

### About AGYA

The Arab-German Young Academy of Sciences and Humanities (AGYA) is based at the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities (BBAW) and at the Academy of Scientific Research and Technology (ASRT) in Egypt. It was established in 2013 as the first bilateral young academy worldwide. AGYA promotes research cooperation among outstanding earlycareer researchers (3–10 years post-PhD) from all disciplines who are affiliated with a research institution in Germany or in any Arab country.

The academy effectively supports the interdisciplinary projects and collaborative initiatives of its members in various fields of scientific research, science policy and education. AGYA is funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) and various Arab and German cooperation partners.

### International Conference

# Conceptualizing Sacred Languages and Their Visual Inimitability

Arab-German Young Academy  
of Sciences and Humanities (AGYA)

7 - 8 December 2023

SOAS University of London, United Kingdom



[agya.info](http://agya.info)

### Venues

SOAS University of London  
Doctoral School  
Lady David Gallery, 1st Floor  
53 Gordon Square  
London



In cooperation with



Organized by AGYA members

**Hany Rashwan**  
United Arab Emirates University

**Florian Zemmin**  
Freie Universität Berlin

**in cooperation with**  
**Rachel Harrison**  
SOAS University of London

Thursday, 7 December 2023

Venue: SOAS University of London, Doctoral School, Lady David Gallery, 1st Floor

10:00 – 10:15 **Welcome Addresses, Introduction & Presentation of AGYA**

**Hany Rashwan**

AGYA member & United Arab Emirates University, UAE

**Florian Zemmin**

AGYA member & Freie Universität Berlin, Germany

**Rachel Harrison**

SOAS University of London, UK

10:15 – 11:00 **Keynote Lecture**  
**“Arabic of the Jews”: On the Early Interpretation of Judeo-Arabic Phenomena Among Scholars of the Wissenschaft des Judentums**

**María Ángeles Gallego**

The Spanish Council for Scientific Research (CSIC), Madrid, Spain

11:00 – 11:15 **Q&A Session**

Session 1

11:15 – 11:40 **From “Lingua Graphica” into “Lingua Sacra”:  
When Arabic Language Became the Lingua Franca of the Early Islamic Centuries**

**Najib George Awad**

University of Bonn, Germany

11:40 – 12:05 **Translation or Transliteration: The Qurʾān in West African Scripts**

**Jannis Kostelnik**

University of Hamburg, Germany

12:05 – 12:30 **Reclaiming Sacred Language: The Use of Arabic Among Expelled Moriscos in al-Anwār al-Nabawiyya fī Abāʾ Khayr al-Barriya**

**Andrew Russo**

University of Rochester, New York, USA

12:30 – 13:00 **Q&A Session**

13:00 – 14:15 **Lunch Break**

Session 2

14:25 – 14:50 **“If the Sight Expands ...” Conceptualizing the Notion of Sacred Language in Egypt Through Time**

**Amr El Hawary**

University of Bonn, Germany & The American University of Cairo, Egypt

14:50 – 15:15 **Re-examining the Shaping of the Taxonomic Notion of “Magic” Through the Sacred Linguistic Semantics of the Late Mediterranean Antiquity**

**Panagiotis Kousoulis**

University of the Aegean, Lesbos, Greece

15:15 – 15:40 **Look Like the Past, Write Like the Past: The Revival of Archaic Forms of Sacred Scripts in Late Period Egypt and Late Imperial China**

**Tian Tian**

Birkbeck College University of London, UK

15:40 – 16:10 **Q&A Session**

Session 3

16:20 – 16:45 **Language and Writing in Śaṅkara’s Interpretation of the Upaniṣads**

**Róbert Gáfrik**

Institute of World Literature of Slovak Academy of Sciences, Bratislava, Slovakia

16:45 – 17:05 **Mother Tongue as the Language of Devotion: Malayalam and Adhyatma Ramayanam Kilippattu in Kerala**

**Gayatri Devi**

The Savannah College of Art and Design, USA

17:05 – 17:30 **Sacred Embraces and Discursive Conversions: The Dharma of Written Poetry in Aśvaghoṣa’s Buddhist Epics**

**Elizabeth Thornton**

Los Angeles Valley College, USA

17:30 – 18:00 **Q&A Session**

18:10 – 18:55 **Keynote Lecture**  
**Touching Sacred Music: Song, Silence, and Embodied Performance in Medieval Art**

**Francisco Prado-Vilar**

University of Santiago de Compostela, Spain

18:55 – 19:10 **Q&A Session**

19:10 – 19:20 **Closing Remarks & Thanks**

19:30 **Dinner at Restaurant**

Friday, 8 December 2023

Venue: SOAS University of London, Doctoral School, Lady David Gallery, 1st Floor

10:00 – 10:15 **Welcome & Introduction**

**Hany Rashwan**

AGYA member & United Arab Emirates University, UAE

**Rachel Harrison**

SOAS University of London, UK

10:15 – 11:00 **Keynote Lecture**

**The Qur'an and Kitab Malay: Preserving the Sacred Form in Transmitting the Message**

**Peter G. Riddell**

SOAS University of London, UK & Australian College of Theology, Sydney, Australia

11:00 – 11:15 **Q&A Session**

**Session 1**

11:15 – 11:40 **Can Muslims Write in Hindu Letters? Competing Sacred Scripts in Post-Partition Pakistan and the Case of Bengali**

**Federico Salvaggio**

University of Udine, Italy

11:40 – 12:05 **Pahlavi Psalter, Psalter Pahlavi: Reconsidering the Aramaeograms in the Pahlavi Psalter**

**Chia-Wei Lin**

Université de Lausanne, Switzerland

12:05 – 12:35 **Q&A Session**

12:35 – 13:35 **Lunch Break**

13:45 – 14:30 **Keynote Lecture**

**Takhmīs as Verbal Reliquary: Visual Performance in al-Fayyūmī's Takhmīs Burdat al-Būṣīrī, Walters Art Gallery ms W581**

**Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych**

Georgetown University, Washington D.C., USA

14:30 – 14:45 **Q&A Session**

**Session 2**

14:45 – 15:10 **Angels as Invisible Letters: The Angelic Matter of Arabic Sacred Speech**

**Louise Gallorini**

American University of Beirut, Lebanon

15:10 – 15:35

**Between Letters and Shapes: The Mysterious Magic Square of the 99 Divines Names attributed to Aḥmad al-Būnī (d. 622/1225)**

**Nadir Boudjellal**

Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales, Paris, France

15:35 – 16:05 **Q&A Session**

**Session 3**

16:05 – 16:30 **How did τὰ ἱερογλυφικὰ Create Religious Reality – Visual Strategies and Divine Words in the Oldest Egyptian Religious Accounts**

**Joanna Popielska-Grzybowska**

IMOC - Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw, Poland

**Marina Sartori**

University of Oxford, UK

16:30 – 16:55

**The Inimitability of Spell 149 in the Book of the Dead: Exploring Variations and Conservatism in Ancient Egyptian Sacred Language**

**He Huang**

University of Munich, Germany

16:55 – 17:20

**The Shape of Water: Materializing Neith's Fluidity Through Figurative Writing at Esna**

**Federica Pancin**

Sapienza University of Rome, Italy

17:20 – 17:50 **Q&A Session**

18:00 – 18:45

**Keynote Lecture**

**Placing Sacred Languages: From the Locative to the Utopian**

**Brian P. Bennett**

Niagara University, New York, USA

18:45 – 19:00 **Q&A Session**

19:00 – 19:10

**Closing Remarks & Thanks**

**Hany Rashwan**

AGYA member & United Arab Emirates University, UAE

**Florian Zemmin**

AGYA member & Freie Universität Berlin, Germany

**Rachel Harrison**

SOAS University of London, UK

## “Arabic of the Jews”: On the Early Interpretation of Judeo-Arabic Phenomena Before the Emergence of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*

**María Ángeles Gallego**

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Judeo-Arabic, that is, the variety of Arabic used by Jews with some differentiating characteristics including the use of the Hebrew script and the use of registers of vernacular Arabic, has been the object of modern sociolinguistic analysis as a case of language use under the impact of religion. As it is the case in the other so-called “Jewish languages” or in “Muslim languages”, employing the script of the sacred language (Hebrew in the case of Judaism and Arabic in the case of Islam) when writing in a different tongue is a common trait among religious communities whose sacred scriptures are associated to one specific language. As for the phenomenon of including linguistic traits considered as non-grammatical or pertaining to the vernacular tongue instead of following the rules of the canonized form of the language, it can be considered as a reflection of the lack of attachment to the latter. The appeal that classical Arabic has for Muslims is of considerably less relevance for the Jews. Therefore, when Jews include these traits in their Arabic writings we must consider other factors in addition to the alleged ignorance or carelessness.

