Written Heritage in The Mediterranean: Research Developments in Spain*

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Abstract

Studies of written heritage have been encouraged during the last years in Europe. They have recently introduced new fields of study within its methodology such as palaeography and codicology, mainly in cataloguing documents. Many libraries have been updated through new catalogues and editions of its manuscripts collections in different ancient languages. Other collections have been restored or inventoried by specialists. The research group devoted to the study of original texts in languages developed in the Mediterranean basin since antiquity is trying to contribute to this field. A survey on the studies carried out during the last years in the CSIC is here presented.

Key words: Manuscripts, written heritage, Mediterranean languages, codicology, palaeography

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1. The Study of Manuscripts: Its Integration within Other Areas

From Antiquity and well into the Middle Ages, manuscripts were the means by which knowledge was transmitted. Until the invention of the printing press, and even after it was widely being used, the only way of passing down knowledge, both scientific as well as religious, was chiefly by manuscript copies of the texts, which were then put into circulation. Therefore, the study of manuscripts conform the base on which any philological or historical research should be founded, regardless of the language in which they were written. However, until the mid-twentieth century, manuscripts were studied as mere containers of the text therein, not considering any other elements, such as the physical support in which such text was written, the materials used, the writing techniques, etc., i.e., all those elements that conform the manuscript but are not the text.

From the first studies exposing the relevance of taking into account these elements and the dawning of codicology¹), the research outlook on manuscripts has been substantially modified. We could set as an example the international conference on Hebrew Palaeography that took place in Paris in 1972²), in which a consensus was reached among palaeographers on the need for an all-encompassing study of manuscripts: physical supports, inks, formats, ruling and piercing, catchwords, etc. and, secondly, on the fact that these are elements that should be studied concurrently in order to have access to the history of transmission of the written heritage, independently of the language in which the manuscripts were written. It should not be forgotten that external characteristics of manuscripts depend on the time when they were made and the place where they were composed, independently of the language in which they were written. There are a few turning points in the history of writing that are not to be properly understood unless a survey is carried out on a wide group of documents written in various languages. The evolution of a single form of writing cannot be

¹) The bibliography on the subject is ample. To name but a few Ruiz García 2002; Lemaire 1989; van Hemelryck et Céline van Hoorebeeck 2006; Sirat 2006; Hoffmann, ed. 1998.

²) s.a., La paléographie … 1974.