

THE CO-OPERATION BETWEEN  
FATHER GHEWOND ALISHAN AND LORD  
ROBERT CURZON IN THE FIELD OF  
BIBLICAL RESEARCH  
(The British Library, MS. OR 15277)

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In late 1996 the British Library received a manuscript that belonged to Lord Robert Curzon (1810-1873) entitled "Translations of the Apocryphal Books of Asenath and Moses', the Epistle of the Corinthians to St. Paul and St. Paul's Third Epistle to the Corinthians from original MSS in the library at Parham, 1853." The manuscript was donated by Mark Frankland, a descendant of Lord Curzon. The book is preserved now in the British Library under the code MS. OR 15277.

**Curzon's collection**

Curzon's collection and publications, and in particular this manuscript, confirm that he had a genuine scientific curiosity and a definite research plan that gave impetus and shape to his activities as a collector. But because of his limited education, he generously shared his treasures with those who could help him achieve what he had set out to study. Famous scholars like Archdeacon Henry Tattam, Joseph Bardell, William Wright, Edward Cureton, J. B. Lightfoot and Armenian Mkhitarist Fathers Yart'wn Avgerian [Aucher] (1774-1854), Eduard Hyurmyuzian (1799-1876) and Ghewond Alishan (1820-1901) contributed their opinions to the descriptions published in Curzon's *Catalogue of Materials*<sup>2</sup>.

After Curzon's death, his son, Robin, 15th Baron Zouche of Haryngworth, deposited his father's manuscripts in the British Museum. They were given to the Museum on 13 October, 1917, by Dorea Curzon (1860-1917), 16th Baroness Zouche, Robert Curzon's daughter. On the 10th of October, 1917, Mr. D. Barnett, Keeper of the Department of Oriental Books and Manuscripts, entered in the British Museum's Donation Reports the following statement: 'Mr. Barnett has the honour to report to the Trustees that the Zouche manuscripts...include a large number of Oriental manuscripts [128 MSS] which from preliminary inspection appear to be as follows: Arabic 16; Armenian 10; Chinese 2; Coptic and Coptic/Arabic 42; Ethiopic 10; Georgian 2; Hindi 1; Hindustani 1; Persian 6; Sanskrit 1; Syriac 4; Turkish 6. These manuscripts are mainly, but by no means exclusively, works on the teachings and rituals of the Eastern Churches, and several of them are remarkable for their antiquity or beauty. The collection is

altogether one of great value and interest, and fully deserves a special acknowledgment on the part of the Trustees which Mr. Barnett accordingly begs to suggest'.<sup>3</sup> Seventy-nine years later, another relative of Lord Curzon presented this manuscript to the library, adding to Curzon's significant legacy already deposited in the British Library.<sup>4</sup>

**Some details of the manuscript**

*Description:* Thick blue paper; water mark consists of a female figure seated, with a crown, seven vertical lines and the maker's name, 'Molnier's superfine 1852' and 'Busbridge's'.

Folios, 155 (new pagination); written in ink with a fine pen on only one side. Folios 128-136 belong to a separate section in a different hand writing on thick white paper, bound into the manuscript. Each of the sections is separately paginated.

Neat flowing hand in single column of mostly 42 lines, entirely in the hand of Robert Curzon, except folios 13-42 and 128-136.  
Size 32.5 x 20 (written surface 29 x 14 cm).

*Binding:* Modern gray leather covers over wooden boards with multicolored marble paper inside the front and back covers. Gold lettering on the spine - APOCRYPHAL BOOKS MS. The manuscript is now kept in a blue buckram box with gold lettering.

*History of the manuscript:* Inside the front cover of this particular manuscript there is the hand-written inscription: R. Curzon - 50 Berkley Square. On November 21, 1996, Mr. Mark Frankland (11 Delvino Road, Parson's Green, London, SW6) from the family of Robert Curzon (Lord Zouche) donated this manuscript to the British Library.

