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**Report about the workshop “Specific issues in Oriental philology” (COMSt Team 2)  
held in Athens, 8-9 December, 2011**

A workshop held in Athens can be justly considered as a very rare and valuable opportunity when scholars from different fields of Oriental studies could discuss and share various problems pertaining to their field of research.

Before presenting some of the papers that were delivered, I would like to express my reflections on why such a mutual discussion is important.

Each field of Oriental studies (not to say about Classical and Medieval studies) has its own tradition of research that was formed in particular circumstances, has its own background and schools. Thus, while starting to work in a particular field a scholar gets used to its methods, tools and approaches. However, there exists no perfect field that requires no further development and improvement. Therefore, an acquaintance with methods, tools and approaches that are used in other fields can play a very important role in further promotion of the field and in refinement of its dealing with the texts. For that reason, a discussion of the problems related to the texts as experienced by the representatives of different fields can be seen as an urgent desideratum.

A mutual discussion of the problems related to the texts can only enrich any field while providing it with new insights on how to deal with certain problems. Eventually, it contributes to the development of the field.

Particularly, an acquaintance with more developed fields can be of great significance while assisting in thematization of the problems and finding the approaches to deal with those problems.

The acquaintance with other fields can help to revise the methods used in one particular field and, what is most important, to reveal the presuppositions and stereotypes.

A mutual discussion has also another aspect of importance. Due to the fact that every field has its own tradition of research, it uses a special scholarly language that

quite often is not self evident and comprehensible for scholars from another fields. It impedes an interdisciplinary research and prevents the results achieved in a field to become easily accessible for scholars from another fields. One can not evaluate the situation as most unfortunate and in my opinion any field will only win when there is a common ground (scholarly lexicon, approaches, methodology) that makes a division between the fields more transparent.

An acquaintance with other traditions and fields of research can not only be instrumental in getting hold of new methods and approaches. Awareness about problems related to other traditions can assist in more refined perception of one's own domain of study. Namely, an investigator will be able to reveal those problems that are peculiar to the text of his field of research when he/she is well aware about other manuscript traditions and problems that texts belonging to those traditions can contain. Consequently, becoming more cautious about specificities of the texts of one particular tradition, an investigator will pay more attention to them and thereby will be able to study the text more thoroughly and will be able to produce more reliable edition.

Such meetings of scholars representing different fields of Oriental studies can not only help in improving and enriching its methodology with regard to the textual criticism. Rather, while attempting to reveal characteristics of different Oriental traditions, it seems that the most specific traits of the Oriental text (as opposed to the Classical and European tradition) also become more recognizable. And, therefore, while trying to emulate developed techniques of the Classical studies, we should not blindly apply its entire methodological repertoire to the Oriental texts. What appears to be more perspective, is, thanks to a good awareness of the methodology of Classical studies and a clear understanding of the specific traits of particular field of Oriental studies to find the best methods and approaches for dealing with the texts. One can not but be deeply grateful to COMSt project that makes it possible not only for those who manage to attend the workshops but also, thanks to an envisaged handbook, for all those who is and will involve into particular domain of Oriental studies.

One practical detail. It is undoubtedly was a wise solution thanks to the establishment of travel grants to provide opportunities for young scholars to attend the

workshops organized by COMSt. While considering the Athens workshop, I am sure that it proved to be a wonderful opportunity for exchange and learning not only for your researches but also for established scholars.

Now I would like to present some of the delivered papers.

Lara Sels (“Editing Medieval Slavonic translations of Byzantine Texts”) used a Slavonic translation of Gregory of Nyssa’s “De opificio hominis” to demonstrate what kind of problems can be encountered while working with Slavonic translations of Greek texts. Interestingly enough, Sels stressed the point that issues related to the vast field of Slavonic translations had been never approached from the methodological point of view. Some of the most important issues were presented in the paper.

As one of the most important desideratum in that domain is a study of translation techniques. In the course of many centuries many dozens and hundreds of texts were translated into Greek and one can clearly reveal periods when different approaches (some more literal, another more periphrastic) to Greek literature were implemented.

Another issue that was underlined by Sels is a necessity for an editor not only to study the text itself but also to be attentive to the context in which it was transmitted. It is important in the sense that it can convey a very clear and important idea about the way how a particular text was perceived and read. For example, “De opificio hominis” can be found in the collections which are devoted to a treatment of a creation history.

From the perspective of a study of text, so argued Sels, it is important to take into account both its original Greek text and its Slavonic translation(s) and not only to limit a research to the Slavonic version.

Marie Cronier (“The use of translations for the edition of an original text (Greek and Arabic)”) made a presentation of a methodological nature and discussed the importance that can lie in an Arabic translation. Of course, it goes without saying that in the situation when the original is lost, an Arabic translation can be of the utmost significance in making the text available and accessible for further investigation.

However, if an original survives then the importance of an Arabic translation can be assessed more cautiously and only afterwards one can decide whether that translation should be used as an indirect witness to the text or not. Cronier stressed that not every Arabic translation is helpful in studying a certain Greek text. For example, if an original manuscript tradition of the text is solid and old then the Arabic version can be simply identified as representing particular branch of its manuscript transmission and, consequently, there appears to be no need to use that translation in the edition. However, and what is quite often the case, an Arabic translation can represent an older stage in the history of the text than any of the extant Greek manuscripts. In that case the Arabic version needs to be studied and edited. Only when the Arabic text is critically edited, an editor can use it for a further study of the Greek original and for establishment of the critical edition.

