

FINAL SCIENTIFIC REPORT COMST TEAM 5: WORKSHOP 2

TITLE OF THE WORKSHOP: Conservation Studies on Oriental Manuscripts

DATE: 18th to 20th December 2010

VENUE: Sabanci Museum, Emirgan Mh.; 34467 Istanbul – Turkey

NAME OF THE ORGANISER: Stéphane Ipert, Centre de Conservation du Livre

SCIENTIFIC SUMMARY

The objective of the Istanbul workshop organized by the TEAM 5 was to highlight the different practices concerning the conservation process implemented within the European and Mediterranean countries for the preservation of manuscripts.

Given the multitude of materials and technologies used (inks, paper, parchment, bindings, etc..), **the objective of participants was to exchange knowledge and experiences on these topics to promote better conservation of collections of manuscripts** preserved in Europe and more widely in Mediterranean countries and refine knowledge about the details of manuscripts making.

These objectives have been achieved through a multidisciplinary and inter-professional approach as participants was from different countries and different structures.

Reviews and detailed descriptions of manuscripts elements and their bindings have been presented. This type of **exchange between experts has allowed a better understanding and analysis of ancient knowledge and codicology testimonies** concerning the stages of manuscript making.

This work of description was supplemented by an inventory of different forms of degradation and their causes. These elements have helped to define the types of treatments appropriate to each case and each environment (taking care of all the detailed steps of these operations and giving the reasons for these interventions).

Each participant described these stages of work by giving specific examples which gave a large overview of the wealth and the large variety of supports of writing and techniques in book making, thus highlighting the specificities of oriental manuscripts making.

Participation of the Manumed project to the workshop also made possible the exchange of experience with participants from Turkey, Lebanon and other Mediterranean countries.

DESCRIPTION OF SCIENTIFIC CONTENT AND OF DISCUSSION (MAX 4 PAGES)

Ewa Balicka-Witakowska:

«Successful Experiences on Recording and Preservation of Oriental Manuscripts».

The projects concerning the recording of oriental manuscripts kept outside of the modern institutions (the museums and libraries) experienced an extraordinary upswing in the middle of 2000s due to the large accessibility to the digital cameras. Ethiopia which owes an enormous amount of the manuscripts (their production is still alive) was one of the first areas where the systematic digitization took place. The projects sponsored by different European and American institutions started in 2005 as a result of cooperation between Toronto University (represented by M. Gervers (Medieval Studies) and Uppsala University (represented by E. Balicka-Witakowska (Byzantine Studies)). The first campaigns concentrated on recording of the illuminated manuscripts to which very soon were added the manuscripts containing the rare texts. Moreover in 2006 the very valuable collection of the remote and difficult accessible monastery of Gunda Gunde was fully digitized. The experiences gathered during this particularly complicated assignment as well as the financial support of the Endangered Archives Programme coordinated by the British Library enabled the organizers of the projects to focus on the collections of the manuscripts which can be easily damaged or destroyed due to unsatisfactory condition of preservation. Until now about digitized 750 manuscripts wait to be catalogued and made largely accessible by putting them online.

François Vinourd:

«The conservation of Syriac manuscripts in the monastery of Charfet, Lebanon »

The patriarchate of the Syrian Catholic Church owns at Charfet, Lebanon, a collection of Syriac and Arab Christian manuscripts, which is one of the most beautiful collections in the Middle East. About 2000 Syriac, Arabic and Garshuni manuscripts divided into two funds:

- Armalet: 586 Syriac mss and 569 Arab mss
- Rahmani: 400 Syriac and garshouni mss and 480 Arabic mss

Since 1998, as part of a European project, Manumed, the Centre de Conservation du Livre in Arles (Manumed project coordinator), has taken many actions to enhance the wealth of this library. We conducted simultaneously the following operations: cataloguing, packing, scanning, preservation of manuscripts as well as staff training.

The description of manuscripts 1 to 125 of funds Rahmani have been done, whose publication will soon be conducted by Alain Desreumaux, Françoise Briquel Chatonnet (CNRS), Muriel Debié and A. Binggeli (IRHT) with the help of Archbishop Gabriel Dib and Youssef Dergham responsible of the library.

We are also working on a detailed description of old bindings, according to the method we have implemented at the National Library of France for the description of Byzantine bindings, work that we presented at our last meeting in London. We present here some type of Syriac binders, preserved in the library of Charfet. To better define the characteristics of these bindings we try to compare them

with those of Armenian or Byzantine bindings that are much better known by the researchers because there have been studied over many years by historians.

