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Report about workshop of Team 1 of COMSt “Book Materials in Oriental Cultures”.

The purpose of my visit was to attend the first workshop of Team 1 of COMSt entitled “Book Materials in Oriental Cultures”. The workshop took place from 26th through 27th of November in Pisa. Co-organizer of the workshop was Pier Giorgio Borbone, Professor at the Faculty of the Ancient World of the University of Pisa. The latter is to be commended – on a par with the Team leader Prof. Marilena Maniaci – for a fine organization of the workshop.

My visit to Pisa lasted for three days (November 25-27) and was limited exclusively to the attendance of the workshop.

My interests in the activity of the Team 1 and in the first workshop in particular arise from two my current projects. One deals with research of the special kind of Syriac manuscripts, namely so-called Syriac monastic anthologies; the other is catalogization of a few collections of Syriac manuscripts. While working directly with Syriac manuscripts a number of desiderata became felt acutely. First is the lack of general treatment of codicology and palaeography of Syriac manuscripts. Although a number of groundbreaking studies, important articles and case studies are available, there exists till today no thorough presentation of the issue that would place together the results achieved so far and thus would delineate the state of art and clearly present direction of the prospective research.

Thus, from my point of view, organization of such a workshop can stimulate the collaboration between potentially interested scholars in the field of Syriac studies that might eventually result in creating of a manual. Two main scholars in the field of Syriac codicology and paleography, Alain Desreumaux and Françoise Briquel-Chatonnet, were present at the workshop, gave very interesting papers and were ready to discuss the related questions with everyone concerned.

Moreover, the progress in the study of Syriac manuscripts can be facilitated by means of comparative analysis with other Oriental manuscript traditions. Fairly speaking, a proper study of the Syriac manuscripts can not be considered as successful without taking into account specific features of such traditions as Armenian, Arabic, Byzantine and Coptic. This is due to the fact that Syriac Christians never had a state of their own but were scattered all over the Near and Middle East. In the course of many centuries (from the Christianization in the 2nd c. till Modern time) the Syriac culture was a minor one and, consequently, was permanently in contact with and influenced by the surrounding cultures. Various influences can be observed in many aspects of Syriac culture and particularly in the production of manuscripts. Since the traces of possible

influences have not been studied virtually at all, I am sure that the activity of Team 1 will promote an investigation of the crucial points of Syriac codicology and palaeography.

What was just said can be applied to any facet of Syriac manuscript tradition. The present workshop on the Book Materials provided an ideal opportunity to learn about different manuscript traditions and thus to apply new knowledge to the Syriac manuscripts.

First of all, should be mentioned the communications of Françoise Briquel-Chatonnet and Alain Desreumaux who provided a comprehensive presentation of the usages of different materials (papyrus, parchment, paper, palm leaves) in the production of Syriac and Christian Palestinian Aramaic manuscripts. Both papers presented an up-to-date state of art of the issue. However, the immediate benefit of having both papers delivered at the workshop that deals with book materials in Oriental manuscripts is that it is possible to reveal the various connections and similarities (their origin is to be yet clarified) with other book cultures. From that perspective a number of papers were very welcome as providing a very important material for comparative analysis.

A paper of Petra Sijpestein on Arabic Scrolls allows to establish relation between Arabic and Syriac scrolls, for (as the recent catalogue of the new finds at the St.Catherine monastery, Sinai) the latter were quite intensively produced approximately in the same area and period (Palestine, Egypt, Sinai in the 10th-13th c.) as the Arabic ones.

François Déroche reported about the usage of parchment in the Arabic manuscripts. Since Syriac Christians lived in the Muslim milieu it quite normal that they were apt to follow the development of parchment usage in the production of Islamic manuscripts. For that reason a study of the usage of parchment in the Syriac manuscript can not be successful without taking into account the history of the parchment in the production of Islamic manuscripts.

Margherita Farina and Pier Giorgio Borbone made a communication about an ongoing cataloguing project of the Syriac manuscript in the Biblioteca Laurenziana in Florence. The project is very welcome because an available catalogue was made in the 18th c. and is very difficult to use. Since there is a considerable number of quite old manuscript in that collection it is worth having a detailed description that would provide both palaeographical and codicological data.

Felix Albrecht delivered a paper about one Greek palimpsest, Codex Ephraemi Syri rescriptus. Comparative analysis of palimpsesting is also an important desideratum, because there a lot of palimpsests among the Syriac manuscripts which often have unique texts in the lower layer.

Paola Buzi and Stephen Emmel made a fascinating presentation of the usage of papyrus, paper and parchment in Coptic tradition. Although, as far as I know, there have been revealed no

interrelations between Syriac and Coptic manuscripts there is number of traits that pertain to both book traditions and thus it is worth comparing them in order to reveal a possible influence or common typologies in their development.

The similar presentations were made by Jost Gippert (about Georgian manuscripts) and Ewa Balicka Witakowska (Ethiopian manuscripts). Both book traditions were in contact with Syriac one and for that reason it might be fruitful to conduct a comparative research of those traditions.

A paper of Dickran Kouymjian is based on a available statistical data regarding Armenian manuscripts. One can only hope that one day the same kind of research can be conducted on Syriac manuscripts.

A paper of Marilena Maniaci presenting a usage of parchment in the production of Byzantine manuscripts gives a model to be followed by those who study Oriental book traditions. A long tradition of study of Byzantine manuscripts gives a possibility not only to analyze and describe the available data but to generalize and thus to reveal underlying trends in the usage of parchment.

A paper of Paul Canart on Oriental paper was of great interest to all participants for all Oriental book cultures at certain period of their development made use of Arabic paper.

And finally, a wonderful report of Ira Rabin presented the possibilities of modern technologies in the research of manuscripts for it is possible not only to date precisely and undated manuscripts but also to reveal the peculiarities of the parchment and paper production in particular period.

The workshop aroused a number of important questions that are related to all Oriental book traditions. I would like to mention only one of them: is there is a relation between the book material used in the production of particular manuscript and the text is contains?

All in all, such a workshop makes it clear that although all the manuscript traditions possess its own characteristics and traits they also have much in common. No doubt, a comparative analysis of Oriental book cultures taking the results achieved in the centuries-long tradition of study of Greek manuscripts together with application of modern technologies will through new light on their history in general and on book materials in particular.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that the workshop provided a convenient opportunity to meet and get acquainted with colleagues working with other book traditions. Such contacts are very important because they stimulate further research and provide possibilities for collaboration.