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Preface

The papers gathered in this book were first presented and discussed at a conference organized in cooperation with the Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures at Universität Hamburg (CSMC) and within the framework of an AHRC-DFG project focusing on the illumination of early Solomonic Ethiopic manuscripts which I co-directed with Alessandro Bausi.¹ The aim of the conference was to bring together scholars working on textual and visual features of manuscript cultures with a strong connection to the Mediterranean area to bridge disciplinary barriers and promote method sharing. With this goal in mind, even if our core focus was on oriental Christian traditions, in view of our own research background, we sought to dialogue with scholars working on Western Europe and other religious traditions.²

In employing this approach, we aligned ourselves with some of the research objectives pursued by the Comparative Oriental Manuscript Studies (COMSt) project which culminated in 2015 with the publication of the volume *Comparative Oriental Manuscript Studies: An Introduction*.³ As the general editor of this volume wrote in the first editorial to the *COMSt Bulletin*, it will take time to evaluate the scholarly response to this landmark publication.⁴ Nevertheless, the impact of COMSt is already evident in many of the volumes published within the Studies in Manuscript Cultures series which share an aspiration to bridge across disciplinary boundaries.⁵

1 The project was ‘Demarginalizing medieval Africa: Images, texts, and identity in early Solomonic Ethiopia (1270–1527)’, AHRC-DFG grant (ref. no. AH/V002910/1). The conference, entitled ‘Illuminating the Eastern Christian World’, was held on 30 June–1 July 2022: <<https://www.aai.uni-hamburg.de/en/ethiostudies/research/demargin/news/20220630.html>> (accessed on 20 July 2024). A review of the conference is available in *Comparative Oriental Manuscript Studies Bulletin*, 8/1 (2022): 287–289, <<https://doi.org/10.25592/uhhfdm.11558>>.

2 Only one of the two papers that dealt with Latin manuscripts has been included here. Oriental traditions for purposes of this volume are, as defined in Bausi 2015a, 2, those ‘non-Occidental (non-Latin based) manuscript cultures which have an immediate historical (“genetic”) relationship with the Mediterranean codex area’.

3 Bausi et al. (eds) 2015.

4 Bausi 2015b, 5.

5 See Bausi, Friedrich and Maniaci (eds) (2020) as well as Bausi and Friedrich (eds) (2023) to mention just two recent examples where COMSt is directly cited.

Twelve of the seventeen papers given at the original conference have been included here. The result is a volume that focuses on manuscripts and is broad in scope, covering artefacts produced during a period that stretches from Late Antiquity to the fifteenth century, and presenting case studies that range from the British Isles to East Africa and from Spain and the Maghreb to Armenia. The papers conceptualise manuscripts as complex portable historical artefacts that are best approached through a multidisciplinary lens, drawing from disciplines such as palaeography, art history, codicology, and text criticism. It is worth noting that, while not all of the manuscripts discussed in what follows were religious in content, they were produced by and/or for people or communities who adhered to a monotheistic religion (Judaism, Islam, and Christianity).

The work of the authors – who recurrently draw on the information provided by colophons and notes as well as on visual and literary cues – sheds light on the impact of patrons and makers on the visual, textual, or material features of manuscripts as well as on their circulation. For instance, Umberto Bongianino shows that an Arabic star atlas (Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Rossiano 1033) was made in Ceuta in 1224 CE alongside other manuscripts destined for the library of a *madrasa* founded by the local scholar and philanthropist Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī al-Ghāfiqī al-Shārri. This was not the only library in town, but, based on a report by historian Muḥammad b. Qāsim al-Anṣārī, was part of a constellation of book collections assembled by local notables and scholars in their own homes. Certain visual features of the manuscript, according to Bongianino reflect the ‘personal style and preferences’ of its artist as well as his wider surroundings. The image of the Virgo, for example, may have been inspired by a female statue locally identified as Virgo. Bongianino informs us that one such statue was placed above a gate of Córdoba. Nevertheless, for Bongianino these collections of manuscripts, and manuscript Rossiano 1033 in particular, should be considered ‘primarily against the background of Andalusī manuscript culture’, which was shaped by the bibliophile activities of individuals such as al-Shārri.

