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Agency: How Manuscripts Affect and Create Social Realities

Edited by Michael Kohs and Sabine Kienitz

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A 'letter from Heaven', ID no. I (33 J) 176/1963, Berlin, Museum of European Cultures (Staatliche Museen zu Berlin – Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Museum Europäischer Kulturen). Written in Ernstroda near Gotha, Thuringia, and dated 1776. The original sheet of paper was folded once, making four pages. Here we can see p. 1 with the title 'Himmels= Brief, welchen, Gott selber geschrieben' ('Letter from Heaven, which God Himself has written') and page 4. The written bifolium was then folded four times. Two words were visible on the two outer sides resulting from this: 'Gottes Brief' ('God's letter'), shown on p. 4. The upper part of the letter has been cropped and part of the illumination has been cut off. Photography: Christian Krug.

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Fig. 1: New York City, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, acc. no. 1984.504.2. Finial of a standard; silver with a black inlay; Iran, early 18th century; 48.9 × 22.9 × 4.0 cm. Standards like this one were typically used by Shi'is in military and religious ceremonies in India. Its form and its inscriptions also provide the standard with an apotropaic function. The object is in the shape of a palm, which is a common symbol in Islam known as the Hand of Fatima, *khamisa* (Arabic for 'five') or *panja* ('paw' in Persian). One of the fingers is missing. The central medallion on the side shown features the names of Allah, the Prophet Muḥammad and members of the Prophet's family. The larger crescent-shaped area contains the Qur'anic 'Throne verse' Q (2:255), which is also typical of talismans. The other side features the name of the twelve imams. The fingers contain Qur'anic verses and Shi'i invocations, the latter partly in Persian. See Farhad 2009, 124–25 on this item and Kemnitz 2023 on the *khamisa* in Islam in general; see also the paper by Berthold in this volume.

Introduction

Agency: How Manuscripts Affect and Create Social Realities

Michael Kohs and Sabine Kienitz | Hamburg

The idea that agency can be attributed to inanimate objects, not just humans, and that these can be considered *non-human actors* has become popular in anthropology, art history and the social sciences since being introduced in the late 1990s by British social anthropologist Alfred Gell and then expanded by French sociologist Bruno Latour.¹ The concept here – the agency of objects – has been applied to diverse topics concerned with material culture studies since then. It has not resulted in a unified theory being created, though. Rather, various theoretical approaches have been pursued in parallel. These vary greatly in terms of their theoretical frameworks, but they also differ as to what kinds of non-human actors are considered. The range includes everything from everyday items to works of art, buildings and even the social structures and networks connected with them. Hardly anyone has thought about the agency of manuscripts yet, though, or applied the concept systematically to research on manuscripts or written artefacts in general.

Partly on the grounds of this disparity between existing theoretical approaches to the subject of agency, when dealing with the agency of written artefacts, it generally proves advantageous *not* to take a top-down approach based on the idea that just one concept of agency is valid.² Rather, the subject should preferably be approached with a more open mind, i.e. exploratively when examining manuscripts, and then drawing on appropriate theoretical models. This open-mindedness is also reflected in the contributions to this volume, which draw on highly differing approaches to agency. In view of this diversity, the fundamental understanding of agency formulated

some time ago by linguist and anthropologist Laura Ahearn – ‘Agency refers to the socioculturally mediated capacity to act’ – can be helpful as a common basis for research on agency and manuscripts.³ This understanding of agency makes it clear that social interaction and networks can be regarded as its core elements. If we adopt this definition of it, however, it will still be debatable what sociocultural role written artefacts can have and how exactly they acquire their specific agency in the course of their production or use – as a result of their specific materiality, their visual organisation or their content, for instance.

The two sections in this volume represent two focal points in this complex issue: firstly, manuscripts that act as magical agents and directly influence human actors and their behaviour, and secondly, manuscripts that affect or even create social relations between human actors in the course of their production, use or circulation and that shape whole communities this way.

Section I: Manuscripts as Magical Agents

The contributions in this first section are case studies on magical and divinatory written artefacts of different types from a variety of manuscript cultures. The papers illustrate the broad spectrum of written artefacts connected with the topics of magic and agency. Besides the specific materiality connected with their use, such as their size, form and writing materials, magic manuscripts can exhibit specific visual designs, symbols and scripts that may be directly related to their assumed potency. These written artefacts should not merely be seen as passive objects containing texts, but need to be understood as ‘actors’ that unfold their *Wirkmacht* (efficacy) and thus contribute to ‘magically’ influenced realities. Human actors rely on the efficacy of magic manuscripts and simultaneously affirm it in their interaction with them. The potency of such manuscripts

¹ See Gell 1998 and Latour 2005, for instance.

² The complexity of the idea of agency can be seen in the frequent German translation of the English term *agency*, namely *Wirkmacht*, meaning ‘efficacy’ or ‘power’. These two meanings are not completely equivalent to the sense found in the English word *agency*, however; the rather ponderous term *Handlungsfähigkeit* would be a better match in German. Consequently, *Wirkmacht* and *agency* should be regarded as related terms that complement each other conceptually.

³ Ahearn 2001, 112.

can be activated by their very presence, direct contact with the human body when worn in various ways or by the material and visual features the artefacts have. Magical manuscripts structure situations and actions and actively intervene in the everyday world of human actors. Written amulets could thus be considered the most obvious case of *agency* in written artefacts, but so could collections of magical recipes in multiple-text manuscripts (MTMs) and manuals of magic.

After reflecting on the use and meaning of the term *magic* in his paper, Michael Kohs considers the various features that can establish the ‘magical’ agency and efficacy of written artefacts. This agency can be triggered by certain practices during the production and use of written artefacts or by their materiality or content. The author proposes a three-step concept of agency here.

The paper by Farouk Yahya is the first publication dedicated exclusively to a divinatory device from Sumatra and the Malay Peninsula: paper wheels with strings attached to them, which were meant to be put on or over a person’s head. A practitioner would pick one of the predictions written on the manuscript by grasping one of the strings.

Marco Heiles analyses a German codex from the sixteenth century. This MTM contains instructions on performing magical rituals and divinatory practices along with several prayer texts. Many of the formularies and prayers include the name *Reynhard Trugeses*, who was presumably the owner of the manuscript at one point. This prompts the question of how this codex was used: was it a compendium used as a set of instructions for magical rituals? Or was the codex itself an apotropaic amulet?

Cornelius Berthold takes a look at the functions of miniature Qur’ans in the past. As the handwriting in these tiny manuscripts was usually too small to be read easily, his paper enquires about the status of these codices in relation to other types of manuscripts containing Qur’anic texts or prayers.

The article by Sabine Kienitz explores the field of German *Himmelsbriefe*, or ‘letters from Heaven’, as they are known. Manuscripts and prints containing such texts were carried close to the body in times of severe danger, e.g. by soldiers in wartime or by women giving birth. They were passed on within families and their handwritten form was sometimes supposed to be a precondition for their efficacy.

Finally, in his paper, Karl Schaefer examines the changing agency of Arabic block-print amulets over time in the different stages of their ‘lives’. In considering the ‘afterlife’ of these

artefacts, now removed from their original settings, he asks about the agency they exert on us today.

Section II: Manuscripts Shaping Communities

Many of the papers in the first section point out that the agency of magical written artefacts is often due to their users attributing them the potential to have an immediate effect. The interaction between the bearer of a written artefact and the object itself has the character of a highly personal relationship. Contrastingly, the focus in the contributions to the second section of this volume is on aspects of the agency of manuscripts that have an impact on social groups. Manuscripts and, indeed, written artefacts in general can affect and even create social relations, for example by connecting people in administrative institutions who are actively involved in the production, use and circulation of forms and schedules, which are essentially shared manuscripts, even if they do not know each other from face-to-face communication. In fact, manuscripts may deeply affect an established community, unfolding an emotional sense of belonging and uniting its members in their joint veneration of the artefact, at the same time excluding and isolating any non-members. This can be the case in religious contexts and even in scholarly environments, like teacher–student relationships. The agency of manuscripts can thus shape social and cultural practices.

The articles in this section discuss some of the requirements and consequences of production and reception and the respective quality of social constellations and communities, which are shaped and defined by sharing manuscripts in many ways, among other things. Hence, the agency and impact of a manuscript is not grounded on its content alone, but rather on the materiality of the object itself, depending on the particular writing material used – whether it was valuable or not – and on its performative origin and usage, i.e. the physical act of production by handwriting and further acts of personal signing and authentication. Beyond that, however, the concrete modes and sequences of use, appropriation and appraisal of the artefact must also be taken into account. In this respect, there are many different kinds of practices and physical involvement (and interaction) with handwritten objects. These can range from worshipping the manuscript collectively at a distance (or touching it in a particular way on certain days) to individual use of the written artefact in everyday life (and even to its misuse and deliberate destruction). As the case studies will show, manuscripts can establish ‘actual’ social relationships and

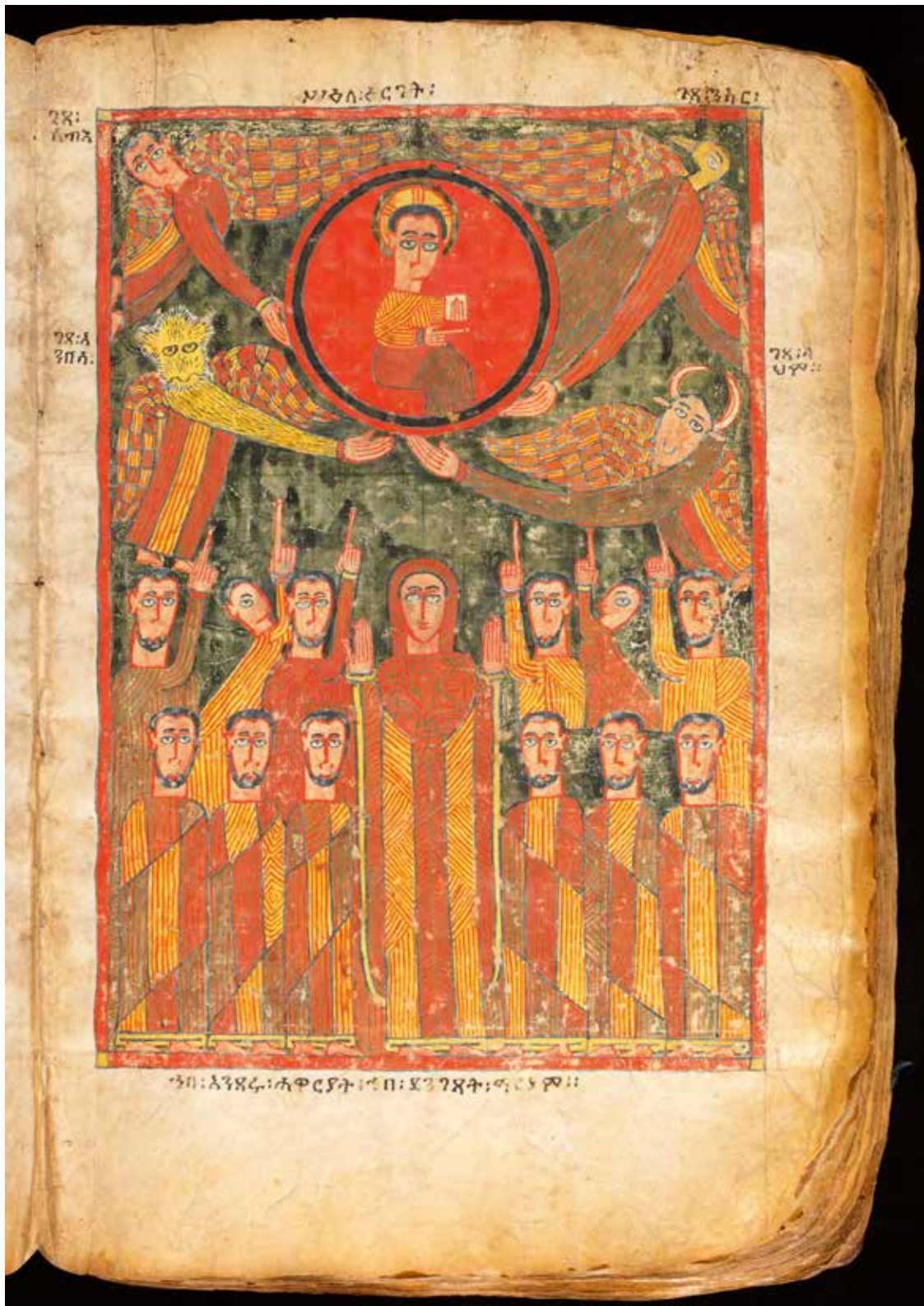


Fig. 2: New York City, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, acc. no. 1998.66, fol. 7'. Illuminated Ge'ez Gospel; Ethiopia, late 14th–early 15th century, parchment, 41.9 × 28.6 × 10.2 cm. The illumination adapts Byzantine iconographic models and shows the ascension of Christ, who is sitting enthroned at the top, surrounded by the symbolised four Evangelists. Mary is encompassed by the twelve apostles in the centre below that. Gospel manuscripts have always been at the heart of faith and practice in all major Christian confessions. In the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, manuscripts like the one shown above are jointly venerated by the community during liturgical services and processions. The illuminations are shown to the congregation, and believers often kiss the covers of the manuscripts or the illuminations themselves. Such Gospel books can therefore be ascribed a constitutive function, shaping the community. On this manuscript see LaGamma 1998, among others.

consequently shape communities actively, e.g. by connecting the owner, scribe and users of a book in a lending library in the Malay world (van der Putten's article) or by involving experts and connoisseurs as collectors of distinctive manuscript issues in China in the nineteenth century (Lu).

In her paper, Sina Sauer considers administrative documents as constitutive actors of a newly established bureaucratic community in Germany after World War II. In her contribution to the volume, she asks how collective administrative acts depended on the use of completely new printed forms to compensate Jewish Germans for the mass spoliation of their own or their relations' property by the Nazi regime.

In contrast, Jan van der Putten investigates a collection of manuscripts rented out for entertainment at an Indonesian lending library. He shows how the broad interest in popular stories created a community of readers of handwritten artefacts that remained active till the first decade of the twentieth century, by which time printing had become established.

The article by Lu Zhenzhen deals with a commercial landscape for the production and reception of entertainment literature and the respective communities of readers and collectors in nineteenth-century China. Some collectors only had an economic interest in pursuing a collection of valuable manuscripts being sold by a famous copying house in Beijing.

Others were artistic collectors who bought manuscripts for their own private performances – people who had established a virtual community without knowing or having contact with each other by reciting the same contents from manuscripts.

Acknowledgements

We, the editors, would like to thank the authors of the papers presented in this volume for their enlightening contributions. We are especially grateful to the authors for their enduring patience as this volume has taken a while to prepare. Our thanks also go to all the anonymous reviewers involved for their constructive criticism and to the various colleagues involved in the production of this volume, in particular Irina Wandrey in the editorial office for her assistance and ever-helpful advice. The papers here are partly based on presentations held at two workshops convened by the former collaborative research group SFB 950 'Manuscript Cultures in Asia, Africa and Europe' at Hamburg University.⁴ We are grateful to the German Research Foundation (DFG) for sponsoring the research for this volume, undertaken at SFB 950 within the scope of work conducted at the Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures (CSMC) at Hamburg University.

⁴ These were 'Manuscripts as Magical Agents' (11–12 June 2016) and 'Shaping Communities: Manuscripts Affecting Social Relations' (13 July 2018).

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PICTURE CREDITS

Fig. 1: The Metropolitan Museum of Art; Gift of Marilyn Jenkins, 1984.

Fig. 2: The Metropolitan Museum of Art; Rogers Fund, 1998.

SECTION I

Manuscripts as Magical Agents

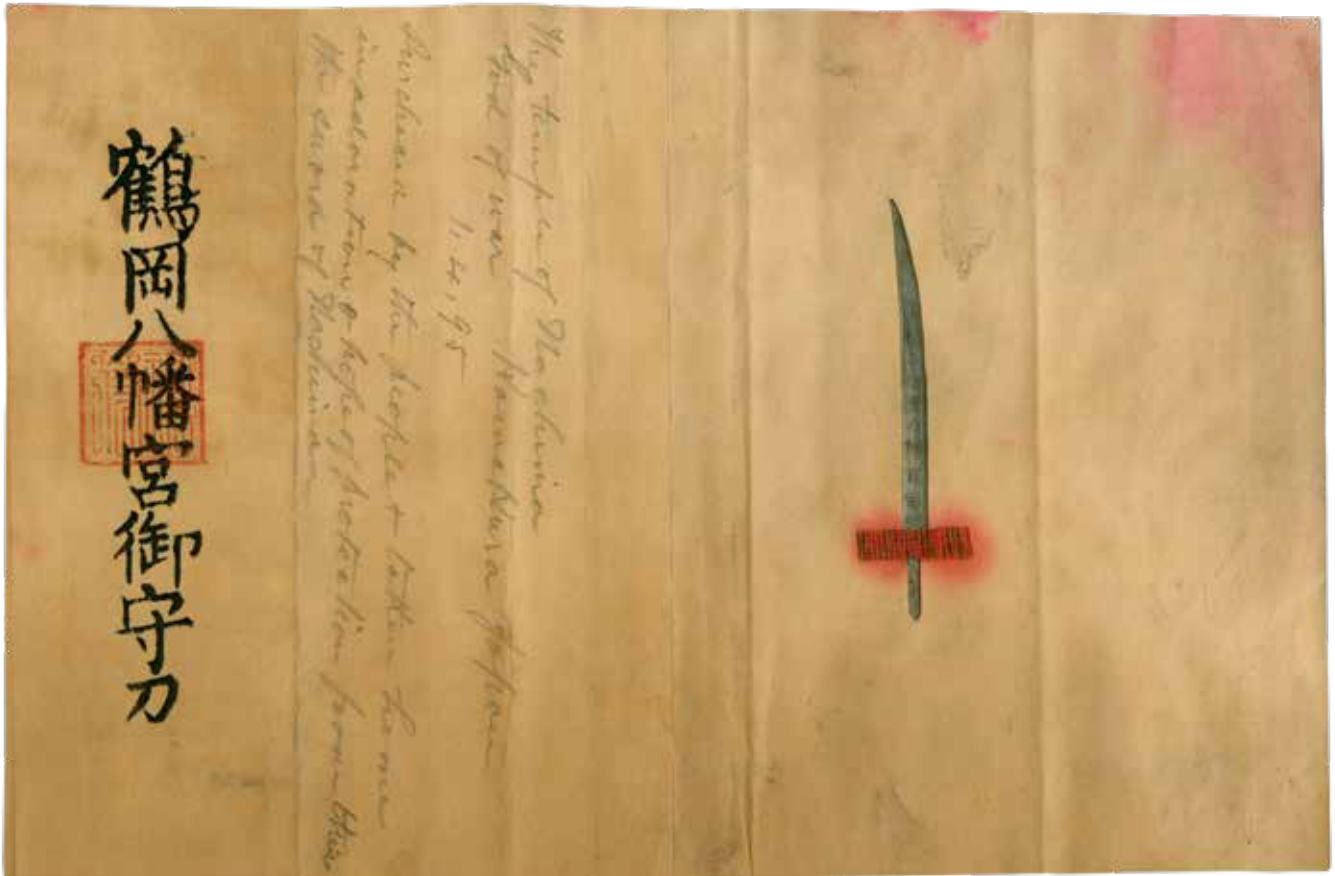


Fig. 1a: General view of the front of the amulet.

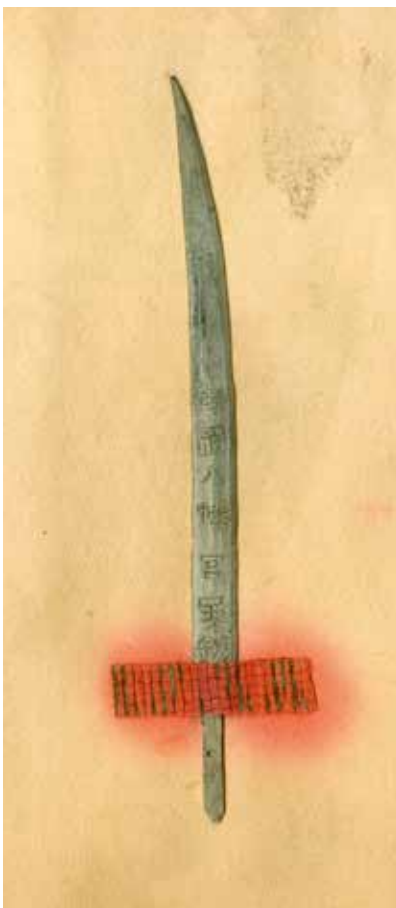


Fig. 1b: Detail showing the metal sword.