Lord Curzon fully details the history and origins of the manuscript in his Preface (fols. 3-9):

'During various voyages and travels on the different countries of that part of the world which is usually called the Levant I collected and brought home to England great store of ancient manuscripts many of them manuscripts of the Holy Scriptures and some of these vying with if not exceeding the antiquity of any existing copies of the sacred text. Among them are found various ancient writings purporting to belong to that collection of the works of many authors and many epochs which we call the Bible, but which are not included in the list of the canonical books of the Holy Scripture which were considered as genuine by the authorities assembled together at the General Council of Trent in the year 1569, or even by the earlier councils of the church held under the auspices of the Emperor and the Pope.

These apocryphal books generally belong to the sects of oriental

Christians who falling into confusion and error in the 4 and 5 centuries, tried to support their heretical doctrines, by references to passages in books which they called scriptural, but which seem frequently to have been forgeries invented purposely to give weight and authority to dogmas which were not found [in] any text that could be discovered in the new and old Testament.

These apocryphal books are very numerous most of them were collected and published by *Fabriques de Codice pseudepigraphæ Veteris et Novi Testamentus* in 1725. Since the publication of that learned and laborious work, several other apocryphal books have been discovered and translated into Latin and English from the Abyssinian, Coptic, and Armenian languages and in addition to these are now added those contained in this volume'.

Furthermore, in his Preface, Lord Curzon goes on to provide valuable information on each of the books translated and their connection with his collection of manuscripts and concludes:

'I may be permitted to express my satisfaction, that with the assistance of Coptic and Arabian manuscripts, bought by me, to England, from Egypt, the New Testament has been printed, in those languages, and distributed to the Coptic Christians on the banks of the Nile, by the zeal and labour of archdeacon Tattam, and the Revd. Ed. Cureton, Canon of Westminster. This book of the New Testament, has been printed by the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge, in the form of a large and handsome quarto volume. It has been to me a source of humble gratitude that the ancient volumes which I have collected in wanderings through many lands, have been made use of for the production of so good a work and have not remained useless on the shelves of a dusty library, in remote country house.

This is one of many instances in which we see how the intentions of Providence are carried out by means of unconscious agents. A number of old useless, worn out books, were sold to a traveller from a distant island of the sea, whose inhabitants were painted savages at the period when these books were written. They were cast aside as rubbish, their owners were glad to receive a price for lumber which they considered as of no value, but the stone which the builders refused has become the chief corner stone and from these torn unused and neglected volumes the text of the Holy Scriptures has been returned to the same people in an improved and altered form, which could not have been the case unless the manuscripts which they had thrown away, had been carried to that far land where the improvements of science and the advances of learning enabled men to reproduce the ancient writings in clear legible characters,

at a price which rendered them accessible to the Christians of the valley of the Nile'.

**Contents of the manuscript**

Fol. 1	Translations of the apocryphal books of Asenath, and Moses. The Epistle of the Corinthians to St. Paul, and St. Paul's Third Epistle to the Corinthians. From original MSS in the library at Parham 1853.
Fols. 3-9	Preface.
Fols. 9b-30	Blank.
Fol. 11	Libro Di Giuseppe ed Asaneth.
Fols. 11b-12	Blank.
Fols. 13-33 (1-21)	Storia di Giuseppe e della sua moglie Asaneth, figlia di Petafre sacerdote della Citta del Sole.
Fols. 33 (p. 21)	Cantico della confessione d'Asaneth a Dio.
Fols. 34-40 (22-28)	Venuta di Giacobbe colla sua famiglia, e dimoro a Gesem.
Fols. 40 a-b(28)	Fine - Memoria.
Fol. 40b (28b)	[Cpophon in Armenian] <sup>5</sup> .
Fols. 41-42 (29-30)	(Un Frammento). A note in pencil above the text states: 'This is not to be placed with the text, but after it.'
Fol. 43	The Book of Joseph and Asaneth. Translated from the original Armenian into Italian by Don Leone Alishan, monk of the Armenian monastery of St. Lazarus in the lagunes of Venice during his residence at Parham House in the summer of 1852, and translated from the Italian into English, by Robert Curzon, in the same year, at Parham.
Fols. 44-45	Blank.
Fols. 46-49	Preface. 'The apocryphal book of which the translation is written on the following pages, is founded on the 45th verse of the 41st chapter of Genesis; where it is said: 'and Pharaoh called Joseph's name Zaphnath Paneah, and he Gave him to wife Asenath the daughter of Potiphra, priest of On; and Joseph went out, over all the land of Egypt'.
Fol. 50	Blank.
Fols. 51-78 (1-28)	The History, of Joseph, and his wife Asaneth. Daughter of Petafre the High Priest of the city of the Sun.
Fols. 79 (29)	'Here beginneth the canticle of the confession of Asaneth to the Lord.'

