

General introduction

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1. Scope of COMSt (ABa)

1.1. The background of COMSt

Work with manuscripts in both an academic, i.e. scholarly, and a non-academic context involves a huge number of aspects to be considered. It has not been a goal of the COMSt project to work on a theoretical definition of the *manuscript*, namely to define *what a manuscript is*. Instead of such a theoretical and comparative typological approach, the object of COMSt was, right from the beginning, *manuscript studies* as a conglomeration of already existing disciplines spread among various fields that were to be put in dialogue with each other. For the sake of convenience, a recent definition might be provided as a starting point here, according to which a ‘book’ is ‘a transportable object intended for hosting, sharing and transmitting immediately readable contents in an ordered and lasting way’ (Andrist et al. 2013, 46, my translation). The focus of the COMSt handbook, however, is on a peculiar subtype of the ‘book’, namely *handwritten book forms* of the *codex* area, including the horizontal and vertical roll and rotulus, all of them seen in their historical development *in a definite historical and geographical area* here styled ‘oriental’ (see below). Other types of handwritten artefacts that are often subsumed under the term ‘manuscript’—such as *ostraca* or inscriptions on other solid or soft supports—are considered and mentioned only in cases where they overlap to some extent in use and function with codex-like book forms in a given manuscript culture (typically in the case of the Coptic manuscript culture (see Ch. 1 § 5.1) and, in general, that of papyrology (see Ch. 3 § 3.16), where *ostraca* are rightly assimilable to manuscripts).

Some basic principles and shared assumptions of COMSt should be introduced here.

- (1) COMSt deals with manuscripts as intellectual products of written cultures in the ancient, mediaeval and pre-modern period, before the introduction of printing; it considers manuscripts as products of literary activity, as opposed, as a rule, to purely archival or documentary materials.
- (2) COMSt deals with manuscripts written in less-taught languages that are mostly considered ancillary, or somehow exotic in the present-day academic landscape of Europe (with the exception of Greek, for reasons that will be explained below); they are opposed to and compared with:
 - (a) languages or clusters of languages which by themselves define disciplinary fields (typically, the classical languages and literatures, namely Greek and Latin, the Romance languages and literatures, the Germanic languages and literatures, the Mediaeval Latin language and literature, and so on);
 - (b) mainstream disciplines and fields which are not defined linguistically, yet traditionally related to some linguistic spheres, even where this is not explicitly declared, as in the cases of codicology and palaeography, which are mainly and usually associated in the European academic environment with Greek, Latin, or Mediaeval European languages and literatures, with a focus thus limited from the very beginning to manuscripts from precise areas. These mainstream fields (either linguistically or methodologically oriented) can look back upon a long tradition of research and standard practices manifesting themselves in a number of handbooks, series, journals, scholarly tools, and scholarly associations: for most of the disciplines in the COMSt spectrum, such an infrastructure is not yet available.
- (3) COMSt deals with manuscripts not only as testimonies of the history of a literate civilization, objects of textual criticism, or cataloguing. They can also be the object of scholarly interest independently of their linguistic domain, in particular when we speak of material (physical, chemical, biological) and digital analysis, as well as conservation, preservation, and restoration.
- (4) COMSt does not focus on the contents as such, even if the textual and figurative constituents are in most cases—yet not always—the ultimate reason for the emergence of a manuscript. Contents have been considered only insofar as they were strictly functional, to illustrate issues concerning codicology, principles of text editing, cataloguing, conservation, preservation and restoration. To deal with the contents of the texts would have meant dealing with the unmanageable mass of knowledge

* The editors thank Stephen Emmel for his invaluable help, as well as for proofreading and revising the English, and Laura E. Parodi for her fruitful contribution in editing § 4.

transmitted in the manuscripts, that is of the entire knowledge of a good portion of the ancient, mediaeval and pre-modern cultures of the world. At the same time, limiting the content to be considered to pictorial matters would not be justifiable either, since this is subject of yet another well-defined discipline, namely art history.

As mentioned above, most of the COMSt disciplines have not (yet) reached the recognition of the ‘major’ fields. Besides, it is anything but easy to overcome the confines of many national or even European and Occidental scholarly traditions, especially in some fields where the echo of harsh debates is still heard. Just to give an example, in textual criticism, the trend towards a ‘New Philology’ was initially accepted enthusiastically in the United States and France (where Bernard Cerquiglini’s *Éloge de la variante*, 1989, was considered a milestone in the field). While much less popular in those countries now, and considered largely irrelevant—superfluous and misleading—in many others (e.g. Italy), this trend has been still attracting adepts in Germany in recent years (as an understandable reaction to a sort of divinization of the ‘old’ *Philologie*) and in the countries that are relatively new to the field of philology in general.

The same can be said of the varying and asymmetric constellations in which the minor COMSt-relevant fields are accommodated within the narrow academic scene of Europe. Some find themselves within (Christian) theology—with religious history, biblical (Old and New Testament) criticism, and patristic studies—or classical studies, with an ‘extended’ look at one or more parallel oriental traditions (for example, Syriac, as already in the case of some of the greatest philologists of the twentieth century, such as Eduard Schwartz or Wilhelm Frankenberg, the editor of the Syriac *Pseudo-Clementines*, who used to retrovert Syriac into Greek; also Coptic, Armenian, and other languages, all the more after the explosion of Late Antique studies in the last decades). Some are addressed within general Islamic studies and history, including Arabic, Persian and Turkish literature. Some are at times accommodated within comparative linguistics, in particular Afro-Asiatic (for the Semitic and Coptic traditions), Indo-European (for the Armenian, Slavonic or Iranian languages), Altaic (for Turkic), and Kartvelian studies (for Georgian); they can also be found as particular area studies; subfields of comparative literature; mediaeval history, etc.