Fig. 1: Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, 29-96-693B; paper and metal, 16.5 × 24.0 cm, mid-1890s <<https://www.penn.museum/collections/object/310720>>. A Japanese *omamori* (protective amulet) from the Tsurugaoka Hachimangū, a very important shrine in the city of Kamakura, Japan, dedicated to the Shinto and Buddhist deity Hachiman, who is commonly associated with archery and warfare. The printed text on the left – actually on the ‘title page’ of the amulet, which is usually folded – reads *Tsurugaoka Hachimangū omamorigatana* (‘Tsurugaoka Hachimangū amulet sword’). The name of the shrine, Tsurugaoka Hachimangū, is also inscribed on the *omamori* itself, a little metal sword that is attached to the paper. The paper contains an additional note by the scholar and collector Maxwell Sommerville stating the provenance of the item. *Omamori* are sold in various forms at Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples in Japan. For a general overview on *omamori* see Swanger and Takayama 1981.

Article

Manuscripts as Magical Agents: A General Outline*

Michael Kohs | Hamburg

1. Introduction

Practices that are called ‘magical’ are to be found in many cultures. They are quite heterogeneous as a whole, so simply subsuming them under one term – the concept of ‘magic’ – is sometimes contested by scholars. Practices of this kind involve the production and use of manuscripts and other written artefacts to a substantial degree: on the one hand, manuscripts are used to collect and transmit knowledge about the practices, which is the case with multiple-text manuscripts (MTMs) like personal notebooks, for example, in which the owners collect recipes, formulas and models for making amulets. On the other hand, manuscripts are used in actual magical practices, the prototypical example being written amulets that are worn on the body to protect their bearers. It seems that manuscripts of this type are attributed an efficacy that is directly connected with the items themselves – not only with their contents, but with their materiality as well – and that gives them a certain degree of autonomy or independence from human behaviour as well as a certain influence upon it. This efficacy can be explained by the concept of *agency*, which enables us to understand manuscripts as socially mediated agents or ‘actors’ that are attributed their own power in dynamic processes between these items and human agents.

The intrinsic potential of manuscripts as agents and their impact in different historical practices or social contexts is a key topic in manuscript studies, but has been rather neglected in research so far. This paper addresses the phenomenon that manuscripts are ascribed magical efficacy. It does not aim to cover the topic exhaustively, but will point out certain aspects or features of manuscripts and manuscript practices that may be linked to this magical efficacy or agency, occa-

sionally referring to examples from various manuscript cultures. Following this, a basic concept of agency will be outlined briefly insofar as it may be helpful as a theoretical background for the other articles in this section. Hopefully, it will stimulate future research on manuscripts serving as magical agents.

2. Magic

The term and concept of ‘magic’ both have a long history.¹ The word itself has frequently been used in a derogatory sense, while the concept has served as a means of alienating people. ‘Magical’ practices have often been subject to marginalisation and de-legitimation at different times and across different cultures. The use of the term ‘magic’ is consequently deemed inappropriate by some, especially in a scholarly context. In contrast, the term is used in the papers in this section in an inductive, heuristic sense as a designation for a loose group of empirically defined practices that may be subsumed under the heading of ‘magic’ – in other words, we all more or less know what we mean when we talk about magic or magical practices, but without having the absolute necessity or even ability to define the term conclusively.²

¹ The English term ‘magic’ is derived via Latin from the Greek word *mageia* and the underlying term *magos*, meaning ‘wise man’ or ‘magician’, which itself was borrowed from Old Persian *maguš*, originally designating a member of a priestly caste. See Bremmer 2002 and Davies 2012, 2–5 for more details. On *concepts* of magic, see Otto and Stausberg (eds) 2013 and Otto 2011, for example.

² Thus, following Rebiger and Schäfer 2009, 2, n. 5, whenever the term is used here and in the articles in this section, it is not intended to convey any affirmative or pejorative attitude to the practices or beliefs that are denoted by it. No specific relation between the concepts of ‘magic’ and ‘religion’ is presupposed either, nor has any threefold evolutionary model of *magic–religion–science* been employed like in older anthropological accounts such as Frazer 1951, for example. Nevertheless, we should be aware of the fact that our notion of magic is inevitably biased when applied to different cultures. This problem should not be tackled by merely avoiding the term, but with constant and conscious reflection of our use of it in relation to the manuscript sources we study. On magic and religion as one continuum, see

* The research for this article was funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG, German Research Foundation). The research was conducted at the Sonderforschungsbereich 950 ‘Manuskriptkulturen in Asien, Afrika und Europa’ within the scope of the Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures (CSMC) at Universität Hamburg.

‘Magic’ thus also serves as a metalinguistic category that covers practices that practitioners may not have labelled as ‘magic’ or one of its various cognates. What is more, we will also subsume divinatory practices under this term – these are discussed by Farouk Yahya in this section, for instance – with a broader understanding of magic, since there appears to be a phenomenological overlap between divination and magical practices.³

As unsatisfactory as this heuristic definition (or even ‘non-definition’) of magic seems to be at first sight, the study of manuscripts and their ‘magical agency’ may also advance our understanding of the phenomena we call magic. Although these may not all be described by a single definition, they usually share a kind of ‘family resemblance’ even across cultures, i.e. they exhibit at least some features of a broader list of prototypical characteristics of magic, such as *coerciveness, manipulation, control, analogy, sympathy, symbolism, performance, privacy* and *secrecy*.⁴ Generally speaking, practices that might be called ‘magic’ in an academic discourse are often based on a worldview of the practices’ participants that involves causal relationships between a microcosm and macrocosm. These are embedded into theological, angelological, demonological, cosmological, astronomical and astrological beliefs and often involve a ritual component.⁵ A comparable notion of magic was expressed by Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa of Nettesheim (1486–1535), the Renaissance polymath and presumed practitioner of magic, when he was discussing ‘natural magic’ in his work *De occulta philosophia* (‘Of Occult Philosophy’):

Seeing there is a threefold world, elementary, celestial, and intellectual, and every inferior is governed by its superior and receiveth the influence of the virtues thereof [...], wise

Versnel 1991, 185–187, for example. Also see Cornelius Berthold’s article in this volume for a discussion on the relationship between magical and religious practices and the apotropaic use of miniature Qur’ans.

³ The cohesiveness of these two domains, which is also comparable to the relationship between magic and religion, is reflected in the titles of secondary literature, like Ann Jeffers (1996), *Magic and Divination in Ancient Palestine and Syria*, Charles Burnett (2001), *Magic and Divination in the Middle Ages*, Emilie Savage-Smith (ed.) (2004), *Magic and Divination in Early Islam* or Helen R. Jacobus et al. (eds) (2013), *Studies on Magic and Divination in the Biblical World*.

⁴ On magic and the Wittgensteinian concept of family resemblance, see Versnel 1991, 185–187 and Otto and Stausberg 2013, 8–10. The latter two authors also provide a comprehensive list of such features.

⁵ See Rebigier 2010, 35.

men conceive it no way irrational that it should be possible for us [...] to enjoy not only these virtues, which are already in the more excellent kind of things, but also besides these, to draw new virtues from above. Hence they seek after the virtues of the elementary world, [...] then of the celestial world in the rays [...], joining the celestial virtues [sic!] to the former; moreover they corroborate and confirm all these with the powers of divers intelligencies through the sacred ceremonies of religion. [...]

Magic is a faculty of wonderful virtue, full of most high mysteries, containing the most profound contemplation of most secret things, together with the nature, power, quality, substance, and virtues thereof, as also the knowledge of whole nature, and it doth instruct us concerning the differing, and agreement of things amongst themselves, whence it produceth its wonderful effects [...].⁶

Although this is only one example of how practitioners of magic and theorists understand these practices, it comprises what might be representative for many concepts of magic: a connection between the human realm and that of non-human powers such as angels, demons and gods, their interdependencies and the possibility to influence both realms in magical practices. What, then, is the role of manuscripts in this ‘web’ of magic? And what may the assumed efficacy of magical manuscripts like amulets or other written artefacts be based on? Can manuscripts be attributed a special status as opposed to other non-inscribed objects in magical practices? Material and content layers meet in manuscripts. To be able to understand them as ‘magical agents’, it may therefore be worthwhile to regard manuscripts – their materiality as well as their contents – as being shaped by four key factors: their *production, use, setting* and *patterns*.⁷ Each of these aspects

⁶ Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa of Nettesheim, *De occulta philosophia*, first book, chapters 1 and 2, cited in Tyson 1993, 3 and 5. The text of the English edition in Tyson 1993 is based on the slightly modernised first English translation of *De occulta philosophia*, published as *Three Books of Occult Philosophy Written by Henry Cornelius Agrippa of Nettesheim, Counsellor to Charles the Fifth, Emperor of Germany and Judge of the Prerogative Court. Translated out of the Latin into the English Tongue, by J. F.* (London: Printed by R. W. for Gregory Moule, 1651). The identity of the translator, J. F., is controversial: although he was identified as James Freake in the past, more recently the initials have been interpreted as standing for John French; cf. Tyson 1993, xl. Regarding the cited passages, also see Lehrich 2003, 43 and 63.

⁷ The use of *manuscript* here refers to the definition established in Lorusso et al. 2015, 1: ‘A manuscript is an artefact planned and realised to provide surfaces on which visible signs are applied by hand; it is portable, self-

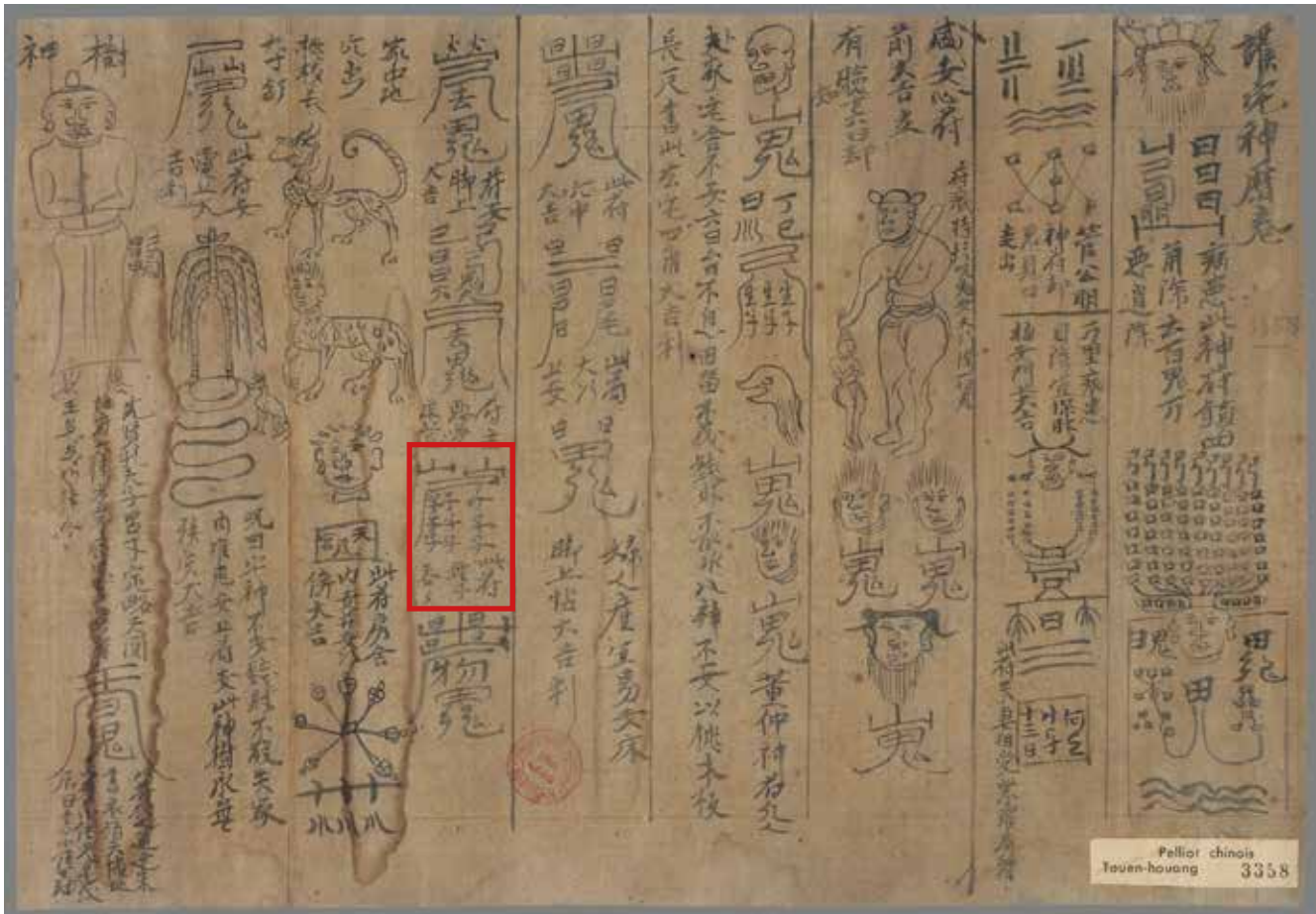


Fig. 2a: Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Pelliot chinois 3358; paper; 26.2×37.8 cm. A talisman to be swallowed to prevent barrenness is highlighted.

– which are usually interwoven – can contribute to the magical agency that is ascribed to manuscripts.

3. Setting and cultural patterns

The setting of magical manuscripts relates to spatial and temporal aspects of their production and use. In addition to that, their social and economic settings are of equal importance, just like their cultural patterns. In this case, the general cultural patterns include the prevalence of ideas of a magical worldview similar to those of Agrippa’s above: that the world is full of invisible connections and dependencies, and is governed by the power of ‘supernatural’ entities like angels or demons, which can be influenced and used to alter the course of the world to one’s own advantage, but which, conversely, influence human fates of their own accord. The social dimension comes into play when we ask why people use magical manuscripts: the artefacts are believed to protect

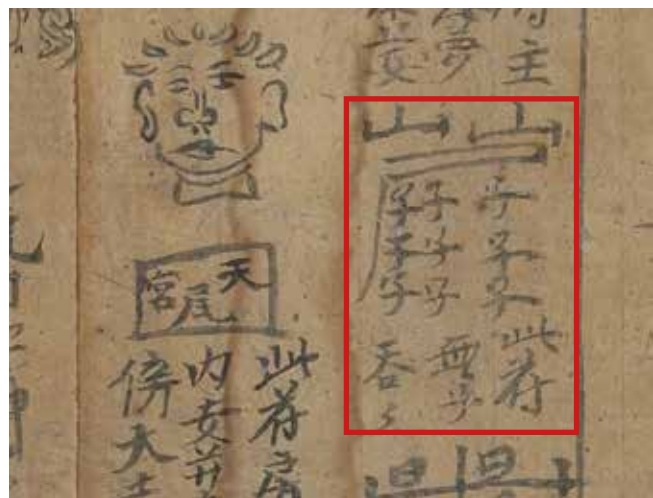


Fig. 2b: Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Pelliot chinois 3358; detail. The highlighted talisman has to be swallowed and is said to prevent barrenness. It contains the word *zi* (‘child’) nine times and the character for ‘mountain’ twice at the top. Printed in its original size.

people from illness or cure them and are used to harm one’s enemies or win someone’s heart. Magical practices and the use of manuscripts with magical efficacy are one way (among others) of coping with the *daily* circumstances that life entails. They also provide a way of coping with

contained, and unique’. See Wimmer et al. 2015 on the role of *production, use, setting and patterns* with regard to manuscripts.

exceptional circumstances in some cases. And finally, an economic context for magical manuscripts would apply to cases where magic is run like a business, a ‘part-time’ or ‘full-time’ professional magician serving the needs of his clients by making personal amulets in return for a fee.

4. Production

Most non-manuscript amulets involve a certain amount of human craftsmanship, which makes them artefacts and contributes to their agency in one way or another. This human contribution can be an act as simple as drilling a hole in a gemstone for a ribbon to hang it round one’s neck. The production of amulets and the constitution of their magical agency can involve extensive procedures that are elaborate, including the step of consecrating the amulet, for instance. This is even more so for amulets that are manuscripts, i.e. artefacts that contain visual signs, be it images, symbols or writing. Sometimes, instructions for preparing amulets require the practice to take place at a specific location and specific time or demand dietary or sexual asceticism on the part of the magician-scribe. The production of amulets or the study of multiple-text manuscripts containing magical recipes, instructions and formulas can have the character of a ritual, and thus a ritualistic attitude or mindset⁸ on the scribe’s or user’s part may be regarded as a presupposition for the practice to be successful. Daoist *fu* amulets are an example of the highly ritualised preparation of magic manuscripts.⁹ After making preparatory offerings and meditating, the complex process involves reciting a magic formula (*zhou*), breathing techniques when writing the *fu*, gestures and specific techniques of writing. Only if these elements are performed well will the amulet be efficacious.¹⁰ Fig. 2a shows a scroll found in Dunhuang and labelled a ‘divine almanac for the protection of the house on a scroll’.¹¹ It contains a collection of talisman models to be copied on amulets. The purpose of the *fu* is given for each model, usually accompanied by some short instructions. The complex rituals that may be part of the preparation of such *fu* are not described in this manuscript, though.

⁸ Cf. Rebiger 2010, 35.

⁹ On *fu*, see Despeux 2000, Drexler 1994, Mollier 2003 and Bokenkamp 2008.

¹⁰ See Drexler 1994, 11–14.

¹¹ Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Pelliot chinois 3358. See Mollier 2003, 421–422 on this manuscript. I would also like to thank Thies Staack, Hamburg, for further information on the manuscript.

The process of writing on a writing surface is what distinguishes written amulets from non-textual amulets on the one hand and from spoken magic on the other. In the theory and practice of magic, two currents seem to co-exist and sometimes even compete with each other: some magical actions are primarily based on oral performances of spoken words. These words can be in plain human language, but they could just as well comprise utterances that are not intelligible to the practitioner, e.g. because they are esoteric – in an angelic language, say, or they constitute powerful names. This is the case with *nomina barbara* (‘foreign or strange names’) or *voces magicae* (‘magic words’) and well-known magic formulas like *abracadabra* in the Greco-Roman Mediterranean context, and with Indian mantras and the use of pseudo-Sanskrit formulas in Daoist incantations.¹² However, other magical practices rely on writing by hand in a wider sense. Agrippa of Nettesheim, who was mentioned previously, emphasised the importance of writing in magic practices:

And whatsoever is in the mind, in voice, in word, in oration, and in speech, the whole and all of this is in writing also. And as nothing which is conceived in the mind is not expressed by voice, so nothing which is expressed is not also written. And therefore Magicians command that in every work, there be imprecations and inscriptions made.¹³

The act of writing itself may be charged with inherent power. While spoken charms and spells are ephemeral, a written artefact not only conserves the verbal (and non-verbal) contents written on it, it even creates a state that virtually resembles the constant recitation or actualisation of its contents. This is also true of Tibetan prayer wheels, for instance, which exist in various forms and sizes, from moderately sized handheld wheels to larger stationary ones (see Fig. 3). Their cylindrical bodies contain handwritten or printed mantras and by spinning the cylinder a practitioner may collect Karma, i.e. gain merit for the afterlife.¹⁴ While a prayer wheel has to be spun actively for it to have any

¹² On *nomina barbara* and *voces magicae*, see Tardieu et al. 2013, Versnel 2001, Frankfurter 1994, 199–205, and the ‘Glossary of *Voces Magicae*’ compiled by Brashear 1995, 3576–6303 for the *Greek Magical Papyri*. See Burchett 2008 on mantras as ‘magical’ language. On pseudo-Sanskrit in Daoist ritual texts, see Drexler 1994, 13 and Capitanio 2011, 530–531.

¹³ Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa of Nettesheim, *De occulta philosophia*, first book, chapter 73, in Tyson 1993, 221; also see Lehrich 2003, 142.

¹⁴ On prayer wheels, see Brox 2018 and Hunter 1985.



Fig. 3a: Hamburg, Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures, inv. no. 1/2016; metal, brass, paper; height 34.5 cm, diameter 15.0 cm. A Tibetan prayer wheel. The brass cylinder and lid are decorated with embossed Tibetan characters of the popular Tibetan mantra *Oṃ maṇi padme hūṃ* and with Buddhist symbols of the Eight Auspicious Signs, *Ashtamangala*, comprising the endless knot and the lotus flower, for example.¹⁵ The cylinder and lid are tinted in silver and gold.

positive effect, one can profit from the efficacy of written amulets passively just by wearing them close to one's body, so the belief goes.