It must be said, however, that before the emergence of modern dialectology and sociolinguistics, these linguistic phenomena were deficiently understood and subject to diverse interpretations. In this paper I intend to analyse the assessment of medieval Judeo-Arabic and its distinctive characteristics by nineteenth and early twentieth century scholarship. I will focus on the assessment made by Jewish scholars of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* movement in Central Europe of the literature produced by the Jews of al-Andalus, an emblematic community whose intellectual production has been traditionally known as the “Golden Age”. As we will see, the historical circumstances of these scholars and their own ideological agenda led at this time to emphasize all aspects of Jewish-Islamic interaction and to idealize all aspects of Jewish life under Islam. And within this ideological framework, the elements that seemed to interfere in that idyllic image were minimized or neglected. The use of the Hebrew script or the inclusion of traits of dialectal Arabic were often ascribed to insufficient knowledge of classical Arabic or even to distortions made by later copyists with no consideration of any identity or nationalistic factor. Their views were also reflected in their editorial work: original Judeo-Arabic texts were transliterated into the Arabic script and deviations of classical Arabic were often “corrected”. Finally, I will compare the views and methodology of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* scholars with those of contemporary Spanish historians and philologists who did also have a special

interest in the intellectual and literary production of Andalusí Judaism but whose evaluation of their Arabic output differed considerably from that of the Jewish *Wissenschaft* movement.

**María Ángeles Gallego** is Tenured Scientist at the Institute of Languages and Cultures of the Mediterranean and the Near East of the Spanish Council for Scientific Research (CSIC) in Madrid, of which she has been Director (2014-2019). She has worked and taught at different academic institutions including Emory University (Atlanta, USA) as Fulbright Visiting Scholar (1997-1999) and the University of Cambridge (2000 - 2002) in the United Kingdom, as Research Associate. Her field of expertise is Judeo-Arabic language and literature and, more specifically, the history of linguistic ideas. She is the author of these selected publications: G. Khan, M. Á. Gallego, J. Olszowy-Schlanger, *The Karaite Tradition of Hebrew Grammatical Thought in its Classical Form*. 2 vols., Leiden-Boston: E. J. Brill, 2017 (2<sup>a</sup> ed.), M. A. Gallego, *El judeo-árabe medieval*. Edición, traducción y estudio lingüístico del *Kitab al-taswi'a del gramático andalusí Yonah ibn Ganah*, Bern: Peter Lang, 2006; “The Languages of Medieval Iberia and their Religious Dimension”, *Medieval Encounters* 9,1 (2003), pp.105 – 137.

## “From ‘Lingua Graphica’ into ‘Lingua Sacra’: When Arabic Language Became the Lingua Franca of the Early Islamic Centuries”

**Najib George Awad**

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In the year of 72 A.H./692 A.D, the central figure in the Umayyad Marwānid dynasty, ‘Abd al-Malik b. Marwān built in Jerusalem, on the Temple Mountain, the monumental Islamic symbolisation of the dawn of the Arab-Muslim Empire, the Dome of the Rock. Simultaneously, he minted new coins, signets and seals with Arabic inscriptions of words like ‘Muhammad’, ‘Abd Allah’ and others. By doing this, the Muslim Caliph inaugurated the transformation of the artistic and pictorial sphere in the newly islamised and arabised territories from iconography into calligraphy, turning Arabic language into the ‘lingua franca’ of the rising Muslim civilization. Arabic language deliberately became an implemented instrument in the service of forming religious thought, cultural identity, societal structures, statehood, politics, but also artistic, visual and textual creativity. This essay endeavours to chase after two stages of evolvement on the process of making Arabic the lingua franca of the Muslim milieu. The first stage was during the Umayyad Caliphate, at the end of the 1st/7th to the beginning of the 2nd/8th centuries, when Arabic was presented as a lingua graphica aiming at universalising the newly born Arab-Islamic civilization and unifying all communities, cultures and nations in the Muslim territories under its flag. The second stage started in the 3rd/9th century and continued ever since, when Arabic was theologised and dogmatized and became a lingua sacra instrument

in the service of solidifying Islam's religious superiority and domination over other faiths. The essay sheds lights on the role of the Arabic lingua franca, in its two-stage implementation, played in shaping religious, cultural and historical interreligious practices and interactions throughout the Muslim Caliphate during early Islam. The first part reflects on how the Arabic language as lingua graphica was used as a visual calligraphic message in the service of universalising the Islamic empire and unifying it on the historical and cultural level, while the second part ponders how the Arabic language as lingua sacra was approached by Muslim and Christian theologians in their interlocution with each other over religious beliefs. The paper aims, in conclusion, to demonstrate that the Arabic language was not just an additional, secondary factor Islam placed center-stage due to coincidental circumstances. The lingua franca called Arabic was rather deliberately implemented as a constitutive, self-perception and identity-formation originator in the process of creating Arab-Muslim civilization and confirming Islam's superiority and veracity. The idea of lingua franca was used after two different strategies that differ from each other in the orientation and telos that underpin the use of language either as lingua graphica or as lingua sacra.

**Najib George Awad** is Associate Researcher at the Center for Comparative Theology, Bonn University, Germany; and the former Professor of Christian Theology and Eastern Christian Thought and the Director of the PhD Program in Islamic Studies and Christian-Muslim Relations in Hartford Seminary, Connecticut USA. His monographs in English are, *God without Face? On the Personal Individuation of the Holy Spirit* (Mohr Siebeck, 2011); *And Freedom Became a Public-Square: Political, Sociological and Religious Overviews on the Arab Christians and the Arabic Spring* (LIT Verlag, 2012); *Persons in Relation: An Essay on the Trinity and Ontology* (Fortress Press, 2014); and *Orthodoxy in Arabic Terms: A Study of Theodore Abū Qurrah's Trinitarian and Christological Doctrines in an Islamic Context* (De Gruyter, 2015); *Umayyad Christianity: John of Damascus as a Contextual Example of Identity-Formation in Early Islam* (Gorgias Press, 2018); and *After-Mission, Beyond Evangelicalism: The Indigenous 'Injiliyyūn' in the Arab-Muslim Context of Syria-Lebanon* (Brill, 2020). He works right now on a research project on Mu'tazilite and Christian Kalām in the 3rd/9th century Abbasid era, and another research project on contemporary Arabic-Oriental Christian Theology.

## "Translation or Transliteration: The Qur'ān in West African Scripts"

**Jannis Kostelnik**

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Translating the Qur'ān is a delicate topic in Islam, not least because the mere term "translation" is highly ambiguous and, as Pink (2021: 364) explains, may refer to different concepts ranging from the "ubiquitous" and "widely embraced" to the "rejected by the majority of Muslims today." Indeed, as the Qur'ān itself

states to have been sent down as an Arabic Qur'ān (Qur'ān, 12:2), the question of translation inevitably touches on the issues of altering a sacred text and thus, on the dogma of *ī āz al-Qur'ān* ("inimitability of the Qur'ān", cf. Pink 2021: 346). Nonetheless, the issue of translation has arisen shortly after the introduction of Islam in virtually all parts of the Islamic world, among them, as Brigaglia (2014) points out, West Africa.

