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# Articles and notes

## Exegesis and Lexicography in the Ethiopian Tradition: The Role of the *Physiologus**

*Massimo Villa (Università di Napoli 'L'Orientale')*

The Ethiopian native lexicographic corpus (the so-called *sawāsəw*) and the traditional commentaries (the *ʾandəmtā* corpus) are intended to explain, with different strategies and expectations, the meaning of poorly understandable Gəʿəz words and canonical or non-canonical passages. This paper intends to offer an unprecedented evaluation of the role of the *Physiologus* as a literary source for both traditions. The influence of the small naturalistic treatise on the *sawāsəw* compilations appears far less significant than previously believed. Several pieces of evidence prove that for most zoonyms treated in the native vocabularies a derivation from the Scriptures is to be privileged. It is known, by contrast, that a variety of accounts from the *Physiologus* were embedded into several Amharic commentaries. A thorough look at their textual features displays a certain closeness to one particular recension of the *Physiologus*, i.e. Et-α. The survey has also highlighted the repeated and intentional reuse of the same literary material in newly-composed commentaries, a phenomenon that might have implications for understanding the historical development of the traditional exegetical literature.

It is a well-known fact that the attitude towards the canonical and quasi-canonical texts in Ethiopia did not remain passive throughout the centuries. A variety of strategies developed in order to clarify the text of the Scriptures and other books, and help the reader understand them. On the one hand, the Bible underwent an extensive process of revision and 'conflation';[1] on the other, a rich set of complementary tools emerged with the purpose of interpreting obscure words and passages. Lexicographic compilations and exegetical expositions are among such tools.

* An earlier version of this paper was read on the occasion of the workshop 'Beyond the Physiologus – animal stories and representations in Oriental manuscript' held at the Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures (CSMC, Hamburg University) on 28–29 June 2018. The research was partially funded by the long-term project 'Beta maṣāḥəft: Die Schriftkultur des christlichen Äthiopiens und Eritreas: Eine multimediale Forschungsumgebung' (2016–2040), headed by Prof. Alessandro Bausi at the Hiob Ludolf Center for Ethiopian Studies (HLCES), Hamburg University, and funded within the Academies' Programme, under survey of the Akademie der Wissenschaften in Hamburg.

1 Zuurmond 1989, 73–81; Uhlig 1991, 1590–1591 and 1595–1596.

It is claimed that native lexicographic compilations, called *sawāsəw* (literally ‘ladder’),[2] were traditionally transmitted orally and received a standardized written form in the seventeenth century, during the so-called Gondarine Age. They typically consist of a grammatical section on morphology, and a vocabulary, which accommodates lists of lesser known Gəʿəz words. Words are indexed according to the book of provenance or the subject, and each is given a Gəʿəz or Amharic equivalent. In subject-based lists the source of a lexeme is typically missing, thus making the task of recognizing the text of provenance particularly hard. *Sawāsəw* have been regularly used in modern local and Western dictionary-compiling initiatives, yet very rarely explored with reference to their own text history, spread, and transmission.

Commentaries are subdivided into *tərgʷāme* and *ʾandəmtā* commentaries. The former represent an early stage of the Ethiopian traditional exegesis. They are in Gəʿəz and are attested from the fourteenth century onwards. They constitute a heterogeneous corpus since different manuscripts admit different interpretations of the same passage.[3] The decline of the *tərgʷāme* corpus is linked to the rise of the *ʾandəmtā* commentaries. The Amharic *ʾandəmtā* corpus, originating in the Gondarine Age and committed to writing only in recent times, intends to explore in depth the true meaning of a given text, verse by verse.[4] Commentaries have generally escaped the attention of the scholars due to several factors. First, they are rife with abbreviations, elliptic or laconic sentences, difficult syntax, and use of rare words. Furthermore, very few scholarly editions of the commentaries have been published, even though a number of them are available in Ethiopian printed editions.[5] Finally, the source of the material used is as a rule seldom indicated. This makes determining the textual source of an explanation often challenging, as it requires a profound knowledge of the religious literature.

2 A word calqued on Arabic *sullām*, i.e. the ‘scalae’ or vocabularies. This, together with the structure and some of the grammatical terms adopted, betrays a distant Copto-Arabic derivation of the entire genre.

3 An updated overview on the *tərgwāme* tradition is in García 2010; see also Mersha Alehegne 2011, 2–7. The transmissional itinerary of numerous Greek and Oriental (Syro-Copto-Arabic) sources into the Ethiopic *tərgwāme* corpus is explored in Cowely 1983 (which also contains the translation of the commentary of the Book of the Revelation) and Cowley 1988.

4 The Amharic word *ʾandəm*, meaning ‘and (there is) one (who says)’ (from which the term *ʾandəmtā* is derived), is typically used to introduce the hidden explanation of a canonical passage.

5 Despite the high number of commentaries published in Ethiopia, especially in the last decades (see Tedros Abraha 2007), few of them have been hitherto critically edited. For an updated state of the art, see in particular Mersha Alehegne 2011, 13–20.

In this paper I will focus on the role of the Ethiopic version of the *Physiologus* as a possible source of interpretation of zoonyms and animal-related biblical passages respectively in the *sawāsəw* and *ʾandəmtā* literature.[6]

## The *Physiologus* and the Ethiopian lexicography

It is believed that many zoonyms explained in the *sawāsəw* originate from the *Physiologus*, or that many difficult animal and stone names appearing in the *Physiologus* were later explained in the *sawāsəw* lists.[7] This assumption, however, has never undergone a proper scrutiny.

It is difficult to assess with clarity the direct impact of the *Physiologus* on the lexicographic compilations. A preliminary and immediate way to estimate the share of influence of the small naturalistic treatise on the *sawāsəw* is by singling out all the Ethiopic names of animals, plants, and stones treated in the *Physiologus* and also incorporated in the *sawāsəw* lists. The total amount is not insignificant. The words are *karādyon* (caladrius), *finəkəs* (phoenix), *ḥalastəyo* (wild donkey), *qaḥm* (ant), *$q^{w}$ənṣəl* (fox), *māʿnaq* (turtledove), *$q^{w}$arnanaʿāt* (frog), *hāyyal* (deer), *ʾadmās* (diamond), *ʾarodyon* (heron). Other words are attested in slightly different spelling forms: *ḥeṗoṗos* (hoopoe), and *gālen* (weasel).[8] Nevertheless, this argument alone is not sufficient to predicate a provenance from the *Physiologus*. The same words might in fact originate from different pieces of literature. In order to remove interference from other textual sources, we need to isolate those words, or even glosses matching exclusively the *Physiologus* context. Admittedly, none of the above words meets this requirement. All of them also occur elsewhere, specifically

6 The Gəʿəz version of the Physiologus (ፊሳልጎስ ፡, *Fisalgos*, or ፊስአልጎስ ፡, *Fisəʾalgos*) was translated in the Aksumite Age (fourth to seventh century) from a Greek model. It therefore belongs to the oldest layer of the literary heritage of Christian Ethiopia. Place and authorship of the translation remain unknown. The work survives in at least nine relatively recent manuscript copies. Dated to the 18th–20th century, these copies were executed more than one millennium after the work made its way into the Horn of Africa. The work is transmitted into three recensions, called Et-α, Et-β, and Et-γ. Only Et-α is sufficiently known to scholars, thanks to the 1877 edition by Fritz Hommel (Hommel 1877; Italian translation in Conti Rossini 1951; English translation in Sumner 1982). For an updated presentation of the text history and the manuscript tradition, see Villa, forthcoming.

7 Weninger 2005.

8 Transcribed in the *sawāsəw* as *ḥeṗoṗā* and *gāle*. Names are given according to the reasonably earliest extant orthography as provided by the available documentation. Since a number of them are loanwords from Greek, they have undergone, not unexpectedly, a proliferation of formal variants over the text transmission.

in the Bible.[9] Provided that the biblical books undoubtedly had a far broader circulation than the *Physiologus*, one is inclined to assume, as a privileged hypothesis, that their legacy in the subsequent lexicographic literature was more conspicuous than that of the *Physiologus*.

An illuminating evidence to this statement comes from a list of bird names contained in MS Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Éth. 150 (f. 47ra–b), an eighteenth-century copy of a *sawāsəw*. Under the section **አ**[**ንቀ**] **ጸ ፡ ነገረ ፡ አዕዋፍ ፡** the *sawāsəw* lists the following species:

> *Finəks*, i.e. a large vulture-like bird; *gep̣ā*, i.e. a bird of prey; […] *ʾarodoyon*, i.e. the heron; *qäqäno*, i.e. the stork; *ʾibən*, i.e. the cross-bird (ibis); […] *herodyanos*, i.e. a fish-eating bird; *seneresaros bədyon*, i.e. the partridge.

Four names are significant: the *finəks*, the *gep̣ā*, the *ʾarodoyon*, and the *ʾibən*. They indeed recall the Greek forms of four species of birds described in the *Physiologus*, respectively the phoenix, the vulture, the heron, and the ibis. However, the provenance of at least three lexemes of them from the *Physiologus* is unlikely due to their spellings. In fact, *gep̣ā*, *ʾarodoyon*, and *ʾibən* are exactly the accusative-based forms inherited from γῦπα, ἐρωδιόν, and ἶβιν, and attested in biblical lists of clean and unclean animals (Lv 11, 14–19 and Dt 14, 12–16). By contrast, the *Physiologus* styles them respectively as *gip̣os* (from the genitive form γυπός), *ʾarodyon*, and *ʾabisor* (perhaps from ἶβις ὄρ[νις]). Therefore, a derivation from the Old Testament lists of animals appears philologically more grounded. The same argument can be extended to the *ḥep̣op̣ā*, 'hoopoe' (in Lv 11, 19 and Dt 14, 17, and in the *sawāsəw*), which originates from the accusative form ἔποπα, versus the genitive-based form *ḥep̣op̣os* transmitted in the *Physiologus* (from ἔποπος).[10] As the example above efficaciously shows, one must not underestimate the pervasive role played by the biblical books. In view of these examples, the real influence of the *Physiologus* on the *sawāsəw* tradition remains an open question.

9 Six names out of twelve are genuine local words (*ḥalastəyo*, *qaḥm*, *qʷənṣəl*, *māʿnaq*, *qʷarnanaʿāt*, *hāyyal*), the remaining six are Greek loanwords. In all cases the animal names are spelt in an identical or very close way both in the *Physiologus* and in the Bible. Concerning the *gālen* (weasel), coming from Greek γαλῆ, it is worth mentioning that the word appears in Lv 11, 30, in the list of unclean reptiles and other species that crawl on the earth. As already noticed by Hiob Ludolf, in this list the Greek word is simply transliterated rather than translated (Ludolf 1691, 210). Interestingly, the reptile-like appearance of the *gāle* survives in its *sawāsəw* explanation, as quoted in August Dillmann's *Lexicon linguae Aethiopicae*: here *gāle* is described as **ጋሌ ፡ ዘ ፡ ሕባበ ፡ ዘ ፡ ፪ ፡ አፉሁ ።**, i.e. a monstrous two-mouth snake (Dillmann 1865, 1138).

10 Hommel 1877, xxix; Conti Rossini 1951, 15 and 22.

## The *Physiologus* and the *ʾandəmtā* corpus

Echoes of animal stories from the *Physiologus* have been more solidly identified in a number of *ʾandəmtā* explanations. The merit goes to Roger W. Cowley, who devoted much efforts to investigate and document the traditional Ethiopian exegesis. He properly addressed the question of the complex and abundant literary background behind it, and managed to identify a number of biblical and non-biblical explanations sourced from various chapters of the *Physiologus*. Among the published commentaries, references are extant to the lion (Rev 5, 5), the caladrius (Mt 8, 17; *Wəddāse Māryām*), the eagle (Is 40, 31), the viper or echidna (Mt 3, 7; *Fəṭḥa nagaśt*), the snake (Mt 10, 16), the panther (Hos 5, 11), and the unicorn (Ps 21, 22).[11] Cowley's work, although pioneering in some respects, is a solid starting point for our purpose. I will examine in this paper some passages containing references to the stories of the eagle, the viper or echidna, and the caladrius.

The commentary explanation of Is 40, 31 (**እለሰ ፡ ይሴፈውዎ ፡ ለእግዚአ ብሔር ፡ ይሔድሱ ፡ ኀይሎሙ ፡ ወይበቍሉ ፡ ክነፊሆሙ ፡ ከመ ፡ ንስር ፡**, 'those who hope in God will renew their strength; and their wings will sprout like eagles') is as follows:

> **ንስር ባረጀ ጊዜ ዐብዶ የሚባል ጭቃ አለ ያነን ተቀብቶ እንጨቱን ከምሮ ወያስተጣግዕ ክነፊሁ ክንፍና ክንፉን ያማታዋል ፤**
>
> **ወይወፅእ እሳት እምአካለ ዝኩ ዖፍ ፤ እንዲል ጊዮርጊስ ወልደ አሚድ ፤ ከአካሉ እሳት ወጥቶ እንጨቱን ያቃጥለዋል ፤ እሱም አብሮ ይቃጠላል ፤ በግብፅ ዝናም ዘንሞ አያውቅም ፤ ባምስት መቶ ዘመን ለሐድሶተ ንስር እንደ ካፊያ ያለ ይዘንማል ፤ በመጀመሪያ ቀን ትል ይሆላል ፤ በሁለተኛው ቀን ዖፍ ያሆላል ፤ በሦስተኛው ቀን በሮ ይሄዳል ፤**[12]
>
> When the eagle grows old, it secretes the so-called *ʿabdo*. After smearing itself with it and after collecting firewood, it fits closely its wings and flutters them.
>
> 'Fire comes out of the body of that bird' (*Gəʿəz*), as Giyorgis Walda ʿAmid says: fire comes out of its body. Then, it burns the firewood and burns down itself together with the wood. In Egypt it has not rained for five hundred years; however, as soon as the eagle has renovated itself, it drizzles. The first day (the eagle) is a worm; the second day [it becomes] a bird; the third day, (having the sky) cleared up, it goes away.

The chapter of the *Physiologus* on the eagle also narrates a story on rejuvenation; but it is quite different from the one retold in the *ʾandəmtā*. According to the *Physiologus*, the eagle, grown old and become blind, flies towards the heat of the sun, burns its wings and its blindness, and plunges three times into a source of pure water, thus becoming young once more.[13] The two stories

11 Cowley 1983, 44. For the reference to the panther in the *ʾandəmtā* commentary on Hos 5, 11, see Weldetensae Andeberhan 1994, 124, and Villa forthcoming.

12 *ʾAndəmtā* commentary on Isaiah, 270*a*–*b*.

