

contrasts with both *hōh* ‘I’ and *nḥah* ‘we [me and more than one other]’, and *atay* ‘you [you and one other]’ contrasts with *hēt* ‘you [singular]’ and *atēm* ‘you [masculine plural]’ and *atēn* ‘you [feminine plural]’. All MSAL exhibit three contrastive sibilants (s-like sounds) – *s*, *š* (sh) and *ś* (a lateral fricative hypothesised for Proto-Semitic with a similar pronunciation to Welsh ‘ll’).

Furthermore, the lexis of MSAL shows links with Ethio-Semitic and extremely conservative Arabic dialects of northern Yemen and south-western Saudi Arabia, suggesting early population movement and contact. Thus the documentation and synchronic and diachronic description of the MSAL is of crucial importance to understanding the historical development of the Semitic language family as a whole.

Alongside their importance to Semitic linguistics, the documentation of the MSAL is vital for recording the disappearing cultural traditions and socio-economic practices of the speakers. Language documentation provides an insight into the culture and way of life of peoples, and preserves important traditional knowledge, including uses of local plant species, land and livestock management practices, fishing, and other areas.

We anticipate that this research will be of interest not only to linguists, but also to historians, anthropologists, sociologists, and specialists in other scientific fields. Language documentation is also of great interest to MSAL language communities who wish to maintain a record of their heritage and traditions in a world which is undergoing rapid change.



Figure 3. Camels returning to the mountains after the Monsoon period in Jerbeeb, Oman (Photograph by J. Watson).

Several hundred oral texts have been collected and published from Mehri and Soqotri. To enable sound comparison of the MSAL, it is necessary to document, in order of urgency, the lesser documented Baḥari, Hobyōt, Ḥarsūsi and Šherēt. In collaboration with native-speaker researchers, we will collect around 20 hours of topic-focussed recordings in each language; we intend to select 10–15 hours of these for transcription, annotation and translation into both Arabic and English.

To facilitate grammatical and lexical comparisons, the new texts will deal with subject matters covered by published sets of MSAL texts, including: fishing, livestock management, rangeland, toponomy, milk-processing, date-harvest for Ḥarsūsi, and frankincense-harvest for all but Baḥari and Ḥarsūsi. Miranda Morris’s recordings of Baḥari, Šheret, Mehri and Hobyōt produced 30–40 years ago will be compared with the project recordings, and we believe this will shed light on language change. The transcribed, translated and annotated texts will be prepared for book publication and a selection of the oral recordings will be made available on the MahrahNet website, hosted in Dhofar, Oman, and the Semitic Sound Archive, hosted in Heidelberg, Germany.

For the 1,000-term comparative cultural glossary, terms will be taken from the text topics plus other culturally specific semantic fields, and lexemes identified in each of the MSAL; for MSAL which exhibit considerable dialect variation, lexemes will be identified in each of the major dialect groups. The cultural glossary will be produced in Latin-based and Arabic-based transliteration, and translated into both English and Arabic. We very much hope that documentation of the MSAL and their cultural traditions will be continued by the language communities long after the period of our involvement.

Janet Watson

‘Corpus Coranicum’ Project

‘Corpus Coranicum’ is a research project of the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities, initiated in 2007 by Angelika Neuwirth (chair of Arabic Studies at the Freie Universität Berlin), Michael Marx and Nicolai Sinai. Based at the Academy’s premises in Potsdam, it is devoted to researching the history of the Qur’an. With an estimated time-

span of 18 years, the project is pursuing research in three areas: (1) textual documentation (manuscripts and variant readings); (2) collection of testimonies from Late Antiquity; and (3) a literary-chronological commentary. The project is publishing its results online, accessible via www.corpuscoranicum.de.

Regarding the textual documentation, the oldest manuscripts and variant readings of the Islamic scholarly tradition are collected in two databases 'Manuscripta Coranica' and 'Variae Lectiones Coranicae'. By allowing access to the relevant material for the written transmission and the oral tradition (variant readings of the text described in Muslim linguistic and exegetical treatises of the first five centuries), new avenues are being opened for scholarship.

The earlier manuscripts of the Qur'an have only been under serious scrutiny in the last decade, therefore it is still necessary to take into account the material evidence. Theodor Nöldeke (1836-1930) already highlighted the need to study manuscript evidence in his reference work *Geschichte des Qorāns* (1860). In the 1920s, Gotthelf Bergsträßer (1886-1933) developed the idea of setting up an *apparatus criticus* for the text of the Qur'an, comprising both evidence from manuscripts and variant readings (in close cooperation with the Australian scholar Arthur Jeffery) as described in Muslim scholarly literature. In 1930 he created a section, the 'Korankommission', at the Bavarian Academy of Sciences in Munich, dedicated to that task.

Financed by the Bavarian Academy, Bergsträßer and his colleague and successor (Otto Pretzl (1893-1941)) took more than 10,000 photographs of Qur'anic manuscripts from collections in Berlin, Istanbul, Cairo, Madrid, Meknes, Paris and Rabat. Their photo collection is currently being digitized by the project in Potsdam.