To try to overcome the barriers between the disciplines and the various scholarly traditions was among the most prominent tasks of the COMSt programme. It meant comparing the methods used and, eventually, seeking a shared approach, taking into very serious consideration the achievements of the mainstream disciplines, but also giving due importance to the specifically ‘oriental’ features wherever these became apparent.

1.2. The notion of ‘oriental’ in the COMSt perspective

The first and most engaging aspect that has been used to identify ‘oriental’ fields of research is definitely the languages involved. We may state with conviction that there is practically no ‘oriental’ study imaginable that is not multilingual, and therefore multilingualism is in a way consubstantial with ‘oriental studies’. However, this is not necessarily true for ‘oriental’ manuscript and textual traditions in themselves.

In her recent book, *German Orientalism in the Age of Empire* (a well-informed book indeed, yet not from the point of view of oriental studies, but much more from that of the history of European culture), Suzanne L. Marchand (2009, xxiii) defines Orientalism as a ‘*set of practices* that were bound up with Central European institutional settings in which the sustained and serious study of the languages, histories, and cultures of Asia took place’. Taking this definition as a basis, the determining feature of an ‘orientalist’ is—at least historically—to be able to read texts of a culture from Asia (extending to other regions and areas assimilated to it, typically the whole Islamic World, including Egypt, North Africa, and Ethiopia), in the original language.

The definition of what is ‘oriental’ in the view of COMSt was obviously among the tasks of the project, but it pertained by necessity also to its very preliminary choices, and the ongoing activities of the project have in fact positively contributed to the point. ‘Oriental’ in the COMSt perspective actually embraces *all non-Occidental (non-Latin-based) manuscript cultures which have an immediate historical (‘genetic’) relationship with the Mediterranean codex area*. This definition first excludes all East-Asian manuscript cultures, which are also ‘oriental’ in a broader sense but which do not share the relationship with the Mediterranean codex area. As a working definition, this delimitation geographically largely corresponds to an alternative one which builds upon the concept of the *area of monotheistic cultures* (Jewish, Christian, and

Islamic). However, the ancient Near Eastern and classical civilizations, especially the Graeco-Roman one, have played a decisive role in the *uninterrupted development of manuscript cultures manifesting themselves in a Mediterranean 'codex area'*, and in this respect, the former definition appears by far superior, all the more since it stresses the basically and intrinsically historical character—be it of structural codicology, textual criticism, or comparative scientific analysis—of all research on manuscripts.

Members of the COMSt community are well aware that the delimitation and selection of an area of study focusing on 'oriental codex cultures' defined as above still remains arbitrary, at least to some extent. More than the exclusion of non-related Central and East Asian manuscript cultures, which has mainly typological implications, the main limitation of this choice consists in the disregarding of the Ancient Near Eastern civilizations, notably the Ancient Egyptian and the cuneiform script cultures, which are nevertheless crucial to understanding the origin of practices still observable in the 'codex cultures'. An example here can be the phenomenon of the colophon, not to mention the impressive results that the application of text-critical 'genealogical' principles to cuneiform texts has brought about recently (see Worthington 2012 on Akkadian textual criticism).

The delimitation of the COMSt focus area has had a substantial consequence: it has distinguished the COMSt enterprise from other 'manuscriptological' projects and research initiatives which pursue more theoretical issues that are inspired by the necessity, in their case unavoidable, of a more typologically than historically oriented comparison. The specific ambition of the COMSt network has been to demonstrate that a strict cooperation between comparative typological and historical approaches can uniquely enhance our understanding of the cultures involved and the relevant phenomena—in terms of codicology, textual criticism, cataloguing, preservation and conservation practices, and, across all these different fields, of digital and technical approaches—and thus establish a sounder basis for an eventual broader comparative perspective.

The geographical and cultural spectrum of COMSt embraces the Greek manuscript culture, from Classical Antiquity down to the Late Byzantine period, as one of the main cultures that were responsible for the emergence and the further development of the codex in Graeco-Roman times and in Late Antiquity, but also in consideration of the quality of the evidence it provides in continuous documentation, starting with papyri and *ostraca*, and of the unparalleled cultural interconnexions it has always had with most of the other manuscript cultures considered. As a matter of fact, all other COMSt-related manuscript cultures have a relation to Greek, manifesting itself in translations from and/or into Greek. What is more, Greek is also essential in terms of the methodology applied and of the scholarly work carried out in manuscript studies. This is true not only for recent developments in codicology, but even more so for the centuries-long expertise in textual criticism, the very invention of palaeography as an autonomous discipline three centuries ago (at the time basically including what is styled codicology today), and the development of scientific practices of cataloguing. It is true that the scholarly work on Latin and western European manuscript traditions offers no lower standard, but it was not considered in COMSt in consideration of its vastness and because, to some extent, its link to the 'oriental' cultures is weaker and more indirect. However, dialogue with specialists in the field was continuously entertained by the COMSt network, and some of the sections take the 'western' studies into consideration.