13 Hommel 1877, 6–7 (text of Et-α), 51–52 (German translation); Conti Rossini 1951, 21 (Italian translation); Sumner 1982, 16–17 (English translation).

have little in common. By contrast, the passage from the *ʾandəmtā* displays a striking resemblance with another well-known tradition, that of the legendary phoenix. According to the *Physiologus*, the phoenix, when it has reached the age of five hundred years, enters the forest of Lebanon and fills its wings with the scent called *ʾabdu*, then it enters the city of the sun, i.e. Heliopolis, and burns itself above the altar. When the priest examines the ashes, he finds a worm, which turns then into a big bird. The phoenix then greets the priest and comes back to its place.[14]

The mention of the *ʾabdu* is significant and demands for a plus of attention. It does not appear either in the Greek or in two of the three recensions of the Ethiopic *Physiologus* (i.e. Et-β and Et-γ). As it is only mentioned in Et-α, it seems to be an innovative reading. Also the *ʾandəmtā* commentary attests the word *ʿabdo* which, despite minor discrepancies, equals the *ʾabdu* fragrance in form and function. This supports a connection between the eagle story in the commentary and the phoenix chapter as transmitted in Et-α, because both share a non-polygenetic secondary variant which, technically speaking, is a ‘conjunctive error’. One is therefore inclined to assume that the exegete learnt the story of the prodigious self-burning bird according to Et-α. As to the confusion between the phoenix and the eagle, it might be conjectured that the exegete did not have the source text nearby and, while retelling the legend from memory, he deliberately replaced the rare and perhaps obscure word *finəks* with a more familiar bird name. However, other explanations cannot be ruled out.[15]

In Mt 3, 7 Jesus calls the Pharisees ‘brood of vipers’: **ወይቤሎሙ ፡ አትውልደ ፡ አራዊተ ፡ ምድር ፡ መኑ ፡ አመረክሙ ፡ ትጕየዩ ፡ እመቅሰፍት ፡ ወእመንሡት ፡ ዘይመጽእ ፡**, ‘and (Jesus) told them: ‘you brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the punishment and the coming wrath?’’. The Amharic commentary to that passage is as follows:

> **ትወልደ አራዊተ ምድር ያላት አርዌ ገሞራዊት ናት አፈ ማኅፀኑዋ ጠባብ ነው ዘሩን ባፏ ትቀበለዋች አባለ ዘሩን ቆርጣ ታስቀረዋለች ። በፅንስ ጊዜ እባት ሥጋዋን በልተው ሆዷን ቀደው ይወጣሉ ። በዚህ ጊዜ እናት ትሞታለች ። እኒህም እንዳባት የሚሆኑዋቸውን ነቢያት እንደ እናት የሚሆኑዋቸው ሐዋርያት ገድለዋና ።**[16]

14 Hommel 1877, 7 (text of Et-α), 52–53 (German translation); Conti Rossini 1951, 21–22 (Italian translation); Sumner 1982, 17–19 (English translation).

15 For instance, that a parallel story on the eagle circulated in a very different form than that transmitted in the *Physiologus*. Hard to explain is also the reference to Giyorgis Walda ʿAmid, author of a historical treatise (*Tārika Walda ʿAmid*), where, however, no reference to the myth of the self-burning bird seems to be found. Further investigation is needed to clear up this point.

16 *ʾAndəmtā* commentary on the Holy Gospels, 36*b*.

> ‘Brood of vipers’: (the viper) is a snake of Gomorrah, and the opening of her womb is tight. (The female) receives the semen from her mouth. After cutting off the (male) organ, she abandons him. At birth the sons eat the flesh (of their mother), lacerate her belly, and come out. Thus, she dies. The prophets, which are like the fathers (of the vipers), and the apostles, which are like the mothers (of the vipers), were likewise killed.

This passage is certainly indebted to the chapter of the *Physiologus* on the viper, or echidna, which contains the same narrative. Comparison with the multiple-version text of the *Physiologus* evidences once more a closer affinity to Et-α. Such an affinity emerges with clarity in the conclusion of the ʾ*andəmtā* explanation. Here, the reference to the ‘prophets’ and the ‘apostles’ parallels the conclusion of the Et-α recension, which reads **ከማሁ ፡ እሙንቱ ፡ ቀተሉ ፡ አበዊሆሙ ፡ ነቢያተ ፡ እግዚእነሂ ፡ አቡሆሙ ፡ ወአርዳኢሁ ።**, ‘so they killed their fathers, the prophets, and also our Lord, their father, and his disciples’ (‘apostles’ in the ʾ*andəmtā* evidently continues ‘disciples’).[17] Conversely, Et-β only has **ቀተልዎ ፡ ለእግዚእነ ፡ ኢየሱስ ፡ ክርስቶስ ፡**, ‘they killed our Lord, Jesus Christ’, and Et-γ only has **ይቀትሉ ፡ አበዊክሙ ፡ ነቢያተ ።**, ‘they killed your fathers, the prophets’.

Remarkably, a very similar account is also found in the ʾ*andəmtā* commentary of a renowned Arabic-based compilation of law, ‘The Law of Kings’ (*Fətḥa nagaśt*).

> The womb of this snake of Gomorrah is tight. (The female) receives the semen from her mouth. After cutting off the (male) organ, she abandons him. The male dies. When the time of the birth has come, the sons lacerate her belly and come out, and she dies. Thus, they kill their own fathers during conception, and their own mothers at birth.[18]

The collation of the two texts shows that they are no doubt two version of one and the same story. Several explanations can be invoked. The most viable explanation is that one version is based on the other. The version from the commentary of Matthew is more likely to be earlier for several reasons. First, it is textually more complete, because it retains the mention of the prophets which, as seen, is also found in the Greek *Physiologus* and in two Ethiopic recensions. Moreover, the reconstruction fits well with the expected process of development of the ʾ*andəmtā* tradition: most probably, commentaries were initially produced to cover the most pre-eminent New Testament books. At a later stage they were extended to prestigious yet non-canonical books such as

17 Hommel 1877, 10 (text of Et-α) 56 (German translation); Conti Rossini 1951, 24 (Italian translation); Sumner 1982, 23 (English translation).

18 ʾ*Andəmtā* commentary on the *Fətḥa nagaśt*, 163*c*.

the *Fəṭḥa nagaśt*, presumably by learned men well acquainted with the exegetical literature already in existence.

That of the echidna is not the sole instance of a verbatim or slavish reuse of material based on the same animal story. The same strategy also affects another account from the *Physiologus*, that on the caladrius. The caladrius is a miraculous all-white bird with diagnostic powers: placed in front of a sick person, the caladrius reveals if he will live or die, depending on whether it looks directly at the face of the sick person or turns away from him.[19] The legend of the caladrius is found in two exegetical passages, the former embedded in the commentary of Matthew (Mt 8, 17, here on the left), the latter in the commentary of a non-biblical text, 'The Praise of Mary' (*Wəddāse Māryām*, here on the right):

| | |
|---|---|
| Story of the caladrius: it is a white bird which is brought and dwells in the royal palace. When someone is ailing, (the caladrius) is brought forth and is put near to him. If he remains sick, (the caladrius) turns its face away; if he survives, it comes close and receives his breath. With the breath (the bird), which was white, becomes black and goes out to the air. | Story of the caladrius: it is a white bird which dwells in the royal house. When someone is ailing, (the caladrius) is brought forth and is placed in front of him. If he remains sick, (the caladrius) turns its face away; if he survives, it comes close and receives his breath. (The bird), which was white, becomes black and goes out to the air. |
| After three hours …, it enters into the sea. After being three days and three nights in the sea, it replaces its old feathers, it renovates, and comes out. | After three hours …, it enters into the sea. After three days and three nights in the depths of the sea, it replaces its old feathers, it renovates, and comes out. |
| The white bird is the Lord, and it is white because of his divinity.[18] | The white bird is the Lord, and it is white because of his divinity.[19] |

Here again the similarity between the two explanations supports the assumption that one stems from the other. Other instances of the same phenomenon are certainly in existence in the *ʾandəmtā* literature,[22] most probably also outside the domain of the *Physiologus*.

19 Hommel 1877, 3–4 (text of Et-α), 48–49 (German translation); Conti Rossini 1951, 18–19 (Italian translation); Sumner 1982, 13–14 (English translation).

20 *ʾAndəmtā* commentary on the Holy Gospels, 76b–c.

21 *ʾAndəmtā* commentary on the *Wəddāse Māryām*, 155–156.

22 By way of example, the commentary on the *Wəddāse Māryām* contains a further reference to the centuries-old drought in Egypt and the legend of the eagle (i.e. the phoenix), which corresponds to the above-mentioned explanation in Is 40, 31 (*ʾAndəmtā* commentary on the *Wəddāse Māryām*, 102).

### ***Some conclusions: A multifaceted impact?***

The case studies presented here show that the dissemination of echoes of the *Physiologus* in the lexicographical and exegetical literature is far from allowing easy-made conclusions.

Evidence from the *sawāsəw* compilations is not uncontroversial: contrary to what is generally claimed, *Physiologus*-related names do not seem to have received extensive treatment in the native vocabularies. Observations based on the orthography of some bird names show tangibly that it is much safer to attribute the latter's provenance to scriptural readings.

The impact on the *ʾandəmtā* corpus is more firmly grounded. It is demonstrated that several accounts from the *Physiologus* were incorporated into the Amharic traditional commentaries. This provides a valuable information on the transmission of the text, since it proves that the latter circulated and was read in the monastic centers where the *ʾandəmtā* tradition emerged. Besides, a dependence from a text type which is closer to Et-α (the most conservative recension) sporadically surfaces from independent text-critical observations, even though more evidence would be required to make solid generalizations.

Even though studies on the sources and the development of the traditional exegesis are still in their infancy, a brief look has revealed clear phenomena of reuse of the literary material. One the one hand, some legendary properties were attributed to a different animal (e.g. the eagle replaces the phoenix as the self-burning bird in the commentary on Is 40, 31) for reasons which are still overall unclear. On the other hand, material from existing commentaries was reused for newly-composed exegetical treatises. This holds true for at least two explanations in the commentary of Matthew that are paralleled by nearly identical passages in the commentaries of two non-biblical books, the *Fəṭḥa nagaśt* and the *Wəddāse Māryām*. This corroborates the idea that the *ʾandəmtā* corpus, despite being a complex body, possesses its own integrity. Studies on this topic might be very inspiring in the coming years, as they provide information on the process of historical development of the Amharic exegetical literature. Obviously, a prerequisite for more precise statements in this respect is the availability of a reliable text edition of the *Physiologus* on the one hand, and of the commentaries on the other, taking into due consideration that the latter existed for a long time as an oral tradition.

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# Research projects

## Everyday Writing in Graeco-Roman and Late Antique Egypt
### Outline of a new research programme*

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In October 2017, the European Research Council awarded a Starting Grant to Klaas Bentein for his project *EVWRIT: Everyday writing in Graeco-Roman and Late Antique Egypt: A socio-semiotic study of communicative variation*. In what follows, the research goals, methodology, and corpus of this new project are briefly outlined.[1]

### *Introduction*

As its title indicates, the focus of the ERC-funded project 'Everyday writing in Graeco-Roman and Late Antique Egypt: A socio-semiotic study of communicative variation' is on non-literary, 'documentary' texts. These texts, which range from scrap papers, shopping lists, and tax receipts on the one hand to marriage contracts, official petitions, and imperial edicts on the other, have been preserved in great number in Egypt's dry climate, especially in the period ranging from the fourth century BCE until the eighth century CE (that is, from the conquests of Alexander the Great until the Arab conquest of Egypt). Recent research has stressed the pervasive nature of writing during this period.[2] Whereas earlier accounts took a 'minimalist' stance towards literacy rates,[3] recent studies have nuanced this view, shifting the terms of the debate to focus on the social environments, in which written texts are embedded. Nowadays, it is recognized that a society as a whole can be literate, even when most of its members aren't: so, for example, MacDonald states that a literate society can be defined as one in which reading and writing have become essential to its functioning, either throughout the society, or in certain vital aspects (such as religious life, the bureaucracy, economic activities, etc.).[4] Bagnall argues that

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1 For more information, see our project website: <http://www.evwrit.ugent.be>.

2 See e.g. Jördens 2011.

3 See e.g. Harris 1989.

4 MacDonald 2005, 49.

Late Antique Egypt formed such a literate society, most adults being participants in a system in which writing was constantly used.[5] Those who did not have the ability to write had a variety of strategies to cope with this literate system: they could contact a professional scribe, or rely on their private networks (relatives, friends, neighbors, or the village school teacher).

One of the key characteristics of documentary texts is that they are varied in external appearance. Just to give some examples: they are mainly written in Greek, which had become the common language or *koinè*, but other languages, such as Latin, Coptic, and Arabic are also attested. They use a variety of linguistic registers, ranging from very formal, archaic language, to informal, every-day language. They are mainly written on papyrus, but writers also used other writing materials including potsherd, wood, linen, leather, and parchment. Their handwriting ranges from slow and calligraphic to very fast and cursive. The choice for one or more of these external features had a serious impact on the message of the text.[6] Whereas a number of ongoing research projects[7] have started drawing attention to material aspects of texts[8] and their contexts of production, there have been no large-scale, systematic studies of the social significance of external textual features.

It is precisely this aspect that our project will focus on: since elements such as handwriting, linguistic register, and writing material transmit indirect social messages concerning hierarchy, status, and power relations, we argue that they constitute 'semiotic resources'.[9] Our key hypothesis is that the expression of social meaning is enabled through 'communicative variation', that is, variation that is functionally insignificant but socially significant (e.g. *there are ~ there's ~ it's* a lot of people), across multiple semiotic resources. The main aim is to analyse the nature of this communicative variation in an inter-disciplinary fashion.

## *1. Social Semiotics*

Theoretically, our project is embedded in the framework of Social Semiotics.[10] This relatively new theoretical framework attempts 'to describe and un-

5 Bagnall 2011.
6 As noted by Sijpesteijn with regard to Arab letters: 'the external features of the text were as important as the contents in establishing their authority', see Sijpesteijn 2013, 257.
7 Such as Martti Leiwo's 'Acts of the Scribe', see <https://blogs.helsinki.fi/actofscribe/>, and Rodney Ast's 'Antique Letters as a Means of Communication', see <https://www.materiale-textkulturen.org/subproject.php?tp=A02&up=>.
8 For a recent edited volume on this topic, see Hoogendijk and Van Gompel 2018.
9 See e.g. Jewitt 2009.
10 See e.g. van Leeuwen 2005.

derstand how people produce and communicate meaning in specific social settings'.[11] Broadly speaking, three strands of research can be distinguished within Social Semiotics: (i) *Socio-linguistics*, which analyses the relationship between language and its social context, (ii) *Critical Discourse Analysis*, which looks into the relationship between language and power relations/ideology, and (iii) *Multi-modality*, which investigates the relationship between the different 'modes' we use to make meaning, including visual, gestural, musical, choreographic etc. resources. It is our intention to combine the first and the third strands of research: we want to analyse how linguistic, but also other types of variation, can be related to the social context, and how these different modes are related to each other.