This paper presents various examples of 'transmission' of the Qur'ān into several West African scripts. The most recent example of such a 'transmission' is constituted by the Qur'ān transliteration undertaken by Burkinabe script creator Mahamadi Ouédraogo into his so-called Minim Script, which I first documented in the framework of my Master's Thesis in 2022. (cf. Kostelnik forthcoming). Additionally, it introduces other examples of Qur'ānic 'transmission' into West African scripts such as the various different versions of the Qur'ān in the N'ko Script, or the role of translations of (parts) of the Qur'ān for Islamic learning in the Mende and Vai as well as in other script communities of West Africa.

By highlighting these different iterations of the same phenomenon, it shows how these 'transmissions' into West African scripts were partly driven by the same motivations encountered in Qur'ān translation throughout the Islamic world, such as the promotion of national (or in the case of West Africa with its arbitrary, colonially-motivated, borders, rather 'regional') languages, but also by distinctive approaches towards Islam in its different currents in West Africa.

Additionally, the paper also seeks to illuminate the role of written language for the dissemination of religion in regions in which the sacred language is not actively spoken, or, to put it in the words of N'ko script creator Sulemana Kantè: "How will religion be understood in the fatherland's language, if it isn't written?" (Kantè 2004, as cited and translated in Donaldson 2020: 476).

### References

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**Jannis Kostelnik** is Research Associate and PhD Student at the Cluster of Excellence "Understanding Written Artefacts", based at University of Hamburg's Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures, where he is carrying out a project on West African Medico-Magical Arabic and Ajami manuscripts, supervised by Dmitry Bondarev. Next to Ajami, his research interest lies in the numerous but severely understudied scripts of West Africa. One of these scripts, the newly created Minim Script of Burkina Faso, was the subject of his MA Thesis "Mahamadi Ouédraogo's Mooré Script in the Context of West African Script Creation" – submitted to University of Bayreuth in January 2023 – for which he undertook fieldwork with the script creator on location in Ouagadougou. A paper summarizing one chapter of his thesis is currently in the revision process with Federal University of Wukari's (Nigeria) *Ahyu: A Journal of Language and Literature*. Additionally, he is preparing an article on the role of dreams and revelations in script creation.

### **"Reclaiming Sacred Language: The Use of Arabic Among Expelled Moriscos in al-Anwār al-Nabawiyya fī abā' khayr al-barriya"**

**Andrew Russo**

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Focusing on an early seventeenth century manuscript, this brief study investigates the role, usage, and reclamation of Arabic among Morisco notables in Ottoman Tunis. The Moriscos were descendants of the Muslims of medieval Iberia. After several centuries of the so-called Reconquista, Ferdinand and Isabella conquered the final Muslim Kingdom of Iberia and would eventually forcibly convert all of their Muslim subjects to Christianity. The resulting Moriscos slowly lost touch with the vestiges of Arabic and Islamic culture, especially the Arabic language. Over the course of the sixteenth century, the Moriscos developed a new style of writing, *aljamiado* literature. *Aljamiado* was a blend of romance language in Arabic script. The use of romance and at times *aljamiado* remained the dominant linguistic situation among the Moriscos until they were expelled en masse in 1609. Afterwards, many found themselves in the states and kingdoms of North Africa, where they were forced to contend with new linguistic and social realities. These included the fears and suspicions of the Tunisian populace. It was widely feared that the Moriscos were in fact secret Catholics that were largely ignorant of Muslim customs and mores. In *al-Anwār al-Nabawiyya fī abā' khayr al-barriya* one Morisco notable penned a lengthy and robust defense of the Morisco population. In it he argued that the Moriscos were the legitimate heirs to the glorious legacy of al-Andalus. As such, the author appropriated Arabic as a proof of the community's Islamic credentials. In it, the author utilizes a rigorous and highly literary style while also referencing central works of poetry and *adab*. The manuscript also integrates literary prose and poetry with a variety of miniatures and diagrams. Thus, this paper argues that sacred language served as a tool for social integration. Its mastery and presence among a marginalized community

served as a way to soothe social tensions and to allow a refugee community to find common ground in their new homeland.

**Andrew Russo** is a PhD Candidate in the department of history at the University of Rochester. His research focuses on the social and cultural interplay between the Iberian Peninsula and North Africa in the late medieval and early modern periods. His work has been published in *Viator* and *The Journal of the Middle East and Africa*. His research has been supported by Fulbright-Hays, the American Institute for Maghrib Studies, and the Renaissance Society of America.

### **"If the sight expands ..." Conceptualizing the Notion of Sacred Language in Egypt Through Time"**

**Amr El Hawary**

*University of Bonn, Germany & The American University of Cairo, Egypt*  
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The investigation of the special language of the mystic has been the topic of several researches. Scholars from many disciplines including theology, comparative religion, Judaistic, Arabistic, and comparative literary studies are concerned with describing and analyzing the language of the mystic in the Kabbalah, Christian, or Sufi traditions. The discussion about the transmission of mystical ideas and practices stresses the influence of pre-Islamic eastern traditions on Islamic Sufism. Particularly, the connection to Judeo-Christian, Indo-Persian, and Neo-Platonic Hellenistic mystic traditions is emphasized in specialized literature. As an Egyptologist, working on the Arabic corpus of magico-mystical texts from medieval and modern Egypt, I would like to point out the analogy and structural similarities between mystical texts and ancient Egyptian magico-religious texts.

Language is the human medium representing the sacred as such. In mystical traditions such as that of the Sufi, mystic language represents *unio mystica* experience from a monistic worldview. It is not exactly a representation, but more like a lingual incarnation of the experience of unification with God. For example, using a miniature Quran as a textual amulet or *Ta'wez* is a microcosmic incarnation of the macro-cosmos.

Mystical language stands as an intersection between the sacred and human spheres. Its main feature is to describe experiences beyond the capability of the human language (in the presence of God/meeting the divine) on three complementary levels: First, revelation and oracle manifest divine language (downwards) in sacred texts. Secondly, prayers express human language addressing the divine (upwards). Finally, magic, as a liminal language, changes nature through the manipulation of the magical power of the divine. An important feature of mystical language is the immense use of metaphorical language on allegorical, tropological and anagogical levels. Another feature is

the tendency to adapt ekphrasis (the drawing of sensual objects with words) as a mystical practice to evoke the invisible. Mystical language, through these features, is the expression of the sacred, which explains the tendency to mysterious language and the Ishāry (referential) expressions. Moreover, textual amulets could also be considered to be the divine language themselves. When considering the materiality of religious experiences, seen-texts which consist of visual highlighted language can be considered sacred in themselves without needing to be read. I would like to compare this aspect of mystical language with ancient textual amulets from Egypt (Ancient Egyptian, Demotic, Coptic, Greek) as objects of cult in itself.

Language is also a form of the sacred. For example, the structure and syntax of mystical language increasingly shows the use of endless genitives and adjectives referring to God (names and epithets of God as his manifestations in the created world). Frame, layout, and shape in Ta āwīdh, Awfāq, Jafr reflect the perfect measures and ideal proportions of the divine creation (squares) and safe enclosures (circles). This contribution investigates the phenomena of representation of the sacred in mystical texts through time.

**Dr. El Hawary** has been teaching Egyptology at the Universities of Bonn and Cairo since 2006. He is the holder of the Simpson professorship of Egyptology at the American University Cairo, Habitant of the Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelm-University of Bonn (Book accepted), visiting Professor of Egyptian languages and Religion at Cairo University, Fellow of the Annemarie-Schimmel-Kolleg for Mamluk studies in Bonn. He is also the co-director of the Serabit El-Khadim excavation, Sinai, and of the epigraphic survey project of Qubet el Hawa, Assuan. He published the comprehensive Edition of the Memphite Philosophy with philological comments and socio-cultural analyses (*Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis* 243, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen 2010) as well as many other books and articles dealing with Ancient Egyptian religion, art and literature. Focusing on Egyptian intellectual history and the history of science and philosophy, he is soon finishing an extensive monograph on Ancient Egyptian Epistemology and Philosophy of Language.

