

# From Sinai to Munich: Tracing the History of a Fragment from the Grote Collection\*

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In 1921, the Bavarian State Library acquired six Christian Arabic manuscript fragments from the notorious collector Friedrich Grote. All fragments, just like a yet to be determined number of Christian Oriental manuscripts from the Grote collection, originally came from St. Catherine's Monastery at Mount Sinai. The aim of the following notes is to exemplarily trace the history of one of these fragments from its place of origin to its present location. The reconstruction of the fragment's whereabouts is largely based on hitherto unused archival material. It will shed new light on the persona of the erratic collector and his methods of manuscript acquisition. This has important implications not only for the *membra disiecta* of the original Sinaitic codex from which the Munich fragment derives, but for all fragments of Sinaitic origin from the former Grote collection. The activity of collectors like Grote led to the dispersion of fragments of some of St. Catherine's most valuable and historically significant manuscripts. These notes are a modest contribution to restoring the integrity of these historical artifacts.

On 29 September 1951, Georg Graf (1875–1955), the great pioneer of Christian Arabic studies and author of the magisterial five-volume *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur*, wrote an enthusiastic note to his pen friend Emil Gratzl (1877–1957). Until 1939, Gratzl had been in charge of acquiring Oriental manuscripts for the Bavarian State Library (Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, henceforth BSB) in Munich. Graf writes:

Today I experienced great joy, which is partly your merit as well. To explain this, I have to elaborate a bit. Since January 1949, I have been head of the Arabic section of Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium (CSCO, Leuven) and have had the honour of starting with an edition myself [...]. Further, I have begun preparing another edition, an extensive, in print, yet unknown work of my dear Theodore Abû

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Qurra following the sole London Ms. [...]. Now, as I continued today transcribing the text on the basis of the Ms. photocopy after a long period of interruption, I reached a chapter that was very familiar to me. Indeed, it is a two-page fragment of those Arabic fragments from the ‘Grote collection’, which you were so fortunate to acquire for the BSB. Now I have, albeit for a minor part, a second Ms., which apparently is half a century older and more original. This naturally makes one wish to discover further fragments.<sup>1</sup>

Contrary to Gratzl, Graf was not himself an active manuscript collector.<sup>2</sup> But he meticulously followed the whereabouts of Christian Arabic manuscripts that had come to his attention in one way or another, both in private and public possession. The supposed Theodore Abū Qurra fragment mentioned in his letter to Gratzl is one example.

The aim of the following notes is to portray the recent history of this fragment, making use, among other sources, of archival material such as the correspondence between Graf and Gratzl. The ‘Grote collection’ was a recurring topic in their letters since Grote had approached Graf for the first time in 1919. By tracing the history of those (originally three) leaves, which started to occupy Graf again thirty years later, some light can be shed on the persona of the erratic collector and his methods of acquiring.

Today this fragment bears the shelfmark Cod. arab. 1071. On 15 April 1921, Gratzl purchased it for the BSB from Grote along with five additional Christian Arabic fragments (Cod. arab. 1066–1070) for the humble price of

- 1 BSB Gratzliana, Graf, no. 66, 29 September 1951: ‘Heute habe ich eine große Freude erlebt, an deren Ursache Sie ein Mitverdienst haben. Zur Erklärung muß ich weiter ausholen. Seit Jan. 1949 bin ich Leiter der arabischen Abteilung im Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium (CSCO, Löwen) und durfte selbst mit einer eigenen Publikation beginnen [...]. Außerdem habe ich mit der Vorbereitung einer anderen Ausgabe begonnen, eines sehr umfangreichen, noch nicht im Druck bekannten Werkes meines Lieblings Theodor Abū Qurra nach der einzigen Londoner Hs. [...] Als ich nun heute nach längerer Unterbrechung die Abschrift aus der erhaltenen Hs. Photographie fortsetze, komme ich zu einem Kapitel, das mir ganz bekannt vorkam. Und wirklich es ist ein zweiseitiges Fragment aus jenen arabischen Fragmenten der ‘Sammlung Grote’, die Sie für die B.St.B. zu erwerben so glücklich waren. Nun habe ich also, wenngleich für einen minimalen Teil, eine zweite Hs., wie es scheint um etwa ein halbes Jahrh. älter und ursprünglicher. Da kommt freilich der Wunsch, noch andere Fragmente zu entdecken’. The above numbering follows that of the letters in Gratzl’s Nachlass, which is kept at the Bavarian State Library (shelfmark BSB Gratzliana); all translations from German are mine. On Gratzl, see Hörmann 1966; Haller/Kempf 2011.
- 2 Gratzl bequeathed his collection of Oriental manuscripts to the BSB; see Rebhan 2011.

