

manuscript cultures

Hamburg | Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures

ISSN 1867-9617



Publishing Information

Homiletic Collections in Greek and Oriental Manuscripts

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Proceedings of the Conference ‘Hagiographico-Homiletic Collections in Greek, Latin and Oriental Manuscripts – Histories of Books and Text Transmission in a Comparative Perspective’

Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures, Universität Hamburg, 23–24 June 2017

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Cover

The front cover shows the three church fathers Cyril of Jerusalem, Nicholas of Myra and John Chrysostom in a 16th-century fresco of the Church of the Archangels in Matskhvarishi, Latali, Svanetia (photography by Jost Gippert). All three fathers bear a board with text fragments from the *Liturgy* by John Chrysostom (CPG 4686) in Georgian; the text passage held by Cyril of Jerusalem is the beginning of the sentence რამეთუ სახიერო და კაცთ-მოყუარე ღმერთი ხარ ‘For you are a benevolent and philanthropic God’, which also appears in lines 6–7 of Fig. 1 on p. 2 below (from an 11th-century scroll of the Iviron Monastery on Mt Athos, ms. Ivir. georg. 89).

Copy-editing

Carl Carter, Amper Translation Service

www.ampertrans.de

Mitch Cohen, Berlin

Print

AZ Druck und Datentechnik GmbH, Kempten

Printed in Germany

ISSN 1867–9617

© 2019

SFB 950 ‘Manuskriptkulturen in Asien, Afrika und Europa’

Universität Hamburg

Warburgstraße 26

D-20354 Hamburg

www.manuscript-cultures.uni-hamburg.de

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Article

Preliminary Remarks on Dionysius Areopagita in the Arabic Homiletic Tradition

Michael Muthreich | Göttingen

1 Terminology

In Arabic there are two words that may be translated as ‘homily’: *turḡām* (تُرْجَام) and *mīmar* (مِيمَر), sometimes also pronounced *maymar*. Both words are derived from the Syriac language: *turḡām* is essentially the Syriac word *tūrgāmā* (ܬܘܪܓܡܐ), which means ‘homily’ as well as ‘interpretation’ or ‘explanation’. In Arabic, *turḡām* is a particular ‘Christian term’ in contrast to the very common Arabic word *tarḡama* (تَرْجَمَة) meaning ‘translation’, which is built upon the same four radicals (root consonants).

In the Christian Arabic tradition, a *turḡām* is very often rhymed. It usually consists of an explanation of New Testament texts.¹ Thus, it is a sermon that follows the Gospels. In the Eastern Syriac tradition, a *tūrgāmā* is an expository anthem preceding a reading of the Gospels or of Paul’s Epistles. In Syriac, the word may also mean ‘allegory’, ‘commentary’, ‘discourse’ or even ‘funeral oration’. There is also an Ethiopic word that is based on the same four radicals, viz. *targwāme* (ተርገወሜ) meaning ‘commentary’ or ‘exegesis’ and signifying mainly Biblical commentaries.

Mīmar, also a very specific Christian Arabic term, is derived from the Syriac word *mimrā* (ܡܡܪܐ) meaning ‘discourse’ or ‘sermon’. *Mīmar* translates ‘speech’, ‘homily’ or ‘theological discourse’ in Arabic. An Arabic *mīmar* is usually not rhymed, whereas in Syriac a *mimrā* normally signifies a metrical homily. Ephrem the Syrian, for example, wrote many of these metrical homilies or *mimrē* (which is the plural of *mimrā*).

2. Arabic homiletic collections

2.1 Designation of the collections in catalogues

It is not really easy to find homilies in catalogues of Arabic manuscripts, because collections of homilies may have different names in Arabic, depending on their content. The

general term for ‘homiliaries’, كتاب الميامير (*kitāb al-mayāmīr*), may be translated as ‘Book of *mīmars*’. However, we also find them mentioned as

- كتاب المواعظ (*kitāb al-mawāʿiẓ*, ‘Book of Exhortations’)
 - كتاب الخطب (*kitāb al-ḥuṭab*, ‘Book of Speeches’, i.e. ‘Sermons’)
 - كتاب عظات للصيام الكبير أو اعياد أخرى مشهورة (*kitāb al-ʿiẓāt liṣ-ṣiyām al-kabīr ʿaw ʿa ʿyād ʿuḥrā mašhūra*, ‘Book of exhortations for Lent and other important feast days’)
- or even with special titles such as
- روضة الواعظ (*rawḍat al-wāʿiẓ*, ‘Meadow of the preacher’) or
 - بوق السماء (*būq as-samāʾ*, ‘The trumpet of Heaven’).