In the second section, texts from the religious, cultural and linguistic environment are collected in the database 'Texte aus der Umwelt des Korans'. Here, testimonies from Late Antiquity in Arabic, Syriac, Hebrew, Greek, and Classical-Ethiopian, inscriptions in North and South Arabian languages before the Islamic period, and other literature, are collected and referred to verses of the Qur'an. This collection is gathered from secondary

literature and from studying relevant sources directly. So far, a focus was placed on the study of Syriac literature, of which testimonies were entered into the project database. By studying Late Antique sources, the project attempts to reconstruct the cultural and religious background of the people addressed by Muhammad's proclamation.



Figure 4. Photograph of a monumental Qur'an manuscript taken in Cairo [N-Film-43-06]. (© Gotthelf Bergsträßer photoarchive Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften).

However, much existing research literature has tried to find sources of the text of the Qur'an, in the sense that it is described as a kind of copy-and-paste-text using older material. The project aims to establish a new approach for the intertextual study of the Qur'an. The highly argumentative and discursive text, proclaimed by Muhammad to his listeners, is read against the background of the Late Antique period in order to understand its original purpose. Since the first community seemingly had knowledge of Jewish, Christian or Arabian traditions, the text of the Qur'an can be read by comparing it to Late Antique traditions and by documenting similarities and differences in order to retrace the argumentative line of its discourse.

The third section contains a chronological-literary commentary that studies observable literary patterns (for e.g. rhyme patterns, verse length, Medinan insertions) and thematic developments in the text. Here the Qur'an is understood as a text that has been proclaimed first in Makkah and then in Medina (between c. 610 and 632 AD) over a period of more than 22 years. Reading it in a chronological order allows us to perceive the text and its theology in a historical framework, reflecting the development of the first Muslim community. The commentary on the Early

Makkan Suras has been written by Nicolai Sinai and is accessible under www.corpuscoranicum.de. Suras of the Middle Makkan and the Late Makkan period are currently being studied.

‘Corpus Coranicum’ is cooperating with scholars from Europe and the Middle East in the framework of the EUME-Project of the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin (Institute of Advanced Study). It is also currently engaged in the German-French research programme ‘Coranica’, dealing with material evidence (manuscripts, inscriptions and language contact). Because of its work with databases, the project is also engaged in the field of digital philology for Semitic languages.

Michael Marx

DASI – Digital Archive for the Study of Pre-Islamic Arabian Inscriptions

DASI is a five-year project funded by the European Community within the 7th Framework Programme ‘Ideas’, ‘ERC – Advanced Grant’. Initiated in May 2011, DASI continues the tradition of applying computer technology to the study of the ancient world. This is part of a long and well-established partnership between Alessandra Avanzini (Chair Professor of Semitic Philology at the University of Pisa) and the Scuola Normale Superiore in Pisa.

The main objective of DASI is to gather all known pre-Islamic Arabian epigraphic material into a comprehensive online database which can be accessed by scholars from anywhere in the world. For the first time, the rich epigraphic cultural heritage of the pre-Islamic Arabian Peninsula can thus be studied in a holistic manner to fill an important gap in the history of the ancient Near East.

The project focuses on a range of activities which are organised within four main phases: meetings and workshops (Phase 1); tools definition and training courses (Phase 2); cataloguing of inscriptions and their digital publication (Phase 3); study of inscriptions and scientific publications (Phase 4). So far, we have completed the first two phases.

1. Meetings and workshops

We organised several meetings and workshops in order to establish the best approach to the study and cataloguing of epigraphic documents, and to involve experts

and young scholars of Arabian studies in the DASI activities.

DASI was officially presented to the scientific community during the first project meeting that was held in Pisa in June 2011. During the following months, a series of workshops were organised in order to select the epigraphic material and to divide the scientific tasks of the project among the collaborators. In particular, a cooperation agreement was made with the OCIANA project (Khalili Research Center, University of Oxford) for the digitization of the North Arabian inscriptions (scientific coordinator: M. Macdonald), and with the laboratory ‘Orient et Méditerranée – Mondes Sémitiques’ (CNRS, Paris) for the digitization of the Nabataean inscriptions (scientific coordinator: L. Nehmé).

Under the umbrella of DASI, A. Avanzini also hosted the conference ‘Rencontres Sabéennes’, which more than 60 scholars attended (5–9 June 2012).

2. Tools definition and training courses

At the end of 2012, the IT technicians of the SNS LARTTE laboratory completed the new technical tool for the digitization of the inscriptions (Fig. 5). It is a relational data-entry, the structure of which is based around the main entity of the epigraph, to which a series of cards are related (site, object, bibliography, image) that allow the user to insert all the complementary information.

The first prototype of the data-entry was tested during the training session that was held in Pisa in May 2012, with the participation of about 20 students and researchers. A second training course was held in October 2012 at Yarmouk University (Jordan).



Figure 5. Home-page of the DASI data-entry site.