This aspect of agency in manuscripts – not only those that are said to be magical – is an inherent potency of the act of writing itself. The quote from Agrippa of Nettesheim describes speech and writing in magic as being equal in terms of their applicability and utility. However, a practitioner may even acknowledge that manuscripts are superior to spoken magic inasmuch as they feature this continuation



Fig. 3b: Hamburg, Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures, inv. no. 1/2016; detail. A bundle of rolled paper strips stored inside the prayer wheel shown in Fig. 3a. Each strip is approx. 72.5 cm long and 5.5 cm high and is imprinted with the same six blocks of text five lines long. Each line of the stamp contains the mantra *Oṃ maṇi padme hūṃ*.

of their magical efficacy or agency and inasmuch as they allow the use of visual signs other than conventional writing representing human language, but visual signs that cannot be expressed in speech. These are figurative and abstract drawings, for example, as well as diagrams or magical signs like *charaktères*.¹⁶

Writing or applying visual signs in magical practices does not only involve the production of manuscripts *stricto sensu*, i.e. inscribed objects that are portable; images and signs may also be inscribed on immobile writing surfaces or in the air or sand. A prominent example of this is a magical circle: in preparation for a magical ritual, a circular diagram is drawn on the ground, often containing magical symbols and efficacious names.¹⁷ The practitioner stands inside the circle during the ritual. Many European handbooks on magic contain depictions of such circles as instructive models or templates, which are then supposed to be reproduced during

¹⁵ I would like to thank Bidur Bhattarai, Hamburg, for providing me with this information.

¹⁶ For more on *charaktères*, see below.

¹⁷ On the theory and practice of magical circles, see Kieckhefer 1998, 170–185, for example.

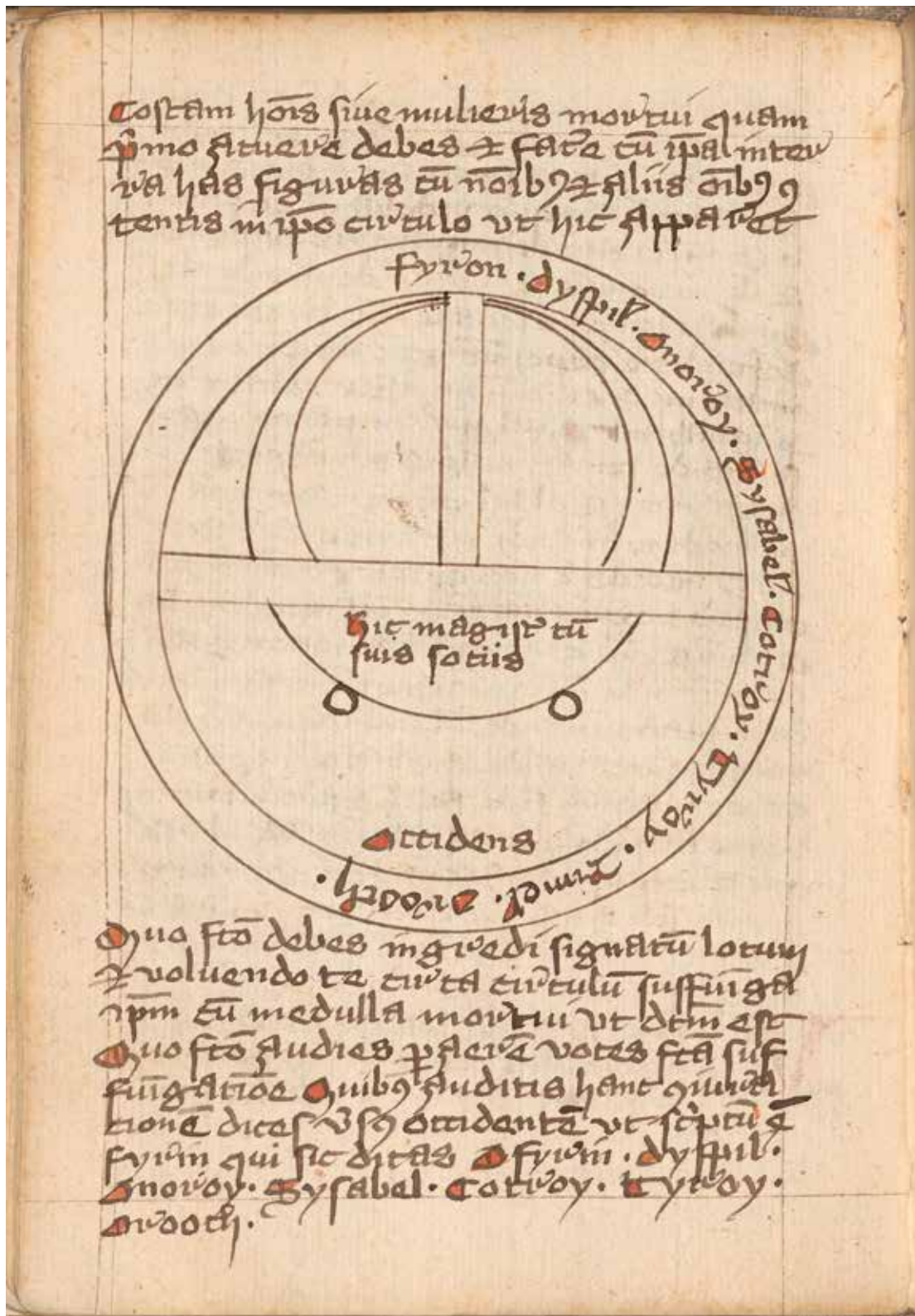


Fig. 4: Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 849, fol. 21^r; approx. 21.0 × 14.6 cm. Magic circle for obtaining a boat. Printed in its original size.



Fig. 5: Copenhagen, The David Collection, inv. no. 36/1995; engraved brass, Syria, c.1200, 11.1 cm in diameter. An Islamic medical bowl for protective and curative purposes. Printed in its original size.

the actual ritual.¹⁸ Fig. 4 provides an example of a circle from a fifteenth-century Latin manuscript on ‘ritual magic’, i.e. magic involving the summoning of demons and spirits of the dead.

The experiment aims to obtain a magical boat that will carry the magician wherever he wants.¹⁹ The instructions that accompany the depiction describe the beginning of the ritual in a rather brief way:

[...] and carry yourself [21^v] a rib of a dead man or woman, which you have to sharpen first. And make with it on the ground these figures with the names and everything else that is contained in this circle. And here it appears: [depiction of magical circle]. When this is done, you shall enter at the designated place and turn yourself around the circle and fumigate it with the marrow/heart of a dead person, as it was said. And that’s all. When this is done, you will hear voices

in the air and fumes will emerge. When you hear the voices, say this conjuration towards the west, as it is written [...]²⁰

The ritual then proceeds with several lengthy conjurations. What is interesting in our context is the writing instrument used to draw the circle: a human rib, which also has to be specially prepared by sharpening it. The place where the magician is meant to stand is shown in the centre in the model of the circle, in what looks like a crescent, where it says: *Hic magister cum suis sociis*, ‘Here [is] the master with his companions’. Kieckhefer has interpreted the crescent as a schematic representation of the boat.²¹ Furthermore, in the lower part of the circle, the word *occidens* (‘west’) indicates how the circle has to be orientated on the ground. Magical circles, drawn by hand before or during the ritual by the practitioners, serve as a means of protection for the

¹⁸ Also see Marco Heiles’ paper in this section concerning a German manuscript containing several circular diagrams.

¹⁹ Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 849, fols 21^r–23^r. For more details of this manuscript, including an edition of the Latin text, see Kieckhefer 1998.

²⁰ Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 849, fols 21^r–21^v; edition of the Latin text in Kieckhefer 1998, 216; translation by the author, who would like to thank Jochen Vennebusch, Hamburg, for his assistance with it.

²¹ Kieckhefer 1998, 216, footnote *c*. See Kohs 2017 for an example from a Hebrew manuscript that features magical circles with schematic depictions of a boat that is to be conjured up.



Fig. 6: Universitätsbibliothek Leipzig, Ms Vollers 1102, vol. 1. Detail from fol. 131r. Depiction of a medieval initiation rite for Jewish boys.



Fig. 7: Bibliothèque nationale de France, Latin 16744, fol. 81r. A historiated initial at the beginning of the Book of Ezekiel in a Latin Bible (second half of the 12th c.). The banderole or scroll contains the second half-line of Ezekiel 3:1: *comede volumē istud, et vadens loquere ad filios Israel* ('eat this scroll and go and speak to the House of Israel'). Printed in its original size.

a focal point, attracting and concentrating the supernatural forces and powers the magician wants to utilise.²²

5. Use

When it comes to the *use* of magical manuscripts, probably the most typical and prominent phenomenon is wearing amulets on the human body. Basically all the papers in this section attest these practices for their respective manuscripts.²³ This is also the most obvious manifestation of the pattern of contact magic, i.e. that the efficacy of the amuletic manuscript influences the bearer through direct contact. Magical recipes can also indicate specific parts of the body where an amulet would need to be placed. While tying an amulet to one's wrist or arm is a generic way of using it, placing such a manuscript on or near other parts of the body may be necessary in healing magic intended for specific organs. As a general pattern, a spatial proximity between the manuscripts and what they are supposed to influence is established by the users. One case where this pattern of proximity and contact is implemented to the utmost is magical practices that involve the ingestion or

magician and his companions, as they establish a barrier against harmful demonic forces. At the same time, they are

²² See Kieckhefer 1998, 175–176.

²³ See Berthold's paper on miniature Qur'ans and Kienitz' article on letters from Heaven in this volume, both of whom address this issue. The presumable use of manuscripts and prints described here in the papers by Farouk, Heiles and Schaefer also involves proximity to the human body.



Fig. 8: Cologne, Papyrus Collection, Inv. T. 35. Egypt, 6th–7th century CE, 10.0 × 7.7 cm. Lead *defixio* containing curses in Coptic. Printed in its original size.

incorporation of manuscripts, remains of a manuscript or a liquid in which writing has been dissolved or that had contact with writing. Practices of this kind can be found in many cultures.²⁴ In Tibet, for example, a custom called *za yig* ('edible letters') involves the ingestion of manuscripts containing magical formulas for various apotropaic and curative purposes.²⁵ In Daoist *fu* healing rituals, the patient may drink the ashes of a burnt talisman mixed with water.²⁶ In Fig. 2b, a model for making such a talisman is highlighted. The talisman contains the word *zi* ('child') nine times and is supposedly effective against childlessness, as indicated by the short text underneath: 'This *fu* is to be swallowed in case of barrenness'.

Phenomenologically related to the aforementioned practices is the drinking of water or other kinds of fluid that are believed to have absorbed the curative and apotropaic powers of texts and signs inscribed in vessels through contact with these inscriptions. Islamic medical bowls such

as the one shown in Fig. 5 are an example of this.²⁷ The text inscribed inside the bowl features excerpts from the Qur'an on childbirth and formulas to prevent colic. The depictions of a serpent, a scorpion and a dog on it were supposed to provide relief to a person who had been bitten by these animals. A feature of many Islamic magic artefacts, magical squares (at the top left and right of the picture) and the so-called 'seven seals' (on the left-hand side) are part of this bowl's content as well.²⁸

A rather different ritual that also involved the ingestion of handwriting is known from the medieval Jewry of Ashkenaz, i.e. the German lands.²⁹ Young Jewish boys who were beginning their Torah studies for the first time and simultaneously learning to read had to pass an initiation rite that was also supposed to improve their ability to remember the text of the Torah. The alphabet was written forwards and backwards on a writing slate and several biblical verses were added. The teacher recited the alphabet and the child repeated it after him. Honey was then put on the slate and the child had to lick it off. After that, the child was given a cake with honey and a hard-boiled egg that had already been peeled. Biblical verses had been written on the cake and the egg. One of the verses inscribed was Ezekiel 3:3: 'He said to me, "Mortal, feed your stomach and fill your belly with this scroll that I give you". I ate it, and it tasted sweet as honey to me'. A depiction of this ritual can be found in the famous *Leipzig Mahzor*, a synagogal prayer book for the High Feasts (see Fig. 6).³⁰

²⁷ Copenhagen, The David Collection, inv. no. 36/1995. For more details about this bowl, see <<https://www.davidmus.dk/islamic-art/medical-science/item/1612?culture=en-us>> Giunta 2018 has identified all in all 20 bowls of this type, which feature depictions of a serpent, a scorpion and a rabid dog, see Giunta 2018, 171–175 and 199–204. For a detailed description of two specimen from the Aron collection see Giunta 2018, 19–36. See also Langer 2013, 21–25 notes 8–11. An identical bowl is owned by the Museum für Islamische Kunst, Berlin, Inv. Nr. 1. 1992.7. On Islamic medical bowls in general, see Giunta 2018 and Langer 2013.

²⁸ See the papers by Cornelius Berthold and Karl R. Schaefer in this volume as well.

²⁹ The ritual is recorded in three different versions: in paragraph 296 of *Sefer ha-roqeah* ('Book of the Perfumer') by Eleazar ben Judah ben Kalonymus (c. 1176–1238), *editio princeps*, Fano, 1505; in *Sefer ha-asufot* ('Book of Collections') in the manuscript London, Jews College, 134 (Montefiore 115), fol. 67^r; and in the manuscript Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Hamburg, Cod. hebr. 17, fols 81^r–82^v. See Marcus 1996 on the ritual, esp. 25–31, and Kogman-Appel 2012, 98–108.

³⁰ Universitätsbibliothek Leipzig, Vollers 1102, vol. 1, fol. 131^r. For more on this illumination and its symbolism, see Kogman-Appel 2012, 98–108 and Marcus 1996, 81–82.

²⁴ For other examples than the ones that follow, see Kühne-Wespi 2019, Hindley 2019 and Wilkens 2019.

²⁵ See Garrett 2009.

²⁶ See Strickmann 2002, 123–193 and Despeux 2000, 535.



Fig. 9: Übersee-Museum Bremen, inv. no. A11130. A Batak apotropaic belt made from plates of bone. Top: front view; bottom: rear view.



Fig. 10: Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, B16023; ceramic, diameter 16.5 cm. An ancient magic bowl from Nippur, Iraq that was supposed to provide protection against various demons. Printed in its original size.

On the left of the image, we can see the teacher holding a child and a gilded writing slate. All the children shown are holding cakes and eggs. On the right, the conclusion of the ritual is depicted, when the boys are taken to a river that symbolises the Torah as a spring or stream that is constantly flowing. To refer to this ritual and its context as ‘magical’ would be misleading, of course. However, like other initiation rites,³¹ it is phenomenologically related to practices that one is

³¹ On Islamic initiation rites from West Africa that are comparable to the Jewish ritual described, see Mommersteeg 2012, 39–40 and Brigaglia 2018, 81; also cf. Wilkens 2019, 375.

likely to call magical. Finally, it should be mentioned that the verses from Ezekiel 3:1–3 have had their impact on Christian manuscript illumination, too (see Fig. 7 for an example).³²

6. Materiality

The most basic source of the magical agency of an inanimate material entity is its own materiality. In many cultures, gemstones are assigned various apotropaic or curative capacities, for example. Different metals are also believed to possess

³² On the metaphor of eating scripture in Ezekiel 3, see Marcus 1996, 53–59.



Fig. 11: Cambridge University Library, Or.1080.6.19, fol. 1b; paper, 18.4 × 8.2 cm. Late mediaeval Jewish amulet from the Cairo Genizah. Printed in its original size.

certain powers – iron, for instance, was often used to ward off demons.³³ The range of materials that are used for amuletic objects is practically infinite. Likewise, a variety of materials

³³ For more on the Islamic context, see Schienerl 1980, for example. As for the Jewish context, see Naveh and Shaked 1985, 121, note 23 and Trachtenberg 1939, 160, 174 and 313, note 14.

were used for magical manuscripts in different cultures, especially for amulets.³⁴ First and foremost, the standard – or at least commonest – writing material of a respective manuscript culture often seems to have been suitable for producing amulets as well. In these cases, the material would not have been intended to contribute to an amulet's efficacy, one may argue. However, there are ample examples where specific writing materials seem to have been chosen deliberately. One such case is curse tablets from the ancient Mediterranean region.³⁵ These were called *defixiones* in Latin or *katadesmoi* in Greek, both terms relating to the meaning of 'binding' or 'banning' and also designating the magical procedure as a whole. The tablets were typically made from thin sheets of lead (as shown in Fig. 8)³⁶. Among other places, they were deposited in cemeteries so that the ghosts of the dead would help the curses and bindings described in their texts to take effect. Sometimes, a tablet was additionally pierced with a needle.

The use of lead for these tablets has been explained by Fritz Graf, who refers to ancient sources:

Another characteristic feature is the reference to the special nature of lead: the metal is 'cold.' Moreover, it has other properties exploited by sorcerers; lead is considered 'without luster,' 'without value,' or 'useless,' in the same way that the words and acts of all those whose names will be engraved on the tablet will be useless.³⁷

However, Graf submits that a number of such binding spells have survived on papyrus, especially in Egypt's dry climate. It may be the case that perishable materials were used for *defixiones* in other regions of the Mediterranean as well.³⁸

We have already encountered the use of human bones as writing instruments in instructions for a magical ritual.

³⁴ For an exemplary case study, see Rebiger 2017 on writing materials in ancient and mediaeval Jewish magic.

³⁵ On the phenomenon of ancient curse tablets, see Gager 1992, Graf 1997, 118–174 and Kropp 2015. On recent research on curse tablets, see Riess 2018, 211–284, for example.

³⁶ Cologne, Papyrus Collection, Inv. T. 35 (previously Inv. T. 10). On this tablet and its text, see Kurth, Thissen and Weber 1980, 109–112 and cf. the reviews by Vittmann 1982, 126–127 and van der Vliet 1998, 119 on the shortcomings of this edition. See Meyer and Smith 1999, 202–203 for an English translation of the tablet's inscription, albeit one based on the aforementioned deficient edition.

³⁷ Graf 1997, 132–133; see 276–277, notes 48 and 49 for the references to the source texts.

³⁸ See Graf 1997, 133.

However, while instruction texts do not necessarily tell us anything about the actual practices, there are cases where human bones have been used as writing surfaces.³⁹ Animal bones were probably employed more often as material for apotropaic manuscripts or as divinatory devices. Fig. 9 shows an apotropaic belt once used by the Batak people of Sumatra. These inscribed bone artefacts have not been studied very much yet.⁴⁰

7. Content

Finally, the assumed efficacy of a magical manuscript such as a written amulet may be directly based on its content. The texts found in amulets may contain performative speech acts like ‘I adjure you, o demon, to ...’. In a similar way to an imperial edict, for example, such performative language creates a new state of reality by being written down or enunciated.⁴¹ Likewise, descriptions of the desired effects of an amulet or assurances of its efficacy in its text might be used to yield these very effects in the same way as self-fulfilling prophecies. The specific contribution that manuscripts make in terms of adjurations, spells, curses and petitions is their transformation to a state of permanence, as already mentioned. Amulets do not have to be read, but they are supposed to unfold their power by their mere existence.

Non-textual contents like images may also contribute to the magical efficacy of manuscripts, of course. The kinds of relations between texts and images can be diverse.⁴² Images may have instructive and illustrative functions, as above in the depiction of a magic circle in a handbook on ritual magic (Fig. 4). Images may also be attributed direct and inherent efficacy. This is the case if the magical circle just mentioned is drawn on the ground using a human rib in the ritual. Babylonian incantation bowls from late antiquity are an example of figurative depictions of demons that were presumed to be efficacious. These bowls were supposed to be placed in the corners of a house, buried under the

doorstep or deposited in cemeteries. In a number of the bowls, the texts for binding and repelling demons are accompanied by an image of a demon shackled by its hands or feet.⁴³ Fig. 10 shows one such example.

The rather brief text on the inside of the bowl is written in Jewish-Babylonian Aramaic script and is also in the same language. It contains a formula to exorcise or bind various demons: ‘exorcised and sealed are the Demon and the Devil and the Satan and the Curse-spirit and the evil Liliths which appear by night and appear by day’.⁴⁴ The name of the possessed patient is mentioned as well: Tardi, daughter of Oni. The figure in the centre of the bowl bears the typical features of such depictions: its feet are shackled and its hair is long and wild, almost appearing like horns – thus the figure can be identified as a female demon.⁴⁵ Such depictions may support or enforce the binding and exorcising that is mentioned by the texts. Perhaps the binding is even accomplished by the images themselves.

Magical signs, which are often named *charaktères*, are content that is neither conventional, readable writing nor figural images.⁴⁶ These signs are occasionally labelled ‘pseudo-script’. However, the practitioners tend to regard them as esoteric scripts whose ‘letters’ contain hidden meanings, or as representations of the powers of supernatural beings that can be utilised. Sometimes they are even addressed in a way that depicts *charaktères* as being virtually identical to these supernatural beings. This is expressed in a late mediaeval Jewish amulet from the Cairo Genizah, for example (see Fig. 11):

And you, praised symbols, angels and *qetirayyā*, (I) request of you, [save] Saṭda daughter of Sitt al-Ahl from all pain, affliction and suffe[ring in her bo]dy ... Amen, Amen, Amen Selah Hallelujah.⁴⁷

³⁹ A peculiar case of human skulls inscribed with magical texts in Aramaic is described in Levene 2006 and Rebiger 2017, 346–347.

