An Arabic Version of the Treatise on the Origin and History of the Thirty Pieces of Silver which Judas Received from the Jews

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Introduction

The rich collection of the Mingana Syriac, Arabic and Garshûnî manuscripts preserved in the library of the University of Birmingham in England contains numerous valuable, and in some cases unique, works. Volume One of the Catalogue in particular contains a number of seminal works on a variety of Christian subject matters in Syriac and Arabic (Garshûnî). At least four of these manuscripts—Mingana Syriac MS 22, Mingana Syriac MS 48, Mingana Syriac MS 479 and Mingana Syriac MS 514—contain, inter alia, the Arabic text of an interesting short piece dealing with the origin and history of the thirty pieces of silver which Judas Iscariot received from the Jews for betraying Jesus. The purpose of this paper is to draw attention to the existence of this hitherto unpublished work, as well as to present its text and translation and to provide an analysis of its contents, linguistic features and likely authenticity.

The Biblical Narrative of the Thirty Pieces of Silver

According to the Gospel accounts, Judas Iscariot was a disciple of Jesus. Before the Last Supper, Judas went to the chief priests and agreed to hand over Jesus in exchange for thirty silver coins (Matthew 26:14–16). Jesus is then arrested in Gethsemane, where Judas reveals Jesus’ identity to the soldiers by giving

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him a kiss. According to Matthew 27, Judas was filled with remorse and he subsequently returned the money to the chief priests before hanging himself. The chief priests then decided that they could not put it into the Temple treasury, and so with it they bought the Potter’s Field (Matthew 27:9–10). In the Book of Zechariah (11:12–13), “thirty pieces of silver” was the price Zechariah received for his labour. He took the coins and cast them “to the Potter.” In the Book of Exodus (21:32), “thirty pieces of silver” was the price of a slave. Klaas Schilder notes that Zechariah’s payment indicates “an assessment of his worth, as well as his dismissal.” He further suggests that these thirty pieces of silver then get “bandied back and forth by the Spirit of Prophecy.” When the chief priests decided to buy a field with the returned money, Matthew says that this fulfilled what was spoken by Jeremiah the Prophet: “They took the thirty pieces of silver, the price set on him by the people of Israel, and they used them to buy the potter’s field, as the Lord commanded me” (Matthew 27:9–10).

The “Thirty Pieces of Silver” are used in Christian literature on the betrayal of Jesus, as in the poem *Thirty Pieces of Silver* by William Blane:

*Thirty pieces of silver for the Lord of life they gave:*
*Thirty pieces of silver—only the price of a slave,*
*But it was the priestly value of the holy One of God:*
*They weighed it out in the temple, the price of the Saviour’s blood.*
*Thirty pieces of silver laid in Iscariot’s hand:—*
*Thirty pieces of silver and the aid of an armed band,*
*Like a lamb that is brought to the slaughter, led the Holy Son of God*
*At midnight from the garden where His sweat had been as blood.*
*Thirty pieces of silver burned in the traitor’s brain:*
*Thirty pieces of silver! but oh! it is hellish gain:*
*“I have sinned and betrayed the guiltless,” he cried with a fevered breath*
*And he cast them down in the temple and rushed to a madman’s death.*

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6 See France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 978. Cf. the same sum given as the “value” of an adult woman in Leviticus 27:4; a man is worth fifty shekels.
7 Klaas Schilder, *Christ in His Suffering* (Grand Rapids, MI, 1938), 74.
8 Schilder, *Christ*, 71.