

MANUSCRIPT FRAGMENTS THE HIDDEN LIBRARY

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ABSTRACT

The paper deals with a topic that has not yet become the object of systematical scientific study: fragments of manuscripts. At Graz University these remnants of a sunken library are going to be researched by collecting and inventoring these pieces, by identifying their contents. Thus a database of hundreds of fragments with predominantly Latin texts written on parchment as well as on paper is going to be created. Furthermore, this paper outlines other international activities on fragment research researchers at Graz University are involved in. Thus a series of key questions in this research area are developed.

KEYWORDS

mediaeval manuscripts, book conservation, digitisation,
ancient libraries, book history

The object: what is a manuscript fragment?

There are various definitions of what can be considered to be a 'fragment'. In this sketch the term is used in the sense of a part of a former book or document. The manuscript collections, Eastern and Western, offer lots and lots of pieces being the remnants of former books. The considerable number of such paper and parchment debris makes me talk of a "hidden library". In many cases these late and rudimentary vestiges do not allow the reconstitution of more than one folium or a bifolium, not to talk about a full quire of a former book. But these fragments can tell us a story.

I am classifying the fragments under two formal aspects: *in situ*-fragments and fragments which are detached from a former surrounding. *In situ*-fragments are more informative and revealing be-

cause they have a context providing information additional to its material and its contents. However, the other type of fragments is not to be neglected at all.

The state of the art: what has been already done?

I have been observing the European scene in terms of research work on manuscript fragments for several years. At the first glance one can notice, many fragments are mentioned in the catalogues – not all of them are described in detail nor in good quality.

Of course, fragments have always been considered for text editions, exploiting their contents. Furthermore, there were some fine editions of fragment corpora in the last years, the majority of them being directed by thematic and formal aspects, e.g. liturgical fragments, or fragments with musical notation, or fragments dating from a certain – normally ancient – period, due to an increasing palaeographical interest. In summary, much individual study on manuscript fragments, and some research on fragments under particular aspects has been carried out. However, all of these works mostly remain connected to single fragments or collections of fragments on a local level.

But we can perceive another development as well, a systematical and more structured study of manuscript fragments. There are some few institutions investigating into the quasi-totality of fragments to be found in a library or even in a wide geographic area. The first place in this sense is held by a Scandinavian group of researchers under the direction of Åslaug Ommundsen, from the Center for Medieval Studies, University of Bergen in Norway. They started a series of workshops and activities on fragment studies years ago, comprising the countries Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Finland and Iceland. The results are published and accessible in pdf form on the homepage of Bergen University.¹ I consider this Scandinavian effort as the most productive so far, creating well elaborated databases with meticulous descriptions as well as photographs of the objects in their *corpus fragmentorum*.

1 The beginnings of Nordic scribal culture, ca 1050-1300 : report from a Workshop on Parchment Fragments, Bergen 28-30 October 2005 / edited by Åslaug Ommundsen [cited 2012-05-20]. Available at: <https://bora.uib.no/handle/1956/2403>; Ommundsen, Åslaug. Books, scribes and sequences in medieval Norway: Diss., 2 vols. [vol. I: Method and analysis, vol. II: Catalogue]. Bergen : The University of Bergen, 2007 [cited 2012-05-20]. Available at: <https://bora.uib.no/handle/1956/2252>; Ommundsen, Åslaug. From books to bindings – and back : medieval manuscript fragments in Norway. // *Gazette du Livre Médiéval* 52-53(2008), 34-44.

From various initiatives in Germany² I want to pick out the case of the University and County Library Düsseldorf.³ In 2003 they started a project sponsored by the German Science Fund (DFG). Within this project more than 300 parchment fragments of any content were investigated scientifically. These objects were digitized and described, and can be found published on the web.

From the Austrian landscape in fragment research I can report some promising beginnings. In 2009 Austrian Academy of Science organized an international congress on the questions and problems associated to the fragmented manuscript heritage. The results are published in a book which contains fundamental insights and strategies in our dealing with manuscript fragments.⁴

Another initiative was set in the National Library in Vienna. The number of manuscript fragments to be found in the National Library is incredibly high, some thousands and it is not possible to easily make a comprehensive census.

In summer 2011 a small but fine fascicle presenting some 70 fragments with musical notation left the printing press. The booklet is a special volume of the series “Codices Manuscripti”.⁵ This publication picks out the most outstanding objects the totality of it being in a database. Emphasis is laid here on the discussion of provenience according to the different styles and schemes of musical notation. Our Colleague from Graz University, Franz Karl Praßl, was consultant in this initiative.

