



## Comparative Oriental Manuscript Studies Newsletter No. 5

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of the population history of Arabia and its cultural areas: a SIG of the Arabian peninsula has been elaborated which contains different groups of geo-referenced maps. The whole archaeological data published by the Saudi Arabian Department of Antiquities in Aţlal has been integrated. This SIG is compatible with the one previously done on Yemen. (2) Study of the geography of writing in Arabia and the constitution of a literary language: every site where inscriptions have been found has been integrated in the SIG. Presently, all Sabaic texts are being integrated in the database Corpus of South Arabian Inscriptions (<http://csai.humnet.unipi.it/csai/html/jor/index.html>) of the University of Pisa. It will be the basis for a new Sabaic grammar.

(3) Critical edition of the first Qur'āns: this task, on the very old Qur'āns of Ṣan'ā', has been transferred to another project, Coranica, sponsored by the ANR and the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft. (4) From Nabataean to Arabic: the publication of 800 Nabataean and transitory texts from North-West Arabia is in print.

A common workshop on scripts in the Middle East and Arabia during the centuries studied will be organised in April 2013 to stimulate exchanges on the results of the project and on the question of script.

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## Individual research in manuscript studies

In this issue:

*The Christian Mediaeval Iranian Codicology: an Unexplored Territory*, Chiara Barbati

*The Topos of Epiphanius in Western Thebes (Egypt): A New Chronology ...*, Renate Dekker

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### ***The Christian Mediaeval Iranian Codicology: an Unexplored Territory***

The Christianisation of large parts of central and south-central Asia goes back to the latter part of the fourth century reaching – at the latest from the beginning of the eighth century – the Turfan oasis,<sup>1</sup> as testified by the discovery of Christian texts coming from the ruins of the monastery of Shūi-pang near Bulayiq, approximately ten kilometres north of Turfan. These texts consist chiefly of fragments<sup>2</sup> dating from the ninth and tenth centuries in Syriac (the official language of the so-called Church of the East), Sogdian and Old Turkish (local vernaculars were also permitted in the Church service)<sup>3</sup> in Nestorian, secular Sogdian and Uygur script, New Persian in Nestorian script, Middle Persian in Pahlavi script, and one line of the psalter in Greek. Briefly, they include religious works, psalters, hymn-books and service books as well as secular documents from those religious and monastic communities.<sup>4</sup>

The Sogdian material<sup>5</sup> consists of circa 500 fragments in the Sogdian language in Nestorian (East Syriac) script<sup>6</sup> and nearly 50 fragments in the Sogdian language in secular Sogdian script.<sup>7</sup> The first part of the corpus, in Nestorian script, contains the so called Sogdian Manuscript C 2<sup>8</sup> published by Nicholas Sims-Williams in 1985 and concerning the story of life, conversion and death of several martyrs; a Gospel lectionary comprising substantial portions of the Gospels of Matthew, Luke, and John in Sogdian with the rubrics in Syriac and nine instances where the original Syriac text is immediately followed by the Sogdian translation (a peculiarity which we do not find in other Christian Sogdian manuscripts); several bilingual Gospel lectionaries, in which the original Syriac and the Sogdian translation alternate phrase by phrase; two small fragments from a single page, the verso of which contains the beginning of the Gospel of Matthew in Syriac and Sogdian; a bilingual lectionary of the Pauline Epistles, with rubrics indicating the psalm verses to be sung before and after each Epistle; a psalter with headings in which the first verse of each psalm is given in Syriac as well as in Sogdian; and a unique fragment containing part of Psalm 33 (32 of the Septuagint), with headlines in Greek. It is

<sup>5</sup> I intentionally omit the discussion of the origin of the Middle Persian material in Pahlavi script, i.e., the thirteen fragmentary pages of the so-called Pahlavi psalter, as it is part of an independent research carried out by Durkin-Meisterernst. See Durkin-Meisterernst 2006:1–19.

<sup>6</sup> See Barbati 2012:177–201; and Sims-Williams 2012.

<sup>7</sup> See Schwartz 1974:257–61; and Reck 2008:191–205.

<sup>8</sup> E 27 in the new classification system: Sims-Williams 2012:99, where E means “[Church of the] East”, *ibidem* 16.

<sup>1</sup> It is one of the three branches of the northern Silk Road, in present-day Xinjiang, Uyghur Autonomous Region of the People's Republic of China.

<sup>2</sup> Concerning the Sogdian material, please note that none of the Christian Sogdian texts has survived in a complete form: it means that we have no colophon (which in Syriac tradition is generally put at the end of a manuscript).

<sup>3</sup> Because of the intensive commercial activities of the Sogdian traders along the Silk road, the Sogdian language was adopted by the “Church of the East” to spread its own message in Central Asia.

