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Manuscripts as Stratified Social Objects

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Manuscripts as Stratified Social Objects*

Filippo Ronconi

The first results of the Uppsala University project *Manuscripta – A Digital Catalogue of Greek Manuscripts in Sweden* are available online and consist of a tool merging a catalogue and a collection of electronic facsimiles.¹ The members of the team responsible for the descriptions of the items have based their work on an in-depth reflection on cataloguing methods and techniques, and this is clearly visible in the quality of the final product.²

Every scholar who deals with catalogues of manuscripts experiences how unsatisfying, even misleading, they can be in some circumstances, but especially so in the case of miscellaneous books. In fact, dealing with this type of objects is one of the hardest tests for a cataloguer as well as for a “manuscriptologist”, and, in addition, it is not an unusual event, since the majority of medieval codices contains more than one text.³ Nevertheless, in my opinion, a methodology that can handle the

* I wish to thank Daniele Bianconi, Lucio Del Corso, Paolo Fioretti and Laura Lulli for reading these pages and for giving useful suggestions.

¹ The infrastructure *Manuscripta – A Digital Catalogue of Manuscripts in Sweden* nowadays contains descriptions of Greek, Latin and Swedish manuscripts: see <https://www.manuscripta.se/> (beta version). I benefited also from the oral summary of the project by Patrik Granholm during the Uppsala workshop.

² See for instance B. Crostini, ‘Greek Manuscripts in Sweden: a Digital Catalogue (www.manuscripta.se)’, in P. Degni – P. Eleuteri – M. Maniaci (ed.), *Greek Manuscript Cataloguing: Past, Present, and Future* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2018), pp. 59-66. Some of the members of the team have already proven their competence in the stratigraphic study of manuscripts: see for instance E. Nyström, *Containing Multitudes: Codex Upsaliensis Graecus 8 in Perspective* (Uppsala, 2009).

³ A quantitative study based on all the available catalogues of the Greek manuscripts in the Vatican Library has shown that 732 volumes out of 1.435 contain a single text or

specificity of miscellaneous manuscripts does not yet exist. For this reason, I will try to lay down in a short but precise manner the way I think each codex should be studied (see § 2). The method I am going to describe has only slightly changed from the one I proposed in a book I published eleven years ago.⁴ Yet, in this lapse of time, I refined it through the analysis of many Greek and Latin manuscripts of different periods.⁵ This wide experience made me realise that the genesis and the history of every handwritten book consist of manifold stratifications, so that all of them – miscellaneous and mono-textual alike – should be analyzed in a stratigraphic way. I became progressively better acquainted with the economic value of books and with their importance as social objects in Antiquity and the Middle Ages.⁶ Taking into consideration

a collection of works by the same author: see M. Maniaci, *The Mediaeval Codex as a Complex Container: the Greek and Latin Tradition*, in M. Friedrich (ed.), *Proceedings of the conference One Volume Libraries. Composite Manuscripts and Multiple Text Manuscripts* (Berlin, 2013), pp. 27-46: 30ff.; M. Maniaci, ‘Greek Codicology’, in A. Bausi et al., *Comparative Oriental Manuscript Studies. An Introduction* (Hamburg, 2015), pp. 187-207: 200. Miscellaneous rolls are on the contrary rare: cf. M. Maniaci, ‘Il codice greco ‘non unitario’. Tipologie e terminologia’, in E. Crisci - O. Pecere (eds), *Il codice miscellaneo. Tipologie e funzioni. Atti del Convegno internazionale*, Cassino, 14-17 maggio 2003, Cassino, 2004 [= *Segno e Testo* 2 (2004)], pp. 75-107: 75 and Crisci, ‘I più antichi codici miscellanei greci. Materiali per una riflessione’, *Ibid.*, pp. 109-144 : 109.

⁴ F. Ronconi, *I manoscritti greci miscellanei. Ricerche su esemplari dei secoli IX-XII* (Spoleto, 2007).

⁵ See for instance F. Ronconi, ‘Il codice Ven. Marc. lat. II 46 (2400) : note paleografiche, filologiche, codicologiche’, in F. Ronconi – A. Bellettini – P. Errani – M. Palma, *Biografia di un manoscritto. L’Isidoro Malatestiano S.XXI.5* (Rome, 2009), pp. 63-74; O. Pecere - F. Ronconi, ‘Le opere dei padri della chiesa tra produzione e ricezione: la testimonianza di alcuni manoscritti tardoantichi di Agostino e Girolamo’, *Antiquité Tardive* 19 (2011), pp. 75-113; F. Ronconi, ‘Le corpus aristotélicien du Paris. gr. 1853 et les cercles érudits à Byzance. Un cas controversé’, *Studia graeco-arabica* 2 (2012), pp. 201-225; F. Ronconi, ‘L’automne du Patriarche. Photios, la Bibliothèque et le Marc. Gr. 450’, in I. Pérez Martin and J. Signez Codoñer (eds), *Textual Transmission in Byzantium: Between Textkritik and Quellenforschung*, (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014), pp. 95–132.

