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Studies in Early Medieval Iranian
Religious Manuscript Traditions other than Islamic

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Introduction

This publication has been made possible thanks to many people who have supported it in various ways. First of all, I thank the members of the Board of the *Societas Iranologica Europaea* for the period 2011–2015, Pierfrancesco Callieri, Desmond Durkin-Meisterernst, Almut Hintze, Pavel Borisovich Lurje, Florian Schwarz, Maria Szuppe and Gabrielle van den Berg for accepting my suggestion to organize a special panel at *ECIS8* in St. Petersburg on *Studies in Medieval Iranian Manuscript Traditions other than Islamic* and for their interest and encouragement.

The special panel held during the *ECIS8* was intended to be an opportunity for exchange among specialists in the field of Middle Iranian Studies — or “Mitteliranistik”, if I may use this term — which is well defined within philology and linguistics and in particular within historical-comparative linguistics. With the organization of a special conference panel and the subsequent publication of this volume we hoped to create a space for discussion and research which for the first time put also the material aspects of manuscripts as “objects bearing texts” at center stage. It encouraged interaction between diverse disciplines and methodological approaches — philology, linguistics, codicology, palaeography, history — while avoiding subordinating any one of them under another field or approach. Rather, from the outset it attributed equal merits and importance to each of them, while being fully aware that an entire field of inquiry, that of material analysis, is still largely absent from the discussion.

Put differently, I attempted to embrace the questions of the field of Manuscript Studies or Manuscriptology¹ and to bring them to the core of Middle Iranian Studies. Behind this stands my firm conviction that much can still be done to add significant pieces to our understanding of the intricate puzzle resulting from the historical existence of diverse religious traditions of and in the Iranian spheres of the early Middle Ages.

Between the organization of the panel and the publication of this thematic volume, another important step in the application of Manuscript Studies or Manuscriptology to Middle Iranian Studies was made: the publication in 2017 of the second volume of the *Handbuch Iranistik* edited by Ludwig Paul.² By devoting a whole section to “Manuskriptologie”, Paul invites several authors to discuss the “Manuskriptologie” of the Zoroastrian-Middle Persian, Buddhist-Sogdian, Buddhist-Khotanese, and Christian Middle Iranian traditions.³ These new contributions expand the section of the *Handbuch*’s first volume,⁴ which only focuses on the Iranian Manichaean manuscript fragments belonging to the Berlin Turfan Collection.⁵

Methodologically speaking, the definition of Manuscript Studies or Manuscriptology calls explicitly for a “cross disciplinary and cross-cultural field of study” where the manuscript “is not be read only as a vehicle for information conveyed mainly through text or images, but studied as a physical object or artefact”, where “the social and cultural context of the manuscript, as a material object, must be studied and reconstructed as completely as possible”, and where the context has to be regarded as “the particular manuscript culture to which a given manuscript belongs: the milieu in which it was and it is produced, used, and transmitted. It is, in turn, influenced by the artefacts it produces, and thus constitutes a highly complex whole changing in time”.⁶ This methodological consideration has matured in the

¹ I share this definition even if I am aware of the fact that since decades there have been attempts to link the text, the material aspects and the context of manuscripts. One can recall the new philology or material philology: NICHOLS 1990. On the other hand, only very recently this kind of research is becoming a growing field of research with the focus on the Asian and African manuscript traditions, or, generally, with the focus on manuscript traditions other than the Greek, the Latin, and the Medieval “western” manuscript traditions. Personally, I benefit a lot from this discourse and therefore I refer directly to this research network.

² PAUL 2017.

³ FERRER-LOSILLA 2017, RECK 2017, DRAGONI 2017, BARBATI 2017 respectively.

⁴ PAUL 2013.

⁵ COLDITZ 2013.

⁶ QUENZER 2014, 5, 1, 1-2 respectively.

past years, especially in the study of Asian, but also for example Ethiopian, manuscript traditions. A similar definition was developed by scholars interested in a comparative approach to Greek, Hebrew, Syriac, Christian-Palestinian, Coptic, Ethiopian, Slavic, Armenian and Caucasian manuscript traditions. In this environment, Manuscript Studies has been defined as a “conglomeration of already existing disciplines spread among various field that were put in dialogue with each other”.⁷ “The existing disciplines spread among various field” intended here are the following: codicology, palaeography, textual criticism and textual editing, cataloguing, conservation and preservation.