⁴⁰ I would like to thank Roberta Zollo, Hamburg, for drawing my attention to these written artefacts. For the first comprehensive account on written artefacts of the Toba Batak in general, see van der Putten and Zollo 2020, on inscribed bones in particular 82–84 and passim. On magical and divinatory Batak manuscripts, see also Sibeth 1991, 100–114 and 10–19 and Sibeth 2000, 40–44.

⁴¹ On speech acts and the performativity of language, see Searle 1969 and Austin 1975, among others.

⁴² On combinations of images and texts in magic manuscripts, see Kiyarad, Theis and Willer (eds) 2018, Camille 1998 and Kohs 2017, among others.

⁴³ On incantation bowls in general, see Naveh and Shaked 1985 and 1993 and Shaked et al. 2013. Regarding their iconography and figurative depictions, see Viložny 2015a, 2015b and 2017 and Hunter 1998.

⁴⁴ See the edition and translation in Montgomery 1913, 201–202.

⁴⁵ See Viložny 2017, 324.

⁴⁶ *Charaktēr*, Greek for ‘(engraved) letter or sign’. There are different forms of magical signs or *charaktères*, the most prominent being what in German is termed *Brillenbuchstaben*. These consist of strokes, curves and small circles, reminiscent of spectacles (‘Brille’ in German). *Charaktères* and other magical signs have a long history going back to antiquity and can be found in various manuscript cultures; see Gordon 2011 and 2014, and Frankfurter 1994, 205–211.

⁴⁷ Cambridge University Library, Or. 1080.6.19, fol. 1b 16–20; translation in Naveh and Shaked 1993, 241. The cited text can be found in the last few lines of this amulet. The magical signs addressed here are found right beneath the middle of the amulet sheet and are characteristic *Brillenbuchstaben*.

The expression *qetirayyā* probably comes from the Greek word *charaktêres*, but experienced some misconceptions during its transmission.⁴⁸ On a few occasions, it is made explicit by the magical recipes that signs of this type do not have any representation in speech, i.e. they cannot be expressed in terms of human language. This is the case in this Greek magical papyrus, for instance:

Taking a golden or silver lamella, engrave with an adamant stone the unutterable characters given below. [...] And say, ‘I call on you the greatest god in the heaven, strong lord, mighty IAŌ OYŌ IŌ AIŌ OYŌ, who exist. Perfect for me, lord, the great, lord, unutterable magical sign, so that I may have it and remain free of danger and unconquered and undefeated, I, NN.’⁴⁹

These uses of magical signs or *charaktêres* raise the question of whether they can actually be regarded as proper signs. If they are not referential, but their ‘meaning’ is constituted by their inherent agency or efficacy, then they may not be signs at all in a general sense. Their lack of conventional referential meaning makes them resemble the aforementioned *voces magicae* in a way.⁵⁰

8. Patterns of magical agency?

Up to this point, we have seen several examples of features or aspects that contribute to the magical efficacy of manuscripts like textual amulets – at least in the view of the practitioners, who attribute a certain intrinsic power to these manuscripts. In order to frame their efficacy and the status such manuscripts have in their users’ eyes, the concept of *agency* may prove useful. The view that objects can be endowed with agency has become quite widespread in the last few decades. Seen from this perspective, manuscripts, like humans, could be regarded as agents with a certain degree of independence from other agents. They would then have a ‘socioculturally

mediated capacity to act’ by themselves.⁵¹ The amount of scholarly literature on the concept (or rather, concepts) of agency is vast. Instead of completely adopting a specific theoretical framework of agency, such as Bruno Latour’s Actor–Network Theory⁵² or the late Alfred Gell’s theory on ‘Art and Agency’,⁵³ this paper will highlight some general aspects of agency or ideas about it that could reasonably be applied to magical manuscripts.⁵⁴ Notably, neither Gell nor Latour seem to have taken books or written material into consideration, let alone manuscripts.⁵⁵

Agency can be theorised with different levels of complexity. Following Latour’s line of thinking, for instance, the simplest definition would be this one:

1. Agency is constituted by making a difference.⁵⁶

In this case, agency lies in the very presence of an agent. Active behaviour is not a necessary condition of an agent, let alone thoughtful behaviour. In an understanding of agency this general, inanimate things and artefacts like manuscripts or even abstract entities such as concepts, ideas or knowledge can all possess agency.⁵⁷

In a next step, agency could be defined as

2. the direct and active causal influence that an agent has on an object.

⁵¹ This is the basic definition of *agency* in Ahearn 2001, 112.

⁵² Latour 2005, for example.

⁵³ Gell 1998.

⁵⁴ For another illuminating account on the agency of magical artefacts see Gordon 2015.

⁵⁵ Cf. the paper by Boutcher 2013 on the application of Gell’s theory to ‘literary art’ and books.

⁵⁶ Cf. Latour 2005, 71: ‘By contrast, if we stick to our decision to start from the controversies about actors and agencies, then *any thing* that does modify a state of affairs by making a difference is an actor—or, if it has no figuration yet, an actant. Thus, the questions to ask about any agent are simply the following: Does it make a difference in the course of some other agent’s action or not? Is there some trial that allows someone to detect this difference?’

⁵⁷ As Latour has also stated explicitly (2008, 155), ‘As a more general descriptive rule, every time you want to know what a nonhuman does, simply imagine what other humans or other nonhumans would have to do were this character not present’. For the sake of terminological clarity, we should point out that *agent* thus denotes a semiotic role that can be attributed to entities like humans, things, concepts, etc. Strictly speaking, the term *object* should only be used in relation to agency to denote a role in which an entity is subject to an(other) agent’s agency, whereas *thing* (and *artefact*) could be used for inanimate material entities.

⁴⁸ See Naveh and Shaked 1993, 242 and Naveh and Shaked 1985, 216–217.

⁴⁹ Leiden, Rijksmuseum van Oudheden, J 395, pp. 23–25 (inv. nos. AMS 76 vel 12 and AMS 76 vel 13) = PGM XIII, 1001–1025; translation by Morton Smith in Betz 1996, 194. For an edition of this papyrus, also see Daniel 1991, XXIV–XXVII and 31–81.

⁵⁰ Cf. Gordon 2011, 27: ‘*Charaktêres* were thus pure graphemes, graphic signifiers which had to resemble orthodox script in order to convey the notion that they constituted a language, but at the same time had to be strange enough to resist recuperation. As such, at least in theory, they are actually the complement or converse of *voces magicae* [or *nomina barbara*], which are pure voice, phonetic signifiers that likewise resist semantic recuperation’.

Agency is thus basically linked to the concept of cause and effect, although it should not and cannot be reduced to this aspect alone. However, agents and the objects of their agency do not exist as isolated pairs, but are part of – and integrated in – larger ‘networks’ of agency, with a multitude of entities being actors or objects of agency. Seen this way, agency can be defined as

3. the relations between various agents (persons, things, etc.), courses of action and their effects.⁵⁸

It is not a single agent that is responsible for a certain effect, but essentially the interaction and collaboration of different agents whose agency is part of what Enfield and Kockelman 2017 have called *distributed agency*. An entity can be an agent and object at the same time within this fundamental distribution of agency. Besides that, an entity that is an object which is subject to another entity’s agency can also be an agent affecting the latter entity as its object. Such ‘reciprocity’ of agency is not an exception, but normal to a certain degree. The constitution of agency can often be understood as a semiotic process. To say that something or someone ‘has agency’ thus actually means that entities are attributed agency, and in particular flexibility and accountability, by other agents through instrumental and inferential practices.⁵⁹

Magical manuscripts with their efficacy seem to be a characteristic case for all three conceptual levels of agency, including distributed agency. With their specific materiality, content and visual design that are attributed magical efficacy, they actively contribute to cultural interpretations of reality. At the same time, this materiality and content is inevitably shaped by other actors or agents in practices of production and use in a setting that involves non-human ‘supernatural’ entities and powers such as angels, demons or gods besides involving human agents. The magical agency of manuscripts is thus constituted by the relationship, interaction and influence between the manuscript and all these other agents. Interestingly, all directions of influence or effect may be attested in magical manuscripts like amulets: manuscripts

that are magical agents may influence humans (e.g. by way of curses) as well as non-human entities (e.g. by means of petitions or adjurations). Humans can endow manuscripts with efficacy (e.g. by using specific production techniques), and supernatural beings can be the source of a manuscript’s efficacy (e.g. when their powerful names are written on an amulet).

Are manuscripts used in magical practices fundamentally different from other magical objects, then? Although many things can be attributed an agent status, the agency that can be connected with manuscripts may be of another kind – either in quality or degree – than the agency of non-manuscript objects, not least because of the additional semiotic layer provided in a manuscript by the visual signs it contains. This layer, regardless of whether it is constituted by writing, symbols or images, delimits the boundaries of the material artefact with the textual and performative dimensions of human language. However, it is not necessarily the case that magical manuscripts are always read or are even readable. The mere knowledge or assumption that what is contained in them will have a certain effect is enough to establish the status of an efficacious agent. In many magical manuscripts, the interplay of different agents in the web of agencies is tangible in a remarkable way, with the manuscripts oscillating between being objects of other agents’ agency (as artefacts) and being agents themselves, considered to eminently impact the fate of other agents.

The distributed agency connected with or present in magical manuscripts is shaped and defined by patterns – patterns like those directly connected to manuscripts in the sense of Wimmer et al. 2015 as well as more general communicative, cultural and cognitive patterns delimiting the phenomena of magical practices. In this paper, we have already seen various features and aspects connected with manuscripts that may contribute to their magical agency. Practically none of the magical manuscripts only include *one* feature or *all* of those that are possible; it is the combination of features that defines a pattern, and the kinds of patterns of magical agency are manifold. Consequently, there is no such thing as *the* magical manuscript per se, and a manuscript does not have to be defined as magical or not magical either. To avoid such a dichotomy, Otto and Stausberg, in applying the concept of family resemblance, have proposed not saying that a practice is ‘magic’, but speaking of different ‘patterns of magicity’ that can be observed in different practices.⁶⁰ Likewise, we may speak of

⁵⁸ Enfield 2017, 7.

⁵⁹ Cf. Kockelmann 2017b, 33–34. In the framework of Alfred Gell, for example, agents are attributed agency through the inferential process of *abduction*. In this case, Gell builds upon a concept first introduced by Charles Sanders Peirce and later expanded upon by Umberto Eco. Abduction comprises the detection of possible patterns by an agent who then acts upon the supposition that the pattern he supposes is true. See Gell 1998, 13–16.

⁶⁰ See Otto and Stausberg 2013, 10–12.

different patterns of magical agency that a manuscript can exhibit or fulfil. Patterns may have parallels or overlap in their respective features. However, a similarity in form as is partly the case for Babylonian incantation bowls and Islamic medical bowls would not necessarily indicate a similarity in terms of other features, e.g. in their use or contents. Although many different patterns of magical agency may be found in

different manuscript cultures, patterns of magical agency seem to exist for manuscripts that are more or less universal, such as wearing an amulet on one's body so it can have an apotropaic or curative effect. These universal patterns of magical manuscripts and their agencies will be explored in greater depth in future research.

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Fig. 12: Minneapolis, Minneapolis Institute of Art, The Christina N. and Swan J. Turnblad Memorial Fund, acc. no. 2014.44.1; ink on wood; height 67.3 cm, width 33.2 cm. This Nigerian *allo kafi gida* ('home protection board') contains protective texts and the stylised drawing of a camel. It was used to ward off evil and attract good luck. On this board see <<https://collections.artsmia.org/art/119282/writing-board-hausa>>, for more on such boards, see Lema 2019.

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Article

Paper Wheels with Strings Used for Divination from Sumatra and the Malay Peninsula

Farouk Yahya | London

Abstract

This paper will explore the concept of agency as it relates to a type of divinatory paper wheel found in Sumatra and the Malay peninsula. This technical device consists of a round piece of paper which is divided into a number of sectors, each of which contains a prediction with a piece of string attached to its edge. The user chooses a sector at random by placing or waving the folded paper on or over his head and pulling at one of the strings. The sector obtained will reveal the answer to an afore-formulated question. These manuscripts are therefore not objects containing texts to be read and internalised, but as divinatory tools that are activated by the human head, have the agency of influencing people to make decisions and carry out certain actions.

Introduction

The focus of this paper is on a type of divinatory technique found in Sumatra and the Malay peninsula. This technique uses a circular piece of paper which is pasted onto a piece of cloth. The paper is divided into a number of sectors, forming a wheel. Each sector contains a prognostication in Malay written in Jawi script, and has a piece of string attached to its edge. The user chooses a sector at random by placing or waving the folded paper on or over his head and then pulling at one of the strings. The sector chosen will then reveal the answer to the query.

This form of divination belongs to a range of practices usually referred to as sortilege or the casting of lots. Such techniques work on the principle of ‘the interpretation of results produced by chance’,¹ and include practices such as throwing dice, bones or sticks, or opening a book at random to find the prediction. Divinatory techniques of sortilege are usually referred to as *faal* in Malay and *phay* in Acehnese (both spelled in the Jawi alphabet as *f-a-’-l*), both terms derived from the Arabic word *fa’l* (‘omens’). As the paper

wheels contain texts that deliver the prognostication, they can be categorised belonging to a form of sortilege known as ‘bibliomancy’, i.e. divination using texts or books.

The procedure

So far, two types of divinatory paper wheels have been identified, hereafter referred to as Type A and Type B.

Type A

The first type (Type A) is more widespread and appears to be particularly popular in the region of Aceh in northern Sumatra, Indonesia, with extant copies dating to the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Ten examples are listed in Appendix 1 (Figs 1–5), five of which have been personally examined by the present author. However, there are further copies in other collections that have yet to be explored.

It seems that these paper wheels are referred to locally as *faal/phay*, as this is how they are described in the colophons of a numbers of manuscripts (PNRI ML 233, Blang Mangki, Aceh, Sumatra, by 1898; and the Syik Jah Cot Baroh manuscript, Aceh, nineteenth century). Similarly, in his 1938 book *Atjeh*, the Dutch journalist and former soldier H. C. Zentgraaf refers to them as *soerat phaj* (*surat phay*; *surat* means ‘thing written’) and *soerat koetika* (*surat kutika*; *kutika* being a general term for divinatory charts/calendars involving time).²

The paper wheels are around 31–34 cm in diameter and are typically pasted onto cloth. The cloth backing helps to preserve the paper, especially if it is often folded to be used (the act of folding can cause the paper to tear at the creases).³

² Zentgraaff 1938, 259, illustrated on p. 251; I am grateful to Mirjam Shatanawi for informing me of this publication. On the use of these terms in Aceh, see Snouck Hurgronje 1906, vol. 1, 298, n. 1 and 3, vol. 2, 41.

³ Many thanks to Francesca Leoni for this insight. In manuscripts which have been worm-eaten (such as TM-674-801a), the structure of the wheel is still intact.

¹ Savage-Smith 2004, xxxiii.



Fig. 1a: Front.



Fig. 1b: Back.



Fig. 1c: Folded together.

Fig. 1: A divinator paper wheel with strings attached (Type A), Aceh, Sumatra, by 1911. Leiden University Library, Ms. Cod. Or. 8505(1).



Fig. 2a: Front.



Fig. 2c: Folded together.

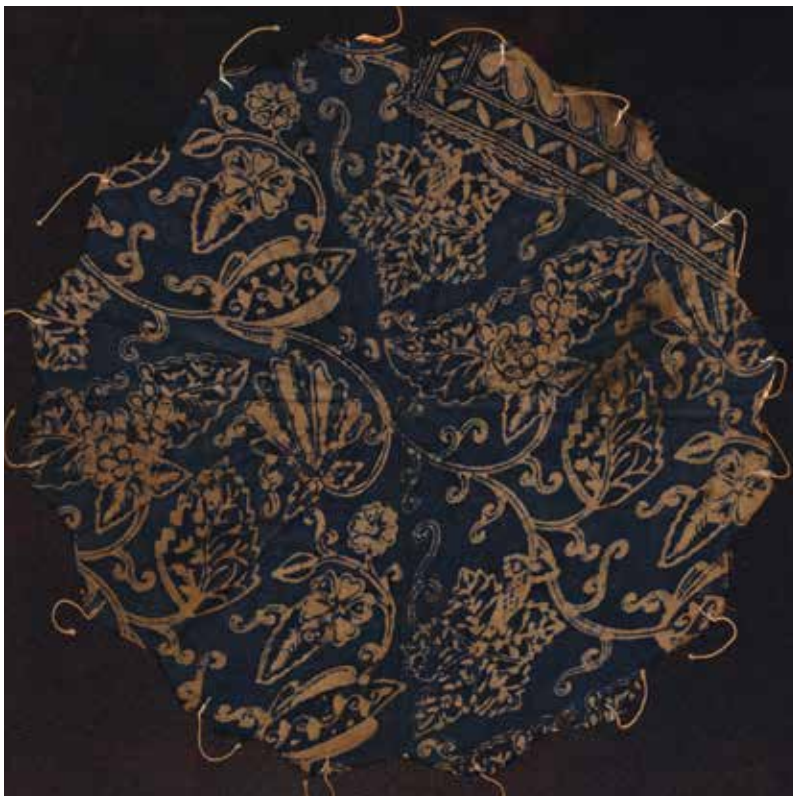


Fig. 2b: Back.

Fig. 2: A divinator paper wheel with strings attached (Type A), Aceh, Sumatra, nineteenth–early twentieth century. Leiden University Library, Ms. Cod. Or. 8506(a).

The five cloth examples that were examined are all made of cotton. Some are plain, such as LUL Cod. Or. 8505(1) (Aceh, by 1911) and TM-674-802 (Seulimeum, Aceh, by 1931), which are simply white (now yellowed; Figs 1b and 5b), while TM-674-801a (Aceh Utara, by 1912) is a plain, dark-red cloth (Fig. 3a). Others are decorated – LUL Cod. Or. 8506(a) (Aceh, nineteenth–early twentieth century) and TM-674-801b (Aceh Utara, by 1912) are backed by indigo-and-white batik textiles with vegetal and floral motifs (Figs 2b and 4b).⁴ The strings attached to the edges of the wheels are typically white, but the ones for LUL Cod. Or. 8505(1) are red.

Each wheel is divided into 16 sectors, and the edges of each sector are typically rounded or pointed, making the shape of the manuscript reminiscent of a flower or star when it is open.⁵ In order for it to be used, the manuscript is folded into a ‘fan’ shape (Figs 1c, 2c).⁶ The wheels themselves do not provide any instructions on how they should be employed, but Zentgraaf provides a brief explanation of how they work. According to him, the folded paper is placed on a person’s forehead, and the bearer then pulls a string at random to reveal the prediction:

Tenslotte is er de ‘soerat phaj’, of ‘soerat koetika’, die bij ondernemingen van beteekenis wordt geraadpleegd. Het is een cirkelvormig papier, in zestien sectoren verdeeld; uit elk hiervan steekt een draadje. Het gesloten papier wordt, biddend en sterk denkend aan het gemaakte plan, tegen het voorhoofd gehouden waarna men een willekeurig draadje tusschen de vingers neemt, het wichelpapier opent en leest wat geschreven staat op den sector waaraan de draad vast zit.

Op de 16 sectoren staan verschillende voorspellingen, goede en slechte [...].⁷

⁴ The batik of the Leiden manuscript is fairly well made (as can be seen by the skills employed in executing the complex patterns), although the colour range is limited. Many thanks to Aimee Payton for this observation.

⁵ A similar shape could be seen in an Arabic moral treatise, *La budd* (‘Thou shalt’), by Sayyid ‘Uthman ibn ‘Abd Allah ibn ‘Aqil ibn Yahya al-‘Alawi of Batavia, Java (1822–1914). The text is placed within a 14-sector diagram on a single sheet which is not folded; lithographed in Batavia, dated 20 Jumādā I 1319 AH / 4 September 1901 AD, Leiden University Library, Plano 53 F 1:3; see Vrolijk and Leeuwen 2014, 137. I am grateful to Michael Feener for this reference.

⁶ This is the case for LUL Cod. Or. 8505(1), LUL Cod. Or. 8506(a) and PNRI ML 233, for instance; see Kumar and McGlynn 1996, 89, fig. 105; also see Zentgraaff 1938, 251.

⁷ Zentgraaff 1938, 259.

Finally, there is the ‘soerat phaj’, or ‘soerat koetika’, which is consulted in matters of importance. It is a circular piece of paper divided into sixteen sectors; each of them has a thread. One folds the paper, prays and thinks hard about the plan, and holds the paper against the forehead, after which one takes a random thread between the fingers, opens the piece of paper and reads what is written on the threaded sector.