### “Re-examining the Shaping of the Taxonomic Notion of “Magic” Through the Sacred Linguistic Semantics of the Late Mediterranean Antiquity”

**Panagiotis Kousoulis**

*University of the Aegean, Lesbos, Greece*  
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There is *μαγεία* and there is “magic”. The former is the Greek term that denotes the magical act, the art of the magician. It goes back to the ancient Persian accusative *ma[n]gus* and the Babylonian *maguš*, to which the Greek sources attribute a wide variety of qualities, functions and duties: it designates priests

or at least experts in religious matters. During the late 6th to the early 5th century BC, the term *magus* was transcribed by the ancient Greek writers to *magician*, acquiring thus its own life and existence. It is this cultural adoption that established the second, taxonomic term, “magic”, in the Western expression and not so much its Persian ancestor, which is characterized by ambiguous semantics. This notion of “magic” goes side by side with the equally analytical categories, “religion” and “science”, interacting with the wider social context, and it is very often perceived as an issue historically charged, ideologically preconceived and scientifically biased. But how much ancient *μαγεία* is involved in the English taxonomic word “magic” and its derivatives in other Indo-European languages? Is there any essential connection between them, or is this limited to an instinctive, phonemic reflection? The scope of this presentation is to re-examine the shaping of this relationship within the linguistic and cultural plurality of the Eastern Mediterranean during the formative period of Late Antiquity and to investigate how the sacred languages of the period played their role in the formation of a cross-cultural, magical phenomenon, which influenced later approaches to the Late Antique magical knowledge and practice. It will be shown that the relationship between *μαγεία*/magia and “magic” does not seem to follow a linear development, nor does it always show meaningful convergences, but it is very often coloured by modern perceptions and prejudices.

**Panagiotis Kousoulis** is Professor of Egyptology, founder and director of the Aegean Egyptology Research Group and the Laboratory for the Ancient World of the Eastern Mediterranean at the Department of Mediterranean Studies of the University of the Aegean, Rhodes, Greece (<http://aegeanegyptology.gr>). His current research includes, inter alia, the project MAG.I.A.M - MAGical Interactivity in the Ancient Mediterranean: phenomenology, semantics, performativity, the study and publication of the 21st Dynasty coffins and funerary material from the Egyptian collection in the National Archaeological Museum of Athens and the Aegyptiaca Project: Ecumene and Economy in the Horizon of Religion. His latest monograph *Apep and the Anti-god Perception in the Egyptian Belief System* will soon appear in *Hans-Bonnet Studien zur Ägyptischen Religion*, Eb-Verlag, Berlin.

### “Look Like the Past, Write Like the Past: The Revival of Archaic Forms of Sacred Scripts in Late Period Egypt and Late Imperial China”

**Tian Tian**

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This cross disciplinary study compares the revival of archaic forms of scripts in sacred writings in Late Period Egypt (664-332 BCE) and Late Imperial China (1644-1912 CE), and explores the similarities in cultural, historical and social elements that motivated such revivals. Despite being more than a thousand years apart, royalties and intellectuals in both cultures made their attempt to write sacred

texts like their ancestors by strictly imitating the orthography, grammar and forms from millennia ago. And this study focuses on their efforts to make a visual affinity with the distant past by reviving archaic forms of scripts in sacred writings. The Late Period Egypt is well-known for their archaism in arts and writings. During this period, hieroglyphic inscriptions on royal monuments recalled scripts from two thousand years ago and scribes copied sacred texts in the form of cursive script (hieratic) from a thousand years ago. Whereas, Late Imperial China witnessed the rise of “evidence study” school in Confucianism, which aimed to weed out Buddhism and Taoism ideas, and to revive the Confucian teachings from two thousand years ago. Ancient scripts were studied and used to print sacred texts. This study will feature two pairs of cases from both cultures, one from royalties, and one from intellectuals. For Egypt, it will show the revival of archaic scripts on the Stela of pharaoh Apries and Papyrus BM 10009, a ritual handbook, all from the 26th Dynasty. The Chinese cases will feature the royal edition of Four Books and Five Classics—sacred texts of Confucianism printed entirely in the scripts from the 2nd century, published by the decree of Kang Xi Emperor. And for intellectuals, the study will showcase the writings of Jiang Sheng (1721-1799), who insisted on printing reconstructed sacred texts in ancient scripts, and writing letters in the same scripts. The comparison will show that abundant ancient inscriptions in both cultures provided models for scholars and artists to imitate. And the archaism in sacred scripts were also accompanied by foreign invasions and influence. Finally, these revivals were not alone, but a part of social movements that aim to purify ancient texts, and to restore the sacred order from the past.

#### References

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## “Language and Writing in Śaṅkara’s Interpretation of the Upaniṣads”

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The Upaniṣads are among the best-known Indian texts. They build the foundation of many Indian philosophical and religious systems. Since the 19th century, they have also become an inspiration for several European philosophers and writers. Although they were composed in the distant past, their ideas are not necessarily too remote from the modern man. They speak to people across millennia and cultures. They are a living part of Indian and, one might even say, global thinking and spirituality. Not only do the ancient texts contain profound ideas, but their mode of presentation is also unique. Their language and style is very compelling. They retain something of their charm even, when translated into modern languages.

The Upaniṣads are connected through oral transmission. To this day, oral transmission plays an important role in the traditional Indian context where they are passed on by the teacher to the student. However, in the past two millennia, written transmission, which has given rise to a rich commentarial tradition, has also gained importance and there exists several schools of interpretation. The print culture and, in the recent decades, the digital culture have further influenced the perception of these texts. Besides that, the modern Western scholarship represents an important landmark in their assessment. Thus, nowadays, there co-exists many independent ways of their transmission and interpretation, which, also occasionally interact with each other.



The paper will focus on the problem of language and writing in Śaṅkara's interpretation of the Upaniṣads. Śaṅkara (circa 7th century CE) is historically their most important interpreter. The philosophy of Advaita Vedānta, advocated in his commentaries, is still a living school of philosophy. According to Śaṅkara there is only one reality called 'Brahma' or 'Ātmā'. It is pure being and consciousness. The diversity of the universe and of living beings inhabiting it arises from ignorance. Ignorance is the superimposition of what is not real on what is real and vice versa. One who gets rid of ignorance attains permanent peace and immortality. Śaṅkara also maintains that the Upaniṣads employ an extraordinary method of deliberately superimposing qualities and symbols on Brahma and then negating them (adhyaṅopāpavāda-nyāya). It is this two-step process which makes the Upaniṣadic language "sacred" and a means of liberation (mokṣa). With these insights, Śaṅkara explains the Upaniṣads, appealing to universal human experience and arguing against the philosophical schools present in his time.

Śaṅkara brings together language and writing in his explanation of the theory of deliberate superimposition and subsequent rescission. However, he is not concerned with connecting Sanskrit or any other language with a specific type of script. He rather points out the general nature of writing as visual superimposition and its relationship to language. The paper will analyse the analogy between language and writing in the context of his theory of superimposition and negation, as well as, of his view of scriptures (śāstra), and elaborate on its significance for the understanding of the problem of revealing the indescribable.

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## "Mother Tongue as the Language of Devotion: Malayalam and Adhyatma Ramayanam Kilippattu in Kerala"

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The epic poem Rāmāyaṇa is one of the sacred texts of Hinduism along with the Mahābhārata. Rāmāyaṇa (8 BCE), which was composed in the Indo-European language known as Sanskrit, and written in the Devanagari script, but in the south Indian state of Kerala, the Rāmāyaṇa story is retold and read in Malayalam. While Sanskrit is an Indo-European language that shares kinship with other Indo-European languages like Greek and Latin, Malayalam belongs to the family of Dravidian languages which are considered a geographically isolated language family without affinities to other language families.