⁶ F. Ronconi, ‘La main insaisissable. Rôle et fonctions des copistes byzantins entre réalité et imaginaire’, in *Scrivere e leggere nell’alto Medioevo*. Settimane di studio della Fondazione Centro Italiano di Studi sull’Alto Medioevo. Spoleto 28 aprile - 4 maggio

the socioeconomic implications of the production and the circulation of manuscripts is not optional in my view, since such a perspective provides the stratigraphic analysis with a wider historical resonance.⁷ Thus, I will explain first my view on the exceptionality of manuscript books compared to all other *Realien* (§ 1), and I will end by exposing what the ideal catalogue is for me, or better what kind of catalogue I hope to find whenever I approach either a collection or a single manuscript (§ 3).

1. The manuscript book as a stratified historical object

A manuscript book is a portable handicraft-object, designed to contain a long handwritten text.⁸ In this tentative definition, by underlining that a manuscript book is a “handicraft-object”, I mean to stress the fact that the main difference between it and its modern and contemporary avatars (i.e. printed and digital books) lies in the artisanal nature of its production process. In fact, each manuscript book is a unique artifact, originated by the cooperation of several artisans, who constituted a kind of “operational chain”.⁹ In this chain, the first links were the workers who turned the raw materials into the writing materials: the wood into the tablets, the linen into the strip constituting the *libri lintei*, the cyperus *papyrus* into *kollēmata* and scrolls, the skin into parchment, the hemp and linen rags into paper *etc.* At the end of the chain, there were the *glutinatores* who restored the papyrus scrolls and those who produced the cases in which they were sometimes preserved, as well as the binders of

2011, 2 vols (Spoleto, 2012), I, pp. 627-664 and F. Ronconi, ‘Essere copista a Bisanzio. Tra immaginario collettivo, autorappresentazioni e realtà’, in D. Bianconi (ed.), *Storia della scrittura e altre storie*. Proceedings of the International Congress, Rome University *La Sapienza*, October 28th-29th 2010 (Rome, 2014), pp. 383-434.

⁷ S. Papaioannou – F. Ronconi, ‘Byzantine Book Culture’, in S. Papaioannou (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Byzantine Literature*, (forthcoming).

⁸ This definition concerns manuscript books in general and not only the codices, on the definition of which see at least P. Andrist – P. Canart – M. Maniaci, *La syntaxe du codex*. Essai de codicologie structurale (Turnhout, 2013), pp. 45-48.

⁹ F. Sellet, ‘Chaîne Operatoire: The Concept and its Applications’, *Lithic Technology* 18 (1993), pp. 106-112.

medieval codices. All these artisans learned their exquisite techniques thanks to oral transmission and imitation of gestures, through a long and protracted process. But when, at some point in history, this tradition was interrupted, nearly all memories of their skills were lost, since almost no written record of them existed: indeed those artisans were themselves generally alien to writing and their activities were perceived by literate elites, at least in Antiquity as *opera servilia*, unworthy of any (written) mention.¹⁰ Nevertheless, the in-depth analysis of their products and of some rare iconographic representations can help in at least partially reconstructing their activities. In the production chain of manuscripts, not by chance, copyists are generally considered the main actors. This is due, among other things, to the fact that, since for a series of complex reasons their social status was raised between Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, literary sources profusely praise their activity (as do colophons and notes).¹¹

In light of all this, the difference between the ancient and medieval book, on the one hand, and the modern (printed) one, on the other, is not only aesthetic or functional, but also ontological: notwithstanding the external resemblance, the handwritten book is an artisanal product characterized by an individuality, while the latter are serial objects produced by machinery (not by chance Immanuel Kant called them *opera me-*

¹⁰ Exceptions are rare: for the production of papyrus rolls, we have the description by Pliny the Elder (NH 13.21-26), for that of parchment, some Greek, Jewish and Arab recipes are extant. More detailed is obviously the documentation concerning the production of paper, while no written description has been preserved to my knowledge concerning the production of linen books and wooden tablets. I will concentrate on this matter in a future publication. See at least Bausi et al., *Comparative Oriental Manuscript Studies*. On the « muets de l'histoire » (social groups who left no written trace in history), see J.-C. Schmitt, 'L'histoire des marginaux', in J. Le Goff - R. Chartier - J. Revel (eds), *La nouvelle histoire* (Paris, 2006), pp. 277-306; J.-C. Schmitt, 'Anthropologie historique', *Bulletin du centre d'études médiévales d'Auxerre*, Hors-série, 2 (2008), online at the address <http://cem.revues.org/8862> ; DOI : 10.4000/cem.8862; J. Morsel, 'Ce qu'écrire veut dire au Moyen Âge... Observations préliminaires à une étude de la scripturalité médiévale', *Memini. Travaux et documents de la Société des études médiévales du Québec* 4 (2000), pp. 3-43.

