



Universität Hamburg  
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CENTRE FOR THE  
STUDY OF  
MANUSCRIPT  
CULTURES

## Manuscripts East and West – Towards Comparative and General Codicology.

### A Conference in Honour of Malachi Beit-Arié

Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures, University of Hamburg

17 – 19 October 2017

Malachi Beit-Arié is Professor Emeritus of Codicology and Palaeography at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and one of the leading scholars in manuscript studies worldwide. He is head of the Hebrew Palaeography Project under the auspices of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities and he served as the director of the Jewish National and University Library of Jerusalem from 1979 until 1990. He is also the founder and director of SfarData, the first online codicological database of dated mediaeval Hebrew manuscripts.

Malachi Beit-Arié's work has an enormous impact on contemporary research in comparative manuscript studies. Therefore CSMC has invited 25 colleagues to this conference in honour of his 80th birthday in May 2017 and his scholarly achievements. The scholars and scientists working on diverse Asian, African, and European manuscript cultures will contribute to a general methodological re-assessment of manuscript research and to new comparative perspectives on codicology and palaeography.

### Tuesday 17 October 2017

- 1.30 pm      **REGISTRATION AND WELCOME COFFEE**
- WELCOME ADDRESSES**
- 2.15 pm      **Prof. Dr. Susanne Rupp, Vice President of the University of Hamburg**  
**Prof. Dr. Nili Cohen, President of The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities**  
**Prof. Dr. Colette Sirat, École Pratique des Hautes Études, Paris**  
**Prof. Dr. Michael Friedrich, Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures**
- SESSION I      CHAIR BRUNO REUDENBACH (UNIVERSITY OF HAMBURG)**
- 2.45 pm      **Michael Friedrich (University of Hamburg)**  
*Codicology in the 21st Century*
- 3.30 pm      **Sarit Shalev-Eyni (The Hebrew University, Jerusalem)**  
*Making Hebrew Manuscripts in the Christian Urban Domain:  
The Case of Esslingen*
- 4.15 pm      *Coffee Break*

**SESSION II      CHAIR HARUNAGA ISAACSON (UNIVERSITY OF HAMBURG)**

- 4.45 pm      **Costantino Moretti (École Pratique des Hautes Études, Paris)**  
Learning from Mistakes: Notes on Scribal Errors, Corrections, and other “Paratextual”  
Elements found in Dunhuang Buddhist Manuscripts
- 5.15 pm      **Christian Brockmann (University of Hamburg)**  
Observations on the Oldest Manuscripts of Aristotle's Logical Writings
- 5.45 pm      **Nurit Pasternak (Hebrew Palaeography Project, Jerusalem)**  
Mise-en-ligne in Hebrew Manuscripts: The Obstructive “Forerunner”
- 6.30 pm      *Reception*

**Wednesday 18 October 2017**

**SESSION III      CHAIR KAJA HARTER-UIBOPUU (UNIVERSITY OF HAMBURG)**

- 9 am      **Henk De Groot (Inden witten Hasewint, Rotterdam)**  
Making Parchment: Some Unsettled Questions
- 9.45 am      **Sarah Fiddymnt (University of York)**  
Biomolecular Codicology: Revealing the Unwritten Biographies of Books
- 10.30 am      **Ira Rabin (University of Hamburg, BAM Berlin)**  
Advanced Codicology: Including Instrumental Analysis into Codicological  
Studies of Hebrew Manuscripts
- 11.15 am      *Coffee Break*

**SESSION IV      CHAIR NILI COHEN (The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities)**

- 11.45 am      **Jost Gippert (Goethe University Frankfurt)**  
Virtual Codicology - Reconstructing Palimpsested Codices
- 12.15 pm      **Oren Weinberg (Director, National Library of Israel, Jerusalem)**  
KTIV – The International Collection of Digitized Hebrew Manuscripts
- 12.45 pm      **Tamar Leiter (Hebrew Palaeography Project, Jerusalem)**  
Upgrading SfarData for Integration into KTIV
- 1 pm      *Lunch Break*

**SESSION V      CHAIR JÖRG QUENZER (UNIVERSITY OF HAMBURG)**

- 2.30 pm      **Dmitry Bondarev (University of Hamburg)**  
*Ajami Manuscripts of West Africa: an Anthropology of Layout*
- 3.15 pm      **Marilena Maniaci (University of Cassino and Southern Lazio) /  
Pasquale Orsini (Sapienza University of Rome)**  
*Comparative Perspectives on the Study of Manuscript Colophons:  
Some Preliminary Remarks*