480 mark.<sup>3</sup> As Graf noted, it is one of the oldest witnesses (if not the oldest) of a voluminous theological tract now commonly referred to as the *Summa Theologiae Arabica*.<sup>4</sup> The Munich fragment contains extracts from Chapters 12 and 13, comprising scriptural and patristic proof-texts for the divinity of Christ. The BSB's online catalogue refers to the fragment as 'Verbatim extracts from an apology of Christianity [a.o.]' ('Wörtliche Auszüge aus einer Apologie des Christentums [u.a.]') and names the eighth/ninth-century Melkite theologian Theodore Abū Qurra (d. c.830 CE) as its author.<sup>5</sup> This ascription, though corresponding with Graf's assertion, is outdated as Abū Qurra is no longer regarded as the author of the *Summa*.<sup>6</sup> The catalogue derives its information from the description given in the *Verzeichnis der Orientalischen Handschriften in Deutschland*,<sup>7</sup> which essentially corresponds to the description Graf published in a short article in 1954.<sup>8</sup> Paul Géhin has studied, in detail, the provenance of (mostly Syriac) Sinaitic manuscripts in Western institutions, many of which originally derive from the Grote collection. He recently pointed out that Graf's article remained the main source of information on Grote,<sup>9</sup> and consequently on our fragment's provenance.

- 3 See *Repertorium der Codices Orientales der Bayerischen Staatsbibliothek*, Kapitel 1: A–J—BSB Cbm Cat. 40 d (<<https://daten.digitale-sammlungen.de/0002/bsb00026277/images/index.html?fp=193.174.98.30&seite=29>>; this and other links last retrieved 15 December 2019). The BSB had already acquired an Arabic manuscript (MS Munich BSB Cod. arab. 1065) from Grote two years earlier on 22 July 1919 for 500 mark. According to the *Repertorium*, Grote 'purchased the Ms. in Syria shortly before the outbreak of the [First] World War'. Grote sold other manuscript fragments toward the end of his life for comparably low prices, such as a Syriac palimpsest fragment (today MS Harvard, Semitic Museum, 8375 = MS Harvard, Houghton Library, MS Syr. 171), for instance, which was acquired in July 1922 for \$5 USD. On this and further Syriac fragments in the Houghton Library, see Kessel 2014b.
- 4 See Swanson 2009. To the manuscripts listed, there must be added MS Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF), Syr. 378, ff. 59–60 (*membrum disiectum* of MS Munich BSB Cod. arab. 1071, see below), MS Sinai, St. Catherine's Monastery Sinai), Ar. NF Parch. 8, ff. 1–7 (identified by Barbara Roggema as corresponding to the text of MS London, British Library (BL), Or. 4950, ff. 132v–133r; parts of Ch. 18), and MS Sinai, Ar. 448, ff. 116v–118v (parts of Ch. 18); the latter is mentioned only as a witness to Chs. 5–8 and 11.
- 5 <<https://opacplus.bsb-muenchen.de/title/BV040213482>>; digital images of the fragment are available online: <<https://daten.digitale-sammlungen.de/~db/0009/bsb00095977/images/>>.
- 6 Cf. Swanson 2009, 791–792.
- 7 Sobieroj 2007, 132.
- 8 Graf 1954, esp. 131–132.
- 9 Géhin 2017, 8.

Grote's name is likely to appear whenever one inquires into the history of Sinaitic manuscripts in Western collections. As to this, Graf makes an interesting remark in a letter from 1921, replying to Gratzl's communication regarding the BSB's recent acquisition of the Grote fragments:

When I examined Grote's fragments, I was of the impression to do the gentleman a favor for academic purposes. Finally, however, I had to realize that he had only mercantile interests, and for this purpose any success in determining [the fragments' age and contents] would naturally be beneficial for commercial success too, which was not what I had in mind originally.<sup>10</sup>

It is due to these 'mercantile interests' that Grote's fragments not only suffered from further dissection, but also were eventually dispersed throughout various Western institutions.

This certainly holds true for MS Munich BSB Cod. arab. 1071. In 1919, Grote approached Graf in writing for the first time. The two never met in person; rather, the collector was in the habit of sending his manuscripts to scholars he knew were experts in their respective fields. In Graf's case, his expertise was the history of Christian Arabic literature to which he had already devoted a monograph several decades before the publication of his *Geschichte*.<sup>11</sup> When the Munich fragment reached Graf in 1919, it consisted of three bifolia, of which, however, only two were acquired by the BSB two years later. In his 1954 description, Graf laconically remarks, 'I have no clue of the whereabouts of the former leaves 1/6.' ('Über den Verbleib der damaligen Blätter 1/6 [...] fehlt mir jede Kenntnis').<sup>12</sup> In Volume 2 of his *Geschichte*, he simply labels the bifolium as 'lost', however, referring to his own transcriptions of all three bifolia.<sup>13</sup>

It is thanks to Géhin that we now know that the missing piece had found its way into the collection of Syriac manuscripts of the Bibliothèque nationale de France (henceforth BnF).<sup>14</sup> The Arabic leaf (ff. 59–60) was bound together with eight Syriac fragments, all deriving from Grote's collection, and was as-

10 BSB Gratziana, Graf, no. 12, April 19, 1921: 'Als ich mich um die Bestimmung der Groteschen Fragmente bemühte, glaubte ich, dem Herrn zu wissenschaftlichen Zwecken einen Dienst erweisen zu können. Am Ende nahm ich gewahr, dass er bloss Handelsgeschäfte intendierte, und hiezu war ihm natürlich Bestimmungserfolg auch sehr dienlich zu geschäftlichem Erfolg, was ich ursprünglich nicht beabsichtigte.'