Another individual responsible for founding a library was ‘Iyasus Mo’a, the prominent Ethiopian abbot of the monastery of Dabra Ḥayq ‘Ēstifānos. In his analysis of the portrait of this abbot that prefaces a gospel book he commissioned in 1280/1281 CE Jacopo Gnisci draws attention to a clear link between his ambitions and the miniature’s visual features. The miniature’s caption uncharacteristically labels ‘Iyasus Mo’a as a ‘saint’ and deliberately blurs the distinction between him and the other saintly figures in the volume to legitimise his newly acquired position as a close ally to the new emperor of Ethiopia, which made him one of the most powerful individuals of his time. The abbot grasps a book that likely represents the gospel manuscript within which his portrait is found. He holds it up as

an offering to the sacred figures that follow, but also to the viewers of the image, namely the monks of Dabra Ḥayq ʿĒstifānos, who would have had to collectively participated in the manuscript's production under ʿIyasus Mo'a's leadership. Viewing this image, Gnisci argues, would have reminded the monks of the spiritual and material relationships that bound them together and are embodied in the manuscript held by the abbot.

Libraries and patrons are also a major concern of Philip Michael Forness's study, where the author shows that Syriac translators could go to great lengths, travel great distances, and even transcend confessional boundaries to consult a particular collection of manuscripts. However, copies of particular works could just as easily travel to a translator, as evidenced by the preface of Sergius of Resh'ayna to his Syriac translation of the Aristotelian treatise *On the World*. Forness's contribution shows that internal Miaphysite debates could provide the impetus for the translation of certain books from Greek into Syriac, such as John Chrysostom's *Commentary on First Corinthians*. To support his argument, Forness has edited, translated, and analysed a group of seven short texts appended to a sixth-century manuscript that contains a portion of this translation (London, British Library, Add. 12160). These paratexts provide information on the circumstances of its production and give us the name of the manuscript's scribe, Thomas deacon of Edessa, and of its homonymous patron, abbot of the monastery of Gubba Barraya.

Several centuries after Thomas commissioned a manuscript for Gubba Barraya, a scribe called Mūbārak finished copying an illustrated Syriac gospel lectionary (Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. sir. 559). This, and other codices are the focus of François Pacha Miran, who discusses the workshops, makers, and patrons involved in the production and illumination of Syriac lectionaries between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries. By drawing on the material features of the manuscripts as well as on the evidence of notes and colophons, Pacha Miran sheds light on the developments that gradually saw copies of the Four Gospels being replaced by gospel lectionaries in the liturgy. The newfound importance of these manuscripts led to greater investment in their making and materials.

The surviving evidence analysed by Pacha Miran indicates that while monks were often involved in these processes the task could also be fulfilled by secular clergymen or by families of craftsmen. To explore such familial ties, Pacha Miran looks closely at the activities of a group of three men who were related to Yūḥanon of Qarṭmin, bishop of Ṭūr ʿAbdīn and who produced at least three lectionaries including London, British Library, Or. 3372. This family of manuscript workers included ʿAmanūʾil, the bishop's nephew, who worked with the assistance

of his brothers Petros and Niḥē. By drawing on the evidence of colophons found in a wide body of illustrated and non-illustrated volumes Pacha Miran's paper also maps out a large network of institutions where manuscripts were produced and shows that some of these institutions could collaborate in the production of a manuscript. Interestingly, several such institutions were located in the environs of Edessa, which, as Forness's paper shows, emerged as an important centre of manuscript production already in Late Antiquity. Taken together, the evidence discussed in these two studies calls for further research on the continuity of manuscript practices around Edessa.