3.45 pm      *Coffee Break*

**SESSION VI      CHAIR ALESSANDRO BAUSI (University of Hamburg)**

- 4.15 pm      **Colette Sirat (École Pratique des Hautes Études, Paris)**  
*Hebrew Codicology versus Latin Codicology*
- 4.45 pm      **Grigory Kessel (Austrian Academy of Sciences, Wien)**  
*Making a Quire of a Syriac Manuscript: Discerning Uniformity and Variety*
- 5.30 pm      *Coffee Break and end of the conference day*

**Thursday 19 October 2017**

**SESSION VII      CHAIR GIUSEPPE VELTRI (University of Hamburg)**

- 9.30 am      **Paola Buzi (Sapienza University of Rome)**  
*Coptic Manuscripts in their Archaeological Context: The "PATHs" Project  
and its First Results*
- 10 am      **Alessandro Bausi (University of Hamburg)**  
*The State of the Art of Ethiopian Manuscript Studies: a Short Overview*
- 10.30 am      **Shimon Iakerson (St. Petersburg State University)**  
*What the Karaite Jews Managed to Conceal from Avraam Firkovich, and  
Where we Can See these Treasures today*
- 11 am      *Coffee Break*

**SESSION VIII      CHAIR EVA WILDEN (University of Hamburg)**

- 11.30 am      **Edwin Wieringa (University of Cologne)**  
*Symbolism and Self-Promotion: Identity Politics in the Production of Contemporary  
Illuminated Qur'ans in Indonesia*
- 12 noon      **Florinda De Simini (University of Naples L'Orientale)**  
*Manuscript Cultures from South Asia and the Creation of Regional Identities*
- 12.30 pm      *Lunch Break*

**SESSION IX      CHAIR TAMAR LEITER (Hebrew Palaeography Project, Jerusalem)**

2.30 pm      **Edna Engel (The Hebrew University, Jerusalem)**  
Codicological and Palaeographical Analysis of the “Sabbateni” Hebrew Binding Fragments

3 pm      **François Déroche (Collège de France, Paris) /  
Nuria Martínez de Castilla (École Pratique des Hautes Études, Paris)**  
*Late Medieval Moroccan Bindings. A few Remarks*

3.30 pm      *Coffee Break*

**SESSION X      CHAIR CHRISTIAN BROCKMANN (University of Hamburg)**

4 pm      **Monika E. Müller (State and University Library Hamburg)**  
Foreign Influences in the Latin Manuscript Tradition of the 12th and 13th Centuries

4.45 pm      **Thies Staack (Heidelberg University)**  
Using “Western” Codicological Concepts for the Analysis of Early Chinese Bamboo Manuscripts: Benefits and Problems

5.30 pm      *Coffee Break*

**SESSION XI      CHAIR MICHAEL FRIEDRICH (University of Hamburg)**

6 pm      **Judith Olszowy-Schlanger (École Pratique des Hautes Études, Paris)**  
Professional Context of Hebrew Book Production in the East: New Perspectives

7.30 pm      *Farewell Dinner*

# Manuscripts East and West – Towards Comparative and General Codicology. A Conference in Honour of Malachi Beit-Arié

## Abstracts

Alessandro Bausi (University of Hamburg)

[‘The state of the art of Ethiopian manuscript studies: a short overview’](#)

The last decades since the 1970s have marked a real explosion in the study of the Ethiopian manuscripts in general and Ethiopian manuscript tradition in particular, with an astonishing acceleration in the last decade. Besides the last comprehensive presentation given in the COMSt Handbook within a broad comparative perspective, a series of general overviews has contributed to mediating the subject to an increasingly wider audience that has discovered the potential of Ethiopian manuscript tradition for comparative work. The two basic reasons for this development are the extremely high number of still little known or completely undocumented manuscripts, particularly in Ethiopia, but in many collections in Europe and the USA as well, and the peculiarity of Ethiopian manuscript tradition being a still living tradition. Besides traditional or even innovative codicological research carried out in the last years, also ethnographic observations have gained in interest and appeal. Besides field research, also scientific analysis was carried out in the last years, in a scale and with a degree of precision like never before. This latter aspect has been fostered by a new appreciation of the physicality of the manuscript as an artefact on the one hand and the new technological approach made possible by miniaturization and portability of tools on the other hand. One cannot say that the same progress can be perceived as far as philological studies are concerned.