11 Graf 1905. A parallel case of Grote seeking out scholars to determine the age and content (and ultimately the value) of his manuscripts involved the two Greek palimpsests he later bequeathed to the Abbey of Beuron; see Dold 1929.

12 Graf 1954, 131–132.

13 Graf 1947, 26, n. 1. Graf's transcriptions are preserved in his Nachlass, on which see Tarras 2018.

14 Géhin 2006, 38–40.

signed the shelfmark Syr. 378. The BnF acquired the lot on 4 February 1922 from the Paris bookseller Henri Leclerc (1862–1941). Attached to MS Paris, BnF, Syr. 378 was a short description of the contents of each fragment, issued in Zurich on 10 May 1921. Since Grote died in Regensburg on 15 August 1922, he must have sold the fragment bundle to Leclerc in Paris, following a stopover in Zurich, sometime during the last two years of his life. The detour to Zurich is somewhat puzzling, though the fate of yet another part of the original codex to which the Munich/Paris fragment used to belong can help elucidate it.

When a total of eight Christian Arabic fragments reached Graf in 1919, the three bifolia of the Munich/Paris fragment were enclosed ('beigelegt') with an even larger fragment of 40 folios. Despite his only limited knowledge of the Sinai collection, Graf immediately recognized the fragment as a *membrum disiectum* of MS Sinai, Ar. 155, since it continued the Arabic translation of the Pauline Epistles edited on the basis of this manuscript by Margaret Dunlop Gibson in 1894.<sup>15</sup> Today, the 40 folios are part of the collection of the British Library (henceforth BL) in London and bear the shelfmark Or. 8612. According to one of Graf's letters to Gratzl, Grote intended to sell his whole collection to the British Library, hoping for 'better business' ('bessere Geschäfte') than he would encounter with German institutions.<sup>16</sup> The British Library bought the fragment in 1920<sup>17</sup> from a certain F.W. Bickel who was also involved in the transactions related to MS Paris, BnF, Syr. 378.<sup>18</sup>

Géhin surmised Bickel to be a bookseller like Leclerc. In fact, however, the person behind the initials 'F.W.' must be identified with the Swiss merchant Friedrich Wilhelm Bickel (1862–1942), father of the Swiss-British social and economic historian Wilhelm Bickel (1903–1977), and no other than Grote's brother-in-law. Bickel had married Grote's sister Margarethe (Theodore Georgine, 1866–1944) in 1892 in Madras, capital of the Madras Presidency of former British India. He was a cotton-grower and shareholder in various companies in India, having earned himself the nickname 'cotton king'.<sup>19</sup> Bickel and his family returned to Switzerland in 1920. Neither he nor his wife Margarethe had any interest in ancient manuscripts. Still, Bickel's professional background and his connections to England made him the perfect

15 Gibson 1894; see also Zaki 2017 and 2019. The first part of MS Sinai, Ar. 155 (ff. 1r–80v), comprising an Arabic version of the deuterocanonical book of Ecclesiasticus, was edited by Frank 1974; see also Tarras 2019.

16 BSB Gratziana, Graf, no. 12, 19 April 1921.

17 The manuscript bears a red receipt stamp on f. 40r. with the date 10 April 1920.

18 Cf. Géhin 2006, 24; 2010, 14, n. 2; 2017, 8, n. 27.

19 Stumpff 2018, 600.

middleman for Grote's manuscript sells, such that it is his name we find in a number of manuscripts that belonged to his brother-in-law Friedrich Grote.

While Graf conceded in 1925 that he knew 'nothing of the whereabouts of most of the fragments' from Grote's collection,<sup>20</sup> an article published by Fritz Krenkow the following year briefly informs the reader of the British Library's recent acquisition of two Christian Arabic manuscripts (MS London, BL, Or. 8605 and MS London, BL, Or. 8612) and 'some Christian Syriac documents'.<sup>21</sup> Krenkow concluded that these must originate from 'some Syrian Church or Monastery'. However, it was Graf who immediately drew the connection to St. Catherine's. What is more, two years after the collector's passing, Graf had managed to obtain an inventory list of the collection from Grote's wife, who continued to dissolve it. To Gratzl, he wrote:

While perusing [the inventory of Grote's manuscripts], two thoughts occurred to me involuntarily: 1) the wish to possess [the manuscripts] or at least to have them within reach, 2) the great sorrow about the vandalic dismemberment of the rich and precious MSS holdings of the Sinai monastery continuing now for four decades. For I have no doubt that, if not all, at least most of Gote's [sic] MSS fragments derive from the Sinai monastery and that both ignorance and greed bear the guilt of their dismemberment.<sup>22</sup>

Graf's disgruntled remarks raise two important questions: the first regards when Grote acquired his manuscripts; the second and more important regards how he acquired them. The fate of the Munich/Paris fragment shall serve here as an example. Our results, however, affect matters pertaining to provenance with respect to the whole of the former Grote collection. As we will see, answers to the first question are easier to pin down than to the second.