Though both Devanagari and Malayalam are believed to be derived from a common, ancient Brahmi script, they are visually distinct and grammatically unique and singular. Malayalam evolved from a script known as Vaṭṭeḷuttū ('round writing') which was later extended with the Grantha alphabet, a variant of the Tamil-Brahmi script prevalent in southern India between 3 BCE – 1 CE. The Grantha alphabet was used in Kerala to write/transliterate Sanskrit vocabulary in Malayalam since the existing Vaṭṭeḷuttū did not have certain sounds that were present in Sanskrit. The modification of Vaṭṭeḷuttū with Grantha resulted in Ārya eḷuttū (writing of Āryas), Āryas being the settlers in the North whose literary language was Sanskrit, the language of the two epics. The Vaṭṭeḷuttū + Grantha combination resulted in the creation of a written form of Malayalam known as Maṇipravāḷam a hybrid form with Sanskrit lexicon and Tamil/Malayalam morpho-syntactical features. This early form of Malayalam script paved the way for the modern, fixed Malayalam alphabet (or alphasyllabary) between 12 CE – 16 CE. This presentation discusses how the Malayalam retelling of the Sanskrit Rāmāyaṇa by a 16th century Malayalam poet Tuṅcattū Rāmānujan Eḷuttacchan, both gave birth to the Bhakti movement of devotional religiosity, and also to modern Malayalam. Eḷuttacchan is credited with arranging the modern Malayalam alphabet through a sophisticated transformation of Vaṭṭeḷuttū, Grantha and Ārya eḷuttū. He popularized the new form of the mother tongue and its orthography through his influential poetic retelling of the Sanskrit Rāmāyaṇa titled in Malayalam as Adhyatma Ramayanam Kilippattu. The Bhakti movement, or devotional religious practice, made religious faith a personal transaction between the devotee and the divine and eliminated the need for Brahminical or priestly intermediaries. The Sanskrit epics, previously inaccessible to non-Brahminical devotees, became accessible to all castes and classes in Kerala with the modern Malayalam retelling. This discussion will cover the historical contexts of the Sanskrit original and its Malayalam retelling, the role of the Bhakti movement and its impact in the development of modern Malayalam, and a comparative side-by-side textual

analysis of the lexicon and morpho-syntactic features of the Sanskrit text and Eḷuttacchan's text to elucidate the role of language in religious experience.

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### “Sacred Embraces and Discursive Conversions: The Dharma of Written Poetry in Aśvaghōṣa's Buddhist Epics”

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Whether considered against the backdrop of Buddhist linguistic conventions or Sanskrit liturgical texts, the poet Aśvaghōṣa's epic-length conversion narratives are situated at a crossroads. They herald a transition away from the earlier Buddhist practice of composing in Middle Indic vernaculars and toward adopting different registers of Sanskrit, likely in service of the rhetorical goal of converting courtly audiences among whom Sanskrit was acquiring the status of a lingua franca. Dated to around the second century C.E., these epics are also the earliest extant examples of kāvya, the Classical Sanskrit poetic tradition which emerged alongside writing itself in South Asia.

Kāvya is often conceptualized as the first Sanskrit poetry of the written word. Works of kāvya could be presented to patrons in book form; in addition, early Buddhist works of kāvya made their way from South Asia eastward as written texts, specifically. Finally, from the early first millennium CE onwards, the form of kāvya came to be defined and constrained by written commentaries and critical traditions. Among these literary critical schools was ala kāraśāstra, or the study of poetic ornaments, some of which seem very hard to construct without writing as a medium of communication. One such ornament is śleṣa, literally “embrace.” Śleṣa causes poetic passages to “embrace” different discursive domains by leveraging strings of characters that could have (at least) two different meanings, depending on their interpretation. For instance, śleṣa may manifest when such a string can be read as one of a number of homonyms; alternatively, it may involve a character string that can be segmented into one word, or two. Particularly where (re)segmentation is the operative device, this form of wordplay would reward careful eyes more regularly than keen ears.

As a learned Brahmin convert to Buddhism, Aśvaghōṣa was adept at cloaking his case for the Buddhist faith in the trappings of Brahmanical courtly and ritual culture. In the *Saundarananda*, the earlier of the two Buddhist epics (detailing the conversion of Nanda, Gautama Buddha's half-brother), Aśvaghōṣa characterized his rhetorical approach as capturing (verbal root, grah) the attention of audiences accustomed to kāvya-dharma. Sonam Kachru glosses kāvya-dharma not only as the norms of poetry, but “language grounded in particular forms of life [dharma] which were lived at leisure, with the values of power and pleasure as experienced, say, at court, as its orienting concerns” (41-2). In practice, the work of “capturing” meant using śleṣa and other pleasing aesthetic possibilities of written kāvya as modes of delivering Buddhist tenets. It also meant including devices of lexical and grammatical repetition more reminiscent of the sacred Vedic (and particularly ṛgvedic) liturgical tradition that was privileged among Brahmin audiences. Together, these ornaments and devices sustained a discursive “double-vision” that presented persuasive implicit comparisons between characters operating within Buddhist and Brahmanical frameworks, much as their closest ṛgvedic counterparts had linked descriptions of ritual devotion and divine reward.

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## “Touching Sacred Music: Song, Silence, and Embodied Performance in Medieval Art”

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Silence and music are essential means of communication with God in the theology and liturgy of the Latin Middle Ages, yet they are highly abstract concepts that defy the limitations of discursive language and visual systems of representation. In this paper, I analyse two case studies in which scribes and artists developed remarkable solutions to overcome those limitations. In the first one, I focus on the illustrations of the apocalyptic passage of “silence in heaven” (Revelation 8.1) in a group of medieval manuscripts of the Commentary on the Apocalypse by the Spanish monk Beatus of Liébana, dated from the 10th to the 12th century. These images present a fascinating variety of pictorial solutions to make silence palpable on the parchment page. In the second case study, I analyse the decoration of one of the earliest and most important cathedral choirs of the Middle Ages, which was built in Santiago Cathedral in the mid-12th century, coinciding with a crucial period in the development of Western music, commonly known as “the birth of polyphony”. The choir’s façade served as backdrop for the performance of liturgical theatre, and its interior was conformed by micro-architectures punctuated by the effigies of singers performing their chants using the gestural system known as the “Guidonian hand” (which here has its earliest and most complex appearance in European monumental art, only comparable to 15th-century examples such as Luca della Robbia’s reliefs for the cantoria of the cathedral of Florence, and Benozzo Gozzoli’s frescoes in the Chapel of the Magi of the Palazzo Medici Riccardi). Through these representations of musical performance, the stone choir was transformed into an enchanted stage capable of generating a variety of multi-sensory experiences in which the boundaries between art and life were blurred. The Compostelan choir functioned as a veritable organum in both meanings of the term, a complex instrument of sound production by echoes and reverberations and, at the same time, a synesthetic organism activating the evocative capacities of the sonic and the visual.

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(awarded with an European Heritage/Europa Nostra Award in 2019), where he led a multidisciplinary team of art historians, architects, and conservation scientist funded by the Mellon Foundation. He is currently the Principal Investigator the project KosmoTech\_1200 „Kosmos/Techne: Experience, Cognition, and Technology in Historic Built Environments. The Horizon of 1200 and their Projection in Time” funded by the EU and the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation. His research and publications focus on diverse aspects of the arts of medieval and early Modern Europe, covering topics of wide chronological, thematic, and methodological range, such as: the afterlife of Antiquity; the intercultural relations among Christians, Muslims, and Jews; the interconnections between medievalism and modernity; photography and the archaeology of archives; intermediality, cognition, and the lives of objects in the Anthropocene; historical memory and the restitution of cultural heritage.