For evident reasons, the study of the Hebrew manuscript culture, one of the major manuscript cultures that adopted the codex book form at a certain time, has likewise been central for COMSt; not only because it pervaded at large the Mediterranean area and beyond, into Occidental Europe to the North, to Yemen southward, and to Iran eastward, but also because of its exceptional and huge interrelationship with the Graeco-Roman culture and with the Christian and the Islamic civilizations, and moreover, because of the exceptionally high state of the art in the field of codicology it has achieved (Beit-Arié 2014).

The Arabic manuscript cultures, meaning the manuscript cultures that use Arabic characters in writing—Arabic, Turkish, Persian, and the large spectrum of 'ağamī literate civilizations—provide by far the largest amount of manuscripts covered by the COMSt spectrum, also embracing the largest geographical area, which extends well beyond the Mediterranean area. It is not only its central place and its vastness, but also its comprehensiveness, the hegemonic role it played for many centuries in the 'Orient' above almost all other manuscript cultures here considered, and the quality, variety and importance of the relevant scholarly tradition that makes it one more major domain in COMSt (see Gacek 2001; Déroche 2006; Gacek 2009; Déroche – Sagaria Rossi 2012).

The Zoroastrian and Manichaean manuscript cultures represented by Avestan, Middle Persian, Parthian, Sogdian, and other mostly Iranian-speaking traditions, are a peculiar case in that they illustrate the easternmost diffusion of the codex book form towards India and Central Asia, with a scholarly tradition that has remained extremely specialized. In accordance with the relative scarcity of relevant materials, they have only been touched upon casually in the present handbook.

The remaining oriental manuscript cultures considered in this handbook are part of a consistent, even though very varied field in terms of languages, scripts, typology of contents, quantity of manuscripts, chronological distribution, and state of the art, which may be subsumed under the heading of the ‘Christian Orient’. Traditionally, Greek is also included (*ex professo* or *de facto*) in this area. The Slavonic manuscript culture holds a place of its own in it, due to its strict relationship to the Byzantine civilization. Within this group, we may distinguish various clusters: a Syro-Palestinian one (including Syriac and Palestinian Aramaic, often in close connexion with Hebrew and Jewish Aramaic manuscript cultures, later continued by Christian Arabic), an Egyptian one (including Coptic, Nubian, too scarcely attested to be considered *in extenso* in our handbook, again Christian Arabic and Ethiopic), and a Caucasian one (with Armenian, Georgian, and Caucasian Albanian, the latter attested only in palimpsest form). The Christian Oriental tradition is indeed one for which we have extensive studies that might be considered ‘comparative’ (with investigations into parallel literary, liturgical, or church historical traditions across several languages), but, to be honest, there is still very little and very poor methodological consistency in these studies, especially as far as the editorial practices are concerned (in the series *Patrologia Orientalis* and *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium*; in several journals, the *Revue de l’Orient Chrétien*, *Oriens Christianus*, *Le Muséon* etc.; and in introductory works such as Assfalg – Krüger 1975; Albert et al. 1993; see also Ch. 3 §§ 1.3B and 3.17). This situation has partially changed only in the last years, with a new editorial policy in some of the most important series (notably, the *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium*) and some important projects in specific fields; we may quote, for example, the editorial activity carried out in the field of Christian Apocrypha by the AELAC (Association pour l’étude de la littérature apocryphe chrétienne), which has introduced a systematic consideration of all available manuscript witnesses to the texts considered, from Western European languages to Sogdian.

1.3. Oriental studies and the role of ‘orientalism’

A history of oriental manuscript studies has not yet been sketched from the inside so far, or only very partially, at least in the perspective of the methodologies and critical approaches the COMSt project has tried to apply. However, when talking of current practices, especially in text editing and cataloguing, we will immediately realize that a whole range of orientations and choices—arbitrary at times and often completely divergent for the different fields—can only be explained by looking at the history of the research in the respective fields.

The work in COMSt, to everyone’s surprise, has revealed that the perception of what is the ‘normal’ approach in a given field (for example, in the case of cataloguing practices) is often a matter of dispute. For many people, the ‘normal approach’ is simply the one they regard as ‘the only possible one’; this, however, may be very different in its contents and its methodology for each field. Comparing the various ‘normal approaches’ has revealed the huge range of methodological differences between the individual disciplines within oriental studies and has resulted in questions such as ‘what should be introduced into my own field that is normal in others?’ or ‘why have the ‘normal’ approaches of others been so far ignored in my own field?’ The different ‘normal’ approaches are often unconnected with each other, being the result of early choices and traditions no longer scrutinized today, rather than the effect of continuous reasoning. This sound criticism should always be preferred to thinking that there is only one way (I am thinking for example of text editing) and to looking for a ‘unique solution’ (for example a fixed, immovable set of ‘fields’ to be filled in in cataloguing). Conversely, in keeping with the comparative approach, similar cases evidenced in other disciplines and fields should not be considered in principle as unrelated ones for which something new and unique must be invented every time, and no single problem can be solved with a vague ‘good sense’.

If we try to have a general view of the development of oriental studies, from the perspective of how this term has been and still is used in the academic occidental environment, we may distinguish the following features.

