

**Homilies of  
Mar Jacob of Sarug**

**Homiliae Selectae Mar-Jacobi Sarugensis**

**Edited By  
Paul Bedjan**

**With Additional Material By  
Sebastian P. Brock**

**Volume I**



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# The Making of the Gorgias Reprinted Edition

By **George A. Kiraz**

The making of these volumes was indeed a saga!

The idea of reprinting the *Homilies of Jacob of Sarug*, originally edited by Bedjan in 1905-1910, was born not much later than the birth of Gorgias Press itself back in late 2001. Most of our reprints at the time were made from books belonging to my private library, a collection I started in my teenage years back in Bethlehem but grew year after year. There was one major problem in reprinting Jacob's homilies: my library only held volume 1 (out of 5 volumes). As I have been searching unsuccessfully for a whole set of Bedjan's edition for the past twenty years or so, there was no hope finding one in the antiquarian market. Library copies I had access to were so tightly bound that made it impossible to make use of them. The project was put on hold.

Finally in April 2005, we managed to gather an entire set from three private collections: volume 1 from my collection, volumes 2 and 3 from David Taylor's collection, and volumes 4 and 5 from Sebastian Brock's collection (in addition to the reprinted material in volume 6 from Andreas Juckel's collection). But who would trust sending such treasures with a postal system?

The following May, both Sebastian and David were attending a special Symposium held in honor of Robert Murray at Princeton, organized by Peter Brown and Emmanuel Papoutsakis. This seemed a good opportunity. I asked them if they will be willing to bring their copies with them. While they were attending the conference, Gorgias staff would work non-stop to digitize the books. They can then take their respective copies back with them. They kindly agreed and a plan was put in place.

At the end of the conference, my wife Christine and I held in our private home a party honouring Robert Murray. The invitees were excited to see our operation, housed in the basement of our home. At the end of the day, everyone left, apart from Robert and Sebastian who stayed as our guests for a few days. With all the excitement of the day, David forgot to pick up his Bedjan volumes and left for England. As soon as he got to his office in Oxford, he

sent us an email requesting that we send his copies with Sebastian. This seemed the safest and fastest way to get the volumes back to Oxford.

The next day, Sebastian and I drove to Pittsburg where Sebastian gave a lecture at Saints Cyril and Methodius Byzantine Catholic Seminary. During the day-long journey, going through the Blue Mountains, we had sufficient time to discuss, *inter alia*, the reprint project and the material that would go in a new volume six. Sebastian, with his typical generosity, offered to underwrite some of the costs for which Gorgias Press is indebted.

All went well, and at the end of the trip, we went back to Piscataway. Sebastian picked up his and David's Bedjan volumes and went back to Oxford. We were relieved that the copies went to their original owners safely. But did they?

When Sebastian reached Oxford, he sent us a disturbing email. His luggage containing all of the four Bedjan volumes must have been put on the wrong flight. The airline promised to search for them. It was not until a few days later that we learnt that the Bedjan volumes have been travelling on their own, but finally they were located, all intact.

Here at the Press, we began working on the project in earnest as soon as Sebastian left for Oxford. The amount of work that went into preparing the text took quadruple times as long as we had originally anticipated. The Bedjan volumes are not that thick, until one realizes that they are printed on thin paper. Each volume was about 900 pages.

The scanned images bled, a technical term indicating that one can see the text of the reverse side of a page. Typically one can set the parameters of a scanner to get rid of bleeding, but without access to the originals for a sufficient period of time, that was not possible. The bleeding had to be removed digitally using various techniques that the Gorgias staff innovatively came up with.

Maintaining the original red headings would make printing prohibitively expensive and had also to be turned into lighter greyscale to be distinguished from the black text. The borders, most of which were broken, had to be removed from each single page. In most cases, one can develop automatic methods to remove borders, but as the borders in question were so close to the text, the entire thing had to be done manually, page by page. The usual speckles (dots introduced during scanning) were also

removed, but our automatic techniques could not be used here either as this would also remove the Syriac diacritic points, many of which are fine in the Bedjan edition. This process too had to be done manually.

After one year of work, we were at the stage to run quality assurance on the volumes, ensuring that, after all the digital processing, the text is intact. However, we found out that about 50 pages throughout the volumes did not withstand all the digital manipulation, and required redigitization from the start. Dayroyo Mikael Öz of Oxford was kind enough to agree to rescan pages. In May 2006, exactly one year after the project began, the volumes went to press.