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The Trials and Tribulations of a Palimpsest Reader

Abstract: This article deals with the history of various methods to read palimpsests with Christian Palestinian Aramaic and Syriac texts (fifth to seventh century) of diverse makings and origins, and the different results achieved through them in the last forty years. Early Christian Palestinian Aramaic and a variety of Syriac texts can be found hidden under a number of scripts such as Arabic, Christian Palestinian Aramaic, Georgian, Greek, Hebrew, and Syriac. Some have even been overwritten two or three times, which makes deciphering them an arduous task. The Hebrew square script tends to be particularly awkward, as it can cover almost the whole lower script, which is then at times difficult to bring out with any technical methods, including even multispectral imaging. It will be demonstrated that such obstacles could and can be overcome with a number of approaches.

1 The beginning

When we think and speak of palimpsests, we often mean overwritten texts hiding under one or more scripts. In most instances, such palimpsest manuscripts are made of animal skin, which required a long procedure to prepare as writing sheets. The animals used to produce the precious writing material, in the form of parchment or vellum, were sheep, goats, and calves. Rare and time-consuming to produce, this material was deployed to be written upon until the introduction of paper. To obtain a sheet with the script erased, generations of scribes tried to scrape off the ink, used acids such as lemon juice, and employed other methods to remove the ink from the parchment. Iron gall ink, however, turned out to be rather resistant, as it eats into the parchment and often was not possible to erase it completely. Sometimes the scribes did not even attempt to get rid of the texts and overwrote them once or several times, as did, for example, the Georgian monk Ioane Zosime in the tenth century.¹ It so happens that very early, rare, and even unique text material has been preserved underneath texts dated centuries later, which have been of importance for Greek, Latin, and many other language trans-

¹ Brock 2012b.

missions like Syriac,² among them languages used only in Late Antiquity such as Caucasian Albanian³ and Christian Palestinian Aramaic (CPA). For the most part, the latter can be studied only in this type of hidden texts.⁴ The majority are early Bible witnesses⁵ and hagiographical,⁶ apocryphal,⁷ theological,⁸ and liturgical texts,⁹ but also philosophical treatises¹⁰ and science texts such as medical and pharmacological descriptions by Galen in Syriac translation¹¹ or, as a very exceptional example, the Archimedes Codex,¹² all of which were handed down to us only through this kind of reuse. Apart from the overwriting, the centuries-long storage and often maltreatment of the parchment material have had their effects on the early witnesses, including the practice of treating barely visible passages with chemical reagents in the second half of the nineteenth century.¹³ With regard to reading palimpsests, they have been a challenge ever since the first scholars tried to figure out what is hidden underneath the many scripts in very early dated manuscripts. In the beginning, one had no other option than to read what could be extracted from the visible lower text with one's own eyes. Despite today having

2 Brock 2011 and 2012a.

3 Gippert et al. 2008–2010.

4 Müller-Kessler 1991, 1–4; Müller-Kessler 2023c.

5 For the New Testament (NT) in Greek, see Parker 2008, 70–74; for the Septuagint, Rahlfs 1907; for the NT in Latin, Parker 2008, 75–76; for NT and Old Testament (OT) in CPA, Baars 1960; Baars 1961; Goshen-Gottstein 1973; Müller-Kessler and Sokoloff 1997; Müller-Kessler and Sokoloff 1998a; Müller-Kessler and Sokoloff 1998b; Müller-Kessler 1992; Müller-Kessler 1993; Müller-Kessler 2019b; Müller-Kessler 2020b; Müller-Kessler 2021a; Müller-Kessler 2022a; Müller-Kessler 2023b; and Müller-Kessler 2024; for the NT in Syriac, Brock 2016. For the Peshitta, hardly anything is extant in palimpsest form.

6 Rather noteworthy have been some rare or even unknown martyrdoms in CPA such as that of Proklos and Hilaros (Müller-Kessler and Kessler 2023) or the *Life and Death of Patriklos*, follower of Pamphilos of Caesarea (d. 309) (Müller-Kessler 2019a).

7 These include some of the earliest attested versions and witnesses of the *Dormition of Mary* in CPA (Müller-Kessler 2018 and 2019b) and the Syriac text running under *Obsequies* (Müller-Kessler 2020a and 2022c).

8 For example, the *Catecheses* of Cyril of Jerusalem (Müller-Kessler and Sokoloff 1999; Müller-Kessler 2021b), or homilies by pseudo-John Chrysostom (Brock 1999b). See also Müller-Kessler 2014, 288–289, and Müller-Kessler 2022a, 35–40.

9 This concerns the earliest versions of the translation from Greek into CPA of the Old Jerusalem Lectionary; see Müller-Kessler 2023c.

10 Not yet published from Sin. arab. NF 68.

11 For more information, see Kessler 2016.

12 For further descriptions of the Archimedes Codex, see Noel *apud* Netz et al. 2011, 21–75.

13 Land 1875, 185; Gibson 1893, 64–65; Lewis 1910, III. See Emanuel Zingg's contribution in the present volume.

many technical appliances and innovations, no methodological rules can be established, as each palimpsest has its individual challenges.

2 Working in various libraries and collections

2.1 Cambridge, Oxford, London

I started my early scholarly career forty years ago by diving directly into the reading and decipherment of early palimpsest manuscripts from the fifth to seventh century. One of the most renowned ones among them has been Codex Climaci Rescriptus (CCR), at that time housed in the library of Westminster College, Cambridge, as a legacy of Agnes Smith Lewis and Dunlop Margaret Gibson left to the college, with the exception of one folio which has been kept since the 1920s or 1930s in the Mingana Collection, Birmingham (Mingana, Syr. no. 637).¹⁴ CCR is a collection of diverse manuscripts which have been overwritten by a ninth-century *ser̄to* hand with the Syriac translation of the *Scala paradisi* (Fig. 1) and the *Liber ad pastorem* (Fig. 2) by John Climacus (d. 649). These lower texts, coming from twelve manuscripts (seven in CPA¹⁵ and five in Greek),¹⁶ might have been produced in the fifth to seventh century. The palaeographic character of the scripts differs quite considerably in the CPA as well as in the Greek text, and thus they do not derive from one and the same time. CCR was acquired over a period of ten years by Lewis and her sister Gibson in Egypt (1895, 1905, 1906) in batches and single leaves,¹⁷ and the Birmingham folio by Alphonse Mingana.¹⁸

The other relevant manuscript contains *The Story of the Forty Martyrs of Sinai and Eulogios the Stone-Cutter*, overwritten in a ninth-century Arabic script, still stored at Westminster College¹⁹ except for one leaf, now in the Max Freiherr von Oppenheim Stiftung in Cologne (Fig. 3).

¹⁴ Duensing 1938 does not mention from whom or where he had the folio at his disposal. He obviously studied the folio years before for decipherment; see Black 1939, 201; Mingana 1939, XXV.

¹⁵ According to the new subdivision as found in Müller-Kessler and Sokoloff 1997, 50–53; Müller-Kessler 2019c; Müller-Kessler 2023c, 209, 212–214; and Müller-Kessler 2023d, 148–151.

¹⁶ Moir 1956; Moir 1957; Williams et al. 2022, 505–506.

¹⁷ Lewis 1897, CXXXVIII–CXXXIX (published with the eleventh-century Lewis Lectionary); Lewis 1909, XI.

¹⁸ Duensing 1938, 44–45; Black 1939, 201.

¹⁹ Lewis 1912; Müller-Kessler and Sokoloff 1996.

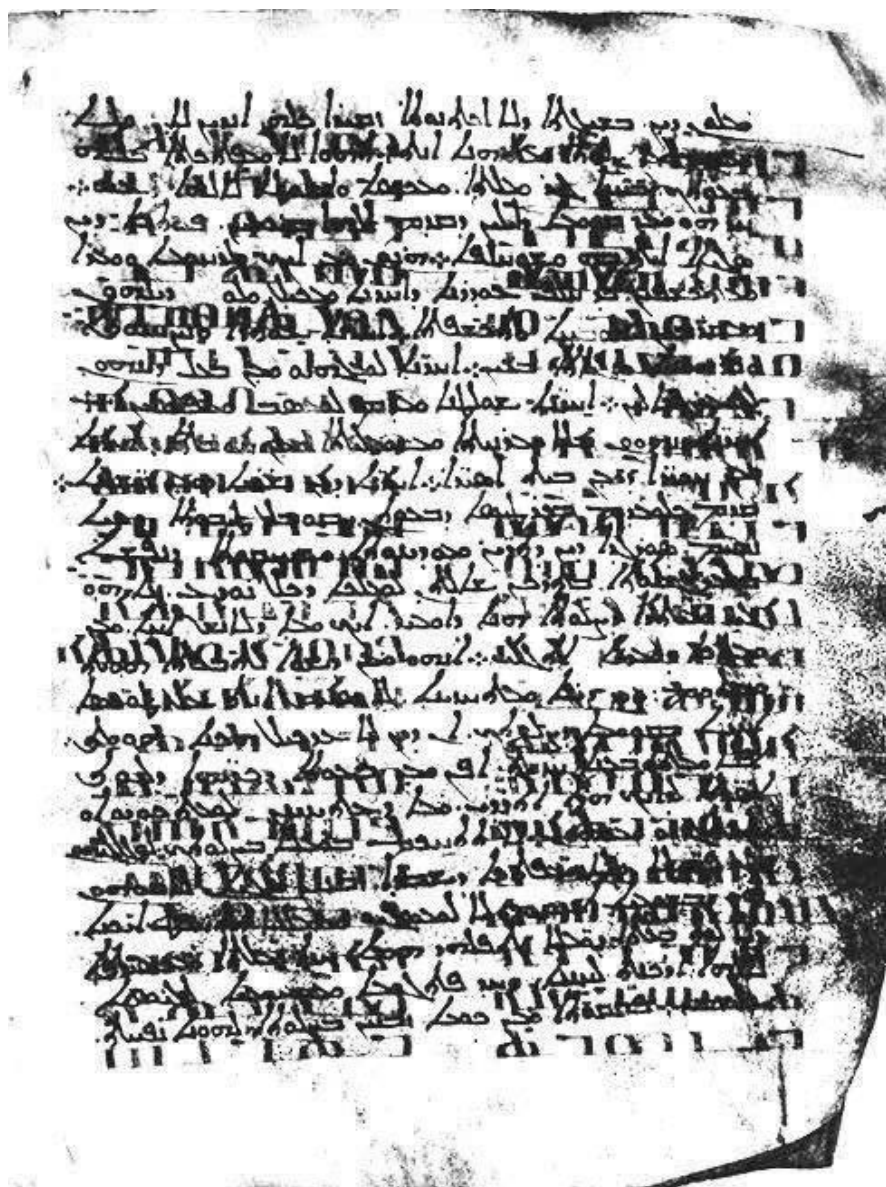


Fig. 1: Washington DC, Bible Museum, CCR2B, fol. 126v: Romans 7:6–11; Lewis 1909, pl. I.



Fig. 2: Sinai, St Catherine's Monastery, syr. NF 38, fol. 5^v: CCR2B, 1 Corinthians 12:17b–24a; © St Catherine's Monastery, Mount Sinai.

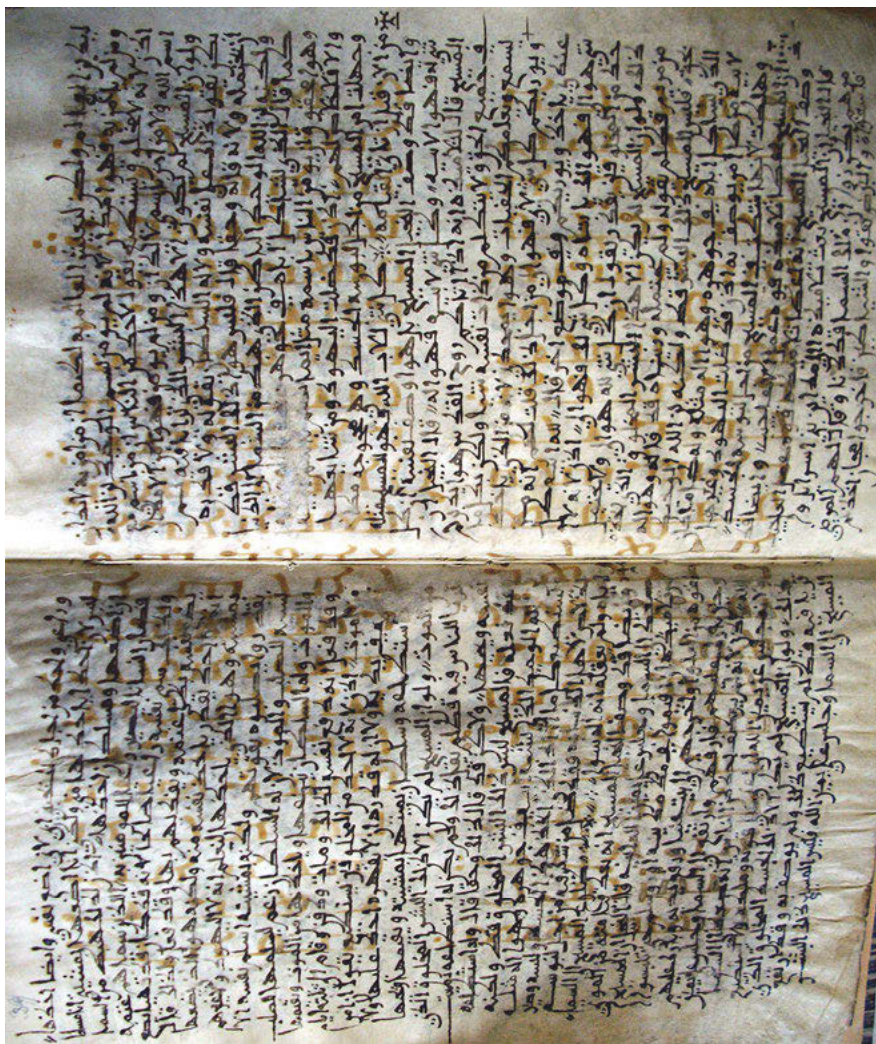


Fig. 3: Cologne, Max Freiherr von Oppenheim Stiftung, no shelf mark, fol. 34^v/39^r: *Forty Martyrs of Sinai*; © Max Freiherr von Oppenheim Stiftung, Cologne.

