

A. Desreumaux. *Répertoire des Bibliothèques et des Catalogues de manuscrits syriaques*. Paris: 1991, 286 pp.

The work published by French scholar A. Desreumaux in co-operation with F. Brickel-Shatonneau is warmly welcomed by all Syrologists. The author of the monograph works in the Centre for the Study of Religious Scriptures of the Practical High School of Paris. He also takes part in the programs of the Centre on the Study of Hellenistic Judaism and the Origin of Christianity. In scholarly circles A. Desreumaux is known for his wide range of interests and subjects of his studies. These include Syrian epigraphics and palaeography, the history of Syro-Melkite Christian communities, archaeological works on the site of Hirbet-Samra in Palestine. His permanent interest is research in the field of Christian apocryphal literature — he is one of the most active fellows of the International Association on the Study of Christian Apocryphal Texts.

The book by A. Desreumaux appeared as a publication of the Institute for Research on and History of Texts. Owing to this institution the reference-book was made after the pattern of M. Richard's *Répertoire des Bibliothèques et des catalogues de manuscrits grecs* (Paris, 1949 — 1st. edition; Paris, 1958 — 2nd edition), in accordance with the aims and tasks of the Institute. Unlike M. Richard, who was basing upon the established tradition of making reference-books on Greek manuscripts going back to the eighteenth century, A. Desreumaux for the first time created a manual summing up all the information available on Syriac manuscripts accumulated in several centuries. The need of such a reference-book has long been felt by all Syrologists.

The task of the scholar was the more difficult because of the thousands surviving Syriac manuscripts (and there are tens of thousands). Some have never been described, and not all the available descriptions, which are present in catalogues, answer all modern requirements. The main task of the reference-book's compiler was to give a full list of places where Syriac manuscripts (for the exception of parchments and papyri) are stored, and to supplement it with a bibliography of catalogues, articles and even short notes describing these manuscripts or funds.

The bibliography is arranged in chronological order, which makes it possible for a scholar to observe the sequence of research irrespective of different authors' opinions or their conformity with the modern views. The author is specially mentioning that he does not include in his catalogue manuscripts in Karshuni, *i. e.* those written in Syriac script but in the Arabic language. In his view, these group of manuscripts deserves a separate study. The bibliography does not also include works published in Arabic.

The reference-book consists of four parts where the available data on Syriac manuscripts is classified by the three features: subject, country, and collection. The first register gives the names of the countries, cities, libraries and collections which have Syriac manuscripts. The addresses of the libraries are provided as a rule.

It is in the second part dealing with subjects, which includes 211 entries, we encounter Desreumaux's greatest weakness. The failure is recognized by the author himself who, in his foreword to the book, complains that this kind of classification by subjects is not productive and is out of date, taking into consideration the present level of research. We cannot, however, agree with the author's general statement on the archaic character of the method. The real fault of the second part is that it is evidently incomplete. It could have been improved by the recognition of one of the characteristic features of the medieval literature — its anonymity. Besides proper names and place-names the author could have included into his list the titles of certain works surviving in Syriac manuscripts. So far this part includes only different versions of the Scriptures in Syriac. The third register presents bibliographical data sorted by countries (50 titles). The fourth and the largest part (596 titles) presents bibliographical data sorted by countries and collections including, when possible, information on the number of manuscripts, their contents, dating, the presence of miniatures etc. As a supplement to the main list there is a list of collections now missing. In all, A. Desreumaux succeeded in assembling information on 393 libraries in 239 cities and 29 countries.

The author admits that his reference-book is still far from being perfect or complete. He invites other scholars, not only Syrologists (publishers of texts, codicologists, palaeographers, art-historians), but many other specialists as well, in particular, orientalist and experts in Hellenistic studies, who deal with Syriac texts in their studies, to cooperate with him. It is impossible, of course, to form any adequate idea of the world fund of Syriac manuscripts without a direct (*de visu*) exploration of libraries and collections. Still, even in its present state, the reference-book is very helpful, as it allows to solve a lot of practical questions. It will be an indispensable guide for scholars in the sea of Syriac manuscripts.

This publication is informative and stimulating. The author has opened up vistas for future exploration, for the creation of works on the history of Syriac script, manuscript production, circulation of manuscripts, as well as of studies on the role of Syrian literature and culture in the history of the world civilization.

E. Mescherskaya