(a) The so-called *philologia sacra* ultimately rooted in ancient Hellenistic philology, through the example of Origen and his *Hexapla* (see Ch. 3 § 3.21) obviously made no distinction whatsoever between ‘oriental’ and ‘non-oriental’ texts and manuscripts, since no such distinction existed. This functional consideration of the material evidence to be used for the study of the divine revelation, characterized by a strict interrelationship between classical philology and oriental studies, has somehow remained—with all possible caution—a continuum up to the present day in the western scholarly tradition. Relying on a knowledge deriving from pilgrimages, crusades, long-distance trade (Marco Polo) or legendary travels (John Mandeville), the Orient was located before the modern age in the Ancient and Near East, as the birthplace of some of the most important world religions and religious texts. Some cases remain exceptional, such as that of the Florentine Riccolando da Monte di Croce (c. 1243–1320), who learnt Arabic, visited the Orient (Baghdad around 1290), and also authored a detailed analysis of the Qur’ān based on the Arabic text. On the eve of modernity this interest was renewed with the flowering of Greek studies, when Europe was invaded by a flood of Greek as well as oriental manuscripts after the fall of Byzantium (1453). Before the Renaissance, already during early Humanism, the knowledge of Hebrew, besides Latin and Greek (consider Giannozzo Manetti, 1396–1459), sometimes also of Aramaic and Arabic (Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, 1463–1494), was not a rare exception but something envisaged by the scholarly and humanistic ideal of the *vir trilinguis*. In addition, the role played by the Jewish as well as by the Christian oriental communities at the pilgrimage sites and even in Europe must not be underestimated. For example, the Ethiopian community in Rome played a decisive role in the development of Ethiopian studies, and the ecumenical councils of the west which saw the participation of oriental delegations, such as the Council of Basle–Ferrara–Florence of 1431–1445 promoted the interest in the east. This went together with the curiosity and interest in the ‘oriental face’ of the syncretistic traditions of Late Antiquity and the appreciation of Jewish cabalistic traditions, Hermetism, Egyptian and neo-Platonic traditions, as they were perceived at the time. But even earlier, for example in Spain, the relationships of Arabic-speaking, Jewish and Romance communities gave birth to a variety of contacts and exchanges, the importance of which must not be disregarded. Translations from Arabic into Hebrew, from Hebrew into Spanish, from Spanish into Latin, and so on were often the way through which lost Greek texts, once translated into Arabic, survived and were circulated (see Ch. 3 § 3.18). (For a first elementary sketch of the forerunners of oriental studies in Europe, see at least Richard [J.] 2001, and for Italy some of the essays included in Spina 2013, 9–20, preface by Franco Cardini, and Galletti 2013).

(b) The early modern period, with a broadening of the concept of the ‘Orient’ beyond the Near Eastern biblical horizon (see Irwin 2006), still kept the same interest in *philologia sacra* unchanged. Humanists and scholars such as Guillaume Postel (1510–1581), Josephus Justus Scaliger (1540–1609), Giovanni Battista Raimondi (1536–1614), the brothers Giambattista (d. 1619) and Girolamo Vecchietti (d. after 1635) or Nicolas-Claude Fabri de Peiresc (1580–1637), or later Hiob Ludolf (1624–1704) had strong interests in the oriental cultures, and some of them in oriental manuscripts in particular (Scaliger’s manuscripts are preserved in Leiden University Library; Peiresc tried, in vain, till the last days of his life, to acquire a copy of the Ethiopic *Book of Enoch*; and Ludolf tried to acquire Ethiopic manuscripts through his pupil Johann Michael Wansleben, who failed then, yet succeeded later in providing Jean-Baptiste Colbert with hundreds of Greek and oriental manuscripts, which are now kept in the Bibliothèque nationale de France). Frequently they relied on Levantines who supplied them with oriental manuscripts and information on the Orient. The situation did not change with the Protestant and Catholic Reformations, quite the opposite (see Wilkinson 2007a): the study of the Bible became even more important and it had to be done in the original language in Protestant Churches, thus being a continuous source of impetus to oriental studies. Hebrew was completely integrated into biblical scholarship. The sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries are also the period of the absolutely remarkable intellectual, technical and editorial enterprises of the polyglot Bibles (from 1514 to 1657; see Wilkinson 2007b).

(c) On the other hand, political events and other factors (for example, the missionary activity in the Orient by the Jesuits) strongly contributed to the condescending view characterizing Islam in derogatory terms, even though in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries there are still several examples of Arabic being considered a key instrument to access Greek mathematics, as appears from the numbers of miscellaneous manuscripts preserved, not a few from a Jewish milieu, containing mediaeval translations; and the edition (1663) by Edward Pococke (1604–1691) of the *Ta’rīḥ muḥtaṣar al-duwal* by Ibn al-‘Ibrī shows the interest in Arabic as a source for historical research, with the paradoxical result that the first ever

printed Arabic historiographical work is one authored by a Christian. It was only in the second half of the eighteenth century, with the gradual decrease of the power of the ‘Turks’, that a more scientific and less suspicious interest in Islam grew (it is needless to mention the importance of Galland’s ‘translation’ of the *Thousand and One Nights*, 1704–1717). Yet, Arabic still tended to be considered an auxiliary language for theology (biblical and Christian studies), since this language had for centuries mainly been cultivated for Christian theological interests and selected manuscripts had been acquired for European collections accordingly (on Arabic studies in England, see Toomer 1996).

(d) The Age of Enlightenment saw the discovery of further oriental cultures, mostly the Indian, with the publications of the first Indian texts in the late eighteenth century by William Jones (1746–1794). The growing interest in Far Eastern cultures provoked a diminution of interest in the Near East; in particular, the interest in Islam, perceived as a ‘late’, definitely not an ‘*Ur-culture*’, decreased, while the charm and fascination of ancient civilizations still grew.