Dmitry Bondarev (University of Hamburg)

[‘Ajami manuscripts of West Africa: an anthropology of layout’](#)

In the context of African studies, the generic term ‘Ajami manuscript’ applies to any instance of writing an African language in Arabic script in manuscript form. The relationship between Ajami, Arabic and interlinear and marginal space can be categorised into five distinct types, each with its own layout tendency. The Ajami manuscripts of types 1 (single Ajami texts), 4 (occasional Ajami in densely written Arabic texts) and 5 (diglossia in manuscript form) exist in any layout known in the Islamic manuscripts of sub-Saharan Africa. However, types 2 (intralinear Ajami) and 3 (interlinear Ajami) have respectively fixed layout sets, each conditioned by scribal practices which are in turn informed by specific domains of Islamic education. Thus, type 2 represents transmission of basic Islamic knowledge, while type 3 reflects the practice of learning Arabic through specialised linguistic registers.

Paola Buzi (Sapienza University of Rome)

[‘Coptic manuscripts in their archaeological context: The “PATHs” project and its first results’](#)

“PATHs” is an ERC project that aims to provide an in-depth diachronical understanding and effective representation of the geography of Coptic literary production, that is the corpus of writings, almost exclusively of religious contents, produced in Egypt between the 3rd and the 11th centuries in the Coptic language.

“PATHs” takes an original and pluridisciplinary approach, combining philology, codicology, archaeology and digital humanities, in order to explore the process of production, copying, usage,

dissemination, and storage of Coptic works in relation to the concrete geographical contexts of origin of both the texts themselves and their related writing supports.

By analysing texts and contents, paratexts (titles and colophons) and linguistic layers (style and dialects), the literary products are strictly related not only to the places where they have been copied, but also to the single intellectual milieus responsible for their creation. Cultural orientations and literary tastes in specific areas of Egypt will be singled out, while changes in the manufacture of codices will emerge, in a manuscript tradition that offers the oldest witnesses for the use of codex.

The final result of the project will be an exhaustive digital atlas of late antique and early medieval Egypt, based upon an interactive and flexible tool that will allow detailed and focused research and correlation of chronological, regional and thematic data.

This will illustrate, as never before, the relationship between settlements, as revealed by the archaeological investigations, and intellectual production, as revealed by manuscripts, and will provide a new comprehensive perspective on the spread and development of Coptic literature and manuscript culture.

This paper will illustrate the first achievements of the “PATHs” project, with particular regard to the relationship between texts and contexts.

[François Déroche \(Collège de France\) and Nuria Martínez de Castilla \(École Pratique des Hautes Études, Paris\)](#)

[‘Late Medieval Moroccan bindings. A few remarks’](#)

The history of Islamic bindings is hampered by the lack of evidence about the date and place of production of the bindings. The library of the Saadian sultans of Morocco provides at least some clues about the local production in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, before the introduction of the plate stamping that local binders borrowed from Ottoman sources. As the library was captured by Spain in 1612, many bindings are still in the condition they were in at that date. The paper focuses on manuscripts transcribed in Morocco during the period indicated and intends to define a type of bindings that seems to have been very successful at that moment.

[Henk de Groot \(Inden witten Hasewint, Rotterdam\)](#)

[‘Making Parchment: Some Unsettled Questions’](#)

This contribution addresses a number of unresolved questions about the making of parchment:

1. Were male or female animals used predominantly for making manuscripts?

It seems that male animals (calves, goats and sheep) provided far more skins for parchment-making than female ones since they were predominantly used for food. Is it possible to obtain a clear answer here using DNA and associated methods?

2. Is it possible to distinguish between ‘abortive’ and ‘stillborn’ animals used for parchment by means of DNA and associated methods?

The use of skins obtained from ‘abortive’ animals is well attested in parchment-making. (In fact, I once saw a picture of a slaughtered cow hanging upside down in a parchment-maker’s shop with a dead calf still inside it.) Skins of this kind were used by the parchment workshop, while the animals’ bodies were sent to universities for closer study. The skins of stillborn animals seem to be equally

appropriate for parchment-making, however, as they can be used to produce parchment that is similarly thin and fine.