By combining these two strands of research, our aim is to develop a new approach towards communication practices in antiquity. Whereas sociolinguistics has been applied to texts from the past (under the heading of '*historical* socio-linguistics'[12]), there have been no applications of multimodality to antiquity: for example, one textbook is explicitly entitled 'Multimodality. A social semiotic approach to *contemporary* communication'.[13] An important point of convergence between sociolinguistics and multimodality, and a practical starting point for this project, can be found in the work of M.A.K. Halliday. While being a linguist, Halliday at an early stage recognized that 'there are many other modes of meaning, in any culture, which are outside the realm of language'; he noted that these other 'modes' are 'all bearers of meaning in the culture. Indeed we can define a culture as a set of semiotic systems, as a set of systems of meaning, all of which interrelate'.[14]

One of Halliday's key insights is that communication is not only multimodal, but also polyfunctional: Halliday postulates three kinds of meaning, called 'ideational' (construing our experience of the world and our consciousness, e.g. 'pen' = instrument for writing), 'textual' (organizing discourse and creating continuity and flow in texts, e.g. 'I love music, so I will go to the festival', *so* indicating a consequential relationship between two clauses), and 'interpersonal' (enacting personal and social relations, e.g. 'I might go', *might* indicating probability of realization).[15] These three types of meaning can be systematically related to three major contextual variables, known as 'field' (what the discourse is about), 'mode' (the ways in which interactants come into contact), and 'tenor' (the interactants and their relationship) respective-

11 Kress and van Leeuwen 2006 (1996), 266.
12 See e.g. Conde-Silvestre and Hernandez-Campoy 2012.
13 Kress 2010; our emphasis.
14 Halliday 1978, 4.
15 The last of these three types corresponds to what we have called 'social meaning' so far.

ly, so that field corresponds to the ideational function, mode to the textual function, and tenor to the interpersonal function. Each of these contextual variables can be further specified (in terms of the social parameters that are traditionally recognized in socio-linguistics), which enables very detailed investigation of how different types of meaning are established.

An important distinction that is made in studies of social semiotics, multimodality in particular, is that between 'intra-semiosis', the making of meaning *within* semiotic resources, and 'inter-semiosis', the making of meaning *across* semiotic resources.[16] This distinction corresponds to the project's two major research goals.

## *2. Intra-semiosis*

The first major goal is to outline which semiotic resources play a role in documentary texts from Graeco-Roman and Late Antique Egypt, and to describe the 'semiotic' potential of each resource, that is, its inventory of communicative variants and the social meaning these variants carry. We hypothesize that the relevant semiotic resources can be situated along two major dimensions or 'modes', that is, the 'verbal' mode and the 'visual-graphological' mode.[17]

### *2.1 The verbal mode*

Rather than taking into account all of the languages attested in our corpus (that is, Greek, Latin, Coptic, and Arabic), we will investigate the verbal mode through an in-depth analysis of Ancient Greek, which is the language used in the majority of the documents.

The conquest by Alexander the Great marked a crucial moment in Egypt's linguistic history: Greek became established as the language of power and administration, which it continued to be until the Arab conquests in the seventh century. However, the Greek that was used in Egypt and elsewhere was not that of the Classical writers. As the common language of a great number of speakers, Greek underwent a quite fundamental restructuring: the optative was lost, the perfect and future tense disappeared, word order changed, vocabulary was extended through derivation and borrowing, etc.[18] Documentary papyri form one of the prime witnesses of these linguistic changes. Surprisingly, however, relatively little linguistic research has been done on this corpus after the initial breakthrough by Deissmann and his followers in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, which definitively changed the study of Post-classical Greek, and culminated in Mayser's Grammar of the Ptolemaic papyri.[19] As

16 See e.g. Lim 2004, 220–221.
17 Compare Matthiessen 2007, 24–25.
18 See e.g. Horrocks 2010.
19 Mayser 1926–1938.

Evans and Obbink have observed, these 'linguistic resources of extraordinary richness … have hardly begun to be explored'.[20] We intend to rectify this situation by performing an in-depth lexicological and morpho-syntactic analysis of the texts.

Next to the analysis of the 'ideational' and 'textual' functions of linguistic features (the syntax and semantics, so to say), our main point of attention will be the 'interpersonal' (social) functions of these features: in many cases, variant constructions were in use at the same time, each with different social values. Lee, for example, notes that the difference in choice between the 'order words' προστάσσω, ἐντέλλομαι, and κελεύω 'are of connotation, not of lexical meaning'.[21] Similarly, in the field of syntax, Bentein has drawn attention to the correlation that seems to exist between complementation patterns and formality.[22] Our project aims to uncover such social correlations (connotations) in a more systematic way, and on a much larger scale.

### *2.2 The visual-graphological mode*

For the visual-graphological mode, diverse semiotic resources will be taken into account: typography,[23] writing material, and document format. Whereas visual elements such as paintings, drawings, and photographs have received much attention in socio-semiotic research, paralinguistic aspects such as typography have been considered of lesser importance. Even less attention has been paid to material aspects of writing such as writing material and document format.

Papyrological studies have drawn some attention to the social importance of these resources. Typography has undoubtedly received the most attention: the study of visual-graphological elements has a longstanding tradition in studies of Antiquity, where it is known as '(papyrological) palaeography'. Palaeographers, however, mainly paid attention to Greek and Latin texts. Our project will also include Arabic and Coptic texts, which have received much less scholarly attention, and study the interaction between these different types of texts. Moreover, palaeographers tend to focus on the micro-level (that is, letterforms); our project will also look into macro-level elements such as the number of lines, the length of lines, symmetrical vs. wavering lines, etc. Writing material and especially document format have been given much less attention; document format in particular is a completely new semiotic re-

20 Evans and Obbink 2010, 2.

21 Lee 2012, 3.

22 See e.g. Bentein 2017.

23 Whereas the term 'typography' is sometimes associated with printed text, it is now increasingly being used 'to refer to the visual organisation of written language however it is produced', Walker 2001, 2.

source, which was first hinted at by Fournet and has recently received a more in-depth treatment by Sarri.[24]

Again, the intention is to make an inventory of meaning-making features for each of the above-mentioned semiotic resources. Rather than studying their ideational and textual meaning, however, the purpose will be to directly connect features to the interpersonal dimension, and to analyse how they create social meaning. Whereas a number of interesting preliminary observations have been made, a detailed and systematic investigation of such correlations has yet to be undertaken.

### *2.3 At the interface between the verbal and visual-graphological modes*

As a last part of the intra-semiotic subproject, the role of language choice and orthography as semiotic resources will also be taken into account. Language choice and orthography are situated in between the verbal and the visual-graphological modes. They are obviously related to the verbal dimension; however, their immediate realization is a visual-graphological matter: for example, each of the languages that is attested in our corpus is attested with a specific script. As with the visual-graphological resources, we will make an inventory of meaning-making features, and analyse how these can be connected to the social context.

Since orthography is such a broad topic, the project will focus specifically on Ancient Greek. The orthography of Post-classical and Byzantine Greek papyri has been quite well studied in the past.[25] Since, however, the primary interest of these studies is phonological change, they pay very little attention to the normative, interpersonal dimension of orthographic choice, a topic which has come under renewed attention elsewhere.[26] Moreover, these studies mostly concentrate on *unlicensed*, innovative orthographic variants: in our corpus, one also finds licensed variants, all of which were socially accepted, but which seem to have carried distinct social values.

For language choice, the inventory is much more limited. However, the situation is more complicated than it may seem because of the phenomenon of 'code switching': in some documents, two languages/scripts are used interchangeably; moreover, multiple scripts are sometimes used in one and the same document for one language. It has been suggested that such practices carry social meaning, but much more investigation is needed, through a careful analysis of such code-switching passages.

24 Fournet 2007; Sarri 2018, 87–113.

25 We have Theodorsson 1977 for the Ptolemaic period, and Gignac 1978 for the Roman and Byzantine periods

26 See e.g. Sebba 2007.

### *3. Intra-semiosis*

The second major goal of our project is to study the interrelationship between different semiotic resources: whereas each of the semiotic resources described above can be said to 'make meaning', ultimately the meaning of the text as a complex sign depends on the interrelationship of these different dimensions. Whereas the interrelationship between different semiotic resources forms one of the central areas of current multimodal research, it still forms a theoretical challenge. So far, little attention has gone to the interrelationship between the verbal and visual-graphological modes; moreover, virtually no studies have focused on the interpersonal (social) dimension, as this project does. Papyrologists have made a number of intriguing observations about the joint expression of meaning: they have observed connections between *document format and typography*;[27] *typography and language/script*;[28] *linguistic register and typography*;[29] *language/script and writing material*;[30] *writing material and typography*;[31] etc. So far, however, these correlations have not been further explored.

Our project aims to offer a more comprehensive analysis. In particular, we will measure the strength of co-occurrence between semiotic features and specific social parameters, analysing for example which features are pragmatically salient when it comes to the expression of social distance. Whereas the main focus will be on convergent features, in other words, intersemiotic complementarity,[32] the occurrence of divergent features will also be looked into. Next to this, we will also investigate the existence of larger patterns of co-occurrence, through multi-variate statistical methods. A central concept in this regard is that of 'register' (which can be defined as 'a variety according to use'; contrast with a 'variety according to user' such as dialect): while this notion is well known in linguistic studies, in other fields, such as typography, it is much less well known. We will not only apply the notion of 'register' to these new fields, but also develop the concept of 'multi-modal' registers,[33] that is, registers across semiotic resources. A second, related concept which can be applied to our corpus is that of 'genre'. Genres, which form stable patterns of register configurations, provide the analyst with an alternative, more direct way of investigating the occurrence of multiple semiotic features.

27 See e.g. Fournet 2007, 360.
28 See e.g. Cromwell 2010, 228.
29 Bagnall and Cribiore 2006, 43.
30 See e.g. Bagnall 2011, 76.
31 See e.g. Sijpesteijn 2007, 517.
32 See e.g. Royce 2007.
33 See e.g. Matthiessen 2007.

### *4. Corpus and database*

In order to study communicative variation in a comprehensive way, our project focuses on Greek, Latin, Coptic, and Arabic documentary texts from the Roman and Late Antique period (first to eighth century CE). Whereas previously documentary texts could only be accessed in printed works, nowadays full access to the documentary texts has become easy, thanks to a number of initiatives in Digital Humanities such as Papyri.Info[34] and Trismegistos.[35] Regrettably, however, there are different databases for Graeco-Latin, Coptic and Arabic texts, attesting to disciplinary fragmentation within the field of papyrology. Moreover, each of these different databases presents information at different levels of detail: for example, for Graeco-Latin papyri, full texts are much more often available than is the case for Arabic and especially Coptic papyri; the same is true for digital images. For this reason, we are currently collaborating with the Trismegistos team to develop a database which brings together documentary texts from these different research traditions. We not only intend to consistently input all metadata, but also to add several annotation layers, including morpho-syntax, lexis & orthography, typography, materiality, text structure, and languages. By 2023, we hope to have completely annotated a focus corpus of about 5,000 texts coming from a number of sites in Middle Egypt for all of these different types of information. At the end of the project, all data will become freely available online through a dedicated website.

### *Conclusion*

To conclude, it is worth briefly outlining some of the main areas where our project hopes to make an impact. First, by offering a holistic perspective towards the meaning of documentary texts, we hope to shift the attention from the literal meaning of the text, towards the social meaning that it conveys. Second, the new digital tool that we are developing will open up new ways to investigate Ancient texts: it will allow researchers to annotate texts with multiple layers of information, and to retrieve different types of information. It will thus complement existing initiatives in the field of digital humanities. Third, our project will make an important contribution to current socio-semiotic research: it will unlock a large new field of research, since documents from Antiquity have never been studied from this perspective; it will investigate a number of semiotic resources which have received very little attention so far, such as handwriting, writing material, and document format; and it will reveal the interplay between the different semiotic resources in a detailed

34 See <https://papyri.info>.

35 See <https://www.trismegistos.org/>.

way. Fourth and finally, by combining the frameworks of multimodality and socio-linguistics in a novel way, this project will make a significant theoretical contribution, developing the new field of *Historical Social Semiotics*.

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# The *NOTAE* Project: a Research between East and West, Late Antiquity and Early Middle Ages*

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The project *NOTAE: NOT A writtEn word but graphic symbols. An evidence-based reconstruction of another written world in pragmatic literacy from Late Antiquity to early medieval Europe* is an ERC Advanced Grant (2018–2023), which represents the first attempt to investigate the presence of graphic symbols in documentary records as a historical phenomenon from Late Antiquity to early medieval Europe.

### *Introduction*

The medieval charter of the Latin West is a complex system of written texts and graphic devices as well as material objects such as applied or pendent seals (Fig. 1). A new approach to studying the medieval charters in all such complexity was introduced in the 1990s by Peter Rück.[1] In his research in the field of diplomatics, he suggested explicating morphology, semantics, syntax, pragmatic function and changes over time of the symbolic elements of a charter, while involving also results and concepts of other disciplines—e.g. archaeology, numismatics, semiotics, anthropology.

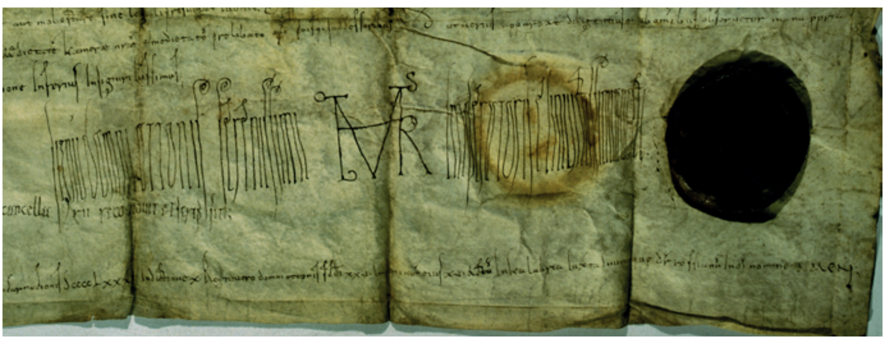

Fig. 1. Lucca, Archivio storico diocesano, Archivio capitolare, Diplomatico, Fondo Martini, 79, privilege issued by emperor Otto II, D O. II. 277 (31 July 982), partial image of the final section, from Ghignoli, Huschner, and Jaros 2016, Beilag 3.

* The project *NOTAE: NOT A writtEn word but graphic symbols. An evidence-based reconstruction of another written world in pragmatic literacy from Late Antiquity to early medieval Europe* has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (grant agreement no. 786572, Advanced Grant 2017, PI Antonella Ghignoli) and is hosted by Sapienza Università di Roma from 01 July 2018 to 30 June 2023. See also <http://www.notae-project.eu>.

