

Scientific report
on the work shop « The Making of the oriental book »

(Nice, oct. 2011)

1. Purpose of the visit

The holding of a workshop on “the Making of the Oriental Book” was an important step in the process of elaboration of a codicological syriac manual, in that it will offer the opportunity to compare different method of manuscript production in the oriental communities. By preparing my PHD I already had the occasion to regret the lack of such manual which would have allowed me to make description notes on the astronomical Syriac manuscripts in a better way and with much more consideration of their scriptural history.

The ANR SYRAB project (“Ecrit et écriture dans la formation des identités en monde syriaque et arabe III^e – VII^e s. ») directed by F. Briquel Chatonnet (DR, CNRS, UMR 8167) has already planed the mission of making a codicological syriac manual. This work is based on two other projects consisting in the realisation of the Rahmani’s fonds catalogue (Charfet in Libanon) and in the conception of an international data base devoted to syriac manuscripts (managed by A. Bingelli). I was request to make part of that last project and specifically to integrate codicological descriptions of the syriac manuscripts in the data base. So that it was very useful for me to participate to the round table of the 14th and 15th Octobre 2011 at Nice. It was as well the occasion to encounter the current actors of the oriental codicology and to be aware of the particularities of the syro-occidentals manuscripts in their making and of their similarities with the various practices which were running in the other linguistic communities.

2. Description of the work carried out during the visit

The work shop on “The making of the oriental book” was organized in three sessions of about three hours dealing with the making and structure of the quires, the types of devices and finally with the preparation of the page. For every session we heard paleographical specialist for various manuscripts traditions : Greek (M. Maniaci), Syriac (G. Borbone, F. Briquel-Chatonnet and M. Fara), Christo-Palestinian (A. Bingelli), Arabic (F. Déroche), Ethiopic (E. Balicka-Witakowski and D. Nosnitsin), Armenian (D. Kouymjian), Hebraic (Malachi Beit-Arié), Georgian (J. Gippert), Coptic (S. Emmel) and Old Slavonic (S. Torres Prieto).

- The making and structure of the quires (How many bifolio are in a quire ? How are they disposed and tacked in the quire ? Is there a different use of the flesh side and hair side ?)

It seems that the quaternion has to be considered as the characteristic making quire of the Greek area, even if different quires could alternate (quaternion, quinion, senion, octon and decanion). So the quaternion would be the large more representative one. Moreover it was noted that the number of quires moved with the time : after the XV^e c. manuscripts are generally about two times less bulky (100 fol.) than those made between the fourth and the eleventh centuries. If a lot of manuscript tradition followed the same way, it was not the case for all of them, especially for the Arabic and the Syriac traditions which both preferred the quinion quire.

- Types of devices : ordering (quire/leaf signature and catchwords), referencing (page/column numbering) and navigation (maniculae, quotation marks, lessons)

In the manuscripts, they are various notations which can enable the reader to know if the book was full or not : at first the quires were encoded (sometimes, according to the traditions, the page also shared a number - as in the Coptic mss.-). In the Greek tradition the beginning of a quire was marked by a signature in the right corner of the upper

margin and the ending by the same signature in the right corner of the lower margin. But it was very different in the other traditions. Then we could find “catchwords”, meaning last word of a page, repeated in the lower and/or upper margin of the following page. But this type of device seems to appear quite late in the oriental tradition (not before the XVI^e c. for the Arabic tradition and the XVII^e c. for the Syriac one) except for the Coptic tradition in which it seems that the catchword be quite in current use.

- The preparation of the Page : Pricking and Rulling.

The system of pricking (how the scribe made the line) was then considered and also the type (design formed by all that composed the ruling). To made the line the scribe used the pricking (set of hole used for the preparation of the page) and could use different kind of ruling called “plummet ruling”, “ink ruling”, “reinforced ruling” (plummet + ink) and “ruling board”. It was noted that that practice was not in way in the Syriac tradition, neither in the Christo-Palestinian and in the Arabic traditions (the Arabs used the so-called “Mastara”).

3. Description of the main results obtained

As resulting of those descriptive confrontations, we may keep in mind that the oriental books could be distinguished in two traditions : in one part the Arabic, the Syriac and the Christo-Palestinian traditions seem to be often crossed, and on the other side the Greek should have had more influence on the remaining traditions (Coptic, Hebraic, Armenian, Ethiopian, Georgian, Old Slavonic). But the contributors agreed to say that to envisage a really comparative study, all the papers should present encoded results (on how many manuscripts ? where are they done?) only based on the study of dated manuscripts (excepted for the Ethiopian tradition, which is very poor in colophons).

What was the most interesting point of that exchanging point of view was, for me, to note all the particularities of the various manuscripts traditions. There is not one Hebraic kind of manuscripts, nor one kind of Greek page preparation: it all depends of the time in which the manuscript was made, as well as it depend of the country of production (for example we saw that the Hebraic West-Africa manuscripts had the particularity of being composed with ternion).

By preparing my PhD I had to make the notice of a Syriac manuscript (from the Vatican Library) which presents a very strange quire signatures. After the intervention of all the contributors, it clearly appeared that only one oriental tradition would have systematically present that unusual kind of signature, called “signature en miroir” (described by A. Bingelli) : the Christo-Palestinian one. That information will be very precious for me in order to do the notice of the manuscript and to reconstruct his transmission.

One of the manuscript I use for the edition of the *History of Philip, apostle and evangelist*, in syriac, was classified as a Melkite one. But after the very interesting conference of A. Bingelli on the Christo-Palestinien and on the Melkite tradition, it seems not to be likely, because the Melkite tradition was largely influenced by the

Byzantine one as early as the ninth century, and because the manuscript which I use for my edition is a regular syriac quinion quires composed from the thirteenth century.

By taking part in that work shop I could also observe how the paleographers do describe the quires of an oriental manuscript. To take an example, you can consider the following scripture :

$$1^5 (1-9); 2^6(10-19);$$

It is a very economical description of the material composition of a manuscript: here we shall understand that the first quire is a quinion which occurs between the first and the ninth folio and that the second quire is a senion which occurs between the tenth and the nineteenth folio.

4. Future collaboration with host institution

I was request to take part of the ANR SYRAB project (“Ecrit et écriture dans la formation des identités en monde syriaque et arabe III^e – VII^e s. ») directed by F. Briquel Chatonnet (DR, CNRS, UMR 8167), in order to make an international data base devoted to the syriac manuscripts. According to F. Briquel-Chatonnet I should integrate this project in January or February 2012. Before, I would have to participate to the next work shop of Arles which will shall deal with “How use the data base?”. One of the aims of the ANR project is to conceive a codicological syriac manual.

After that survey of the oriental manuscript traditions, I feel more aware on the material details which could share precious indications on the time and on the geographical origin of a manuscript. Expecting the publication of a general manual on the making of the oriental books, I will carefully keep all the precious notes I wrote during those both conference day in order to be able to explain, eventually, why one manuscript presents an originality regarding the Syriac tradition. And in case of doubt I could easily contact one of the paleographer I had the opportunity to meet at Nice.

I own all these opportunities of meeting and gathering informations to the European Science Foundation which intended to according me short travel grants, so that I was financially able to take part in the work shop hold at Nice those 14 and 15 October 2011.