3. Is there a natural explanation of Gregory's rule for collating parchment leaves in mediaeval manuscripts?

To obtain a flat manuscript that is easy to handle, its folia need to be arranged in a direction that will counteract the natural curling of the parchment. This can be presented schematically as ( ) ( ) ( ) results in IIIII. Furthermore, since the hair and flesh sides differ in colour, such an arrangement results in a single colour when the book is open.

4. How were skins split in antiquity?

Splitting of skin between the reticular and papillary layers is a well-known practice in the medical world. Is it possible to transfer this knowledge to parchment-making?

[Edna Engel \(The Hebrew University, Jerusalem\)](#)

['The 'Sabbatani' Hebrew Binding Fragments - A Codicological and Palaeographical Analysis'](#)

The covers of three volumes of the "Sabbatani Collection" of renaissance music manuscripts (ca. 1600; Fales Library & Special Collections, New York University) had boards made from six discarded parchment leaves from a Hebrew manuscript of BT *Temurah* ('Heave Offerings'). My presentation traces how joint consideration of the codicological and palaeographical characteristics of these fragments enabled me to conceptualize a model of the manuscript from which the fragments were derived, thereby contributing to the determination of its dating and provenance: late-thirteenth-century Germany.

[Sarah Fiddyment \(University of York\)](#)

['Biomolecular codicology: revealing the unwritten biographies of books'](#)

The potential information to be obtained from the large corpus of codices and documents written on parchment is immense. Aside from the obvious textual information there is a wealth of biomolecular information trapped in the fibres of the parchment. These skins represent not only legal documents or illuminated manuscripts but also an extraordinary biomolecular reservoir, preserving both proteins and DNA from the animal itself.

However, due to ethical considerations access to sample documents is often restricted. This has necessitated the development of less destructive or even non-invasive techniques in order to interrogate the material from a biological perspective. In light of this we have developed a non-invasive method for sampling parchment based on triboelectric extraction. Using conventional conservation erasers we are now able to 'dry sample' parchment in libraries and archives using a non-invasive procedure that requires no specialist training. The 'waste' eraser crumbs collected contain minute quantities of proteins and DNA that can be analysed to reveal information relating to the animal that made the parchment, the production quality and even the history of the objects handling.

Our ongoing parchment analysis project has now analysed approximately 4000 parchment samples through protein analysis to build up a picture of geographic distribution and craft production quality through time. Subsequent strategic targeting of key parchment objects has now allowed us to complete in depth biomolecular studies of complete book objects, revealing information not only about animal species and sex but also the history of the book object through microbial fingerprints.

Jost Gippert (Goethe University Frankfurt)

'Virtual Codicology – Reconstructing Palimpsested Codices'

The decipherment of palimpsests is often hampered by the fact that they have been preserved only fragmentarily, either because of damages or because parts were clipped off deliberately in the preparation of folios to be re-used. Only in very rare cases, the original structure of a palimpsested codex has been retained as such, in the sense that original quires or gatherings were kept together yielding quires or gatherings of the new codex. The reconstruction of original codex structures can nevertheless be successful, even in cases of badly distorted or fragmented palimpsests, and the reconstructability of such structures can in its turn support the decipherment. In the present paper, this will be demonstrated with examples from projects on palimpsests of Caucasian origin.

Shimon Iakerson (St. Petersburg State University)

'What the Karaite Jews Managed to Conceal from Avraam Firkovich, and Where We Can See These Treasures Today'

The famous *First Collection* of Firkovich that includes the eldest dated and indirectly dated Hebrew manuscripts of the geo-cultural region Orient, was compiled, for the most part, in Crimea. Today it is kept at the Russian National Library. The 'brutal' methods of collecting materials (breaking into *genizas* and expropriation of manuscripts from the synagogues of the Karaite Jews and the Rabbanites) were described by Avraham Firkovich himself in his book *Memorial Stones*. The book might create the impression that after the exhaustive search of the Firkovich expedition in 1839, no Hebrew manuscripts were left on the Crimean Peninsula. This is not the case, however. In the beginning of the 20th century there were still hundreds of Hebrew manuscripts there. The present talk seeks to establish what happened to them since then.