In total, as far as I see, there is an awakening interest in research on manuscript fragments, and an increasing awareness of the multilayered and complex reality connected with manuscript fragments. There

- 2 Ausgewählte liturgische Fragmente aus der Bischöflichen Zentralbibliothek Regensburg / Hrsg. Benz, Karl Joseph, Ditttrich; Raymond. Regensburg : Schnell & Steiner, 2007.; Potwitz, Gerhardt. Mittelalterliche Handschriftenfragmente der Stadt und Universitätsbibliothek Frankfurt am Main. Frankfurt am Main : V. Klostermann, 1994.
- 3 Plassmann, Max. Ein Projekt zur Erschließung und Digitalisierung von mittelalterlichen Handschriftenfragmenten an der ULB Düsseldorf. // *ProLibris* Heft 1-2(2004), S. 12-14.; Zechiel-Eckes, Klaus. Katalog der frühmittelalterlichen Fragmente der Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek Düsseldorf : vom beginnenden achten bis zum ausgehenden neunten Jahrhundert / Mit Beiträgen von Max Plassmann und Ulrich Schlüter. Wiesbaden : Reichert, 2003. Also available at: www.ub.uni-duesseldorf.de/home/ueber_uns/projekte/abgeschlossene_projekte/fragmente [cited 2012-05-20].
- 4 Fragmente : der Umgang mit lückenhafter Quellenüberlieferung in der Mittelalterforschung : Akten des internationalen Symposiums des Zentrums Mittelalterforschung der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften / Hrsg. Gastgeber, Christian [et. al.]. Wien : Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2010.
- 5 Klugseder, Robert. Ausgewählte mittelalterliche Musikfragmente der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek. // *Codices Manuscripti*. Supplement 5. Wien : Verlag Brüder Hollinek, 2011.

is some evidence for a certain shift towards codicological research, perceiving fragments as part of a former book or document. There is a general bias from purely exploiting the contents towards the material character and the “second life” of a book in its fragmented form. This new appreciation possibly is a tribute to the book restorers and conservators who are nowadays the main “generators” of fragments – in the sense that they are discovering and making visible fragments at various places of mediaeval bookbindings. However, scientific community started research on the so called “waste material”, not in a large scale, but there are some serious beginnings.

The projects: what is on the way?

The VESTIGIA – (“Traces”) – research centre at Graz University which is connected to the Special Collection Department has taken responsibility for a couple of initiatives dedicated to research on manuscript fragments.

The fragments hold in the University Library Graz

First of all, we have to do works in our own library. Our Special Collections at University Library Graz are holding more than two thousand manuscripts, eleven hundred *incunabulae* and 27 thousand books from the 16th and 17th centuries. All parts of these collections are “contaminated” with fragments of former manuscripts. A first census, half a century ago, inventorized a number of 195 detached fragments. Among these we count 41 numbers being the remnants of former charters.⁶ The collection of Hebrew fragments comprises 17 numbers. In total we have about 280 detached fragments. The number of *in situ*-fragments is gradually increasing. We took notice of more than 500 up to now. Thus, we have at least 800 fragments of mediaeval books in our shelves.⁷

The majority of the detached fragments is visible on the web.⁸ The quality of their description – done in former times – is varying. It is our

6 Die Urkundenfragmente in den Sondersammlungen der UB Graz [cited 2012-5-20]. Available at: www.vestigia.at/urkundenfragmente.html

7 Fragmente/Makulaturen : Die Bearbeitung der Grazer Handschriftenfragmente [cited 2012-5-20]. Available at: www.uni-graz.at/ubwww/ub-sosa/ub-sosa-handschriften/ub-sosa-hs-fragmente.htm

8 A wonderful work describing the manuscripts and fragments of the former Carthusian monastery of Seitz (Žiče/Slovenija), now in our library, has been done by Nataša Golob. *Mittelalterliche Handschriften aus der Kartause Seitz (1160-1560)*. Ljubljana : Narodna galerija, 2006. Pp. esp. 145-147 [in Slovenian and German].

task to work out the complete material anew. We have to describe each object systematically, to provide high quality photographs and to enter the results in an easily accessible database.

One part of our collection – the fragments of the Monastery of St Lambrecht – is being worked out by Christopher Schaffer, a PhD student.⁹ He will accomplish works next spring. Since emphasis is put here on notated fragments, it is again our colleague Franz Karl PRASSL who is co-heading this project.

At present we are developing a vast research proposal to include the totality of our fragments to be investigated.

The fragments hold in the Diocesane Archive, Graz

There are other places in Graz where we can find manuscript fragments. One of these places is the Archive of the Diocese. We do not find any mediaeval manuscript there. But there is rich archival material, volumes of all formats, which are bound and rebound using parchment leaves. Thus, we count some 250 pieces – fragments of outdated manuscripts. We digitized all of them and made them accessible for scientific investigation. It is our colleague Mrs Margit Westermeyer, who is elaborating her doctoral thesis on these objects.

