

For the full programme of the conference, visit <https://www.manuscript-cultures.uni-hamburg.de/natural_sciences_2018.html>.

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Manuscript Cultures in Medieval Syria: Towards a history of the Qubbat al-khazna depository in Damascus

Berlin, 28–29 June 2018

On 28 and 29 June 2018, a two-day conference on Manuscript Cultures in Medieval Syria was convened jointly by Arianna D'Ottone Rambach (Sapienza Università di Roma), Konrad Hirschler (Freie Universität Berlin), and Ronny Vollandt (LMU München). Funded by the Fritz Thyssen Foundation, it was hosted by the Freie Universität Berlin and the Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften.

The Qubbat al-khazna of the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus was 'academically discovered' as early as in 1900. Similarly to the famous Cairo Gheniza, it is a rich depository for worn-out books and disused documents, yet far less known or studied. It preserves great numbers of parchment and paper documents. The majority are in Arabic and pertain to the Islamic sphere (Qur'ān, theological works, legal documents, etc.), yet there are also writings of Jews, Samaritans, and Christians, not only in Arabic but also in Syriac, Christian-Palestinian Aramaic, Armenian, Georgian, Coptic, Greek, Latin, and even Old French. Scholars from across the world came together in order to evaluate this multilingual heritage and launch the Qubba studies similar to the established Genizah studies.

The morning sessions on both days were dedicated to the Qubba's history and its academic discovery. On the first day, Said Aljoumani (Scholars at Risk/Freie Universität Berlin) on 'The pre-Ottoman history of the Qubbat al-Khazna' (delivered in Arabic) and by Boris Liebrez (Freie Universität Berlin/The Graduate Center, City University of New York) on 'Fire, Consuls, Scholars: Conflicting Views on the Discovery of the Qubbat al-Khazna Documents' both focused on the Qubba before its 'academic discovery' in 1900. On the second day, Cordula Bandt and Arnd Rattmann (Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften) focused on the discovery itself in their talk 'Bruno Violet and the exploration of the Qubbat al-khazna around 1900'. Studies by Hermann von Soden, a scholar of the history of Christian Bible who used Damascus materials, were in the focus of the talk by Christoph Marksches (Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften) 'Her-

mann von Soden: Some remarks on a Berlin Professor undeservedly fallen into oblivion’.

The second panel of the first day was entitled ‘Looking beyond the Qubba and Syria’ and compared the Qubba with other famous manuscript repositories in the East, namely St Catherine’s Monastery in Sinai. The papers presented included Miriam Lindgren-Hjälms (Stockholm School of Theology, Sankt Ignatios Theological Academy), ‘What has Damascus to do with Sinai? Paleographical similarities in Christian-Arabic texts preserved in the Qubba and in Saint Catherine’s Monastery’ and Ronny Vollandt’s ‘The Qubbat al-Khazna and the Cairo Genizah: a typological comparison’.

The evening session of the first day was dedicated to ‘Studying Scripts’. Ahmad al-Jallad (Universiteit Leiden) spoke of ‘An embryonic Graeco-Arabic script? The transcription system of the Psalm Fragment in light of Greek transcriptions of Arabic from the early Islamic and pre-Islamic periods’ and illustrated that the writing system of this longest example of early Arabic transcribed in Greek letters must have been designed without the influence of Arabic orthography. Francesco D’Aiuto and Donatella Bucca (Tor Vergata Università di Roma) focused on ‘The Greek hymnographic fragments of Damascus: scripts and texts’.

The traditions covered included Arabic, Jewish, Syriac, Latin, and Old French, and were presented in three panels entitled ‘Mapping corpora’. The ‘Mapping corpora’ panel in the afternoon of the first day focused on Jewish and Syriac heritage as discovered in the Qubba. In his paper on ‘The Jewish texts from the Damascus Genizah’, Gideon Bohak (Tel-Aviv University) focused on three manuscripts, a magical booklet, a marriage document, and a roll with the ‘Sayings of the Fathers’, illustrating the variety of the types of Jewish texts preserved. Grigory Kessel (Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften) offered ‘A survey of the fragments from Syriac manuscripts found in Qubbat al-Khazna’, trying to offer identification, grouping, and dating of the many fragments. In the morning of the second day, Coptic, Latin and Old French fragments were discussed. Alin Suciu (Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen) spoke of ‘The Coptic fragments from the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus’, Serena Ammirati (University of RomaTre) spoke of ‘Again on the Latin Fragments of Damascus: A further analysis of the oldest items’, and Laura Minervini (Università di Napoli Federico II) with Gabriele Giannini (Université de Montréal) of ‘The Old French texts of Damascus Qubbat al-Khazna’. In the afternoon of the second day, the Arabic manuscripts were in the centre of attention. Eyad al-Ṭabbā‘ (University of Damascus) presented his work towards ‘A preliminary catalogue of the Koran manuscripts in the Umayyad Mosque’. Konrad Hirschler presented his research on the ‘Binding

fragments from the Qubbat al-Khazna in Syrian manuscripts'. Finally, Arianna D'Ottone Rambach introduced the early woodcut prints discovered at the Qubba in her paper 'Unpublished exemplars of block-printed Arabic amulets from the Qubbat al-Khazna'.

The programme and abstracts are available at <<https://www.geschkult.fu-berlin.de/e/islamwiss/forschung/Konferenzen-und-Workshops/Qubbat-al-Khazna/>>.

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Beyond the *Physiologus* Animal Stories and Representations in Oriental Manuscripts Hamburg, 28–29 June 2018

On 28 and 29 June 2018 the Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures (CSMC, at Hamburg University) hosted the conference 'Beyond the *Physiologus* – Animal Stories and Representations in Oriental Manuscripts', organized with the support of the COMSt network and Fritz Thyssen foundation. The workshop, intended to promote the discussion of themes, new findings and ongoing researches about zoography in Oriental manuscript traditions, was not the first initiative of its kind to be organized in the past years. It constituted, in fact, the ideal continuation of the conference 'The *Physiologus* between East and West. Transmission and dissemination of an early Christian text on nature', held in Paris from 15 to 17 June 2017. Aim of the CSMC conference was to expand the area of investigation from the *Physiologus* (the well-known early Christian collection of natural descriptions and their moralizing teaching) to a broader context, and to explore parallel material containing animal-related stories in the main Oriental literary traditions.

During the seven sessions of the conference no major cultural area was left untouched. In his paper 'Mischwesen im *Physiologus*: Das Echidna-Kapitel', Horst Schneider (Universität München) drew attention to the imprecise rendering of the word 'echidna' in modern editions. The echidna, habitually translated as 'viper' on the basis of the biblical passage Mt 3.7 which opens the *Physiologus* chapter, is in fact clearly described as a monstrous hybrid between a man and a crocodile. Caroline Macé (then at the Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen, presently at the University of Lausanne) expressed 'Methodological considerations and new hypotheses about the recensions of the Greek *Physiologus* and their indirect tradition', with respect to the intricate tradition of the chapter on the aspidochelone, i.e. the widespread legend of the island-whale which dives into the depths and drowns the sailors who anchored on it. Within the Hebrew literary context, Malachi Beit-Arié (Hebrew Univer-