Fortunately, Gibson documented the find context of MS Sinai, Ar. 155 rather accurately, which allows us to reconstruct a *terminus ante quem* for the deliberate disintegration of the original manuscript. In the preface to her edition, she attributes the discovery of 'this little manuscript' to her twin sister Agnes Smith Lewis (1843–1926) and describes it as follows:

20 Graf 1925, 217.

21 Krenkow 1926, 275. To the manuscripts acquired via Bickel belong also the Christian Arabic MS London, BL, Or. 8857 and the Syriac MS London, BL, Or. 8858.

22 BSB Gratziana, Graf, 2 November 1924: 'Zwei Gedanken sind mir bei der Einsicht [des Inventars der Handschriften Grottes] unwillkürlich gekommen: 1) der Wunsch, sie zu besitzen oder doch in erreichbarer Nähe zu haben, 2) das grosse Bedauern, dass die schon seit vierz Jahrzehnten fortgesetzte vandalische Zerstückelung der reichen und wertvollen Hss-Bestände des Sinaiklosters immer noch weitergeht. Denn ich zweifle nicht, dass, wenn nicht alle, so doch die meisten Goteschen [sic] MSS[sic]-Fragmente dem Sinaikloster entstammen und dass Verständnislosigkeit und Habgier zugleich die Aufteilung in Stücke verschuldet hat.'

The manuscript from which I transcribed these Epistles was found by my sister, Mrs. S. [sic] S. Lewis, in February 1892, in the Convent of St. Catherine on Mount Sinai. It did not come out of the chest in the little dark closet which had yielded the Syriac codices, but lay in a basket in another closet at the foot of the staircase leading to the Archbishop's room, a closet which does duty for a library of Semitic and Iberian books. It had the number 155 on its tattered back, and it retains this number in the catalogue of Arabic books which I made the year after its discovery [...].<sup>23</sup>

The practice of keeping manuscripts in baskets and boxes was common at St. Catherine's, but must have changed before the turn of the last century during the period of the Scottish sisters' visits.<sup>24</sup> Gibson's report offers a first important clue as to the history of the *membra disiecta* of MS Sinai, Ar. 155. These must have been detached from the original codex before February 1892. The date coincides with Grote's stay at St. Catherine's and its environs. The Scottish sisters actually met him shortly before their own arrival at the monastery. Lewis documented the encounter in her travel journal, which Gibson later published:

Our tents were pitched at the foot of the Nugb Hawa, and there to our great delight we met Dr. Gröte [sic], an Anglo-German missionary to the Bedaween, who had been spending the three months of winter in the convent, and had made good use of the time in exploring its Greek library. He had no tent, but slept on an air bed just on the sand, and ate with his Bedawee escort.<sup>25</sup>

The report dates from the beginning of February 1892. Lewis speaks of 'the three months of winter', which means that Grote already had access to the monastery's library by the end (November or December) of 1891. Following this chronology, it is at least possible that Grote's fragments were detached from MS Sinai, Ar. 155 within this time frame.

Now one of the most pressing but also the most delicate questions is how Grote attained these fragments in the first place. All Graf knew (or was made to believe) was that Grote 'had bought them in earlier years in Cairo'.<sup>26</sup> In a letter to Gratzl from 1951, Graf elaborates only a little, writing, 'Mr. Grote formerly told me that he had acquired *all* his treasures from antiquities dealers in Cairo and elsewhere' ('Herr Grote [...] teilte mir früher mit, daß er seine Schätze *alle* bei Altertumshändlern in Kairo u. anderswo erworben habe').<sup>27</sup> As the acquisition history of other Sinaitic manuscripts in European

23 Gibson 1894, 5.

24 Gibson 1899, v, n. 1 remarks that the room upstairs where they used to work within the monastery 'has since been improved by two rooms thrown into it, and the whole has been furnished with shelves, on which the MSS. are arranged according to their numbers, old boxes and baskets being completely abolished'.