The goal of my studies on all these palimpsests was to prepare a reference grammar for CPA from scratch.²⁰ This Western Aramaic dialect from the early period (fifth to

²⁰ Müller-Kessler 1991, XIII–XIV.

seventh centuries) is known to have survived, with a few exceptions, only in the form of palimpsest manuscripts. These manuscripts were in great need of collation so that non-existent grammatical forms or ghost words could be avoided in this new philological reference work, since the old readings were from previous editions published eighty to hundred years earlier. It was clear from the beginning, as my training in Assyriology taught me, that only through the re-reading of the originals a better result could be achieved for a reliable text basis. With generous funding, I travelled to Cambridge, Oxford, London, Rome, St Petersburg (then Leningrad), Göttingen,²¹ and later Philadelphia,²² and worked with the originals. The Istanbul material was not among the researched objects, since this fragmentary material from the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus remains inaccessible due to its unknown catalogue numbers in the Museum of Turkish and Islamic Art.²³

In the beginning, I was able to read the individual palimpsest folios only with the naked eye, and results depended on the light conditions in the various libraries. By chance I was permitted access to CCR and the manuscript of *The Story of the Forty Martyrs and Eulogios the Stone-Cutter*²⁴ at my leisure. To my utter surprise the key to the library of Westminster College, Cambridge and the adjacent tower, where the manuscripts were stored at that time (CCR today Bible Museum, Washington), was handed over to me, and studying was possible for three months whenever the light was favourable. This was advantageous for better reading, but on some folios the script was too faint underneath the Syriac and Arabic hands, and even holding them in the afternoon sunlight at the window was not of much help. One folio from CCR, containing 1 Corinthians 15:42b–49a, had been treated with a chemical reagent in the time of Lewis, and except for some lines at the bottom and top of the verso nothing is

21 Financed by the city of Berlin (Nachwuchsförderungsgesetz).

22 Financed by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG) during a post-doc at Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore.

23 Only Dominique Sourdél and Janine Sourdél Thomine worked on some relevant Arabic text material in the 1960s, but the shelf numbers of the CPA material remain unknown. See Sourdél and Sourdél Thomine 1964 and 1965.

24 One bifolio (34/39) could not be collated at that time, since Lewis had lent the manuscript to Friedrich Schulthess in 1913–1914 (Schulthess 1914, 253), who had a single folio from a private collector at his disposal for study. With the return of the manuscript, this very folio (23/24, Lewis's foliation, published in Schulthess 1902, 258–260) came along by error, but bifolio 34/39 stayed behind in Germany, and its whereabouts had not been known until 2016, when my colleague Tamás Visi drew my attention to its storage in the Max Freiherr von Oppenheim Stiftung at the Orientalisches Seminar, Universität zu Köln. There does not exist any correspondence by Lewis concerning this accidental mix up of the two folios. The black-and-white photograph of bifolio 32/35 published with the edition gives a glimpse of the legibility of the manuscript in general and shows the faint lower script in some parts.

legible today.²⁵ It also looks like the subscription between 2 Corinthians and Galatians must have been visible underneath at the time Lewis prepared the reading of the text for her edition.²⁶ One amusing remark found in the first edition of CCR is by Lewis herself: she complains in her introduction that the lower script came out too clearly in the first photographs for the facsimiles in the book, which she had ordered from the Cambridge photographer. She did not want the reader of the edition to get a wrong idea of the legibility of the single manuscript fragments, which in reality were less readable for the decipherer of the original.²⁷ A new approach to this codex made it clear that the folios written in the typical CPA uncial had to be further subdivided, as they belonged to more manuscripts than Lewis's sub-numbers implied,²⁸ but this has been a question of content rather than deciphering the text. Meanwhile, the missing eight folios of the eighteenth quire came to our attention in a manuscript from the New Finds at St Catherine's Monastery on Mount Sinai (hereafter: Sin.), syr. NF 38. The text was at once recognised as belonging to this very codex by Sebastian Brock,²⁹ despite the poor quality of the photograph, the moment the catalogue by Sister Philothée came out.³⁰ During the Sinai Palimpsests Project,³¹ I was entrusted with deciphering the lower texts and attributing the upper Syriac text of this quire, which turned out to contain missing parts from 1–2 Corinthians of CCR2B.³² Despite

25 Although not mentioned as such in Lewis's introduction, it has to be explained that the script is today hardly visible on the verso of this folio and therefore also did not show up under ultraviolet light in the 1990s during the reading preparation for the text edition of the *Epistles*. Lewis's readings of this folio are nearly complete but cannot be restored today; see Lewis 1909, 132, and Müller-Kessler and Sokoloff 1998a, 86.

26 See Lewis 1909, 144 and Müller-Kessler and Sokoloff 1998a, 107.

27 Lewis 1909, XVI. One wishes that all folios had been photographed with this excellent photographic skill at that time. The scholarly twins Lewis and Gibson would have had the means to finance it. It also highlights, however, the difficulty of reading such text material at that time. This should be taken into consideration before young scholars, who have multispectral images at their disposal, make disparaging remarks, forgetting about the working conditions at that time.

28 With the identification of the text passages under Sin. syr. NF 38 from the New Finds at St Catherine's Monastery, another subdivision was possible for the manuscript containing the *Acts of the Apostles* and the manuscript with the Pauline Letters; see Müller-Kessler 2023d, 150. This applies also to the new subdivisions concerning the Greek folios, as recently signalled by Malik 2022, 737–738; Williams et al. 2022, 505–506.

29 Brock 2012a, 13.

30 Philothée 2008, 422.

31 <<http://sinaipalimpsests.org/>>. All web addresses (URLs) referred to in this article were last accessed on 12 June 2024.

32 Müller-Kessler 2023d.

the help of multispectral images, the salvaging of certain text passages from the palimpsest folios required some time to reach a satisfactory basis for its *editio princeps*.³³

Far more of a challenge was reading and deciphering the lower script in the diverse palimpsest fragments of the Taylor-Schechter Collection (hereafter: T-S), housed at Cambridge University Library, in 1983–1998. It was still the simple and primitive reading of the 1980s, although the method of using ultraviolet lamps had been introduced long before.³⁴ Each fragment in this collection has been sewn into glass (actually a kind of perspex) and mounted into large and heavy volumes, which were to be left lying flat on the table. Reading was only possible during library hours, which were of course shorter than in other reading rooms. The light was the typical overhead artificial neon light, which might be useful for any book reader but not for a palimpsest decipherer. A dark room and ultraviolet lamps were not provided in these years. Nevertheless, a few badly preserved fragments, in which the underneath script was clearly legible, could be deciphered and subsequently identified as containing a number of biblical texts (Genesis, 2 Kingdoms [2 Samuel], Isaiah, Jeremiah, Acts, 1 Corinthians, John).³⁵ This was more than a surprise, since Moshe H. Gottstein had not identified all the Old Testament material for the first collection of all passages and citations in the monograph *The Bible in the Syropalestinian Version*, a collaborative work with Hanan Shirun.³⁶ Additionally, regarding the description of palimpsests underneath Rabbinic texts from the Cairo Genizah a few years later by Michael Sokoloff and Joseph Yahalom, no identification could be achieved for these fragments.³⁷ Finally, it was also possible to work on the whole set of palimpsest fragments back home in the form of black-and-white bromide prints, since I could not spend more than three months in Cambridge and Oxford in 1983, returning there only sporadically later in the 1980s and 1990s. I ordered them as ultraviolet photographs. Using these bromide photo prints, however, requires that one already has some experience with the reading of originals; the untrained reader will be at loss. Extraordinarily, in some passages the lower script came out much clearer in the black-and-white prints than in the originals, but this could differ from one pal-

33 Müller-Kessler 2023d.

34 Moir 1956, 5, n. 2 speaks of a reading aid in the form of ultraviolet light for the Greek sections of CCR. He obviously must have had a private lamp at hand, since Westminster College in the 1980s did not own one.

35 Müller-Kessler 1992; Müller-Kessler 1993; Müller-Kessler and Sokoloff 1997, 19, 99–100; Müller-Kessler and Sokoloff 1998a, 189–190; Müller-Kessler and Sokoloff 1998b, 46–49, 88–89.

36 Goshen-Gottstein 1973.

37 Sokoloff and Yahalom 1978.

impsest fragment to another. On some of them, the *scriptio inferior* was legible neither in the manuscript reading room nor in the photos. It took another thirty years (2023) for five very deteriorated folios from the Taylor-Schechter and Lewis-Gibson (L-G) collections (T-S 12.209^r, Fig. 4; 12.759; 16.328^r, Fig. 5,³⁸ 12.758;³⁹ L-G Glass 1a^r, Fig. 6, and 1b⁴⁰) to be identified with the help of an ultraviolet reading lamp or a torch in a dark room within the Manuscript Reading Room⁴¹ (see Section 3.4 below), which today is the general manuscript reading room in the Cambridge University Library, since the Taylor-Schechter Collection unit had a special reading room in the 1980s and 1990s.



Fig. 4: Cambridge, University Library, T-S 12.759^r: *Pseudo-Caesarius*; © Cambridge University Library, Cambridge.

³⁸ Müller-Kessler 2023b, 104, 107–112, 116–117, 119–121; two articles on the biblical fragments are in preparation.

³⁹ Müller-Kessler 2023a and 2024.

⁴⁰ Müller-Kessler and Kessler forthcoming.

⁴¹ Müller-Kessler 2023b.



Fig. 5: Cambridge, University Library, T-S 16.328, fols 1^r, 2^r: 3 Kingdoms 11:5–12a; 11:32b–36; © Cambridge University Library, Cambridge.

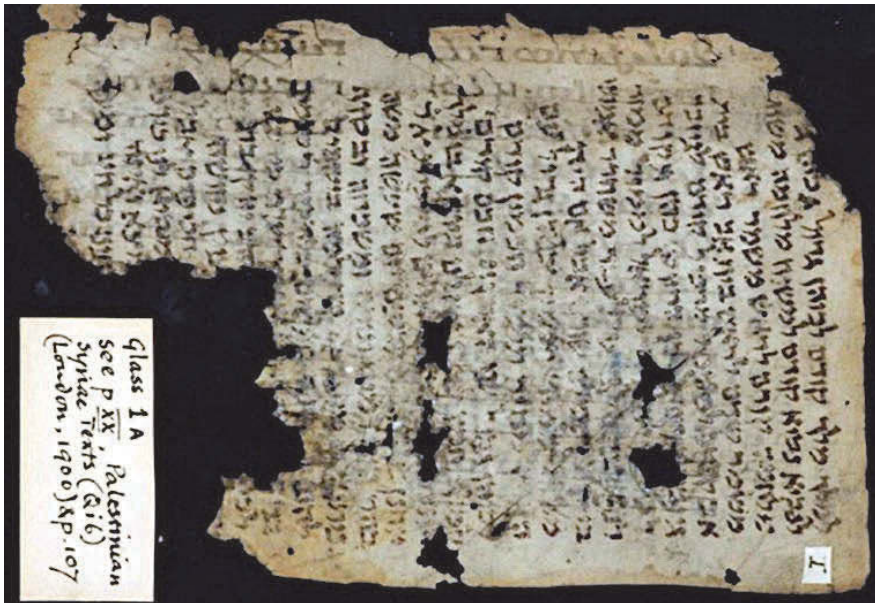


Fig. 6: Cambridge, University Library, L-G Glass 1a^r: Ioannes Ieiunator, *Sermo de poenitentia*; © Cambridge University Library, Cambridge.

The old Oriental Manuscript Reading Room within the Bodleian Library in Oxford (today the Weston Library, hereafter: Bodl.), with another collection of Genizah finds, had similar working conditions, despite having the ancient and comfortable atmosphere and charm of an old library. The single fragments from the Cairo Genizah are either kept under glass (Syr. c. 32–33 [P]) or are bound into book volumes, which have to be forced open with heavy weights to be able to read a single folio. In some of them, the lower script is very faint, especially in one Jeremiah fragment (Heb. e., fol. 43^v), which gives a rather greasy impression of the parchment. The reading of the erased script is rather difficult and the biblical text still cannot be fully deciphered today. However, some reverse sides of Jeremiah (Bodl., Heb. e. 73, fol. 42^v; Heb. b. 13, fol. 13) and Lamentations (Heb. b. 13, fol. 12) finally were able to be read and subsequently published.⁴²

2.2 Göttingen and the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana

In between, in 1985, followed reading trips to the Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek in Göttingen (hereafter: SUB) and the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana (hereafter: BAV) in the year 1985. Again, both research libraries did not provide any additional helping devices so that palimpsest reading was only possible without ultraviolet light. The black-and-white prints of Vat.sir. 623 and 627 (Fig. 7) provided by the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana were not very helpful, especially for the parts where the script was too faint to study at home. Whether they are indeed ultraviolet photographs as ordered is doubtful, since the lower script does not come up in the photos as clearly as it should in this case.

⁴² Müller-Kessler 1992.

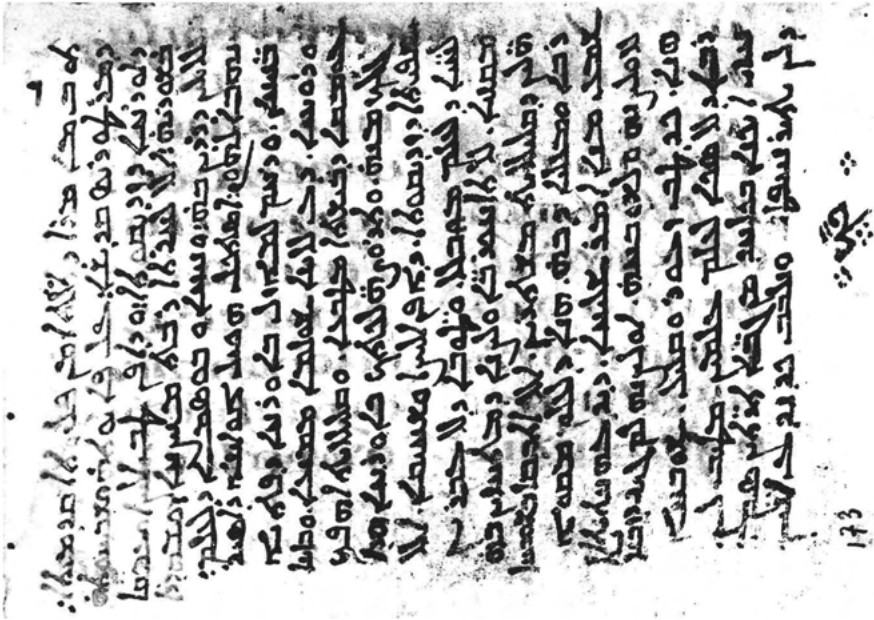
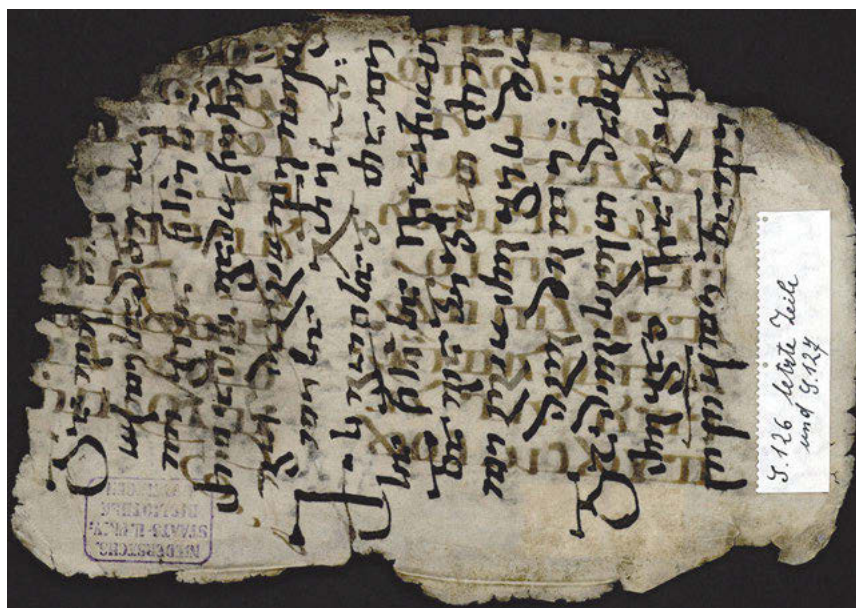


Fig. 7: BAV, Vat. sir. 623, fol. 173^r: Exodus 12:34–35b; 37b–39a; © Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vatican City.

