



Christian Troelsgård from Denmark lecturing on early Christian chant repertoires. (Photo: DL)

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CHANT POPYRI AND
THE 'JERUSALEM TROPOLOGION'

AN IMPORTANT GROUP OF SOURCES FOR THE STUDY
OF THE FORMATION OF THE EARLIEST ORTHODOX
CHRISTIAN CHANT REPERTORIES

Until recently, the early Jerusalem chant repertory and its relation to the standard repertoires of the Byzantine rite have been studied primarily through the Georgian translations of the Greek original chants. The basis of this study has first of all been the 1980-edition of the 'Ancient Iadgari', also known as the 'Ancient Georgian Tropologion'. That chant book may represent one of the oldest known systematic hymn collections in Christendom and is connected with the Jerusalem rite of the fifth-sixth centuries AD. However, the questions whether and how the Georgian translators, redactors, and scribes may have altered, rearranged, or supplemented the Greek originals beyond a mere translation remain in many ways unanswered, because both the main copies and the manuscripts available for comparison are of a considerably later date. I suggest here that there be taken into systematic account another group of sources that can shed light on the musical culture of the Early Church: papyrus sheets

with musical contents. Previously, this class of sources has been known and studied primarily by papyrologists and scholars of the early Christian liturgy and theology, but it has been used surprisingly little for early chant studies.

In all, some 230 papyri fragments with traces of early Christian chant have been listed by Jacques van Haelst¹ and in later supplements by Cornelia Römer² and Celine Grassien³. However, not all the fragments designated 'papyri' are in fact written on sheets made from fibres from the *Cyperus Papyrus* plant. Though technically classified as papyri and stored in papyrus collections, some of these are written on parchment, some on oriental paper, a writing material which was introduced quite early in Egypt, and some even on clay, the so-called *ostraca*. Accordingly, it is the very fact that they have been brought to light through archaeological finds rather than having been copied by hand from previous manuscript models and kept for centuries in traditional manuscript collections which has been decisive for their classification as 'papyri' and 'manuscripts' (or 'manuscript fragments') respectively.

However fragmentary they may appear, these pieces of papyrus provide chant scholarship with an interesting group of primary sources that definitely deserves a systematic investigation. I shall here deliver a few comments on this evidence and its importance for the study of the formation of the earliest chant repertoires.

DATING AND LOCATION OF THE PAPYRI

There are many uncertainties regarding the dating and location of the papyrus fragments. Palaeographical dating is often the only means of dating the hymnographic fragments. It is based on comparison with contemporary documents and rests on the specialised knowledge of papyrologists. But the method has some evident weaknesses, since one must realise that various genres may have been associated with different script canons, and that the question of archaizing script can in some cases be raised. It is, however, reasonable to rely on the period ascribed to these fragments by the specialists, but to make too much out of the ascription of a given fragment to the end of one century instead of the beginning of the next is, of course, not tenable.

1 van Haelst, J., *Catalogue des papyrus littéraires juifs et chrétiens*, Paris 1976.

2 Römer, Cornelia, 'Christliche Texte I', *Archiv für Papyrusforschung u. verwandte Gebiete* (AFP) 43 (1997) 107-145; 'Christliche Texte II (1996-1997)', AFP 44 (1998) 129-139; 'Christliche Texte III', AFP 45 (1999) 138-148; 'Christliche Texte V', AFP 47 (2001) 368-76; 'Christliche Texte VI', AFP 48 (2002) 449-450; 'Christliche Texte VII (2002-2004)', AFP 50 (2004) 275-283.

3 Grassien, Céline, 'Deux hymnes et une litanie chrétienne byzantines conservées par le P.Rainer Cent. 31 et cinq autres témoins', *Tyche: Beiträge zur Alten Geschichte, Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 12 (1997), 51-84; 'Problèmes d'édition dans le corpus papyrologique des hymnes chrétiennes', AFP 51 (2005) 253-279; (with Johanne Diethart) 'Remarques sur la composition, la transmission et l'édition de trois hymnes chrétiennes en provenance d'Égypte', AFP 51 (2005) 95-104; Doctoral dissertation from Sorbonne (2011), forthcoming.