25 Gibson 1893, 35. The account is also quoted in Kessel 2014b, 50, n. 42.

26 Graf 1925, 217; cf. also Graf 1954, 125.

27 BSB Gratzliana, Graf, no. 66, 29 September 1951; the italics are mine.

libraries shows, whole codices and fragments were already available on the Egyptian antiquities market in the 1880s.<sup>28</sup> It is, however, also the case that manuscripts and fragments disappeared from the monastery between 1889 and 1894, which was noted and made public, for instance, by James Rendel Harris (1852–1941).<sup>29</sup>

A note recently published by Alba Fedeli from the private correspondence between Harris and Gibson documents the monks' viewpoint on the question of who might have been responsible for the pre-1894 misappropriation. According to them, the suspect was 'a certain Swiss German pseudo-missionary, who has spent so much of his time at Sinai, and has been lately in prison three months for theft'.<sup>30</sup> This 'pseudo-missionary' is no other than Friedrich Grote. The correction of 'Swiss' to 'German' is in the original and mirrors Grote's troubled biography. Born in Lower Saxony in 1861 as the first of ten children to the quarrelsome pastor and publicist Ludwig Grote (1825–1887),<sup>31</sup> he and his family emigrated to Geneva in 1877 because of his father's political persecution. The details of Grote's biography shall not occupy us here, as I intend to treat them in a separate publication.<sup>32</sup> Yet, it is worth reviewing the circumstances of his sojourn in Egypt in order to get a better impression of the way in which he came into the possession of his manuscripts.

After graduating from Geneva's Faculty of Theology around 1885, Grote held the pastoral office of the Milanese German Protestant Church (Chiesa Cristiana Protestante in Milano) between 1886 and 1889. The church archive still holds his letter of resignation, which yields interesting details:

After diligent personal deliberations and encouraged by the advice of theological friends, I have made up my mind and decided to quit church office in order to devote myself more exclusively to theological studies and thereby prepare myself for academic teaching. An extraordinary opportunity that arose for me in this instant to return to Sinai making use of St. Catherine's library reinforces my intention [...].<sup>33</sup>

28 This is the case, for instance, with five Georgian manuscripts and three single leaves now part of the collection of the University Library Graz. Austrian painter Alphons Leopold Mielich (1863–1929) purchased them in Egypt between 1883 and 1885. On the history of these manuscripts, see Imnaischwili 2008.

29 Detailed in Fedeli 2019, 233–235.

30 Quoted from Fedeli 2019, 234; see also *ibid.* n. 32. The letter is dated 29 January 1895.

31 On whom, see Stumpff 2018.

32 Tarras forthcoming.

33 CCPM, Grote, 11 September 1889: 'Nach gewissenhaften persönlichen Erwägungen und ermuntert durch die Beratung theologischer Freunde bin ich zu dem Entschluß gekommen, aus dem Kirchendienst auszutreten, um mich ausschließlicher den theologischen Studien widmen und dadurch auf Ausübung einer akademischen Lehrtätigkeit vorbereiten zu können. Eine außerordentliche Gelegenheit, die sich

Grote's relationship with the church board was not an easy one and must have contributed its share to his decision. It must also be noted that his plans of an academic career never materialized, which is why his scholarly as well as his collecting activities remained almost exclusively private matters.

Now, what was the 'extraordinary opportunity' he alludes to? As a handful of references in Eduard Schwartz's and Theodor Mommsen's edition of Eusebius' *Church History* makes clear, Grote received payment from the Church Fathers Commission of the Royal Prussian Academy of Sciences to collate manuscripts at St. Catherine's.<sup>34</sup> This assignment from the prestigious institution was probably Grote's door opener. Moreover, this might also indicate how we have to understand Lewis' remark that 'he made good use of the time in exploring [the monastery's] Greek library' in the period of 1891–92. Grote further writes of his 'returning' ('zurückkehren') to Sinai. From an 1891 travelogue, we not only learn that Grote guided a group of YMCA pilgrims to Sinai in the same year, but also that he 'had spent two months in the peninsula nine years ago'.<sup>35</sup> Thus, Grote had visited Sinai for the first time as a 21-year-old c.1882. The trip was sponsored by his peer and life-long friend, count Adalbert zu Erbach-Fürstenau (1861–1944), whom he also joined on a trip to Jerusalem in 1887, resulting in Grote's only traceable academic publication.<sup>36</sup> His traveling companion, by contrast, managed to establish himself as an expert on medieval European book art.<sup>37</sup> It is not unlikely that the count was at least partly responsible for interesting Grote in ancient manuscripts. During his solo tour on the Sinai Peninsula, however, Grote did not let everyone in on his interests. For in the 1891 report there is no mention of manuscripts. According to its author, 'Mr. Grote's purpose in accompanying us was to make certain investigations preparatory to opening a mission among the Bedouins'. Yet, it is also clear that his motives were not exclusively altruistic, and the guide received payment from the travel party. Further, Grote received funding from the Free Church of Scotland (hence Lewis' calling him an '*Anglo-German missionary*').<sup>38</sup> These records of Grote's financial situation indicate, in

mir in diesem Augenblicke darbietet, behelfs Benutzung der Katharinenbibliothek nach Sinai zurückzukehren, bestärkt mich in meinem Vorhaben [...].'