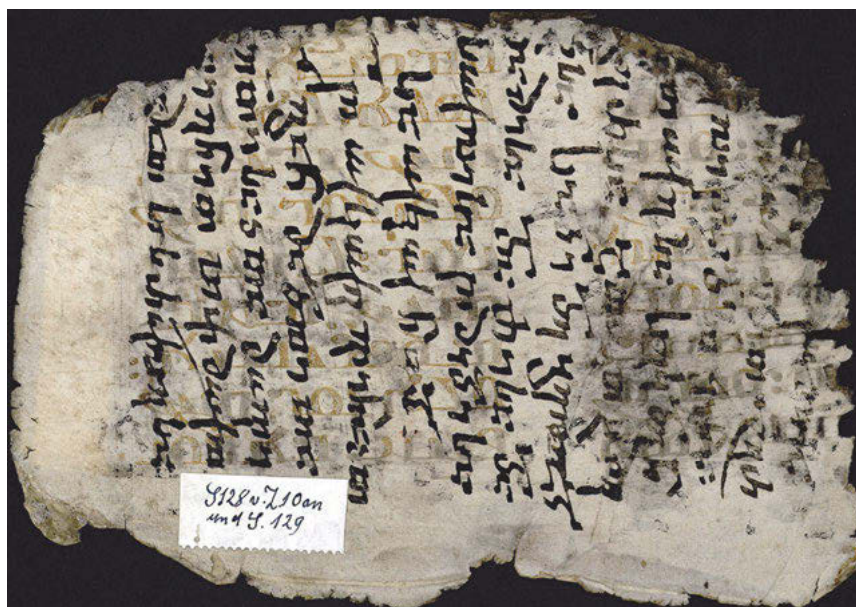
The staff was always very attentive and helpful at both libraries, but I had to try to read the palimpsests in the old-fashioned method. Since Hugo Duensing had done a proper job with the reading of the originals when he had them for private study, he provided a reliable text basis, and so it was only a question of verifying the readings and not deciphering the whole lot from scratch.⁴³ SUB produced in the meantime very good colour photos of the CPA palimpsest fragments from the Duensing Collection, in which Duensing's handwritten references are still attached (Figs 8a–b).⁴⁴

⁴³ Duensing 1906, 113–125.

⁴⁴ Duensing 1944; Duensing 1955, 117–118, 120–149, 150–152.



a



b

Figs 8a–b: SUB, Syr. 23, fol. 2¹/₃^v: Ephrem, *Sermo in adventum Domini*; © Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek, Göttingen.

2.3 St Petersburg

Another challenge concerning CPA manuscript collations was obtaining a working permit for the National Library of Russia (hereafter: NLR) in 1986 in St Petersburg, at that time Leningrad, to check the two manuscript parts of Sin. georg. 34 (I) and formerly Tsagareli 81 (I),⁴⁵ which had been taken to St Petersburg by Constantin von Tischendorf in 1855 and 1857.⁴⁶ Jan Pieter Nicolaas Land edited all passages of the lower script in CPA that were legible to him in his fourth volume of *Anecdota Syriaca*.⁴⁷ The other two separate folios are NLR, Greek, MS. 119⁴⁸ and Antonin Collection, EBP IIIB 958^r.⁴⁹ Although my mentor in Semitic languages Rudolf Macuch started writing to the library already in 1984, it took two years to receive an answer confirming that I could prepare my trip to Russia (Soviet Union). After four days of formalities, I was able to inspect these palimpsest folios, which had not been studied or rechecked since Land's publications in 1875 and Nina Pigulevskaya's manuscript description in 1960.⁵⁰ In October 1986, the manuscript reading room was open some days in the morning for eight hours and some days in the afternoon, including Sundays. Despite being a rather dark room with only a table lamp and a bit of light coming through tiny windows, a first collation was possible. In the 1990s followed several research trips with an ultraviolet lamp in my luggage. I worked in the same room, and the librarians never questioned my lamp. In contrast, one employee even offered to help me with my readings and suggested that one might develop something with a computer program to highlight the lower script. I found this very forthcoming, since none of the earlier librarians from any of the libraries had cared to provide me with anything to bring out the faint script, even in the form of an ultraviolet lamp. With the latter device, I could decipher the numerous unread passages and pages, especially in the folios containing the Old Jerusalem Lectionary⁵¹ and the unread pages and

⁴⁵ Tsagareli 1888, 233.

⁴⁶ Tischendorf 1855, 13; Tischendorf 1860, 49.

⁴⁷ Land 1875, 185–189 (Latin part), 165–224 (Syriac part).

⁴⁸ Pigulevskaya 1934, pl. XXIX–XXX. This leaf is very deteriorated but the reading with an ultraviolet lamp helped a bit in restoring the text; see Müller-Kessler and Sokoloff 1997, 126–127. It was the only example of a remaining psalter in CPA with a Eusebian hypothesis at that time. Only recently some more examples have surfaced under Sin. CPA NF frg. 12 (Brock with an Appendix by Müller-Kessler forthcoming).

⁴⁹ The Antonin folio from the Cairo Genizah find could be studied only in the 1990s; see Müller-Kessler and Sokoloff 1997, 211–212.

⁵⁰ Pigulevskaya 1960, 55, no. XVII; Pigulevskaya 1937, 556.

⁵¹ Müller-Kessler and Sokoloff 1997, 77–79, 116–122.

passages of the *Catecheses* of Cyril of Jerusalem (CPG 3585),⁵² which were not possible for Land to make out in the 1860s.



Fig. 9: NLR, Syr. 16, fol. 19r: unidentified; © National Library of Russia, St Petersburg.

⁵² Müller-Kessler and Sokoloff 1999, 29, 31, 43, 61, 63, 69, 71, 81, 91, 101, 103, 105, 107, 117, 119, 123, 139, 149, 151, 153, 163, 171, 175, 179, 189, 191, 199.

On many passages, he or someone in the library had tried to apply a chemical reagent, which left traces of green and brown colour on the parchment, as if someone had used paint. In contrast to the application on the Old Syriac Gospels (Sin. syr. 30)⁵³ by Lewis in St Catherine's Monastery, the script in St Petersburg did not suffer under this chemical treatment, and the text still can be brought out with ultraviolet light. Only some folios or the versos could not be read. This includes a number of pages from former Sin. georg. 34, which originates from the Laura of Mar Saba. The parchment is very greasy, which might be connected with the production of the animal skin (Fig. 9). The parchment folios defy any kind of reading and had to be left blank in the publication (NLR, Syr. 16, fols 12, 14, 25, 28–29, 57),⁵⁴ especially for one Old Jerusalem Lectionary fragment (MS B)⁵⁵ and some still unidentified texts.⁵⁶ Land already declared them in 1875 as unreadable.⁵⁷

2.4 Martin Schøyen Collection, Oslo

In June 1996, I met with the private collector Martin Schøyen at University College London. Over lunch in the Senior Common Room, I discovered that he had acquired the missing second part of the Georgian codex Tsagareli 81 (II)⁵⁸ from the antiquarian book dealer Hans Peter Kraus in New York. Without waiting for final permission from our grant giver, the German Israeli Foundation (GIF), which only permitted travel between Israel and Germany, I travelled in the first days of July 1996 to Oslo to collate and add the unpublished text parts.⁵⁹ Thanks to the summer light conditions, I was able to work on the palimpsest folios with my personal ultraviolet lamp nearly all day and night in Schøyen's guest house. I was unable to read some half-columns of Cyril of Jerusalem's *Catecheses*⁶⁰ during this short sojourn, since I decided to concentrate on as many folios as possible to complete

⁵³ Brock 2016.

⁵⁴ Müller-Kessler 2014, 270, 280, 300–302.

⁵⁵ Müller-Kessler 2023c.

⁵⁶ Müller-Kessler 2014, 302.

⁵⁷ Land 1875, 187–188, fols 19, 23, 35, 50, 53.

⁵⁸ Tsagareli 1888, 233; MS 35 in the Schøyen collection. While the present article was being prepared for printing, this part of Tsagareli 81 was auctioned and bought by a Georgian private person who promised to donate it to the National Museum of Georgia, Tbilisi; see Tarras 2024.

⁵⁹ Müller-Kessler and Sokoloff 1997, 128, 188, 150; Müller-Kessler and Sokoloff 1998a, 52–55, 58–67, 98, 100, 102, 110–111, 114–115, 119, 133–134, 138, 141–142, 155, 171.

⁶⁰ Müller-Kessler and Sokoloff 1999. We did not want to transmit incorrect readings and therefore omitted the additions in Desreumaux 1997, 143, 145, 149, 151 (without referring to what had been published before by Duensing 1906; 1955).

their readings. This part of the Tsagareli 81 manuscript was difficult to handle, as the collector had it bound tightly into the former Coptic wooden boards to obtain, in his opinion, a complete book, despite the other part of Tsagareli 81 (I) being kept in St Petersburg since 1857.⁶¹ At least, I was able to salvage the correct Eusebian canon tables below the Gospel texts with the Ammonian numbering in the margins of Luke and John,⁶² which were already presented in Duensing's edition⁶³ but were partially later misread by Alain Desreumaux.⁶⁴ I had already extracted them from the St Petersburg part as an exceptional example of the only early Gospel manuscript preserved in fragments in CPA (CSR^c) with these numberings,⁶⁵ alongside the Gospel sections left unread by Duensing in 1906.⁶⁶ The readings in the Gospel part in Desreumaux's text edition do not represent the text as appearing in the original but were restored from another unpublished version in Sin. syr. NF 42 (an eleventh-century manuscript) and a late text witness in Vat.sir. 19 (eleventh century) as published by Lewis and Gibson in 1899, or even in the *Horologion* (twelfth century) edited by Matthew Black (1954).⁶⁷ Where no parallels were extant in CPA, Desreumaux left the readings open or they cannot be traced back to the original text in the folios.⁶⁸ Naturally, some readings remained doubtful for our edition, which were indicated in the lower apparatus as 'MS should be collated'.

2.5 New Finds from St Catherine's Monastery on Mount Sinai

In 2012 came the offer to join the Sinai Palimpsests Project, run by Claudia Rapp from the Institute for Medieval Research of the Austrian Academy of Sciences, Vienna, and the Early Manuscripts Electronic Library in Los Angeles under Michael Phelps, as a joint venture with St Catherine's Monastery on Mount Sinai and financed by Arcadia Foundation.⁶⁹ There had been a gap of nearly twenty years since I had dealt with even more difficult texts, on metal strips in lead, gold, and silver in tiny scripts, or on

⁶¹ Müller-Kessler 2022b, 24–28.

⁶² Müller-Kessler and Sokoloff 1998a, 139–140.

⁶³ Duensing 1906, 145–146.

⁶⁴ Desreumaux 1997, 72–73; Brock 1999a, 764–765; Müller-Kessler 1999, 633–634.

⁶⁵ Müller-Kessler and Sokoloff 1998a, 94–95, 97, 168–169.

⁶⁶ Müller-Kessler and Sokoloff 1998a, 58–67, 88, 98–100, 102, 110–111, 114–115, 133–136, 138, 141–142, 145–146, 155–156, 170–171.

⁶⁷ Desreumaux 1997, 65–71, 74–81, 101–112, 115, 127. Some readings were even made worse in contrast to Duensing's in 1906; see Müller-Kessler 1999.

⁶⁸ Desreumaux 1997, 61, 64, 66, 68–69, 75, 100, 102, 104–107, 114, 116, 118, 122; see Lewis 1899.

⁶⁹ See the project website at <<http://sinaipalimpsests.org/>>.

many ceramic bowls used as protective amulets.⁷⁰ It was not clear to me what text material I would be given in the form of multispectral images, which arrived on a memory stick by special delivery from Los Angeles. The palimpsest manuscripts, or parts of them, were selected randomly according to the lower scripts for each individual participant. The start was made with Sin. georg. NF 71, with eight damaged quarters of folios which had been cut to that format to be overwritten in a Georgian *khutsuri* script by Ioane Zosime for a hymnary (*iadgari*). As I was familiar with the scribal hands from St Petersburg (NLR, Syr. 16) and Oslo (Schøyen Collection, MS 35, 37) it did not take very long to assign the extant quarters of the former folios to their rightful contents. Two very badly preserved fragments belonged to the Old Jerusalem Lectionary MS A, with the pericope of Exodus 4:31b–5:1a, 5:3–4a, 5:6b–7a, 8b–10a (Sin. georg. NF 71, fols 1 + 8),⁷¹ but there were also passages from the *Catecheses* of Cyril of Jerusalem⁷² and the Gospel of Matthew.⁷³ I was not aware that the same fragments had been given to Sebastian Brock for identification and that I was ahead of him in the decipherment, on account of the advantage of having dealt with parts of the original palimpsest manuscripts years beforehand. The second collective manuscript, Sin. georg. NF 19, which followed soon after, would turn out to be a real challenge to work with, as it forms a collection of nine manuscripts underneath this Georgian Codex Sinaiticus Rescriptus with individual hands in CPA.⁷⁴ Again it contained fragments of the Old Jerusalem Lectionary MS A (Fig. 10)⁷⁵ as well as of the *Catecheses* of Cyril of Jerusalem (CPG 3585) (Fig. 11).⁷⁶ Here Ioane Zosime really made use of the most disfigured scraps of former parchment folios. In the case of *Catechesis* X.10–12 (Sin. georg. NF 19, fol. 7 [I]), one column was cut into two parts and the second column was sewn onto it upside down. The right-hand column belongs to another fragment, today housed in St Petersburg (NLR, Syr. 16, fol. 117), which could be reconstructed in its former set-up in the edition of the additional fragments.⁷⁷ The second sewn-on column (Sin. georg. NF 19, fol. 7 [II]) derives from *Catechesis* III.10–13.⁷⁸ The most bizarrely preserved bifolio is Sin. georg. NF 19, fols 2 + 3, which contains *Catechesis* VI.7–8, with six lines cut off from one folio and then sewn onto the right side of an-

⁷⁰ Land 1875, 187–188, fols 19, 23, 35, 50, 53.

⁷¹ Müller-Kessler 2023c, 211, 226, 249–250.

⁷² Müller-Kessler 2021a, 34–53.

⁷³ <<https://sinai.library.ucla.edu/browse/>>, under ‘Georgian NF 71’.

⁷⁴ <<https://sinai.library.ucla.edu/browse/>>, under ‘Georgian NF 19’.