Considering this kind of material means opening a new page in the book. Beyond the normal scope of a project of this kind – identifying contents and date etc. – this project offers new possibilities. The situation is that: the archival material with the fragments are collected from all over the country. There are several dozens of places where parchment fragments had been used for binding purposes. Some of these locations are close to monasteries. We hope to get information about the ways, some manuscripts went. We hope to find some traces in order to clarify if, how and where bookbinders were on the way – with or without connections to neighbouring libraries. And we want to verify the hypothesis of manuscript waste material being object of commerce. The project started late in 2009.¹⁰

9 Katalog der Notenfragmente in den Makulaturen der Grazer Universitätsbibliothek / Projektausführender Gangl, Christopher. Graz : Vestigia, 2004. Also available at: www.vestigia.at/fragmentelambrech.html [cited 2012-5-20].

10 Die Makulaturfragmente im Diözesanarchiv der Diözese Graz-Seckau [cited 2012-5-20]. Available at: www.vestigia.at/makulaturfragmente.html

The Armenian fragments of the Mechitharist Library, Vienna

The beginnings of our works on fragments goes back to the year 2005, when we started the identification and subsequent digitization of the fragments in the Mechitharist Library of Vienna. This library holds more than 3,000 medieval Armenian manuscripts. We identified some 250 fragments mentioned in the excellent catalogue. The scientific description was done by our colleagues Gohar Muradyan and Aram Topchyan who are connected to the Matenadaran in Yerevan/Armenia. The works were completed in 2009. One may find the publication of these fragments in a bilingual edition (Armenian and English) to be downloaded as pdf on our website.¹¹ At present we are working on the edition in classical book form.

This project was our very first on fragments to be started and accomplished. And we won much experience in the course of its realization, in terms of the specific problems and the expectations in view of the results. Emphasis was laid on the identification of the contents and on palaeography. At the beginning we did not pay sufficient attention to the place of the fragment in the book and to various other questions of codicology. This project was a highly useful experience. One of the main results: It is absolutely necessary to develop an open access database for the Armenian manuscript fragments worldwide.

The Syriac Manuscripts and Fragments of the Matenadaran of Yerevan, Armenia

It was in 2007 when we started another mission to inventorise and describe manuscript fragments.¹² The Matenadaran is the most prominent collection of Armenian manuscripts in the world – some twelve thousand out of a total of approximately 18,000 at that place. Matenadaran holds a tiny collection of several dozens of Syriac manuscripts and fragments. Most of these fragments are parchments and some of them are indeed very old. We choose this corpus of fragments because there is a close cooperation between our institutions and accessibility is guaranteed and easy. Finally, the amount of documents is limited, work is feasible within a reasonable span of time. We are in close cooperation

11 Die armenischen Handschriftenfragmente in der Mechitharistenbibliothek/Wien [cited 2012-5-20]. Available at: www.vestigia.at/armmechitharisten.html

12 Die syrischen Handschriften und Fragmente in armenischen Sammlungen [cited 2012-5-20]. Available at: www.vestigia.at/syriacfragments.html

with the Oriental Institute in Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium, to elaborate the catalogue. Together with the resident colleague Andrea Schmidt we are expecting to accomplish works on these materials in 2012. The outcome will be a bilingual publication (German and Armenian).

The Collection of Diyarbakir, Turkey

Finally, I'd like to indicate another newly inspected collection of manuscripts and fragments. In May 2011 Manfred Mayer, our chief conservator, and me, we came across a collection of 370 Syriac manuscripts in the town of Diyarbakir – the historical Amida in Cappadocia. Diyarbakir is situated on the Tigris river and may be considered as the main metropolis of Kurdistan. Historically the region was settled by Greeks, Armenians and Syrians as well.

The collection of manuscripts there offers several hundred detached fragments apart from the still intact books. In close collaboration with Paul Hepworth, the book restorer in charge, we are going to design a project in order to set necessary steps as to the conservation of the manuscripts, to catalogue them and to make these manuscripts and the fragments accessible for scientific community. The amount of book debris we saw there made us become desperate – and this is just one location in the Middle East, where we are confronted with fragmented books of historical libraries.¹³

The aims: what do we want to know when we are going to study fragments?

Text-findings

It is a matter of fact that practically all historical text editions are lacking their “Urschrift” – the original manuscript from which several copies have been taken, normally with slight changes or alterations. Actually, we do not believe to discover such treasures among the piles of fragments. And we do not expect to discover completely new – so far unknown – texts. But from time to time we are surprised to find a piece of a rare text. Thus, in a modest scale, research on manuscript fragments may contribute even to text editions. But it is the standard case to uncover texts which are already known, texts from which printed editions are already existant.