<sup>4</sup> See [www.bbaw.de/forschung/turfanforschung](http://www.bbaw.de/forschung/turfanforschung) for an overview. This material was found at the beginning of the twentieth century by four German archaeological expeditions and is currently preserved at the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities. On the expeditions, see Sundermann 2004.

revealing for our discussion that the first catalogue of the manuscript fragments in Iranian languages in Syriac script coming from the Turfan oasis was published by Sims-Williams only in 2012.<sup>9</sup>

The second part of the corpus, in secular Sogdian script, consists of the *Creed*, published by Friedrich Müller in 1913 and the end of an as yet unidentified prayer with a shortened version of the final *Gloria Patri* “in the will of the Father, the Son and Holy Spirit, for ever and ever, amen”, which usually follows psalms; some pages of the Book of Psalms, edited by Martin Schwartz in 1974, and in 1982 in the second revised edition;<sup>10</sup> two fragments of a Melkite Book of Psalms, several fragments of different contents (prayers, homilies, and secular texts, like commercial transactions, in which the priest takes an active part) and twenty eight fragments belonging to a single manuscript (judging from the identical handwriting) with yet unidentified contents.

Ever since the discovery of this corpus, the main issues have been its digitisation and edition. This implies an extraordinary philological-linguistic work that has been carried out by some of the most distinguished scholars in Iranian studies.<sup>11</sup> It is now time, however, to take a further step and to consider these texts *in toto* in the cultural-historical context from which they arose. This calls for approaches from several sides. The translational dimension of this corpus is the most obvious: Christian Sogdian literature aims at very close formal and semantic correspondence to the Syriac Vorlage. It testifies that the Christianisation of Central Asia passed through an intensive translational activity, which included making choices of language, script and images. This leads to a codicological approach, which is highly relevant but has so far never been applied to this material. Other important aspects include the transfer of texts and knowledge and cultural encounter and exchange. The Christian Sogdian corpus can help to elucidate the missionary history of Central Asia and in particular the relations between the centre and the peripheral regions of the “Church of the East”. Beyond this Christian context it is important to keep in mind that the Sogdian Christian communities along the Silk Road in Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages co-existed in an heterogeneous environment with Manichaean and Buddhist communities.

Of all the aforementioned points, codicology seems to be the most neglected one. There has been no at-

<sup>9</sup> See Sims-Williams 2012. The catalogue of the Syriac texts coming from the Turfan oasis by Hunter-Dickens is forthcoming.

<sup>10</sup> It is noteworthy that this text is not written in the Nestorian script but in Sogdian script. In this way it was readable for a wider public which was familiar with the script. See Reck 2008:197.

<sup>11</sup> I allow myself to remember the late Werner Sundermann.

tempt at a complete codicological survey of the Christian Sogdian material. The state-of-the-art in this field consists in isolated observations on various particular questions, but there is no cohesive, inclusive and systematic study. Christian Iranian<sup>12</sup> codicology is an unexplored territory, a field which has yet to be developed, and one that can not be separated from Syriac codicology. On the one hand, the Christian Sogdian material urgently calls for a codicological survey in its own right. On the other hand, and just as urgently, it calls for an investigation in connection with the Syriac manuscript tradition. In other words, it is time to try to answer the question: which kind of manuscript tradition *lato sensu* emerges from the surviving corpus of Christian Middle Iranian texts?

In 1974, 1975 and 1981, Werner Sundermann edited the Sogdian Gospel lectionary C 5<sup>13</sup> in three articles providing transliteration,<sup>14</sup> translation, and philological-linguistic commentary and adding a draft of the number of the lines as well as of the numbering of the quires in this text and, generally, in Christian Sogdian manuscripts.<sup>15</sup> In his 1985 publication of the Sogdian manuscript C 2, Sims-Williams offered interesting considerations on the numbering of the quires at the Bulaïyîq scriptorium, taking into account at the same time the Syriac tradition as well as a possible influence of the Manichaean tradition.<sup>16</sup> In 2008, Christiane Reck published an article on Christian Sogdian fragments in Sogdian secular script in the Berlin Turfan collection outlining the use of brown or black ink for writing the text and the use of coloured inks for titles and punctuation marks as well as the presence of a cross on the outer margin of the verso side.<sup>17</sup> Also in 2008, Desmond Durkin-Meisterernst published an article on the Manichaean manuscript tradition which has important comparative implications for our discussion.<sup>18</sup> Regarding the nature of the Manichaean manuscript tradition the scholar asserts that “it is very difficult to answer whether the Manichaean books represents an Iranian or a Syriac tradition”<sup>19</sup>. Sims-Williams’s excellent new 2012 catalogue of the Iranian<sup>20</sup> manuscripts in Syriac script in the Berlin Turfan collection contains important codicological information on each fragment including

<sup>12</sup> I am focusing on Christian Sogdian but that is true for Christian Middle Persian and Christian New Persian material, too.