1 See Rück 1996a. See also Worm 2006, 335–370.

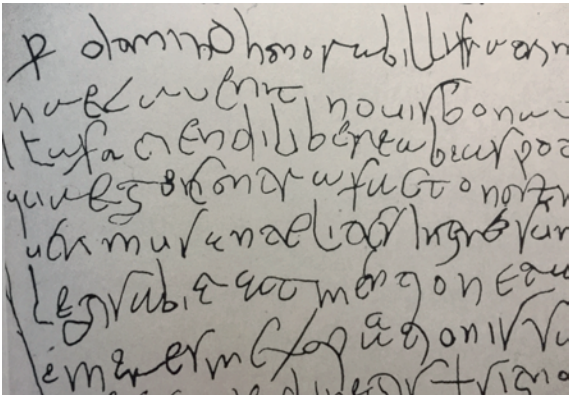

Fig. 2. Private collection of D. M.C. Díaz y Díaz, Santiago de Compostela, squeeze of a document on slate from Visigothic Spain, period of King Reccared I (586–601), selection, from Millares Carlo 1932, II, Tab. 41.

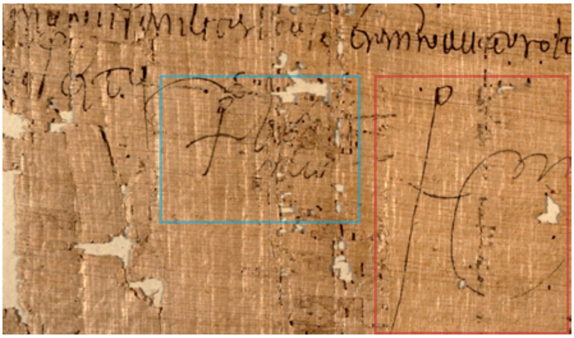

Fig. 3. The University of Manchester Library, P.Ryl. IV 609 (ChLA IV.246), authentic order from Theophanes, *comes rei militaris Thebaici limitis*, 505 CE. Signature of Theophanes—*bene uale*—preceded by a staurogram (blue). Subscription of the referendarius—*Complevi* [...]—also preceded by a staurogram (red).

The well-studied subjects in this new field have so far been the graphic symbols which are striking features of the charters of high medieval Europe (tenth to thirteenth century), and in particular of those issued by rulers and elites or written by public notaries. The few comparative analyses have so far been conducted mainly on high and late medieval western sources. It must be said at this point that diplomatics has increasingly become limited to the field of medieval studies, while its 'sister', palaeography (both Latin and Greek, in particular when applied to literary texts), treats a far vaster time range. Scholars of diplomatics no longer quote studies in legal history regarding Roman law and vulgar Roman law, such as those of Heinrich Brunner, Artur Steinwenter, Harold Steinacker and others, which established a bridge between the documentary practice of the early medieval West and that of the Graeco-Roman Late Antiquity.[2]

2 Steinwenter and Steinacker are still present in the list of references on juridical or documentary papyrology: see e.g. Keenan, Manning and Yftach-Firanko 2014. Tjäder (1955, 1982) or Classen (1977) are no longer part of the curriculum in palaeography and diplomatics, at least in Italian universities.

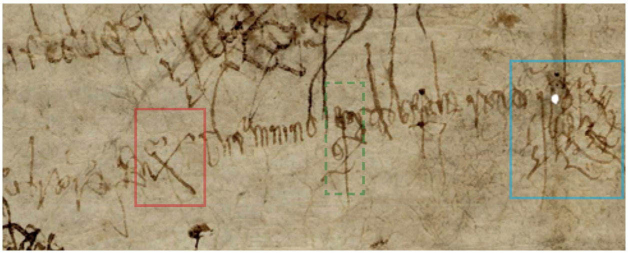

Fig. 4. Paris, Archives Nationales, K//2 n°10 (AE/II/11 = ChLA XIII.564), Lamorlaye, France (Merovingian Kingdom), 10 March 673, Charter of Dame Clotilde: autograph diagonal cross (or letter χ, marked in red) of Chramnino, an illiterate man; complex final sign (marked in blue) in the autograph signature of Radoberthus, where there is also an initial symbol (marked in green).

For many years I have been wondering what kind of history could connect the staurogram traced by an anonymous hand at the beginning of a document written on slate in Spain, during the reign of King Reccared (586–601) (Fig. 2), with those drawn by the *comes rei militaris Thebaici limitis*, Theophanes, in year 505, at the beginning of his autograph Latin signature and by his refererendarius in the same position (Fig. 3). What kind of paths could be followed, without running the risk of being naïve, in order to connect the crosses drawn all over the post-Roman West by illiterates giving their consent, testifying their presence, and expressing their identity on legal records (Fig. 4)? What kind of historical explanation could ever be possible for the structural similarity of the complex final sign we can observe in subscriptions of Greek notaries from Egypt of the sixth century, in Latin subscriptions from Ravenna of the same period, in Latin subscriptions from Frankish Gaul, or, more rarely, from Lombard Italy,[3] where the author, after the last word of his signature, no matter which alphabet he has used, continues writing a text but in shorthand (Fig. 4)? In most cases he communicates again his own name, but sometimes also something else that remains almost invariably obscure to us: tachigraphic notes and crossed lines are combined elements of a unique unreadeable graphic structure. It was in order to answer these and similar questions that the project NOTAE was conceived.

3 Among several examples, see for comparison: Sonderkamp 1996, 108 Abb. 1–3 (Hermopolites and Arsinoites, Egypt, sixth to seventh centuries, subscriptions of notaries); Città del Vaticano, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Pap. Lat. 11 (P.Ital. 1,6 = ChLA XXI.714, Ravenna, Italy, 25 February 575, autograph subscription of the witness *Iohannis vir strenuus*); Paris, Archives Nationales, K//2 n°10 (AE/II/11 = ChLA XIII.564, Lamorlaye, France, 10 March 673, autograph subscription of Radoberthus, see Fig. 4); Pisa, Archivio storico diocesano, Archivio arcivescovile, Diplomatico 29 (ChLA XXVI.803, Pisa, Italy, 17 February–13 March 748, autograph subscription of the Lombard bishop of Pisa *Iohannis*).

Recent years have seen a renewed interest in the graphic aspects of early medieval written sources, both literary and documentary, as the research of Ildar Garipzanov on the rise of graphicacy demonstrates.[4] Other works edited and authored by him have shown the connection between Late Antiquity and early Middle Ages and the efficacy of an interdisciplinary collaboration between historians, art historians, and archaeologists.[5] They have dealt, however, only with cross signs, christograms, and monograms selected in advance as graphic signs of identity, faith, and power and disseminated in diverse media—but not in documentary records. The project NOTAE represents therefore the first attempt to conduct a research on graphic symbols in documentary records from Late Antiquity to early medieval Europe.

### *About terminology*

In the research approaches promoted by Rück and Garipzanov, different terms are employed to indicate the respective objects of investigation: 'symbol' and 'sign', respectively,[6] even though the two terms slightly overlap sometimes. But the objects are not so different; what is different is the typology of the media involved in the respective investigations.

Problems of terminology do exist indeed in the field of human communication: according to the distinction proposed by Edmund Leach, the use of a particular signum determines wheter it is to be regarded as a symbol or as a sign.[7] Since the media that the NOTAE project investigates are written contexts—that is texts formed by letters used as 'signs' according to the terminology proposed by Leach—, it seemed appropriate to follow Rück by using the term 'graphic symbol' to indicate the object of research.[8] 'Graphic symbols' are meant as graphic entities (composed by graphic signs, including alphabetical ones) drawn as a visual unit whithin a written text but communicating something other or something more than a word of that text. The message they carry is to discover, because there is no intrinsic prior relationship between the message-bearing graphic entity and the informations it conveys.

### *About sources*

We use the term 'document' in a wider sense, for any written source containing texts generated for pragmatic purposes. Such sources are expressions of 'pragmatic literacy',[9] and include documentary records of all possible kinds:

4 Garipzanov 2015.
5 Garipzanov, Goodson, and Maguire 2017; Garipzanov 2018.
6 As emphasized by the respective book titles; see above notes 1 and 4.
7 Leach 1976, 12–16.
8 For the arguments to support such a choice see Rück 1996b, 14–15.
9 In the meaning proposed by Malcom B. Parkes (1991, 275): 'literacy of one who has to read or write in the course of transacting any kind of business'.

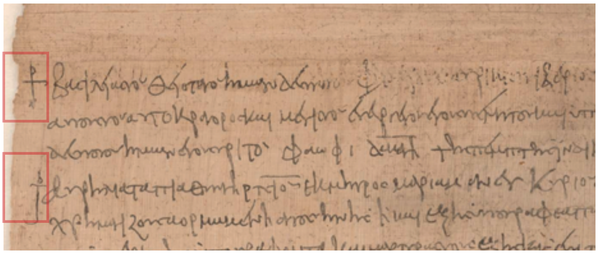

Fig. 5. Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Pap.graec. mon 100 (P.Muench. 1.11), fragment, Syene, Egypt, 7 October 586, staurogram at l. 1 (beginning of dating formula) and at l. 4 (beginning of the address formula).

petitions, official letters, private letters, lists, authentics from relics etc. Legal documents and contracts (the focus of classical diplomatics) are included, of course, in the concept of pragmatic literacy. The documents may have survived in original or have been transmitted in contemporary copies on papyrus, wooden tablet, slate, or parchment (inscriptions and graffiti are excluded) during the long historical period in question. We therefore have to consider different levels of literacy and of documentary practice, and consequently raise different questions about production, use, storage, and transmission of records. This wider approach offers the possibility of investigating literacy and writing practice from a diverse, complementary angle, connecting graphic symbols and illiterate people.

The increasing use of papyrus and the gradual introduction of signature in the legal documentary practice of the late Roman state between the end of the fourth and fifth centuries were an effect of the influence of the hellenistic practice on the Roman legal system. The introduction of autograph signatures, in particular, represented a turning point as regards the value of a document as evidence.[10] And it could be seen as an important link between Late Antiquity and early Middle Ages: it is the basis of the development of the legal documentary practice in the post-Roman Kingdoms.

The introduction of autograph signatures involved also an increasing use of graphic symbols in the written context of legal documents. Usually graphic symbols were traced as distinctive signs at the beginning or at the end of the document (or of significant parts of it) (Fig. 5). In the contemporary practice of writing letters similar symbols—which are often Christian symbols—appear in analogue positions.[11]

With the introduction of the signature, graphic symbols are now drawn also at the beginning or at the end of autograph subscriptions written by persons participating in the legal contract. But what is really new in the question of literacy is that also illiterates performed graphic symbols by their own hands. Persons who were not able to write a *subscriptio* to a legal do-

10 Saupe 1983, 17.
11 Blumell 2012, Appendix 310, Table 4.

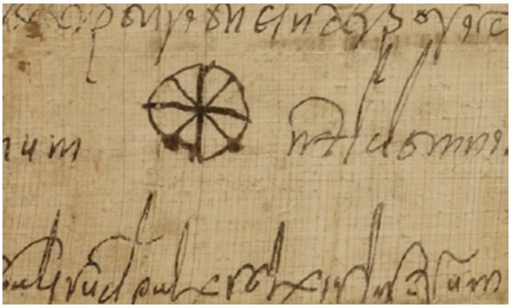

Fig. 6 London, British Library Add MS 5412 (P.Ital. II.35 = ChLA III.181), Ravenna, Italy, 572, autograph symbol of the illiterate seller Domninus.

Fig. 7. Rome, Basilica di San Clemente al Laterano, pluteus, from Hilberg 2000, Abb. 5b.

cument could still take part in the writing process of the document—as author of the written contract or as witness—by drawing a *signum* in the empty space left for it in the line written by the scribe or by a delegated third-party literate person. So did the illiterate seller *Domninus*, a hayward (*agellarius*) and *vir honestus*, on 6 June 572 in Ravenna (Fig. 6): the shape of his signum seems to evoke the wheel of a cart, so that one can conclude that he chose to express his identity through his work: the 'wheel' is a graphic 'sign' in Leach's terminology, a metonymy for the work activity of Domninus. But there could be another explanation: Domninus could have joined a *iota-chi* monogram (⳩) and the symbol of the cross within a single monogrammatic structure (the vertical stroke is, at the same time, the Greek letter *iota* and the vertical stroke of the cross), connecting their extremities through a circle. In other words, Domninus could have chosen not a sign but a symbol, a Christian symbol suggested by widespread models (Fig. 7).

### *Premises*

Two premises form the necessary basis of the research. The first one concerns one of the broadest and most pervasive themes ever discussed in western historiography: the relationship between the end of the Roman state and the beginning of the early middle ages in Europe and the conceptualization of the period of 'Late Antiquity'. The notion of a long Late Antiquity, from the third to the eighth century, is well argumented by Averil Cameron.[12] On the other hand, medievalists refer to the period from the fifth to the eighth or tenth century as Early Middle Ages. But, whatever the interpretation of the period from

12 Cameron 2015, 3–22.

the fifth century onwards may be—radical change or continuity, or both change and continuity, depending on regional differences[13]—in the period from the third to the tenth century, covered by the terms Late Antiquity and early Middle Ages, some historical phenomenons can be studied in continuity, and the documentary practice is one of them. The basic textual frame of the barbarian documents is recognizable as part of a Roman discourse: this fact gives fundamental evidence for the derivation of the early medieval documentary practice in the West from the late Roman world,[14] even though this constitutes, at the same time, the main obstacle for understanding the process of derivation in all its aspects.[15]

The second important premise concerns the linguistic relationship between spoken language and written language, illiterate and written word. In the late Roman empire, the network of communication in general was based on a linguistic and graphic koinè of two dominant metropolitan tongues, Greek and Latin.[16]

What was the situation in post-Roman kingdoms? The barbarian aristocracies did not ignore the written medium as a tool both of government and of economic relations: they certainly used it in much more simplified ways, even though we assume this on the basis of a documentary transmission that is problematic. The language of their written word was Latin, apart from exceptions like the rare use of Gothic in Ostrogothic Italy attested twice in Latin papyri. The script of the barbarians' written word (in its various aspects, formal or cursive), was inherited from the late Roman world.

Latin remained the common language of communication for a long time in the West; it ceased to have any effect as a language of 'communication verticale'[17] between the eighth and ninth centuries, at different times and phases in different parts of Europe.[18] So illiterate people participating in legal proceedings could understand documents written in Latin when they were read out to them: the 'Latin parlé tardif' always emerges, at least, in the part of the document containing the essential details of the transaction. Assuming the ability of illiterate listeners in the early medieval Europe to understand Latin

13 As well argued in Wickham 2005, 12–14.
14 Classen 1977 and 1977b.
15 Ghignoli 2009; Ghignoli and Bougard 2001; Rio 2001.
16 Cavallo 1970; 1990. From the perspective of a transformation of the Late Roman world into the post-Roman kingdoms of the early medieval West, the cases of Greek-Coptic and Greek-Syriac bilinguism (respectively in Roman Egypt and in Roman Near East) can be left aside, although extremely significant in framing the literacy of the Graeco-Roman East: Bagnall 2011, 75–94, 95–116.
17 Banniard 1992, 38.
18 Banniard 1993, 9.

texts read aloud implies that illiterate people participating in legal proceedings in Merovingian France or in Lombard Italy or in Visigothic Spain were like illiterates of the late Roman state and that graphic symbols drawn by illiterates in those circumstances in the historical span in question are comparable.