With different words and a stronger focus on Asia, this is also how the journal that hosts this special issue presents itself. From its first volume, published in 2004, *Pismennye Pamjatniki Vostoka / Written Monuments of the Orient*, has offered and distinguished itself as a place of encounter for all who dedicate themselves to “book culture, collections and archives, restoration and storage” of those “thousands of manuscripts and written monuments...in the great and vast *ocean of scriptures* of the peoples of Asia”.⁸

For this reason, when Pavel Borisovich Lurje raised the possibility of publishing the papers of the special panel held during the *ECIS8* as a separate thematic issue in this journal, rather than in the general *Proceedings* of the conference, I enthusiastically accepted. I wish to express my sincere gratitude to Irina Popova, editor-in-chief of *Pismennye Pamjatniki Vostoka-Written Monuments of the Orient*, for opening the journal to a thematic issue on Iranian manuscript traditions of the Early Medieval period other than Islamic. I also thank her for her admirable hospitality during a week of study in May 2018 in St. Petersburg, a week that served also as a moment of liaising and updating on the state of the publication before sending it to the printer.

As may be noted, the title of this thematic issue, *Studies in early Medieval Iranian Religious Manuscript Traditions other than Islamic*, takes up the title of the special panel at *ECIS8* with the specifications that concern the period and the type of manuscript traditions studied here.

Some valuable papers presented at the special panel at *ECIS8* are missing from the present volume. They concern a contribution on Buddhist manuscript production, which, however, is at least partially represented thanks to the article of Christiane Reck, “Short survey on Sogdian Manuscriptology”,

⁷ BAUSI and GIPPERT (eds.) 2015, 1.

⁸ See <http://www.orientalstudies.ru/eng/index.php?option=content&task=view&id=51>

while the Zoroastrian Middle Persian manuscript tradition is entirely absent.⁹ On the other hand, valuable articles have been added strengthening the focus on the Iranian Manichaean and on the Christian manuscript traditions. There is no pretense of completeness. I only express my hope that this effort will help to lay the foundations for further study in this direction, be it within individual manuscript traditions, Zoroastrian, Manichaean, Christian, and Buddhist on a comparative level. After all, none of the cited manuscript traditions ever existed independently and in isolation. Consequently, if one conceives of literary traditions in terms of circulation of knowledge, or in other words in terms of production, organization, transmission, circulation or even disappearance and destruction, the same is also true for the relevant material traditions and therefore ultimately for the manuscript traditions in their complexity.

The five contributions assembled in this volume offer multiple impulses for reflection on Manichaean, Buddhist and Christian manuscript traditions in the Iranian sphere between the eighth and eleventh centuries, including a remarkable foray into the world of Central Asian medical practices.

The volume opens with an article by Enrico Morano on the Manichaean manuscript tradition. His considerations are based on the 590 fragments in Manichaean script, and mostly in Sogdian language, from the Berlin Turfan Collection. This contribution offers a valuable and precise overview on “books, glossaries, letters, booklets, bilingual and trilingual texts, normal, bold and cursive script”. Morano touches on the codicology, on the formats (codices and scrolls) that exist in this manuscript tradition as evidenced by those fragments; on the singular example of a bound book, the *Manichäisches Bet- und Beichtbuch*; on materials (paper, parchment and silk); on the mise-en-page and mise-en-texte, including also decorative elements. Morano contextualizes the use of different languages and scripts in those fragments and focuses on the palaeography, providing an overview of the diverse varieties of Manichaean script evidenced in the 590 fragments: normal script, elegant semi-cursive script, cursive bold, cursive script, ornamental script, used in headlines with a variety, script with calligraphically elaborated “rope” letters. The comprehensive clarity that emerges from this article is characteristic of a scholar who after years of study and research has achieved full command of his field. The article represents a skilful combination of established concepts with results of new research. Not least, the

⁹ I extend here my thanks to Ruixuan Chen, Almut Hintze, Juanjo Ferrer-Losilla, Jaime Martínez-Porro, and Kianoosh Rezania for the contributions to the special panel at *ECIS8*.

article stimulates further study. I have in mind Morano's reflections on the use of blank versos in codices. His argument, presented in a footnote (note 16), may open an avenue towards a comparative perspective, especially with the Christian manuscript tradition of Turfan, whose Sogdian and Syriac fragments are chronologically and spatially connected to the Manichaean.