(e) The institutionalization of oriental studies, at least at some European universities (in Germany at Göttingen, for example), also dates from the last decades of the eighteenth century. It happened in close connexion with the extraordinary development of classical philology, and still within the framework of Old Testament and generally biblical criticism. Theology still kept all its importance for oriental studies, and theologians, for example in the Protestant tradition, had to learn Greek and Hebrew. Besides the interest in the biblical text, the interest in ancient Judaism played a major role in keeping this ultimately humanistic Christian oriental tradition alive.

(f) It is extremely important to observe that it is from within this tradition that those philological and text-critical innovations emerged that provoked—applied to the text of the New Testament—a revolution in philological studies. Johann Albrecht Bengel (1687–1752) tried to establish a relationship between the manuscripts on the basis of similar readings. He did not yet distinguish between errors and correct readings; he did realize, however, that it is the majority of the families that is important, and that the authenticity of a reading is proved by the agreement of codices of different families. Johann Jacob Wettstein (1693–1754) claimed that it was important to use the codices and not the *textus receptus*, that is the Greek text of the New Testament as first established by Erasmus and then accepted by the Protestant Churches, even in minor details. He did not understand the criterion of the majority of the families but preferred, like Bengel, the use of internal criteria, and only when two readings were equivalent, he turned to the codices—unlike Karl Lachmann (1793–1851), who used *iudicium* only when two readings had the same authority. Johann Salomo Semler (1725–1791) distinguished between the external and internal age (*äusserliches* and *inneres Alter*) of a reading. Johann Jacob Griesbach (1745–1812) summarized what his predecessors had proposed.

(g) We may say that up to the end of the eighteenth century most of the orientalist working and dealing with manuscripts had shared substantially the same methods and approaches as were used in classical philology: orientalist and classicist belonged to the same academic milieu and their attitudes overlapped at large. Between the last decades of the eighteenth century, still in the Age of Enlightenment, and the mid-nineteenth century, a text-critical method emerged in classical studies; this is the reconstructive method connected with the name of Lachmann. A century earlier, Johann August Ernesti (1707–1781) and, above all, Friedrich August Wolf (1759–1824) had already taken systematic recourse to manuscript witnesses for their philological work, and it was Wolf who stressed the unparalleled superiority of classical, and Greek philology in particular, as the best way to interpret humanistic culture, and who consistently disparaged the importance of the *philologia sacra*. As a result, philological studies focused exclusively on classical Greek, and oriental studies still followed their own traditional way, in theological studies or biblical criticism, or even, at the other end, in the current of a more explicitly ‘orientalist’ approach in the Saidian sense. It is important to remark here that a great deal of oriental studies was completely underestimated by Edward Said in his celebrated, yet misleading and definitely one-sided analysis of European orientalism, the birth of which he locates in the age of Imperialism (see Said 1978) and which he substantially restricts to British and French orientalism. Mallette (2010) has provided a completely new perspective on orientalism from a Mediterranean perspective, with much stronger consideration of the phenomena of interchange and cultural continuity in the Mediterranean basin, where, for example, such figures as the scholar and colonialist Enrico Cerulli (1898–1988), who animated the intellectual debate on cross-Mediterranean cultural interconnexions and relationships for fifty years, is portrayed as one of the most emblematic figures (see also Fiaccadori 2011).

Still in the nineteenth century, while classical philology became more and more elaborate, oriental studies tended to become weaker and gradually less up-to-date and less methodologically oriented, since the mainstream was dictated now by classical and particularly Greek studies, as Marchand (2009, 73) states:

In the early modern period, oriental philologists had pioneered many of these text-critical skills, but nineteenth-century orientalists almost by definition could not concentrate on one language; nor could they secularize their field with equal alacrity.

The end of the eighteenth century—c. 1780—is the period to which the beginning of scientific secularized oriental studies is usually fixed, but also exactly the period when oriental studies ceased to follow the development of the mainstream humanistic disciplines. We may say that this was also due to some intrinsic features of the respective fields. Classical studies were based upon an intensive scholarly tradition extending over several centuries, with a huge number of printed editions of texts, where often manuscripts did not play the most important role in editing (yet this was again one of the important contributions by Wolf and Lachmann). Besides, the needs of oriental studies were completely different, the majority of texts remaining unpublished (somewhat similar to mediaeval Latin and Byzantine studies). For a long time, ‘to publish a manuscript’ (one manuscript, the most accessible, not necessarily the best, or only ‘the best’, etc.), rather than to edit a text, was the ‘normal’ working condition, and this trend has in many cases survived to the present. In oriental studies, the content of a single manuscript—*understood exclusively as a text-carrier*—has remained for much longer a self-justified object of study and research.

(h) One more factor to be considered is the development of comparative and historical linguistics in the nineteenth century. Unlike Romance studies, where the link between linguistics, philology as textual criticism, and, in a way, the whole spectrum of manuscripts and literary studies, was not broken and interrupted, certain fields of oriental studies, for example in the Neo-Grammarians’ approach, were absorbed by and reduced to comparative linguistics, implying a disregard of non-linguistic aspects, including material carriers, but also text-critical methodology.

(i) As said before, we do not have any history of oriental studies from a proper methodological perspective: we only have very sectorial approaches that are based upon all-embracing empty and almost meaningless labels. One may quote two examples, among possibly many others, of orientalists who were well aware of the methodological questions discussed at their time (it is a pity that neither of them has received any attention in this respect in Marchand 2009).