¹¹ Ronconi, 'La main insaisissable'.

chanica).¹² Furthermore, manuscripts and printed books were in many cases the products of quite different social actors, as generally printers were not former copyists, but mainly goldsmiths and engravers of medals or coins. Unlike copyists, who reproduced a text by means of a manual activity based on grammatical knowledge and graphic abilities, the latter normally centered their work on purely technological skills and on machines.¹³

According to our definition, manuscripts are “portable objects”.¹⁴ Indeed, most of the books that have come down to us had a wide circulation, before being deposited in the libraries where we consult them. The

¹² I. Kant, *Die Metaphysik der Sitten* (Königsberg 1797), 1. Teil, 3. Abschnitt, § 32 (Berliner Ausgabe 2013², p. 72).

¹³ I write “in many cases”, “generally” and “normally” because, apart from the fact that the chain of production of early printed book was the fruit of the collaboration of many workers, some copyists were directly responsible for the making of printed editions. Furthermore, during the first century and a half of printing, copyists, illuminators and printers collaborated extensively. It is not by chance that printed books from the fifteenth century tend to reproduce the formats of codices (cf. R. Chartier – E. Anheim – P. Chastang, ‘Les usages de l’écrit du Moyen Âge aux Temps modernes’, in E. Anheim – P. Chastang, *Les pratiques de l’écrit dans les sociétés médiévales (VIe-XIIIe siècle)* », *Médiévales* [En ligne], 56 | printemps 2009) and if the print characters – in particular Greek ones – were drawn by professional copyists who in some cases were also printers (see E. Crisci – P. Degni [eds.], *La scrittura greca dall’antichità all’epoca della stampa. Una introduzione*, Rome 2011, pp. 228-229). Furthermore, until the middle of the sixteenth century, printed books were completed by illuminators, who painted the initials and miniatures, and by correctors, who added the punctuation marks, rubrics and titles. Printing influenced the activity of the copyists at such an extent that a typology of handwriting of that period is called *Druckminuskel*: see at least H. Hunger, *Antikes und mittelalterliches Buch- und Schriftwesen. Überlieferungsgeschichte der antiken Literatur* (Zurich, 1961), pp. 105-106 and J. Irigoin, ‘Les origines paléographiques et épigraphiques de la typographie grecque’, in M. Cortesi - E. V. Maltese (eds), *Dotti bizantini e libri greci nell’Italia del secolo XV* (Naples, 1992), pp. 13-28. L. Febvre - H.-J. Martin, *L’apparition du livre* (Paris, 2013), pp. 7ff. rightly note the generally different social status of copyists and printers. However, these two scholars seem to me to go too far in considering the worlds of manuscripts and printed books so separate that they identify the birth of the book with that of the printed book. See also, in this sense, E. Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early Modern Europe*, 2 vols (Cambridge, 1979).

¹⁴ Andrist – Canart – Maniaci, *La syntaxe du codex*, pp. 45-46.

historical implications of books' mobility (whose traces in Antiquity and the Middle Ages are copious) are crucial, as it determined the migration of texts and ideas from one cultural area to others: manuscripts were in fact (together with human beings) the essential media of the inter-civilizing process that has characterized the formative stages of human history.

Finally, as we said, each book is "designed to contain a text".¹⁵ Whilst many other objects bear some text as an accessory element, in the case of the book the latter is essential, as it determines its primary function.¹⁶ In our tentative definition, the term "text" comprehends ornamental elements and illustrations, following an ancient tradition: the Greek verb *graphō* means at the same time "to write" and "to paint" and, according to Gregory the Great, the images are the reading tools of the illiterate. The *biblia pauperum* exemplifies this principle and medieval law assigns a similar status to writing as to painting.¹⁷ As Rudolf Schen-

¹⁵ Andrist – Canart – Maniaci, *La syntaxe du codex*, p. 46, define the codex (not the manuscript in general) as an « objet transportable destiné à accueillir, partager et transmettre des contenus immédiatement lisibles de façon ordonnée et durable ». On p. 46 n. 5, they add that « la notion de 'destiné' n'a pas un sens d'antériorité temporelle, mais fait référence à un projet sous-jacent : il y a des objets qui sont conçus dès le début comme livres [...] et d'autres qui ne le deviennent effectivement que par décision de l'utilisateur [...] ».