Staying in the Manichaean environment of Turfan, we move from a survey to a case study, presented by Olga Chunakova. Chunakova offers a good example of how to combine the study of material and literary aspects of a manuscript tradition, in her case Manichaean. Specifically, she highlights how material aspects are tied to the content, and how palaeographic analysis can be critical for a study that combines two Parthian Manichaean fragments held in two different collections: SI 5576 in the Serindian Collection of the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts, Russian Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg, and M 4590 in the Berlin Turfan Collection. Despite all the complications involved — fragmentarity, decontextualization and preservation in different places — I am certain that this analysis as well as the parts of the article that focus more on the literary aspects will trigger interest and discussion.

With the article by Christiane Reck, the Buddhist and Christian manuscript traditions also enter into debate. Reck contours in few pages, and with great clarity, the results of years of study and research. With her three volumes of catalogues of manuscripts of Manichaean, Buddhist, Christian and various content in Sogdian script in the Berlin Turfan Collection,¹⁰ not to mention her numerous other publications, Reck is the person most qualified to indicate foundations, aims, challenges, limitations and future perspectives of Manuscript Studies or Manuscriptology applied to Sogdian manuscript fragments in Sogdian script. In her contribution, Reck lays solid foundations and multiple impulses of reflections for future research. She offers observations on the relationship between book format and religious affiliation; she establishes with the help of a comparative approach the absence of page numbers in Manichaean and Christian manuscripts in Sogdian script, as is the case in Manichaean manuscripts in Manichaean script, but in contrast to Christian Sogdian manuscripts in East-Syriac script which have quire numbers (see my contribution to this volume); and she describes the difficulties in identifying recto and verso when one is dealing with fragmentary manuscripts. It may be noted that while Olga Chunakova

¹⁰ RECK 2006, 2016, 2018.

in her article uses palaeographic analysis as criterion, Christiane Reck in her contribution points out that the use of script variety as single tool for identifying a fragment is not enough. This demonstrates once again the complexity presented by the material.

The fourth contribution is the brilliant result of a collaboration between Christiane Reck and Adam Benkato. Again we are dealing with fragments; to be able to demonstrate that fragments can be joined together means being able to gain valuable information from a literary perspective as well as from a material perspective, while always keeping an eye on the context. From a literary viewpoint, the article examines a Sogdian text of medical character. It introduces the reader to Central Asian medical prescriptions for regaining (obviously female) virginity, with forays into the Greco-Roman and Arab worlds. It advances the hypothesis of a Sanskrit origin of the Sogdian text, underscoring the “social importance of women’s purity” in the context in which the text must have been produced. From a material viewpoint the article provides an extremely interesting reflection on the relationship between medical and pharmacological texts in Sogdian language in Sogdian script, “both regular and formal variants”, and format. Reck and Benkato point out how most of those texts were written on scrolls or pustaka-leaves, with few exceptions. According to the authors, this might indicate that also the Manichaean and Christian communities, when producing medical texts, would not use the codex but “but rather more usable writing supports”.

The fifth and final article is my own contribution. It focuses on quire-numbering as evidenced in the circa 1000 Christian Sogdian and Syriac manuscript fragments in East Syriac script in the Berlin Turfan Collection and the circa 116 Syriac manuscript fragments in the Krotkov Collection in St. Petersburg. Even if the lion’s share obviously is represented by the holdings of the Berlin Turfan Collection, I strongly encourage the integration of data from smaller collections (smaller in the sense of the amount of material preserved there). Focusing on a specific aspect of codicological inquiry, namely the system of quire numbering, I intend in the first place to offer a panoramic overview, from which emerges a problem of interpretation. Considering quire numbering, what in the light of previous studies should be expected to be a more or less clear and homogenous picture (with the usual exceptions) turned out to be much more heterogeneous. This made it necessary to consider also other manuscript traditions than the standard manuscript tradition belonging to the Church of the East. I am convinced that Manuscript Studies or Manuscriptology applied to “Mitteliranistik” is

still a field that has been too little explored to draw definite conclusions, and that at the present stage it is much more useful to sound every single detail and then to propose explanations and point out problems of interpretation. The “conclusions” should be read in this sense.

Not a single article in this volume gets around listing and discussing the numerous methodological limitations of Manuscript Studies when applied to a material corpus that presents, in its fragmentary state and its near-total decontextualization, almost unsurmountable obstacles. Nevertheless, and perhaps precisely for this reason, each analysis focusing on an in-depth study of all aspects from literary, material and contextual perspectives is valuable and even critical for arriving at a broader and more comprehensive vision.

Finally, my deep gratitude to Adam Benkato for accepting the task of reviewing the English of all contributions. The volume has enormously benefited not only from his native English, but from his brilliant command of the topics and discussions, with the result of a careful and critical language editing.

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Vienna, June 2018

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