Benoit Junod:

«Conservation supports for manuscripts exhibitions: a challenge for between conservation and aesthetic»

The Aga Khan Museum, centred on Islamic art, will open in Toronto in 2013. Since 2003, the Aga Khan Trust for culture has presented nine exhibitions of the highlights of its collections, the most recent being at the Sakip Sabanci Museum in Istanbul between November 6th 2010 and February 27th 2011. As the AKM collections are to a great extent manuscripts and miniatures, the manner in which the manuscripts have been shown has varied in a conscious attempt to find solutions both aesthetic for the public and respectful of conservation conditions.

The first two presentations (Parma, 31.03.07 - 03.06.07 and London, 14.07.07 - 31.08.07) used showcases and supports prepared by the Barcelona firm Ambito Cero, and the material used was foam polystyrene cut in a v-shape for inclination, covered in pH neutral Tyvek. Effective, cheap, but rather heavy and anaesthetic. Then at the Louvre (05.10.07 - 07.01.08), complex folded acrylic transparent supports were used, adjusted for each book. This allowed a more vertical presentation, more aesthetic but perhaps with more stress to the manuscript. At the Gulbenkian in Lisbon (14.03.08 - 26.07.08), simple 'open book' shaped supports were used, and the materials used were effective – however, when viewed laterally, the supports were too visible. Finally, the same supports were used for Madrid (05.06.09 - 06.09.09), Barcelona (08.10.09 - 17.01.10) and Berlin (16.03.10 – 07. 07. 10). They were made of steel (so as to be resistant to transport) and carefully adjusted to each manuscript. They were, however, impossible to modify with a change of showcase, and in Istanbul the designer Boris Micka had to make new supports: hard-board black sheets like an open book, set on small inclined wooden bases. The problem caused by the inclination was that acrylic 'tacks' had to be glued on the bases to stop the manuscripts from slipping forward.

The conclusion is the there is no 'perfect' solution, and that the supports have to be adjusted to the atmospherics of the exhibition. As long as a conservation specialist approves the supports used, the rest is a question of taste.

Paul Hepworth:

«A Lexicon for Islamic Manuscript Conservators».

The creation of a lexicon for the conservation of Islamic manuscripts has been undertaken by some members of the Islamic Manuscript Association. This presentation will consider the needs that motivated the project and the various uses such a lexicon might have for those who work with Islamic manuscripts. The proposed organization of the lexicon will be discussed, with examples of vocabulary to demonstrate the issues that are being addressed and the challenges that have been posed.

Karin Scheper:

«Refining the classification of Islamic Manuscripts structures».

That paper will first summarize how the Islamic binding is traditionally described and perceived - as a case-binding structure. Then the appropriateness of that term will be considered more closely. The rest of the paper is concerned with the evidence for more varieties and it will try to explain the underlying reasons for those differences, and that part will be the topic of the presentation for the next COMSt meeting. Conservation and preservation treatments of Islamic manuscripts in the University Library Leiden offered the opportunity to investigate the structures more closely, and a recently carried out *structure-and-composition-survey* served to substantiated these new insights. Although the presentation will not provide detailed results from the survey, it will touch on the need for a broader classification.

Joseph Moukarzel:

«Overview of the manuscripts studies and projects conducted at Kaslik: the issue of conservation».

Since 2004, the Central Library of the Holy Spirit University of Kaslik (USEK) and since 2009, the Phoenix Centre for Lebanese Studies at the same university, undertake a project to preserve the written heritage in Lebanon.

The project is to conserve (some restoration as well) and to digitalize several collections of manuscripts, archives, rare books, photographs and maps relating to the history of Lebanon in general and the heritage of the Lebanese Christians in particular.

The intervention in Istanbul was to present the various strands of this project: inventory, projects started, method of preservation and restoration, digitization policy and process, and the software for the manuscripts cataloging at USEK.

Andrea Schmidt and Tamara Pataridze:

«Digitisation of Arabic, Syrian and Georgian manuscripts from Mount Sinai at the University of Louvain-la-Neuve».

The Monastery of St. Catherine has often represented a relatively safe place for the most precious writings. Sinai was a inaccessible refuge and had one of the most important library containing manuscripts, books printed and archives. This library is also one of the richest and one of the most inaccessible from the collections of Greek and oriental Christians manuscripts. It is exceptional in more ways than one. It offers the rare feature of a continuity of more than a millennium and a wide range because Greek, Syriac, Arabic, Georgian and others languages was spoken inside the library by the owners.

The manuscripts are divided into five main funds:

- Greek (2300 mss)
- Arabic (600)
- Syriac (270)
- Georgian (86)
- Slavonic (40)

These figures do not account for new discoveries of 1975. The library has 3140 units for the old series and 4000 for the new.

In this presentation a brief overview of the collections was done: Georgian, Syriac, Arabic Collections and a review of the contribution of the missions that took place at Sinai.

The microfilming and cataloging prior digitization of microfilm Sinai done at Université Catholique de Louvain was presented and discussed.

