



## Comparative Oriental Manuscript Studies Newsletter No. 2

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### Editorial

We are very happy to publish the second issue of the Newsletter of the European Science Foundation Research Networking Programme in Comparative Oriental Manuscript Studies (COMSt).

It will be evident to the reader that the emphasis in this issue has shifted from conference reports and project descriptions (which, while still included, are fewer in number compared to the first Newsletter) to scholarly miscellanies.

The Newsletter seeks to reflect the breadth of the academic spectrum in COMSt. While the ‘miscellanea’ section of the first issue featured Ethiopic and Greek-Armenian traditions, the articles in the second News-

letter deal additionally with such different manuscript cultures as Coptic, Turkish and Islamic West African. As before, all COMSt-relevant aspects ranging from codicology to philology to cataloguing to preservation are reflected in the Newsletter’s various contributions. We would like to use this opportunity to express, in the name of the entire COMSt community, our deepest gratitude to Dr Arianna Ciula, who in her function as ESF science officer has accompanied the network since its launch in June 2009. For personal reasons she will temporarily retire from office from August 2011, to be replaced by Dr Barry Dixon.

Editors

lated writings. For the first part, all available manuscripts will be collated in order to produce a critical edition. In his *editio princeps*, Ernst Trumpp (1882) used one single manuscript and “corrected” the text on the basis of an Arabic manuscript. The critical edition of the Ethiopic tradition is therefore absolutely necessary. Translation and commentary will be also provided. The second part, the translation of selected related texts, will aim at clarifying the general confusion that surrounds the entire scope of Ethiopian Creational and Adamic literature. The *Ṭəntä haymanot*, so far unpublished, will be analysed in particular detail, with a collation of different manuscripts. Unlike the *Aksimaros*, the *Ṭəntä haymanot* seems to be a genuine Ethiopian work. If possible, it should be established which text was used as *Vorlage*, functioned as provider of ideas for this and other writings, or in which parts possible exchange can be detected. For this task, as an example, the examination of the order and rank of different groups of angels will be crucial. In this part of the thesis, traditional commentaries of *Aksimaros* will be also analysed.

Under the title “remapping Paradise”, a map shall be created in order to visualise the different geographical descriptions given, as well as provide a comparison of the differing world views and general cosmologies transmitted in the texts. As an example, the role of the “Ethiopian river” Gihon (Nile) as one of the four rivers of Paradise will be discussed in detail.

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### A Conservative Census of Arabic Manuscripts in the Central National Library of Florence

The census is the result of the final stage project of a post-University Master course in Conservation and Restoration of Book Heritage held in Spoleto, Italy, in 2009. It was carried out at the Manuscripts and Rare Books Section of the Central National Library of Florence (BNCF) during a period of three months and it took into account the catalogued Arab manuscripts kept in the Library (about 140 scattered among different funds). The

existing catalogue (Buonazia 1885) was taken as a starting point of the census: it includes the Magliabechiano, Palatino and Nazionale collections. Part of the Arab manuscripts of the Magliabechiano fund had been previously catalogued and classified by Giovanni Targioni Tozzetti (1712-1783) and some of them were referable to the publishing project of the Medicean Printing House of Oriental Languages of Rome (second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century). A last group of manuscripts is part of the Nuove Accessioni; it was inventorised by Olga Pinto in 1935.

The catalogues or inventories consulted contain no codicological or structural description, except for a mention of the writing support, the size and the bindings in Buonazia’s catalogue. As this census was supposed to serve as a reference point for the Restoration Laboratory to draft a list of the most urgent interventions, it was decided to devote particular attention to the codicological features of the manuscripts and their conservative conditions.

In the first part of the form-sheet adopted for the census, Bibliographical and Palaeographical Data, the most pressing need was the transcription and a more scientific transliteration of Arab titles and authors according to the shared rules of the scientific international community; a translation of the titles was also proposed with the transcription of the dates as they appear in the manuscripts with their corresponding Gregorian calendar date. A new entry in this section is the description of seals or stamps, a very important piece of information for both eventual restoration interventions and for the reconstruction of the book history.