<sup>13</sup> E 5 according to the new classification system: Sims-Williams 2012:28 where E means “[Church of the] East”, *ibidem* 16.

<sup>14</sup> In Sogdian studies, we do not have an accepted system of transcription.

<sup>15</sup> See Sundermann 1981:85–87.

<sup>16</sup> See Sims-Williams 1985:14–16.

<sup>17</sup> See Reck 2008:194.

<sup>18</sup> See Durkin-Meisterernst 2008:1–15.

<sup>19</sup> Durkin-Meisterernst *op. cit.* 13–14.

<sup>20</sup> Mostly in Sogdian with the exception of two manuscripts in New Persian.

physical description, dimensions and written area.<sup>21</sup> In a recent article on the allographic phenomenon within the Christian Sogdian tradition, I have given some data on the formal aspects including writing materials, ink, headlines, decorative punctuation points, punctuation, columns, ornaments, colophon, dating and quires, trying to contextualise these aspects.<sup>22</sup> Currently, I am preparing a monograph based on my PhD dissertation, *Il manoscritto sogdiano cristiano C 5. Una nuova edizione*<sup>23</sup>, in which I try to discuss such aspects in a broader way. Among the most peculiar features of the of the Bulayīq scriptorium is, according to my opinion, the drawing of a cross appearing on the upper outer margin of the verso side of each page (s. fig. 1). I am currently working closely on this topic, trying to find explanations as to the varying shapes of the cross and to its function in the manuscripts.

We are still far from a comprehensive codicological study of Christian Iranian manuscript fragments coming from the Turfan oasis. Many fundamental questions remain to be answered. What about the *mise en page*? the size, proportion, layout, lines of writing, columns? the structuring of contents: titles, rubrication, decoration? Why does the cross seem to be the only decorative element besides combinations of red and black dots? Is this a “cultural question”, as Alain Desreumaux suggested regarding decorative aspects of the Christian Palestinian Aramaic manuscripts during the COMSt workshop held in Arles on 9–13 October 2012? And if it is so, what is the relevant cultural context, considering that the Manichaean and the Syriac manuscripts attest richer decorative traditions? Finally, what about the relationships between this tradition, the Syriac one and the particular Central Asia milieu in the time from the eighth to eleventh century in connection to all these questions?

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<sup>21</sup> See Sims-Williams 2012:11–18.

<sup>22</sup> Barbati 2012:193–97.

<sup>23</sup> Barbati in preparation.

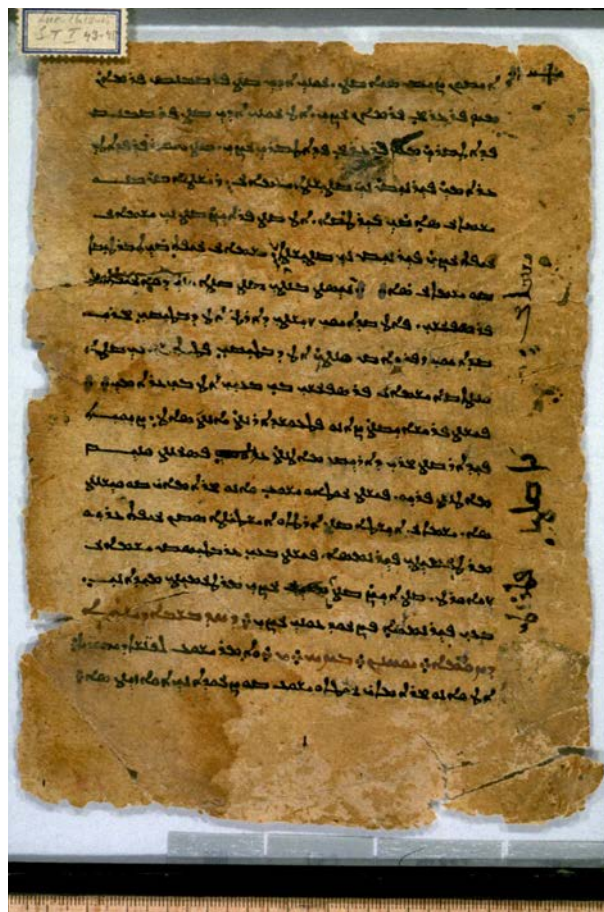


Fig. 1. Sogdian Gospel lectionary Ms. C 5 (E 5 according to Sims-Williams 2012:28-43), fol. 153v. Holdings of the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities in the State Library Berlin - Preussischer Kulturbesitz. Photo courtesy of the Turfanforschung Digital Archive, Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities.

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