### *Methods*

The research requires of course more than one analysis method. First, the methods of (juridical) papyrology and diplomatics are necessary to investigate graphic symbols in their context, since they appear drawn in legal documents in most cases. In the context of legal contracts—if not fragmentary—graphic symbols are never anonymous, thus the 'host' texts represent primary sources, from which we can assume social and economic status of the authors of the symbols as well as their level of literacy. For that, we apply the historical method of research. It is moreover implicit in facing any kind of issue raised by the documentary transmission. For the late antique documents, it may overlap with the method of the 'archeology of papyrology'.[19] Finally, the palaeographical method (Greek and Latin palaeography) is needed to analyse both the host texts and the graphic symbols, which are graphic signs often organized in graphic chains by means of ligatures and which involve also the question if they are an autograph or not. For the period in question the external feature of graphic symbols is not particularly noticeable within the texture of the written text in Greek or Latin cursive: the technology requested in drawing them is the same as for writing a text, i.e. a human hand tracing thin lines.

New in this project is also the idea of considering the graphic execution of these symbols as a matter of the scribal culture, as—we could say—the other side of the written world, and consequently as an object of palaeographical analysis. But a tendency toward alphabetocentric bias characterizes palaeographical studies in general, and it happens far too often that what appears as something other than a written line is classified as a 'doodle' whenever its elements are not immediately recognizable as alphabetical signs. 'Doodles' are thus implicitly elevated by palaeographers to a fixed category of graphic objects, characterized by their certain ahistorical nature. The late antique and early medieval pragmatic literacy is, however, a historical issue, and not a single written line on a document should to be presumed a priori merely decorative or superfluous, drawn by literates or illiterates who were bored or thinking about something else rather than writing something significant.

I have demonstrated the feasibility of such approach by showing the graphic transformation of the late antique χμγ-group from a graphic symbol with a certain religious meaning in the documentary practice of the Grae-

19 Bagnall 2011, 4.

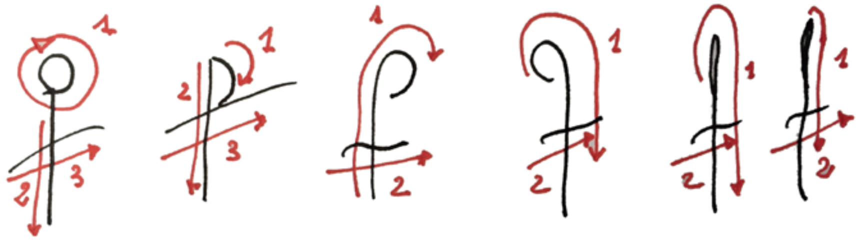


Fig. 8. (1) Monogram ταυ + ρ (⳨): (a) circle+ 2 strokes; (b) semi-circle + 2 strokes; (c) 2 strokes (loop towards right= *rho*). (2) From monogram ταυ + ρ to a particular shape of the cross: 2 strokes (direction of the first stroke inverted and loop towards left = lost of the letter *rho*); sketch by Antonella Ghignoli.

co-Roman East to a graphic symbol with the same meaning and function but drawn in the form of a chain of circles in ligature (i.e. in the form of a 'doodle') in the documentary practice of Ostrogothic Italy.[20]

Two important factors of the evolution of letter forms in palaeography are 'morphology' and 'ductus'. Morphology is a form in a visual sense: the final result of one or more movements of the hand. Ductus is the movement by which a certain form is produced and it is defined as a sequence of strokes traced in a certain direction. The analysis of the ductus of the graphic symbols in a diachronic perspective may be a proper methodological angle to observe changes in their morphology and to follow, in some cases, their transformation to another symbol. It could be the case of the staurogram, which is a case currently under study (Fig. 8).

It is important to remember that from the ninth century onwards—from the beginning of the Carolingian age in Europe—there is no more 'vertical communication' in Latin language between literate elités and the illiterates. Following the Carolingian reform, Latin becomes an elitist language, fatally severed, with its reformed clerical pronunciation, from the living language of the laity. Only clerics as scribes of a ruler or the few laymen as public notaries of a kingdom have now competence and ability to write documents in Latin and to understand them when read out. They only have the responsibility to draw into them selected graphic devices, which are now easy to see within the graphic texture of the written text, having the distinctive, opposite morphology of a picture. The text of a document has now to be translated in vernacular, both to the issuer and the addressee if they were laymen or laywomen, while the graphic symbols can communicate a message to anyone more or less immediately. This is precisely the fundamental question in understanding the communication function of the graphic symbols in the charters of high Middle Ages.

20 Ghignoli 2016, 32–40.

### *Aims and objectives*

The physical act of drawing symbols put both literates (professional scribes, bureaucrats, economic élites etc.) and illiterates (who were they?) on the same footing. The project NOTAE aims to investigate the graphic symbols in order to capture all the possible historical implications by studying their graphic execution as well as their models and cross-influences, their contexts and transmissions, and with the purpose to frame the category of illiterates for each significant period and region involved in the wide historical and geographical span with which the project is engaged; archaeology, sociolinguistics, social anthropology, history of christianity will also provide important methodological angles and specific attention will be devoted also to the results of the studies about the presence of symbols in manuscripts of the literary tradition, which represents one of the most interesting research topics in recent years.[21]

Within this general aim, the project pursues four main objectives: (1) to provide an inventory as complete as possible of graphic symbols and a collection of their images, through the systematic inspection of all the documentary sources available for the period in question; (2) to study each graphic symbol in its context through a complete synchronic analysis, in order to classify, to interpret and to relate each symbol to its author, to the host document, to the historical geographical context; (3) to create the NOTAE system, which will be primarily designed and implemented in order to work as a research tool of the Project; (4) to conduct comparative and diachronic studies on the basis of the results of the objective 2 and employing the NOTAE system. Starting from the purpose to know 'who drew what', 'when and where', 'how and why', the project aims to historicizing graphic symbols as material traces left by human hands on the border between written and oral culture, educated literacy and poor graphic abilities of illitterates.

Significant contributions are expected also about two unsolved problems in the specific field of palaeography: the meaning of the complex graphic symbol, consisting of tachigraphic notes and crossed lines drawn as interlocking pieces, which appears in the notarial subscriptions of the Greek private documents; the survival of tachigraphic notes and Tironian notes in the pragmatic literacy of the post-Roman West.

### *Conclusion*

The NOTAE project covers a long time span, from the Late Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages, and considers the use of graphic symbols in pragmatic literacy by both literate and illiterate people, in contexts in which a clear gap between written and spoken language did not exist at all (Late Antiquity)

21 See, for example, Steinová 2018.

or still was not complete (post-Roman western kingdoms till the eighth or ninth centuries). It shall therefore produce new knowledge, needed to attain a deeper historical comprehension of the graphic symbols known and used by the elites in the immediate aftermath of post-Roman kingdoms. Against this background, the NOTAE project is expected to impact greatly on the studies in diplomatic semiotics of the High Middle Ages.

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# The Zaydi Manuscript Tradition (ZMT) Project
## Digitizing the Collections of Yemeni Manuscripts in Italian Libraries*

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The literary tradition of the Zaydi community, a branch of Shiʿi Islam that originated in Kufa and later developed in Northern Iran and Yemen, is among the richest and most variegated strands within Islamic civilization and at the same time one of the least studied due to issues of preservation and access. The ZMT project is an attempt to create a digital library of the literary tradition of Zaydism.

### *Zaydism and its manuscript tradition*

Zaydism has flourished mainly in two regions, the mountainous Northern Highlands of Yemen and the Caspian regions of Northern Iran. The two Zaydi states that were established in the third century/ninth century CE initially constituted separate political and cultural entities. The situation changed in the early sixth/twelfth century, when a rapprochement between the two communities began that eventually resulted in their political unification. The political development was accompanied by a transfer of knowledge from Northern Iran to Yemen that comprised nearly the entire literary and religious legacy of Caspian Zaydism. While Yemen largely replaced Northern Iran as the intellectual center of Zaydism, the Zaydi communities in Iran experienced a gradual decline, though scattered documentary and manuscript evidence confirms that the tradition of Zaydi learning continued in Iran at least until the tenth/sixteenth century.[1]

As a result of their continuous presence in Yemen since the third/ninth century, the rich and still largely unstudied manuscript tradition of the Zaydis has largely survived until today: Zaydi Yemen is characterized by a religio-dynastic continuance that stretched over nearly a millennium until the abolition of the Zaydi imamate in 1962, and the country witnessed various initiatives to affirm and renew the state's Zaydi identity during the thirteenth, seventeenth, and twentieth centuries CE. During these periods, the production of books rose exponentially and new libraries were founded. Vicissitudes notwithstanding, the remarkable political continuity of the Zaydis is reflected in an almost uninterrupted library tradition in the country which remains unexplored.[2]

* Our thanks to Camilla Adang for her comments on an earlier draft of this report.

1 Ansari and Schmidtke 2017, chapters 5 and 6; Ansari and Schmidtke 2019.

2 Ansari and Schmidtke forthcoming a.

Fig. 1. MS Ṣanʿāʾ, Maktabat al-awqāf 599 (titlepage), containing a supercommentary (*taʿlīq*) of Ismāʿīl b. ʿAlī b. Ismāʿīl al-Farrazādī on the commentary (*taʿlīq*) by Abū l-Ḥusayn Aḥmad b. Abī Hāšim al-Ḥusaynī al-Qazwīnī (‘Mānkdīm Šašdīw’, d. *c*.425/1034) on the *Šarḥ al-Uṣūl al-ḫamsa*, a doctrinal summa by *qāḍī l-quḍāt* ʿAbd al-Ǧabbār al-Hamadānī (d. 415/1025), the head of the Baṣran school of the Muʿtazila of his time (codex completed on 3 Muḥarram 543/May 1148, in Rayy, Iran)

The Zaydi literary tradition is among the richest and most variegated strands within Islamic civilization, and at the same time one of the least studied. Moreover, Zaydis were at all times intimately familiar with the relevant intellectual strands beyond the confines of their own community, and they actively engaged in them. The typical library of a Zaydi scholar would comprise not only works belonging to his own religious tradition, but also an array of titles of authors from other communities, including the literary legacy of the Muʿtazila, one of the most important rational schools in the history of Muslim theology (Fig. 1). The Yemeni manuscript collections thus constitute a unique treasure trove for large segments of the Islamic intellectual tradition—Sunni as well as Shiʿi.[3]

At the same time, the written Zaydi manuscript heritage is widely dispersed. The most significant and by far largest collections of Zaydi manu-

3 Ansari and Schmidtke 2017, chapters 1–12; Schmidtke 2018a and 2018b.

Fig. 2. Inside the Maktabat al-awqāf, Ṣanʿāʾ (2010, photo: Sabine Schmidtke)

Fig. 3. Scholars cataloguing manuscripts in the Dār al-maḫṭūṭāt, Ṣanʿāʾ (2009, photo: Sabine Schmidtke)

scripts are housed by the many public and private libraries of Yemen, first and foremost the Maktabat al-awqāf on the premises of the Great Mosque of Ṣanʿāʾ (founded by Imām Yaḥyā Ḥamīd al-Dīn in the 1920s as al-Ḫizāna al-mutawakkiliyya; Fig. 2) and the Dār al-maḫṭūṭāt (formerly al-Maktaba al-ġarbiyya, which was founded in 1969) which is located in the immediate vicinity of the Great Mosque (Fig. 3). The catalogues of the two libraries cover only part of their respective holdings. Among the numerous private and mosque libraries throughout the country, only a few have been partially catalogued (Fig. 4).[4]

4 Schmidtke 2018c.

Fig. 4. Private Library in Ṣanʿāʾ, with manuscripts stored in the lower shelf (2011; anonymous photographer)

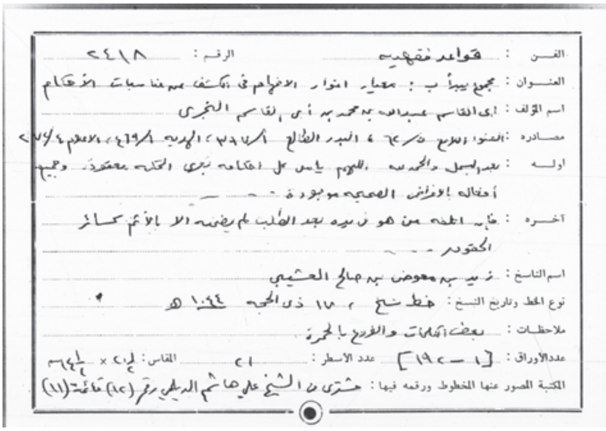
The manuscript libraries in Yemen are under imminent threat. Throughout much of the second half of the twentieth and the first decades of the twenty-first century, Yemeni authorities have been constantly fighting manuscript dealers, trying to prevent them from smuggling manuscripts out of the country, with only limited success it would seem. In addition to this, many of the private libraries in Yemen have been severely damaged, looted, or even destroyed over the course of the twentieth century as a result of the political turmoil and wars that Yemen has witnessed.[5] The continuing war in the country has accelerated this process (Figs 5 and 6).[6]

Fig. 5. The fortified Yemeni town of Kawkabān in 1978, home to several important manuscript libraries, including the library of the Madrasat Šaraf al-Dīn (photo courtesy Daniel Martin Varisco)

Fig. 6 Kawkabān, after an attack by an U.S. backed Saudi coalition aircraft in February 2016 (photo: Twitter)

5 Hollenberg and Regourd 2016.

6 Schmidtke 2018b; Sahner 2018; Ansari and Schmidtke forthcoming b. Cf. also Craig 2015; Khalidi 2015 and 2017; Raghavan 2016; Varisco 2016; Jarus 2019; Mashberg 2019.



الفن : قواعد فقهية — الرقم : ٢٤١٨

العنوان : مجموع يبدأ ب : معيار أنوار الأفهام في الكشف عن مناسبات الأحكام

اسم المؤلف : أبي القاسم عبدالله بن محمد بن أبي القاسم النجري

مصادره : الضوء اللامع [illegible] ، البدر الطالع [illegible] ، الهدية [illegible] ، الأعلام [illegible]

أوله : بعد البسملة والحمد لله اللهم يا من كل أحكامه تجري الحكمة بمقتضاه وجميع أفعاله بالأغراض الصحيحة موجودة ...

