

Scientific Report

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1. *Purpose of the visit*

The aim of participation in the workshop “The Making Of The Oriental Book” is to learn the modern comparative method applied to the material aspects of manuscripts from different cultural areas, to enrich my experience in the field.

My main research interests concern the following aspects:

- palaeography and codicology of the Greek-Byzantine manuscripts, especially those of IV-XI centuries;
- history of the Greek majuscules, especially the “canonized” ones;
- comparative study of Greek and Coptic majuscules;
- palaeography and codicology of the oldest Christian book production (I-IV centuries);
- cataloging (on traditional paper media and online catalogs) of Greek and Latin manuscripts;
- development of new research tools and technologies for the study of Greek manuscripts.

In each of these areas so far I have produced work and publications.

It is useful to remember some of the initiatives in which I am particularly committed to the work and development of innovative solutions:

– *LDAB. Leuven Database of Ancient Books*

(<http://www.trismegistos.org/ldab/>);

– *MaGI. Manoscritti Greci d'Italia*

([http://www.nuovabibliotecamanoscritta.it/MaGI/index.html?language=it](http://www.nuovabibliotecamanoscritta.it/MaGI/index.html?language=it;);

http://webuser2.unicas.it/webpace/04_projects_magi.html);

– *NBM. Nuova Biblioteca Manoscritta*

(<http://www.nuovabibliotecamanoscritta.it/index.html>);

– *Pyle. A Gateway to Greek Manuscripts*

(<http://webuser2.unicas.it/webpace/index.html> [Beta Version]).

2. Description of the work carried out during the visit and of the main results obtained

The workshop in Nice has been an important opportunity to meet some of the scholars I had been in contact with only through e-mails and to verify the status of research in various oriental made manuscripts. I personally have had a formation based on Greek and Latin codicology and paleography, that is why it's important for me to tell the differences in the production of manuscripts according to the geo-cultural areas they come from.

The only way to understand the material elements of a manuscript is the comparative method. So far the scientific research has operated in a sectorial way without confrontation among scholars working on the same aspects but in several cultural contexts. That is why meetings such as the one in Nice are useful to develop a mature and critical view on manuscripts.

When analyzing the manufacture and structure of quires, the various ways of numbering quires, leaves and pages, the pricking and the ruling of oriental manuscripts, the different level of knowledge reached in each single area is evident. For example, whereas the Greek-Byzantine studies have determined the investigation object, reconstructed the procedures of manufacture and established a technical language this can't be considered for what concerns all the other geo-cultural areas represented inside the COMSt project. We often find ourselves in front of sectorial observations made by an only researcher or group that can't be generalized to a whole area of production. In the past scholars strongly refused to read the bibliography of other areas of investigation, this attitude has brought to negative consequences today. Anyhow, interesting aspects of various geo-cultural areas have come out thanks to the comparing spirit of the meeting.

In my opinion some examples may be useful to demonstrate this point of view.

The quaternion is certainly the most widespread and common typology of the quire of the Greek-Byzantine, the Ethiopian, the Armenian and Coptic manuscripts, and this circulation can be explained with technical and traditional elements but perhaps it has historical-cultural roots that haven't been studied in depth.

The side of the parchment which a quire begins with, identifies the different oriental

areas. There are areas in which the quire begins with the flesh side and others in which it begins with the hair side. Another element of distinction is the side of the parchment where the incision is made as in the pricking, made on the flesh or hair side. These different practices haven't got a historically founded explanation. In some cases, for example, in the Greek-Byzantine and Coptic areas the fact that the quire begins with the flesh side is probably due to the direct heritage of manufacture practices that the Coptic manuscript production has received from the Greek-Byzantine one. In other cases even though the areas are culturally close the material features of the book are different. Maybe due to these reasons we can implicate the principle of differentiation and distinction to preserve the cultural identity through the object of the book.

Furthermore the effects and exchanges amongst the various areas ought to be considered multidirectional and not simply bidirectional. For example in Coptic manuscripts we can find Byzantine and Arabic typical features. That is why it is difficult to reconstruct a consistent outlook of the manuscripts belonging to the Oriental area.

Finally the tendency to subscribe or not manuscripts is an important component that identifies the writers from different areas. For example subscriptions are very popular in Hebrew and Armenian fields whereas in the Greek-Byzantine we have a poor demonstration in the 9th – 10th centuries which grows in the following centuries. The practice is almost missing in the Slavic manuscripts. This difference is due to deep and long-lived cultural structures that ought to be thoroughly investigated. This situation affects the capabilities that scholar has in order to develop geo-chronological information. It is known that thanks to subscriptions we can have precious information for the history of the manuscript itself such as place, date, name of the copyist, cost of the book, the work, etc... Without this information everything becomes difficult to date and locate a series of events.

3. Future collaboration with host institution

I have already started collaborating with the host institution (Prof. Willy Clarysse, Leuven, Belgium) for the LDAB project especially for what concerns palaeographic aspects and the dating of Greek and Coptic manuscripts. Thanks to this collaboration I

have had the opportunity to write and publish works regarding the Coptic Biblical majuscule, the Nag Hammadi codices and the Greek scripts that are in the oldest manuscripts of the New Testament.

In future we aim to draw up a project relating to the possible use of scientific laboratory technique, particularly the carbon 14 technique in order to date a few Greek and Coptic manuscripts. Thereafter we will be able to observe the results of the comparative method of palaeography and codicology and those of scientific analysis. It is an opportunity to test principles and methods from different points of view of investigation.

In this first phase we identified a few manuscripts that need to be analysed scientifically and we started to get in contact with the institutions that preserve these manuscripts to make sure about the interest in this project. In the next phase we need to raise funds and involve a team of specialists.

4. Projected publications / articles resulting or to result from the grant

During the workshop in Nice I had the chance to exchange ideas with Dr. Ida Rabin (from “Bundesanstalt für Materialforschung und -prüfung” – Berlin) regarding the dating of the Greek “Minor Prophets Scroll” discovered in Nahal Hever, in the so called “horror cave” and published in *DJD* VIII.

Dr. Rabin suggested I write a text with the palaeographic observations about this scroll which will be part of a publication of hers where she describes the results of her laboratory investigations concerning this important manuscript.

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