Grigory Kessel (Austrian Academy of Sciences, Wien)

'Making a Quire of a Syriac Manuscript: Discerning Uniformity and Variety'

The manuscript culture of the Aramaic-speaking Christians scattered during the two millennia of their history from Turkey to the Persian Gulf and from Egypt to China and India was bound to ramify. A diversity was caused not only by milieu and contacts with other neighboring traditions but also by different ecclesiastical affiliations. In the course of time emerged Syrian Orthodox (Jacobite), Church of the East (Nestorian) and Rum-Orthodox (Melkite) communities, all being heirs of the ancient Syro-Aramaic tradition. In each of those evolved a peculiar tradition of manuscript production and writing. In my talk, I am going to present what those manuscript traditions have in common and what distinguishes each of those against the others with regard to the central element of a codex, namely a quire.

Marilena Maniaci (University of Cassino and Southern Lazio) and Pasquale Orsini (Sapienza University of Rome)

'Comparative Perspectives on the Study of Manuscript Colophons: Some Preliminary Remarks'

The presence of information directly or indirectly related to the circumstances of the copy is a well-attested phenomenon in various manuscript cultures, although with a very varied, and never precisely estimated, diffusion. Even the diachronic and synchronic variations which can be observed within a single tradition have not been subjected to systematic investigations. Subscriptions were mostly used as a source of specific information on the dating of individual manuscripts; the persons



related to their manufacture (scribes, artists, patrons, dedicatees, binders, etc.); the contexts, circumstances and rhythms of their transcription; the episodic mention of historical, local, or personal events. Some (mainly anecdotal) attention was also devoted to the reasons that prompted the scribe to leave a more or less explicit and detailed track of his work. On the contrary, there is still a lack of 'wide-ranging' enquiries devoted to the chronological and geographical spread of subscriptions, the structure of their contents, the relationship between the constituent elements of the texts and the factors that might explain their variation.

The contribution aims to present and exemplify some general preliminary reflections emerged in the early stage of a research project devoted to Greek manuscript subscriptions, based on the systematic perusal of catalogues and repertoires, and the collection of data concerning both the structure and phrasing of the texts (decomposed into its main constituent elements and analyzed from a textual and linguistic point of view), their contents and their position, layout, writing and decoration: all factors to be put in connection with other 'external' and 'internal' manuscript features, production environments, and intended recipients.

[Costantino Moretti \(École Pratique des Hautes Études, Paris\)](#)

['Learning from Mistakes: Notes on Scribal Errors, Corrections and other "Paratextual" Elements found in Dunhuang Buddhist Manuscripts'](#)

The thousands of Buddhist manuscripts found in the Dunhuang cache at the beginning of the last century, and dating from the fourth to the early eleventh century, are essential sources in the study of scribal practices and book production in Mediaeval China, and the evolution of both in specific periods. Systematic scribal errors of various types, made during the copying of a text or in the production phase of a manuscript, can affect the meaning of the "original" text, its layout, or even the material support on which it is written, providing us with important information as to the specific characteristics of the source-text, and copying methods and processes. Similarly, correction marks and paratextual elements added during proofreading, emendation, and the assembling of the manuscript are of great interest in analyzing its use and the context in which it was produced. This paper will explore a few points concerning this topic and provide examples of specific scribal practices, which can help us to formulate hypotheses as to the approximate date of a given manuscript.

[Monika E. Müller \(State and University Library Hamburg\)](#)

['Foreign Influences in the Latin Manuscript Tradition of the 12th and 13th Centuries'](#)

For centuries, different types and styles of scripts were used to decorate art objects such as sculptures, images and in particular miniatures in lavishly illuminated manuscripts. The phenomenon is not just limited to European manuscripts, but is also known from other manuscript cultures, some of which tended to be hostile to images, as can be seen in Hebrew and Oriental codices.

Most of the time, scholars focused on the style of the images and the script connected with them, both of which were created by people with the same cultural provenance. Forms of scripts derived from foreign writing cultures, such as Kufic or Hebrew scripts, were rarely considered when used in the context of European manuscripts and art objects. In the late 1950s, however, Adolf Erdmann published an article presenting many different examples of the use of foreign decorative elements in European book illumination, which goes to show what a strong impact they had in the region in the Middle Ages.

This paper will focus on some examples of Latin Romanesque and Gothic manuscripts in which pseudo-Kufic was used. Questions will be dealt with such as where or in which codicological position in the manuscripts and in which thematic context foreign lettering was used and what function and semantic implication its usage had.