There are different predictions in the 16 sectors, [both] good and bad [...].⁸

Similarly, in 1882, the Dutch explorer A. L. van Hasselt described this form of divinatory technique being used in Lubuk Tarok, Central Sumatra. He referred to it as ‘koetikô’ and also provided an explanation of how it was used:

Te Loeboewq-Taròq zag ik er een in den vorm van een papieren cirkel, die in 16 sectoren gevouwen was en diende om na te gaan of de dag al dan niet gunstig was te achten. Daartoe staat op iederen sector geschreven of het een goede of slechte dag is, en hangt er aan den omtrek van elk deel een koordje. De onderzoeker vat met de rechterhand de toegevouwen koetikô bij de punt en zwaait haar driemaal boven het hoofd; daarna en terwijl de koetikô op dezelfde plaats blijft, zoekt zijn linkerhand een van de koordjes dat hem als uitgangspunt dient om voort te tellen tot zeven toe. Op den sector waaraan de zevende draad is vastgemaakt, staat te lezen of de dag al dan niet gunstig voor hem zal zijn.⁹

In Loeboewq-Taròq [Lubuk Tarok] I saw one in the shape of a [paper] circle, which was folded into 16 sectors and served to determine whether the day was or was not considered favourable. To this end, it is written on every sector whether it is a good or a bad day, and a short string is attached to the circumference of each part. The person applying it takes hold of the folded *koetiko* at the tip using his right hand and waves it over his head three times; and then, while the *koetiko* remains in the same place, he searches for one of the strings with his left hand to serve as a starting point to count to seven from there.

⁸ I am grateful to Mirjam Shatanawi for her help with this translation.

⁹ Hasselt 1882, 88.



Fig. 3a: Front.



Fig. 3b: Back.

Fig. 3: A divinator paper wheel with strings attached (Type A), Aceh Utara, Sumatra, by 1912. Amsterdam, Tropenmuseum, Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, TM-674-801a.

On the sector to which the seventh string is fixed, you can see whether or not the day will be favourable for him.¹⁰

Each of the 16 sectors of the paper wheel contains an augury. Each augury is associated with a prophet or angel of Islam, and the related predictions are good, bad or a mixture of the two (see Table 1). The predictions are usually constructed in the form of conditional statements, i.e. ‘If (*jika*) P, then Q’. The human activities mentioned in the predictions include travelling, sailing, studying and marriage as well as the prognosis of illness (see Appendix 2 for the full text and an English translation). A method to counteract the effects of bad predictions would sometimes be offered, too. These include giving alms to the poor, being patient and undergoing the *berlimau*¹¹ bathing ceremony.¹²

Table 1: List of angels and prophets with associated outcomes.

Prophet/angel	Outcome
Idrīs (Enoch)	Good
Nūḥ (Noah)	Good
Ibrāhīm (Abraham)	Good
Ismā‘īl (Ishmael)	Good
Ya‘qūb (Jacob)	Good
Yūsuf (Joseph)	Mixed
Mūsā (Moses)	Good
Khiḍr	Bad
Dāwūd (David)	Bad
Yaḥyā (John)	Good
‘Īsā (Jesus)	Mixed
Muḥammad	Good
Jibrā‘īl (Gabriel)	Good
Mikā‘īl (Michael)	Good
Isrāfīl	Good
‘Izrā‘īl (Azrael)	Bad

Thus under the augury relating to the Prophet Ismā‘īl, for instance, a person will be protected by God from all danger, obtain huge profits and be safe while sailing. In contrast, under the augury relating to the Prophet Dāwūd, sailing will

end in disaster, illnesses will take a while to recover from, and a marriage partner will turn out to be a bad choice. Some of the associations between these prophets and angels associated with good or bad fortune are obvious. For example, the augury relating to ‘Izrā‘īl, the angel of death, is understandably bad. However, the associations are not so clear with others. The fortune relating to Prophet Dāwūd is also very bad, for instance, and it is difficult to ascertain the reasons behind this.

There is some variation in the sequences of prophets and angels amongst the various wheels, which could be due to attempts to further ensure a random prediction (see Table 2). Nevertheless, there are also some similarities between the examples that have been examined. The sequence in LUL Cod. Or. 8506(a) (Aceh, nineteenth–early twentieth century) (Fig. 2a), for example, is exactly the same as in TM-674-801b (Aceh Utara, by 1912) (Fig. 4a), although the prognostic texts in the latter are shorter. In addition, PNRI ML 233 (Blang Mangki, Aceh, by 1898) has almost exactly the same sequence as TM-674-801a (Aceh Utara, by 1912), except the sections on ‘Īsā and Mūsā are transposed, and the prognostic texts in both copies are broadly in line with each other. The list in TM-674-802 (Seulimeum, by 1931) (Fig. 5a) is the same as in TM-674-801a (Fig. 3a), but in reverse order. All of these similarities suggest that the sequencing of the prophets/angels was not deemed to be a major concern in the randomisation of the procedure.

It is perhaps significant that the Dutch took three of the manuscripts as booty from leaders of the Acehnese religious resistance in the early twentieth century: LUL Cod. Or. 8505(1) (Aceh, by 1911) from Teungku di Mata Ie (d. 1917) and TM-674-801a and TM-674-801b from his son-in-law Teungku di Barat (d. 1912).¹³ Firstly, this demonstrates that the wheels were portable and carried around by their users. Secondly, the owners of these three manuscripts were prominent ulamas (religious scholars). As occult practices such as divination are sometimes perceived by some conservative Muslims as being prohibited (*haram*) in Islam, the use of divinatory paper wheels by these ulamas indicates that this practice was accepted by the religious milieu (at least in Aceh). Indeed, as will be discussed later, this divinatory device is perceived as ultimately relying on God’s wisdom and knowledge in helping people make decisions, and as such its use could be reconciled with the belief in God and His power.

¹⁰ I am grateful to Jan van der Putten for his help with this translation.

¹¹ A ritual bath of water mixed with lime, used to ‘wash off’ any bad luck.

¹² Cf. Farhad and Bağcı 2009, 31–34 for similar texts in the Persian *fālnāma* (‘books of omens’).

¹³ Both individuals are mentioned briefly in Veer 1969, 264. I am grateful to Michael Feener for this pointer.



Fig. 4a: Front.



Fig. 4b: Back.

Fig. 4: A divinator paper wheel with strings attached (Type A), Aceh Utara, Sumatra, by 1912. Amsterdam, Tropenmuseum, Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, TM-674-801b.

Type B

Currently, the second type of divinatory paper wheel (Type B) is only represented by a single manuscript from the sultanate of Terengganu on the east coast of Peninsular Malaysia and is dateable to the early twentieth century. It is now part of a collection housed by the National Library of Malaysia in Kuala Lumpur (PNM MS 4084) (see Appendix 1; Fig. 6) and is in the shape of a decagon or 10-sided polygon (the sides reflect the division of the wheel into 10 sectors) and has a diameter of 33 cm. The paper has been pasted onto a piece of yellow cloth of the same shape.

This version of the paper wheel works slightly differently to the previous one. On the cloth side there are instructions on how the wheel (referred to here as *faal*) is supposed to be used (Fig. 6c). It says:

Ini faal jikalau seorang berhajat apa-apa. Baca Fatihah sekali hadiah kepada Rasulullah shallā allāh ‘alaihi wa-sallam dan kita pohon kepada Allah subhānahu wa- ta‘ālā samada dikabulkan atau tidaknya. Lihat dalam faal ini. Peraturan melihat: ambil ini faal, letak atas kepala, jangan lihat. Pegang mana-mana satu talinya, nescaya engkau dapat apa-apa kenyataan.

This *fa’l* (augury) is for anyone who wishes for anything. Read the *Sūrat al-Fātiḥa* once as a gift to the Messenger of God (blessings and peace be upon him) and we ask God (the Glorified and Exalted) if it will be granted or otherwise. Look in this *fa’l*. The rules for looking: take this *fa’l*, put it on your head, don’t look [at it yet]. Hold any of the strings and you will surely get what you are seeking.

The paper is divided into 10 sectors, each of which is numbered between 1 and 10 and contains a prediction, and each prediction is linked to a Qur’anic verse. In almost every case, the Qur’anic verse chosen makes a reference to the number of the sector. Thus, in the ninth sector, for example, the Qur’anic verse refers to the nine miraculous signs of Moses for the Pharaoh (17:101). The text reads as follows:

Dan jika terpegang tempat yang kesembilan inilah dalilnya. Firman Allah Taala: ‘wa-la-qad ātainā Mūsā tis‘a āyātīn bayyinātīn’. Adalah pekerjaan yang engkau niatkan itu tiadalah kebajikan di dalamnya dan jahat perbuat

olehmu barang yang engkau kehendaki tetapi adalah perbuatan di dalamnya kemudian mendapat kebajikan dan berjual dan membeli kuranglah baik, insya-Allah Taala. Wallāhu a‘lam.

And if you hold the ninth section, this is the prediction. God the Exalted says: ‘To Moses We did give Nine Clear Signs’.¹⁴ The work that you wish to do does not have any goodness in it and will be bad if you carry it out. However, the actions will bring benefits later. And selling and buying will not be so good, God the Exalted willing. And God knows best.

The origin of the device

It is difficult to trace the origin, development and transmission of this form of divination. The hot and humid climate of the region, coupled with the perishable nature of the material, means that the majority of South East Asian manuscripts that existed prior to the late eighteenth century have not survived. The paper wheels themselves are undated, but most likely date to the nineteenth or early twentieth century, as is the case for most Malay manuscripts. In addition, the texts contained in the wheels do not have any information on the person(s) who devised this divinatory technique or the author of the texts.

Type A of the divinatory paper wheel has some very close parallels with another form of divinatory technique found in South East Asia, however. A number of Malay divination manuscripts describe the use of a wooden or paper dice inscribed with the Arabic letters *hā’* and *wāw* (a physical example of such an object is yet to be found, though). The dice is thrown four times to generate a combination of four letters. Each sequence of four letters is represented by an Islamic prophet or angel and predicts a good or bad outcome.¹⁵ The list of prophets/angels and their predictions in this dice divination technique is exactly the same as those found in Type A of the divinatory paper wheel, indicating a connection between the two. Indeed, the sequence of prophets/angels in TM-674-802 (Seulimeum, by 1931) is identical to that for dice divination listed in a manuscript from Pontianak, western Borneo, dated 1303 AH/1885–86 CE (PNM MS 3225, fols 9^v–11^v). The prognostic texts in both manuscripts are also very similar.

¹⁴ Translation of the Qur’an based on ‘Alī 1999, 270.

¹⁵ Farouk 2016, 140.

Table 2: The different sequences of prophets and angels in some of the wheels investigated (read in an anti-clockwise direction).

LUL Cod. Or. 8505(1)	LUL Cod. Or. 8506(a)	PNRI ML 233	TM-674-801a	TM-674-801b	TM-674-802
Muḥammad	Muḥammad	Muḥammad	Muḥammad	Muḥammad	Muḥammad
Ibrāhīm	Khiḍr	Jibrā'īl	Jibrā'īl	Khiḍr	Ya'qūb
Yūsuf	'Izrā'īl	Isrāfīl	Isrāfīl	'Izrā'īl	Idrīs
Mūsā	Jibrā'īl	Mikā'īl	Mikā'īl	Jibrā'īl	Nūḥ
Yaḥyā	Isrāfīl	'Izrā'īl	'Izrā'īl	Isrāfīl	Khiḍr
Dāwūd	Mikā'īl	'Īsā	Mūsā	Mikā'īl	Yaḥyā
Yūnus	'Īsā	Mūsā	'Īsā	'Īsā	Yūsuf
Idrīs	Dāwūd	Dāwūd	Dāwūd	Dāwūd	Ismā'īl
Ya'qūb	Ismā'īl	Ibrāhīm	Ibrāhīm	Ismā'īl	Ibrāhīm
Khiḍr	Ibrāhīm	Ismā'īl	Ismā'īl	Ibrāhīm	Dāwūd
Jibrā'īl	Yūsuf	Yūsuf	Yūsuf	Yūsuf	'Īsā
Isrāfīl	Mūsā	Yaḥyā	Yaḥyā	Mūsā	Mūsā
'Īsā	Yaḥyā	Khiḍr	Khiḍr	Yaḥyā	'Izrā'īl
Ismā'īl	Idrīs	Nūḥ	Nūḥ	Nūḥ	Mikā'īl
Mikā'īl	Nūḥ	Idrīs	Idrīs	Idrīs	Isrāfīl
'Izrā'īl	Ya'qūb	Ya'qūb	Ya'qūb	Ya'qūb	Jibrā'īl

This dice divination technique may have originated in Iran where there is a similar practice, but one that employs different Arabic letters on the dice (*alif, bā', jīm and dāl*) and which is attributed to the sixth Shi'i imam Ja'far al-Ṣādiq (702/3–765 CE). Here the dice is thrown three times and the resulting combinations are consulted in a manual, which provides the predictions.¹⁶ A dice of this type and its associated manual have been located in Cape Town, South Africa, where it once belonged to an eighteenth-century Islamic scholar named Imam Abdullah Kadi Abdus Salam, also known as Tuan Guru. He was originally a prince from Tidore, Indonesia before being exiled to the Cape in 1780. It is unclear whether he obtained the dice and manual before he arrived in South Africa, but if he did, then it provides physical evidence of the use of dice divination in South East Asia.¹⁷

Thus, although it seems likely that the practice of dice divination was transmitted to South East Asia from the Persian world (possibly via India), it is, however, difficult to say the same about the use of the divinatory paper wheel. No Persian examples of the wheels have been found so far (or, indeed, examples from any other parts of the Islamic world), which

implies that the use of such instruments for divination may have been a South East Asian innovation.

The significance of the human head

A particular characteristic of the procedure is placing the wheel above or on the user's head in order to find the prediction. It could even be argued that the divinatory procedure is activated by the human head. This suggests a particular connection between the wheel – in terms of it as a physical object and/or the text it contains – and the head. Indeed, the bibliomantic practice of placing texts or books on a person's head for divination is also found in other cultures, including those in the Western world. In the Christian tradition, religious texts were often used for divination, such as in the *Sortes Bibliae* ('Lots of the Bible') whereby a person would open the Bible at random and the first passage seen would provide the guidance they needed. In another practice, during the consecration of a bishop, the Book of Gospels is placed on the bishop's head, and the first verse in the open book is believed to provide an indication of how the bishop's episcopacy would be.¹⁸ Thus it is said that during the consecration of Thomas Becket, the twelfth-century Archbishop of Canterbury who was murdered while in office, the passage encountered during the ritual was

¹⁶ Donaldson 1938, 194.

¹⁷ Davids 1980, 18 with a photograph on p. 19. I am grateful to Michael Feener for this reference.

¹⁸ Brande 1842, 1132, s.v. 'Sortes Homericae, Virgilianae, Sanctorum, &c.'; Baring-Gould 1896, 258–259; Elukin 1993, 138–139, 152–153.



Fig. 5a: Front.



Fig. 5b: Back.

Fig. 5: A divinatory paper wheel with strings attached (Type A), Seulimeum, Aceh, Sumatra, by 1931. Amsterdam, Tropenmuseum, Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, TM-674-802.

from St Matthew in which Christ cursed a fig tree and caused it to wither.¹⁹ Elsewhere, the Psalter is used for divination in Russia: the bibliomantic procedure is preceded by rotating the book three times above a person's head.²⁰

One issue that needs to be addressed is the significance of the human head in these rituals. In the bishop consecration ceremony, the bibliomantic element appears to have been a later addition to the practice of placing the Book of Gospels on the head (or the neck or shoulders) of the bishop. This ritual – known as *impositio evangeliorum* – was to impress the responsibilities of his office upon the bishop and the audience, and the use of the holy text to gauge the nature of his term was a natural extension of this practice.²¹

With regard to the divinatory paper wheel, however, the reason for placing it on the user's head may have been a practical one – so that the person concerned cannot see which string he is pulling. Nevertheless, there might be a deeper meaning behind this act. In Islamic societies, the head

is the highest-ranking part of the human body and represents high status.²² Thus the act of prostration signifies submission to a higher authority. Part of the prayer ritual involves prostration to God with the forehead on the ground. Wearing things on the head could likewise be a form of prostration and humility. In Turkey, for example, the wearing of caps with the image of the Prophet Muhammad's sandal print is considered a form of devotion to him.²³ However, whether placing the divinatory paper wheel on or above a person's head represents a form of 'prostration' to God's power in revealing the Unseen requires further investigation.

The significance of the head would also have resonated with local ancient South East Asian beliefs, as exemplified by the practice of headhunting in various parts of the region such as Sumatra, Borneo, the Philippines and Myanmar (Burma). There have been many interpretations about the purposes of these headhunting expeditions, such as maintaining a cosmological ideology, enhancing fertility and for territorial expansion.²⁴ One reason the head was chosen as opposed to other parts of the human body (at least in Borneo) was because it contains the face, which represents 'the individual as a social person'.²⁵ In Malay society, the sanctity of the head reverberates through many aspects of culture and customs; indeed, it is a major taboo for a person to touch another person's head.²⁶ Similarly, the Portuguese traveller Duarte Barbosa (d. 1521) reported that the Javanese 'wear nothing on their heads, saying that nothing ought to be over the head; the greatest insult among them is to put the hand on any man's head'.²⁷ Again, however, connections between notions of the sanctity and symbolism of the human head among South East Asian societies with the divinatory paper wheel still need further research.

Paper wheels as objects with agency

Another issue to be considered is the power of the paper wheel and its role as an agent in people's lives. Although paper in itself does not have any magical properties in particular, the

¹⁹ Guy 2012, 147.

²⁰ Ryan 1997, 50.

²¹ Elukin 1993, 138–139.

²² Khuri 2001, 17–18.

²³ Christiane Gruber, personal communication in 2016. On the Prophet's sandalprint, see Gruber 2009.

²⁴ For a general overview of headhunting, see Hoskins 1996; Russell n.d.

²⁵ McKinley 1976, 118.

²⁶ Skeat 1900, 43–45.

²⁷ Barbosa 2002, vol. 2, 192–193.



Fig. 6a: Front.



Fig. 6b: Back.

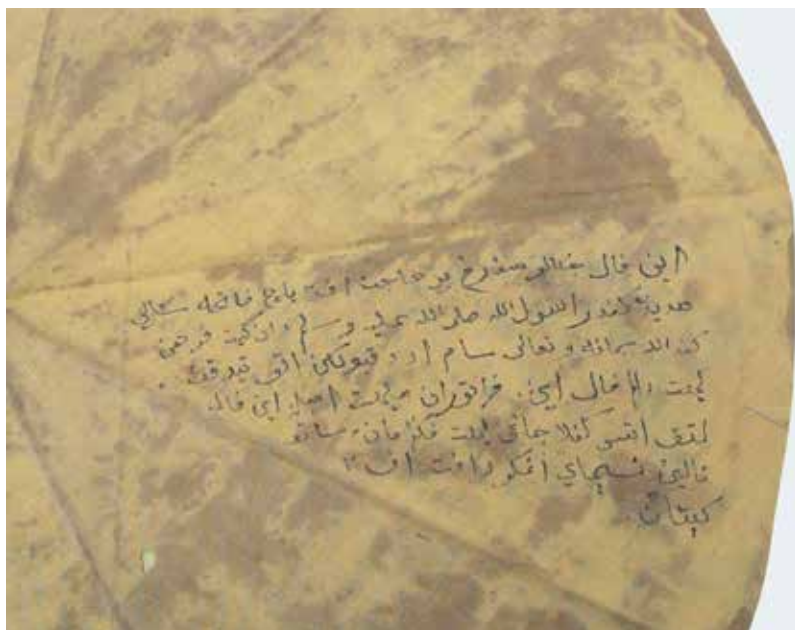


Fig. 6c: Instructions.

Fig. 6: A divinatory paper wheel with strings attached (Type B), Terengganu, Peninsular Malaysia, early twentieth century. Kuala Lumpur, Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia, MS 4084.

texts written on it can transform the material into an object of power, as in the case of paper talismans (this is in contrast to objects such as gemstones, which can have their own power, and any texts inscribed on them serve to enhance this power). By giving instructions and generating various predictions, the paper wheels have the ‘power’ to cause a person to carry out (or not carry out) certain actions and make decisions, and therefore influence people’s behaviour. In addition, it could be said that this agency is activated by the human head. We can perhaps compare these paper wheels to similar objects found elsewhere, even in literature. In the Harry Potter novels, for instance, new students who arrive at Hogwarts School have to undergo a ceremony in which a Sorting Hat is placed on the student’s head. The Hat then delves into the student’s soul and mind and pronounces which house the student should reside in.²⁸ Here it would seem that it is the Hat that is making the decisions, but in the case of the divinatory paper wheels, the situation is not as clear-cut. As they contain texts containing names of holy figures and sacred verses, we may ask whether they are indeed the ones who are making pronouncements for human beings to follow, or are merely instruments to communicate the pronouncements of other entities.