⁷⁵ Müller-Kessler 2023c, 248–252.

⁷⁶ Müller-Kessler 2014, 283–288; Müller-Kessler 2021a, 23–53; Müller-Kessler 2022b, 31–32.

⁷⁷ Müller-Kessler 2021a, 34, pl. I.

⁷⁸ Müller-Kessler 2021a, 34, pl. I.

other folio.⁷⁹ Apart from the maltreatment, it was easy to assign these fragments to their rightful contents.⁸⁰ Only their reading turned out to be rather difficult, as it will be for any external reader of the multispectral images provided by the Sinai Palimpsests Project. Two other individual folios were easily legible, with one being part of an until today unidentified homily (Sin. georg. NF 19, fol. 59)⁸¹ and the second also containing a homiletic text, namely, John Chrysostom's *De poenitentia* (CPG 4631), which only recently could be identified and joined with one fragment stored at the Princeton University Library (hereafter: Princeton, Garrett MS. 24, fol. 99),⁸² and one year later connected with Sin. georg. NF 19, fol. 62.⁸³ The Garrett palimpsest fragments could be read with the help of various photographic methods (black and white, digital colour, multispectral imaging).⁸⁴ One non-palimpsest scrap (Sin. georg. NF 19, fol. 1) is a Gospel fragment.⁸⁵

Of Sin. georg. NF 19, six folios are double palimpsests with CPA as the *scriptio infima* and a Greek minuscule in between. With all, it was very difficult to find a way to start reading them. Two years later, however – on a very chaotic train trip from the south of Germany to London – I was able to salvage on one folio in every second line the name 'Mary'. In email correspondence with Brock while still on the Eurostar, he expressed the opinion that it is probably from the *Dormition of Mary* (BHO 643; Fig. 12), of which just this section had been recently published from an early Syriac version by Stephen Shoemaker in *Le Muséon*.⁸⁶ I followed this hint straight away, after dropping off my suitcase, consulting Victor Arras's Ethiopic text edition held in the library of the School of Oriental and African Studies in London.⁸⁷ Brock's guess turned out to be correct. Despite the successful identification, it took me months to figure out a nearly complete reading, since the lowest writing mingles in a pseudo-red colour with the text in between, which makes the reading more than challenging. Still, it was worthwhile to produce a first edition of one of the earliest witnesses of this apocryphal text next to the Syriac transmission from Deir al-Suryan, which would follow a few years later.⁸⁸

79 Müller-Kessler 2021a, 34–35, pl. II.

80 <<https://sinai.library.ucla.edu/browse>>, under 'Georgian NF 19'.

81 Müller-Kessler 2014.

82 Müller-Kessler 2022b.

83 Müller-Kessler 2023e.

84 Skemer 1996; Müller-Kessler 2022b. The folios were not considered for the CPA catalogues by Bar-Asher 1977 and Desreumaux 1979.

85 <<https://sinai.library.ucla.edu/browse>>, under 'Georgian NF 19'.

86 Shoemaker 2011, 260–263, 267.

87 Arras 1973.

88 Müller-Kessler 2018, 71–73, 85–91; Müller-Kessler 2020a; Müller-Kessler 2022c.

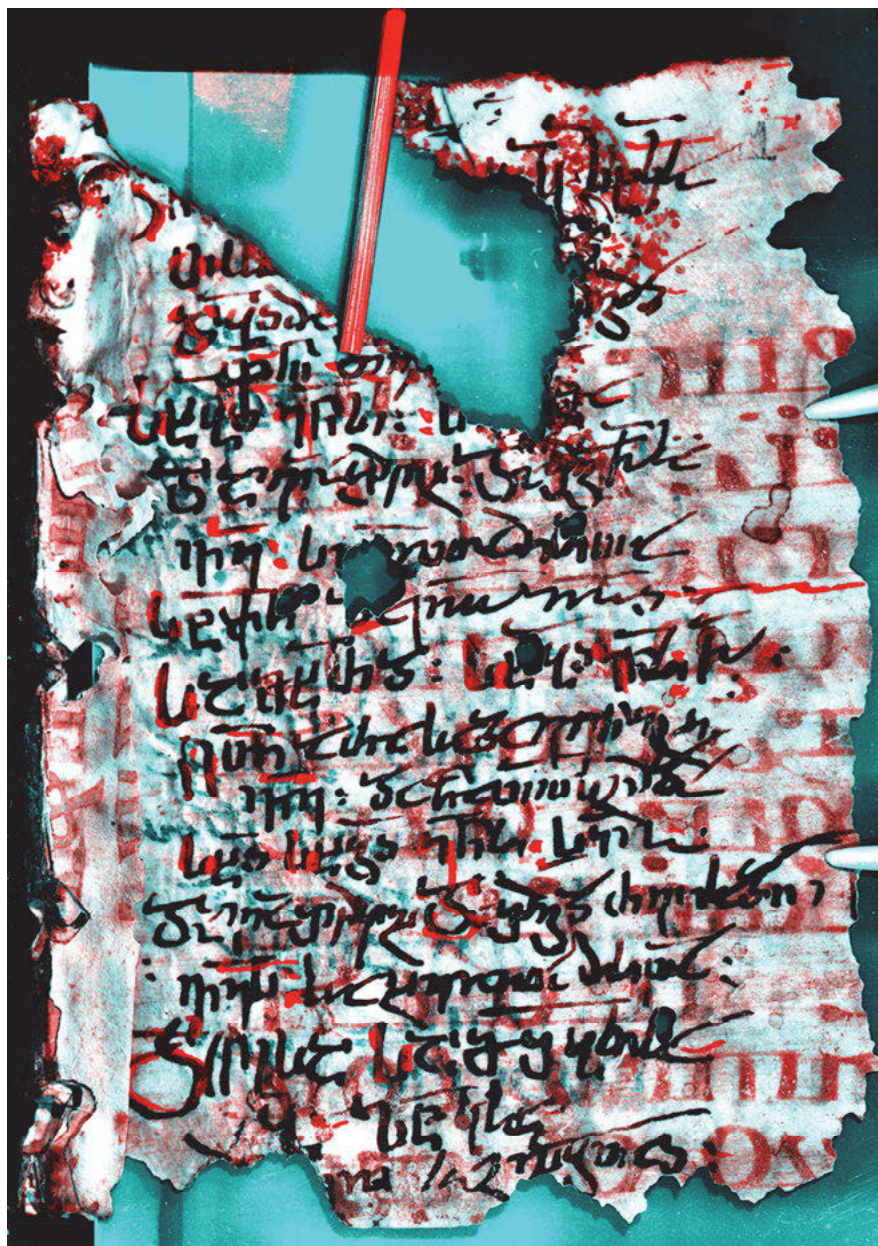


Fig. 10: Sin. georg. 71, fol. 1f: Exodus 4:31b–5:1a; © St Catherine's Monastery, Mount Sinai.

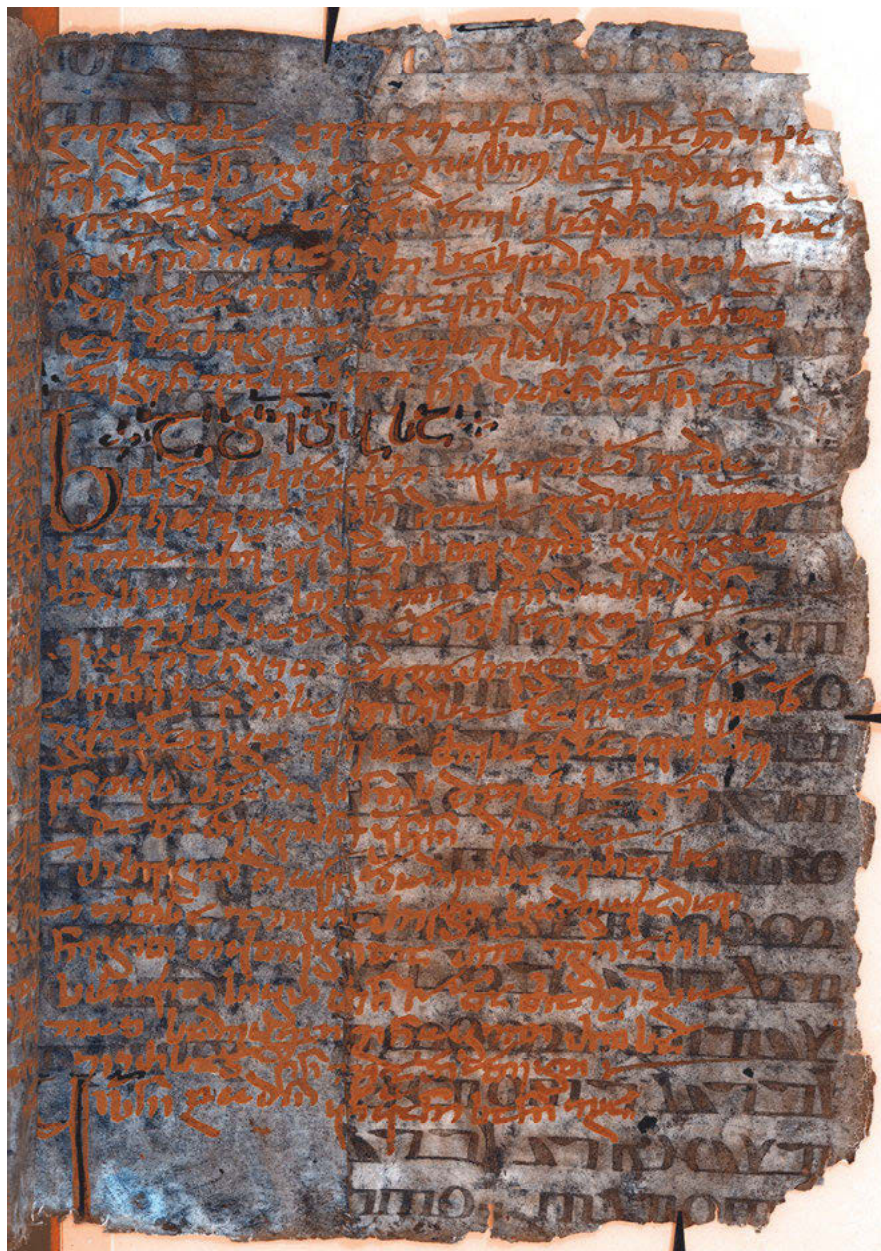


Fig. 11: Sin. georg. NF 19, fol. 7 [I]^r: Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechesis* X.10–11; © St Catherine's Monastery, Mount Sinai.

In 1992, I had prepared a textual reading of two palimpsests found on double folios with this Marian text in the Taylor-Schechter Collection (T-S 16.327, 16.351), which Brock was able to identify based on my readings as pertaining to the *Koimesis*. Meanwhile I had discovered the tiny fragment T-S AS 78.401, which joined to T-S 16.327, fol. 1. Due to the Sinai New Finds, I went again through the Taylor-Schechter Collection, with the result of coming across a fragment which, on account of the upper Midrashic text, belongs to the same manuscript. Instead of going to Cambridge for reading, I tried to figure out the text, using the large computer screens in the British Library Rare Reading Room, via the Friedberg Genizah Manuscript website.⁸⁹ After many obstacles and wrong guesses, I was able to fit it into this text a few chapters onwards (as § 80).⁹⁰ It came as a surprise to many interested scholars in the apocryphal field who had not been aware that there existed such an early source translated into this Western Aramaic dialect. Only two folios (Sin. georg. NF 19, fols 4 and 5) could be attributed neither to the five-book nor to the six-book version according to the content,⁹¹ despite a near-to-complete reading. The content, however, speaks clearly for its being connected with the apocryphal transmission of the *Dormition of Mary*.

This left me with two remaining double palimpsest folios (Sin. georg. NF 19, fols 10 and 11). They appeared in the beginning as likely illegible or not possible to assign. The Sinai Palimpsest Project was coming to an end, in July 2017, and I had not made anything out of them. I tried again and finally, after several attempts, I was able to identify the two folios as belonging to Jeremiah 15:19b–16:4a (Fig. 13).⁹²

Some years after the images went online in 2018, I visited the website to find that I supposedly had been unable to identify one non-palimpsested fragment, which I had never received with the batch of Sin. georg. NF 19. To straighten this out: fol. 62 obviously contains the same homily by John Chrysostom as fol. 61, since the scribal hand is identical, and the content fits in between Princeton, Garrett MS. 24, fol. 99 and the beginning of Sin. georg. NF 19, fol. 61.⁹³

⁸⁹ <<https://fjms.genizah.org>>.

⁹⁰ Müller-Kessler 2018, 76.

⁹¹ Müller-Kessler 2018, 73–74, 91–95.

⁹² <<https://sinai.library.ucla.edu/browse>>, under ‘Georgian NF 19’. For fol. 11, despite the identical scribal hand, the exact biblical passage could not be defined.

⁹³ Now Müller-Kessler 2023e.

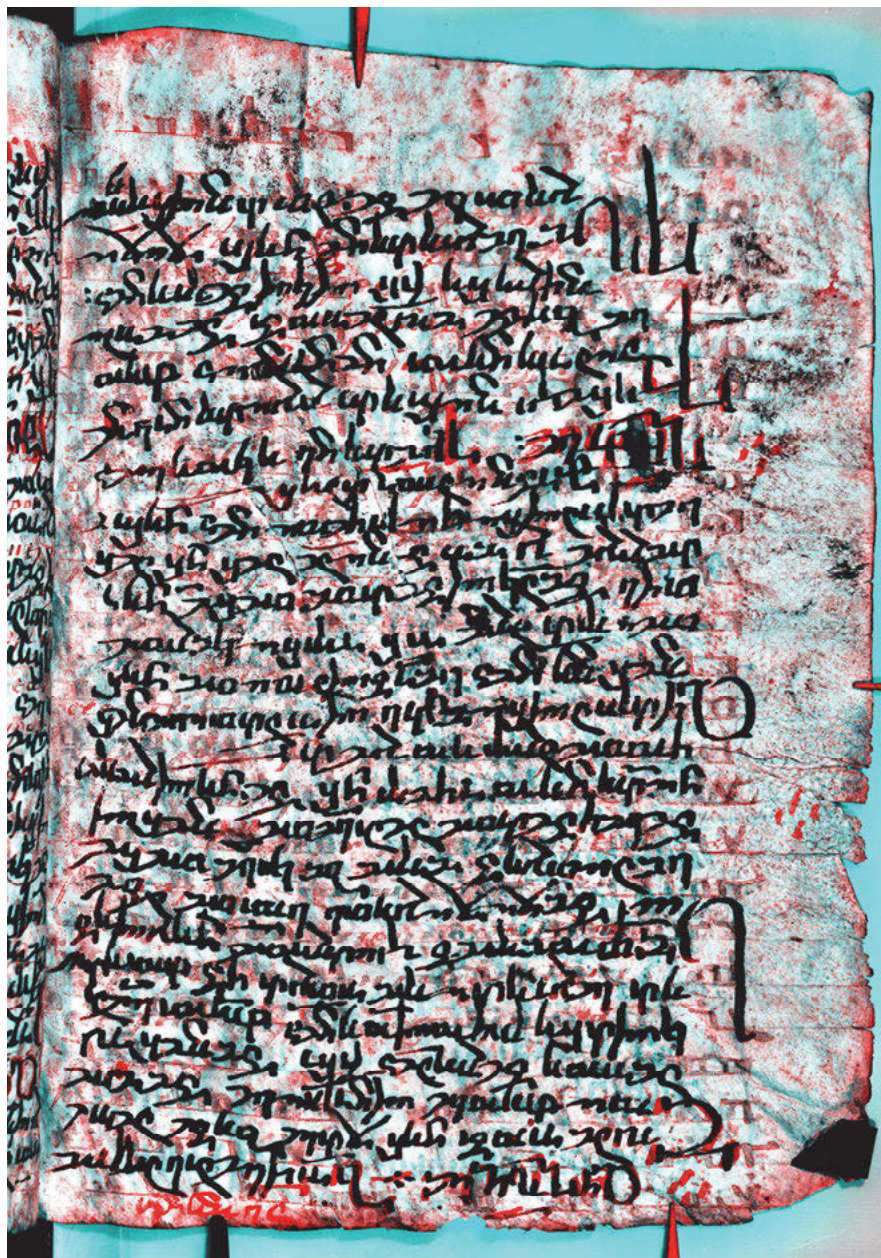


Fig. 12: Sin. georg. NF 19, fol. 8v: *Dormition of Mary* §§ 99b–100a; © St Catherine's Monastery, Mount Sinai.

