

# EINLADUNG

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# VORTRAG

von

**Alexandros TSAKOS**

University of Bergen, Norway

**Progress of work on the corpus of  
medieval texts from SR022.A –  
a church site in northern Sudan**

Donnerstag, 5. März 2015, 16:00 Uhr

Akademie der bildenden Künste, Schillerplatz 3

Vortragssaal EA1 (Erdgeschoss)

## Progress of work on the corpus of medieval texts from SR022.A – a church site in northern Sudan

Alexandros Tsakos, University of Bergen, Norway

[atsakos@gmail.com](mailto:atsakos@gmail.com)

### Abstract

In February 2007, the Humboldt University Nubian Expedition (HUNE) undertook emergency excavations on Sur Island in the frame of the Merowe Dam Archaeological Salvage Project and brought to light the ruins of the largest medieval church discovered in the Fourth Cataract region, which is now submerged behind the reservoir of the Merowe Dam. The medieval church site was registered as SR022.A, and in a room behind the apse, a cache of 140 manuscripts on parchment and leather was unearthed. Among these, 41 parchment fragments preserved texts written in Greek and these constitute the database for my doctoral thesis defended successfully at Humboldt University in February 2013.

The other two categories of text related finds unearthed at SR022.A, namely manuscripts on leather written in Old Nubian, as well as other leather fragments representing what used to be the book binding material of the codices kept in the church on Sur, play a major role in the development of my research on “Religious Literacy of Christian Nubia”, which is the title of the postdoctoral project that I began at the University of Bergen in June 2014. My studies are oriented towards the decipherment of the texts and their edition, in order to be able to set them in their culture-historical context and to analyze literacy as a religious phenomenon. In various levels the understanding of the materiality of these objects is of primal importance.

The paleographical and codicological analyses undertaken until now are based on traditional methods (i.e. observation and comparison). However, I am fully aware of the potential of laboratory methods, both for the materiality of these manuscripts – in sheet- or codex-form – and, in turn, for further decipherment of sections of texts, if not entire manuscript fragments, that have remained until now illegible.

Thus, the members of HUNE have sought the advice and collaboration with institutions like the Wiener Archäographisches Forum and the Centre of Image and Material Analysis in Cultural Heritage (CIMA).

My talk at the Institute of Science and Technology in Art in Vienna is one step in a hopefully fruitful future collaboration in all fields investigated at CIMA: Philology, Image Analysis, and Material Analysis. After presenting the archaeological context of this important manuscript collection from Sur Island and the decipherments achieved until now, I will propose concrete examples of manuscripts that can be studied further if image enhancement or writer identification methods are applied. Then, based on the analyses of the culture-historical significance of these material products of literacy from Christian Nubia, I will set forth a series of research questions that may find very useful answers and offer fascinating insights by the application of the non-invasive methods practiced at CIMA.

## CV

Alexandros Tsakos has studied History and Archaeology in Greece and Ancient Religions in Belgium. He holds a PhD from Humboldt University, Berlin, on Greek manuscripts from medieval Sudan. He has worked as an archaeologist in Greece, Syria, and Sudan, where he was resident between 2003 and 2008. During this time, he taught Greek in the Greek High School of Khartoum, organized and catalogued the library of the Greek Community in Khartoum, and set up the Greek Cultural Center there, under the name «Ergamenis». He has rehabilitated the display of the Jebel Barkal Museum at Karima (2004-5) and of the permanent exhibition of Medieval Antiquities in the Sudan National Museum in Khartoum (2007-8). Since 2008, he is living in Bergen, Norway, where in 2011 he founded with his wife, Henriette Hafsaas-Tsakos, the Organization for Greek-Norwegian Cooperation in the fields of Culture and Humanities. He has published a series of articles on texts discovered at sites of Christian Nubia, he has edited a book about Sudan Studies together with Henriette Hafsaas-Tsakos, and he is at the editorial board of the Nubiological journal Dotawo. He has contributed in many important international conferences, and he has been invited to give lectures in Greece, Norway, and France. He has teaching experience from introductory courses in religion at the University of Bergen, where since 2010 he is active with the formation and promotion of archives relating to Egyptological, Nubiological and Sudanological material belonging to the University Library. He is currently a postdoc researcher at the Institute of Archaeology, History, History of Art, and Religion at the University of Bergen, with the project Religious Literacy of Christian Nubia.

<http://www.uib.no/personer/Alexandros.Tsakos>

<https://uib.academia.edu/AlexandrosTsakos>

<https://medievalsaiproject.wordpress.com/>