

**Workshop Cataloguing Projects of Oriental Manuscripts:
Evolution of Descriptive Criteria
Uppsala (Sweden), 22-23 September 2010**

Scientific report of travel grant
(ESF – Short Visit Grant)

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1. Purpose of the visit

The candidate, currently writing her PhD thesis about the Arabic text of the *“History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria”* (supervisor: Prof. Johannes den Heijer, Université catholique de Louvain, Belgium), applied for the travel grant of the ESF to participate in the workshop *“Cataloguing Projects of Oriental Manuscripts: Evolution of Descriptive Criteria”*, held in Uppsala (Sweden) on 22-23 September 2010. The workshop was organized by the *Team 4* (“Manuscripts cataloguing) of the COMSt project (Comparative Oriental Manuscripts Studies) and its teamleader, Prof. Witold Witakowski (University of Uppsala). This team is concentrating on questions concerning manuscripts cataloguing.

The candidate’s PhD project implies several approaches. Among them, the approach concerning manuscripts studies is of a particular relevance. In this context, a specific analysis of the complete tradition of the aforementioned text, never done before, is being realized. Moreover, she is now trying to develop a method for quickly cataloguing Arabic manuscripts (“checklist method”), in the framework of the European “Manumed” Project (funded by the European commission, *Euromed Heritage IV* programme).

In this context, the purpose of the participation of the candidate in this workshop concerning cataloguing of oriental manuscripts was to improve her skills and knowledge in the field of manuscripts studies to contribute to discussions between specialists.

2. Description of the work carried out during the visit

The workshop *“Cataloguing Projects of Oriental Manuscripts: Evolution of Descriptive Criteria”* was divided in four sessions. All of them consisted of theoretical presentations, followed by constructive discussions between the gathered specialists, coming from numerous research areas (concerning the study of different Oriental languages). It has to be pointed out that one of the most fundamental inputs of this workshop (and of the COMSt project) is the opportunity to construct multidisciplinary discussion and exchange of information.

Session 1 : Reports on current project of cataloguing Oriental manuscripts

The first session was dedicated to reports on current project of cataloguing Oriental manuscripts. In this framework, a number of specialists gave information concerning the state of the

art and recent projects of cataloguing manuscripts written in different oriental languages: 1. Witold Witakowski (Uppsala): Recent catalogues of Ethiopian manuscripts; 2. Irmeli Perho (Copenhagen): Recent catalogues of Arabic manuscripts; 3. André Binggeli (Paris): Recent cataloguing projects of Syriac manuscripts (in Charfet, Lebanon); 4. Paola Buzi (Hamburg): Recent cataloguing projects of Coptic manuscripts; 5. André Binggeli (Paris): Recent cataloguing projects of Greek manuscripts; 6. Per Ambrosiani (Umeå, Sweden): Recent cataloguing projects of Old Slavonic & Old Russian manuscripts.

These presentations enabled the comparison between the cataloguing of manuscripts in different languages and put the emphasis on common/different methodological features and problems, to be discussed in the next session (see hereunder).

Session 2 : Discussion concerning the elements of catalogue description of manuscripts

During the second session, which concerned elements of catalogue description of manuscripts, many fundamental features were debated: the physical (or codicological) description, the palaeographical description, the colophons and the dating of Oriental manuscripts.

The gathered specialists agreed to quickly produce and spread the needed tools for the description and the cataloguing of the manuscripts: a systematic repertory for the specific codicological terminology (to be published in the handbook, see pt. 3), a standardized model of manuscript description to be found in any future catalogue (including hierarchy of the information, limits and bibliography). It was also decided to finalize a much needed list of correspondences of the ancient authors' names in different oriental languages, as well as a standardized list of used abbreviations.

Moreover, specific concepts were debated, some of them remaining controversial. Among them, we find the concept of "codicological units", applicable for all manuscripts, regardless of their language. The question of the existence of cultural features differing between manuscripts of different languages was also discussed and remains open. All these elements will continue to be studied by the research network, which will share observations and considerations before the next meeting, in 2012, as this workshop was the first step towards the publication of a handbook (2014, see pt. 3).

Finally, it has to be pointed out here that the participation of scholars specialized in different research fields was enlightening for the discussion and the evolution of the common works. For instance, the formal presentation by Ewa Balicka-Witakowska (Uppsala): "Cataloguing manuscripts from the point of view of art", pointed out the importance of a systematic and scientific description of all the illuminations of the manuscripts, only possible through cooperation between different research fields.

Session 3 : Computer technologies as tool of cataloguing manuscripts

We can say here that one of the most recurrent points of discussion during the workshop was the construction of internet databases, aiming the easy, systematic and worldwide access to information about description and cataloguing of manuscripts. Most of the scholars were involved in the creation of manuscripts databases concerning their own linguistic field. Nevertheless, during this session, the questions raised during the previous one were adapted to the online databases point of view. The guidelines were given by Paola Buzi (Rome-Hamburg), who made a report of the last workshop session of the *Team 3* ("Digital approaches to manuscript studies") of the COMSt project (held on 23-24 July 2010 in Hamburg).

Here also, the intervention of a scholar coming from a different research area (Icelandic studies) was of the highest relevance: Matthew Driscoll (Copenhagen): Manuscript description using TEI-conformant XML (with examples). He described his own research project, concerning the constitution of a much elaborated cataloguing database of manuscripts, based on the XML computer

language and the “<oxygen/>” software. This kind of XML database is easy to create, transfer, translate and transform, and it enables flexible querying and information research.

Session 4 : Business session & organization matters

After a feedback of the previous sessions, the last session of the workshop was dedicated to business and organization matters, concerning the redaction of the handbook after these discussions and the continuations of the common works of the research network.

3. Description of the main results obtained

The main results obtained during the workshop have to be found in the two following points. First, the newly created COMSt research network, and its *Team 4* for the current workshop, is, for now, the most obvious and concrete result. It enables exchange and diffusion of information, concerning different linguistic fields and materials, between numerous specialists, teachers and young researchers from different countries.

Moreover, the final result, still to be reached (at the end of the COMSt project, in 2014), will be the redaction and publication of a systematic handbook concerning the field of comparative studies in oriental manuscripts. This workshop has thus to be seen as a first step towards this final and important result.

4. Future collaboration with host institution (if applicable)

In the next future, the candidate will continue to collaborate with the COMSt project and to the construction of a comparative study of Oriental manuscripts in the framework of her PhD project: all the given and exchanged information in the framework of the COMSt project will constitute the basis of her next investigations about the codicological approach of her research project. Moreover, she will share results concerning her own research project to help towards the redaction of the handbook (see pt. 3).

5. Projected publications / articles to result from the grant

All the data shared and discussed in this workshop’s framework are of the highest relevance for the PhD research project of the candidate. They will certainly have a great impact on her thesis. Moreover, the projected publication of the handbook at the end of the COMSt project (see pt. 3) is the aim of all these meetings and discussions. It will involve the contribution of all the team members.

6. Other comments

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