## “The Qur’an and Kitab Malay: Preserving the Sacred Form in Transmitting the Message”

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Since the emergence of the Qur’an as Islam’s most sacred text in the 7th century, debate has surrounded the extent to which its Arabic text can and should be translated into other languages. Three of the four main Sunni law schools were opposed to any rendering of the Qur’anic text into vernacular languages for liturgical purposes and it was only in the early 20th century that such restrictions were somewhat relaxed.

The opposition to translating the Arabic text of the Qur’an was based on the view of that text being sacred, namely the direct words of God, not of humanity. As such, transferring the sacred language into non-sacred vernacular languages risked demeaning the Word of God, and therefore, God himself. Yet, new Muslim communities in non-Arabic speaking regions had a need to understand the Qur’an’s injunctions in order to develop in their faith through worship, prayer, and participation in Muslim community life.

In Southeast Asia, Islamic communities were established in the late 13th century and were consolidated through trade and the arrival of Sufi missionaries in subsequent centuries. While the region played host to a vast array of regional tongues, the Malay language came to serve as a lingua franca in trade, literary development, and faith. Thus Southeast Asian Muslims in these early centuries looked to Malay as a vehicle for understanding their new faith. But an obstacle presented itself: the predominant law school of the region, the Shafi’i school, did not encourage the translation of the Qur’an’s sacred Arabic text into Malay, or other local languages. A creative solution was pioneered by early Malay Islamic scholars in their method of rendering Arabic works into Malay. In this paper we will focus upon one

particular scholar, 'Abd al-Ra'uf al-Fansuri (ca. 1615-1693), a prolific author whose works covered the full range of the Islamic sciences. 'Abd al-Ra'uf authored the first commentary on the entire Qur'an in the Malay language, which involved rendering the Qur'anic text into Malay and adding exegetical supplements. Clearly sensitive to the debates around translating the Qur'an, he adopted a word-for-word method of translation that preserved in the Malay text as far as possible the surface syntactic form of the Arabic original.

What does this mean in practical terms? Qur'anic Arabic is a verb-initial language, with the unmarked (default) syntactic structure being Verb-Subject-Object (VSO). By contrast, Malay tends to be subject initial, giving an unmarked form of Subject-Verb-Object (SVO). Nevertheless, Malay does allow for a VSO structure as a marked syntactic form, requiring a transformation whereby the verb is given greater focus and the subject demoted in order in the sentence. In preparing his rendering of the Qur'an into Malay with commentary, 'Abd al-Ra'uf included a higher proportion of VSO structures than was usual in vernacular Malay. In this way, he showed due respect to the normal word order of the sacred Arabic of the Qur'an. But that was not all.

Qur'anic Arabic, like many languages, employs a number of phrasal verbs, namely verbs that are followed by specific particles (prepositions). The Malay equivalents of such verbs often take prepositions that are other than their Arabic equivalents. Yet 'Abd al-Ra'uf typically rendered the Qur'anic Arabic phrasal verbs literally in Malay, creating phrases that must have seemed awkward in the common Malay vernacular of his day.

In this paper we will consider the above issues in order, first, surveying debates about translation in the early Muslim world, then addressing 'Abd al-Ra'uf's creative solution to the challenge by adopting what came to be known as Kitab Malay, a form of translations used in religious texts in order to give due respect to the surface form of the sacred language of Qur'anic Arabic. Our paper will include a number of linguistic examples, showing how the Kitab Malay used by 'Abd al-Ra'uf served as a mirror of the syntax of the sacred Arabic original text of the Qur'an.

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## “Can Muslims Write in Hindu Letters? Competing Sacred Scripts in Post-Partition Pakistan and the Case of Bengali”

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Writing has long been considered a purely technical invention, yet the cultural significance of writing goes far beyond its technical function. In fact, writing systems may be powerful instruments of knowledge, representation and manipulation of reality, and ideological and symbolic production (Cardona 1981: 8). This is even more evident with scripts related to holy scriptures which are believed sacred not only in their content but also in the audible (sounds, phonemes, etc.) and visible (symbols, graphemes, etc.) form of their linguistic medium. The case of the post-Partition debate on the acceptability of a Devanagari-related script for Bengali, as one of the languages of the newly established state of Pakistan, is particularly illustrative in this respect. The political discourse of the time is extremely instructive in that it cannot be fully understood on the basis of purely linguistic and pragmatic concerns about the pros and cons of the choice of one script over another (conceived of as a neutral instrument for writing), and need to be interpreted from a religious, symbolic, and ideolinguistic perspective.

For instance, when we consider the declaration, by the then Minister of Education, Fazlur Rahman, that Pakistan and Devanagari script could not coexist and that the Bengali alphabet was “full of idolatry” since each of its letters was “associated with this or that god or goddess of Hindu pantheon” (Mohsin 2003: 88) it is clear that we are entering a symbolic field and dealing with a quite explicit recognition of the sacred status and ideological significance that Devanagari and Devanagari-related scripts had within Hinduism (whereas, remarkably, the widespread use in the “land of the pure” of the English language in its Latin script, even in official statements, did not seem to be as much of a problem). Conversely, the ‘Islamic’ defence of a ‘Hindu’ script for the Bengali language led by Bengali Muslim scholars like Muhammad Shahidullah (one the intellectual fathers of the bhā ā āndolan ‘the Bengali Language Movement’) had to come to terms with the complexity of the issue and address it from its multiple linguistic, cultural, ideological and symbolic standpoints (Shahidullah 1949: 65-73). By looking at the arguments in favour and against the attempt by the Pakistani government, in the aftermath of the Partition, to introduce an Arabic-based script for the language of the Bengali Muslim population, in the present contribution we will try to explore the explicit and implicit assumptions behind those different positions and the way in which distinct religious and ethnic communities in the Indian subcontinent conceptualised their respective sacred languages and perceived the visual inimitability of their scripts.

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## “Pahlavi Psalter, Psalter Pahlavi: Reconsidering the Aramaeograms in the Pahlavi Psalter”

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The Pahlavi Psalter (PPs) is a 12-folio fragment of Middle Persian Psalter translation from the Syriac Peshitta. It was discovered by the German Turfan Expeditions at the beginning of the 20th century in a Nestorian monastery in Bulayiq, Xinjiang. This fragment holds a unique significance as it stands out not only as the sole Christian document within the Middle Persian corpus, but also as the earliest manuscript known in the Pahlavi script, dated to 6th -7th century CE. Written in the unique „Psalter Pahlavi” script, which substantially differs from the more familiar Book Pahlavi script, the PPs has a more extensive usage of Aramaeograms and Syriac loanwords compared to the Zoroastrian Book Pahlavi. The paper will consider the usage of Aramaeograms and Aramaic loanwords in the PPs within the broader context of Nestorian Christianity in Central Asia

and China, comparing them with other writing traditions of Turfan documents (Syriac, Sogdian, Chinese, Old Uyghur, etc.) that reflect Aramaic influence. The paper argues that the so-called „Psalter-Pahlavi“ script is central to the liturgical usage of the PPs. On the one hand, the Aramaeograms inherited a long tradition of Parthian and Middle Persian inscriptions that utilize Old Aramaic orthography to spell out Iranian words, typologically parallel to the presence of Sumerograms in Akkadian cuneiform tablets or Kanji/Hanza in Classical Japanese/Korean literature. On the other hand, the PPs entails a number of Syriac loanwords/Syrograms that are unattested neither in earlier Parthian or Middle Persian inscriptions nor in the later Zoroastrian Book Pahlavi corpus. It is the ambiguous status of these Syriac loanwords/Syrograms that contribute to the religious sanctity of the PPs. Moreover, the paper will provide an analysis of the unique Aramaeogram <MRWHY> /xwadāy/ ‚God‘, which is used to translate Syriac maryā, corresponding to the tetragrammaton יהוה YHWH in the Hebrew scripture.

