

Report

Workshop of COMSt Team 4 „Cataloguing Projects of Oriental Manuscripts: Evolution of Descriptive Criteria” Uppsala (Sweden) 22-23 September 2010

Thanks to the ESF-travel grant, I could attend the workshop of COMSt team 4 in Uppsala. In the ongoing research project *Corpus Coranicum* of the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities of which I am responsible, it seems to be crucial to share knowledge and experiences with scholars and institutions in the field. The convenor Prof. Witold Witakowski organized a rich and dense programme for this two days workshop on issues of cataloguing oriental manuscripts.

In the first panel an overview about cataloguing techniques concerning Ethiopian, Arabic, Syriac, Coptic, Greek, Old Slavonic and Old Russian manuscripts was given by specialists from the variant disciplines. As the issue of cataloguing of Qur’anic manuscripts is central in our ongoing project at the Academy of Sciences in Berlin, it was important to ask questions concerning e.g. ornaments and how these “paratextual” issues could be treated in a cataloguing enterprise. In our project at the Academy, we are currently producing in the shape of an SQL-database a research catalogue “Manuscripta Coranica” by which the textual witnesses on the history of the Qur’an will be accessible to the public. Here parameters have been developed by our research group in Berlin and it was important to listen to specialists from neighbour disciplines. In the discussion led by prof. Witakowski and prof. Witakowska relevant parameters (physical, palaeographical, content, discussion about ornaments, colophons, dating and others) for a catalogue description were discussed. Among the various conversations and discussions, the discussion with Prof. Irmeli Perrho who has published a large catalogue on the manuscripts in the library of Copenhagen and a representative of the Vatican Library were in particular helpful for me.

Since the Berlin project is working with data-base structures for both cataloguing and documenting material relevant for the history of the Qur’an, I was very pleased to see that technical issues (text encoding, data structuring etc.) were given a central place in the COMSt meeting. Matthew Driscoll (Copenhagen) held a quite impressive introduction into xml referring to the TEI-standard (Text Encoding Initiative). Being a scholar in the field of Icelandic, he gave a convincing presentation how philology can change standards by applying new techniques for encoding and structuring linguistic data. In the Berlin project on the textual history of the Qur’an and a critical commentary (“Corpus Coranicum” / BBAW), we are using SQL-databases for the documentation of manuscripts and variant readings. At the moment, especially for the section of the commentary, we are trying to apply xml-structures to encode the data in a more sophisticated way. The examples Dr Driscoll gave, were quite convincing, and I am grateful to the ESF for having had a chance to get in contact with a scholar that is applying these structures successfully in the field of Nordic, old Germanic languages and text editions.

During the workshop I had also the opportunity to get in contact with younger scholars and students in the field of Semitic languages working in Syriac or Arabic studies. It was exciting as well to pay a visit to Uppsala’s university library and the oriental manuscript department with its director Mickael Persenius. The library has a

quite old collection of Arabic and Syriac manuscripts, and due to the tradition of the studies in the fields of theology and church history, during the last two centuries a number of Swedish scholars engaged in the field of Qur'anic studies. The most prominent of them was Tor Andrae (1887-1947), theologian, bishop of Linköping and scholar in Qur'anic Studies. His book, *Mohammed, Sein Leben und sein Glaube* (1932), can still be considered a reference for the question about the context of the first Muslim community. I was quite excited to see that the University library has a to date unpublished work of another scholar, perhaps a teacher of Tor Andrae, prof. Ernst Victor Nordling (1832-1898) on the Qur'an. Hopefully, with the cooperation of the university library, our project could take care of this still unknown work on the Qur'an. I think that it will be worth to study Nordling's manuscript about the Qur'an and hopefully a young scholar, knowing Swedish would help us with this little research project.

I am grateful to the organisers of the Uppsala conference for having prepared such a rich programme. Sometimes it might be not easy to find a common language in meetings where several disciplines are present, but it is important to start to develop common standard in disciplines that deal all with manuscripts in Oriental languages, especially when technical possibilities allow us a much easier accessibility and visibility of material and achievements in the field. As I told the organiser of the Uppsala conference, the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities will be honoured to host a COMSt meeting of team 4 in the coming years in Berlin.

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