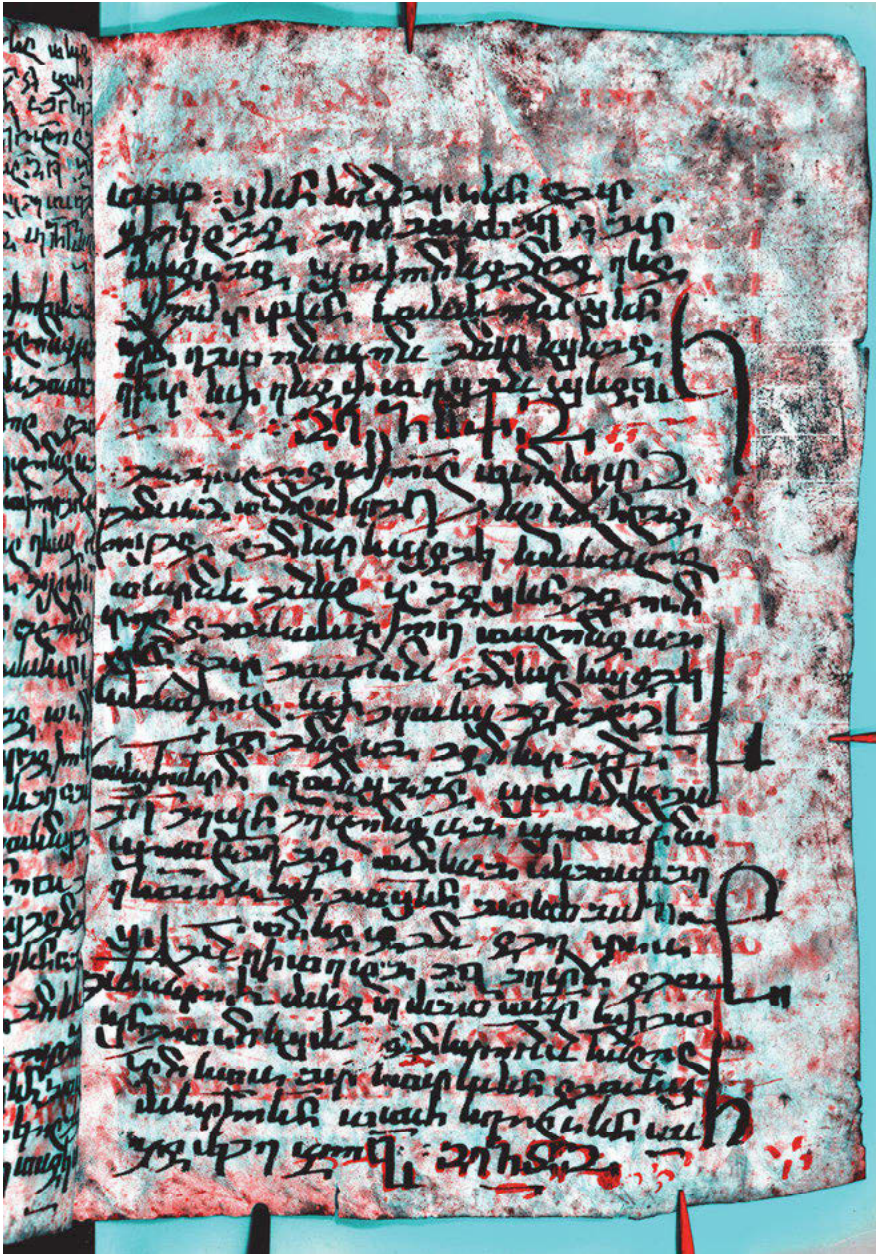


Fig. 13: Sin. georg. NF 19, fol. 10v: Jeremiah 15:19b–16:4a; © St Catherine's Monastery, Mount Sinai.

After the two heavily damaged Georgian manuscripts, a beautiful Greek one (Sin. gr. NF MG 14) followed in 2013, four CPA folios under a Greek majuscule (fols 16/21, 17/20, 18/19, 28). Folios of this codex were chosen as examples to demonstrate the legibility of the overwritten scripts and were made available on the internet⁹⁴ before the results of the Sinai Palimpsests Project finally went online. Although these CPA texts with biblical books were quite legible, a certain passage of 3 Kingdoms 9:6 on fol. 28^v could not be made out despite the multispectral imaging. Here, the *scriptio inferior* is hidden under a smudge and the words could not be fully extracted for publication.⁹⁵ The bifolio 17/20, with Proverbs 11:1b–15, was a puzzle at the beginning of transliteration from the point of its deviating biblical contents, but here again Sebastian Brock had a solution: he discovered that it more or less follows the Byzantine Prophetologion as published by Carsten Høeg and Günther Zuntz.⁹⁶ The CPA text, however, derives from a biblical manuscript (Fig. 14). The last bifolio (fol. 18/19) was rather easy to attribute to Job 3:11c–4:3a,⁹⁷ and except for some missing edges of the parchment with a few words and letters, the text could be fully established. The script is rather bold and not as fine as in the text of 1 Kingdoms, which made reading it a bit easier.⁹⁸

Another matter has been Sin. syr. NF 11, consisting of two independent lower manuscripts written in CPA, which I was offered for identification in 2015. In the first part, one finds sections of the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and in the second, the *Catecheses* of Cyril of Jerusalem. The parchment material is rather well preserved in this extant part of the Gospel manuscript, and the script can be easily made out. All former folios were cut into quarters and are overwritten in a Melkite Syriac script type with the translation of the *Life of Sabbas* (BHG 1608) and the *Life of Euthymius* (BHG 647–648b) by Cyril of Scythopolis.⁹⁹ A drawback, however, is that the majority of folios 1–61 in this manuscript cling together in this fragmentary state and could not be taken apart, and therefore could not be foliated.¹⁰⁰ Thus it cannot be judged yet if all fragments come from a Bible or a lectionary manuscript, as no traces of lectionary rubrics or subdivisions are visible so far except for a large decorative *waw* with a cross inside (Fig. 15). As already pointed

94 <<http://emel-library.org/gallery/sinai-palimpsests-processed-images/>>.

95 Müller-Kessler 2022a.

96 Høeg and Zuntz 1952, 233–234.

97 Little reward after all the years, since this passage in biblical Hebrew was my exam text in my doctoral *rigorosum* in 1988 at the Freie Universität Berlin.

98 Müller-Kessler 2020b.

99 Binggeli 2019, 51–54.

100 Sin. syr. NF 11; see <<https://sinai.library.ucla.edu/browse/>>, under ‘Syriac NF 11’ and ‘Codicology & Overtex’.

out above, the other folios with higher numbers contain a few parts of the *Catecheses* of Cyril of Jerusalem in CPA, surviving here in a second independent version. In these folios, the lower script is rather faint, but the multispectral images bring out enough text to establish a full reading. Some sides cannot be read at present, as they are also stuck together. Only in the folios at the end can we make out that the text is written in two columns as expected (Fig. 16), and therefore the individual folios could be joined to their original set-up.¹⁰¹

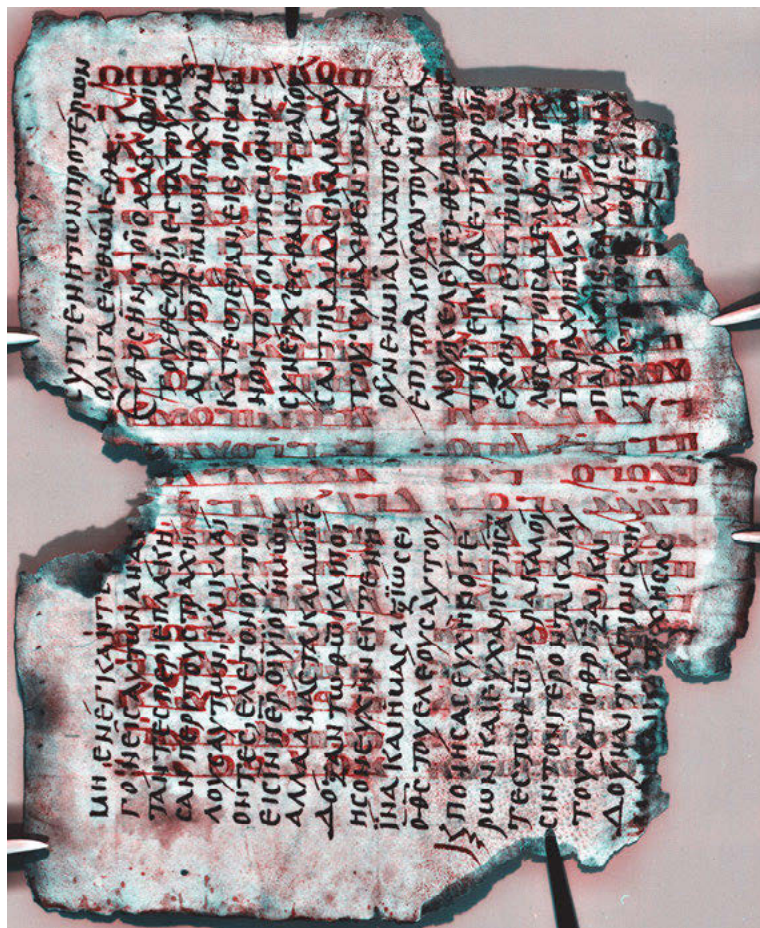


Fig. 14: Sin. gr. NF MG 14, fol. 17^v/20^r: Proverbs 11:1b–8a; © St Catherine's Monastery, Mount Sinai.

101 Müller-Kessler 2021b, 358–366, 370.

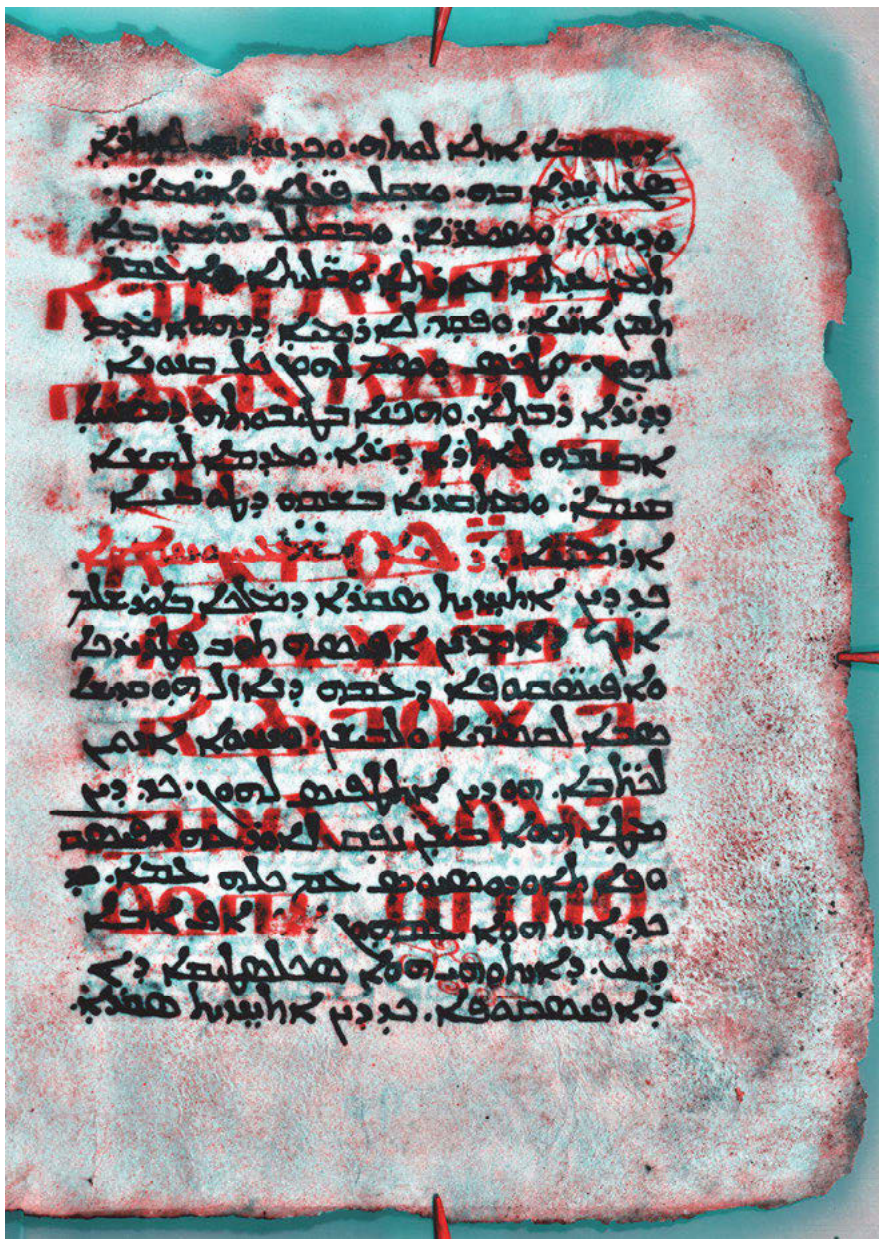


Fig. 15: Sin. syr. NF 11, fol. 90r: Luke 14:1; © St Catherine's Monastery, Mount Sinai.