Besides the titles given above, homiliaries can be found in connection with ‘Saints’ Lives’, ‘Acts’ and ‘Martyrdoms’ or even as ‘Prayer Books’ and ‘Service Books’. Thus, Arabic manuscript catalogues (especially the older ones) do not in fact classify such collections under a specific or well defined rubric so far.

2.2 Authors of homilies found in Arabic homiliaries

If we follow Graf’s monumental *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur*,² especially volumes I and II, we find mainly homilies by the following Greek and Syriac authors in Arabic translations. Most of them are well known:

- Theophilus (Monophysite) bishop of Alexandria (c.385–412)
- Gregory of Nyssa (c.335–395)
- John Chrysostom (c.349–407) (very copious)
- Epiphanius of Salamis (c.320–403)
- Cyril of Alexandria (c.376–444)
- Theodosius of Alexandria (Monophysite, sixth century)
- Ephrem the Syrian (c.306–373)
- Jacob of Sarug (c.451–521)

¹ Cf. Graf 1954, 29.

² Graf 1944–1947.



Fig. 1: Mt Sinai, St Catherine's Monastery, ar. 448^{bis}, fols 23^v-24^r.

It is possible to arrange homiletic collections in accordance with different denominations or Churches. In doing so, we may again follow Graf. The given list is, like the one above, extracted from Graf's *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur*. I mention only important authors before the fifteenth century, some of them not native Arabs or not Arabic-speaking:

Jacobite Church (Syrians)

- Moses bar Kepha (*903)
- Michael the Syrian (*1199)

Coptic Church (Egyptians)

- Būlus al-Būṣī (twelfth/thirteenth century)
- Al-Waḡīṭh Yūḥannā al-Qalyūbī (thirteenth century)
- Aṣ-Ṣaḡī abu'l-Faḍā'il ibn al-'Assāl (thirteenth century)
- Al-Mu'taman Abu-Iṣḥāq ibn al-'Assāl (thirteenth century)

- Šams ar-Ri'āsa Abu'l-Barakāt ibn Kabar (thirteenth/fourteenth century)

Melkite Church

- Athanasius, patriarch of Jerusalem (uncertain)³

Nestorian Church

- Abū Ḥalīm Īlīyā ibn al-Ḥadīṭī (*1190).⁴

3. Works by pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite or attributed to him in Arabic homiletic collections

There are essentially only two Dionysian texts in Arabic that are explicitly called *mīmar*, i.e. 'homilies': the *Narratio de vita sua* (CPG 6633, hereinafter *NVS*) and 'On Good and

³ Cf. Graf 1947, 86–87.

⁴ Cf. Graf 1947, 202.



Fig. 2: Mt Sinai, St Catherine's Monastery, ar. 475, fols 156^v-157^r.

Evil', an extract of *De divinis nominibus* (IV, 18–35). Neither of these two texts is a 'homily' in the proper sense. The *NVS* is a report in which Dionysius the Areopagite allegedly narrates his conversion to Christianity. It is related to the seventh letter to Polycarp attributed to Dionysius the Areopagite and belonging to the *Corpus Dionysiacum*.⁵ In this letter, Dionysius relates that he saw the solar eclipse during the crucifixion of Christ when he was in Heliopolis. The *NVS* also reports this experience and connects it with St Paul's speech at the Areopagus. The two events finally led to his baptism.

3.1 Narratio de vita sua

We find the *NVS* mainly in homiletic collections such as the 'Holy Book of Homilies', where it follows a homily of

Benjamin I of Alexandria (*fl.* 623–661) about the 'Wedding in Cana'.⁶

We otherwise find the *NVS* in collections of saints' lives and, possibly, in lectionaries for the Passion Week. There is, for example, a fragment of a codex consisting of eight leaves from the Mingana Collection in Birmingham (additional Christian Arabic ms. 247 [add. 258], about 1400 CE) which may have belonged to a lectionary. It is difficult to say where it is to be located; it came from the Church of Our Lady in a place spelt نياخي الضابرة (Niyāḥī aḍ-Ḍābira)⁷ and may perhaps be of Coptic origin. The assumption that it might have been a lectionary is quite probable for two reasons: first, it contains a note indicating when the text was to be read, namely, after

⁵ The *Corpus Dionysiacum* comprises four treatises (*De divinis nominibus*, *De coelesti hierarchia*, *De ecclesiastica hierarchia*, *De mystica theologia*) and ten letters (*Epistolae*). It was originally ascribed to Dionysius the Areopagite mentioned in Acts 17:34, which does not prove to be true.