²⁸ Rowling 1998, 85–91.

In order to answer this, we may apply Alfred Gell’s theoretical framework espoused in his book *Art and Agency* as well as Warren Boutcher’s application of Gell’s theory to literary artefacts, and apply this to the use of divinatory paper wheels.²⁹ Within Gell’s framework, the paper wheel is considered an ‘index’, which is created by the ‘artist’ (i.e. the person who made copies of it). The user of the wheel (the ‘recipient’) is causally affected by it (as a ‘patient’) when he/she carries out the instructions given in the manuscript on how to perform the technique (such as that given in PNM MS 4084), and later when he/she decides to carry out or not to carry out actions based on the prediction given by the wheel. However, the wheel itself

is only a ‘secondary agent’, with the agency residing with the anonymous author of the text (who is another ‘artist’) and God (who is the ‘prototype’).

The agency of the author affects the user of the wheel through his words. In their study of pictorial auguries in the Persian and Ottoman worlds, Massumeh Farhad and Serpil Bağcı have observed that techniques in which the predictions are delivered orally to the client by a diviner allow the diviner to provide his own interpretations and embellishments, and that these predictions are personalised for the client. In contrast, written auguries or *fālnāmas* (‘books of omens’) do not require an intermediary, and the texts are ‘fixed’.³⁰ This highlights an important difference between divinatory techniques that are delivered orally and in written form. In the former, the agency of the original composer/author of the technique is supplemented by the diviner’s (who adds his own interpretations and embellishments) and affects only one person, i.e. the client for whom it has been personalised. In the latter, the written form, (including devices such as the divinatory paper wheels), the agency of the original composer/author affects the user directly and can reach multiple people in different physical locations and periods.

God’s agency is manifest in the random selection of the string as well as the predictions delivered by the wheel. The latter is particularly pronounced in Type B of the paper wheel,

²⁹ See Gell 1998 and Boutcher 2013. For a similar discussion on the application of Gell’s theory to another Malay divinatory technique known as the *Faal Qur’an*, see Farouk 2017.

³⁰ Farhad and Bağcı 2009, 28, 34.

which employs Qur'anic verses. As the Qur'an is believed to be the Word of God in Islam, the predictions delivered by this type of wheel can be said to be divine knowledge from God. As for Type A of the paper wheel and the related method of dice divination, the auguries are linked to Islamic prophets and angels. In the Islamic world, these figures are often invoked in talismans and divinatory techniques.³¹ They act as God's intercessors and help to disclose God's Will, which aids people in making the right decisions. Their role in delivering messages from God can be seen clearly with regard to the angel Gabriel, who delivered God's Revelations to the Prophet Muhammad. Thus the predictions provided by this type of paper wheel can also be said to ultimately emanate from God.

Such divine assurances would have certainly provided comfort to those using the wheels, or indeed any other kind of lot-casting technique. In his study of biblical bibliomancy or *sortes* in medieval Europe, Jonathan Elukin noted that the use of sacred books would have provided divine approval or legitimacy in matters such as decision-making, resolving disputes, providing an excuse for not undertaking a particular action (such as avoiding an unwanted marriage proposal), endorsing the act of warfare and bestowing courage upon fighters to seek martyrdom³² – all of which could equally be applied to the use of similar procedures in South East Asia. Indeed, the divine sanction of warfare and martyrdom is particularly apt in the case of divinatory paper wheels – as mentioned earlier, three of the examples investigated were associated with Acehese religious leaders involved in resistance fighting against the Dutch in the early twentieth century.

Elukin, however, points out that, although *sortes* can relieve the burden of making a difficult decision or gaining group consensus by deferring to God, often a decision or consensus has already been made prior to carrying out the divinatory procedure, so the result of the *sortes* is essentially to provide sacred approval of the desired outcome.³³ We may assume that this was also true in South East Asia, at least in some cases, although historical and anthropological reports on the use of bibliomancy and other lot-casting procedures have yet to be analysed in detail. As such, it could be argued that, although the principles underlying these techniques

rely on God's agency in providing a divine resolution, there is also a level of agency on the part of the users that must also be considered, which is manifest in the innate personal struggles or group negotiations that took place prior to the divination being carried out. Alternatively, this agency could be more direct – as Elukin points out, these divinatory procedures could be manipulated to ensure a desired outcome or used to intimidate others or impose a particular decision on them.³⁴

While the divinatory procedure defers to God's power, there are also some indications that the paper wheels themselves were regarded as sacred objects. As mentioned earlier, in South East Asian societies, the sanctity of the human head means that it is not permissible to put one's hand or other objects on a person's head. Yet the fact that the divinatory paper wheels are placed on or above the head for divination indicates that they are revered enough to circumvent this taboo.

Furthermore, the cloth backing of the paper may also indicate the value of the wheels. An obvious example of how the choice of cloth can demonstrate the sacred nature of the object can be seen in PNM MS 4084. This manuscript is said to have been obtained from a member of the royal family of Terengganu, and evidence of its royal provenance can be seen in the fact that it has been pasted onto yellow cloth (Fig. 6b). In Malay society, yellow is a colour that is strictly reserved for royalty, and yellow cloth is often used to wrap or cover royal regalia.³⁵ Items of royal regalia are thought to have great power in themselves. For instance, it is believed that anyone who touches royal musical ensembles (known as *nobat*) will be afflicted by illness or misfortune. The colour yellow also has further associations with the supernatural world – yellow cloth is often used to wrap talismans, for instance, and shrines of saints who are believed to have great spiritual and supernatural power are also decorated in yellow.³⁶

The choice of white cloth for LUL Cod. Or. 8505(1) (Fig. 1b) and TM-674-802 (Fig. 5b) could have been for economic reasons, as white cloth was possibly cheaper and more easily attainable. Yet white also has sacred, mystical and spiritual associations in South East Asia. In Malay society, white 'has been adopted by Malay medicine-men

³¹ Canaan 2004, 137–139, 143–145.

³² Elukin 1993, 142–153.

³³ Elukin 1993, 143–144.

³⁴ Elukin 1993, 144, 152–153.

³⁵ Skeat 1900, 33–34, 51.

³⁶ For instance see <<http://belogmystery.blogspot.co.uk/2013/02/sejarah-kehidupan-tokku-pulau-manis.html>> (last accessed 30 October 2022).

as the colour most likely to conciliate the spirits and demons with whom they have to deal',³⁷ which might explain the use of white cloth to back divinatory paper wheels.

Conclusion

Malay divinatory paper wheels provide important insights into South East Asian manuscript and divinatory traditions. Their unusual format attests to the diversity of manuscripts in the region, while their function provides evidence for the use of divination in practice. Additionally, the paper wheels offer a valuable opportunity to understand the issues relating to manuscripts and agency, such as how they act as agents, the significance of actions that need to be carried out for them to be activated (in this case by placing them on the human head), and the exact identity of the agent, i.e. whether it is the manuscripts, the texts or the divine entities that are bestowing the predictions. This paper has attempted to address some of these issues, but further examples of such wheels could help to shed more light on their usage and significance in South East Asia.

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³⁷ Skeat 1900, 51.

APPENDIX 1: A PRELIMINARY LIST OF KNOWN MANUSCRIPTS

This is a list of selected examples of divinatory paper wheels that are known to the author (both Type A and Type B). The descriptions include the place and date of production, the type of material used, measurements and bibliographical references. Those wheels that are only documented from photographs or publications and that I have not inspected personally are labelled as ‘not seen’.

Abbreviations of institutions

LUL	Leiden University Library
PNM	Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur
PNRI	Perpustakaan Nasional Republik Indonesia, Jakarta
TM	Tropenmuseum, Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, Amsterdam

Type A:

	Manuscript	Place and Date of Production	Type of Material and Measurements	Bibliographical References
1	LUL Cod. Or. 8505(1) (Fig. 1)	Aceh, Sumatra, by 1911.	Circular sheet of lined paper, divided into 16 sections with pointed ends to which red strings have been attached, pasted onto plain white cotton cloth. Diameter: 34 cm. One of a group of manuscripts taken as booty ‘in the hiding-place of Teungku di Mata Ie, along the river Krueng Ramaihsan (near Lhök Sukōn), by a patrol under Lieut. Le Maire in August 1911; donated by H. T. Damsté in 1954’. ³⁸	Iskandar 1999, 552–553.
2	LUL Cod. Or. 8506(a) (Fig. 2)	Aceh, Sumatra, nineteenth–early twentieth century.	Circular sheet of lined paper, divided into 16 sections with pointed ends to which strings have been attached, pasted onto indigo batik cotton cloth with white (now yellowed) vegetal and floral motifs. Diameter: 34 cm. Donated by H. T. Damsté in 1954.	Iskandar 1999, 554.

³⁸ Iskandar 1999, 552–553.

	Manuscript	Place and Date of Production	Type of Material and Measurements	Bibliographical References
3	PNRI ML 233 [not seen]	Gampong Blang Mangki, Aceh, Sumatra, by 1898.	Circular sheet of paper, divided into 16 sections to which strings have been attached. Diameter: 34 cm. There is a colophon on the back which says that it belonged to Teungku Nyak Ra'i from Gampong Blang Mangki. Found by Lt. Caval. Rauh in Cot Plieng, Aceh, on 22 July 1898.	Bataviaasch Genootschap 1900, 41; Ronkel 1909, 448, no. DCCLXXXVIII; Kumar and McGlynn 1996, 89, fig. 105; ³⁹ Behrend 1998, 22, fig. 3, 285; Farouk 2016, 146, fig. 148.
4	TM-674-801a (Fig. 3)	Aceh Utara, Sumatra, by 1912.	Circular sheet of paper, divided into 16 sections with rounded ends to which strings have been attached, pasted onto plain dark red cotton cloth. Diameter: 31 cm. One of a group of objects seized by a Dutch army officer, Henri Behrens, from Teungku di Barat, a leader of the Acehnese religious resistance, when he was killed by the Dutch in 1912; purchased from Friedrich Stammeshaus in 1931. ⁴⁰	Shatanawi 2014, 42, fig. 25.
5	TM-674-801b (Fig. 4)	Aceh Utara, Sumatra, by 1912.	Circular sheet of paper, divided into 16 sections with rounded ends to which strings have been attached, pasted onto white (now yellowed) batik cotton cloth with indigo vegetal motifs. Diameter: 31 cm. One of a group of objects seized by a Dutch army officer, Henri Behrens, from Teungku di Barat, a leader of the Acehnese religious resistance, when he was killed by the Dutch in 1912; purchased from Friedrich Stammeshaus in 1931.	Shatanawi 2014, 42, fig. 25.
6	TM-674-802 (Fig. 5)	Seulimeum, Aceh, Sumatra, by 1931.	Circular sheet of paper, divided into 16 sections with pointed ends to which strings have been attached, pasted onto plain white (now yellowed) cotton cloth. Diameter: 32 cm. Purchased from Friedrich Stammeshaus in 1931.	Shatanawi 2014, 42, fig. 25.

³⁹ The manuscript is erroneously described as being a letter here.

⁴⁰ I am grateful to Mirjam Shatanawi for the information on the Tropenmuseum objects.

	Manuscript	Place and Date of Production	Type of Material and Measurements	Bibliographical References
7	Private collection belonging to Syik Jah Cot Baroh of Pidie, Aceh, Sumatra ⁴¹ [not seen]	Aceh, Sumatra, nineteenth century.	Circular sheet of paper, divided into 16 sections to which strings have been attached. There is a colophon on the reverse side, which says that it was copied and owned by Nyak Umar Cut Amut ibn Muhammad ibn Yakub.	It has been digitised by the British Library Endangered Archives Programme under the number EAP229/4/1. < https://eap.bl.uk/archive-file/EAP229-4-1 > (last accessed on 30 October 2022)
8	Private collection of Teungku Ainal Mardhiah of Aceh, Sumatra [not seen] ⁴²	Aceh, Sumatra, nineteenth century.	Circular sheet of paper [incomplete], divided into 16 sections (one of which is missing) to which strings have been attached.	It has been digitised by the British Library Endangered Archives Programme under the number EAP329/10/11 < https://eap.bl.uk/archive-file/EAP329-10-11 > (last accessed on 30 October 2022)
9	Private collection [not seen] ⁴³	Pidie, Aceh, Sumatra, nineteenth century.	Circular sheet of paper [incomplete], divided into 16 sections (only six sections of which are left). In each sector the paper extends into a rather large protrusion to which the string might have been attached previously.	
10	Present location unknown [not seen] ⁴⁴	Pidie, Aceh, Sumatra, nineteenth century.	Circular sheet of paper, divided into 16 sections to which strings have been attached.	Zentgraaff 1938, 251, 259–260.

⁴¹ Many thanks to Annabel Gallop for informing me about this manuscript.

⁴² Many thanks to Annabel Gallop for informing me about this manuscript.

⁴³ Many thanks to Hermansyah for informing me about this manuscript.

⁴⁴ Many thanks to Mirjam Shatanawi for informing me about this manuscript.

Type B:

1	PNM MS 4084 (Fig. 6)	Terengganu, Malaysia, early twentieth century.	Circular sheet of paper, divided into 10 sections to which strings have been attached, pasted onto plain yellow cotton cloth. Diameter: 33 cm. Said to have been owned by a member of the Terengganu royal family. ⁴⁵ No colophon, but according to Muhammad Pauzi Abdul Latif, it was copied by Haji Abdul Rahman ibn Encik Long. ⁴⁶	Muhammad Pauzi 2007, 5, no. i; Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia 2011, 111, also illustrated on the front cover; Farouk 2016, 146, fig. 147, 290, cat. 83.
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APPENDIX 2: TRANSLITERATION AND TRANSLATION OF THE MANUSCRIPT TM-674-802 (TYPE A)

This is a transliteration and translation of the text of the divinatory paper wheel (Type A) taken from the manuscript TM-674-802 (Seulimeum, by 1931). Square brackets [] indicate additions or explanations that I have added, based upon texts in other manuscripts, including the one on dice divination in PNM MS 3225.⁴⁷

Transliteration

Bab ini faal Nabi Muhammad shallā Allāh ‘alaihi wa-sallam. Maka faal ini amat baik, [da]n segala pekerjaannya beroleh sempurna, lagi ditolongkan Allah Taala pada segala mara dan bahaya. Lagi beroleh berkat berlabah, barang ke mana ia perginya selamat, lagi diperoleh kebajikan dianugerah akan Allah Taala. Lagi rahmat pun banyak bertambah-tambah daripada Allah Taala beroleh sempurnanya. Wallāhu a‘lam, āmīn.

Bab faal ini Nabi Yaakub ‘alaihi al-salām. Faal ini maha baik pada segala pekerjaan[nya]. Jika pergi-pergian selamat, dan jika pergi beroleh sukacita, dan pada rezeki pun beroleh sentiasa bertambah-tambah dianugerahkan Allah Taala, dan barang ke ma[na] ia pergi selamat. Jika sakit segera sembuh dan usyianya pun dilanjutkan umurnya oleh Allah Taala. Jika berlayar berolehlah yang besarnya. Wallāhu a‘lam, āmīn.

Bab ini faal Nabi Idris ‘alaihi al-salām. Faal ini maha baik.

⁴⁵ Muhammad Pauzi Abdul Latif 2007, 5.

⁴⁶ Muhammad Pauzi Abdul Latif, personal communication on 7 July 2012.

⁴⁷ Pontianak 1885–1886.

Diperolehnya dapat kesukaannya dunia dan akhirat. Dan orang pun kasih kepadanya. Dan barang diperbuatnya segera menjadi dan luput daripada mara dan bahaya. Akan tetapi adalah bercintaannya daripada bersahabat atau bencana orang; tiadalah mengapa. Dan arta pun ba[nyak] diperolehnya dan dapat sentiasa kesukaannya. Wallāhu a‘lam, āmīn.

Bab ini faal Nabi Nuh ‘alaihi al-salām. Faal ini maha baik, lagi dipertemukan oleh Allah Taala dengan kekasihnya. Dan barang dicitanya diperolehnya. Jika menuntut ilmu pun dianugerahkan Allah Taala dengan dia. Jika sakit segera sembuh. Dan kasih orang dekat dia. Lagi arta pun banyak diperolehnya. Dan [ham]pir kepadanya raja-raja dan segeralah beroleh besar[?] martabat dia. Wallāhu a‘lam, āmīn.

Bab ini faal Nabi Khidr ‘alaihi al-salām. Faal ini maha jahat. Maka barang pekerjaan diperbuat tiada menjadi lagi dukacita. Dan bencana [i.e. benci] orang pun banyak dan o[rang] dengki pun banyak dan fitnah pun banyak. Dan jika berlayar binasa. Maka hendaklah mandi berlimau dan memberi sedekah akan fakir miskin kadar tujuh ha[ri] supaya lepaslah ia daripada bencana itu p[?]a-y-b-2. Wallāhu a‘lam, āmīn.

Bab ini faal Nabi Yahya ‘alaihi al-salām. Faal ini maha baik lagi beroleh kesukaan pun baik kepadanya dan rezekinya dimudahkan Allah Taala. Dan rahsia pun dibukakan Allah akan baginya. Dan jika berlayar segera datang kepadanya. Dan jika sakit segera sembuh. Dan [jika] ada bencana pun tiada mengapa. Akan menambah berkat akan kepadanya pun selamat, insya-Allah Taala. Wallāhu a‘lam, āmīn.

[Bab] ini Nabi Yusuf ‘alaihi al-salām. Maka faal ini seperti pahit rupanya, kepada kamu sekalian lagi bercinta-cintaannya. Maka akan tetapi [le]kas kamu dapat yang sukacita dan yang sentiasa.⁴⁸ Dan barang pekerjaan menjadi dan sampai maksudnya. Dan jika [ber]layar selamat, insya-Allah Taala. Wallāhu a‘lam, āmīn.

Bab ini faal Nabi Ismail ‘alaihi al-salām. Faal ini maha baik diperolehnya lagi dia dipelihara Allah daripada segala mara dan bahaya. Dan beroleh laba besar. Dapatnya melihat segala⁴⁹ yang baik. Dan jika berlayar selamat, akan tetapi adalah sedikit yang kesakitan, akan tetapi tiada mengapa nescaya dikembalikan Allah Taala jua dia selamat dan dapat sejahtera yang sempurnanya, insya-Allah Taala. Wallāhu a‘lam, āmīn.

Bab ini faal Nabi Ibrahim ‘alaihi al-salām. Faal ini amat baik lagi diperoleh kebajikan dan dipelihara Allah Taala daripada sekalian [ba]la. Dapat melihat kekasihnya yang baik. Dan jika berlayar selamat akan tetapi adalah untungnya yang kesakitan sedikit, tetapi tiada mengapa nescaya dikembalikan oleh Allah Taala jua dianya, dapat selamatnya daripada mara dan bahaya, insya-Allah Taala. Wallāhu a‘lam, āmīn.

Bab ini faal Nabi Daud ‘alaihi al-salām. Faal ini maha jahat. Maka barang pekerjaannya jahat dan tiada menjadi. Jika ber[layar] binasa atau akan gundah hati. Da[n jika] sakit lambat sembuh, dan seteru[ny]a banyak. Jika beristeri itu [jahat]. Dan jika perempuan bersuami dapat orang yang jahat. Maka hendaklah memberi se[dekah] supaya menolakan bala [ania]ya daripada keja[hatan], insya-Allah Taala. Wallāhu a‘lam, āmīn.

Bab ini faal Nabi Isa ‘alaihi al-salām. Fa[al] ini maha baik lagi beroleh kesukaannya, dan beroleh arta yang halal daripada dunia akhirat. Dan ilmu pun diperolehnya. Akan tetapi jika berlayar lambat kembali. Jika sakit lambat sembuh. Jika sahaya lari lambat dapat. Jika berjual beli beroleh [laba] lagi sukacita. Jika beristeri pun baik. Jika ada fitnah orang tiada mengapanya, insya-Allah Taala selamatnya. Wallāhu a‘lam, āmīn.

Bab ini faal Nabi Musa ‘alaihi al-salām. Faal ini maha baik, akan bertemu dengan kekasihnya, dan keluarga yang dari jauh akan datangnya dan beroleh sukacita yang amat baik. Jika sakit lekas sembuh. Dan jika kenda [i.e. kena] bencana tiada mengapa, Allah subhānahu wa-ta‘ālā yang memelihara dia. Jika berlayar itu bersakit datangnya, hendaklah sabar supaya beroleh kebajikan akan dia itu, insya-Allah Taala sejahteranya dan selamat. Wallāhu a‘lam, āmīn.

[Bab] ini faal Izrail ‘alaihi al-salām. Faal [ini] amat jahat. Jika pergi-pergian binasa [atau] kerugian. Dan jika berniagaannya tiada [membe]ri manfaat, lagi benci orang pun [banyak]. Maka hendaklah sabar daripadanya, dimenangkan dia, dan menolakan [bala] barang tiga hari dan [man]di berlimaunya supaya memelihara oleh Allah Taala akan dia, [in]sya-Allah Taala selamatnya. Wallāhu a‘lam, āmīn.