آخره : [illegible]

اسم الناسخ : زيد بن معوض بن صالح العشيبي

نوع الخط وتاريخ النسخ : خط نسخ ، ١٧ ذي الحجة ١٠٤٤ هـ

ملاحظات : بعض الكلمات والفروع بالحمرة

عدد الأوراق : [١ — ١٩٢] عدد الأسطر : ٢١ المقاس : [illegible]

المكتبة المصور عنها المخطوط ورقمه فيها : مشترى من الشيخ علي هاشم الديلمي رقم (١٢) [illegible] (١١)

Fig. 7. MS Riyadh, Ǧāmiʿat al-Imām Muḥammad b. Saʿūd 2418, containing a collective manuscript of Yemeni provenance that was sold to the library by al-Šayḫ ʿAlī Hāšim al-Daylamī (catalogue card)

Fig. 8. MS Riyadh, Ǧāmiʿat al-Imām Muḥammad b. Saʿūd 2418, containing a collective manuscript of Yemeni provenance that was sold to the library by al-Šayḫ ʿAlī Hāšim al-Daylamī (first page of the codex)

Important collections of Yemeni manuscripts are also held in Europe (Italy, Germany, The Netherlands, and the UK), the US (especially Princeton, Yale), as well as in some Middle Eastern libraries, in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey. These had been brought together by European, Ottoman-Turkish, and Saudi scholars, diplomats, merchants and travelers to Yemen since the second half of the nineteenth century (Figs 7 and 8).[7]

Over the course of the second half of the twentieth century and during the early twenty-first century, various microfilming and digitization projects have been carried out by teams from Egypt, Kuwait, Iran, Germany, and the United States in an attempt to facilitate access to the manuscript holdings of the libraries in Yemen.[8] Despite the significance of these efforts, there are also several downsides. The Egyptians, and later the Kuwaitis, had a selective

7 Schmidtke 2011 and 2017.

8 Schmidtke and Thiele 2011; Schmidtke 2017; Ahmed 2016.

Fig. 9. Yemeni operators in Ṣanʿāʾ digitizing a manuscript from a private collection (2009, photo: Sabine Schmidtke)

approach in their choice of manuscripts to be microfilmed. Scholars of Egypt published a fair amount of works they had brought from Yemen during the late 1960s and 1970s, and with this rendered a great service to scholarship. The publication of these works evoked a reappraisal of rationalism as evidenced in the theological writings of the Muʿtazila, resulting in a movement that was summarized under the label Neo-Muʿtazila. The Iranians, who microfilmed and later digitized significant amounts of Yemeni manuscripts during the early 2000s, had a far more comprehensive approach—in many cases they filmed entire collections. The various digitization efforts supported by the German Foreign Office (2010) and the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft in conjunction with the National Endowment for the Humanities (2010–2013)—both carried out in cooperation with the local Imam Zayd bin Ali Cultural Foundation (Muʾassasat Zayd b. ʿAlī al-ṯaqāfiyya)—aimed at digitizing a select number of private collections in their entirety (Fig. 9).[9]

While the various efforts to capture manuscripts in Yemen aimed at providing scholars outside of Yemen access to the material, little thought has been given to the question of how Yemeni scholars might gain access to holdings of libraries outside their country and only a fraction of the Zaydi/Yemeni manuscripts held outside of Yemen is available through open access. On the other hand, Yemenis have made attempts over the past decades to 'repatriate' some of the important collections of Yemeni manuscripts in the West, but none of them came to fruition. In 2008, the Yemeni Ministry of Culture apparently planned 'to get back the Yemeni manuscripts at European libraries, particularly those that are available at the Italian ones', and at one stage a senior Yemeni diplomat negotiated with the Ambrosiana to purchase surrogates of portions

9 Hollenberg 2012; Schmidtke 2016. See also <http://pudl.princeton.edu/collections/pudl0079> (consulted July 2, 2019).

Fig. 10. Eduard Glaser collection of Yemeni mss in Vienna with Dr. Andreas Fingernagel, Head of the Department of Manuscripts and Rare Books at the Austrian National Library in Vienna (2012, photo: Sabine Schmidtke)

of the Caprotti collection, but the costs were beyond the means available to the embassy. Moreover, during 2014 the then newly appointed Minister of Cultural Affairs approached the US ambassador to Yemen, Matthew H. Tueller, in order to bring about the return of 'any Yemeni historical manuscript in the US' to Yemen, an initiative that was never pursued any further.[10]

***The Zaydi Manuscript Tradition (ZMT) project***

To remedy the calamitous impact of the war situation in present-day Yemen on the country's cultural heritage, the Zaydi Manuscript Tradition (ZMT) project was initiated in 2016 to build up a virtual library of the Zaydi / Yemeni literary heritage which is being made freely available to scholars and intellectuals worldwide. As such it also allows for digital repatriation of the extensive holdings of manuscripts of Yemeni provenance in libraries outside the country. The ZMT is a joint project initiated by the Institute for Advanced Study (IAS), Princeton, in partnership with the Hill Museum and Manuscript Library (HMML) at Saint John's University, Collegeville, Minnesota.[11]

10 Schmidtke 2018c.

11 <https://www.ias.edu/digital-scholarship/zaydi_manuscript_tradition> (consulted July 2, 2019).

Through generous funding provided by the National Endowment of the Humanities,[12] the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Charles & Lisa Simonyi Fund for the Arts and Sciences, the Gerard B. Lambert Foundation, the Ruth Stanton Foundation, Sherwin Seligsohn, and the Middle Easter Center at the University of Pennsylvania, some 2,000 codices have already been uploaded unto vHMML, and until the end of 2019, the entire collections of Yemeni manuscripts held by the libraries of Leiden University Library,[13] Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin,[14] Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek (Fig. 10), as well as the holdings of some fifteen private libraries in Yemen will be available online, some 3,000 codices in total.

### *The ZMT project and Italian library collections*

In cooperation with the Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei in Rome (BANLC), the Project is currently also engaged in including all the Italian collections of Yemeni manuscripts into vHMML, some of them still ignored, uncatalogued and yet to be investigated. Joining the ZMT has been a great opportunity to track all the Arabic collections that might include Yemeni manuscripts as well as individual manuscripts scattered in the different Italian institutions and libraries during the first half of the last century.[15]

In 2017, sixty-eight Yemeni Arabic manuscripts of the Lincei holdings have been digitized and uploaded and they are now available at the vHMML (including basic metadata, see Fig. 11).[16] The collection was purchased and mainly built up by two Italians, namely the Orientalist scholar Ettore Rossi, who was in Yemen in 1937–1938, and the physician Cesare Ansaldi who was a member of the Italian health mission to Yemen from 1929 to 1932.[17] One manuscript produced in Yemen was donated to the Accademia by the Islamicist Leone Caetani in 1911.[18] The oldest one among the manuscripts held by the Accademia dei Lincei dates back to the end of the seventh/thirteenth century (Fig. 12).

12 Grant number: PW-258989-18.
13 Vrolijk 2018.
14 Pehlivanian and Rauch 2018.
15 For the political background of the Italian presence in Yemen during the first decades of the twentieth century, see Baldry 1976–77. For the Italian scholarship on Yemen during the pre-Islamic and the Islamic period, see Traini 2006; Antonini de Maigret, D‘Amore and Jung 2012.
16 <http://hmml.org/digital-copies-rossi-ansaldi-caetani-yemeni-manuscript-collections-now-available-vhmml-reading-room/> (consulted July 2, 2019). See also the ZMT digital portal at <http://projects.ias.edu/zmt/> (consulted July 2, 2019).
17 Nallino 1933; Traini 1967.
18 Colini 2016.

Fig. 11. MS Rome, Accademia dei Lincei Or. 321 (titlepage), *K. al-Mufaṣṣal fī ʿilm al-iʿrāb*, a handbook on grammar by Ǧār Allāh al-Zamaḫšarī, copied by ʿAlī b. Qāsim b. Muḥammad b. Mūsā al-Ṣaʿdī al-Zaydī (dated 2 Ǧumādā II 786[/1384])

Fig. 12. MS Rome, Accademia dei Lincei Or. 332 (titlepage), containing Ibn Khallāl al-Baṣrī's (d. 311/923) *Kitāb al-Radd ʿalā l-Ǧabriyya wa-l-Qadariyya* (copy tentatively dated to the end of the seventh/thirteenth century)

Since 2018 another five institutions have become involved and agreed to include their Yemeni manuscripts in the ZMT Digital Portal. Exploring their content, graphical and codicological features was a means of identifying the manuscripts of Yemeni provenance among the others: such an investigation has never been carried out so far in the Italian libraries.[19] The Istituto per l'Oriente Carlo Alfonso Nallino (IPOCAN, Rome) holds fourteen Yemeni manuscripts collected by the outstanding Italian Arabist Carlo Alfonso Nallino (Fig. 13),[20] the Istituto Centrale per il Restauro e la Conservazione del Patrimonio Archivistico e Librario (ICRCPAL, Rome) holds two Yemeni Arabic manuscripts (Fig. 14) given by the Arabist and physician Tommaso Sarnelli to his friend the Director of the Istituto, Alfonso Gallo (one of them is an ancient copy of al-Nawawī's Commentary on Muslim's *Ṣaḥīḥ*, dated to the early

19 Sagaria Rossi 2000.
20 Bottini 2017.

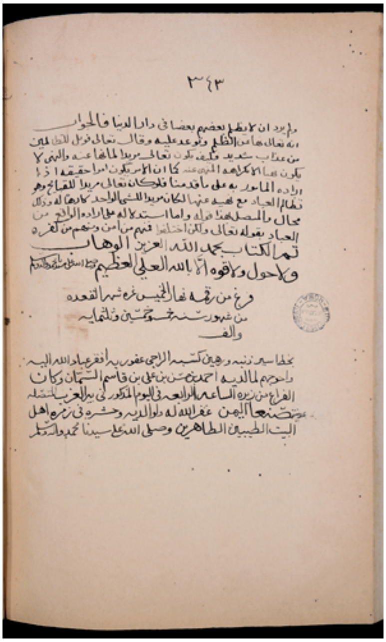


Fig. 13. MS Rome, Istituto per l'Oriente Carlo Alfonso Nallino (IPOCAN), CAN_Ar.I-46bis_3-1 (final page), containing the *K. al-Šāfī* by Imām al-Manṣūr bi-llāh ʿAbd Allāh b. Ḥamza (d. 614/1217), a refutation directed against the Ašʿarites of Yemen, focusing specifically on the notion of the imamate. The copy was completed in Ḏu l-Qaʿda 1355[/January-February 1937] in Ṣanʿāʾ

Fig. 14. MS Rome, Istituto Centrale per il Restauro e la Conservazione del Patrimonio Archivistico e Librario (ICRCPAL), Bib 1058 (binding from the seventh/thirteenth century)

eighth/fourteenth century), while the Biblioteca di Storia della Medicine of the University 'La Sapienza' (BSM, Rome), has two additional manuscripts donated by Sarnelli.

The Biblioteca of the Sistema di Ateneo, Asiatic Section, of the University 'L'Orientale' in Naples (UNIOR) has joined the Project in 2019. Among their 256 Arabic manuscripts—currently being digitized—forty-two are Zaydi,[21] whose Yemeni origin had never been recognized so far (Fig. 15). They were collected by Sarnelli, who was in Yemen in the years 1930–1932 (Fig. 16).

21 Celentano and Sarnelli Cerqua 1984.

Fig. 15. MS Naples, Biblioteca of the Sistema di Ateneo, Asiatic Section, ‘L’Orientale’, ARA 2 (titlepage), containing *K. Maǧmaʿ al-ḫulāṣa fī l-ṭibb*, by one Fatḥī al-Muḥarrir


Fig. 16. MS Naples, Biblioteca of the Sistema di Ateneo, Asiatic Section, ‘L’Orientale’, ARA 5 (ex libris Tommaso Sarnelli)

Fig. 17. Emilio Dubbiosi collection, Istituto Italiano per l’Africa e l’Oriente (IsIAO, Rome), now deposited in the National Library in Rome

Fig. 18. MS Rome, Istituto Italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente (IsIAO), Dubbiosi 31

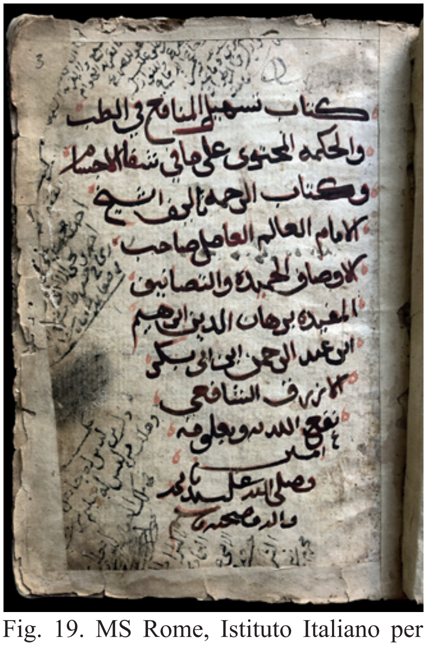


Fig. 19. MS Rome, Istituto Italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente (IsIAO), Dubbiosi 37, containing *K. Tashīl al-manāfiʿ fī l-ṭibb wa-l-ḥikma al-muḥtawī ʿalā mā fī šifāʾ al-ağsām* by Burhān al-Dīn Ibrāhīm b. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Abī Bakr al-Azraq al-Šāfiʿī (active ninth/fifteenth century)

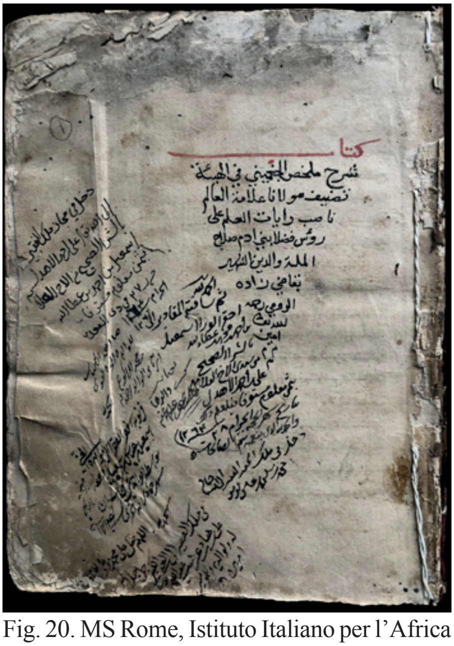


Fig. 20. MS Rome, Istituto Italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente (IsIAO), Dubbiosi 32, containing *Šarḥ Mulaḫḫaṣ al-Ǧaġmīnī*, a commentary on *al-Mulaḫḫaṣ fī l-hayʾa* of Maḥmūd b. Muḥammad b. ʿUmar al-Čaġmīnī al-Ḫwārazmī (d. 745/1344-45) by Ǧalāl al-Dīn Mūsā b. Muḥammad b. Maḥmūd al-Rūmī al-Bursawī al-Ḥanafī al-maʿrūf bi-Qāḍī Zāda (d. after 835/1432), a popular work on astronomy

