

The Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures (CSMC)

cordially invites you to a

Permanent Seminar on Manuscript Analysis, Description, and Documentation Forms of manuscripts and their description: 'Rolled up manuscripts'

Monday, 12 April 2021, 2.30-4.00 PM CET

Marilena Maniaci (Cassino / Rom), Patrick Andrist (Munich / Fribourg): Introduction to the 'Forms of manuscripts and their description' seminar series

Monday, 17 May 2021, 2.30-4.00 PM CET

Thies Staack (Hamburg): *Wooden and bamboo Chinese rolls*
Stefan Baums (Munich): *Gandhāran birchbark scrolls*

Monday, 14 June 2021, 2.30-4.00 PM CET

Imre Galambos (Cambridge): *Medieval Chinese paper scrolls*
Nathan Carlig (Liège): *Coptic papyrus rolls*

Monday, 19 July 2021, 2.30-4.00 PM CET

Élodie Attia (Aix-en Provence), Antony Perrot (Paris): *Parchment / Leather Hebrew liturgical scrolls*
Marilena Maniaci (Cassino / Rom): *Greek and Latin Vertical rolls/scrolls*

Monday, 13 September, 2.30-4.00 PM CET

Final wrap-up discussion

Zoom-Meeting

Details on how to access the sessions will be sent a few days earlier. Please feel free to invite other colleagues to join, by filling the form at

<https://www.csmc.uni-hamburg.de/research/working-groups/permanent-seminar.html>

About the Seminar

Almost two years ago, after a fruitful conference on Manuscript Cataloguing in a Comparative Perspective: State of the Art, Common Challenges, Future Directions (held at the Universität Hamburg, Centre for the Study of Manuscript Culture, on May 7-10. 2018), we proposed the establishment of a “Permanent Seminar on Manuscript Analysis, Description, and Documentation” (<https://www.csmc.uni-hamburg.de/research/working-groups/permanent-seminar.html>), aimed at creating a free network of scholars and professionals involved in the study and scientific cataloguing of manuscripts belonging to European, Asian and African traditions, and interested in exchanging experiences and developing shared best-practice approaches and standards. The response was much more favourable than expected, and the number of participants is currently over seventy.

The pandemic has unfortunately slowed the beginning of the planned activities, but we are now ready to propose a first cycle of meetings open to all the participants in the Seminar, on a topic of shared interest for experts of different manuscript traditions: Forms of manuscripts and their description.

As a cross-cultural forum, we are all aware of the huge diversity of shapes manuscripts have taken synchronically and diachronically in the course of time, both in different cultures (often with contacts and contaminations across them) and within the same culture. Some of these manuscript forms – such as the codex, or to a lesser extent the roll/scroll – have been the subject of more in-depth research, aimed at a better understanding of their material structure and at the precise and effective description of their physical, content-related, and historical features. As for other manuscript forms, their material (but also their content-related) aspects are only recently receiving more specific attention, and their scientific knowledge is still hampered by the absence of systematic collections of data, based on accurate, updated and shared descriptive protocols. In some cases, manuscripts may take less common shapes, which still need to be better analysed, also in order to be recognized as autonomous types or secondary manifestations of more widespread forms.

Even though the scientific description of the book in codex form has made significant progresses in recent years – stimulated both by a clearer recognition of the codex’ structural complexity and by the need to more deeply exploit the potential of IT in the creation and interconnection of electronic catalogues – much remains to be done as regards more correct description practices of both the contents and physical features, as well as the definition of shared conventions. For the majority of non-codex book forms (with the partial exception of the horizontal roll) the situation is much more unsatisfactory, because of the lack of the most basic common standards for their material description and the rendering of their contents.

In most cases, also the terminology used (both in English and in the other languages) for the designation of the individual manuscript forms and their characteristics shows uncertainties, ambiguities and omissions that quite faithfully mirror the gaps and limits of our current knowledge.

The seminar series 'Forms of manuscripts and their description' aims at gathering examples of the different ways in which manuscripts appear in the various cultural traditions and, on this basis, stimulating a common reflection and a critical cross-examination of them, in order to characterize each form more precisely, to share experiences, approaches, tools and best practices in the field of scientific cataloguing and to elaborate shared principles of description. The ultimate goal is to lay the foundation for the drafting of recommendations and guidelines for the cataloguing of the different manuscript forms, based on a comparative approach and aimed at proposing the adoption of coherent principles for a more effective description of both common and peculiar features.

After a general presentation, the sessions will develop a reflection on the main manuscript forms, tentatively grouped in the following categories:

1. Rolled up manuscripts
2. 'Paged volumes'
3. Folded manuscripts
4. Piled up and joined surfaces
5. Other forms (if necessary) and 'borderline' cases

Each category will be the object of a number of short sessions (usually two to three), centred on the presentation of one or two significant examples, and aiming at discussing its salient features, the methods currently adopted for describing them, and whether they are scientifically appropriate or not (what is important to look at and why? how should it be observed and effectively catalogued?). Since we are aware that descriptive approaches and protocols may vary according to several scientific and practical factors, our goal is not to propose the definition of a unique and universal set of cataloguing rules, but rather to agree on a number of general principles and best practices for a better understanding of the manuscripts' materiality and contents, in their mutual relation, and of their evolution over time.

Each of the speakers will be asked to prepare a short document, to be commented offline by the participants, also on the basis of further examples and cataloguing experiences provided by them. For each manuscript form, the results of the common work will be summarized in a final wrap-up session; the revised versions of the presentations will be uploaded on the Permanent Seminar's webpage, but we also envisage to publish them in a collective volume at the end of the seminar series.

The general plan of the series, based on a provisional classification of manuscript forms (regardless of their areas of intersection and overlap), may be subject to critical rethinking – and modified or integrated accordingly – in the course of the sessions.