¹⁶ In our definition, we speak of "long" texts. Without this distinction, it would apply to other objects also, such as a piece of papyrus or parchment enclosing a letter, an ostrakon containing some verses of a literary work or a *tabella defixionis* on which is engraved a curse. However, the concept of "long text" is historically ambiguous. I will focus on it in a further publication.

¹⁷ Concerning the verb *graphō* see D. Bianconi, Cura et studio. *Il restauro del libro a Bisanzio* (Alessandria, 2018), pp. X-XI. For Gregory the Great see PL 77, col. 1027C-1028A (« [...] pictura in ecclesiis adhibetur; ut hi qui litteras nesciunt, saltem in parietibus videndo legant quae legere in codicibus non valent »). See also the *Acta Synodi Atrebatensis*, ch. 14: C. M. Chazelle, 'Pictures, Books, and the Illiterate: Pope Gregory I's Letters to Serenus of Marseilles', *Word and Image* 6 (1990), pp. 138-153; M. Banniard, Viva voce. *Communication écrite et communication orale du IV^e au IX^e siècle en Occident latin* (Paris, 1992), pp. 131-138 : 131-138 ; G. Cavallo, *Escribir, leer, conservar. Tipologías y prácticas de lo escrito, de la Antigüedad al Medioevo* (Buenos Aires, 2017), pp. 286-287. On the *biblia pauperum* cf. P. Chastang, 'L'archéologie du texte médiéval. Autour de travaux récents sur l'écrit au Moyen

da wrote, « les représentations figurées, en particulier dans l'espace à deux dimensions de la peinture et de l'art graphique, se donnent [...] à percevoir comme des textes composés de signes [...] ». ¹⁸ Our highly inclusive denotation of the term “text”, on one side, pragmatically refuses the dissociation between writing and painting as theorized during the Renaissance, ¹⁹ and, on the other, complies with the etymology of the Latin word *textus*, which means “woven canvas” and hints at a set of interconnected verbal and, as the case may be, figurative elements. ²⁰

Despite its obvious limitations, our tentative definition may highlight the complex nature of the manuscript book as a threefold artisanal object consisting of a *material*, on which a *text* has been *written*. Therefore, its study should be based on three levels of analysis, related to three distinct but complementary disciplines: codicology, philology and paleography (the last two being complemented by art history in the case of illustrated manuscripts and albums).

In addition to being a portable handicraft object, designed to contain a long handwritten text, each manuscript represents, as we said, the final stage of a long-lasting historical process. For this reason, the study of a handwritten book, whatever its purpose, should not be limited to the object as such, but it should reconstruct the different stages by which it has come to its present form, focusing on the milieus in which such alterations have taken place. This forensic and retrospective process should distinguish three crucial steps in the existence of each book: its prehistory (i.e. the production of the writing surface starting from raw materials), its protohistory (consisting in the text transcription and in the final assembling of the book ²¹) and its posterior history (i.e. the lapse of

Âge’, *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 63 (2008), pp. 245-269: 255. For medieval law see M. Madero, *Tabula picta. La peinture et l'écriture dans le droit médiéval* (Paris, 2004).

¹⁸ R. Schenda, ‘La lecture des images et l’iconisation du peuple’, *Revue française d’histoire du livre*, 114-115 (2002), pp. 12-30: 17.

¹⁹ Chastang, ‘L’archéologie du texte médiéval’, pp. 253-254 (with bibliography).

²⁰ On the other hand, the identification between “image” and “text” also concerns contemporary times: the reference to André Breton and Surrealism is obvious.

²¹ For the term protohistory when used for texts (and not for manuscripts), see J. Velaza (ed.), *From the Protohistory to the History of the Text* (Frankfurt, 2016).

time between the end of the genetic process and the present moment, including the multiple accidents that have altered the appearance and original structure of the book). Seen in this light, the existence of each manuscript is characterized by what Igor Kopytoff has called “singularization”, that is, the process by which, in a given community, an object is pulled out of its usual commodity sphere and is attributed a “cultural biography”.²² In this perspective, the approach to manuscripts should be both stratigraphic (see below) and “biographical” in the proper sense of the term, as it should shed light, on the one side, on the marks that environmental agents and human actors have left on its ‘body’, and, on the other, on the role that each copy has played in the milieu it has passed through. In the framework of such a study, the methods of historical and social sciences have to meld with the analysis of the book’s structural, graphic, ornamental and textual characteristics. Therefore, after reconstructing the formative stages of each manuscript (its prehistory and proto-history) through an in-depth stratigraphic analysis, it is necessary to focus on the traces left on it by natural agents, plants, animals and mostly by human beings. Such traces take the form of mutilations, restorations, alterations of a graphic, material, and textual nature. These traces accumulate on the manuscript like scars, documenting the critical moments of its biography. In this socio-historical perspective, the scars turn out to be more valuable than the intact parts of the book.