⁶ In Ethiopic, we find the *NVS* in connection with a homily by Benjamin I, as well. The homily in question is different though; it is on the crucifixion of Christ. In Arabic, on the other hand, the *NVS* follows the homily of Benjamin I; in Ethiopic it is included in it. Cf. Müller 1968, 43–49 (47).

⁷ 'A locality the name of which cannot be read with safety' as Mingana says, see Mingana 1939, 52.

the prayer of the sixth hour on Good Friday; and second, the text is followed by a homily of Jacob of Sarug on the angel who guarded the Paradise of Eden and on the believing malefactor, i.e. the thief on the right side of Jesus when he was crucified, which was read after the prayer of the ninth hour on Good Friday. This homily of Jacob usually follows or precedes the *NVS* immediately in Ethiopic lectionaries for the Passion Week. Ethiopic lectionaries, on the other hand, were adopted from the Coptic Church in the fourteenth century and thus translated from Arabic.

Arabic homiletic collections containing the *NVS* are found in the following manuscripts:

1. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Fonds arabe, 147 (fols 146^r–162^r).
Paper; fifteenth century; 326 folios; 25 × 16 cm; 15–17 lines.
McGuckin 1883–1895, 32–33.
2. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Fonds arabe, 212 (fols 129^r–134^v).⁸
Paper; 1601; 322 folios; 21 × 15 cm; 17 lines.
McGuckin 1883–1895, 53.
3. University of Birmingham, Cadbury Research Library, Mingana Collection, additional Christian Arabic ms. 247 [Chr. Arab. add. 258] (fols 1–6^v).
Paper; fourteenth century; 8 folios; 20.6 × 14.7 cm; 12 lines.
Mingana 1939, 51–52.
4. Cairo, Coptic Museum, 455 [Graf], 654 [Simaika, serial number] (fols 33^v–39^v).
Paper; 1741; 244 folios; 21 × 16 cm; 14 lines.
Graf 1934, 170.
Simaika and ‘Abd al-Masīḥ 1942, 299.
5. Cairo, Coptic Museum, 446 [Graf], 861 [Simaika, serial number].
Paper; 1782; 208 folios, 32 × 23 cm; 17 lines.
Graf 1934, 166.
Simaika and ‘Abd al-Masīḥ 1942, 388.
6. Vatican City, Bibliotheca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. ar. 75 (fols 157^v–168^v).
Paper; thirteenth/fourteenth century.
Mai 1831, 154.
Sauget 1984, 201–240.