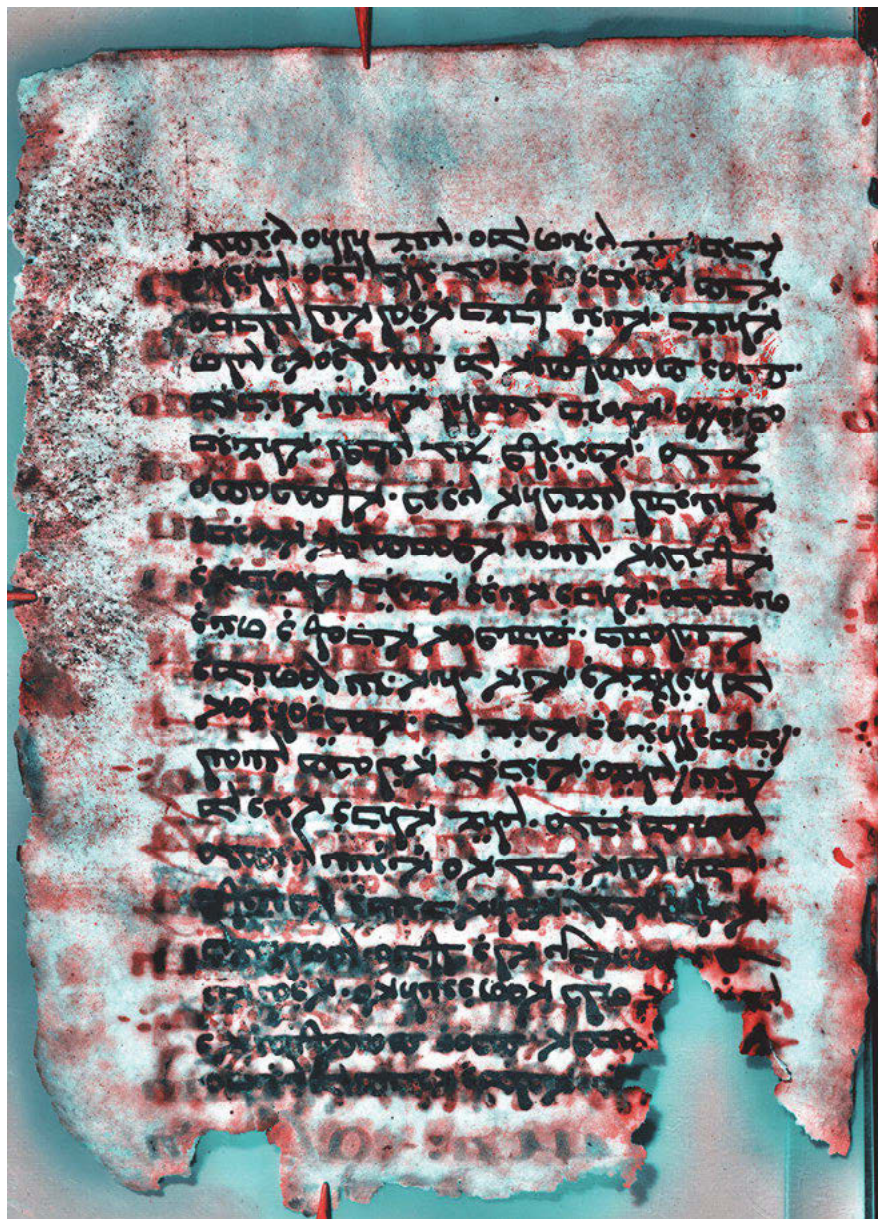


Fig. 16: Sin. syr. NF 11, fol. 109^v: Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechesis* X.16–17; © St Catherine's Monastery, Mount Sinai.

Not always is the lower script so well preserved as in Sin. arab. NF 66, which arrived in December 2015 by memory stick and could be immediately read. This is true of the lower Greek text with an unknown mythological poem in hexameters, as well as the CPA folios with a fragmentarily remaining *martyrologion* as their content. Here, the CPA script underneath was not removed and comes up in clearly legible letters. The one matter of hindrance for establishing the unknown texts is that the ninth-century Arabic scribe decided to cut some folios apart; that is, what is left of the separated right- or left-hand column, which has been merged onto a complete folio (Fig. 17). Only a few letters remain of the incomplete column. As long as the content is known from other language sources, this is not of great disadvantage, except for missing text parts; however, on two folios (representing four original folios in CPA), a complete non-transmitted martyrdom surfaced. This is the *Martyrdom of Patriklos*, who was one of the eleven or twelve followers of Pamphilos of Caesarea (d. 309)¹⁰² and has been only known by his name listed in Georgian as *Patrikila* among other saints buried in the church of St George at Lydda,¹⁰³ and in Arabic as *Batṛīqlāwus* under 3 November in the Melkite *synaxarium*.¹⁰⁴ Apart from this new and previously untransmitted martyrdom, the version of the *Martyrdom of Mamas of Caesarea in Cappadocia* (BHG 1017–1019; BHO 589)¹⁰⁵ is attested for the first time in CPA, as is the last part of a multiple *Martyrdom of Philemon, Ariannos, and the Four Protectors* (BHG 1514; BHO 973).¹⁰⁶

From the Old Collection in the Sinai library followed four folios (Sin. arab. 588, fols 33, 35, 45, 46) in 2016, which were already known to Lewis when she compiled her Syriac catalogue in 1894.¹⁰⁷ John Frederick Stenning published snippets of a few verses from 2 Kingdoms 2 and 3 Kingdoms 9 in 1896.¹⁰⁸ He was unable to glean more from the folios at that time at St Catherine's Monastery, as these pages have been quite a challenge to decipher. They are double palimpsests with an old *naskhī* Arabic script on top and a Syriac *estrangela* in between, and the CPA layer with 2–3 Kingdoms is the lowest script (Sin. arab. 588, fols 33, 35, 45, 46).¹⁰⁹ Here

102 Müller-Kessler 2019a.

103 See Kekelidze 1918, 4, l. 34.

104 Sauget 1969, 316.

105 Müller-Kessler 2016.

106 Müller-Kessler 2017.

107 Gibson 1894, 125.

108 Stenning *apud* Gwilliam, Burkitt and Stenning 1896, 29–36.

109 Attiya and Kessel in <<https://sinai.library.ucla.edu/browse>>, under 'Arabic 588'.

also the multispectral imaging shows its limits (Fig. 18), since only two recto sides can be fully read at present, and of the rest only the attribution of the biblical verses was somehow possible. The CPA script is in most parts so effaced that a complete reading seems impossible if no future technology emerges that can bring out even the faintest traces. Being a double palimpsest is a principle problem, as the middle script interferes with the lowest. Differentiating the characters is often difficult, since both come up in one colour in contrast to the top script, mostly in the original black ink.

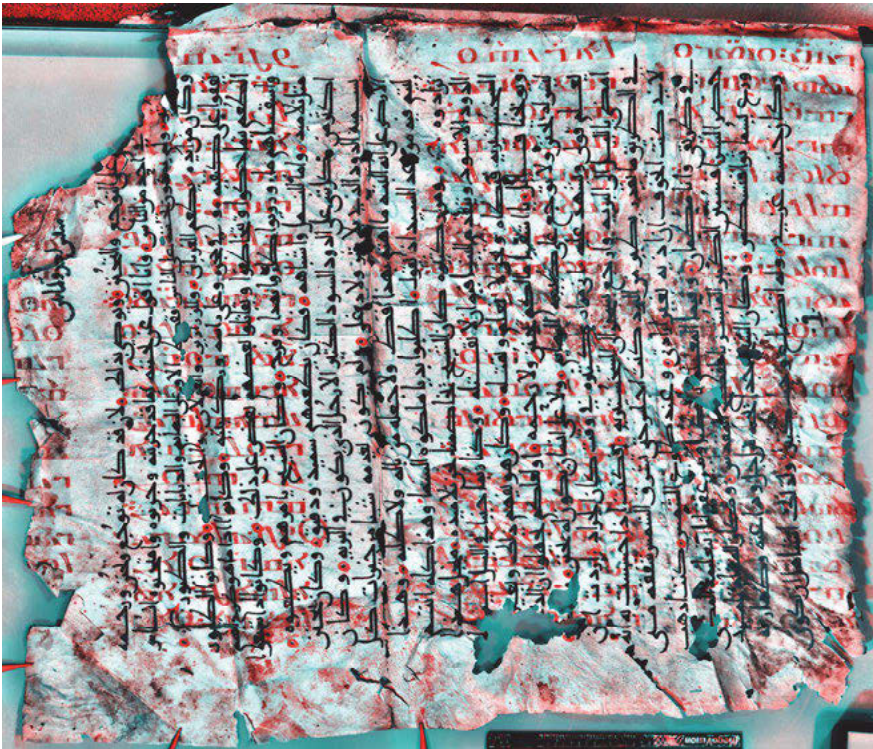


Fig. 17: Sin. arab. NF 66, fol. 1 (II)' + (II)': *Martyrdom of Patriklos of Caesarea*; © St Catherine's Monastery, Mount Sinai.

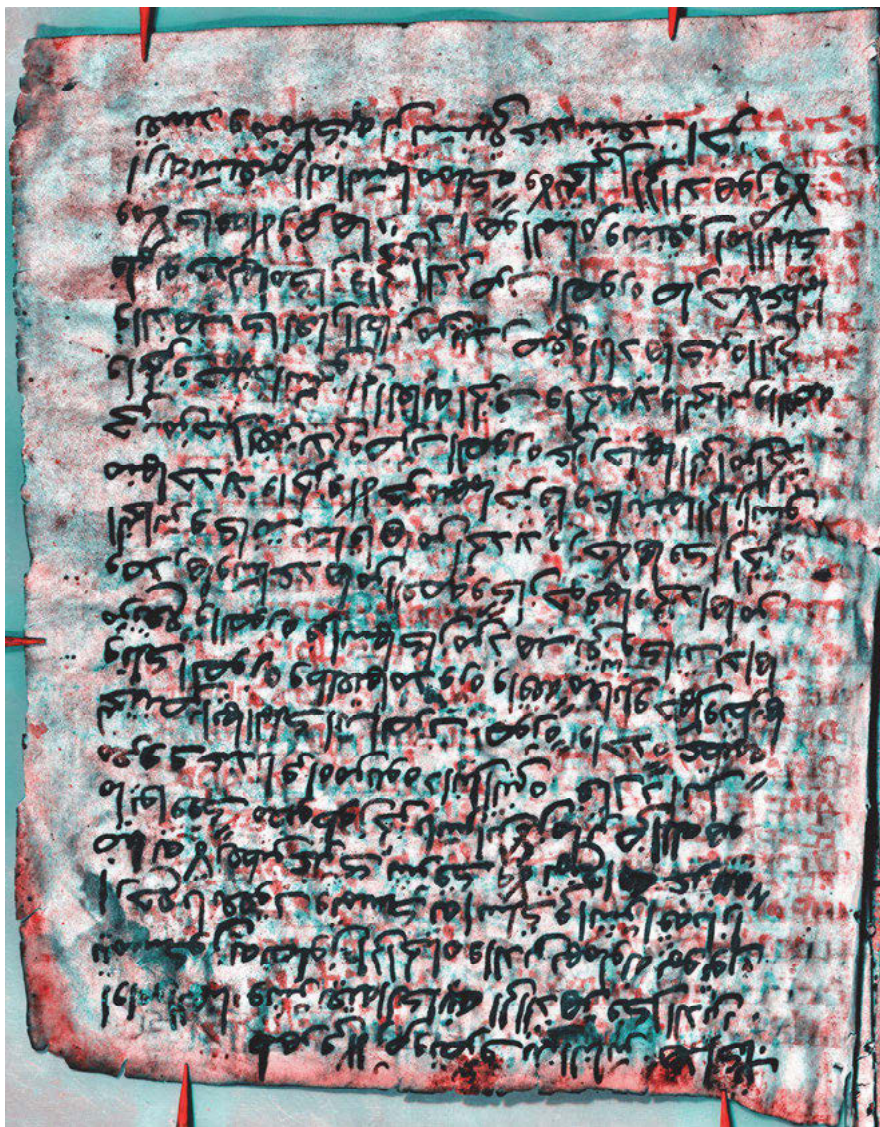


Fig. 18: Sin. arab. 588, fol. 35v: 3 Kingdoms 2:35b–35g; © St Catherine's Monastery, Mount Sinai.

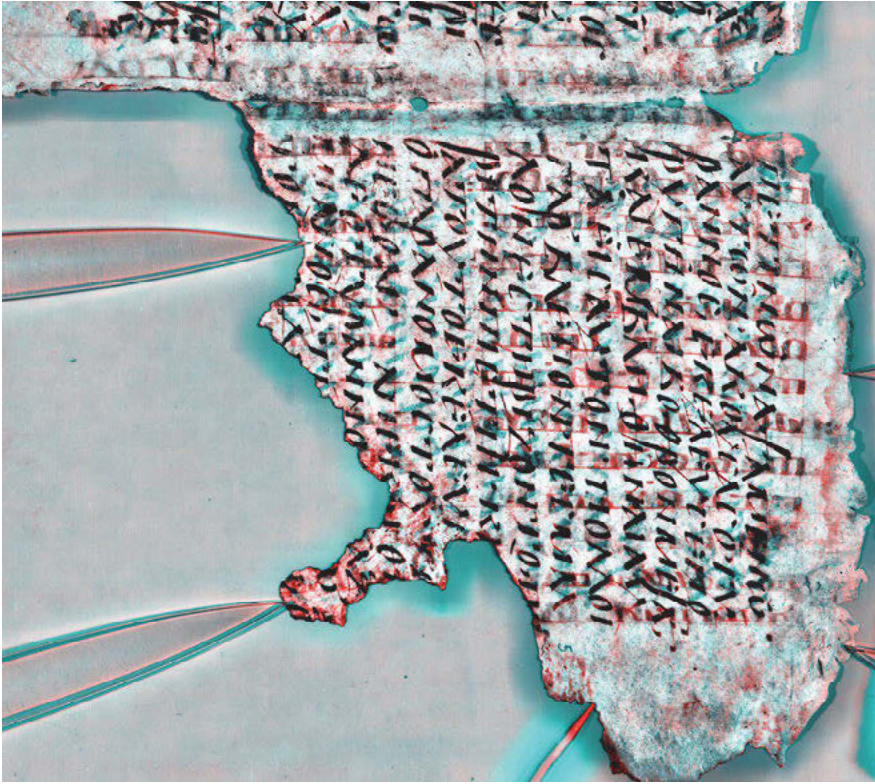


Fig. 19: Sin. gr. NF MG 32, fol. 5': Job 14:22; Isaiah 42:4; Psalm 74:1; Exodus 6:28–29a; © St Catherine's Monastery, Mount Sinai.

When Sin. gr. NF MG 32 arrived in 2016, it turned out to be a palimpsest manuscript which was sort of legible with multispectral images, but some parts of the folios, being rather damaged, could be only joined from disjunctive pieces. The CPA fragments contain sections of biblical pericopes from the Old Jerusalem Lectionary, some of which had been hitherto unattested. The rubrics, however, which are more of interest for liturgy studies, are unfortunately gone. Only one rubric can still be seen, and from the others the red ink has vanished (Fig. 19), which is often the case for this kind of ink. It is a deficiency in such early lectionary palimpsests that the rubrics cannot be extracted. It is further deplorable as the CPA transmission can be considered the earliest secondary source after the missing

early Greek witnesses of the Old Jerusalem Lectionary. The folios are heavily damaged fragments, and only a part of them survived.¹¹⁰

3 Progress in technology and identifications in long-known palimpsest material

While modern technology might have brought a different approach, with the possibility to display and easily read simple manuscripts in electronic formats, it has not made much of difference for the reading of palimpsests. The latter still can only be read in a tedious and time-consuming fashion to prepare a text basis for a broader readership. Although the palimpsest reader has access to better devices, such as multispectral imaging, to help in the deciphering, it is still experience that matters when it comes to reading such overlaid texts, especially tightly overwritten lower scripts or double and triple palimpsests. The difficulty with multiple palimpsests is that in multispectral images the lower scripts are brought out in the same colour, making it a nightmare to distinguish the different characters, especially when the undertext is very faint and overwritten in inconvenient places.

