

The Turfan Collection - a treasury for the history of paper

According to palaeographic studies, more than twenty languages are represented in the Turfan Collection of manuscripts, gathered during four German expeditions to the oasis of Turfan and surroundings.

The manuscripts originating from different cultures in Central Asia and the Middle East are mounted between sealed glass plates, but de-mounting takes place in connection with the digitization project in progress of the documents.

During this period it is possible to have a closer study of the paper material and collect data through analysis of the paper. Only limited studies exist of paper history from these areas and the spread of the craft westwards. Fibre identification can be of help to decide whether it is a local production or not and the mixture and condition of the fibres reveal the technology used. Combination of the palaeographic studies of the origin of the languages and scripts with analysis of the paper and fibre material of the manuscripts can serve to trace the provenance of the paper and thus to map and follow the technological development of papermaking from Samarquand through the Middle East to the Mediterranean area and the Arab production of rag paper.

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