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### “Takhmīs as Verbal Reliquary: Visual Performance in al-Fayyūmī's Takhmīs Burdat al-Būṣīrī, Walters Art Gallery ms W581”

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The centrepiece of medieval Arabic Islamic devotional poetry is the praise poem to the Prophet Muhammad, the Burdah (Mantle Ode) of the Mamluk period Egyptian poet, Sharaf al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Būṣīrī (d. 694 AH/1294 CE). The Burdah's extraordinary popularity is tied to its role in the miraculous cure that its author experienced after reciting the poem to the Prophet in a dream. The poem was credited with extraordinary barakah, or blessing, and was widely believed to cure maladies, both spiritual and physical, and, especially, to procure for both its original author and subsequent “performers” the intercession of the Prophet on Judgment Day. Such beliefs generated a prodigious production of imitations, amplifications, translations, simple and ornate manuscript copies, commentaries, etc., in attempts to acquire, or co-opt, the blessing of the Burdah. Chief among

these was the amplification termed takhmīs (“fiver”), in which the new poet adds three half-lines to each original two-hemistich line.

Of the hundreds of extant Burdah takhmīsāt, that of Nāṣir al-Din al-Fayyūmī (14th c.) has consistently been one of the most popular. This paper interprets the composition of takhmīs in terms of the poetics of performance, both aurally—in terms of how the takhmīs incorporates and amplifies through auditory techniques (rhyme, meter, repetition)—and, particularly for the presently proposed paper, visually—in terms of how the manuscript presentations manipulate scriptural aesthetics and techniques to achieve their performance goals. Within a broader context of mss. and print examples of al-Fayyūmī's Takhmīs, the present study focusses on the Walter Art Gallery ms. W581, an ornate “treasury” (khazā inī) manuscript from 8th/14th c. Konya. My paper explores the mutual sacralisation and interpretation of the original poetic “text” of al-Būṣīrī's Burdah; the textual “amplification” by al-Fayyūmī; and the ornately “coded” manuscript by the hand of Riḍwān ibn Muḥammad al-Tibrīzī in 767 AH (1366 AD). It examines how the Arabic script (in this case in naskh and thuluth scripts), already sacralised through its association with the Qur'ān, both confers upon and expresses the sacred character of the Burdah and the subordinate sacrality of its amplification in the Takhmīs. It further explores the textual and scriptural components of the introduction and conclusion as they “frame” the aural and visual “performance.” It concludes that, as I have argued earlier for the verbal and aural aspects of the takhmīs, the visual “performance” of the text in Walters ms. serves as a “reliquary” that frames, preserves, interprets, and adorns the Burdah, understood now as the “relic” of al-Būṣīrī's dream encounter with the Prophet Muhammad and miraculous cure.

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## “Angels as Invisible Letters: The Angelic Matter of Sacred Speech”

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In his cosmological system, Ibn Arabi develops a complex relationship between the spiritual and the physical worlds via the Imaginal world. Communication between these planes of existence take specific shapes or images, and in the Islamic context, the key creatures of communication with the divine and the sacred are angels. They bear messages, or they are the messages, sometimes taking their shapes down to its most basic detail in a culture of the sacred written word: Ibn Arabi considers letters of the Arabic alphabet to be angels' names, and the spirits of these letters are angels saying them aloud is equivalent to invoking these angels. They are similarly enrolled to the service and representation of the Divine Names, object of ritual repetition by believers: angels are acting their meaning out into the world.

And while angels explains the sacredness of language, language also helps us understand the status of angels in relation to us and the physical world: Ibn 'Arabi elaborates on the archetypal divine command “Be!” (kun), by using cosmological symbols: this word made of two visible letters although it is constructed of three letters - the third (middle) letter waw, being erased. This letter, “such as an isthmus” (barzakhiyya) and “spiritual” (ruḥāniyya) is given a status as that of the angel: leaving a mark even though the source of this mark is gone.

This paper explores this specific aspect of Akbarian thought, to trace this relationship between angels and sacred language in older works, within the same religious tradition and in other traditions, and understand its situation within its wider medieval period.

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Lebanon and the Arabian Peninsula, she returned to classical Arabic and Islamic literature for her PhD dissertation. Her dissertation explored the function and representation of angels in Sufi texts of the pre-Mongol era, and being worked into a monograph. Her current subjects of interest include the “use” of angels in religious and occult practices in the wider Islamic area.

## “Between Letters and Shapes: the Mysterious Magic Square of the 99 Divines Names by Aḥmad al-Būnī (d. 622/1225)”

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„We will show them Our signs in the universe and in themselves, until it becomes clear to them that this is the truth“ (Q. 41, 53). In Islam, the signs of nature are as important an object of meditation as the verses of the Quran. And indeed, doesn't the harmony of Islamic art lie in maintaining a form of ambiguity and blurred boundaries between the revealed verses of the Quran and the arabesques with which they intermingle? It should be added that, from a terminological point of view, letters and shapes are entirely confused here, since in the Quran, the same word (āya) is used to designate a „sign“ of nature and a revealed „verse“.

From a strictly metaphysical perspective, the revealed verses of the Book open up a second level of correspondence with the created world. This is offered by the science of letters ('ilm al-ḥurūf), the most elitist discipline of Islamic esotericism and Sufism. Holistic by nature, it develops an extremely dense network of correspondences between the microcosm and the macrocosm: numbers, sounds, shapes, planetary orbits and even human organs are symbolically redirected in the phonetic, scriptural and intellectual aspect of Arabic letters, the tool of God's creation of the universe. But ultimately, the letters also symbolize the founding event of human reason: the Divine Names that God taught Adam.

The science of letters is sometimes used for prophylactic purposes in the context of magic. Yet many Sufi thinkers refrain from such opportunism, reserving esoteric knowledge of letters for nobler, more contemplative aspirations. Even the Arabic talismans that most often combine letters, numbers, and arabesques, and whose avowed aim is to obtain all manner of benefits, can in fact reveal, at the heart of their structures, complex doctrinal elements to be meditated upon. It is one such talisman, and more precisely a magic square attributed to Aḥmad al-Būnī (d. 622/1225), that we wish to present in this paper. Its mathematical structure defies any attempt of formalization. By integrating the 99 Divine Names and the name of the Prophet Muhammad, al-Būnī indeed manages to link the numerical values of these 100 names with the help of a magic constant, but without using any algorithm or systematic construction method. Beyond

this surprising arithmetical harmony, we want to highlight a precise symbolism emerging from the juxtaposition of certain names and their associated values. In particular, this symbolism links the Divine Names to the 28 Arabic letters and the hands as an organ endowed with symbolic 'binarity'. Our analysis of this magic square is based on the equivalences between the letters' names, shapes, and numerical values, as well as on Quranic revelation itself and the philosophical and esoteric literature of the first centuries of Islam, in particular the work of the Iḥwān al-Ṣafā' (9th/10th century) and Ibn 'Arabī (d. 638/1240).

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## “How Did τὰ ἱερογλυφικὰ Create Religious Reality – Visual Strategies and Divine Words in the Oldest Egyptian Religious Accounts”

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The religious and ritual texts covering the walls of Egyptian pyramids of the third millennium BCE reflect the oldest traces of ancient Egyptian spirituality, written in a sacred language (Allen 2010: 2-3) that seems to have been used as a performance medium before being set in stone. Even though studies have mentioned layout (Hays 2012; Alvarez 2022) and palaeography (Pierre-Croisiau 2019), little attention has been given until now to details such as the use of tabular format, as well as, the size and positioning of the signs. However, these are both important elements in the use of the sacred script to strengthen and create the desired religious and spiritual reality for the deceased.

