

**A Report on a COMSt workshop entitled ‘Oriental Textual Traditions and 21<sup>st</sup> Century Philology: New Challenges’ held in Leuven, 5-7 September 2012 at the Faculty Club**

**(Groot Begijnhof)**

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First, I would like to thank the ESF for providing me with a COMSt travel grant without which it might have not been possible to participate in such an eye opening conference! The conference was valuable in that it allowed me to rethink about the age old manual methods of textual edition and update myself with the emerging digital methods of textual scholarship. I have had the chance to meet prominent scholars who work in developing digital software for textual edition and was able to acquire some software which I hope I will use in my future works. The presentations given by many of the scholars gave me the insight into different manuscript cultures and their textual editorial histories, challenges and developments. I was given the chance to present my working PhD proposal from which I gained useful comments. Here under, I have tried to recapitulate the main points of the presentations.

**Day 1 (Wednesday, 5 September 2012)**

The conference was officially opened by Professor Dr. Alessandro Bausi. After welcoming the participants he briefly talked about the progress and future plans of the COMSt Team 2 handbook. Details about the forthcoming contents of this very hand book were discussed later in a separate session of the editorial team.

The first presenter, Sever Voicu, discussed the topic ‘The diffusion of John Chrysostom in Oriental languages’ He explained the issues of translation and attribution of composition. Chrysostom, who is believed to have composed about 620 homilies, was a prolific writer. His works were translated into 12 ancient and medieval languages. Translations of his other works including the homilies from Greek were made to Coptic, Syriac, Armenian, and Arabic with a clear line of the transmission. But, the translation of his works in to Ethiopic remains to be problematic to chart as one cannot produce clear textual evidence. He also added that it is hard to draw a line between works which are actually composed by Chrysostom himself and works by other Christian writers as many are allegedly attributed to him though that may not be the case in actual facts. This is attributed to the fact that the homilies were compiled while he was in exile.

The presentation: “The Edition of Apocryphal Literature” by Valentina Calzolari followed. In this presentation which was delivered in French (I had to rely on colleagues for clarification), the concept of ease of re-edition and modification in apocryphal literature was focused. Calzolari used Venetian and Parisian sources as cases in point. But, issues of generalization

were raised after her discussion as apocryphal literature in other cultures may not be as fluid as the ones she has taken as her sample.

The third speaker was Emilio Bonfiglio. His presentation focused on his ongoing critical edition work which he is preparing for the CSCO entitled: 'The Armenian Versions of the Martyrium of Philip: Status Questionis and Editorial Issues'. The Martyrium of Philip being one of the New Testament Apocrypha was written in Greek against some extreme austere Christians who were residing in present day Turkey in a place which was called Hierapolis. The Armenian version of the text preserves some original parts of the text which were later lost because of religious censure, Bonfiglio stressed. Translations from the Greek original are known to have been made into Armenian (the case in point), church –Slavonic, Syriac and Georgian. He expects a digital edition as it is difficult to handle a many column edition to be carried out on paper.

Caroline Macé's presentation: 'Dealing with an overabundant textual tradition – stemmatology and beyond' opened the second session. The writings of Gregory of Nazianzus were the subjects of her case study. She explained that though the writings of Gregory of Nazianzus were taken as canonical and authentic ones, a careful textual examination results in a different conclusion. For example, taking his homily one can easily see that he wrote it as a diary not as an authentic text for canonical religious use. She used ancient translations of the homily, 1200 Greek manuscripts (IX-XVI C.), Editio Aldina of 1516 and an edition by the Mauriners (1778-1840) as general subjects of her case study. She used homily 27 of the Latin, Armenian, Syriac (1 & 2) as bases and applied parcing as a method to reconstruct the archetypal reading which results in 556 variant locations and 691 variants. She displayed philogenetic tree using parcimony which seems to be the future of stemma building.

The presentation 'Syriac Monastic Antologies: Mediators or Obstacles in the Study of Monastic Literature in Syriac?-Some Methodological considerations on transmission of the texts' by Gregory Kessel was as long a presentation as its title. After explaining that the anthologies are useful to reconstruct the history of Syriac Christianity, he divided them into three major categories: West Syriac (Jacobite), East Syriac (Nestorian) and Chalcedonian. After stating that majority of the witnesses was written in Greek, the overall textual tradition could be dated to 4-7 Centuries with the oldest group and 15 C a later group. The main objectives as he stated are: discovery of new witnesses, discovery of new texts, reconstruction of 'real' transmission histories, and synchronic and diachronic analyses of the monastic intellectual culture.