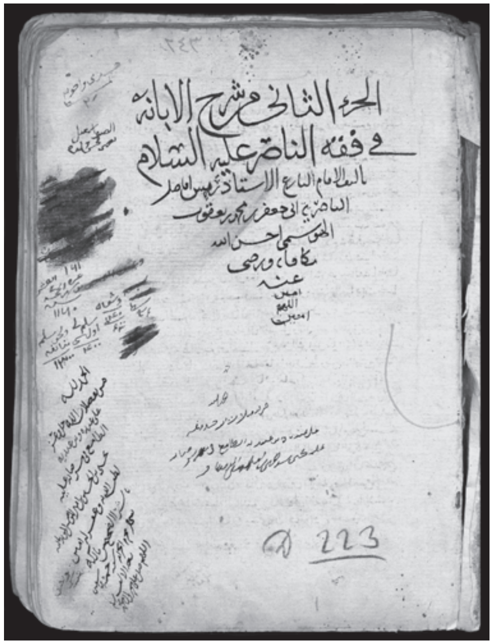



Fig. 21. MS Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, D 223 ar, a multiple-text volume containing part two of the legal work *Šarḥ al-Ibāna fī fiqh al-Nāṣir al-Uṭrūš*, by Abū Ǧaʿfar Muḥammad b. Yaʿqūb al-Hawsamī (fl. mid-fifth/eleventh century), copied in 969[/1561]

One of the most original and lesser-known collections, comprising 223 Yemeni codices, is represented by the Fondo Dubbiosi, donated to the former Istituto Italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente (IsIAO, Rome) in 1990 by the family of doctor Emilio Dubbiosi, medical officer in Yemen from 1926 to 1938 (Fig. 17). History, medicine, zoology, geography and theology are the prevailing topics covered by the manuscripts, dated mostly from the sixteenth through the twentieth century CE (Figs 18, 19, 20).[22]

The Nuovo Fondo at the Veneranda Biblioteca Ambrosiana, and several dozens of manuscripts of the Antico Fondo, represent the most outstanding collection of Arabic manuscripts of Yemeni provenance in the Western world, with its around 1,900 codices,[23] fully digitized by the Ambrosiana in recent years and waiting to join our Project. The collection was brought together by the Lombardic merchant Giuseppe Caprotti in Yemen in the years 1882–1919, and sold to the Ambrosiana in 1909, thanks to the Arabist Eugenio Griffini, the first scholar who studied and investigated the manuscripts.[24] Some tens of them date back to the ninth/eleventh through seventh/thirteenth centuries, the

22 <https://www.raicultura.it/storia/eventi/Lapertura-della-Biblioteca-IsIAO-e1e-a51d0-b97b-4f1d-913f-85bdc188d07a.html> (consulted July 2, 2019) On the current status of the IsIAO, see Barrera 2016.

23 Löfgren and Traini 1981–2011.

24 Griffini 1909–1920.

majority is dated to the tenth/sixteenth and eleventh/seventeenth centuries, corresponding to the period of greater flowering of manuscript production in Zaydi Yemen during the Qāsimī era (Fig. 21).

Finally, the Yemeni Arabic manuscripts held by the Apostolica Biblioteca Vaticana,[25] about 150 codices, also originated with Giuseppe Caprotti. This corpus still needs a thorough study specifically focused on them. As for the holdings of Arabic manuscripts in other Italian libraries, these still need to be searched exhaustively to verify whether they also hold Yemeni materials.

It is expected that the ZMT Project will ultimately include approximately 2,500 manuscripts from the libraries of Italy, which means about 8,600 works because of the miscellaneous nature of many Yemeni manuscripts.

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25 Levi della Vida 1935.

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# Conference reports

## New Light on Old Manuscripts: Recent Advances in Palimpsest Studies

### Vienna, 25–27 April 2018

The international conference ‘New Light on Old Manuscripts: Recent Advances in Palimpsest Studies’, organized within the framework of the Wittgenstein Prize Project ‘Moving Byzantium: Mobility, Microstructure and Personal Agency’, took place in Vienna on 20 to 22 April 2018. The organizing team included the project leader Claudia Rapp and project members Jana Grusková, Grigory Kessel, Giulia Rossetto, and Paraskevi Sykopetritou.

The conference prominently featured work that has been accomplished in the course of the Sinai Palimpsests Project (<http://sinaipalimpsests.org>), introduced to the audience on the day before the conference, 24 April 2018, by Father Justin Sinaites (Saint Catherine of Sinai) in his lecture ‘The Sinai Palimpsests: Recovering Ancient Texts and the Early History of the Monastery’. The morning session of the conference on 25 April further developed the topic, first by Michael B. Phelps (EMEL: Early Manuscripts Electronic Library) in his presentation ‘The Sinai Palimpsests Project: its History, Philosophy, and Contributions’ and Claudia Rapp who spoke on ‘The Palimpsest Corpus at St. Catherine’s Monastery in the Sinai Preliminary Observations’.

Most of the research featured during the conference was related to the work conducted on Sinai manuscripts, in particular those of the New Finds.

Greek texts in Sinai manuscripts were in the focus of papers of Giulia Rossetto (Vienna), ‘Greek under Arabic: Behind the Lines of Sinaiticus arabicus NF 66’, Pasquale Orsini (Rome), ‘Greek Scripts, Books and Texts: New Materials from Sinai’, and Agamemnon Tselikas (Athens), ‘Textual Observations on Some Sinai Majuscule Palimpsests’. Greek palimpsests of other provenance were in the focus of papers by Dieter Harlfinger (Hamburg), ‘Palimpsest-Forschung am Beispiel der Athener Handschrift EBE 192 mit juristischen Texten und Aristoteles-Kommentaren’, and André Binggeli (Paris), ‘The Making of a Greek Palimpsest from the Patriarchal Library in Istanbul’. Felix Albrecht (Göttingen) and Chiara Francesca Faraggiana di Sarzana (Bologna) spoke of ‘A Carbonized Septuagint Palimpsest of the Libri Sapientiales in Biblical Majuscule, Codex Taurinensis, Biblioteca Nazionale Universitaria, C.V. 25 (Rahlfs-Ms. 3010): Its Text and Context’. Jana Grusková (Vienna) and Giuseppe De Gregorio (Salerno) presented a paper entitled ‘Neueste Einblicke in einige palimpsestierte Handschriftenunikate aus den griechischen Beständen der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek'. Bernard H. Stolte (Groningen) spoke on 'Editing the Basilica and the Role of Palimpsests. The Case of Vindob. Suppl. gr. 200'.

Ethiopic undertexts in Sinai (Greek) manuscripts were revealed by Steve Delamarter (Portland, OR) and Getatchew Haile (Collegeville, MI) in their paper 'The Ethiopic Undertext of Sinai Greek NF 90: Discovery and Analysis'.

Slavonic texts in palimpsests from Sinai were introduced by Heinz Miklas (Vienna) in his paper '"Excavating" the Slavonic Palimpsests in the New Sinaitic Finds'.

Syriac and Christian Palestinian Aramaic traditions featured in Sinai palimpsests were in the focus of attention of Grigory Kessel (Vienna) ('Codex Arabicus (Sinai Arabic 514) Revisited'), Sebastian P. Brock (Oxford) ('What Can Be Learnt, and What Not, from the Experience of the Syriac and Christian Palestinian Aramaic Palimpsests'), Christa Müller-Kessler (Jena) ('A Florilegium of Christian Palestinian Aramaic Palimpsests from St. Catherine's Monastery'), and Alain J. Desreumaux (Paris) ('L'apport des palimpsestes du Sinaï à la codicologie araméenne christopalestinienne et aux versions anciennes des textes bibliques'). Other palimpsests with underlying Syriac texts were used by Peter E. Pormann (Manchester) for his research on 'The Syriac Galen Palimpsest: Between Philology and Digital Humanities'.

Christian Palestinian Aramaic and Georgian literature as revealed by the palimpsests was explored by Bernard Outtier (Paris), 'New Insights in Christo-Palestinian Aramaic and Georgian Literatures'. Georgian palimpsests of Sinai were further explored by Zaza Aleksidze (Tbilisi) in the talk on 'Dali Chitunashvili Palimpsest N/Sin Geo 7 Kept at the St. Catherine's Monastery on Mount Sinai (Identification of the Texts)'. Jost Gippert (Frankfurt) spoke on 'New Light on the Caucasian Albanian Palimpsests of St. Catherine's Monastery'.

Arabic palimpsests were in the focus of the talks of Alba Fedeli (Hamburg and Birmingham), 'A Few Remarks on Qur'anic Palimpsests' and Ronny Vollandt (Munich), 'Palimpsests from Cairo and Damascus: A Comparative Perspective from the Cairo Genizah and the Qubbat al-Khazna'.

A comparative outlook into the non-oriental manuscript traditions was provided by the talks by Michelle P. Brown (London) on 'Arabic NF 8 and the Latin Manuscripts of St. Catherine's, Sinai' and Carla Falluomini (Perugia) on 'The Gothic Palimpsests: New Readings and Discoveries'. Besides, Andreas Janke (Hamburg) spoke of 'Challenges in Working with Music Palimpsests'.

A wide array of papers focused on the technical aspects of imaging and visual analysis. András Németh (Vatican Library) offered an overview of what technology may offer in his talk ‘Interactive Learning of Palimpsest Research: Virtual Guided Tour from the Invisible to the Abstract Reconstruction’. Damianos Kasotakis (EMEL) spoke on ‘Implementing Spectral Imaging in the Sinai Desert’, Kenneth Boydston (MegaVision, Inc., CA) presented on ‘Beyond Discovery: Bringing More Good Things to Light’, Keith T. Knox (EMEL) introduced ‘Recovery of Erased Text Using Unsupervised Methods’, Roger L. Easton Jr. (Rochester Institute of Technology) approached the topic of ‘Customized Processing of Multispectral Imagery of Palimpsests Based on Spectral Statistics’, and Dave Kelbe (Rochester Institute of Technology) delivered a paper entitled ‘Is it Magic? The Science Behind Image Processing: Perspectives and Possibilities’. Further on, digital techniques in palimpsest reconstruction were featured in papers by Michael B. Toth (Archimedes Palimpsest Project), ‘Dispersed Palimpsest Offers Digital Insight into St. Catherine’s Library’ and Doug Emery (University of Pennsylvania), ‘Reflections on the Digital Palimpsest: Data Modeling and Data Management’.

Imaging techniques for various scopes were also introduced in the talks by Irmgard Schuler (Vatican Library) on ‘Imaging for Manuscript Inspection’, Simon Brenner (Vienna) on ‘Photometric Stereo for Palimpsest Analysis’, Leif Glaser (Hamburg) on ‘X-Ray Fluorescence Investigations on Erased Text Written in Iron Gall Ink’ and Ivan Shevchuk (Hamburg) on ‘Full Field Multispectral Imaging as a Tool for Text Recovery in Palimpsests’. Gregory Heyworth (Rochester, IN) delivered a paper entitled ‘From Technology to Text: Reading and Editing the Lacunose Manuscript’

The conference thus brought together an international assembly of scholars who have been in the forefront of palimpsest studies in recent years, either in reading and analyzing palimpsests texts, or in making them legible through advanced imaging and image processing methods. The discussion highlighted further directions in which the collaboration between the technology, natural sciences, and philology/codicology may develop in the future. Conference papers are expected to be published in a volume of the conference proceedings.

The conference programme is available at <https://rapp.univie.ac.at/fileadmin/user_upload/p_rapp/Events_2018/Palimpsests_Conference_Programme_25-27.04.2018.pdf>.

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## African Voices in Islamic Manuscripts from Mali

### Hamburg, 31 October–1 November 2018

On 31 October and 1 November 2018 the Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures (CSMC, at Hamburg University) hosted the conference ‘African voices in Islamic manuscripts from Mali’ sponsored by the DFG-funded project ‘African voices in Islamic manuscripts from Mali: documenting and exploring African languages in Arabic script (Ajami)’.

Various little explored manuscript traditions from Islamic Africa were featured. Soninke tradition was explored by Djibril Drame (Hamburg) in his talks ‘Soninke of the Islamic Manuscripts: A comparative overview of a written register and modern (spoken) Soninke’, and, together with Samby Khalil Magassouba (Bamako), ‘Analysis of a Soninke Ajami poem’. Darya Ogorodnikova (Hamburg) explored the marginal notes left in study manuscripts coming from the greater Senegambia region and Guinea to describe ‘The scribes of the Soninke Islamic manuscripts and their networks’. Lameen Souag (Paris) presented some ‘Preliminary notes on a page of premodern Songhay and Tamasheq poetry from Timbuktu’. Fula poetry, transmitted in Arabic script, was explored by Hamadou Boly (Bamako) in his talk ‘Une étude analytique de la poésie du cheick Mouhammad Abdoulaye Souadou’.

The programme and abstracts are available at <https://www.manuscript-cultures.uni-hamburg.de/cal-details/181031111%20Ajami%20WS%20programme.pdf>.

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## Medieval Biblical Manuscripts from the Thames to the Euphrates

### Texts, Paratexts, Forms, and Uses

### Aix-en-Provence, 8–9 November 2018

On 8 and 9 November 2018, the conference ‘Medieval Biblical Manuscripts. From the Thames to the Euphrates: Texts, Paratexts, Forms, and Uses’ took place in the Maison méditerranéenne des sciences de l’homme at Aix-en-Provence. It was convened by the principal investigators of two major research projects, Élodie Attia of the *Manuscripta Bibliae Hebraicae* (funded by the French National Research Agency, Aix-Marseille University) and Patrick Andrist of the *ParaTexBib – Paratexts of the Bible* project (funded by the European Research Council, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München), with support from Marilena Maniaci (Università degli studi di Cassino e del Lazio meridionale).

Following the growing interest in the study of late medieval Bibles, the conference aimed at stimulating studies that are cross-cutting and synchronic rather than diachronic or based on identified cultural spaces of the Middle Ages. Scholars working on Latin, Hebrew, Greek, Arabic language tradition discussed specific aspects of manuscript studies focusing on possible distinctive or shared features of Bible manuscripts, and on the possible products of exchanges, cultural transfers, or the Zeitgeist.

The conference papers were grouped in three panels, Complete Bibles, Partial Bibles, and Bibles with Commentaries.

The first panel, on 8 November, grouped papers dealing with Complete Bibles (in one volume or several volumes clearly designed as a single unit). Chiara Ruzzier (Leuven) discussed the compression techniques used in Latin Bibles in her talk 'Item Biblia in uno volumine. Le "compactage" du texte biblique du XI$^{e}$ au XIII$^{e}$ siècle'. Latin glossed Bibles were studied by Martin Morard (Paris) in his paper 'Les problématiques de la Bible glosée latine'. Patrick Andrist focused on the Greek complete Bible manuscripts and their paratexts in his talk 'La structure des pandectes: modularité, séries ininterrompues, paratextualité'. The Hebrew Bible manuscripts were the object of study by Ben Outhwaite (Cambridge University Library), 'Maḥzor and Muṣḥaf: form and function of the Hebrew Bible codex in the Middle East' and in the focus of comments provided by the discussant Philippe Cassuto (Aix-Marseille University).

