

**Scientific Report of the international workshop
“Digital Cataloguing Projects of Oriental Manuscripts: Evolution of Descriptive Criteria”,
Uppsala, 22-23 September 2010.**

The purpose of the visit to Uppsala, which took place between the 22nd and 23rd of July 2010, was to assist to the COMSt workshop “Cataloguing Projects of Oriental Manuscripts: Evolution of Descriptive Criteria”.

In the afternoon of the 22nd, after the welcome address and the presentation of participants, the first Session was devoted to reports on current project of cataloguing Oriental manuscripts. The first Speaker, Professor Witakowski (Uppsala), tried to give a definition of Ethiopian manuscripts, considering the large number of Semitic languages attested in such documents. Moreover, the number of scholars and students in this field is considerably inferior in comparison with other languages and traditions. He referred the experience of Professor Witakowska, who conducted a census in Northern Ethiopia, finding a number greater than the estimated one. Cataloguing is useful also for a large number of Western libraries where Ethiopic manuscripts are preserved. The speaker delineates two different approaches to cataloguing activity: one concerning with small collections, the other including a larger number of witnesses and made by non specialists. In the former group it is possible to include compound catalogues with a different degree of accuracy (British Library, University of Minnesota, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana). In the former, instead, there are the catalogues written by non-specialists, who use to consider manuscripts mainly as material objects; in many cases, no secondary literature is quoted.

The Irmeli Perho, who worked on electronic (Islamic manuscripts in Michigan and the Royal Library in Copenhagen) and printed (Qom in Iran and Royal Library in Copenhagen) catalogues reported her experience. She affirmed that electronic catalogues need to receive feedbacks, concerning each parameter, by scholars. But the time requested risks to be too long. In addition, there are several problems of compatibility from a system of digital cataloguing to another. The speaker mentioned the Copenhagen catalogue as example, where the parameters were decided *a priori*, choosing to reproduce the first and last page, especially if the manuscripts were of some artistic interest.

André Binggeli (Paris) reported on the recent cataloguing projects of Syriac manuscripts in Charfet (Lebanon). Firstly, the speaker traced a brief history of previous catalogues (Wright, Brock), noting that in the field of Syriac studies paleography gets left behind and codicology is neglected. Then he presented the project in Lebanon (2007), where four people worked for the same number of years on a huge number of manuscripts in Syriac or Garshuni, hailing from two different collection (Patriarchal and Raḥmani). In such a work, bibliographical references include Greek works, description gives a wealth of details, the linguistic question is important to deal with both Syriac and Arabic texts and sometimes there are also problems of identification, philological approach is needed for especially for liturgical texts. In 2008 a database of existent catalogues was asked, in order to centralize the resources in the form of a list at scholars' disposal.

Paola Buzi (Hamburg) presented a report of recent cataloguing projects in Coptic manuscripts. The speaker handled with the compilation of a Coptic fragments' catalogue which had had a long history and prestigious ancestors. Such fragments converged in two distinct collections, property of Jacopo Nani and cardinal Cesare Borgia. Mingarelli was the first one to attempt to catalogue them (1786): since he was aware of fragmentary nature of the texts, gave extensive quotations. Zoega made another milestone-catalogue (1810), including paleographic and codicological information. After some decades without significant improvements, the catalogue of Bentley-Leyton appeared as innovative, devoting interest to material support and dedicating a section apart to the correlations

among fragments. In her own catalogue a wider room is given to fragments' references and to call numbers too. Regrettably, there is still a lack of specific terminology and not all the fragments are identified.

Then, Andé Binggeli presented a report devoted to recent cataloguing projects of Greek manuscripts. The *corpus* consists in 3000 manuscripts of Rochard Collection, as *addendum* to 1995 printed catalogue. Many collection have already been catalogued, but a revision is required. The concept of codicological unit leads to be as accurate as possible in describing all the procedures implied in the creation of a manuscripts as it is. For example, in the National Library of France there was still an inventory of the XIX century, a general catalogue –where also the codicological aspects were analyzed- was missing. Since 1993, a database of Greek manuscripts has been existing, 40.000 manuscripts have already been described, with the aim to include the text in its textual tradition.

Per Ambrosiani (Umea, Sweden) reported on recent cataloguing projects of Old Slavonic and Old Russian manuscripts. The speaker presented the state of art, adding that many of the previous catalogues are available on line, if they are not reprinted; but there are several difficulties in transcription and identification of fonts. Moreover, catalogues are produced in many different languages since they are perceived as national products, witnesses of a peculiar linguistic tradition. It would be desirable to standardize, to find a way to harmonize different tradition of studies, making use of modern technology.

The Second Session was dedicated to a discussion concerning the elements of catalogue description of manuscripts (codicology, paleography, content). Professor Den Hejer presented a model of manuscripts' cataloguing. He declared that the same criteria discussed before can be adopted, but they should be fulfill in a shorter time, may be deepened later. Professor Bausi replied wishing an open-catalogue model (like in Biblioteca Malatestiana) to be updated online, with a sort of electronic signature and copyright to guarantee added information. Professor Driscoll suggested that the best and widest technical opportunity is given by TEI, where categories are clear and the frame is searchable. Discussing about Delamarter's catalogue of Ethiopian manuscripts, Professor Bausi pointed out that such catalogue has ignored the whole tradition of studies, but it follows the stream which tries to revalue material aspects. Zotenberg had already described Ethiopic tradition in connection with the other ones of Christian Orient. Then Professor Driscoll suggested to propose a fictitious title for manuscripts lacking of it, in order to ease the research.

The Third Session was devoted to discussion on the elements of catalogue description. Professor Balicka-Witakowska (Uppsala) proposed a more attentive approach to illuminations and decoration in general. Specific catalogues exist, but in the rest of them little interest is given to decoration, even if both are research's tools to be looked through. Furthermore, a system of abbreviations to point out the different aspects of decoration could be extremely useful, also because general and specific terminology needs to be defined. Cataloguing performed as team work could get closer to completeness.

Then a further discussion concerning the element of catalogue description of manuscripts followed. The remarks emerged were: the approach to the ideal chapter of an handbook should be theoretical and cultural, pointing out peculiarities of each tradition; wider labels and categories should be defined in order to inscribe specific problems in a general terminology; the project of cataloguing oriental manuscripts in Germany develops printed catalogues with a text suitable to be searched on line; as suggested by the examples of Brockelmann and Zotenberg, a scholar knows when it is useful to add further details to description; paleographic description can be done only observing the physical object, formal elements should be pointed out with the aim of comparing on such a basis.

The Fourth and last Session dealt with computer technologies as tool of cataloguing manuscripts and was inaugurated by Paola Buzi with the report from the Workshop of Team 3 in Hamburg on July 23-24.

Then, Matthew Driscoll (Copenhagen) presented TEI (Text Encoding Initiative) whose target is an international standard for the manuscripts' description. TEI module includes a holding institution, intellectual contents, codicological and paleographic features, text layout and illumination or decoration in general, origin and provenance, primary and secondary bibliographical information. It could be an useful and flexible tool for description at every level.

The final discussion led to the concrete proposal of writing down an exhaustive bibliography to check the status of the art, in order to prepare the future handbook's chapter as organic and complete as possible. The intention to carry out such discussion emerged, considering subject's complexity.

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