(1) The first is the very remarkable antiquarian—or, better, classicist and orientalist—and, above all, coptologist, Georg Zoëga (1755–1809). Like Wolf, who was only a few years younger, he was a pupil of Christian Gottlob Heyne (1729–1812) at Göttingen. Wolf dealt with Homer and classical texts, whereas Zoëga, besides the bas-reliefs of Rome, also worked with coins, obelisks, and Coptic parchments. Zoëga applied principles that were very similar to those proposed by Wolf, which he developed independently and in parallel. The study of Coptic and of the special kind of documentation represented by dismembered codices oriented his research in a decisive way. As elsewhere, in countries such as Italy, the knowledge of Greek was at the time in the hands of the orientalists, who were somehow its ‘custodians’. Moreover, the documentation of Coptic, dispersed and fragmentary, implied and required an extremely careful and absolutely new type of material philology and cataloguing, in an extremely modern sense, which was radically different from the purely formal textual analysis (see Ch. 4 § 2.3). One more important element to consider is that Zoëga did not feel the need to dispose of *philologia sacra*—probably he could not and did not want to do so, for various reasons, some of them obvious (he worked at the papal court). Rather he understood the potential interest of the almost virgin field of oriental Christian apocrypha, which he started to explore.

(2) The other remarkable example to be mentioned, although outside the COMSt spectrum, is that of August Wilhelm Schlegel (1767–1845). While Sanskrit linguistics was rapidly developing,

it was he who understood, even better than his British contemporaries or predecessors, that besides a pure Sanskrit *linguistics* also a real Sanskrit philology had to be established, furnished with text editions and commentaries carried out according to those principles of textual criticism and exegesis which were being developed by the scholars of Greek and Latin philology. He planned a very clear programme of this activity, which he also began to implement, and he also had a pupil and collaborator of exceptional value: Christian Lassen (1806–1876; Timpanaro 1973, 61–62, translation ABa; see also nn. 8–9 for reference to Schlegel’s method and philological activity).

Note that besides being a pioneer in Sanskrit philology, Christian Lassen was also a remarkable Arabist.

In the course of the nineteenth century, philological discourse and methodologies were developed in the field of classical, New Testament, and Romance studies, and the names of Karl Lachmann and Gaston Paris (1839–1903; see Ch. 3 § 3.13) can be mentioned as exemplary for the critical, reconstructivist methodology. It is a matter of fact that with very few exceptions—usually due to a stronger connexion to biblical scholarship or classical studies—at the beginning of the twentieth century and later on, oriental studies in the COMSt spectrum still practised by and large the method of the ‘base manuscript’. This practice had little to do with Joseph Bédier’s (1864–1938) rethinking of the reconstructive Lachmannian method—a rethinking that might have had its reasons, although the solution is always questionable (see Ch. 3 § 2.3)—and had much more to do with the continuation of a previous practice current in oriental studies, corresponding to what might be termed ‘the simple normal way’. In pre-Lachmannian classical studies, the editor ‘normally’ started from the *textus receptus* and an existing edition which he emended, and the recourse to codices was occasional and optional; in oriental studies, however, the editor usually started from one manuscript, since most of the time the text in question was to be published for the first time. Not much more attention was paid in oriental studies to the application of the so-called ‘neo-Lachmannian’ approach which was elaborated in Classics by Giorgio Pasquali (1885–1952) and his pupils, and in Romance studies by Gianfranco Contini (1912–1990)—even though they did take into account cases and questions that would also be relevant for some oriental traditions, the latter not being affected by a special status of their own (Witkam 1988). For the Christian Near East in particular, René Draguet’s (1896–1980) credo of the ‘base manuscript’ method has dominated for long, even before being canonized in a controversial contribution (Draguet 1977; see Ch. 3 § 3.17), a major part of which was dedicated to technical concerns of layout and printing, and very little to methodological concerns. It recommended a simple reproduction of the best manuscript’s text—taking into consideration its age and legibility—with all its errors included. Draguet’s ‘best manuscript’ is thus simply the most suitable for the representation of the form; it is not even the ‘best manuscript’ *a posteriori*, i.e. the manuscript most similar to the critically established text (see Bausi 2006a, 2008b). It is therefore different, one might even say, worse, than the *codex optimus*, *codex vetustissimus*, etc. of pre-Lachmannian philology, which was a ‘base manuscript’ whose errors could be corrected *ope codicum* and *ope ingenii*.

Exceptions to this trend can be probably traced in every field. One example is Bernard Botte (1893–1980), the investigator of Christian oriental canonico-liturgical texts, who pleaded for the consideration of versions as textual witnesses, *when undertaking the search for an original*:

The principles I have set out are not new... I do not think one can proceed in any other way, without risking falling into fantasy. One cannot blindly trust any version. The question is not that of finding ‘the right version’, any more than in a critical edition of a Greek text one must look for ‘the right manuscript’. What is important is to make a good use of all the witnesses (Botte 1955, 168, translation ABa; see also Botte 1966, 177–179).

Earlier in 1922, Albrecht Götze (1897–1971), later the great Hittitologist, examined the manuscript tradition of the Syriac *Cave of Treasures*, and on the basis of the extant manuscripts he supposed the existence of an archetype, reconstructed its physical structure (columns and number of lines), as well as that of a subarchetype; he established subgroups on the basis of mechanical errors (loss of folia), and corroborated all this evidence by that of ‘various readings and shared innovations’ (‘verschiedene Lesungen und gemeinsame Neuerungen’), giving also a complex but clear *stemma codicum* (Götze 1922, 5–12).