Bab ini faal Mikail ‘alaihi al-salām. Faal ini amat baik. Pada rezekinya dimudahkan oleh Allah Taala, akan tetapi adalah sedikit yang tiada baik akan tetapi tiada mengapa. Bermula barang kerjanya menjadi dan barang yang dimaksudnya diperolehnya. Akan tetapi cedera sedikit. Jika berlayar tiada banyak laba akan tetapi selamat jua. Jika laki-laki [me]lihat faal ini beroleh isteri yang baik. Wallāhu a‘lam, āmīn.

Bab ini faal Israfil ‘alaihi al-salām. Faal ini amat baik baginya. Jika sakit lekas [sem]buh. Dan jika berlayar sejahtera lagi dengan [su]kacita yang baik diperolehnya, akan tetapi adalah kesakitan sedikit akan tetapi tiada menga[pa], Allah Taala yang memelihara akan dia dapat sejahtera, dan yang sempurnanya pada pergi dan datangnya selamat pada mara dan bahaya. Wallāhu a‘lam, āmīn.

Bab ini faal Jibrail ‘alaihi al-salām. Faal ini sangat baik lagi banyak faedahnya. Pertama, pada rezekinya dimudahkan Allah Taala. Dan jika menuntut ilmu segera diperoleh dianugerahkan Allah Taala daripada sehari kemudian sehari bertambah-tambahlah kebajikan dan k-w-a-s-n h-m-a-nya[?].⁵⁰ Dan segala orang yang dengki dan khianat akan dia pun dijauhkan Allah Taala daripadanya, lagi beroleh kesukaannya. Wallāhu a‘lam, āmīn.

⁴⁸ PNM MS 3225, fol. 10^v says *sentosa*.

⁴⁹ PNM MS 3225, fol. 10^v says *kekasihnya*.

⁵⁰ PNM MS 3225, fol. 11^v says *kesukaan*.

Translation

This chapter is on the augury of the Prophet Muḥammad, blessings and peace be upon him. This augury is very good, and any undertakings will turn out perfectly. God the Exalted will also provide help against all danger. The augury seeker will receive bountiful blessings, wherever he⁵¹ goes he will be safe, and he will have goodness bestowed upon him by God the Exalted. And bountiful blessings will be received from God the Exalted. And God knows best. Amen.

This chapter is on the augury of the Prophet Ya'qūb, peace be upon him. This augury is very good for all undertakings. If the person goes travelling, he will be safe, and whenever he travels, he will obtain happiness, and his life will be bountiful, bestowed upon him by God the Exalted, and anywhere he goes he will be safe. If he is ill, the patient will recover quickly and his life will be extended by God the Exalted. If he goes sailing, he will get [rich]. And God knows best. Amen.

This chapter is on the augury of the Prophet Idrīs, peace be upon him. This augury is very good. The person will obtain whatever he wants in this world and the hereafter. And people will love him. And anything he does will be successful and he will always be safe from danger. There will be sorrow from friendship or other people's misfortune, however; it is alright. And he will receive a great deal of wealth and will also be happy. And God knows best. Amen.

This chapter is on the augury of the Prophet Nūḥ, peace be upon him. This augury is very good, and God the Exalted will ensure the person meets the one he loves. And whatever he wishes for will be obtained. If he seeks knowledge, this will also be bestowed upon him by God the Exalted. If he is ill, he will be cured quickly. And other people will love him. And he will obtain a great deal of wealth. And he will be close to royalty and will soon receive a high status. And God knows best. Amen.

This chapter is on the augury of the Prophet Khidr, peace be upon him. This augury is very bad. Any undertaking will fail and cause disappointment. And there will be many people

⁵¹ In Malay, the third-person singular pronouns – 'dia', 'ia' or 'nya' – are genderless and could therefore equally refer to a man or a woman. For the sake of simplicity, however, the words have been translated as 'he', 'him' or 'his' here rather than 'he/she', 'him/her' or 'his/hers' unless otherwise specified.

who hate him, and many who are envious and many who will create a lot of slander. And if he goes sailing, it will end in calamity. He must therefore undergo the *berlimau* bathing ceremony and give alms to the poor for seven days to escape his bad luck. And God knows best. Amen.

This chapter is on the augury of the Prophet Yahyā, peace be upon him. This augury is very good. The person will receive much happiness and his livelihood will be made easy by God the Exalted. And secrets will be revealed to him by God. And if he goes sailing, he will return quickly. And if he is ill, he will be cured quickly. And even if there is a disaster, it will be alright. And he will receive blessings and safety, God the Exalted willing. And God knows best. Amen.

[This chapter] is on the Prophet Yūsuf, peace be upon him. This augury resembles bitterness: there will be sorrow. But happiness will be obtained quickly and it will last forever. And any undertaking will be successful and achieve its goals. And if [the person goes] sailing, it will be safe, God the Exalted willing. And God knows best. Amen.

This chapter is on the augury of the Prophet Ismā'īl, peace be upon him. And this augury is very good: he will obtain a lot and will be protected from all danger by God. And he will make a huge profit. And he will be able to see all that is good. And if he goes sailing, he will be safe. There will be a little pain, but it is alright as God the Exalted will keep him safe and in peace, God the Exalted willing. And God knows best. Amen.

This chapter is on the augury of the Prophet Ibrāhīm, peace be upon him. This augury is very good: the person will obtain goodness and will be kept safe from all misfortune by God the Exalted. And he will be able to meet the one he loves. And if he goes sailing, he will be safe, but there will be a small financial loss. It is alright, though, because God the Exalted will return him and keep him safe from danger, God the Exalted willing. And God knows best. Amen.

This chapter is on the augury of the Prophet Dāwūd, peace be upon him. This augury is very bad. Any undertaking will go badly and not be successful. If the person goes sailing, there will be destruction or sadness in his heart. And if he is ill, he will be slow to recover. And he will have a lot of enemies. If he picks a wife, she will be bad. And if a woman takes a

husband, he will be bad. He must therefore give alms to cast away his misfortune and bad luck, God the Exalted willing. And God knows best. Amen.

This chapter is the augury of the Prophet ʿĪsā, peace be upon him. This augury is very good, and the person will receive happiness and obtain wealth, which is rightful in this life and the next. And he will gain knowledge. However, if he goes sailing, he will be late in returning. And if he is ill, he will be slow to recover. And if a slave escapes, he will be slow in getting him back. If he does business, he will receive a lot of profit and happiness. If he picks a wife, she will also be good. And if there is slander [or conflict], it will be alright; he will be safe, God the Exalted willing. And God knows best. Amen.

This chapter is on the augury of the Prophet Mūsā, peace be upon him. This augury is very good: the person will meet loved ones, and his family will come from afar and experience great happiness. If he is ill, he will recover quickly. And if he is hit by a disaster, it will be alright as God the Glorified and Exalted will protect him. If he goes sailing, illness will occur. He must be patient in order to obtain goodness. There will be peace and safety, God the Exalted willing. And God knows best. Amen.

[This chapter] is on the augury of ʿIzrāʿīl, peace be upon him. This augury is very bad. If the person travels somewhere, there will be destruction [or] loss. And if he goes trading, it will not have any benefits and there will be a great deal of hatred from others. He must therefore be patient as success will

be granted [eventually], and he must cast away the bad luck for three days and undergo the *berlimau* bathing ceremony in order to be protected by God the Exalted; he will be safe, God the Exalted willing. And God knows best. Amen.

This chapter is on the augury of Mikāʿīl, peace be upon him. This augury is very good. The person's livelihood will be made easier by God the Exalted. There is a little bit that is not good, but it is alright. Any undertaking will be successful and everything he wishes for will be obtained. There will be a mishap, however. If he goes sailing, there will not be much profit made, but it will be safe. If a man looks at this augury, he will get a good wife. And God knows best. Amen.

This chapter is on the augury of Isrāfīl, peace be upon him. This augury is very good. If the person is ill, he will recover quickly. And if he goes sailing, it will be peaceful and there will be great happiness. There will be a financial setback, though, but it will be alright as God the Exalted will protect him, and he will be safe and sound in going and returning from danger. And God knows best. Amen.

This chapter is on the augury of Jibrāʿīl, peace be upon him. This augury is very good and has many benefits. Firstly, the person's livelihood will be made easy by God the Exalted. And if he seeks knowledge, it will be bestowed upon him by God the Exalted from one day to the next. His goodness and happiness[?] will increase. And those who are envious of and false to him will be moved far away from him by God the Exalted and he will obtain happiness. And God knows best. Amen.

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Article

Textual Amulets in Context: Was the Early Modern German Manuscript *Mscr. Dresd. M 206* Used as a Magical Agent?

Marco Heiles | Aachen

The manuscript *Mscr. Dresd. M 206* of the Sächsische Landesbibliothek – Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Dresden (SLUB) is a paper manuscript in a small quarto format.¹ The main part of the manuscript was written in about 1515 and contains several texts in the German dialect Thuringian-East Franconian and in Latin.² The textual composition of this part is without precedent in the history of German literature. Three hands collected here only texts that the majority of the clerics in this time would classify as superstition or magic: texts on divination, instructions for ritual magic and a huge collection of textual amulets.³ This amulet collection, which an *explicit* (the last words of a textual unit, from the Latin *explicitus*, meaning ‘unrolled’) calls ‘fundamentum Leonis pape super omnes caracteres’ (‘the fundamental teaching of Pope Leo about all *characteres*’),⁴ is the focus of this study. What was the function of this collection of amulets? Was it used as a catalogue for verbal charms or for the production of textual amulets? Or was this collection meant to give the book itself apotropaic agency? Was the codex itself used as a magical agent?

Codicology

The quarto codex *Mscr. Dresd. M 206* consists of 136 leaves. It measures 155 × 200 × 32 mm. The codex is still preserved in its sixteenth-century binding (Fig. 1). The boards are pasteboard



Fig. 1: Dresden, Landesbibliothek, Mscr. Dresd. M. 206, front cover.

and covered with white leather, which is decorated with blind lines and blind stamping.⁵ The leather covering of the lower board was left larger to build a fore-edge flap. This flap protects the fore edge and covers 5 cm of the upper cover.⁶

¹ This paper is based on a detailed manuscript description by Werner Hoffmann and Marco Heiles: Hoffmann and Heiles 2016. The manuscript is digitised and available online on the web page of the Sächsische Landesbibliothek – Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek (SLUB) <<http://digital.slub-dresden.de/id278681387>>.

² SLUB, Mscr. Dresd. M. 206, fols 12^r–22^v, 32^r–134^v.

³ On the late medieval discourse on superstition and magic cf. Heiles 2021; Bailey 2019. On the medieval genres of divination and ritual magic cf. Rapisarda 2021; Klaassen 2019; Véronèse 2019; Láng 2008, 123–143, 162–188.

⁴ SLUB, Mscr. Dresd. M. 206, fol. 64^v. The Word *characteres* is used here as a *terminus technicus* meaning magical signs, magical characters or magical writing.

⁵ Similar blind stamping is known from workshops in Saxony. Cf. Hoffmann and Heiles 2016.

⁶ This type of binding is more common in the Islamic world. Cf. Scheper 2015, 115–118. In late mediaeval Germany, top-edge flaps and fore-edge flaps are known from the Nuremberg Dominican (1433–1522) and Augustinian (1464–1526) workshops. Cf. Szirmai 2000, 236; Kyriass 1940, 33, 46; Bock 1928, Fig. 1.

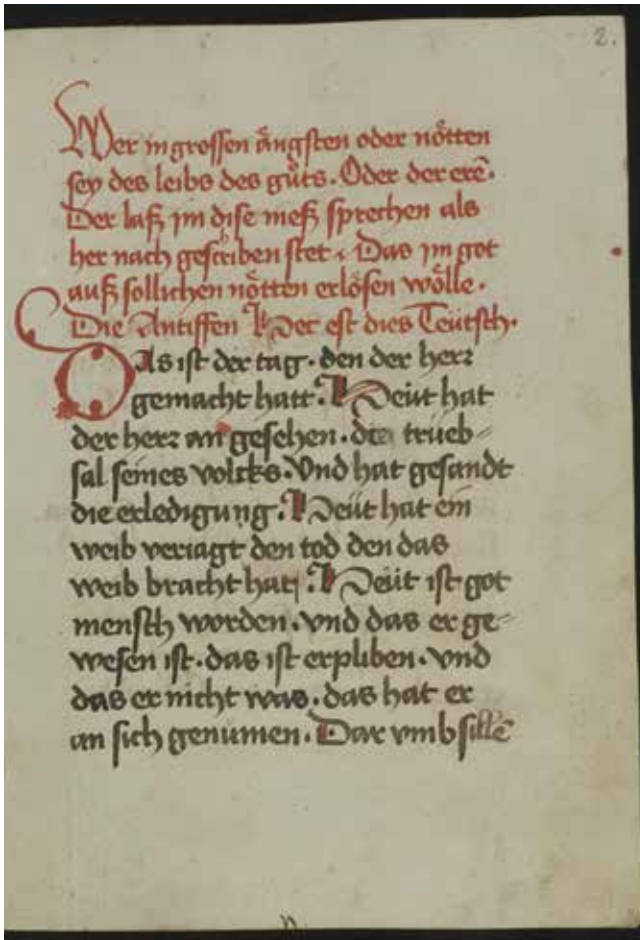


Fig. 2: Dresden, Landesbibliothek, Mscr. Dresd. M. 206, fol. 2^r, 15.5 × 20.0 cm.

There is a textile strap attached to the flap.⁷ This strap is the fastening: it can be wrapped around the book two times.⁸

The manuscript is a composite and consists of three parts or codicological units⁹ that were produced separately. This can be easily deduced from the quire structure and the watermarks. The book block consists of 13 quires. The first two quires (fols 1–11) are made from paper that can be dated to c. 1495/96 (Fig. 2). These form the first codicological unit. The paper in the following eleven quires (fols 12–134) can be dated to the years around 1515, but the quire structure is not consistent. The fourth quire (fols 23–31) separates the third quire into two parts (fols 12–22, 32–33). The paper of this inserted quire is not used in other quires and does not have the foliation numbers com-

⁷ The textile strap is a modern reconstruction.

⁸ For a description of this type of fastening (Untergesteckter Wickelverschluss), which is known from fifteenth-century Germany, cf. Adler 2010, 7 (B.V.1.1.1.), 75 (Abb. 4–14 and Abb. 4–15).

⁹ On this concept, cf. Gumbert 2004.

mon to all the other quires (Fig. 3). So quire three and quires five to thirteen form the second codicological unit (fol. 12–22, 32–134). This second unit consists of different kinds of paper. The fourth quire, added later, is the third codicological unit. Each unit was written by a different group of scribes. The first codicological unit was written by three scribal hands. The main text of this unit is a Latin mass for the Feast of the Annunciation (*Haec est dies*, Ps 117,24) on fols 2^r–10^r. The rubric of this text by hand 2 tells us in German that this mass should be said for the protection of life, goods and honour (Fig. 2).¹⁰ The other two mass texts on fol. 1^{rv} written by hand 1 and on fols 10^v–11^v by hand 3 were added a short time later.

The second codicological unit was written by three hands in Thuringian-East Franconian. Hand 4 writes a geomantic book of sorts on fols 12^r–22^r, the *Dresdener Sandkunst der 16 Richter*.¹¹ Hand 5 gives us a collection of magical signs on fol. 32^r and a short instruction on treasure hunting in Latin on fol. 32^v.¹² All other texts of this unit were written by hand 6: onomantic and other divinatory texts on fols 34^r–38^v, the aforementioned collection of text amulets on fols 40^r–64^v, detailed instructions on ritual magic on fols 65^r–111^r and further onomantic texts attributed to Nanno Philosophus on fols 119^r–130^r. The *Dresdener Sandkunst der 16 Richter* (Fig. 4) can be used to answer sixteen questions like: ‘Will someone live for a long time or briefly?’, ‘Will someone come into an inheritance?’ or ‘Will the pregnant woman give birth to a son or a daughter?’¹³ The onomantic texts can be consulted for similar questions, for example, whether an ill person will die or recover, or who will win a tournament.¹⁴ The

¹⁰ ‘Wer in grossen ängsten oder nöthen sey des leibs des güts oder der eren, der lasz im dise mesz sprechen als her nach geschriben stet, das im got ausz sollichen nöthen erlösen wölle’ (‘Whoever is in great fear and distress for life, goods or honour, let this Mass be said as it is written in the following, so that God may deliver him from this distress.’), SLUB, Mscr. Dresd. M. 206, fol. 2^r. – The orthography has deliberately been simplified in the transliterated version of the German text, with words generally being written uniformly in lower case rather than lower and upper as in the original (apart from proper nouns and the beginning of a sentence).

¹¹ Cf. Heiles 2018.

¹² Fol. 32 consists of two leaves that were glued together. The drawing on the reverse side of the first leaf shines through. It might be the drawing of the Almandal. Cf. Veenstra 2002, Figs 1–3.

¹³ ‘Ab eynere lange adder kürz sal leben. Ab einer ouch sall erben haben. Ab das schwanger weib sün ader tochter trage’ (‘Whether someone will live long or short. Whether someone will inherit something. Whether the pregnant woman will bear a son or a daughter.’), SLUB, Mscr. Dresd. M. 206, fol. 13^v. Cf. Heiles 2018. An edition of a similar text is offered by Eis 1956, 29–48.

¹⁴ ‘In der figur fyndet man, war eyn mensch an eynem thag siech würt, ob er des sichthums sterb adder nitt’ (‘If a person falls ill one day, you will find in this diagram whether he dies of the disease or not.’), SLUB, Mscr.

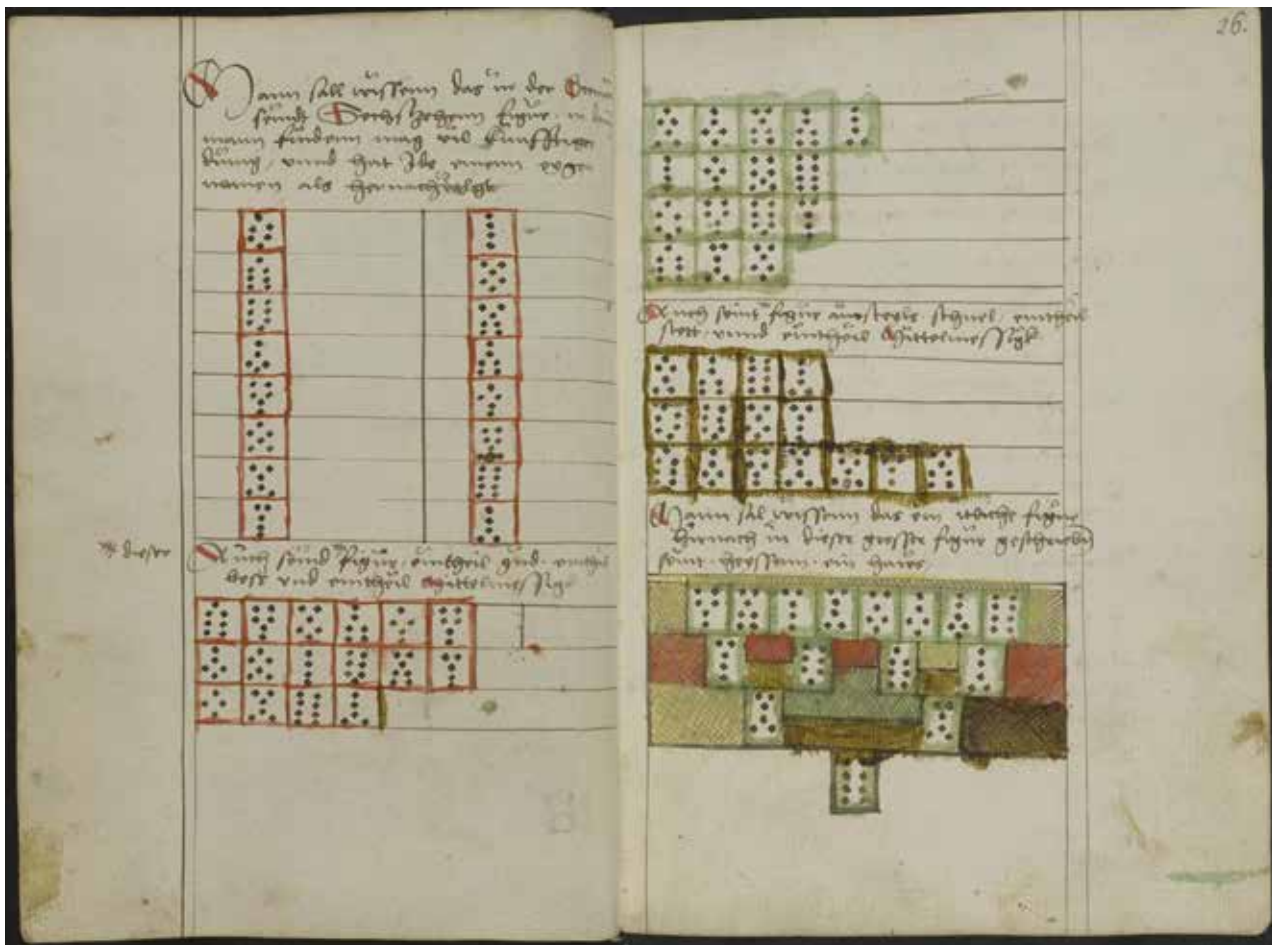


Fig. 3: Dresden, Landesbibliothek, Mscr. Dresd. M. 206, fols 25^v/26^r.

texts on ritual magic, in contrast, give detailed instructions for communicating with devils. One of these texts tells the reader how to find treasures with the help of devils and the ghost of King Solomon. The text explains how a virgin boy should be used as a medium for scrying, how magic circles are cast with a conjured sword and how devils are conjured and forced to help (Fig. 5).¹⁵

The third codicological unit, which was added after the first and second unit were brought together and foliated, was written by two hands, also in Thuringian-East Franconian, and contains texts and tables on geomancy (Fig. 3).