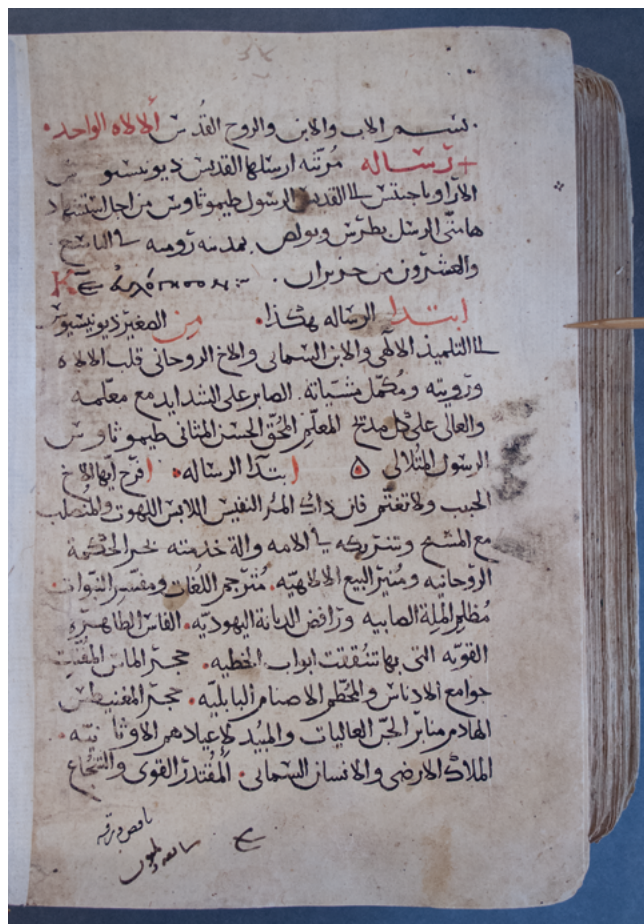


Fig. 3: Mt Sinai, St Catherine's Monastery, ar. 482, fol. 269^v.

7. Vatican City, Bibliotheca Apostolica Vaticana, Borg. ar. 99 (fols 352^r–366^v).⁹
Paper; eighteenth century, 475 folios.
Tisserant 1924, 15.
Graf 1944, 269.

The content of all of these collections varies. In Paris, Fonds arabe, 147 we find homilies about the resurrection, the death or the body of Christ. In Paris, Fonds arabe, 212 we find homilies about the circumcision of Christ and his entry into the temple, combined with saints' lives. Cairo 446 contains 18 homilies of the Fathers for Lazarus Saturday and Palm Sunday. In all cases, the *NVS* is read on the sixth hour of Good Friday. In this usage, the Ethiopic Church follows the Coptic Arabic Church.

⁸ McGuckin erroneously says that it is on folios 122^r–135^r.

⁹ Graf 1947 gives page numbers: 666–710.

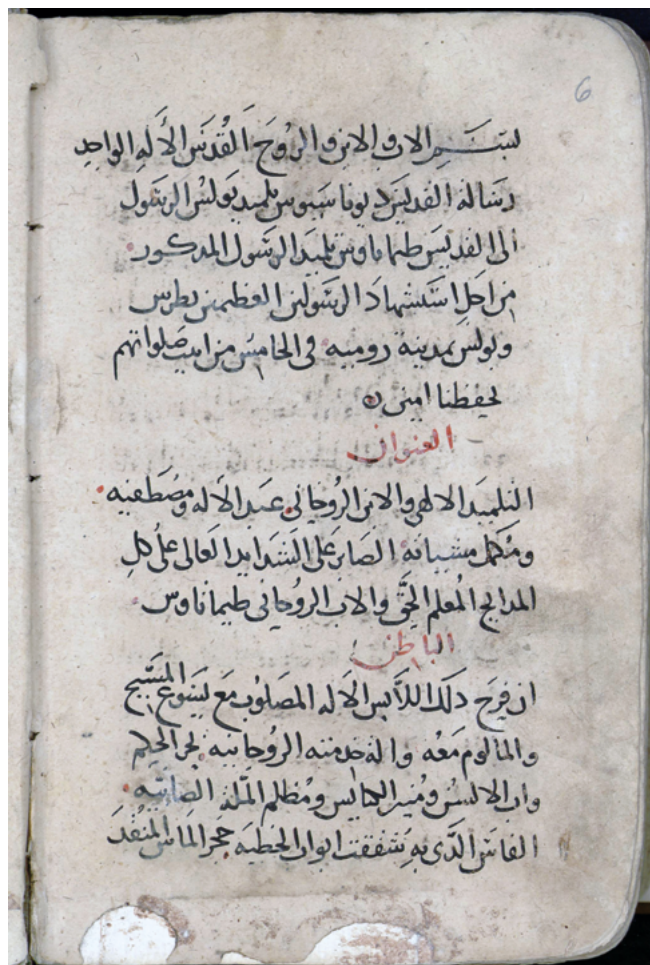


Fig. 4: Göttingen, State and University Library, MS arab. 104, fol. 6r.



Fig. 5: Göttingen, State and University Library, MS arab. 105, fol. 142v.

3.2 'On Good and Evil'

'On Good and Evil' is extant in different kinds of collections. The text is found, for example, as an appendix to the work of Sim'ān al-Kalīl al-Maqāra (Macarius), which is called 'Garden of the Anchorite and Benediction of the Solitary'.¹⁰ In his book, Sim'ān (Macarius) praises moral virtues such as patience, forgiveness, humility, piety and faith. Its subject is thus the Good, which makes it a proper place to add the Dionysian treatise on Good and Evil.