Zeina Genadry:

«Conservation Challenges and ethics».

A code of ethics should indicate the standards of behaviour expected of a member of a group. It is intended to protect the profession, the practitioner, the client and the collections/works of art. Ethics should be considered i) at the decision level as to who decides what should be saved; ii) at the level of the conservation practice per se.

If we take Cesare Brandi's definition of conservation as "the methodological moment in which the object is appreciated in its material form and its historical and aesthetic duality, with a view to transmitting it to the future" and apply it to the books/manuscripts field, then several questions are raised : Are all books and manuscripts works of art ? What is the border between the necessity of a treatment and the respect of the physical integrity?

Does books/manuscripts conservation fit into the code/standards of practice?

Another major question concerns the relationship between ethics and digitization: original or copy, authenticity of the digital copy, manipulation of images, conciliation between global technology and regional cultures, priorities, copyright, digitization standards, funding, etc.....

Defining the profession in terms of ethical guidelines is essential not forgetting that, above all, books convey a content and ought to be functional, hence allowing a certain flexibility towards the pure theory.

Arietta Revithi:

« Condition survey of the Manuscript Collection of the Hellenic Parliament Library: present evaluation and future planning».

The Conservation department of the Hellenic Parliament Library has started in December 2009 an ambitious as much as indispensable, program of recording the entire manuscript collection in order to establish the preservation condition of its approximately 600 codices.

The first 169 manuscripts were documented, focusing on their present condition, the necessity or not for immediate conservation treatments as well as other significant aspects like whether they have

been rebound or not, if they have undergone conservation treatments in the past and whether these have altered their historical characteristics.

The results of this survey will determine the objects in need of immediate treatment, while a future planning for the rest of the collection will be established.

Nikolas Sarris:

«Byzantine crossover with the Middle-East: Bindings of Arabic Christian Manuscripts at the St Catherine’s Monastery, Sinai and their preservation».

This paper discusses a number of Arabic Christian manuscripts preserved at the library of the St Catherine’s monastery in Sinai, which were bound in workshops at the monastery by either Arab or Greek monks. The blending of the Arabic bookbinding tradition with the Byzantine binding style is a unique phenomenon at the monastery, where language, religion and tradition are often interpreted through the craft of bookbinding.

Sara Fani:

«Conservative census of the Arabic manuscripts in the Central National Library of Firenze».

A preliminary study on BNCF Arab manuscripts provenience pointed out their belonging to the Magliabechi fund, National fund (from Magliabechi and of Mediceo-Palatina origins), Palatin fund (most of all of the Graberg series), and New Acquisition fund (Castelli provenience). Divided between the Magliabechi and the National funds are many manuscripts related to the Stamperia Medicea delle Lingue Orientali, founded in Rome in the XVI century. A conservative census through catalographic forms (compiled according to the codicological peculiarities of this heritage) has pointed out the conservative and restoration emergencies of the collection. In the same time many bad restoration interventions have been reported: their observation reveals many mistakes either in a technical or a “philological” point of view. The census on this not-very-consulted collection also revealed some particular kind of *codex* and other kind of books which also need conservative interventions.

Report on discussion:

Formalities:

Team composition:

Team leader, Stéphane Ipert introduced and welcomed the new team’s members (Nikolas Sarris and Arietta Revithi) and the members who participated to the workshop thanks to Manumed project (Andrea Schmidt, Tamara Padtridze, Sara Fani, Benoit Junod, Paul Hepworth, Maria-Luisa Agati, Laura Parodi).

Topics discussed

Evaluation of the passed workshop

The members expressed their satisfaction in front of the success and the good quality of Istanbul meeting. Particularly appreciated was the possibility to visit the exhibition “Treasures of the Aga Khan” in the Sabanci Museum.

Handbook and the chapter of team 5

The group was very positive to addition of the new members, founding their competence valuable and perfectly completing the expertise required for the effectiveness of the team. However all members, included the new ones, agreed that further enlargement of the team and the need to introduce them into the already advanced work of the group may cause some problems and consequently should be avoided.

The preliminary content of the publication was discussed and in connection to it the content of the chapter for which team 5 is responsible. It was agreed that the final form of the latter will be decided after the meeting of the editorial board (planned for early February) where the definite structure of the handbook will be decided. The team leader intends to attend the meeting and presents there a draft of the chapter prepared by team 5. In relation to the decisions taken by the editorial board the further work on the chapter will be taken up and the achieved results discussed at the team workshop in Leiden scheduled for 4-5 April 2011.

