

**Scientific report**  
**on the Syriac manuscripts Session of the**  
**11<sup>th</sup> SYMPOSIUM SYRIACUM INTERNATIONAL**  
**(16-18 June 2012)**  
**University of Malta, Valletta, Malta**

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**1. Purpose of the visit**

The “Syriac manuscripts Session” held in Malta in the framework of the 11<sup>th</sup> Symposium Syriacum in Malta was an exceptional occasion to be aware on the research progress in the field of the Syriac manuscripts and also to present the results of my own work.

The field of the Syriac Manuscripts is actually in progress. The particularities of the “Syriac codicology” is being at present explored by famous personalities who have participated at the Symposium. I had to assist to those presentations in order to be able to make precise descriptions of the Syriac Manuscripts. Just as an example : for my job (Engineer for the ANR SYRAB), I must every week describe the Binding of five manuscripts in the Richelieu Library (Paris, BnF). If I could see that those Bindings were very different from the Byzantin or the Arabic one, I always just felt enable to describe their seam or their sinking accurately, and I was never sure to be in front of a real Syriac Binding, or rather a kind of Byzantin binding. So that I needed to be enlightened on that point.

That field can be now explored, thanks to recent initiatives like the catalogue made by a french-lebanese team in Charfet (André Bingelli, Françoise Briquel-Chatonnet, Muriel Debié, Alain Desreumaux, Mgr Gibrail Dib and Youssef Dergham), or like the digitalization campaign of the HMML University in Minnessota (with Columba Stewart, Adam Mc Collum and Grigory Kessel) all over the world. So that beyond the interest for the codicology, it was also the occasion to share different testimonies on digitalizing and cataloging campaigns.

However I had to present, with my colleague Flavia Ruani, the results of our research on the manuscripts tradition of the *History of the apostle Philip* : Flavia Ruani had to present a paper on the syro-occidental tradition of that apocryphal text, and I had to present a paper on the syro-oriental tradition.

Finally, as a member of the SYRAB ANR team (sustained by two CNRS laboratories : IRHT Section grecque and UMR 8167 Orient et Méditerranée), Muriel Debié, Flavia Ruani and myself had to present a shared conference on the new Syriac database called “e-ktobe”.

## **2. Description of the work carried out during the visit**

- Description of the different papers during the Syriac manuscripts Session

The first day we heard four exciting papers about Syriac codicology : Youssef DERGHAM (Bibliothèque patriarcale de Charfet, Liban) and François VINOURE (Centre de conservation du livre, Arles) presented an exclusive paper about the Syriac Bindings according to their own observations on the Syriac Manuscripts in Charfet (Lebanon). François VINOURE especially compared the Syriac Binding techniques with the well known Byzantin, Armenian or Islamic one. It was a very pedagogic presentation with a clear demonstrative power point showing not only photographs of the manuscripts, but also very accurate and precious schematic illustrations ; then Alain DESREUMAUX (CNRS, Paris), who has a very long experience of the Syriac Manuscripts, put forward the result of his observations on the ink used in Syriac Manuscripts ; after having made a survey of all the ancient supports used by the Syriac to scribe (skin, ostraca, papyrus, “pétioles de palmes”), Françoise BRIQUEL-CHATONNET (CNRS, Paris) expounded how the paper supplid the parchment in syro-oriental context in one part, and in syro-occidental context on an other part. That paper was particularly interesting in that the reflexion was only based on dated manuscripts ; finally Ewa Balicka-Witakowska (University of Uppsala) presented her codicological Approach applied on the Syriac Illuminated Manuscripts.

A large Session was devoted , the second day, to the Syriac Manuscripts : one presentation was about the Syriac paleography by Ayda KAPLAN (Centre d'études sur les chrétiens d'Orient, Bruxelles), two others were dedicated to the Texts transmission trough the Syriac manuscripts by Flavia RUANI and myself ; we also heard two papers

about recent database projects : one is done by the CNRS (IRHT Section grecque and UMR 8167 Orient et Méditerranée) and was presented by Muriel DEBIÉ, Flavia RUANI and myself ; the second is conceived by the Brigham Young University and was presented by Kristian HEAL. The first database, called “e-ktobe” intends to take all kind of texts in consideration. On an other part, the Brigham Young University make a focus on the Religious Texts. We heard then four exciting papers about four Syriac Manuscripts Collections : the Charfet Collection (Lebanon) was presented by Muriel DEBIÉ, the Manuscripts Collection of the Syrian Orthodox Church of Meryem Ana in Diyarbakir was presented by Grigory KESSEL (Marburg University), Erica HUNTER (SOAS, University of London) made a paper on the Manuscripts from Turfan, and Kristian HEAL offered an interesting notes on the acquisition history of the Mingana Sinai Fragments. Finally Columba STEWART , Adam Mc COLLUM (both from the Hill Museum and Manuscript Library, Saint John's University, USA) and Nageeb MICHAEL expounded their digitalization and cataloguing work on the Syriac Manuscripts in the Middle East and in India.