We further find 'On Good and Evil' in manuscripts containing texts from the *Corpus Dionysiacum*. It is sometimes located after the eighth letter of Dionysius (the letter to Demophilus), which is – broadly speaking – about doing good or acting righteously in the Church. It is otherwise placed between the Apocalypse of John and the Dionysian 'Celestial Hierarchy'.

¹⁰ Graf 1947, 336–337. Graf translates it 'Garden of the Anchorite and Consolation of the Solitary'.

3.3 The Epistola de morte Apostolorum Petri et Pauli

In addition to the liturgical books mentioned above, the *NVS* is sometimes found in homiletic collections, too, where it appears after the *Epistola de morte Apostolorum Petri et Pauli* (CPG 6631, hereinafter *EMA*).¹¹ The *EMA* ascribed to Dionysius the Areopagite is, as the title says, an epistle (رسالة *risāla* in Arabic). It is never called a 'homily', neither in Arabic nor in Syriac, although about a third of all Arabic translations of the *EMA* extant in Arabic manuscripts (as far as I have been able to locate them as yet) are found in homiletic collections. Another large part of Arabic translations of the *EMA* appears in manuscripts containing the Pauline Epistles, either as a sort of preamble or preface or as an apostil or postscript. Two Arabic manuscripts in Göttingen containing

¹¹ A critical edition of this text, also covering translations from almost every Christian oriental language, is being prepared by the Göttingen Academy of Sciences and Humanities (Patristic Commission) and is expected to be published in 2020.



Fig. 6: Beirut, Bibliothèque Orientale, Ms. 512, fols 151^v-152^r.

the *EMA*, for instance, are collections of Pauline epistles.¹² The *EMA* is otherwise extant in collections of saints' lives and martyrdoms or in various collections, dogmatic or other.

The *EMA* is not really a homily, as mentioned above. It is a 'Letter of Consolation', and it was written by (a certain) Dionysius to Timothy, Paul's disciple, on the occasion of St Paul's and St Peter's martyrdom. If we take a closer look, we find it to be a eulogy for St Paul, telling the story of his martyrdom. The martyrdom of St Peter is mentioned only briefly, with the information that he was crucified upside down.

Arabic homiletic collections containing the *EMA* are found in the following manuscripts:

a) Melkite¹³:

1. Jerusalem, Melkite Seminary of St Anne of the White Fathers, 38 (207–214).
Paper; 1874; 150 folios; 20.5 × 13 cm.
Graf 1914, 107–109.
Sauget 1986.
2. Lebanon, Dair Mār Dūmīṭ Fairūn, 10.
Paper; 1710¹⁴.
al-Lubnānī 1928, 458–459.
3. Aleppo, Library of Paul Sbath, 523 [14] (348–356).
Paper; seventeenth century; 452 pages; 23 × 17 cm.
Sbath 1928, 201–203.

¹³ The division into Melkite, Jacobite and Maronite homiletic collections is not meant to be strict. Jacobite homiletic collections, for example, were indeed used in the Melkite Church, with Monophysite statements sometimes being marked as heretical. Numbers seven and eight of the Melkite group are, for instance, most probably of Jacobite origin.

¹² Göttingen, State and University Library, Arab. 104 and Arab. 105.

¹⁴ Graf mentions the date 1694, see Graf 1947, 490.