13 First results are going to be presented at the Symposium Syriacum, Malta, in July 2012.

Palaeography

It is one of the outreaching goals of research on manuscript fragments to enlarge our knowledge of palaeography. The more writings we can attribute to a certain period, to a certain region, to a certain scriptorium or to the hand of a writer, the better we can rely on palaeography, which is sometimes the only tool for dating etc. Therefore, dealing with manuscript fragments necessitates a thorough description of the writing style, inventorizing all irregularities and regularities as well. We need comprehensive albums of paleography for all alphabets and regions with a historical production of manuscripts.

History of books

One of our main concerns is to contribute to elucidate the history of books and libraries. Scientific community has a good knowledge of single books and whole libraries which have disappeared in history. There are various reasons for that: destruction and confusion due to historical events and catastrophes, changes of techniques (e.g. book printing), censorship and many others. We are considering fragments as the rudiments of a former book or a charter of any kind. Finally, we want to know, which categories of books have been cut into pieces, when and where, and why.

Techniques of book-binding

Dealing with manuscript fragments used as material for bookbinding means to study the “second life” of a folium – a folium cut off from its original surrounding of an intact book in order to be subsidiary now to a completely different book. We want to increase our knowledge of historical techniques of book-binding, and to get some insight into the ways fragments were used as waste material. By the way, it is normally the book-binder and the book restorer who discovers a fragment.

**The experiences: what questions did emerge,
what results do we have?**

Immense and increasing number of fragments

Even in good catalogues we will not always find necessary information about the existence of fragments in a library. There is a considerable number of fragments to be found not in the manuscript collection itself but on the cover of printed books especially from the 16th to the

18th centuries. Such fragments are frequently not inventorized and indicated in the catalogues. The existence of a manuscript fragment is not necessarily connected to books at all. And, there are many cases when fragments appear in the process of restoring a book. Thus the number of fragments is growing steadily. Even the census of manuscript fragments is a difficult task and the repertories might be full of gaps.

Technical questions (digitization, ...)

Sometimes we are able to detect small strips of parchment in the fold, on the spine or elsewhere in a manuscript. This leads us to a serious problem: Although we see that there is a fragment we are not able to read its contents because the surface is not accessible for our eyes. Here we need the help of technologies and facilities of various kind in order to make the parchment's text or whatever it bears visible. But there are cases where we are failing even with the help of a most sophisticated technology.

Necessity of more than local cataloguing of fragments

Substantial work on fragments may be carried out on a local level. It seems to be the ordinary way to work on fragments in a special collection at a certain place. Scientific literature convincingly testifies to this practise – and produced a lot of good results. Beyond that scope we could search for fragments dispersed in a wider area. Books were travelling around in all historical periods. This is only gradually different from practises in present time – e.g. we have precise knowledge of officially sending a one thousand year old manuscript by ordinary mail from our university to a place in France. It happened some 25 years ago. We got it back via mail. And fragments, of course were travelling with the books, with the book binders, with the monks, the readers and so on. Therefore, it makes much sense to search for fragments in a more than local area, to collect the traces of the hidden library across political and cultural borders: There is the other case of a 14th c. charter fragment, originating from the German town of Heilbronn, which I found in Armenia, three thousand kilometer from its place of origin, now being part of an Armenian manuscript.

Creation of databases

As a consequence I would like to suggest the creation of local and regional databases and to make them compatible. Creating such databases would not only be advantageous to identify fragments more easily or to bring pieces together – which is the exceptional case. Such databases would allow modified scientific questions and new insights in historical bookproduction and the fate of books and libraries.

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Biographical sketch

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FRAGMENTI – SAKRIVENA KNJIŽNICA

Sažetak

Rad se bavi temom koja još nije postala predmetom sustavnog znanstvenog proučavanja: fragmentima rukopisa. Na Sveučilištu u Grazu ti ostaci potopljene knjižnice će biti istraženi prikupljanjem i inventarizacijom takvih dijelova te identifikacijom njihova sadržaja. Na taj će se način stvoriti baza podataka sa stotinama fragmenata, uglavnom s latinskim tekstovima, pisanim na pergameni i papiru. Rad prikazuje i ostale međunarodne aktivnosti o istraživanju fragmenata u kojima sudjeluju istraživači sa Sveučilišta u Grazu. Na taj se način otvara niz pitanja u ovom području istraživanja.

Ključne riječi: srednjevjekovni rukopisi, zaštita knjiga, digitalizacija, stare knjižnice, povijest knjige