The section dedicated to Codicological and Material



BNCF, B.R. 343 n. 5, Qur’ān octagonal codex in chiselled metal box, 17<sup>th</sup> cent. (?); copyright Italian Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Activities / Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze, not to be reproduced or copied.

Data was conceived to highlight the technical and structural peculiarities of Arab-Islamic manuscripts, in a description that moves from the outer to the inner parts of the specimens. This kind of description could help conservators and restorers, including those less familiar to this area, to establish a hierarchical restoring intervention list.

The last section was dedicated to Conservation and Restoration Data: the conservation conditions were described in three main graduations that consider both the book binding and book-block damages; according to this, it was indicated whether the manuscript can be used for consultation, independently or under a librarian's supervision, with further recommendations for handling the specimen, including use of particular book-rests or facilities. An extra field was conceived for the description of damage: for each manuscript it was indicated the kind of damage (mould, insects, ink acidity, use damages) and the involved book elements (cover, sewing, writing material). Then eventual previous restoring interventions were described; as regards to this, some bad interventions from either technical or philological point of view were noticed. It was also decided to add to this section a last entry related to "Further Remarks" in which any other element external to the codex could be noted, for example smells, remains of plant leaves or other materials due to the inappropriate use of the codices, to external contaminations or damages, or to traditional customs.

The different histories behind the manuscripts in the BNCF collections influenced their conservation condition. It is not simple to draft a summary diagram of the damages according to the manuscripts' provenance or particular collection, but, as a first step of this project, it was possible to determine specific groups of manuscripts that, more or less, reflect a common standard of conservative status.

The census will be subsequently used as a starting point for the planned MANUMED digitisation project, both in terms of the manuscripts data already collected and of the preliminary knowledge of their conservation status, as it will help the conservators to determine which manuscripts need conservation interventions prior to the digitisation process.

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### **Diagnostic analysis and restoration of Ms. Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei e Corsiniana, Conti Rossini, Et. 70.**

The research and restoration of manuscript Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei e Corsiniana, Conti Rossini Et. 70 (Psalter, 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century) was conducted, within the framework of a B.A. course in Methods and technologies for the conservation and restoration of book heritage at the Faculty of Arts of the University of Rome "Tor Vergata", with the idea of gaining insight in the materials and techniques of Ethiopian manuscript production that would enable to approach knowingly the restoration. It was the first time that the cognitive scientific methods of inquiry that have been used in various spheres of library and archive – and generally cultural heritage – work were applied to an Ethiopian manuscript.

The preliminary codicological analysis aimed at identifying the type of stitching and the connection between the quires and the wooden boards of the binding, defining the structure of the quires and providing measurements for the various layout aspects (number of columns, text size, margin width, number of lines, etc.). It was followed by a series of scientific analytic and diagnostic procedures conducted by the Laboratory of Biology, Chemistry and Technology of the ICPAL (Istituto Centrale per il Restauro e la Conservazione del Patrimonio Archivistico e Librario, Rome) and the Laboratory of Biological Investigations of the ISCR (Istituto Superiore per la Conservazione ed il Restauro, Rome) on the parchment, inks, threads and wood of the binding, in order to identify the origin and nature of the materials used. Finally, conservation and restoration measures were carried out.

Among the techniques used was the non-destructive molecular spectroscopy Raman, based on the different light diffusion characteristics of molecules. Scattered radiation is material-specific and the response is visible in the form of a spectrum that allows seeing what substances are present. The analysis of binding threads revealed their collagen nature, which corresponds to what one knows from historical sources: in Ethiopia, beside threads of vegetable origin (cotton, linen and other natural fibers), those of animal origin were in use (beef, goat or sheep intestines, or tendons from cattle thighs).

Another tool used was SEM (Scanning Electron Mi-