Judith Olszowy-Schlanger (École Pratique des Hautes Études, Paris)

'Professional Context of Hebrew Book Production in the East: New Perspectives'

Malachi Beit Arié has shown that Jewish books were predominantly produced by scribes, many of whom copied books for their own use. Indeed, unlike the institutional contexts of book production in Christian scriptoria or Muslim libraries, Jewish religious institutions played little role in the book production. Making books was either a personal work or a commercial matter, and it had implications on the transmission of Jewish texts. In this paper, I enroll several documents from the Cairo Geniza to shed new light on the role of the town shops and book sellers in the process of the copy and distribution of books in the medieval Muslim world.

Sarit Shalev-Eyni (The Hebrew University, Jerusalem)

'Making Hebrew Illuminated Manuscripts in the Christian Urban Domain: The Case of Esslingen'

Already during the twelfth century, Western manuscript production was making significant progress towards an increasing degree of professionalization. Parchment was purchased outside the monasteries and travelling illuminators were involved in the traditional frame of the scriptoria. Later on, in thirteenth and fourteenth century urban centers, parchment makers and illuminators organized themselves in groups, and these gradually developed to form economic and political entities. Lay artisans would offer their services to every customer, including Jewish clients who could afford them. These Jews could have bought their parchment sheets from local producers and, upon completing the copying of the text, hired a Christian artist to illuminate their Hebrew book. On the other hand, the direct contact with Christian artisans in the urban domain exposed Jewish parchment makers, scribes and scribes-illuminators to local techniques and trends that would have affected their own work. The impact of the urban domain on the making of Ashkenazi manuscripts, as well as the cultural and historical implications of that impact, will be the focus of this paper. As a case study, I will analyze some liturgical manuscripts and historical documents, both originating in Esslingen between the late thirteenth century and the first decades of the fourteenth century.

Ira Rabin (University of Hamburg, BAM Federal Institute for Materials Research and Testing)

'Advanced codicology: including instrumental analysis into codicological studies of Hebrew manuscripts'

Investigation of physical properties and chemical composition of writing materials generates important data that we add to the results of the codicological analysis of the manuscripts. In its individual materiality, each manuscript is the result of a wide variety of influences. The 'life' of a manuscript starts with its production that includes preparation of the writing surfaces and inks; it is followed by the use and storage, and finally characterized by treatment during restoration. Using instrumental analysis we record the characteristics that still exist. Combining our data with those obtained from the palaeographical and codicological analysis produces a new powerful tool for reconstruction of the history of a manuscript.

Florinda de Simini (University of Naples L'Orientale)

'Manuscript Cultures from South Asia and the Creation of Regional Identities'

In this talk, I will tackle the issue of the transregional manuscript cultures of South Asia, and their adaptation to the different local contexts of their transmission. I will illustrate this case on the basis of examples selected from two manuscript traditions, that of the *Mahābhārata* and that of the *Śivadharma*. What these two traditions have in common is their being attested in a large number of specimens spread throughout the whole cultural area of South Asia, from Nepal up to the southernmost regions; moreover, ongoing research is proving that the *Mahābhārata* had an important influence on the *Śivadharma*, both in terms of textual composition and for what concerns the culture surrounding the production and circulation of manuscripts. With the aid of a few case studies, we will take into considerations some regional specificities of both traditions, and examine them in light of their contribution to the local cultures.

Colette Sirat (École Pratique des Hautes Études, Paris)

'Hebrew Codicology versus Latin Codicology'

Hebrew Codicology has been built on the model of the Latin Codicology : thus these two disciplines have in common most of their features. The differences between them and the reasons of these differences are the subject of my talk.

Thies Staack (University of Heidelberg)

'Using "Western" Codicological Concepts for the Analysis of Early Chinese Bamboo Manuscripts: Benefits and Problems'

In the course of the past decades, codicologists have increasingly focused on investigating manuscript codices as complex, evolving objects. Analyzing "layers" attesting to a manuscript's production and use, they have introduced different concepts that enable a stratigraphic description of the structure of manuscript codices. Among the most prominent concepts are the "codicological unit" (e.g. Gumbert 2004) as well as the more recent "production unit" and "circulation unit" (Andrist/Canart/Maniaci 2013). What these concepts have in common is that they were mainly tailored to mediaeval European manuscript codices. The present paper discusses in how far the mentioned concepts and approaches can be fruitfully applied to the study of certain non-codex manuscripts, more precisely bamboo manuscripts from early imperial China (3rd century BCE to 1st century CE). Particular attention will be paid to possible differences in what has been called the "cohesion of codicological units" (Friedrich/Schwarke 2016).