Cronier singled out different issues that need to be treated while working with Arabic translation: there can exist more than one Arabic translation of the same Greek text; it is necessary to reveal translation techniques used by a translator and to reveal his abilities in comprehension of the Greek; a translation can be not complete but an abridged one; translation can be inaccurate; it is necessary to investigate which reasons might stand behind the variation on a textual level.

Cronier concluded the paper underscoring that not every Arabic translation is valuable and it is necessary to implement an accurate examination in order to reveal its limits with regard to its Greek original.

A paper of Andrea Schmidt ("Editing an Armenian text translated from Syriac (the History of Michael the Syrian)") dealt with an Armenian translation of the "Chronicle" of Syrian orthodox patriarch Michael the Great (1126-1199) that is considered as one of the most important sources for study of Syriac Christianity. The problems revealed in the Armenian translation are as follows: there exist two different translations (what is most striking, both were produced in the same time by the same group of translators!); Armenian translation was made based on an autograph (whereas the surviving Syriac manuscripts are considerably younger); the translation is not literal

but periphrastic; the Syriac text underwent a significant editorial interferences; the form of the original Syriac text (division into three columns) was reworked into a continues narration; there were introduced a lot of additions related to the Armenian history. All those problems require special treatment by an editor.

A joint paper of Johannes den Heijer and Perrine Pilette (“Research on Coptic-Arabic historiography”) aimed to demonstrate on example of an important for the history of Medieval Egyptian Christianity text “History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria” a complex manuscript tradition of a Christian Arabic text. On the one hand, there exists a primitive, and more original, recension of the text. On the other hand, a reworked and supplemented with additional material recension of the same text became the most widespread form of the treatise. Johannes den Heijer pointed at various sorts of disagreement that can be found between two recensions and highlighted a difficulty of finding solution for those issues in the context of work on critical edition of the text. Finally, it was stressed that the field of Christian Arabic studies lacks a standard methodology of textual criticism. This complicates the task of an editor of Arabic Christian texts and eventually can lead to imperfect editions.

Alessandro Bausi’s contribution (“Purported fluid traditions (Ethiopic)”) was aimed to present a fluid tradition. Additionally, Bausi provided a very useful overview of editorial techniques applied to the Ethiopic texts by modern editors. As demonstrated by Bausi, the field of Ethiopic studies does not have a standard textual criticism and for that reason editors, while dealing with problems presented by the texts, do not always find satisfactory solutions and not always produce reliable editions. Moreover, Bausi revealed very clearly peculiar traits of Ethiopic texts (e.g. existence of many recensions, late manuscript traditions) that form a specific field of problems.

Ilse de Vos’ contribution (“Dealing with a large manuscript tradition (Greek: Pseudo-Athanasius’ Erotapokriseis)”) was an excellent illustration of the use of databases while working with a text represented by a big number of witnesses. A text

that de Vos works on is witnessed by 233 manuscripts and it was simply impossible, applying standard methods, to study text's manuscript transmission and establish a critical edition. However, thanks to the use of computer database, it became possible to reveal families and thereby to examine text's history and development.

Ugo Zanetti ("Editing liturgical texts (Greek, Coptic) (continued)") introduced the problems that can be encountered while working with liturgical texts. To the specific traits of liturgical literature belong the following: it is not possible to establish an archetype of particular text; every variant reading is potentially very important; rich manuscript transmission. As a possibility for solving a range of difficulties related to edition of liturgical texts Zanetti proposed a digital edition that due to its polyfunctionality can provide a ground for a proper representation of text's complexity.

It goes without saying that one of the most fascinating contributions to the workshop was that of Matthew Driscoll ("On Old and New Philology") who presented the main principles of the "new philology". A special interest of that contribution made by a scholar of Old Irish literature for researchers from different fields of Oriental studies is determined by the fact that many of the basic principles of the "new philology", as exposed by Driscoll, match very well to some of the problems peculiar to Oriental texts. In particular, there exist many texts in Syriac that are extant in only one, unique copy. In that case a researcher is obliged to study as deep as possible that copy and, consequently, he/she is not able (due to the lack of other witnesses) to reconstruct an archetype. The approach can be characterized as text (or: witness) oriented (rather than "author", in classical philology). And it is precisely this approach that is advocated by the "new philology".

Another example can be drawn from my own project that deals with Syriac manuscript collections of monastic literature (ca. 130 manuscripts). Many of those collections were used for edition of particular text but never have been studied "per se", as collections. Thus we see that modern editors, while extracting one text from the collection, disregarded the context of the text, neglected the way how the text was

understood and transmitted. This kind of approach quite often led to imperfect editions, as the editors, not paying attention to the context of the text, did not realize that the text in the collection was subject to certain editorial interventions. Therefore in my study of the anthologies, apart from simply describing the contents of the collections, I would like to reveal all those possible techniques that a text might have undergone being transmitted in a collection. My interest is, therefore, not with particular texts but with real manuscripts that contain them. Every collection is equally important (despite its age) and the more collections are studied, the more clearly and precisely I can detect the peculiarities of the transmission of texts in them.

I think it was not only my impressions that many of the principles of the “new philology” were felt as already known and applied in this or other way in one’s particular area of studies. It was, however, important to learn that there exists an independent methodology that comprises and unites all those principles and approaches.

All in all, a meeting of scholars from different fields of Oriental studies proved to be very successful and meaningful. It will not be an exaggeration to argue that meetings like this one shape the future of Oriental studies while opening new perspectives for research and providing new approaches for investigation of the texts. It is already a great achievement that various fields of Oriental studies tend to become, on the one hand, more interrelated between each other and, on the other hand, more transparent with other big domains of research outside of Orientalism.