3.1 Sinai, St Catherine's Monastery

The year 2021 marked forty years since James Hamilton Charlesworth edited a booklet with photo samples of seven manuscripts from the New Finds, made in the St George Tower at St Catherine's Monastery in 1975. These images, which he had come by in an anonymous fashion, resulted in the announcement of some interesting texts.¹¹¹ For one double folio from Sin. gr. NF M 167 (without shelf number in the publication), however, Charlesworth failed to attribute the lower script and content, probably due to a lack of knowledge of the script in question. In a number of publications, he declared it as Syriac written in one column.¹¹² It was clear to specialists, however, that what one had here was a CPA uncial. The photo is a poor black-and-white print (Fig. 20), and its contents defied any kind of

¹¹⁰ Müller-Kessler 2023c.

¹¹¹ Charlesworth 1981, XIV, n. 2: 'For the present, our benefactor must remain anonymous for political reasons'.

¹¹² Charlesworth 1980, 32–33; Charlesworth 1981, 29.

identification.¹¹³ Another reading trial in 2021, during the Covid-19 pandemic, and at more leisure with an electronic version of Charlesworth's article, the undertext seemed to be a bit more legible; it turned out to be a biblical text from Numbers (4:15b–5:6a).

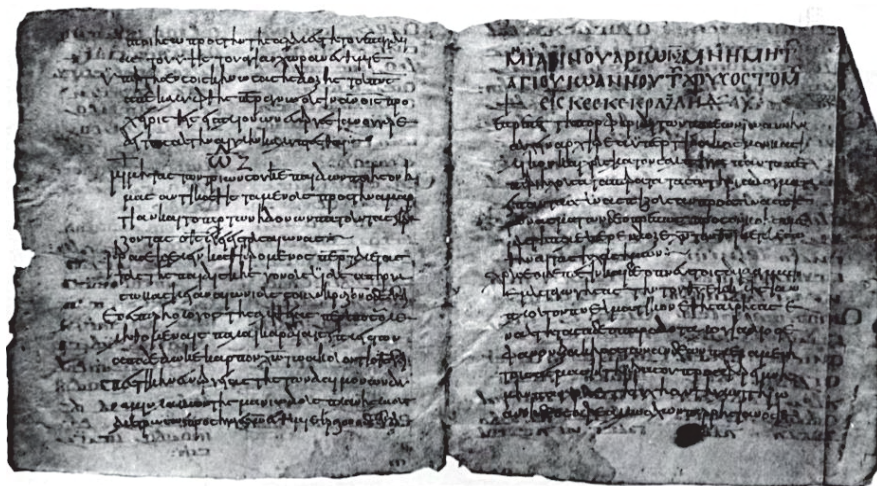


Fig. 20: Sin. gr. NF M 167, unnumbered fols: Leviticus 26:26b–35; Numbers 4:23b–5:6a; Charlesworth 1981, XIV.

On this basis, I was able to decipher the correct number of Gershon's sons, and only this number agrees with the Septuagint and Masoretic transmission, whereas the rest heavily deviates from any Bible transmissions. Since it is a double folio, the other part should have contained Numbers too, but there were verses of Leviticus 26, again deviating from any *textus receptus*. Although 90% could be extracted from this faint photo, one needed better images. I sent a request to Father Justin, the librarian of St Catherine's, by email, asking if he would be able to provide me with simple digital photos. This query was answered immediately with a set of digital photos including all other CPA fragments of this manuscript,¹¹⁴ including

¹¹³ Charlesworth 1981, 29, pl. VII.

¹¹⁴ I owe my sincere thanks to Father Justin, who promptly produced the digital photos for me, which enabled the publication of such exceptional Bible witnesses at a satisfactory level.

some non-palimpsest ones,¹¹⁵ and a nearly full reading was possible, except for two verbs in Leviticus 26:29–30 (Fig. 21).¹¹⁶ The script was not erased on all folios, which makes it a perfect sample for palaeographic studies, even in the case of the palimpsest folios.¹¹⁷

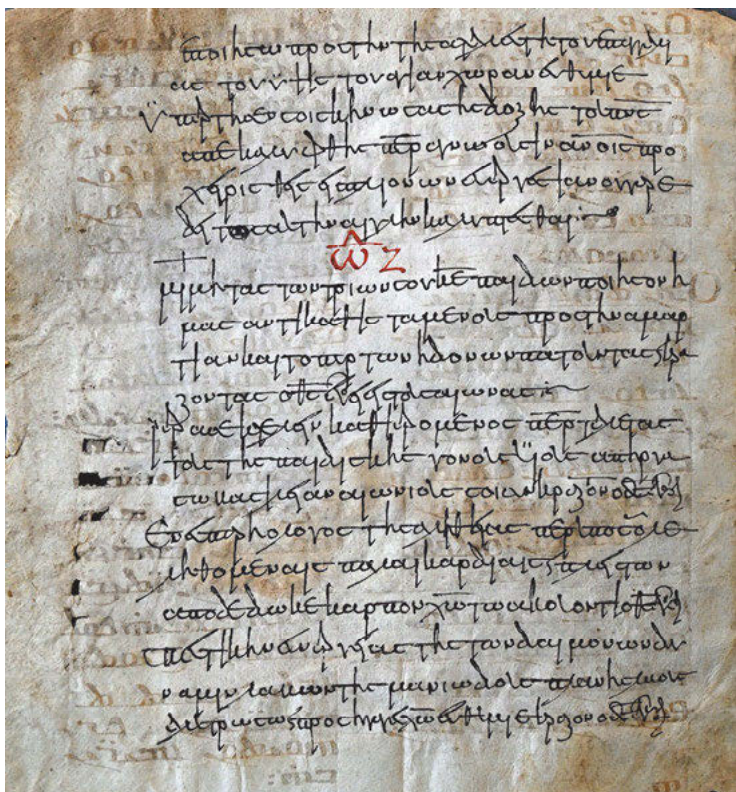


Fig. 21: Sin. gr. NF M 167, unnumbered fol.: Leviticus 26:26b–35; © St Catherine's Monastery, Mount Sinai.

¹¹⁵ The nearly complete folios, some of which are non-palimpsests, contain the Gospel passages of Luke 5:27–39, 7:25–37, 8:13b–24b, 8:37–9:4 and John 10:10–23, 11:11–27, and are not new to the CPA transmission, since they also can be found in eleventh-century Lectionaries A, B, C; see Lewis and Gibson 1899. It is a typical CPA Bible manuscript for the Gospels with a gap and header between the sections.

¹¹⁶ Müller-Kessler 2021a, 366. Another matter are the Leviticus verses 7:15b–8:9a and 8:9b–20a, which have been a challenge to attribute to and are newly attested verses.

¹¹⁷ The manuscript has not been foliated yet, but this will be done in the near future for the next session of multispectral imaging to be put online.

Sebastian Brock had been given the fragments with Syriac and CPA from the New Finds for a first catalogue description. Among them were a few deteriorated fragments under the class mark Sin. CPA NF frg. 12, with the rest of a psalter in CPA as *scriptio superior*.¹¹⁸ The *scriptio inferior* as it appeared in the catalogue photos was too faint to make any sensible reading of. Later, however, Brock also received this collection during the Sinai Palimpsests Project and could assign the undertexts to a psalter as well.¹¹⁹ Being not the best preserved palimpsest fragments – with heavily erased underwriting, mostly frayed on some sides as well as on edges, and only half preserved – these fragments turned out to be tricky to read. Brock sent his primary readings to me for rechecking, and I managed to get a bit ahead. Puzzling for me were a number of text passages between the Psalms, which I could not fully read in the beginning. Nevertheless, Brock was able to realise, with the scanty and incomplete readings I was able to offer, that these were the Eusebian *hypotheses* as found in a few Greek sources.¹²⁰ My first readings were not satisfying for me, and I had another go at the multispectral images on the website a year later. Finally, I was able to establish the full readings of the *hypotheses*, also termed *periochae*, for Psalms 21–23 and 121–123;¹²¹ they agree with the Greek transmissions.¹²²

3.2 Syriac palimpsests in the British Library

On account of my identifications and new readings of the CPA palimpsest folios with the *Dormition of Mary* from the Cairo Genizah in the Taylor-Schechter Collection (T-S 16.327; T-S 16.351; T-S AS 78.401; T-S NS 258.140), St Catherine's Monastery on Mount Sinai (Sin. georg. NF 19, fols 4–5, 8–9), and CCR4 (still Westminster College, Cambridge at that time), I decided to check and compare the Syriac witnesses in the British Library (hereafter: BL). Of one class mark (BL, Add MS 17135, fol. 9^r), Stephen Shoemaker had recently published one left column,¹²³ but the rest was said to contain this apocryphal text as well. I recognised at once that there were two different Syriac manuscripts underneath a late-eleventh-century Syriac script. There was only one drawback for reading the

¹¹⁸ Brock 1995, 87–88 with figs 418–434.

¹¹⁹ <<https://sinai.library.ucla.edu/browse>>, under 'CPA NF frg. 12'.

¹²⁰ Bandt 2019, 124–127.

¹²¹ Brock with an Appendix by Müller-Kessler forthcoming.

¹²² Bandt 2019, 136–139.

¹²³ Shoemaker 2011, 267.

complete folios of Add MS 17135, fols 6–11 (Fig. 22)¹²⁴ and the fragmentarily published Add MS 14665, fols 21–24¹²⁵ – namely, that the British Library could not offer me any ultraviolet reading lamp (either missing, broken, etc.), and even the batteries in the torch were not working. On my next research visits, I brought my own lamp, which was of the same making as in any other library such as the University Library of Cambridge or the Bodleian Library in Oxford. It was, however, absolutely forbidden to use this lamp, and I was also denied a dark room. The Rare Reading Room allowed me to use the lamp only if I would not constantly light up the manuscript with it. In the end, I bought another private torch with ultraviolet light, which I was entitled to use in both reading rooms. Although the light conditions in the Rare Reading Room in the corner of ‘Special Material’ were better (i.e. darker) in the beginning, suddenly this part of the room was lit as in the Oriental and Asiatic Reading Room due to the complaints of other readers. Despite all these obstacles in the end I was able to prepare primary editions of the *Obsequies of the Lady Mary* (BHO 643) from these two early and unique textual transmissions in Syriac (Add MS 17135, fols 9, 6 [top], 7 [bottom])¹²⁶ and the fragmentarily published Add MS 14665, fols 21–24, which both have no surviving Greek *Vorlage*,¹²⁷ and could offer at least a codicological description of probably one of the earliest witnesses of a text by Jacob of Serugh, his *Homily on the Presentation at the Temple*, in the other four folios BL, Add MS 17135, fols 6 (bottom), 7 (top), 10–11 (Fig. 23).¹²⁸ With the help of multi-spectral imaging, more might have been possible to achieve, but one must bear in mind that no granting body would finance travel of the Lazarus Project group from the Rochester Institute of Technology, New York State, to shoot photographs of only ten palimpsest folios in London. However, the Association pour l’Étude de la Littérature Apocryphe Chrétienne (AELAC) in Lausanne does have a project planned to procure such multispectral images from the British Library for the edition of the *Dormition of Mary* (BHO 643) from various language sources, which will probably improve the reading through this technological method.¹²⁹

¹²⁴ Müller-Kessler 2020a.

¹²⁵ Müller-Kessler 2022c.

¹²⁶ Müller-Kessler 2020a.

¹²⁷ Müller-Kessler 2020a and 2022c.

¹²⁸ Müller-Kessler 2020c.

¹²⁹ The project of an edition in a Corpus Christianorum Series Apocryphorum volume for all witnesses of the *Dormition of Mary* was discussed and planned in a meeting between Sergey Kim, Jean-Daniel Kaestli, and myself in Lausanne in November 2023.



Fig. 22: BL, Add MS 17135, fol. 9^r: *Obsequies* §§ 98–99a; © Christa Müller-Kessler.

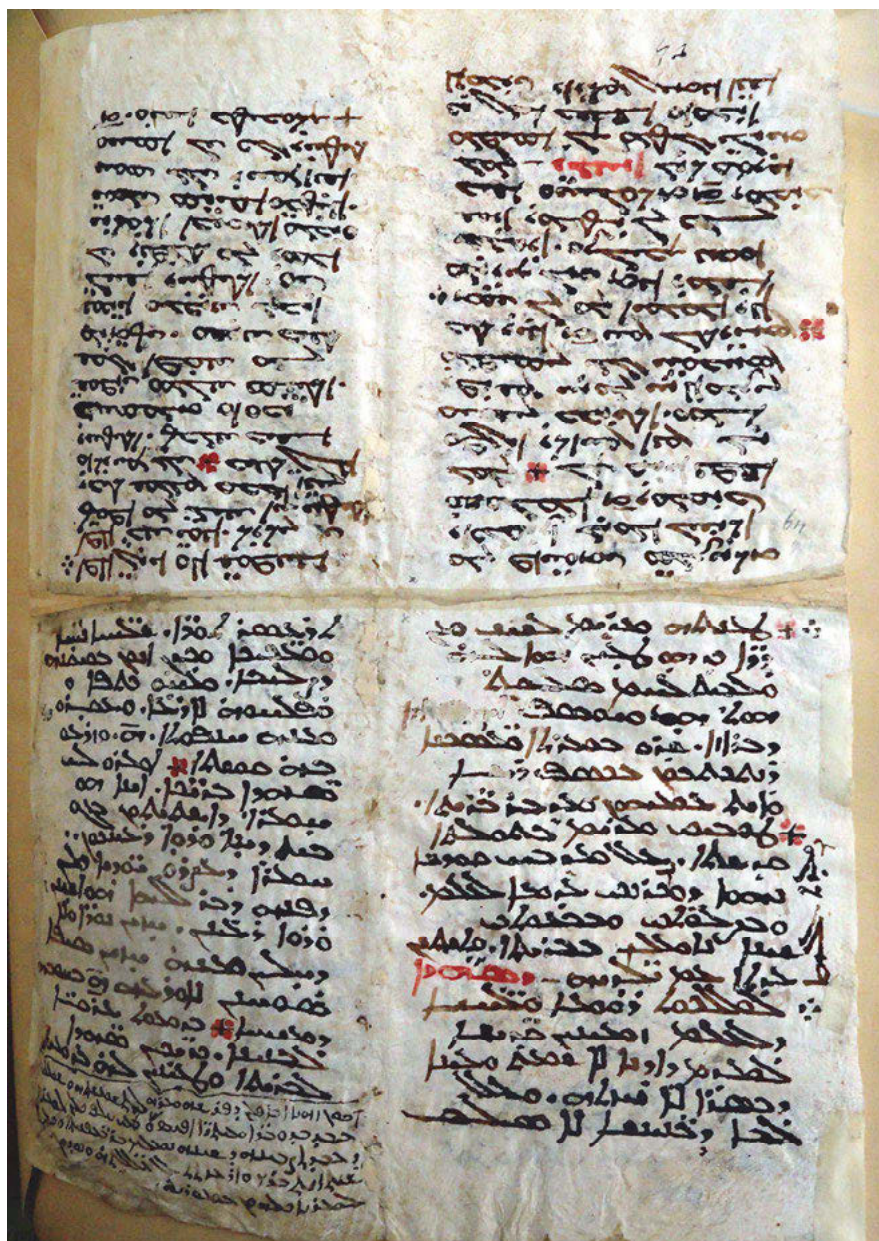


Fig. 23: BL, Add MS 17135, fol. 11^v: Jacob of Serugh, *Homily of the Presentation at the Temple*; © Christa Müller-Kessler.

