely*. (Italics his). Why? "The *diwans* gather dust, while the radios are constantly dusted." Dare we hope that this is a passing phase, or does it threaten worse to come? If the day comes when the ear is complete victor over the eye, it may be "talking book records," such as now exist in English for the blind, which the future colporteur will have to carry to such people "having itching ears," to take their chances against the broadcasts of politicians and the strains of popular musicians. Here is a problem we can willingly leave to our children or *their* children!

Apropos of waiting for changes that time may bring, in this business of spreading the Bible, it would be well if all of us could share the point of view of one of the Palestinian colporteurs. "A man asked me why I was distributing Scriptures in these troubled times, and expressed the view that it would be better to stop until

conditions improved. But I brought out," says he, "my monthly sales accounts, and showed him, to his astonishment, how the work continues month after month without abatement; and after some further talk, he too bought a Bible." From that same little troubled land of Palestine comes this fresh testimony to the Bible from a Moslem who loves it—a bit of concrete testimony, to set alongside all our abstract discussions of missionary methods: "I am a Moslem, but I like reading the Bible. Especially have I studied the New Testament minutely, and found it delightful. In it is all that man can desire; and it is true to say that it is the only book which can make the heart of man happy, because it contains teaching about sacrifice and love and the true delight of man. Further, if a man were to order his life and his goings according to the teaching of the New Testament, there is no doubt that he would become as pure as an angel. Also, the wide love of God toward mankind, as displayed in the New Testament, is worth while; for the life of Christ is the highest that mankind can desire. His great sacrifice has caused me to change many things in my life that were not good." Naïve?—yes, no doubt; but with his "the only book" he has put the Koran where it belongs, and with his "sacrifice," "love" and "purity" he has grasped the central essentials of the Gospel.

If this is the book that Moslems as well as Christians and all the rest of poor mankind need, how good it is to learn the success that is attending its dissemination, precisely in these times when men are most conscious of their need! China is so Bible-hungry that no staff of colporteurs, however numerous and devoted, can meet the existing demand; and Mohammedans are among those hungry millions of China. Even in Turkey, where lingering Moslem bigotry from the past vies with "laïque" and often atheistic bias of the present day, to discourage Bible reading, we are nevertheless told that more than half of all the Scriptures sold are in the romanized Turkish. And since practically all who read in that language are Moslems, this means that against all opposition the Book is making its way, in preparation for the day when the Turkish Bible, now in press in war-threatened Istanbul, shall be ready to be offered, complete, to a literate nation.

*New York City.*

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## ARABIC AND ISLAMIC STUDIES IN PRINCETON UNIVERSITY

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Of the Semitic languages, Hebrew—as to be expected—was the first to figure in the curriculum of Princeton University. Courses in Hebrew were offered from time to time in the eighteenth century and patronized mainly by biblical students. When the Princeton Theological Seminary was established in 1812, an arrangement was made whereby theological and allied subjects were left to the Seminary. Some time after that, however, Princeton University reintroduced Semitic courses. The first instructor in Semitics listed in its catalog was Arthur Lincoln Frothingham, professor of archeology, who in 1890 added to an elective course in Hebrew running through junior and senior years “studies in comparative Semitic philology with special reference to Syriac, Arabic and Assyrian.”

In the following year the Rev. Charles Martin was appointed instructor in Semitic languages, succeeding Frothingham. The courses he offered included Hebrew and Syriac, but not Arabic, and were listed from 1896 to 1900 under the Department of Biblical Literature, whose faculty counted among its members Patton and Hibben, later presidents of the University.

In 1901 a young German scholar, Enno Littmann, now of Tübingen, was appointed “librarian of the Oriental Department and instructor in Semitic philology.” It was about that time that the first part of the collection of Arabic manuscripts was acquired by Mr. Robert Garrett, of the class of 1897, and deposited in the University library. Enriched by later additions, this collection, whose voluminous catalog was published in 1938, has grown to a leading position among collections of its kind in the United States. Dr. Littmann conducted graduate courses in advanced Arabic and Semitic epigraphy and promised those who desired additional courses in Turkish. His course in epigraphy is described as covering “South Arabic inscriptions.” One thing is certain—that the registrants for such courses were few, recruited mainly from the ranks of those primarily concerned with archeological, biblical or classical studies. As there was no Oriental department at that time, no student could receive M.A. or Ph.D. in Semitics. From 1902

to 1906 Littmann held the title of lecturer and took part in the Princeton archeological expeditions to Syria under Professor Howard Crosby Butler. One of the practical results of these expeditions was the increment in the number of original inscriptions and squeezes, including both North and South Arabic, now in the Princeton Epigraphical Museum.