2. Method of study: a proposal

The stratigraphic analysis of manuscript books should consist of four steps (from here on, we will focus on codices, but a similar method can be applied to all sorts of handwritten books). The first is the study of the material features of the book, and consists of noting its dimensions and the quality of the papyrus, of the parchment or of the paper the sheets are made of. In the case of papyrus codices, one will try to reconstruct

²² I. Kopytoff, ‘The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as a Process’, in A. Appadurai (ed.), *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 74-83.

the characteristics of the roll(s) from which the sheets were prepared, by analyzing the orientation of the fibers, the recurrence of *kollēseis* and the dimensions of the original *kollēmata*.²³ For the paper, it is important to note whether it is Eastern or Western, and to specify its size, thickness and quality. The presence, position and shape of the watermarks should also be noted, sheet by sheet and quire by quire. Size and thickness are important factors also for parchment sheets, as well as the animal species they stem from. The variations in the thickness of the sheets deserve attention, when they occur within the same quire or between one quire and another. Furthermore, the chromatic contrast between the hair and the flesh sides, the accuracy of the shaving and smoothing process and the presence of holes and scars are also valuable factors: concerning the latter, it is crucial to distinguish those produced during the genetic process by the parchment maker, from those due to later events. In fact, imperfections of the first kind tell us something about the technical capacities of the production milieu and about the economic level of the sponsor: for example, the presence of untrimmed edges implies the use of the less noble parts of the skin (not only the saddle, but also the collar, the shoulders, the rump) and the occurrence of manufacturing holes (especially those inside the writing surface) suggests that damaged parts of the parchment have not been discarded during the process.

It is also important to note the number and the structure of the quires, and their irregularities, in comparison with the standard gathering-structure found in the book (quaternions and quinions are the most widespread quire formats in medieval codices). The presence, the

²³ The sheets used to produce papyrus codices always result from cutting one or more rolls: E.G. Turner, *The Typology of the Early Codex* (Philadelphia, 1977), pp. 43ff.; A. Gascou, 'Les codices documentaires égyptiens', in A. Blanchard (ed.), *Les débuts du codex*. Actes de la journée d'étude organisée à Paris, 3 et 4 juillet 1985 (Turnhout, 1989), pp. 71-101: 80-81. Papyrus codices were current in Egypt up to the high Middle Ages and they were also produced in Europe at least up to the 6th cent., as witnessed for instance by the folia of a codex copied at Luxeuil or Lyon containing works by Saint Augustine and currently preserved in Paris (Paris. Lat. 11641), Geneva (BPU, latin 16) and Saint Petersburg (Publichnaya Biblioteka, F. Papyr. I, 1): see *Codices Latini Antiquiores* 85.614 (Paris); *CLA* 7.**614 p. 15 (Geneva); *CLA* 9, p. 4 and 30 ; *CLA* 11.**614 (Saint Petersburg).

position and the nature of the quire signatures and of the catchwords (*reclamantes*) have to be noted, together with the pagination and the foliation (specifying if they are first-hand), the pricking, the ruling type, the ruling system and the layout (noting the number of columns).²⁴ It is also important to notice all the cases when Gregory's rule (that is, that any opening is constituted to two flesh-sides or two hair-sides facing each other) is applied and the cases when it is not respected. Gregory's rule helps detecting lacunae and reconstructing the original structure of mutilated quires. All this should be carried out not by random checks, but sheet by sheet and quire by quire, since any lack of homogeneity can turn out to be revealing in the reconstruction of the original structure of the book and of its posterior history (see below).

After examining such elements, one should move on to the second step of the analysis, which concerns the scripts. One can distinguish the one(s) of the main text(s) from the additional one(s). The analysis will establish whether the main text(s) has (have) been written by just one copyist (and, in this case, in a single writing campaign or in several different phases) or by several hands. One will then pass to additional scripts, distinguishing the ones apposed during the genetic process from those due to readers or users. The analysis of the former ones will reveal the skills of the copyist(s) and the cultural interests of the patrons. In fact, a book whose wide margins and ruling type were conceived in order to contain a commentary has generally been realized by a professional copyist, as the capacity to manage the balance between the marginal text and the available space constituted a highly prized skill.²⁵

²⁴ See M. Maniaci, 'Per una nuova definizione e descrizione dei sistemi di rigatura. Considerazioni di metodo', in *The Legacy of Bernard de Montfaucon: Three Hundred Years of Studies on Greek Handwriting. Proceedings of the Seventh International Colloquium of Greek Palaeography* (Madrid – Salamanca, 15-20 September 2008) (Turnhout, 2010), pp. 333-345.