The first day Jeanne-Nicole SAINT-LAURENT (St. Michael's College, Vermont) made a presentation on a Syriac research Portal Project which intends to take the Hagiographical Syriac Manuscripts in consideration.

– Presentation of my participation during that Session

I presented a first paper on the Syriac transmission of the *History of Philip* : an especially focus was given to the syro-oriental tradition, while Flavia RUANI, offered an exam on the syro-occidental tradition of that text. The *History of the apostle and evangelist Philip* was

already edited and translated in 1871 by William Wright, but this edition is only based on one manuscript : actually this text is preserved by seven Syriac Manuscripts. Six of those are written in a syro-oriental scripture (chaldean) and just one of them is written in serto (typical syro-occidental scripture). Flavia Ruani made a comparaison of the syro-occidental copy (from the 13th century) with two other Hagiographical Manuscripts product in the same time and also written in a syro-occidental scripture. On my side, I used a preliminar critical edition work I made on the *History of Philip* to show how the stemma of all the Manuscripts could be considered. After that I turned my attention to the texts (hagiographical, apocryphal and edifying) circulating together with the *History of Philip*. I showed that those texts were the same in five of the six Manuscripts, and that those texts were always given in the same order in the Manuscripts. After having explained that my two first investigations were not enough to conclude at a syro-oriental circulation before the 16<sup>th</sup> century (because of the lack of critical edition, and because most of the texts circulating with the *History of Philip* are unedited), I suggested to make an incursion through the other Hagiographical Manuscripts containing the texts circulating with the History of Philip, and I presented the first results obtained thanks to the new “e-ktobe” database : those texts were always attested in a late syro-oriental tradition (not before the 16<sup>th</sup> century), but also , and it was the most interesting, in an earlier syro-occidental tradition, with testimonies from the 12<sup>th</sup> century product in Deyr al-Za'faran near Mardin and in the Barsauma monastery in Melitene (very famous place of production for Hagiographical Compilations, initiated by Michael the Great).

My second contribution consisted in participating, with my colleagues, Muriel Debié and Flavia Ruani, to present the new database called “e-ktobe : manuscrits syriaques”. A power point was prepared for

this occasion to make the use of this database easier. This database, which is in progress, was conceived in the framework of the ANR program called SYRAB. The web site, placed under the scientific responsibility of André Bingelli, Muriel Debié (CNRS, IRHT), Françoise Briquel-Chatonnet and Alain Desreumaux (CNRS, UMR 8167) is fed by Flavia Ruani and myself. This database aimed to enable any researcher to make a request on texts, authors and codicological elements for all Manuscripts in the world. But as the project is just at the beginning, we had to present the kind of material already integrated (Manuscripts of the French Collection, Charfet Collection and Hagiographical Manuscripts from different Collections), and to throw a call for collaboration to the assistance

### **3. Description of the main results obtained**

That Session on Syriac Manuscripts gave me, first of all, the opportunity to improve my formation in Syriac codicology : thanks to the François VINOURE presentation about the Bindings I will be now able to describe accurately the Syriac Bindings and to make a clear difference between the Syriac and the Byzantin Bindings. So that the quality of the codicological descriptions I have to write, in the database “e-ktobe”, would be considerably improved. Let's give some illustrations : thanks to the observation of the sinking in the cover and thanks to the exam of the thickness of the cover, it's seems to be easy to make a clear difference between a Syriac and a Byzantin Binding : the Syriac Binding presents just one sinking in front of any seam point and a cover thickness between 4 and 6 mm, while the Byzantin Binding is rather characterized by two or more sinkings and a cover thickness of 9 to 11 mm. When the Binding is in a bad state of conservation, we can also make an other observation : if the Manuscript is seamed in two blocks, it means that it results from a Byzantin confection ; on the contrary if the Manuscript is seamed in one block, it means most certainly that we are dealing with a Syriac production. As all those characteristics are not 100% always true, there is also a fird possibility to decide between a Syriac and a Byzantin Binding : the kind of seam visible inside the covers. If the seam looks like a “Z”, it is a Byzantin Binding. If the seam is in right line, or like a arc in a circle, or in a triangle, it is a Syriac Binding. Many other characteristics were presented, but it appears to me that those three elements could already give a comfortable criterion base to identify a Syriac Binding.

An other important result of that visit in Malta was the contact made with probable futur collaborators to the database e-ktobe : actually four

people demonstrated a serious interest for that project and for participating, and among them Kristian Heal from the Brigham Young University (USA), Bas Ter Haar Romeny from the Peshitta Institut in Leiden (Netherland), Michael NAGEEB from the Centre Numérique des Manuscrits Orientaux (CNMO) of Mossoul in Iraq and finally Gabriel Rabo from the University of Göttingen (Germany). To hope a concrete future for that collaboration, our team has now the responsibility to pursue the contact and to find the good way for training those partners to the data insertion in the base.

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