Alessandro Mengozzi who presented the 'History of transmission and publication of Syriac dialogue poems' started his discussion with general methodological problems of edition. He stated that there is no single and binding method of textual edition, methods depend on objective circumstances like history of the text and its transmission though there have been times when editors played a role in choosing methods. He substantiated his claim taking the editions of Sebastian Brock. Brock, Mengozzi stated, published his Syriac dialogue poems in 20 different periodicals his corpus of the texts being chosen by the editors. He finally

described the corpus and concluded his presentation with some further methodological remarks.

Sophia Dege started the last session allotted for junior scholars to present their work briefly. She presented her ongoing PhD research work on the critical edition of the book of Aksimarus (Ethiopic, Ge'ez). My own presentation of my working PhD proposal on Ethiopian Medicinal and 'Magical' texts followed. Four short presentations on Arabic manuscript culture with different contents were the next ones: Maria on a textual edition of an Arabic text based on 2 manuscripts, Alba Fedeli on 'Virtual Reconstruction of Arabic Texts', Lucia Raggetti 'The Science of Properties: Natural Science, Magic and Medicine', and finally, Cornelius Berthold talked about 'Editing Standards and Lacking Standards in Oriental Studies'. Berthold stated that his nomenclature 'Oriental Studies' applies as is given in his institution, the university of Leipzig. This marked the end of the first day of the work shop.

## **Day 2 (Thursday, 6 September 2012)**

Jan Just Witkam's "The philologists's stone. The continuing search of the stemma" started the next day. This presentation in addition to its organized format was different from many others in that it was born out of the scholar's experience in text edition. He explained the academic hurdles he passed through to find an 'all including and definitive approach' for stemma construction. The hand out he distributed discusses the literature on stemmatology and the problems one faces when there is a huge number of witnesses of a manuscript especially of a manuscript culture which is not addressed in the text critical manuals of contemporary literature. He underlined the inherent pitfalls of Paul Mass's *Textkritik* and of his own teachers. The ideal nature of the steps and considerations for developing a stemma, Witkam rather scornfully, says were simple hypothetical formulations which are not tested in practice. The idea of an open recension which is practically possible was not part of Mass's handbook though ML West who followed Mass in the same line came up with such a brilliant idea. All in all this presentation was born out of the presenter's practical editorial toils.

The next presentation by David Birnbaum and Lara Sels shifted the mood from the 'old' manual philological methods in to the 'emerging' digital philological innovations. Their work "Editing Medieval Slavonic Translations of Byzantine Texts" focused on a text entitled 'The Story of Mary Abraham's niece'. They elaborated a digital edition where modern techniques of dealing with fonts, magnification and text and image parallel display are possible. In addition to their specific area of edition they touched up on theory and methods of digital editions.

Before the noon of that day there was a thorough round-table discussion on 'Oriental Textual Traditions and 21<sup>st</sup> Cent. Philology: New Challenges' chaired by Caroline Macé. The discussion revolved around stemma and history of traditions, whether stemma and history of traditions is always possible and desirable, the problems of 'ancestor' and 'extant' tradition, the issue of diplomatic editions, questions of readership and their effects on the textual scholarship, whether going for digital editions can solve the problems of critical editions or not, whether there are intrinsic differences between 'oriental' and other textual traditions, how phylogenetic method could be applied to open recensions and archetypes, and what does

the terminologies ‘archetype and open tradition’ mean. This session was later followed by editorial meeting of the handbook of team 2 of the COMSt.

The next session was devoted to the Interedition Schooling Program of the COMSt where problems and approaches for transcription of oriental manuscripts esp. software for automatic text collation were presented. Another tool for paleographical and editorial transcription was also part of the lively discussion. The discussants offered the tools like the T-PEN to the participants. The next presentation by Stefan Hagel on ‘Classical Text Editor’ was more than practical for it can perfectly be applied for Ethiopic textual editions of which my ongoing research projects area a part. I am using this software in my edition of an Ethiopian hagiographic text of a female saint.

### **Day 3, 7 September 2012**

The day was totally devoted to the interedition schooling program. Tools for detecting how many authors have been involved in a manuscript, tools for managing large scale corpora of manuscripts, and uses and usefulness of digital methods for textual scholarship were discussed. Like in the previous day tools like the ‘stemaweb’ for digital editions was offered by Tara Andrews to the participants.

With concluding remarks by Jan Just Witkam the workshop was officially closed.

### **What have I gained?**

To walk with the pace of time, one has to update himself with new innovations. The workshop has done this for me in the area of digital editions. I will try to use the tools for digital collation, Image and text processing and the classical text editor in my future works. In addition to these insights, it was a good chance to meet giant scholars of the field and learn from them in person.