Fols. 80-87 (30-38) The arrival of Jacob, and his family and their residence in the land of Gesem.  
 Fols. 88 (38) Memoria [see Colophons].  
 Fols.89-90 Blank.

**II.**

Fols. 91a The Life and The Book of The Prophet Moses<sup>6</sup>.  
 Fols. 92- 94 Preface to the history of the life and death of the great Prophet Moses [signed R. Curzon].  
 Fol. 95 Blank.  
 Fols. 96-127 (1-28) The History of the Prophet Moses.  
 Fols. 128-136 (12-29) The Book of the Prophet Moses: here beginneth the Conversation between God, and Moses, on mount Sinai. [This section is on different paper and script, written on both sides of the paper and numbered 12- 29. This section was bound into the manuscript].

**III.**

Fols. 137-140 Blank.  
 Fol. 141 The Epistle of the Corinthians to St Paul the Apostle and the Third Epistle of Saint Paul to the Corinthians<sup>7</sup>.  
 Fols.142 Blank.  
 Fols.143-144 Preface.  
 Fols.145-147 (1-3) 'Here beginneth the Epistle of the Corinthians to St Paul Apostle.'  
 Fols.148-153 (4-9) 'Here beginneth the Third Epistle of St Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians.'  
 Fols. 154-155 Blank.

**Colophons**

Fols. 40a-b. Fine Memoria [for the English translation by Robert Curzon, see below].

Fol. 40b., Father Ghewond Alishan's colophon in Armenian.  
 Նժիկնորքնսը ստեղծելու յ'անգղիական աշխուհի եւ ի' Բարթոլոմէոսի զարմանոց Գործն-Տնայ տոհմի, եւ Հ. Անտոնի վրայ Մ. Ալիշանեան, վանական Միսիսթայ վանից Ա. Ասգարու որ ի' Աննտիկ, քարգմանցի գ'Աստուր(ի)ն յա վերջայ եւ Տնանքի ի' հայկական (եզու) յտարական քարտաւ. եւ ինով ձեռամբ գրեցի ի' ժոյժ ստորս մարգաց անսնան, ի' թուիս Հայոց Ը-ՅԱ:  
 Ձ'համընդող տառիս վերջանոք(ի)նով գ'Հայկական' աղայն ամբանալ գայս ի'վեր ժիանգան առ ին յիշատակ:

Fol. 88.

Memoria

I, Father Leon Marcar Alishan; Doctor of Divinity, Monk of the Armenian  
Mediterranean of Saint Lazarus, of Venice in the year of our Lord, 1852, being in the  
capital of England for the affairs of my society, was courteously invited, by the noble  
gentleman, Robert Curzon, to his ancient villa of Parham Park, in the county of  
Sussex, where that honourable gentleman kept, among other precious and most  
ancient manuscripts in various languages also 10 Armenian MSS which I examined at  
my ease, for I am a great admirer of the manuscripts of my nation. Among these  
there was an Armenian Bible, written probably at the end of the XV century, or in the  
XVI century; in which was also the apocryphal book of the History of Joseph and  
Azaneth, and as its possessor wished to have a translation of it, I made one, from the  
original, into the Italian tongue; which altho (sic - V.N.) incorrect and unpolished, is  
faithful in other respects.

I therefore, pray the noble gentleman, that he will keep this little work of mine, as  
a remembrance of my esteem for him; and of my gratitude for the kind hospitality  
with which I was entertained, during certain days, by him and the whole noble family  
of his parents.

The above mentioned translation, was undertaken by me, during the first three  
days of the month of July 1852 in a chamber from which I continually heard the  
rustling sighs of the leaves of trees, twice as ancient as the leaves of that manuscript -  
and I also sighed for my country.