34 See Schwartz/Mommsen 1909, esp. xxx: 'Die Hs. ist von F. Grote auf Kosten der Berliner Akademie verglichen.'

35 Wishard 1891, 429.

36 See Grote 1887.

37 Stumpff 2018, 491–92. See also Crivello 2011.

38 See 'Notes from the Wild Field: Arabia', 210–211: 'Just now, however, a German of the Lutheran church, Rev. Mr. Grote, has been inspired by the published life of Mr. Keith-Falconer to undertake a mission among the Towara tribe of Bedouin around Mount Sinai. He has traveled in the Sinaitic peninsula, and has familiarized

my view, that he must have struggled to support his sojourn in Egypt. Gibson's remark about his having been imprisoned for theft seems to point in the same direction. Moreover, these records appear to stand in striking contrast to a report about the acquisition of one of his manuscripts, being the most detailed account of Grote's methods of acquiring, however, notably differing from the story he used to provide scholars like Graf with.

The manuscript in question is part of the so-called Codex Sinaiticus Zosimi Rescriptus (today MS Oslo, Schøyen Collection, 35–37),<sup>39</sup> a palimpsest with Georgian and Syriac upper writing and Christian Palestinian Aramaic undertext.<sup>40</sup> The report about the manuscript's acquisition is found in the 1937 volume of *Rotulus*, a catalogue series issued by the Leiden manuscript dealer Erik von Scherling (1907–1956), and reads as follows:

The precious volume had been offered in pawn about 1893 together with other Syriac mss. to a German traveler who had lent money to the monastery of St. Catherinea [sic]. It remained in this way many years in private possession without being the object of scientific examination.<sup>41</sup>

As to the Syriac manuscripts mentioned by von Scherling, there is no way of determining which of those manuscripts that ended up in Birmingham, London, Milan, Oslo, Paris, and the Vatican (not to mention those of Grote's manuscripts that were lost during WWII) formed part of this alleged 1893 'pawn'.<sup>42</sup> The Codex Zosimi Rescriptus makes a reappearance in a 1954 Sotheby's auction catalogue, and was by then in the possession of an otherwise unknown D. Maclarens who had purchased the palimpsest by auction in the meantime and is possibly responsible for the provenance statement, which reads: 'Purchased from the monks of St. Catherine of Sinai (where it had been since at least the 10th Century—see colophon of Georgian upper writing), by Friedrich Grote at the end of the last century'.<sup>43</sup> This information does not exactly accord with that given in *Rotulus*, though it might be a simplification

himself with the language of the Bedouin. He goes forth as a private missionary, but with funds obtained within the Free Church of Scotland.'

39 Note that MS Oslo, Schøyen Collection, 36 was included in sale 18152 (as lot 407) at Christie's on July 10, 2019. See Christie's 2019, 14–15; see also Prescott/Munch Rasmussen 2020.

40 See Desreumaux 1997.

41 Scherling 1937, 32. Quoted also in Fedeli 2019, 235.

42 For Grote's Syriac and Christian Aramaic Palestinian manuscripts, see Géhin 2006, 2007, 2010, 2017, Kessel 2014a, 2014b, Kessel and Smelova 2018, and Müller-Kessler 2014. For his connection to Mingana and the latter's collection held in Birmingham, see Fedeli 2019.

43 Sotheby & Co. 1954, no. 302. The manuscript was bought for 90,000£ by a Dr. O.O. Fischer. Note that Graf 1954, 125, n. 4 alludes to the catalogue as well, however, giving the wrong date.

of the latter. It should be noted that the purported acquisition of the palimpsest dates to the period during which a number of manuscripts were misappropriated from the monastery, as Harris documented. We shall again turn to Graf's engagement with Grote's manuscripts in order to more clearly highlight the discrepancies in their acquisition history.

Already in 1919, Graf expressed his suspicions that most of Grote's manuscripts 'had escaped the Sinai monastery' ('Es ist sehr wahrscheinlich, daß auch die übrigen Stücke dem Sinaikloster entkommen sind').<sup>44</sup> However, he did not speculate on how this could have happened. It was not until 1951 that Graf learned from Grote's widow Käthe Grote-Hahn that the collector himself had visited the monastery. Grote-Hahn sought Graf's help in selling the remainder of her deceased husband's collection.<sup>45</sup> After visiting her in Bad Homburg in September 1950, Graf wrote to Gratzl:

Now what is remarkable is that all manuscripts that I have seen of [the collection] as well as others, which have been published (in catalogues), originate from the Sinai monastery, as the many colophons prove. Mrs. Dr. Grote told me that her husband had been to the monastery. I believe to be entitled to assume with all certainty that the monks of Sinai tore apart their manuscripts themselves and sold them on their habitual journeys to Cairo as well as partly left them to the collector Dr. Grote in the monastery, piecemeal, in order to make more money.<sup>46</sup>

What is truly remarkable about Graf's deliberations is that he may have fallen for the collector's own account (as transmitted by Grote's widow), which he seems to be reproducing here. According to this story, it is the Sinaitic monks themselves who were responsible for the fragmentation and dispersal