Matthew R. Crawford contribution considers the decoration of the Eusebian Canon Tables in the Middle Ages and looks comparatively at how two separate communities came to interpret them. For the Anglo-Saxon tradition, he considers the visual evidence provided by the Canon Tables of the Lindisfarne Gospels and the symbolism of their numeric forms. For the Armenian tradition, he focuses on written commentaries on the Canon Tables attributed to Step'anos Siwnec'i and Nersēs Šnorhali, which interpret the accompanying illuminations in symbolic terms. Despite the geographic divide, Crawford shows that both traditions came to view and interpret the Canon Tables in remarkably similar ways, associating them with the Christian community of worshipers united, despite their diversity, through the figure of Christ. In his opinion, such shared interpretations stem from a new mode of viewing art that emerged among Christians in Late Antiquity.

Crawford papers shows that interconnected traditions need not necessarily be prompted by shared spaces. Indeed, most of the manuscripts considered in this volume draw on visual, material, or textual traditions that have their roots in the late antique Mediterranean world. This 'common patrimony', as Crawford calls it, can be mobilized to explain some of the iconographic affinities between classical Roman globes, medieval Aratean manuscripts, and the Arabic star atlas discussed by Bongianino. Likewise, the illuminated frame that surmounts the portrait of 'Iyasus Mo'a, discussed in Gnisci's paper, recalls the arches that decorate the Canon Tables from the same manuscript, which, in turn, evidently have their roots in late antique visual culture.

As portable as manuscripts might sometimes be, their decorations may call forth notions of monumentality and immobility. In this respect, movement comes into play in a very different manner in Katrin Kogman-Appel's discussion of a Hebrew Bible produced in 1299 by the scribe Solomon ben Raphael (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, hébreu 7) – a work that features pages with architectural frames that were intended to evoke the urban space in which its anonymous patron lived. In this respect, the images may be seen as an index of the movement of their maker across the multifith networks and entangled spaces of medieval

Iberia. In this regard, the arches in the Hebrew Bible may have led their first viewers to think as much about their permeable physical surroundings as about the cultural networks they were part of.

For Kogman-Appel, the shared material and visual features of certain Hebrew Bibles might have contributed to a ‘sense of belonging that must have transcended cultural and/or religious divides’. Contiguity, the author notes, could aid acculturation and the diffusion of material practices, techniques, and visual motifs, but ideas could also travel across longer distances. In this regard, by looking at the micrographic designs of manuscript hébreu 7, Kogman-Appel also draws the reader’s attention to the existence of strong links between North Africa and the Iberian Peninsula – ties which are also explored in Bongianino’s contribution where the visual conventions of the Arabic star atlas are compared to contemporary Maghribī codices. Ultimately, for Kogman-Appel, the 1299 Bible can be read as a work that responded to local scholarship while simultaneously tapped into a wider Jewish network of bibliophiles. The latter connection is evidenced by the similarities in how the Temple vessels are represented in the hébreu 7 codex and in a manuscript now in Parma (Biblioteca Palatina, Parm. 2668) that was probably illustrated in Toledo.

The possible transmission of visual ideas between manuscripts and monumental art comes into play also in Mat Immerzeel’s paper which focuses on the Christian arts of medieval Egypt. The author carefully weaves the thread of his argument acknowledging the limitations of the available evidence and focusing on a group of manuscripts linked to monastic sites in the Fayyum and Wādī al-Naṭrūn. Among the works considered by Immerzeel is a manuscript (New York, The Morgan Library & Museum, M.613) that includes a copy of the martyrdom of St Theodore the Oriental and a note indicating that the volume was copied by Mōusēs, a deacon of Tebtunis, with the assistance of the subdeacon Khaēl and then given to the nearby monastery of Dayr al-Mal’ak Miḥā’il. The book is prefaced by a miniature of Theodore slaying an androcephalous dragon. Immerzeel notes that the only other representation of this motif was found in a now-lost wall painting from Tebtunis and points out that there *may* have been an indirect link between the two. Building upon this and other carefully collected observations Immerzeel concludes that it is difficult to definitively locate ‘direct connections between specific miniatures and works of monumental art’, but that continued research into this topic could further our knowledge of the activities of monastic workshops in medieval Egypt.