²⁵ See for instance M. Maniaci, '«La serva padrona». Interazioni fra testo e glossa sulla pagina del manoscritto', in V. Fera, G. Ferraiù, S. Rizzo (eds), *Talking to the Text. Marginalia from Papyri to Print. Proceedings of a Conference held at Erice, 26 September – 3 October 1998*, as the 12th Course of the International School for the Study of Written Records, Messina 2002 (Università degli Studi di Messina. Centro Interdipartimentale di Studi Umanistici), I, pp. 3-35 and M. Maniaci, 'Words within

After establishing the scripts' hierarchy, one will synthetically describe them, noting some basic elements (dimensions and form of the module, tilt of the axis, stroke-contrasts, design and construction of specific letters, fluency, formal or informal character of the handwriting). Each script should be referred, if possible, to a known normative model, style or type.²⁶ In order to date the manuscript, special attention will be paid to subscriptions, colophons and to any kind of annotation containing indications about the place and the period the book was realized, bought or read.²⁷ If objective dating elements are absent, the confrontation of the script(s) with dated specimen will be necessary, according to the paleographic method.²⁸

In the third step of the analysis, one should focus on the main text(s): not only on its/their identification, but also on its/their arrangement on the writing material and on its/their belonging to specific branches of the textual traditions. Besides, the analysis of the nature and of the quality of the marginal texts will tell whether the book was conceived as an edifying reading, for religious purposes, or as a study tool, thus revealing whether its patron was, say, a priest, a theologian or a school-teacher.²⁹ On the other hand, the analysis of later annotations reveals the cultural level and interests of the actual users of the book: they may be scholarly notes or naive observations, but also drawings or scribbles.

This three-step analysis leads to the realization of a detailed “map” of the book, of its components and of its current structure. Nevertheless, this descriptive and “anatomical” stage of the investigation is but pro-paedeutic to the fourth and last phase of the stratigraphic analysis, which

Words: Layout Strategies in some Glossed Manuscripts of the Iliad', *Manuscripta* 50.2 (2006), pp. 241-268.

²⁶ See at least D. Bianconi, 'Greek Palaeography', in Bausi et al., *Comparative Oriental Manuscript Studies* cit., pp. 297-305 (with further bibliography).

²⁷ We must take into account the possibility that colophons may have been copied from the model. Sometimes they are inside the manuscript and not at the end.

²⁸ D. Bianconi, 'Paleografia: riflessioni su concetto e ruolo', in idem (ed.), *Storia della scrittura e altre storie*, pp. 7-29 (with further bibliography).

²⁹ On the role of medieval glosses in Law history see for instance P. Napoli, 'Le droit, l'histoire, la comparaison', in O. Remaud - J.-F. Schaub - I. Thireau, *Faire des sciences sociales*, 2, *Comparer* (Paris, 2012), pp. 125-158: 128ff.

consists in the detailed reconstruction of the dynamics that have characterized the book's history from its genetic phase to the current moment. For this purpose, material, graphic and textual factors have to be evaluated in their mutual implications. In this framework, the scholar's attention has to focus on the potential coincidence between the changes in hand, the transition from one text to another (or from one section to another of the same text) and the passage from one quire to another. It is also important to note if the end of a text (or of a text section) overlaps with some irregularities in the quire structure. The coincidence of textual and physical (and eventually graphic) caesurae is what we call a "joint", which delimits blocks inside a manuscript. Such a holistic analysis leads to the detailed reconstruction of the genetic process that gave birth to the book. In fact, thanks to this approach, it will be possible to say whether a manuscript was realized in one writing campaign or whether it goes back to the stratification of several diachronic interventions by one or more hands, sometimes due to restorations.³⁰ Moreover, in the case of a manuscript written by more than one copyist, the codicological and paleographical analyses (see above steps one and two) allow establishing whether it is the result of a team of scribes operating synchronously in the same milieu, or of a series of independent and temporally distant writing acts. Thus, the study of the tradition of the texts contained in a miscellaneous manuscript, in the light of the results of the paleographical and codicological analysis, allows establishing (a) whether a codex consists of just one, or of more than one, block; (b) whether, in both cases, these blocks were originally conceived as they now appear, or whether they are the result of a more or less long drawn-out textual and/or codicological sedimentation; (c) in the case of multiple-block manuscripts, whether they stem from the juxtaposition of contemporary units designed to be joined together,³¹ of existing and originally independent units, or of a mixture of both.³² In the case of a manuscript made up by combining originally independent units, it is necessary to submit them

³⁰ Bianconi, *Cura et studio*.

³¹ Like for instance in the case of the Palat. Heid. gr. 398 and the Bodl. Barocci 50: Ronconi, *I manoscritti greci miscellanei*, pp. 33-75 and 91-131.