ASSESSMENT OF THE RESULTS AND IMPACT ON THE FUTURE DIRECTION (MAX 2 PAGES)

Manuscripts and archival documents have inestimable historical or artistic value, but over time these documents are deteriorating. To end their degradation, it becomes necessary for them to undergo certain treatments. These aim to eradicate the causes of deterioration, ie the negative change of one or more characteristics of the documents, and to repair damage from degradation in order to save this written heritage. Paper deteriorates mainly by internal factors related to the type and quality of fibre and raw materials used (eg charges, acidic compounds, etc.) as well as external factors such as air pollutants, temperature , Relative humidity, light, etc..

To ensure the preservation of a document, it is crucial to understand the reasons for its deterioration. Deterioration means a negative change in one or more of the document's features. Causes vary as well as the solutions.

The aim of the workshop was to exchange experiences and knowledge on this topics in order to propose and define solutions for a better preservation for oriental manuscripts collections and old documents in the future.

One of the points shared at this workshop is that conservation should be considered as a preventive way rather than curative. The use of physical restoration of the manuscript remains a failure. However, in the latter case, we must be sure that the ethical and professional standards of restoration are applied. Only specialists should attempt to restore documents. Although efforts have been made, restoration initiatives sometimes lead to harmful errors in the choice of a technique or material. These techniques are crucial and follow very specific rules today (included the studies of ancient and craft manuscript making). They comply with three fundamental principles: to be effective and durable in order to guarantee the preservation of the document; to be reversible or removable at no risk; to be honest and not hide repairs, to add nothing that changes the document's primary appearance.

Raising awareness on this matter to the manuscripts collections owners and professional must be done, as about storage and handling of documents. Precautions that are often very simple can significantly reduce damage. To remedy degradation, it is important to determine the causes by regularly inspecting storage areas and collections. Complete and detailed reports that examine all of the factors posing a threat to documents should be encouraged.

These reports should include a series of technical suggestions and potential solutions.

Planned activities

The group also decide to develop a separate web site with links to COMSt and ESF programmes in order to put online analyses and literature about manuscripts conservation (in the sense of the workshop conclusion). Other aim is to give our group more visibility, i.e. to present it to the international scholarly milieu and give opportunity to a larger group of specialists to follow the work of the team within and outside of the COMSt programme. The web site will also give access to a bibliographical database.

Comparative Oriental Manuscripts Studies TEAM 5 : Manuscripts Preservation



Two workshops will take place in 2011

1. April in Leiden (Netherland): the team will focus on digitization and its relations with conservation.
2. November in Nice (France), probably in cooperation of team 1: the subject which will be discussed concerns the "traffic of manuscripts" and the problem of preservation.



FINAL PROGRAMME OF THE WORKSHOP

Saturday, 18th December

9.00—10.30

Visit of Sulemnaye Mosque (conservation Laboratory) of Sabanci Museum.

Discussions with local experts

10.30—13.00

Visit of the Exhibition: « The Art of Book and Calligraphy » from the collections of Sabanci Museum.

The Catalogue includes texts from Oleg Grabar, Francis Richard, Annie Vernay-Nouri, Michael Barry etc.

14.30—16.00

Visit of the « Quran Exhibition in its 1,400th year » at the Istanbul Museum of Turkish and Islamic Art.

The exhibition will reveal unique, rare pieces of the 250,000-page Damascus documents collection. A large selection of handwritten Qurans normally held in inventory of the Museum will be displayed for art lovers for the first time.

16.00—17.30

Discussions with local experts

Monday, 20th December

9.00—9.15

Opening of the workshop

9.15—9.45

Ewa Balicka-Witakowska: «Recording and Preservation of Ethiopian Manuscripts : the latest projects».

9.45-10.15

François Vinourd: «La conservation des manuscrits syriaques au monastère de Charfet, Liban».

10.15-10.45

Benoit Junod: «Conservation supports for manuscripts exhibitions: a challenge for between conservation and aesthetic».

Coffee Break

11.15-11.45

Paul Hepworth: «A Lexicon for Islamic Manuscript Conservators».

11.45—12.15

Karin Scheper: «Refining the classification of Islamic Manuscripts structures».

12.15-12:45

Joseph Moukarzel: «Overview of the manuscripts studies and projects conducted at Kaslik: the issue of conservation».

Lunch



14:00 –14:30

Andrea Schmidt and Tamara Pataridze: «Digitisation of Arabic, Syrian and Georgian manuscripts from Mount Sinai at the University of Louvain-la-Neuve».

14:30—15.00

Zeina Genadry: «Conservation Challenges and ethics».

15.00—15.30

Arietta Revithi: « Condition survey of the Manuscript Collection of the Hellenic Parliament Library: present evaluation and future planning».

15.30-16.00

Nikolas Sarris: «Byzantine crossover with the Middle-East: Bindings of Arabic Christian Manuscripts at the St Catherine’s Monastery, Sinai and their preservation».

16.00-16.30

Sara Fani: «Conservative census of the Arabic manuscripts in the Central National Library of Firenze».

16.30-17.45

Discussions.

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