The tabular layout was an important means of ordering the world in ancient Egypt (Hoffmann in Deicher-Maroko 2015) and this paper will reveal how the presence of this format or its absence influences the efficacy of the Pyramid Texts in each context. Likewise, monumentalisation of the text (Hays 2012, Alvarez 2022) is not only achieved by the transposition of original cursive drafts into the hieroglyphic script but also by the very way hieroglyphs are positioned and designed. The paper will illustrate several devices adopted by the writers/artists to achieve a clear aesthetic effect (contra Mathieu 1996: 309)<sup>1</sup> and through the monumentality of the script reflect figuratively the profound sense, denotation and prominence of the text.

The way in which the hieroglyphic inscriptions on the walls were executed enabled the religious reality creation (Popielska-Grzybowska 2020: 20-22, 281-289) for the deceased Pharaoh in order to achieve his destiny among the Imperishable Stars and be unified with the creator Atum. The texts not only maintained their religious significance but also when pronounced out loud possessed their power to create. This performative interplay and use of language and script was mirrored in a specific term used by the Ancient Egyptians which will be introduced and debated.

Furthermore, the authors of the paper intend to outline how the Egyptians conceptualised their language and script to illustrate the world's ambiguity. Consequently, hieroglyphic signs utilised in a religious context introduced both the clarity, order and beauty of the universe, as well as, the seeming paradoxes of religious concepts that were elucidated as duality in earthly spheres and the trinity in divine context. Meaning and different possible levels of perception will be touched upon to, as a result, demonstrate the inimitability and uniqueness of the Ancient Egyptian sacred language embodied in their oldest religious texts. The authors will exemplify how the ancient Egyptian language and script acted for religious and spiritual purposes and seemed to have been believed to be divine in nature as they were named *medu netjer* “words of god”.

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## "The Inimitability of Spell 149 in the Book of the Dead: Exploring Variations and Conservatism in Ancient Egyptian Sacred Language"

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The Book of the Dead is a collection of sacred spells from ancient Egypt, primarily used in funerary contexts. The spells were designed to guide the deceased through the underworld to fulfil their rebirth. However, unlike the canonization process in biblical studies, the order, selection, and wording of the spells were not always fixed or standardized in existing Book of the Dead writings. This study will explore the inimitability of the copy of Spell 149 in the Book of the Dead. This spell comprises 14 sections of texts and vignettes depicting the 14 mounds and their divine inhabitants in the underworld. It was composed in the New Kingdom, but its content can be traced back to the Coffin Text from the Middle Kingdom. Subsequently, it was adapted into temple cultic texts engraved on the walls of the Temple of Dendera and Edfu during the Greco-Roman periods. It is important to note that this sacred text served a wide range of purposes within the religious context, from private funerary rituals to divine worship.

The visual representation of the combination of vignettes and texts varied depending on the writing material, such as mummy bandages, papyri, and stone-walls. The length of the texts was adjusted to fit the available space, resulting in the abbreviation or omission of specific sentences. Even when written on the same material, like papyri, different variations appear in the writings from different locations due to local religious traditions or vowel and consonantal changes in words influenced by dialectal pronunciations or grammatical differences.

In explanation of the text changes, some of them are purposefully made as they show particular intentions or preferences of the scribes. The selection of synonyms and hieroglyphic determinatives for the same words differed, indicating the scribes' understanding of the sacred language and their preference for the way of writing it. Varied divine epithets were added to emphasize the divinity's influence in local theology. Person changes typically imply the shifting relationship between the presumed addresser and addressee.

However, some variations may be meaningless as the scribes themselves may not have fully understood the true meaning of the sacred language they were copying. Apart from spelling errors, the grammatical and semantical relationship among different elements of certain sentences changed, thus altering the whole meaning of them. This kind of inattention and indifference prompt us to think: Can we indeed determine a „correct“ or more „original“ version of the sacred text? Is the sacred language's correctness or presence in various religious contexts

more essential to the Egyptians? Does correctness hold significance for us or the Egyptians? We also need to consider what makes the unchangeable and preservable parts of the texts so unique. The interplay between the conservatism and variations in the texts helps us better understand the true purpose behind copying the sacred text and preserving the sacred languages within religious contexts.

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### “The Shape of Water: Materialising Neith’s Fluidity Through Figurative Writing at Esna”

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The epigraphic corpus in the pronaos of the Temple of Khnum and Neith at Esna testifies to a mature phase of the hieroglyphic script (1st – mid-3rd centuries CE), presenting interesting features in style, form, and content, as a product of the creativity of the lively local scribal community. The texts composed in ancient Latopolis are characterised by a refined complexity, both in the depth of their doctrinal reflection and in their visual rendering (e.g. Klotz 2023). Writing is a high theological occupation at Esna, with signs selected and arranged to disclose the recondite divine reality of the universe (Sauneron 1982). The theology of the temple revolves around a productive divine duality – it is a sanctuary for Khnum and Neith, after all (Haltof 2007) – but, as it has been argued, it is also the worship place for an original Creator god, an androgynous primeval entity manifesting either as Khnum or Neith in the cosmogonical process (Sauneron 1961: 242-244).

This non-binary substance of the divinity is often described in the Latopolite mythological accounts (e.g. in the Cosmogony of Neith, Esna 206), but is also further stressed by means of writing (Ciampini 2023). The figurative theonyms of Neith in her litany (Esna 216) are eloquent in showing this ambivalence (Leitz 2022: 691-828; Ciampini 2015; Sauneron 1982: 73-76), especially with the use of the visual semantics of creation and becoming. As a demiurge emerging from the primeval ocean (el-Sayed 1982: 19, 51-53), Neith is represented in her fluid essence, as agent of change while creating the Cosmos. Her fluidity is also manifest in her continuous self-transformations, a multiplicity mirroring the shape-shifting nature of the Creator god.

The paper aims to analyse some cryptograms of the goddess’ name containing pictorial or phonetic allusions to the semantics of water, so to present the figure of an ever-changing deity and her potential for creation.

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## “Placing Sacred Languages: From the Locative to the Utopian”

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Language is a constitutive element of religion. As Paden (2016) says, “Religious systems are topographies of language and practice in which humans construe the world as a place of engagement with superhuman beings and become actors in that culturally generated system.” This paper aims to contribute to the conceptualization of sacred languages by highlighting their differences with *lingua francas*. Building on Bennett (2017) and Salverda (2018), it suggests the two types of language entail contrasting topographies, which are here termed locative and utopian (cf. Smith 2004).

Sacred languages are locative, being associated with formality, purity, and hierarchy, and typically restricted to dedicated places of worship. Cantillation and calligraphy are two modes of semiotic heightening commonly encountered in such milieu. For example, Church Slavonic is the hieratic language of Russian Orthodoxy. It is always chanted or sung. Russian churches, typically called temples, are adorned with Slavonic lettering, which is more ornate than workaday Cyrillic. Some inscriptions are executed in *vyaz* ('linked'), an elaborate calligraphic style that blurs the boundary between word and image—a kind of Slavonic hieroglyphics. The inimitable visual form of *vyaz* connotes mystery and sanctity. There are different kinds of *lingua francas* (Fiedler & Brosch 2022). Planned languages offer the clearest contrast with sacred languages. The best known, Esperanto, is utopian ('nowhere'), having been designed by L. L. Zamenhof in the nineteenth century to transcend geographical and cultural divisions. Today it flourishes in cyberspace. While *lingua sacras* generate forms of beautification, *lingua francas* thrive on simplicity: Esperanto is famously built on just sixteen rules. It has a considerable body of literature but no *Schriftkunst*. Although some Catholics, Baha'is, and others have endowed Zamenhof's *lingvo internacia* with religious significance (Bennett 2022), this is because they view it as a vehicle for spreading their universalist message and uniting humankind, not as a nexus between “time and eternity, earth and Heaven,” as one catechism says about Church Slavonic (Makarii 2017).

Between the poles of *lingua sacra* and *lingua franca* fall mixed cases like Latin which, over its long history, has been a vehicular language, a sacred tongue, and the basis for numerous planned languages (Barandovská-Frank 2010).

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