44 BSB Gratzliana, Graf, no. 3, 25 July 1919.

45 Shortly after her husband's death, Käthe Grote-Hahn started selling parts of his collection. A rather bold offer was made to Agnes Smith Lewis in 1923; see Fedeli 2019, 239, n. 55. From Graf's correspondence with Gratzl (BSB Gratzliana, Graf, no. 71, 21 February 1954), we learn that 'Mrs. Dr. Kathi [sic] Grote, [residing] in Bad Homburg, eventually succeeded in selling the whole rest of the manuscript collection to the Vatican Library. I have not received notice of the price from either her or the Vatican Library.' ('die Frau Dr. Kathi Grote in Bad Homburg [hat] doch noch den Ankauf des ganzen Restes der Hss.-Sammlung durch die Vat. Bibliothek erreicht. Über den Preis hat weder sie noch die Vat. Bibliothek mir Mitteilung gemacht.')

46 BSB Gratzliana, Graf, no. 66, 29 September 1951: 'Nun ist das Auffallende, daß alle Hss., die ich davon gesehen habe, und die anderen, von denen schon etwas veröffentlicht ist (in Katalogen) aus dem Sinaikloster stammen, wie die zahlreichen Kolophone dartun. Frau Dr. Grote sagte mir auch, daß ihr Gemahl in diesem Kloster gewesen ist. Ich glaube, ganz bestimmt annehmen zu dürfen, daß die Sinai-Mönche selbst ihre Hss. zerissen haben und bei ihren oftmaligen Wanderungen nach Kairo dort verkauften, z. Tl. auch dem Sammler Dr. Grote im Kloster selbst überlassen haben, Stückweise, um so mehr zu verdienen.'

of St. Catherine's manuscripts. The same is implied by von Scherling's report and the Sotheby's provenance statement. This would mean that the *membra disjecta* of MS Sinai, Ar. 155 were taken from the codex shortly before Gibson and Lewis arrived at the monastery in February 1892 and were sold to Grote before that date.

Another document of uncertain origin appears to testify to Grote's account, or rather its circulation. It is an anonymous handwritten letter in French attached to the composite manuscript MS Paris, BnF, Ar. 6725, comprising six Christian Arabic fragments and one Syriac fragment, again deriving from Grote's collection.<sup>47</sup> It is likely that the addressee of this letter is Grote himself. The anonymous author is concerned with the provenance of fragment VII, a *membrum disiectum* of MS Sinai, Ar. 154, which she or he rightly assumes must have been detached from the codex after 1897 since its contents are reproduced in Gibson's 1899 edition of the manuscript's texts.<sup>48</sup> The preface to the edition, to which the anonymous author refers a number of times, details the stages of preparation by use of the manuscript, being completed during Gibson's third visit in 1897. The author speculates that the interest Gibson showed in this manuscript 'must have struck the illiterate monks as proof for its high antiquity and, above all, its value' ('Cet intérêt [...] ne peut avoir manqué de frapper les moins illettrés comme preuve de sa haute antiquité et pourtant de sa valeur').<sup>49</sup> Thus, the author raises the following point:

Have they, looking for profit, after Mrs. Gibson's departure, sought to sell or let sell through their agents at Suez the first two folios, which had been seen and published by Mrs. Gibson, together with the six folios, the absence of which was already noticed by her, suggesting that these were hid by the monks during the visits of the English scholar?<sup>50</sup>

The question could possibly be related to a provenance story Grote provided. The same holds for the subsequent question as to whether the eight folios of the *membrum disiectum* of MS Sinai, Ar. 154 'have passed through the hands of the same dealer of Suez' ('il serait intéressant si vos 8 feuilles sinaïtiques n'avaient pas passé par les mains du même négociant ['dealer'] [sic] du

47 The letter can be viewed at <<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b8406179n/f48.image>>. For a detailed analysis of the single fragments, see Géhin 2006, 25–31. Grote had shown Graf photographs of fragment III in 1921, cf. Graf 1925, 219.

48 Gibson 1899, esp. v–vi.

49 MS Paris, BnF, Ar. 6725, f. 19v; the English translation is mine.

50 *Ibid.*: 'Ont-ils, en quête d'un profit, trouvé moyen, après le départ de Mrs. Gibson, de vendre ou faire vendre par leurs agents à Suez les deux premières feuilles vues et publiés par Mrs. Gibson, plus les 6 feuilles dont l'absence déjà constatée par celle-ci fait supposer qu'elles étaient tenues cachées par les moins lors des visites de la savante anglaise?'; the English translation is mine.