Littmann was succeeded, after a four-year interval, by another German scholar, Rudolph Ernest Brünnow, who held the chair of Semitic philology from 1910-1917. Professor Brünnow evidently devoted his time and energy to research work in Arabic and Assyriology; only occasionally did he conduct a Semitic seminar. After his death his private books found their way into the University library and laid the basis of its printed Arabic collection, which has since developed into a position of preëminence among university collections of its kind.

The interruption in Arabic studies lasted until the establishment of the Department of Oriental Languages and Literatures in 1927. Ever since its organization, this young department, unhampered by tradition, has pursued the policy of specializing on Arabic and Islamic studies as a field of Semitic concentration. It was felt that these studies have not been seriously cultivated in most American universities with Oriental departments. While such universities had maintained for years chairs in Semitic languages, the incumbents busied themselves primarily with the pursuit of Hebrew, Aramaic or Assyriological studies. Hebrew, Aramaic and Assyrian seemed closer to the Bible and relatively limited in their vocabulary and literature, unlike Arabic with its copious vocabulary, rich and varied literature and long history of development. Arabic courses were as a rule treated as subsidiary to Hebrew or contributory to Semitic philology. In only rare cases were Arabic courses offered for their own sake and as a key to the further investigation of Islamic culture. In the company of Hebrew, Aramaic and Assyrian, Arabic was generally treated as a dead language rather than the living tongue of some fifty million people and the religious tongue of about two hundred million more.

As a part of the program of Arabic study in Princeton, special emphasis is laid on proper pronunciation, a usually neglected aspect in university teaching. Advanced students are given assignments from current Arabic literature, including newspapers printed in New York and magazines from Egypt. Contacts are encouraged with other departments of the graduate school, particularly those of art and archeology, history and Romance languages. Opportunities for research are amply provided by the Garrett Collection of Arabic Manuscripts, whose items number about five thousand. Its sister

collection of Persian and Turkish manuscripts, whose catalog was published in 1939, is especially rich in miniatures and illuminations. Certain manuscripts have already been edited and translated by graduate students or members of the faculty. One of these was al-Hamdāni's *al-Iklīl*, issued in Arabic and done into English by Dr. Nabih A. Faris. Another was al-Shādhili's *Qawānīn Hikam al-Ishrāq*, which was translated by Dr. Edward J. Jurji under the title *Illumination in Islamic Mysticism*. These three volumes form part of Princeton Oriental Texts, of which eight volumes have already appeared. The series is published by Princeton University Press, which boasts the only Arabic linotype connected with an American university. Volume II in the series is a Turkish text and its translation by Dr. Walter L. Wright Jr., now president of the American Colleges at Istanbul.

From the very beginning it was planned that not only Arabic but its two sister Islamic languages, Turkish and Persian, be cultivated in Princeton. This ambition was realized when in 1939 Dr. George C. Miles, a graduate of the department and a resident of Istanbul and Teheran, was appointed instructor in these two languages. A survey made two years earlier by a committee of the American Council of Learned Societies had found that of all the underworked fields in our higher education Islamic studies in general and Turkish and Persian in particular are the ones in special need of promotion.

This new orientation in Near Eastern studies at Princeton found expression in the Summer Seminar in Arabic and Islamic Studies, which was held for the first time in 1935 under the auspices of the American Council of Learned Societies. The Seminar attracted young professors and instructors, as well as advanced graduate students, from all parts of the United States and Canada. It was repeated in 1938 and will be held again this summer. The Seminar does not attempt to duplicate work done by Oriental departments in American universities but rather to meet the need of historians, medievalists, Byzantinists, historians of fine arts, archeology and science, students of philosophy and religion and others who have become convinced of the necessity of acquiring some competence in the Arabic-Islamic phases of their respective disciplines. The underlying principle in all this orientation is to make Arabic and Islamic studies more serviceable not only to the philologist and linguist but also to students of other disciplines to which the Islamic culture is peripheral.