

Report

Workshop of COMSt Team 2 „Textual Criticism and Oriental Manuscripts“

Leuven, 25-26 October 2010

Thanks to the ESF-travel grant, I could attend the workshop of team 2 in Leuven, together with two junior researches of our research project „Corpus Coranicum“ at the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities. In the ongoing research project Corpus Coranicum on the textual history of the Qur'an it is crucial to share knowledge and experience with scholars and institutions in the field. The convenors Johannes den Heijer and Caroline Macé organized a rich and dense programme for this two days workshop in Leuven. In the first panel the historical overview about philological techniques of text editions did offer an impressive bird's eye perspective on the field and its history. It somehow made clear that the edition of texts and academic reflection about is often times closely related to the circumstances and needs of the period they were embedded in. Especially when modern computer techniques and data base structures allow us to deal with the manuscript material in a sophisticated way, one has to ask the question whether to refer to systems like the Lachmannian method or other philological edition methods blindly without rethinking how methods before the age of digital techniques would make its way with today's possibilities. The example of the CSCO-Corpus was a good example to show the development of a central edition series in the field of text editions in the languages of the Middle East. During the whole workshop, and especially in the second panel, e.g. in the very systematic and technically very sophisticated approach of Wido van Peursen on the transmission of the Syriac Bible, the field of philological methods applied on sacred texts was of central interests for myself and my colleagues working on the textual history of the Qur'an. The lecture of Udo Zanetti brought another type of sacred texts into the discussion: liturgical traditions. Here, it seems, a huge corpus of complicated transmission patterns seems to be fairly understudied to date. In the field of Qur'anic studies, liturgical texts of the Oriental churches seem to have played a major rôle to influence the environment of the Qur'an and one would wish that more attention could be paid to the intricate textual transmission of liturgical traditions, especially of the Middle Eastern Christian communities. The presentation of Zuzana Gazakova made clear that the question of the relationship between oral and written transmission cannot be left out. Philological study especially on popular literary genres (as well as the already mentioned liturgical traditions) has to be very careful to understand the value of a written document in the relationship to the function of the written down text in the circumstances of « real life ». The lecture of Hugo Lundhaug was very valuable since it offered reflections on transmissions of texts where more than one language is involved. Unfortunately Joshua Sabih could not deliver his lecture on Jewish texts, I hope that in one of the next Comst-meetings his studies on Jewish bilingual Bible manuscripts can be discussed. The presentations on orthography and punctuations (e.g. Antonia Giannouli) offered interesting perspectives into the field, but sometimes during the discussions of the workshop, somehow the need was felt that the experiences of specialists of the philology in one field or one language are not always understood by specialists of a neighbour philology. It is here that the COMSt-meeting in Leuven offered very inspiring discussions during the meetings but also during the breaks. The impressive presentation of Joris van Zundert on a technique that developed in the field of Germanic philology pointed to an already existing substantial gap between individual scholars in their way they make use of digital solutions. During two decades, it seems, very different compatible technical solutions have developed, making it somehow difficult to overview and evaluate properly modern

technology in the field. Here the COMSt-network could produce perhaps very needed technical consultancy in the disciplines of oriental philologies. The panel of project presentations of younger scholars was very stimulating and I do hope that the following meetings will offer more time to similar sessions. We were very happy that two junior researchers (H. Gurtmann and T. Khadomalsharieh) of our Berlin based project could briefly discuss their research on Qur'anic manuscripts (questions of transliteration and graphic reconstruction of palimpsests). Myself having had the opportunity to present ongoing research on the textual history of the Qur'an, was very pleased to have discussions with colleagues of neighbouring philologies. It was especially with those colleagues working on sacred texts that many shared aspects and problems were discovered. Here, a very important remark was made by one Jewish scholar who brought in the relevance and the intense reception of research results if the text in question is relevant for a religious community today. Although I could not follow the sometimes very specialised presentations during the workshop in all their details, the COMSt meeting pointed to the need that scholars in neighbouring philologies of one cultural space (the Middle East in a larger sense) have to exchange their experience in a similar context more often, in order to benefit from each other's experiences and to develop more and more a "cross-disciplinary-language". Difficult to predict how will be the result, but the not-so-small group of specialists working on text editions in the different Oriental philologies share knowledge and experience that offers a huge potential to each other. Digital philology is still in its beginnings and more scholars in the European academia should be made aware of the COMSt-project, even if they cannot attend all the meetings.

I was very pleased that the responsible scholars for COMSt Team 2 „Textual Criticism and Oriental Manuscripts“ asked me to become member of the team. For the planned publication I will contribute an overview about digital philology in the field of Qur'anic studies. The discussion with scholars participating in the research network seems to be very promising to obtain advice and feed back for digital solutions (data base structures) relevant for the ongoing development of a digital interface to explore the textual history of the Qur'an. Also, in the field of liturgical Oriental traditions (Syriac, Coptic, Ethiopian) and the question about the relationship between written and oral textual tradition, the discussion with scholars through the COMSt-network and their workshops will be of high value.

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