³² See for instance MS Paris. gr. 1853: Ronconi, 'Le corpus aristotélicien'.

to an in-depth enquiry, consisting in the analysis of material and graphic details. The scholar should pay great attention, among other things, to the identity, resemblance or diversity of layouts, to the homogeneity or dishomogeneity of the quire signatures and to the chronological proximity or distance of the handwritings. This process should help to establish whether the original units are more or less contemporary or not, and whether their juxtaposition is the fruit of an intellectual activity only slightly posterior to the production of the most recent unit, or of a later activity, due to modern binders or librarians. Finally, it is possible, in any of the previous cases, to establish (d) whether the miscellaneous manuscript flatly reproduces the contents of a miscellaneous model (thus containing a secondary miscellany) or whether it represents the first attempt to put together the texts it contains (which would then constitute a primary miscellany): these two scenarios imply very different intellectual activities behind the production of the books.³³

In short, the stratigraphic method is the most effective tool in order to go back in time, as it helps reconstructing not only the capacities and the level of the production milieu of the present manuscript, but also the main characteristics of its model(s), and the patron's expectations.³⁴

Finally, it is important to focus on book-bindings in a stratigraphic perspective. These are seldom contemporary to the making of the book

³³ On the distinction between “primary” and “secondary” miscellanies see F. Ronconi, ‘Per una tipologia del codice miscellaneo greco in epoca mediobizantina’, in E. Crisci – O. Pecere (eds.), *Il codice miscellaneo. Tipologie e funzioni*. Atti del Convegno internazionale. Cassino 14-17 maggio 2003 (Cassino 2004) [= Segno e testo 2, 2004], pp. 145-182.

³⁴ In some cases, copyists reproduced their models in a photographic way, giving birth to “facsimile” copies in which not only the script, but also the material structure of the models were faithfully reproduced. Concerning the first factor, paleographers speak in such cases of “mimetic scripts”: see at least G. Prato, ‘Scritture librerie arcaizzanti della prima età dei Paleologi e loro modelli’, *Scrittura e Civiltà* 3 (1979), pp. 151-193 (repr. in G. Prato, *Studi di paleografia greca*, Spoleto, 1994, pp. 73-115); G. De Gregorio – G. Prato, ‘Scrittura arcaizzante in codici profani e sacri della prima età paleologa’, *Römische Historische Mitteilungen* 45 (2003), pp. 59-101; D. Bianconi, ‘La minuscola greca dal 1204 al 1453 (e oltre)’, in Crisci - Degni (eds), *La scrittura greca dall'antichità all'epoca della stampa*, pp. 179-210: 183 ff.

(in fact many manuscripts were originally not even bound³⁵) and were generally realized in modern times. In the course of such operations, the codices were trimmed, sometimes divided into several volumes or, vice versa, independent volumes were combined into a single factitious book (see above). In some cases, the previous sewing was preserved: as sewing methods were often locally characterized processes, the study of such details is of the greatest importance in a stratigraphic perspective.³⁶

To sum up, each manuscript (and mostly each codex, and even more a miscellaneous codex) is a sedimentary entity, a “*lieu de savoir*”, in which, as at the mouth of a river, many elements brought by the stream of time meet.³⁷ These elements are at first the material components produced by the papyrus-, parchment- or paper-makers, then the texts transcribed by the copyist(s) and the illuminations made by the limners, and finally, but not necessarily, the bindings made by the bookbinders. As we said above, as each manuscript is characterized by a specific biography, which consists in the events that have marked its existence and in the influence it had on the milieus in which it was used, as we said above, the purpose of manuscript studies should not just be to describe books, but also to reconstruct their history, their genesis and the essential characteristics of their models, in order to retrace the nature of the social milieus in which each book was produced and circulated. Thus, the study of manuscript books can make a considerable contribution to the history of societies.

³⁵ D. Frioli, ‘Tabulae, quaterni disligati, scartafacci’, in C. Leonardi - M. Morelli - F. Santi (eds), *Album. I luoghi dove si accumulano i segni (dal manoscritto alle reti telematiche)*. Atti del Convegno di studio della Fondazione Ezio Franceschini e della Fondazione IBM Italia (Spoleto, 1996), pp. 25-74; P. Fioretti, ‘Percorsi di autori latini tra libro e testo. Contesti di produzione e di ricezione in epoca antica’, *Segno e testo* 14 (2016), pp. 1-38: 19-29; M. Cursi, *Le forme del libro. Dalla tavoletta cerata all’e-book* (Bologna, 2016), pp. 131-135; Bianconi, *Cura et studio*, pp. 95-97 and 134.

³⁶ A recent book on manuscript restoration in Byzantium has demonstrated the cultural value of such elements: Bianconi, *Cura et studio*.

³⁷ For the concept of “*lieu de savoir*”, see C. Jacob, *Qu’est-ce qu’un lieu de savoir?* (Marseille, 2014) (online at 10.4000/books.oep.423).