4. Lebanon, Dair aš-Šuwair, 335.
Paper; eighteenth/nineteenth century.
Nasrallah 1961, 228.
 5. Lebanon, Harissa, 37.
Paper; seventeenth century; 379 pages; 22 × 16 cm.
Nasrallah 1958, 66–69.
Sauget 1986.
 6. Beirut, Bibliothèque Orientale, 510 [61] (fols 232^r–234^v [445–450]).
Paper; eighteenth century; 278 folios; 36 × 21 cm.
Cheikho 1926, 214–215 [308–309].
Cheikho 1905, 471–473.
Sauget 1988, 231–290.
 7. Beirut, Bibliothèque Orientale, 511 (fols 334^v–341^r [655–668]).
Paper; 1867; 668 pages; 23.5 × 18 cm.
Cheikho 1926, 215 [309].
 8. Beirut, Bibliothèque Orientale, 512 (fols 152^r–156^r [352–361]).
Paper; sixteenth century; 744 pages; 21 × 14 cm.
Cheikho 1926, 215–216 [309–310].
 9. Mt Sinai, St Catherine's Monastery, ar. 448^{bis} (fols 24^r–28^r).
Paper; thirteenth century; 323 folios; 21 × 13 cm.
Dunlop Gibson 1894, 86–87.
Clark 1952, 35b.
 10. Mt Sinai, St Catherine's Monastery, ar. 475 (fols 157^r–164^v, incomplete).
Paper; thirteenth century; 272 folios; 21 × 11 cm.
Dunlop Gibson 1894, 92–93.
Clark 1952, 36a.
 11. Mt Sinai, St Catherine's Monastery, ar. 482 (fols 269^v + 271^r–276^v).
Paper; thirteenth century; 297 folios; 24 × 15 cm.
Dunlop Gibson 1894, 94.
Clark 1952, 36a.
- b) Jacobite:
1. Vatican City, Bibliotheca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. sir. 196 (fols 429^r–436^v).
Bombycinus (silken paper); 1551 (Garshuni); 437 leaves.
Assemani and Assemani 1759, 416–426.
 2. University of Birmingham, Cadbury Research Library, Mingana Collection of Manuscripts, Mingana 461 (fols 59^v–67^v).
Paper; nineteenth century; 93 folios; 21.7 × 15.4 cm; 20 lines.
Mingana 1933, 822–825.
 3. Cairo, Coptic Museum, 799 [2].
Paper; 110 folios; 39 × 23 cm; 16 lines.
Simaika and 'Abd al-Masīḥ 1942, 361.
 4. Cairo, Library of the Church of St Sergius and Bacchus, 110 (fols 42^r–52^r).
Paper; 1716; 214 folios, 20.0 × 14.5 cm; 13 lines.
Burmester and Khater 1977, 38–39.
- c) Maronite:
1. Lebanon, Library of the Lebanese Missionaries of Dair al-Kreīm, 26.
Paper; end seventeenth century; 27 × 20 cm.
Nasrallah 1963, 28–29.

Why do we find the *EMA* in homiletic collections? The reason is that in the Coptic-Arabic tradition the *EMA* was read on 29 June, the day of the martyrdoms of St Peter and St Paul. It covers basically the same story as the account of their martyrdom given in the Coptic synaxary (a liturgical book containing hagiographies),¹⁵ but it goes into greater detail about St Paul.

4. Conclusion

Whereas the Dionysian writings proper, as we may style them, were passed down because they were being collected in the *Corpus Dionysiacum*, smaller and more dubious writings that were also ascribed to Dionysius the Areopagite, such as the *EMA* and the *NVS*, were obviously handed down from one generation to the next because they were read as homilies and preserved in synaxaria, homiliaries or menologia, among other collections, and thus survived in manuscripts until today.

¹⁵ See for example St George Coptic Orthodox Church 1995, 417–418. The exact Coptic date is the 5th of the month of Abib.

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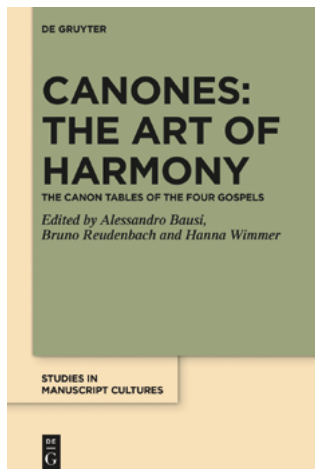
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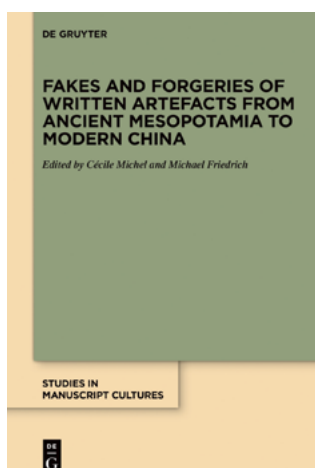


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This book offers an updated overview on the topic of ‘Canon Tables’ in a comparative perspective and with a precise look at their context of origin, their visual appearance, their meaning, function and their usage in different times, domains, and cultures.

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ISSN 1867–9617

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“Manuskriptkulturen in Asien, Afrika und Europa”

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Warburgstraße 26

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