Patrons, familial ties, networks, and manuscript making emerge as a key concern also in Gohar Grigoryan’s study of the decorations of an Armenian ritual book (London, British Library, Add. 19548) whose miniatures were hitherto un-

published. The colophon in the manuscript identifies its maker as an individual called Kostandin, whereas its miniatures showcase a resemblance to works produced at Cilician scriptoria around the last quarter of the twelfth century. This evidence leads Grigoryan to associate the British Library manuscript with the network of Grigor Mliċec'i and Kostandin Skewřac'i, accomplished scribes and miniaturists with strong ties to the Lambron family.

Elite patronage is the focus also of Sophia Dege-Müller's paper, which looks at a group of illuminated Ethiopic manuscripts produced between the late fourteenth and first half of the fifteenth centuries and analyses their links with the imperial court of Ethiopia. In particular, Dege-Müller draws a connection between the illustrations found in a fragmentary fifteenth-century copy of the *Miracles of Mary* (Munich, Museum Fünf Kontinente, MfVK 86-307647) with the illustrations found in six other Ethiopic manuscripts from this period which have imperial provenance. A supplication note in the Munich *Miracles of Mary* discussed by the author shows that the manuscript was commissioned by Emperor Zar'a Yā'qob alongside Habta Māryām and 'Amata Māryām. The latter is known from other sources as a sister of the emperor. By drawing on the evidence provided by this and other manuscripts, Dege-Müller turns the spotlight on the role of women linked to the Solomonic dynasty of Ethiopia, such as Emperor Zar'a Yā'qob's wife 'Ēleni, in the commissioning of manuscripts in fifteenth-century Ethiopia, a topic that had received only marginal attention up to this point.

Ethiopian imperial patronage comes into focus also in a paper by Vitagrazia Pisani that looks at the movement of Ethiopic manuscripts to and from Jerusalem starting from a volume (Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Borg. et. 3) that was donated by Emperor 'Amda Šəyon to the Church of St Mary of Golgotha in Jerusalem and that was likely taken to the Vatican by Māḥšanta Māryām in the first half of the seventeenth century. Some of the notes in the manuscripts discussed by Pisani document the movement of manuscripts, but also provide insight into the rationale for commissioning a particular group of texts and the religious motivations of a patron. For example, a note from a fifteenth-century Octateuch (Cambridge, University Library, BFBS 169) tells us that a certain Yəšḥaq brought this and several other manuscripts with him on his way to Jerusalem to enhance his chances of salvation. Among them was a version of the *Book of Hours* that had only recently been written in Ethiopia. Yəšḥaq commissioned this manuscript because he believed the work would have been unknown to the members of the Ethiopian diaspora present in the city of Jerusalem. The remarkable journeys made by some of these manuscripts did not always end in Jerusalem; a considerable number would subsequently reach other destinations, such as Rome, in the hands of pilgrims and travellers, a topic addressed also in Alin Suciu's paper.

A very different and more personal network of relations contributed to the production of an Armenian manuscript (Venice, Biblioteca dei Mechitaristi di S. Lazaro degli Armeni, 103) copied in 1336 and discussed by Theo Maarten van Lint. The manuscript, occasionally decorated with headpieces, contains a homily by Yovhannēs Erznkac'i Pluz and a group of twenty-two poems by Kostandin Erznkac'i. Remarkably, one of the poems is devoted to the copyist and owner of the manuscript Amir P'ōlin, who may even have had an autograph copy of the poems at hand when copying them in the Sanjarān gate of Tabriz. Intimate intellectual and emotional relationships are at play in this manuscript, so much so that Amir often adds his name next to that of Kostandin when the latter addresses himself in one of his poems. According to van Lint, the choice to juxtapose the homily and poems, which tackle similar topics, such as love and knowledge, is also clearly Amir's, who must have perceived the texts as closely related. The S. Lazaro degli Armeni manuscript thus reveals much about Amir's spiritual and religious world-view.