The second panel, in the morning of 9 November, grouped papers dealing with Partial Bibles produced as separate volumes (various texts brought together). Hebrew collections of selected biblical books of the Ashkenaz were in the focus of the talk of Élodie Attia, 'Bibles hébraïques partielles: le cas des 'Pentateuque-Megillot-Haftarot' ashkénazes'. Latin partial Bibles were discussed by Roberta Casavecchia (Cassino) and Marilena Maniaci, 'Partial Bibles in Southern Italy: The Case of Montecassino'. Georgi Parpulov (Birmingham) spoke of 'The Emergence of Biblical Lectionaries'. Greek manuscript tradition was further explored by the discussant Gilles Dorival (Aix-Marseille University).

The final panel, in the afternoon of 9 November, focused on Bibles with commentaries. Several presenters saw the commentaries as a first step towards a critical edition, e.g. Caroline Chevalier-Royer (Lyon) who spoke of 'Les annotations marginales des Bibles de la première Renaissance carolingienne (780-850 environ): une ébauche d'apparat critique?', or Ronny Vollandt (Munich) who discussed some 'Text-critical marginalia in Arabic Bible Manuscripts'. Javier del Barco (Madrid) presented on 'La Bible hébraïque glosée au Moyen Âge en Europe occidentale: Mise en (con)texte'. The final discussion was led by Manuel Sartori and Christian Boudignon (Aix-Marseille University).

The programme of the conference is available at <http://cpaf.cnrs.fr/IMG/pdf/web-medieval-biblical-manuscripts.pdf>.

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## L'Africa nel mondo, il mondo in Africa
## Africa in the World, the World in Africa
### Accademia Ambrosiana, Classis Africana, V Dies Academicus
### Milan, 24–25 January 2019

On 24 and 25 January, Biblioteca Ambrosiana in Milan hosted a conference entitled 'L'Africa nel mondo, il mondo in Africa / Africa in the World, the World in Africa'. Convened by Alessandro Gori and Fabio Viti, it took its title from the collection of papers by the Afro-American intellectual William Edward Burghardt Du Bois (1965) and aimed at exploring connections between Africa and the Occident, including those witnessed by manuscript traditions.

Thus, the Ethiopian connection to Rome was explored on the basis of manuscripts in the paper 'An Early Ethiopic Collection on Calendar and Chronology: Between Northern Ethiopia and Rome' by Denis Nosnitsin (Hamburg). Paul M. Love (Ifrane) focused on the interaction between manuscripts and books at the boundary between the Orient ant the Occident in his paper 'The Charlatan and the Library: At the intersections of manuscripts, colonialism, and Ibadi Muslims in late-Ottoman Cairo'. The role of Timbuktu manuscripts in the transmission of knowledge was, among other things, explored by Shamil Jeppie (Cape Town) in his talk 'Timbuktu, the world and Africa'.

Full conference programme is available at < https://www.ambrosiana.it/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/V-DA-2019-Africana-Locandina.pdf>.

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## Coptic Literature in Context. The Contexts of Coptic Literature
### Late Antique Egypt in a dialogue between literature, archaeology and digital humanities
### Rome, 25–27 February 2019

From February 25 to 27, 2019, the conference *Coptic Literature in Context. The Contexts of Coptic Literature: Late Antique Egypt in a dialogue between literature, archaeology and digital humanities*, organized in the framework of the ERC Advanced Grant 2015 ‘PATHs - Tracking Papyrus and Parchment Paths: An Archaeological Atlas of Coptic Literature’ (P.I. Paola Buzi; <paths.uniroma1.it>) was held at the Sapienza University of Rome. Several scholars from all over the world presented their ongoing research in various branches of Coptic studies, including codicology and palaeography, papyrology, literature, history, epigraphy, art, archaeology, and topography.

The conference was also the occasion for the official launch of the Archaeological Atlas of Coptic Literature, <https://atlas.paths-erc.eu/>, the main product of the PAThs project, which has reached its ‘mid-term’. Though still in progress, and daily improved and enriched by the project team, the Atlas is now available online for the scholarly community.

At the onset, the wintry climate of February was heated by a warm welcome addresses by Eugenio Gaudio, Rector of Sapienza University, and Gaetano Lettieri, Head of the Department SARAS (Storia Antropologia Religioni Arte Spettacolo).

The first day was entirely devoted to the official presentation of the PAThs project and  the tasks of its team members. Paola Buzi gave an introductory speech on the real and imaginary landscapes of Coptic literature. Julian Bogdani illustrated the structure of the online Atlas, a relational database containing thematic sections devoted to Places, Manuscripts, Works, Authors, Titles, Colophons. Nathan Carlig and Francesco Valerio, both in charge of the Manuscript section, presented their researches on Coptic codicology and palaeography (Carlig on the Akhmim papyri, Valerio on the Phantoou Manuscripts). Francesco Berno, responsible of the Authors and Works sections, discussed the new periodization of the Coptic literature as elaborated in the framework of the PAThs project. Agostino Soldati, in charge of the Colophons section, presented an unpublished Sahidic colophon dated to the year 1070 CE, preserved on a parchment bifolium, recently discovered among the Coptic fragments of the Biblioteca Corsiniana (Rome). Angelo Colonna and Ilaria Rossetti, in charge of the Places section, focused on the Coptic archaeological evidence of the Nile Delta. Finally, Ira Rabin and Tea Ghigo illustrated one of the most innovative features of the PAThs project, namely the archaeometric analysis of Coptic inks.

The second day of the conference was devoted to manuscripts and texts, with a specific attention (in accordance with the goal of the conference itself) to their connection with the geographical and archaeological dimensions. Frank Feder, Alain Delattre, and Andrea Hasznos reviewed Coptic manuscripts belonging respectively to Hermopolis Magna, Antinopolis, and Elephantine. Hugo Lundhaug and Christian Bull investigated the monastic setting of the Coptic literary production (Lundhaug of apocryphal literature; Bull of the Nag Hammadi Codices). Tito Orlandi spoke of the many references to the construction and dedication of churches he picked up in Coptic literary texts. Sofía Torallas Tovar commented on a recently identified papyrus roll containing the Akhmimic version of a Festal Letter delivered by Athanasius of Alexandria. Alin Suciu focused on papyrus or parchment rolls and scrolls, a very intriguing book format, due to its scarce attestation in the Coptic domain. Adam Łajtar and Artur Obłuski provided an extremely rich and fascinating overview on the Christian kingdoms of Nubia, paying attention both to the archaeological settings and to the written sources (inscriptions and codices, in Coptic and Greek).

The third and last day of the conference was devoted more specifically to the physical (i.e. archaeological, geographical, and artistic) dimension of Late Antique Egypt. Caroline Schroeder analyzed some space and place names occurring in Coptic literary texts. Gertrude van Loon investigated the 'visual' counterpart of Coptic literature, i.e. the works of art (paintings, reliefs) and their relationship with the corresponding literary narratives. Darlene Brooks-Hedstrom introduced the audience to the everyday life of the Coptic monks, 'reconstructing' a monastic kitchen through a systematic review of documentary and archaeological evidence. Andreas Effland illustrated the transformation of the sacred space of Abydos from the third to the sixth century, at the crossroads of pagan and Christian cults (of course in conflict), using both literary and archaeological evidence. Vicente Barba Colmenero (*in absentia*) and (again) Sofía Torallas Tovar provided a detailed archaeological and epigraphical survey of the Coptic Monastery at Qubbet El-Hawa (Aswan). Finally, Eva Subias presented a new chapter of her ongoing architectural and archaeological research on the Byzantine fortress of Oxyrhynchus.

Three distinguished scholars in the field of Late Antique and Early Christian Studies, namely Gianfranco Agosti, Alberto Camplani, and Emanuela Prinzivalli, acted as chairmen of the conference sections. They animated the lengthy concluding debates, enriched by various competent and sharp discussants, including Lloyd Abercrombie (selected among the participants to the Summer School on Coptic Literature and Manuscript Tradition, held in Hamburg in September 2018), Alessandro Bausi, Heike Behlmer, Paola Moscati, and Ewa Wipszycka. Many undergraduate, graduate and doctoral students attended the conference, hopefully with no less pleasure than profit.

The full conference programme is available at <http://paths.uniroma1.it/coptic-literature-in-context-the-contexts-of-coptic-literature>.

Francesco Valerio

## At One Remove: Versions and Other Indirect Evidence for the New Testament
### Birmingham, 4–6 March 2019

The eleventh Birmingham colloquim on the textual criticism of the New Testament took place from 4 to 6 March 2019, convened by Hugh Houghton, the Director of the Institute for Textual Scholarship and Electronic Editing. This time, non-Greek versions of various New Testament texts, in particular when they add information in our search for the Greek Vorlage, were in the focus of attention.

In his opening paper, 'Versional Evidence in the Nestle-Aland *Novum Testamentum Graece* (1898–2012)', Gregory S. Paulson (Münster) illustrated how the editors of the most authoritative critical Greek text have been increasingly considering parallel versions in their reconstruction, in particular, since the third edition that considered, speaking of oriental traditions, Syriac and Sahidic Coptic, among others.

Coptic biblical tradition was explored by Hans Förster and Matthias Schulz (Vienna) in their paper 'The Coptic Version of the Gospel of John – Translating an Understandable Text into Coptic'. For his recent project, they explored not only the most representative Sahidic tradition, but also considered translations in Bohairic, Lycopolitan, and Achmimic; the attested variants relevant for the Greek text have already been incorporated into the apparatus of the 28th edition of the *Novum Testamentum Graece*.

The Syriac text of the Gospels was addressed, in his highlight lecture, by David Taylor (Oxford, 'New Developments in the Text of the Old Syriac Gospels'), who heavily drew on the palimpsest manuscript with fragments from the Gospels in Old Syriac (sixth century), only recently first described as Sinai New Finds Syriac 37 + 39 (only two other witnesses to Old Syriac Gospel tradition had been previously known). Ian Mills (North Carolina) spoke on 'The Old Syriac Gospels and Tatian's *Diatessaron*, Revisited: The Text Critical Use of a Rival Tradition'). Emanuele Zimbardi (Rome/Berlin) focused on how Syriac translation of the New Testament influenced non-biblical Greek tradition in his talk on the 'Use of Syriac and Greek New Testament for the Biblical Quotations in a *mēmrā* by Ephrem translated into Greek'.

Among other oriental text traditions explored, there was Old Church Slavonic (Neza Zajc (Ljubljana), 'The Old Church Slavonic Translations of Acts and Matthew by St Maximos the Greek'), Christian Arabic (Elie Dannaoui (Balamand), 'The Textual Value of the Arabic Text of L2211: The Case of Mark', Robert Turnbull (Melbourne), 'The Textual Affinities of Codex Sinaiticus Arabicus and its Family'), and Caucasian Albanian (Simon Crisp

(Birmingham), 'The Caucasian Albanian Palimpsests and their Significance for New Testament Textual Criticism').

Influences upon the transmitted text coming from the mother tongue of the scribe, who may have been non-native in Greek, were highlighted by Alan Taylor Farnes (Utah) in his paper on 'The Scribal Habits of Non-Native Greek Scribes'. The place of the multiple traditions in Byzantine biblical lexicography was approached by Reinhart Ceulemans (Leuven) in the second keynote speech of the colloquim, 'Biblical Lexicography in Late Antiquity and Byzantium'.

Full programme is available at <http://cal-itsee.bham.ac.uk/itseeweb/conferences/11Coll-timetable.pdf>.

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## Scribal Habits in Middle Eastern Manuscripts
### Princeton, 10–11 May 2019

The workshop 'Scribal Habits in Middle Eastern Manuscripts' was convened by Sabine Schmidtke and George A. Kiraz and took place in the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton, on 10 and 11 May 2019.

The idea behind the workshop was to focus on the role of the scribe in creating the manuscripts and understand better the process by which the manuscripts were produced. It brought together scholars from various disciplines to study how the scribes shaped the transmission of literary texts they copied. The workshop dealt primarily with Middle Eastern manuscripts written in Greek, Hebrew, Syriac, Arabic, Persian, Armenian, Coptic and other languages.

Greek scribes of the New Testament were in the focus of the talks of Alan Taylor Farnes, 'Direct Copies as Test Cases in the Quest for Scribal Habits' and of Thomas C. Schmidt, 'Scribes and the Book of Revelation in Eastern New Testaments'. Greek biblical scribal habits were further addressed by Michael Dormandy in his paper '"We are the sum of our habits": Aggregate Scribal Habits of Whole Bible Manuscripts'.

Techniques of Coptic scribes writing in Greek were explored by Elizabeth Buchanan in her paper 'Connecting the Dots: Using Diaeresis as a Source of Information about Scribal Practices in Greek Papyri in Sixth-Century Egypt'. Diacritical practices were also the interest of Julia G. Krivoruchko, this time applied to (Levantine) Jewish scribes writing Greek in Hebrew characters: 'The *niqqud* in medieval Judeo-Greek manuscripts: research expectations vs. scribal practice'. Jewish scribal practices in Hebrew texts were dealt with by

Binyamin Katzoff in his paper ‘The Second-Hand Scribe: A Unique Tosefta Fragment from the Levant, Its Intellectual Environment, and Its Influence’.

Syriac and Christian Aramaic manuscript traditions were in the focus of the studies by Ed Cook (‘Scribal Errors and Corrections in Aramaic’), Jonathan Loopstra (‘Scribes and Their Habits in Eighth-Century Syria’), and Dan Batovici (‘Organising 1 Clement in Syriac and Coptic: Text dividers in University Library Cambridge Add. MSS 1700, Berlin Staatsbibliothek Ms. or. fol. 3065, and Strasbourg Université copte 362-385’).

Islamic Arabic scribal practices were explored by Ursula Bsees (‘Scribal Practice in Arabic Literary Papyri’), Sabine Schmidtke and Hassan Ansari (‘Scholarly Practices in 12th-Century Kashan: Fadl Allah al-Rawandi and His Role in the Transmission of al-Sharif al-Murtada’s Ghurar al-fawa’id’), and Zuzana Gažáková (‘Manuscripts of Arabic Popular Epics and Sīrat Sayf ibn Dhī Yazan’). In addition, Persian tradition was approached by Mihan Shiva (‘Manuscript production and scribal work-rate in 15th-century Iran’), and the Ottoman Turkish by H. Evren Sünnetçioğlu (‘Inscribing Authority on the Books of Jurisprudence: Fatwās, Scribes, and Chief Jurisprudents in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire, 15th–18th Centuries’).

Full workshop programme is available at <https://albert.ias.edu/handle/20.500.12111/6732>.

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