3.3 Various CPA palimpsest fragments under the handwriting of Ioane Zosime

In 2022, I was supposed to hand in a contribution on CPA texts found in four or more manuscripts reused under Georgian texts by Ioane Zosime for the journal *Digital Kartvelology*. Most of the texts had already been assigned to their rightful content, but again single fragments were left over, which still needed identification. The fragments in question came from Princeton, Garrett MS. 24 and others from the New Finds at St Catherine's Monastery. Time was running short in February, since – due to a misunderstanding about the deadline – I had only one month to put together the article. Again, the problem was that the fragments from the Princeton University Library, except for one, existed only in xeroopies of black-and-white photo prints, which were hardly legible, and Princeton's plan to prepare multispectral images and put them online for an interested readership was only to happen in June.¹³⁰ So, I was stuck with these hardly legible fragments in poor photographs. Trying to extract some sensible passages, and noticing that in Princeton, Garrett MS. 24, fol. 99 (Fig. 24), the same scribal hand could be made out as in Sin. georg. NF 19, fol. 61, provided a start for a possible identification.¹³¹ The successful attribution on the basis of my scanty readings was achieved by Estella Kessler.¹³² She was able to trace the vital passages of the *Sermo de poenitentia* by John Chrysostom (CPG 4631) through the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae*,¹³³ which helped considerably in understanding the lower text. Finally, the Garrett palimpsest fragments went online in June 2022 and it was possible to fill remaining reading gaps for publication, except for the two fols 88/89, which remained unidentified. On 15 August (Assumption Day), when the new electronic journal *Digital Kartvelology* was published, Sebastian Brock identified my readings of Princeton, Garrett MS. 24, fols 88/89 with Ephrem, *In adventum Domini* (CPG 4012). The fragments directly precede SUB, Syr. 23, fols 2^r/3^v (Figs 8a–b).¹³⁴ The identification of all the Georgian palimpsest fragments which have CPA underneath is not

¹³⁰ A number of colleagues were informed about this link by William Noel, Associate University Librarian for Special Collections; see <<https://catalog.princeton.edu/catalog/99108928073506421>>.

¹³¹ At <<https://sinai.library.ucla.edu/browse>> under 'Georgian NF 19', fol. 62 is found a text which is a non-palimpsest. It was not identified by me as in 2013 I had never received any photo of this folio with the lot of CPA folios under Sin. georg. NF 19. The text on this damaged and only partially preserved fragment precedes, from the content point of view, Sin. georg. NF 19, fol. 61. Now only the former lower half of Princeton, Garrett MS. 24, fol. 99 is still missing.

¹³² At that time, Kessler was still at Brasenose College, now New College, Oxford.

¹³³ <<https://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu/>>.

¹³⁴ Sebastian P. Brock, email, 15 August 2022.

possible, except for some perfectly legible homilies (CSR^j, CSR^k).¹³⁵ They were presumably removed from St Catherine's Monastery by Friedrich Grote in 1892, later went through shadowy routes into the private possession of Consul Adam in Göttingen,¹³⁶ and, via the antiquarian book dealer Karl W. Hiersemann, into the collections of Robert Garrett¹³⁷ and the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana (Vat.sir. 623; 627; 628).

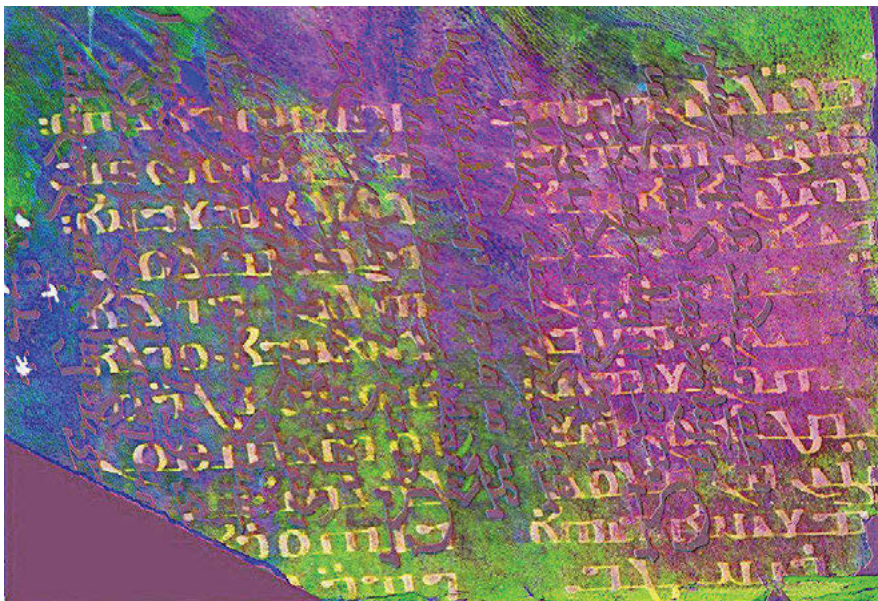


Fig. 24: Princeton, Garrett MS. 24, fol. 99r: John Chrysostom, *De poenitentia*; © Princeton University Library, Princeton.

Another double folio (Sin. georg. NF 55, fols 19 + 20) took several attempts for a first identification.¹³⁸ Jost Gippert asked me a few times if I could manage any kind of attribution of the two lower CPA scripts in this unique palimpsest to be inte-

¹³⁵ Müller-Kessler 2014, 288–296.

¹³⁶ Albrecht 2013, 273. See Emilio Bonfiglio's contribution to the present volume for a similar case.

¹³⁷ Skemer 1996.

¹³⁸ Alain Desreumaux in <<https://sinai.library.ucla.edu/browse>>, under 'Georgian NF 55', 'Under-texts', and 'Gospel of Mark. New Testament'. This identification cannot be verified. It also should be pointed out that this bifolio is a double palimpsest with two CPA texts above each other, where the lowest layer and older CPA type is difficult to make out. For the first publication concerning the double folio, see Gippert et al. 2008–2010, vol. 1, I-29 where the undertext was assumed to be Syriac.

grated in a revised publication of the Caucasian Albanian palimpsests. The difficulty has been, despite having multispectral images at hand, that only on two sides of each folio are single words of the lowest CPA script sort of legible. The individual letters do not show clear contours. The middle CPA script shows a different scribal hand and mingles with the lower one, especially in fol. 19^r. It so happened that I had just transliterated one folio in another manuscript from the New Finds, Sin. syr. NF 56, fol. 82^v/77^r, which contains Matthew 13:49b–55a.¹³⁹ Although Sin. georg. NF 55, fol. 20^v deviates slightly in text from Sin. syr. NF 56, fol. 82^v/77^r, it provided the entry into a first reading and assigning of the double folio to a similar layer of a quire with probably nearly identical Matthew verses (13:49?–55a), which turned out to be in fol. 20^v from hitherto unattested verses (13:54b–55a), also in CPA.¹⁴⁰

3.4 Taylor-Schechter Collection and Lewis-Gibson Glass Collection

In 2023, forty years after I started my work on the CPA text corpus and during the preparation of a manuscript catalogue of all the CPA palimpsests known from the Cairo Genizah in a number of collections, I decided to attempt another reading of the unidentified palimpsests in the Cambridge University Library. I had obtained black-and-white prints of all the fragments between 1991 and 1994, but the script on some fragments has been so very poorly preserved that reading or identification at home was impossible, just as it was years ago in the library itself. In February 2023, the head of the Genizah Unit, Ben Outhwaite, gave permission for the fragments sewn into glass (actually perspex) to be taken to the dark room, where I could use the two ultraviolet lamps provided. This was very helpful for all the Taylor-Schechter fragments, but not for the two folios which belong to the former Lewis and Gibson collection (L-G Glass 1a, 1b), which meanwhile were bought in a joint acquisition by the Cambridge University Library and Bodleian Library at Oxford from Westminster College, Cambridge. The glass material (perspex) under which these are mounted clearly must be a different kind, since this material reflects, and reading the lower text was impossible with this kind of method in the dark room. On the third day, I could not access the Manuscript Room, as an over-

¹³⁹ Identified by Alain Desreumaux in <<https://sinai.library.ucla.edu/browse>>, under ‘Syriac NF 56’ and ‘Undertexts’.

¹⁴⁰ According to the quire with fols 82/77 and 83/76 (Matthew 13:42b–55a, 15:27b–39), as displayed by Desreumaux 2023, 136.

head lamp had fused and burnt out. The room was understandably closed for replacement of all lamps, as it would have been a hazard for the materials stored there. Due to the repeated experience of libraries not having ultraviolet lamps at all or only missing or broken ones (as in all reading rooms of the British Library in the last years), I keep with me my own lamp or other lighting device, such as a torch with ultraviolet light. To my utter surprise, the reading of the lower script under these two folios (L-G Glass 1a, 1b) with this torch under full overhead artificial neon light in the Rare Reading Room was suddenly possible.¹⁴¹ It happens to be the rather rare text of the *Sermo de poenitentia* by Ioannes Ieiunator (Ἰωάννης ὁ νηστευτής; CPG 7555) in its earliest transmission (Fig. 6), of which I owe the identification to Estella Kessler, who managed to attribute the Greek version through the help of the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae*.¹⁴² All in all, five palimpsest fragments out of eight were possible to attribute despite the appalling state of their preservation.¹⁴³ One is from the Book of Joshua (T-S 12.758);¹⁴⁴ a double folio of 3 Kingdoms 11:5–14; 31–36 (T-S 16.328), partially as a non-palimpsest but with a very faint script (Fig. 5); one belongs to the Wisdom of Solomon 13:1–11 (T-S 12.209),¹⁴⁵ as a part of the same manuscript as Bodl., Syr. d. 32; and the last probably comes from pseudo-Caesarius (T-S 12.759; Fig. 4). All are hidden under Palestinian Hebrew types of script. As I write this article, three of the fragments with Wisdom of Solomon, 3 Kingdoms, and pseudo-Caesarius (CPG 7482?) are to be photographed with the multispectral-imaging method by Ivan Shevchuk and Kyle Ann Huskin from the Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures at Hamburg University, which will hopefully make a better or full reading for their coming publications feasible. Remaining are two half-complete folios, and the rest are only surviving edges of folios with a few letters on them, not enough to be able to join or read them.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴¹ Although Lewis applied a reagent (hydro-sulphuret of ammonia) on the two fragments and some others in the Taylor-Schechter Collection, the lower script was not affected, and it is still legible; see Lewis and Gibson 1900, IX.

¹⁴² Müller-Kessler and Kessler forthcoming.

¹⁴³ Müller-Kessler 2023b.

¹⁴⁴ Cambridge, University Library, T-S 12.758 with Joshua underneath is one of the best examples for a Palestinian Hebrew script nearly covering the CPA one below; see Müller-Kessler 2023a.

¹⁴⁵ Two articles on these topics are in preparation.

¹⁴⁶ Müller-Kessler 2023b, 117.

Conclusion

All in all, it will have become clear that reading and dealing with palimpsest manuscripts, as well as their remaining fragments, is not as easily done as one would expect, even in our modern times and with advanced technology. Despite the introduction of multispectral imaging, many institutions do not yet have the equipment to produce such photographs. It also would have been quite an endeavour and too expensive to fly in specialists for, for example, one to ten folios when I was dealing with the palimpsest fragments of the *Dormition of Mary* (BHO 643; Fig. 22) and the earliest palimpsest fragments of Jacob of Serugh's homily on the *Presentation at the Temple* (Fig. 23) between 2018 and 2022, both stored in the British Library.¹⁴⁷ In the end, one is stuck with the old reading methods, which, nevertheless, produced in the early stages of palimpsest research excellent results when, for example, Lewis and Gibson were working with Francis C. Burkitt, Robert L. Bensly, and John Rendel Harris on the Old Syriac Gospel text in St Catherine's Monastery on Mount Sinai during the first months of 1892,¹⁴⁸ or when Johan Ludvig Heiberg was working on the Archimedes Codex in Istanbul in 1906,¹⁴⁹ or when scholars were working from their photographs back home. It cannot be denied that with the new technology a fuller reading is often possible, undertaken in a leisurely fashion at one's own desk, but the achievements of preceding scholars should not be underestimated or sneered at. The question is if it is vital to have elaborate commentaries on a missing diacritical sign, as in Greek recently,¹⁵⁰ or on *seyames* (double plural dots) in Syriac when the basic texts have already been more or less established with perhaps a few errors in some readings.¹⁵¹ Young scholars who do not know such historical working methods should show more respect for the work done under less favourable conditions, which can be still found and experienced nowadays even in renowned libraries.

Acknowledgements

For the permission to reproduce images, I must thank the following institutions: Cambridge University Library; St Catherine's Monastery; Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Göttingen; Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana; and Princeton University Library.

¹⁴⁷ Müller-Kessler 2020a; 2020c and 2022c.

¹⁴⁸ Gibson 1893; Lewis 1910.

¹⁴⁹ Netz et al. 2011.

¹⁵⁰ Malik 2022, 741–746, and Malik 2023, 22–23 overrates such deficiencies, which do not change anything on the text readings, as rightly pointed out by Parker 2008, 96–97.

¹⁵¹ Such tiny diacritical signs are often covered by the upper layer.

Abbreviations

BHG = François Halkin, *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Graeca*, 3rd edn (Subsidia Hagiographica, 8a), Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1957; *Novum Auctarium* (Subsidia Hagiographica, 65), Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1984.

BHO = Paul Peeters, *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Orientalis* (Subsidia Hagiographica, 10), Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1910.

CPG = Maurits Geerard, *Clavis Patrum Graecorum*, vols 1–5 (Corpus Christianorum), Turnhout: Brepols, 1974–1987; Jacques Noret, *CPG III*, 2nd edn, Turnhout: Brepols, 2003; Maurits Geerard and Jacques Noret, *Supplementum*, Turnhout: Brepols, 1998; <<https://clavis.brepols.net/ciacla/Default.aspx>> (accessed on 13 February 2024).

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