The pentaglot psalter (Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Barb. or. 2) written in Ethiopic, Syriac, Bohairic Coptic, Arabic, and Armenian considered by Alin Suciu attest to a much wider web of relationships that stretched across the Eastern Christian world. The mirror-like arrangement of the five columns on the verso and recto of each opening confers 'orderliness' to the manuscript but also ensures that Coptic 'entertains the place of honour' within the overall design of the volume. Suciu shows that the manuscript, as its companion volumes (e.g. Milan, Veneranda Biblioteca Ambrosiana, B 20/A inf. and B 20/B inf.), were likely all commissioned for the monastic settlements of the Wādī al-Naṭrūn by a Syrian priest called Ṣalīb or Ṣalībā towards the mid thirteenth century. Changes of hand in the manuscripts indicate that they were produced by multiple scribes working in each language. Thus, for Suciu, the pentaglot manuscripts point to the 'fact that the Wādī Naṭrūn was a space of entangled communities' with a shared non-Chalcedonian identity.

In addition to considering the circumstances that led to the production of the polyglot manuscripts considered in his study, Suciu takes us beyond the Middle Ages by exploring their subsequent biography. He notes that the books he discusses continued to attract interest from readers after the sixteenth century. The pentaglot psalter, for instance, was repaired in 1626 at the behest of Anba Yūnis, abbot of the monastery of St Macarius in Wādī al-Naṭrūn where the book was kept. Shortly after, the volume aroused the interest of the French Capuchin missionary Agathange de Vendôme who purchased it in 1635 to send it to France to the antiquarian Nicolas-Claude Fabri de Peiresc. The manuscript was, however, seized by pirates and ended up in the hands of the pasha of Tripoli. Peiresc mobilized his

overseas contacts and eventually managed to track down the manuscript and ransom it, only to later discover that he had been sent a dud. Peiresc would die before ever seeing the manuscript which would eventually find its way into the collection of Cardinal Francesco Barberini. Suciu shows that, as an object of the burgeoning European interests in Oriental manuscripts, the pentaglot psalter was entangled in a network of ties that criss-crossed the Mediterranean world. In Europe, the interests in such works were spurred by men of letters who contributed to the development of research on the Oriental manuscript traditions. Suciu's contribution thus provides a fitting conclusion to the essays collected in this volume.

The case studies in this volume provide a multifaceted view of the relationship between manuscripts and their scribes, collectors, patrons, and readers during the Middle Ages. Taken as a whole, the papers provided readers with a glimpse of the dynamics affecting book production and circulation across the wider Mediterranean region. The papers bring out a rich range of evidence and methods that can be deployed for understanding such dynamics and some remarkable similarities. One may mention, as an example, the key role played by wealthy and powerful patrons in shaping the production and movement of material culture (e.g. in the papers by Bongianino, Gnisci, Grigoryan, Pisani, Dege-Müller) or the ongoing engagement with the heritage of Late Antiquity and early Christianity (e.g. Pacha Miran, Crawford, Kogman-Appel, Immerzeel). In all of these traditions, however, the engagement with tradition and the past is never a static exercise of repetition, but rather an evolving and ever-changing dialogue that results in the creation of remarkable and unprecedented written artefacts (e.g. van Lint, Suciu). The manuscript traditions considered here were extraordinarily dynamic each in their own unique way, and this is a point that still needs to be underscored when focusing on contexts outside of the Latin West.

Thus, providing this platform for comparative dialogue between scholars working on different traditions does not imply a call for methodological uniformity on our part. Indeed, while the studies in this volume provide a basis for developing shared perspectives and for locating instances of cross-Mediterranean exchange during the Middle Ages, it is equally clear that the written artefacts considered here require that equal attention is paid to the local and the particular. The contributors have achieved this objective by destabilising notions of cultural uniformity and national or religious identity and by locating instances of heterodoxy, idiosyncrasy, cultural mixing, acculturation, and pluralism.

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