A third even earlier example is that of the Syriacist Arthur Amiaud (1849–1889). In the year of his death, 1889, following in the footsteps of Gaston Paris both in contents and method, he published a reconstructivist edition of the Syriac Alexis legends, stating in his introduction:

We do not deal... with personal compositions... If one undertook the publication of a family of such works, where every author respecting only the general features of the legend has dealt with all other features with absolute freedom..., all that one could do would be to present each one entirely and separately. But here, where we have only more or less precise copies of the same text, the duty of the editor is to try to trace the original or to restore it as far as possible, and this is the target we are aiming at now through the comparison and the classification of our manuscripts (Amiaud 1889, ix, with an explicit reference to Paris 1872 on p. x, n. 1; translation ABa).

It is quite remarkable then to note that while little has been proposed on a methodological level for the scholarly editor, the respective ‘traditional philologies’ of the individual oriental cultures have, in some

cases, been investigated widely and in-depth: this is definitely the case of the Islamic one, starting from Franz Rosenthal's classic work *The technique and approach of Muslim scholarship* (Rosenthal 1947), and all handbooks of Arabic codicology devote some sections to the question of *iġāza* (certificates of transmission) and related phenomena (Gacek 2001, 256–261; Déroche 2006, 332–334; Gacek 2009, 266–268).

Among the few attempts at applying a consistent text-critical methodology in oriental studies, one may mention the work conducted on Ethiopic texts by Paolo Marrassini (1942–2013), who used with full awareness a 'neo-Lachmannian' approach in a number of critical editions of Ethiopic texts, both original (hagiographical and historiographical ones) and translated (apocryphal writings, for example the Ethiopic version of the *Apocalypse of Peter*; Marrassini 2009).

1.4. The comparative approach

The COMSt handbook is a comparative manual. We can distinguish at least two meanings of 'comparative' in the COMSt perspective. In the field of codicology in particular, the necessity of a comparative approach has become the watchword of the most progressive trends in the last decades. A broader scope of interests has actually been encouraged and applied by codicologists starting from the 1980s at least, in a series of conferences that have focused on book forms and cultures in the Byzantine, Near Eastern and Islamic areas, yet these at times have assembled views from different fields rather than pursuing a real comparative work, which was hardly possible because of the uneven state of the art and consequent lack of data (see Déroche 1989; Cavallo et al. 1991; Maniaci – Munafò 1993; Condello – de Gregorio 1995; Déroche – Richard 1997; Hoffmann [P.] 1998). The importance of the most recent trend is well declared by J. Peter Gumbert in his preface to Agati's manual (Agati 2009, 14), stating that 'comparative codicology and quantitative codicology' are 'the two most striking modern developments' in the field (see for example Gumbert 2011, for a keen application of the comparative approach in codicology).

While a generally applied quantitative approach is still to come for most of the fields concerned with the manuscript traditions considered in this handbook, with a few notable exceptions (mainly, Hebrew and Greek codicology), we can confidently say that each chapter displays a comparative approach, yet in different ways. Moreover, it is the first time that such a systematic attempt of overall comparison has been carried out in a handbook on such a scale. In Chapters 1 ('Codicology') and 4 ('Cataloguing'), the manuscript traditions compared alternate, whenever applicable and possible, according to a common scheme of themes and topics corresponding to the intrinsic features of the manuscripts as objects of investigation and the studies carried out, whereas a comprehensive and synthetic overview of the main common points is outlined in the relevant chapter introductions. Chapter 2 ('Palaeography' in the narrow sense) is less comparative in fact, since it answers to the need of providing basic information on the scripts featuring in the handbook and their history. Of a broadly unitary character is Chapter 5 ('Conservation and preservation'), where methods, practices, and questions revolve around material aspects that largely transcend the individual manuscript traditions. Quite different is the case of Chapter 3 ('Textual criticism and text editing'), the first section of which assumes the text as an absolute reference point independently of the individual manuscript cultures, while the comparative perspective is delegated to a series of detailed case studies, not necessarily representative of a linguistic or manuscript culture, but rather of a method, a typology, or a problem to be approached.

Obviously, even in the extended COMSt perspective, a total comparative view was limited by the availability and accessibility of data and was only possible in terms of goals to be pursued and issues to be discussed. Moreover, as stated above, the comparison was applied to a coherent or in any case defined historical and cultural area of the 'codex' cultures. (As to a more general definition of 'codex' that to some extent seems to go beyond the usual understanding, see Andrist et al. 2013, 47, 'a book consisting of a series of folia' (translation ABa): yet the authors do not consider cases beyond the COMSt spectrum, and actually focus only on the Greek codex).

1.5. Structure of the book

1.5.1. Structure and approach

Needless to say, any structuring is arbitrary, at least to a certain extent, like every cutting of a continuum of documentation and questions. The chapters of the present handbook follow five thematic focuses that were originally selected as relevant and most appropriate for the work to be carried out in the COMSt re-

search networking programme. These focuses correspond to the work done by, and within, the respective work teams, namely, ‘Codicology’ (Chapter 1 and in part Chapter 2), ‘Textual criticism and text editing’ (Chapter 3), ‘Cataloguing’ (Chapter 4 and in part Chapter 2), and ‘Conservation and preservation’ (Chapter 5, and the part of the *General introduction* dedicated to ethical and legal issues). The work of the team ‘Digital and instrumental approaches to manuscript studies’ has been distributed in the General introduction and every chapter wherever applicable.