3. The ideal catalogue

In view of all these considerations (or, perhaps, just in my own view), the ideal catalogue is one that goes as far as possible into stratigraphic analysis, making the reader virtually and synthetically visualize the manuscript in its details, in order to help him reconstruct its “biography”, from its pre-history up to the present day.³⁸ When consulting a catalogue, the reader should bear in mind that no description is neutral, since the way data are presented, hierarchized and selected is in itself a form of interpretation.³⁹ For this reason, the cataloguer should strive for completeness, and always try to distinguish objective data from interpretations (never forgetting that the first are necessary, the latter are not).⁴⁰ He/She should also remember that different kinds of users will

³⁸ An important contribution to cataloguing techniques is made in the volume Degni – Eleuteri – Maniaci (eds), *Greek Manuscript Cataloguing* (which I could consult only partially).

³⁹ Andrist – Canart – Maniaci, *La syntaxe du codex*, p. 135: « toute description est nécessairement sélective et interprétative, la sélection entrant déjà dans le champ de l’interprétation ».

⁴⁰ P. Canart, ‘Consigli fraterni a giovani catalogatori di libri manoscritti’, *Gazette du livre médiéval* 50 (2007), pp. 1–13: 8 has effectively summarized all of the above in four words: objectivity, extensiveness, exactness, clarity (“obiettività, completezza, precisione, chiarezza”). In P. Andrist’s view, « [...] the primary scientific goal of a modern full-scale catalogue of ancient manuscripts must be to present the readers with the cataloguer’s own historical ‘diagnosis’ of the objects described [...]. From such a perspective, each description in a catalogue must be a systematic, precise, and complete report, especially with regard to the codicological elements that are used (or can potentially be used by others) to make such a historical diagnosis. As such an evaluation has to take full account of intellectual, cultural, social, and technological issues, the catalogue must describe its content and its material aspects as completely and precisely as the scope of the cataloguing project allows” (P. Andrist, *Purposes and Methods of a Modern Catalogue of Ancient Manuscripts: Some Reader’s Notes on the Recent Catalogue of Greek Manuscripts at St John’s College, Oxford*, *Medium Aevum* 77 [2008], pp. 293-305: 294). Such a perspective is desirable and, in some cases, it gives highly appreciable results (see for instance P. Andrist, *Les manuscrits grecs conservés à la Bibliothèque de la Bourgeoisie de Berne – Burgerbibliothek Bern. Catalogue et histoire de la collection*, Dietikon – Zürich, 2007). However, it implies a very long cataloguing process. On cataloguing techniques see also, besides the bibliography already quoted, P. Andrist, *Règles de catalogage* at www.codices.ch/catalogi/leges_2007.pdf.

read his/her work, not just paleographers and codicologists, but also philologists, art historians and historians *tout court*. For this reason, each item should be presented in the most simple and understandable way, avoiding complex and artificial terminologies based on specific conventions. In fact, unnecessary technicalities determine misunderstandings and hinder communication among disciplines. Furthermore, many scholars will base their studies almost exclusively on the cataloguer's descriptions, without ever seeing the manuscript and, even when they do gain first-hand access to it, they do so without the necessary critical competencies to judge whether the description proposed is correct. For their part, paleographers and codicologists are more and more often denied direct access to manuscripts, having to be content with consulting electronic images of them. Thus, the responsibility of the cataloguer is enormous, especially for the description of the factors that cannot be inferred from photographic reproductions.

Cataloguing manuscripts is an ungrateful activity, but when it is done properly, it can build a bridge between different disciplines, and it can translate the complexity of handwritten books into a straightforward and easily graspable description, useful to experts and to non-specialist readers alike. It has been written that “le seul catalogue parfaitement objectif serait constitué par l'objet lui-même”.⁴¹ This is a constructive provocation, but, for the same reason that “a map is not the territory it represents”⁴² (pace Suárez Miranda),⁴³ a catalogue entry is nothing but a tool. Like mapping, cataloguing is not a mimetic technique, but an encoding activity, which deserves to be transformed “from an almost technical and instrumental activity into an operation both historical and critical”.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Andrist – Canart – Maniaci, *La syntaxe du codex*, p. 135.

⁴² A. Korzybski, *Science and Sanity. An introduction to Non-Aristotelian Systems and General Semantics* (New York, 1933), p. 58.

⁴³ S. Miranda, *Viajes de varones prudentes*, book 4, ch. 45, Lerida 1658 (see J. L. Borges, *Histoire de l'infamie, histoire de l'éternité*, Le Rocher, Paris, 1951, pp. 129-130). The reference to Borges is also found, concerning manuscript cataloguing, in I. Pérez Martín, ‘Novedades en catalogación de manuscritos griegos. Una visión crítica’, *Emerita* 77 (2009), pp. 336-344: 336.

⁴⁴ Bianconi, ‘Greek Palaeography’, p. 305.

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