Suez').<sup>51</sup> The story implied by the letter's anonymous author, however, goes beyond the account spread by the above-quoted catalogues, involving the accusation of greed for profit on the monks' side, which by then, of course, was a common trope in acquisition accounts of Western scholars and manuscript hunters.<sup>52</sup>

What conclusions are we to draw from this for the recent history of the Munich/Paris fragment? Thanks to the details provided by Gibson, it is certain that the *membra disiecta* of MS Sinai, Ar. 155 (including MS London, BL, Or. 8612) had been detached from the codex before February 1892. The detachment itself might have occurred either due to the disintegration of binding material or deliberate tampering. In the latter case, the perpetrator was one of the Sinaitic monks or their visitor Grote. Further, the manuscript fragments were either sold to Grote, given as pawn, or pilfered by him. The evidence presented above renders the purchase and pawn options implausible at best. First of all, Grote himself claimed to have bought *all* his manuscripts from antiquities dealers in Egyptian cities (i.e., Cairo, possibly Suez). This is belied by the *Rotulus* (and subsequent Sotheby's) provenance statement, which, in addition, does not mention Arabic manuscripts as part of the pawn. Further, there are the indications of Grote's strained financial situation, and there is his imprisonment,<sup>53</sup> allegedly for theft. As we have seen, thievery from St. Catherine's library was documented for the years between 1889 and 1894, coinciding with Grote's stay on the Sinai Peninsula and at St. Catherine's where he had access to manuscripts (though we hear only of Greek ones). It is striking that the guilt for the dismemberment of the Sinaitic manuscripts is placed on the monks in later accounts, the direct or indirect source of which, however, was Grote. Therefore, the most charitable reading of the evidence is that Grote bought at least some of his manuscripts directly from St. Catherine's, which must have involved the complicity of one of the monks. This is a possibility that calls for further scrutiny. It is strange, though, that Grote later seems to have tried to cover his tracks without any obvious reason. Thus, our sources could also be interpreted as showing that Grote deliberately misappropriated manuscripts from the monastery, which is what the monks expressly accused him of, rendering an indeterminate number of his manuscript holdings illicit. The Munich/Paris fragment might very well be among them.

As these few notes on the recent history of a Sinaitic manuscript have shown, the activity of collectors like Grote (and those who bought from him and from his buyers) led to the dispersion of fragments of some of St. Cath-

51 The author is referring to the provenance report in Lewis 1902, ix.

52 Cf. Stewart 2008, 624.

53 Grote's imprisonment is also documented in Hartwig 1894.

erine's most valuable and historically most significant manuscripts. Manuscripts are much more than text bearers. Manuscripts are themselves historical events, a 'cultural drama' materialized.<sup>54</sup> This drama continues well into our present day, albeit under completely different circumstances than at the time of their production. Fragmentation and dispersion weaken these artifacts as historical sources, something that can only be compensated by the laborious task of locating and reassembling dispersed *membra disiecta*. Here, I have only attempted at a first step, collecting bits and pieces of information concerning the fate of a fragment that ended up in three different European collections. Manuscripts from the Grote collection are still circulating today on the antiquities market, showing that the dispersion of Sinai's manuscripts, lamented by Graf one hundred years ago, still continues,<sup>55</sup> fortunately though to a much lesser degree. It can only be hoped that current owners of these artifacts are as forthcoming as possible about what they have acquired and where it comes from, making them available for further investigation to the scholarly public. Detailed scrutiny of the recent history of Sinaitic manuscripts in Western collections is still much needed. To this the present case study seeks to contribute.

### ***Manuscripts***

MS Harvard, Houghton Library, Syr. 171 [formerly Grote collection]

MS London, British Library, Or. 4950

MS London, British Library, Or. 8605 [formerly Grote collection]

MS London, British Library, Or. 8612 [formerly Grote collection]

MS London, British Library, Or. 8857 [formerly Grote collection]

MS London, British Library, Or. 8658 [formerly Grote collection]

MS Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Cod. arab. 1065 [formerly Grote collection]

MS Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Cod. arab. 1066 [formerly Grote collection]

MS Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Cod. arab. 1067 [formerly Grote collection]

MS Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Cod. arab. 1068 [formerly Grote collection]

MS Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Cod. arab. 1069 [formerly Grote collection]

MS Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Cod. arab. 1070 [formerly Grote collection]

54 This notion is borrowed from Nichols 1997.

55 See note 39 above.

- MS Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Cod. arab. 1071 [formerly Grote collection]
- MS Paris, Bibliothèque national de France, Ar. 6725 [formerly Grote collection]
- MS Paris, Bibliothèque national de France, Syr. 378 [formerly Grote collection]
- MS Oslo, Schøyen Collection, 35 [formerly Grote collection]
- MS Oslo, Schøyen Collection, 36 [formerly Grote collection, present location unknown]
- MS Oslo, Schøyen Collection, 37 [formerly Grote collection]
- MS Sinai, St. Catherine's Monastery, Ar. 154
- MS Sinai, St. Catherine's Monastery, Ar. 155
- MS Sinai, St. Catherine's Monastery, Ar. 448
- MS Sinai, St. Catherine's Monastery, Ar. NF Parch. 8

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