The structure of the handbook has been conceived in order to provide a reasonable balance between a strictly focused presentation of the topics on the one hand, and a comfortable readability on the other hand, the latter necessarily implying some repetition in providing background information. In order to limit repetitions and redundancies, cross-references to the relevant chapters and paragraphs have been provided wherever possible. In a few cases redundancies are dictated by the uneven state of the art in the single fields, which also implied the consideration of different points of view. This is not always a matter of the state of the art, but also of the specific internal features of each single tradition. For example, arranging single codicological features chronologically, usually done in order to date precisely undated manuscripts, is a practice little developed in Armenian codicology, since Armenian manuscripts can be so precisely dated, almost without exception, by colophons, that it was never necessary to establish such correlations. This is definitely not the case for most of the other manuscript traditions, some of which (Hebrew, to a lesser extent Greek) successfully developed refined codicological and palaeographical dating systems. Some very particular issues (for example, manuscripts with musical notation) could not be dealt with within the limited time frame and the physical space allotted. The same applies, as already said, to art-historical issues, which were to some degree considered as aspects of codicology / book production.

Finally, I cannot stress enough that the COMSt approach tends to consider manuscript studies in a global perspective, and that every attempt has been made to take advantage of the fruitful interrelationship established between methodologies, in a real interdisciplinary approach, where the more precisely focused single disciplines are, the better they can reveal their potential—which is the opposite of an all-embracing interdisciplinary approach, where disciplines tend to merge and methodological clearness disappears.

1.5.2. Questions of terminology

The question of terminology is extremely sensitive in a comparative approach, since comparing necessarily entails defining exactly *what* is compared. The COMSt manual has approached this difficult question with a practical attitude. The redaction of a detailed, extensive terminology for the whole area encompassed by COMSt would have been a research project in itself. The present handbook has considered throughout the work carried out in major fields that investigate the codex manuscript cultures (see for example Muzerelle 1985; Maniaci 1996; Ostos et al. 1997); however, as a matter of fact, it appeared that the construction of a common and satisfactory English terminology, also in main-stream disciplines, is still in its very beginning (see Beal 2008; and above all, Gumbert 2010b; see also Andrist et al. 2013 for a detailed critical discussion of some of Gumbert’s proposals, starting from Gumbert 2004).

Carrying out a complete standardization of terminology has therefore been impossible at this stage of research. Consequently, terminology specific to certain fields has sometimes been retained when the relevant scholarly tradition had established practices that did not entail methodological consequences. Yet due explanation has always been provided. Book forms, *Realien*, all phenomena related to codicology, palaeography, textual criticism, cataloguing, and digital and scientific approaches, have been defined as clearly as possible when first introduced (typically for book forms such as ‘roll’ versus ‘scroll’ versus ‘rotulus’, respectively defined as horizontal or vertical rolls/scrolls; ‘accordion book’ has been adopted for the alternative terms ‘concertina’ or ‘lepporello book’; and ‘painting’, ‘illumination’, ‘illustrator’, and ‘decoration’ with the relevant *nomina agentis*, that is ‘painter’, ‘illuminator’, ‘illustrator’, and ‘decorator’ are all used and as carefully as possible distinguished, instead of the often comprehensively and extensively used ‘illumination’ and ‘illuminator’, or even simply ‘artist’). In particular in Chapter 3 (‘Textual criticism and text editing’), case studies show the variety of traditions and theoretical and practical approaches, and consequently of terminology, which is precisely what was intended to be surveyed and displayed in that part of the chapter.

We must not disregard, however, that the parallel presentation of the single manuscript traditions in the single chapters has *de facto* enforced a tendentially uniform, consistent, common and shared terminology, and even in this respect the COMSt manual definitely marks a substantial progress.

On the other hand, no attempt has been undertaken to collect or systematically take into account the traditional terminology used by the single manuscript traditions. Except for a few fields, where much research has been done and the tradition itself has developed a special interest in terminological taxonomy (for example, the Arabic and Islamic manuscript tradition, see Gacek 2001, 2008), basic research is still very much needed in most of the fields (for a first attempt and with a degree of caution, see for example Mersha Alehegne 2011 on Ethiopic manuscript culture terminology). In very few cases, however, local terminology has been introduced or quoted to describe specific phenomena.

References

Agati 2003, 2009; Albert et al. 1993; Amiaud 1889; Andrist et al. 2013; Assfalg – Krüger 1975 (1991); Bausi 2006a, 2008b; Beal 2008; Beit-Arié 2014; Botte 1955, 1966; Cavallo et al. 1991; Cerquiglini 1989; Condello – de Gregorio 1995; Déroche 1989, 2006; Déroche – Richard 1997; Déroche – Sagaria Rossi 2012; Draguet 1977; Fiaccadori 2011; Frankenberg 1937; Gacek 2001, 2008, 2009; Galletti 2013; Géhin 2005; Götze 1922; Gumbert 2004, 2010b, 2011; Hoffmann [P.] 1998; Irwin 2006; Mallette 2010; Maniaci 1996, 2002a, 2008; Maniaci – Munafò 1993; Marchand 2009; Marrassini 2009; Mersha Alehegne 2011; Muzerelle 1985; Ostos et al. 1997; Paris 1872; Pfeiffer – Kropp 2007; Richard [J.] 2001; Rosenthal 1947; Said 1978; Spina 2013; Timpanaro 1973; Toomer 1996; Wilkinson 2007a, 2007b; Witkam 1988; Worthington 2012.