O thou who readest these lines, remember me, a passing Pilgrim, and think of  
thyself also, that thou art no less a Pilgrim, whoever, and wherever thou mayst be.

Ընդհանրապես անհայտ յայտնված արձանագրության  
և ի քրոնիկոս գրքի անհայտ լինելու մասին խոսելու  
և 3. Պատմության համար ի Երևանում, լեզուներով  
և այլ լեզուներով զարգացնելու քրոնիկոսի ի նախ  
և հետո շարժումը և ժամանակի ի հայտնի լինելու  
և հայտնի լինելու և հայտնի լինելու ի հայտնի  
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և հայտնի լինելու ի հայտնի լինելու ի հայտնի

Հայր Անուի Ալիշանի ծննդավայրի յիշատակարանը

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> The Old Testament records that Pharaoh gave Joseph Asenath, the daughter of Potiphara, Priest of On, for his wife (Gen.41:45). How could Joseph - the model of chastity, piety, and statesmanship - marry a foreign Hamitic girl, daughter of an idolatrous priest? Jewish theology and folklore found many answers to this intriguing question and expanded some into narratives. Joseph and Asenath, the longest of these stories, is a full-fledged romance by an anonymous author. The romance is altogether one of the most successful, from a literary point of view, and the story survives in many versions including Armenian, Ethiopian and Syriac. Of these the Armenian version is the most successful. Among the apocryphal books of the Old Testament it appears under the title 'Patmut'wn Asanet'ay or Patmut'wn Yovsep'ay ew knoj nora Asanet'i [The story of Asaneth or Story of Joseph and his wife Asaneth], translated from the Greek probably in the 6/7th centuries. The Armenian version has attracted wide attention in biblical research. The earliest occurrence of the text is found in Matenadaran Mss 1500, which is the famous Lectionary of Mikhit'ar Ayrvanotsi, copied in A.D. 1282-83 and Vienna Mikhit'arist Library Mss 126 (XIV century). It first appears under the title of 'Asanet'i's Prayer' among the 'secret' books in Hovhannes Sarkisavag's ('the deacon', 1045-55) list of the book of the Scriptures, C. Burchard, 'Joseph and Aseneth,' in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (Charlesworth, J. H. ed.), London, 1985, vol. 2, pp. 177-247.

<sup>2</sup> Curzon, Robert, *Catalogue of Materials for Writing, Early Writings on Tablets, on Stones, Roll'd and Other Manuscripts and Oriental Manuscript Books, in the Library of the Hon. Robert Curzon, at Parham in the County of Sussex, London, 1849, Mss. no. 8, pp. 16-17; Nersessian, Vrej, Robert Curzon (1810-1873) and the Levant (An Exhibition in the King's Library: 30 May to 25 October 1992).*

<sup>3</sup> Nersessian, Vrej, *Catalogue of Early Armenian Books 1512-1850*, London, The British Library, 1980; idem, "A brief history of the Armenian manuscript collection in the British Library," in *Armenian Illuminated Gospel Books*, London, The British Library, 1987, pp. 44-47.

<sup>4</sup> Nersessian, Vrej, *Treasures from the Ark: 1700 years of Armenian Christian Art*, London, The British Library, 2001.

<sup>5</sup> This translation is based on British Library Mss Or. 8833, no. 8 in the collection of Hon. Robert Curzon, bequeathed to the library on 13th October, 1917. According to the colophon at the end of the Italian translation, and rendered into English by Robert Curzon (fol. 88). The translation was done 'in the year of our Lord, 1852, being in the capital of England, for the affairs of my society, was courteously invited, by the noble gentleman, Robert Curzon, to his ancient villa of Parham Park, in the county of Sussex... I made one, from the original, into the Italian tongue'.

<sup>6</sup> The Book of the Conversations of God with Moses is taken from British Library Arabic MSS Or. 8734, on paper of the 15th century, bought by Robert Curzon from a Coptic priest in Cairo in 1837. The manuscript is no.18 of the Arabic manuscripts in the printed catalogue of Oriental manuscripts at Parham. The Book of the Conversation of Moses is translated by the Revd. E. Curzon. This was published as *The Book of the Prophet Moses*.