Dresd. M. 206, fol. 34^r. This text is a German version of *The Victorious and Vanquished*. Cf. Burnett 1988. – ‘Hyr nach folget aber ein experiment Nannonis des vorgnanthen philosophi, do durch d^w magst wissen, ab czwehn mitteinander szollen kempfenn adder ander ritterspiell treiben, welcher gewynnen adder vorlieren soll’ (‘Here follows an experiment by the aforementioned philosopher Nanno, from which you can learn which of two who fight with each other or play knights’ games will win or lose.’), SLUB, Mscr. Dresd. M. 206, fol. 128^v.

¹⁵ Cf. SLUB, Mscr. Dresd. M. 206, fols 74^r–95^v.

Fundamentum Leonis pape super omnes caracteres

The layout of the amuletic texts in *Mscr. Dresd. M. 206* is very characteristic. The text of the fols 40^r–64^v is divided into 28 sections by 29 pairs or triplets of magic seals (Fig. 6). Each section contains one to three paragraphs, each beginning with a lombard initial or red headlines. Werner Hoffmann distinguished 43 textual units, but he remarks that the text borders couldn’t always be determined with certainty.¹⁶ The circular seals are inserted with multi-rayed figures, crosses, holy names, letters and other unknown signs (*characteres*). The first pairs of seals on fols 40^r–55^v are surrounded by Latin inscriptions,¹⁷ the following by coloured circles (Fig. 7).¹⁸

¹⁶ Cf. Hoffmann and Heiles 2016, no. 4.14 and nos 4.14.1–4.14.43.

¹⁷ SLUB, Mscr. Dresd. M. 206, fols 40^r, 40^v, 41^r, 42^v, 43^r, 44^v, 45^r, 47^v, 47^r, 49^v, 51^r, 51^v, 52^r, 53^v, 55^r, 55^v.

¹⁸ SLUB, Mscr. Dresd. M. 206, fols 56^r, 58^r, 58^v, 59^r, 60^v, 60^r, 61^v, 62^r, 63^v, 64^r, 64^v.

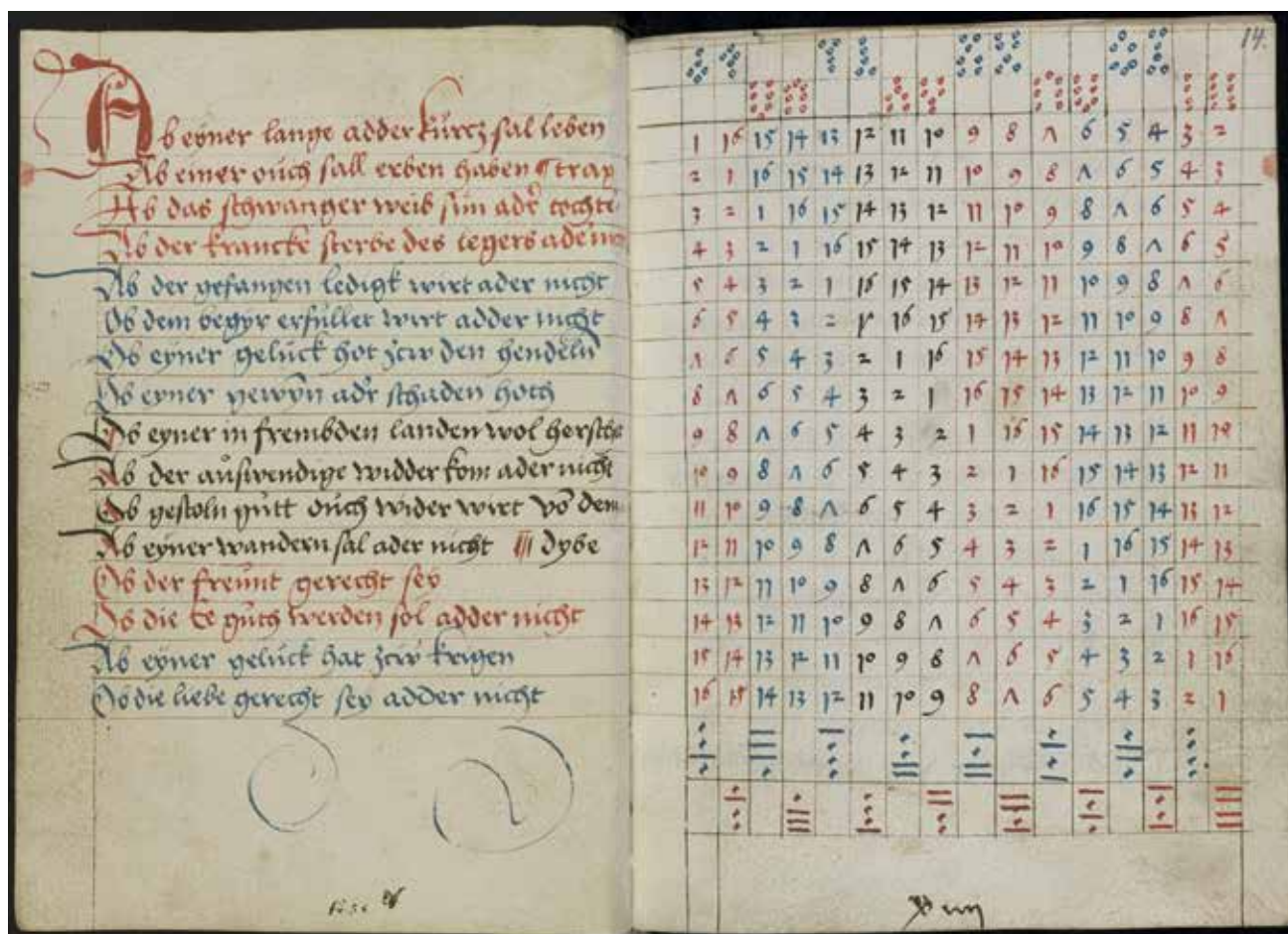


Fig. 4: Dresden, Landesbibliothek, Mscr. Dresd. M. 206, fols 13^v/14^r.

Some of the inscriptions are (liturgical) invocations¹⁹ or Biblical verses,²⁰ and some inform the reader about the agency (*Wirkmacht*) of the respective seal. The first two seals of the collection, for example, protect the one who looks at them against sudden death and trouble (Fig. 8).²¹ In general, there is no recognizable connection between the seals and the content of the paragraphs following them. But some of the paragraphs are illustrated by pen drawings of a sword (Figs 6 and 7), a cross (Fig. 12), a ruler (Fig. 7) or a hand

(Figs 10 and 11).²² And on two pages there are full-colour pen drawings glued into the codex. The first one on fol. 45^v shows the Crucifixion of Jesus (Fig. 9), the second one on fol. 59^v the Adoration of the Magi (Fig. 10). In both cases the text next to the drawings refers to the depicted scene.²³

The title of the compilation is given only in an explicit on its last page: ‘Finis fundamentum Leonis pape super omnes characteres’ (‘End of the fundamental teaching of Pope Leo about all *characteres*’)²⁴ (Fig. 11). The origin of this unique entitlement is unclear. *Characteres* are non-standard signs with magical power. The term can refer to ‘a strange and incomprehensible script, astrological signs, symbols without verbal equivalents, or [...] long series of ordinary

¹⁹ E.g. ‘In manus tuas, domine, commendo spiritum meum’ (‘Into your hands, o Lord, I commend my spirit.’) (from the Compline, i.e. the Night Prayer; cf. also Psalms 30:6, Luke 23:46), SLUB, Mscr. Dresd. M. 206, fol. 40^v. Cf. <<http://cantusindex.org/id/601142>> (10 December 2022).

²⁰ E.g. ‘Consummatum est’ (‘It is finished.’) (John 19:30), SLUB, Mscr. Dresd. M. 206, fol. 40^v.

²¹ ‘Contra subitaneam mortem hoc signum si inspexeris’ (‘If you will have seen this sign, it [will help] against sudden death.’) and ‘In quacumque die hoc signum videris, sine molestia permanebis’ (‘The day you see this sign, it will last without difficulty.’), both SLUB, Mscr. Dresd. M. 206, fol. 40^v.

²² SLUB, Mscr. Dresd. M. 206, fols 40^v, 43^v, 56^v, 57^v. – SLUB, Mscr. Dresd. M. 206, fol. 48^v. – SLUB, Mscr. Dresd. M. 206, fols 52^v, 56^v. – SLUB, Mscr. Dresd. M. 206, fols 59^v, 64^v.

²³ SLUB, Mscr. Dresd. M. 206, fols 45^v and 59^v. There is no text lost. The writer left some blank space for these (or other perhaps now covered) images.

²⁴ SLUB, Mscr. Dresd. M. 206, fol. 64^v.

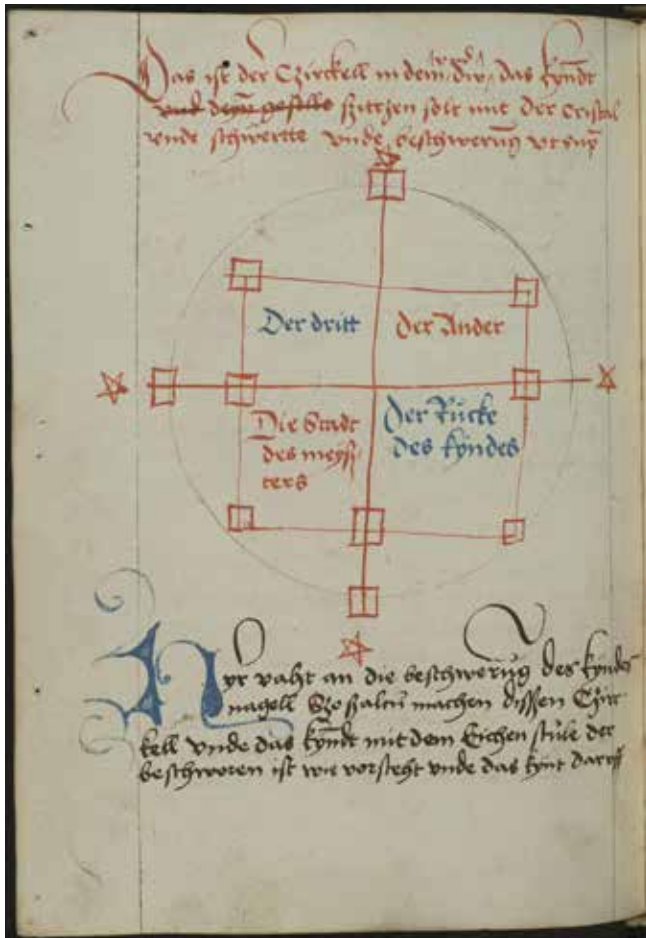


Fig. 5: Dresden, Landesbibliothek, Mscr. Dresd. M. 206, fol. 82^r.

Latin letters'.²⁵ But it can also stand for 'magic seal' or 'textual amulet'.²⁶ In this sense, our extensive collection of magic seals and amuletic texts might be called a 'fundamental teaching' of all (or at least plenty of) *characteres*. The connection to a Pope Leo seems arbitrary, since a Pope Leo occurs only in one short text of the collection. But in the sixteenth century, another Latin collection of amuletic texts connected to a Pope Leo is known. *The Leonis papae enchiridion* ('Handbook of Pope Leo') was first printed in 1525 in Rome.²⁷ Although the text was listed in the *Index librorum prohibitorum* ('List of prohibited books'), it was frequently reprinted, enriched and translated until the nineteenth century.²⁸ While the first printing was ascribed to

²⁵ Skemer 2006, 18. Gordon 2014 offers a detailed analysis of the development of characteres.

²⁶ Cf. Skemer 2006, 17–18.

²⁷ Cf. Brunet 1820, 337; Jacoby 1930/1931, 566.

²⁸ Cf. Jacoby 1930/1931, 566; Skemer 2006, 98–99; Davies 2009, 34–35, 92, 96, 97, 107, 128, 159, 245. There is no direct textual dependence between the *Enchiridion* and the *Fundamentum*. Cf. the edition Mainz 1633, completely digitised on the website Wolfenbüttel Digital Library (WDB) of the

Pope Leo I Magnus (440–461), later editions are attributed to Pope Leo III (795–816) or Leo X (1515–1521). The Pope Leo in the *Fundamentum Leonis papae* (Fig. 12) is also Pope Leo III, who was a contemporary of Charlemagne (742/747–814):

Das ist der brief den Bapst Leo dem Kunnig Karolo, Keyszer Karolo magno gab vnde hat dÿ [!] der engel gottes Sant Gregorio geleret. Alle dy do in streitten szeÿndt, szollten [!] szie bey yn tragen. † In der ere der Heÿligen Feronica. † In der ere des heyligen fronleichnams vnde bluts vnszers herren Ihesu Cristi. † In der ere der gerechtigkeit gottes. † Dw einiger fechter meynes lebens. † Die gerechtigkeit des herren hat gemacht die thÿgendt vnde eynigkeit. Die gerechtigkeit szeÿ mich behuthen vnde beschÿrmen in allen thÿgenden Amen.²⁹

This is the letter Pope Leo gave to King and Emperor Carolus Magnus and this letter was taught to Saint George by God's angel. Everyone who is in combat should carry them [!] with himself. In the honour of Saint Veronica. In the honour of the holy Corpus Christi and the holy blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. In the honour of God's righteousness. You sole fighter of my life. The righteousness of the Lord has made virtue and unity. The righteousness shall protect and shelter me in all virtues. Amen.

Like this *Kaiser-Karl-Segen* ('Blessing of Emperor Charles'),³⁰ most of the texts in this collection tell us that they have the ability, not to say agency, to protect a person who carries the text on his body. Phrases like 'szollten szie bey yn tragen' ('they should carry them with themselves')³¹ can be found 21 times.³² These texts effect invincibility, salvation from all hardships and affection.³³ They protect against all weapons,³⁴

Herzog August Bibliothek <<http://diglib.hab.de/drucke/xb-6782/start.htm>> (22 October 2022).

²⁹ SLUB, Mscr. Dresd. M. 206, fol. 48^r.

³⁰ This text type is very common. Cf. Stübe 1932; Hoffmann and Heiles 2016, no. 4.14.12; Bozoky 2003, 51; Skemer 2006, 202, 295; Holzmann 2001, 264–267; Bischoff 1967, 275–283; Klapper 1907, 36–27. On 'Charlemagne's blessing' see Sabine Kienitz' contribution in this volume as well.

³¹ SLUB, Mscr. Dresd. M. 206, fol. 48^r.

³² SLUB, Mscr. Dresd. M. 206, fols 40^r, 41^r (2×), 42^r, 43^r, 45^r (2×), 46^r, 46^v, 47^r, 48^r, 48^v, 52^r, 56^r, 56^v (2×), 57^r (2×), 59^r, 63^r, 63^v.

³³ Cf. SLUB, Mscr. Dresd. M. 206, fol. 42^r.

³⁴ Cf. SLUB, Mscr. Dresd. M. 206, fol. 43^r.

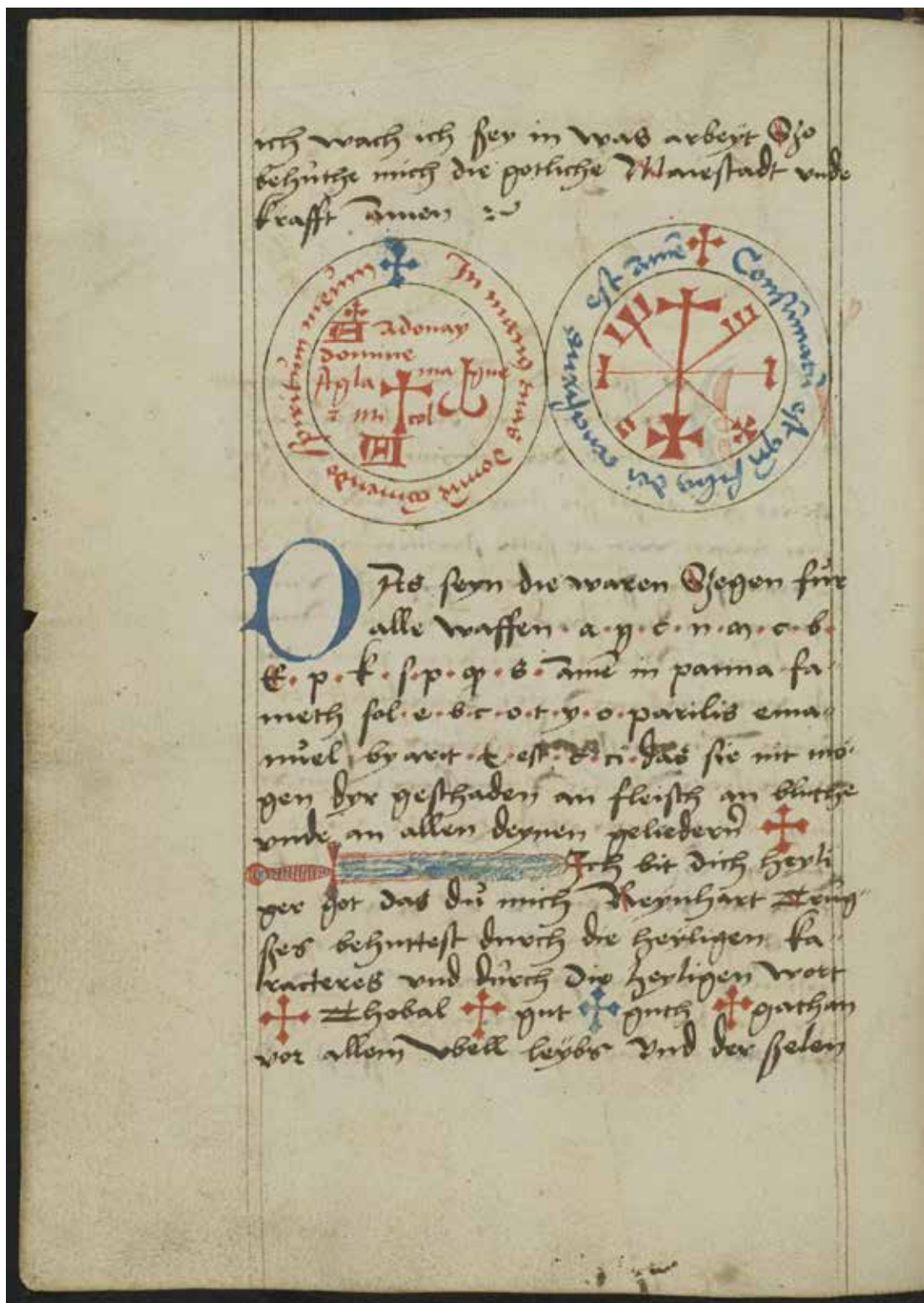


Fig. 6: Dresden, Landesbibliothek, Mscr. Dresd. M. 206, fols 40^v/41^r, original size.

41

Amen **H**erre ewiger Gott himelstiger
 Vatter mit verlaß mich wann du bist
 ein frölicher meynes lebens das ich mit
 walle in die angeführt meynen verhödt
 und behüt mich frö dem gewalt
 myner feydt das sie frö mit frewen
 meynen trübsal sündes gib frö der
 dysser wort bey im sey rügen fröde
 unde frö der sie bey im ist haben
 unde gesüntzert des leibes unde des
 lebens der wacklichen der im ist gelou-
 ben In dem nhamen Gottes Vatters
 und des Jüngers unde des heyligen
 Geistes Amen



Das sent die heyligen nhamen
 wer sie bey im hat dem mag

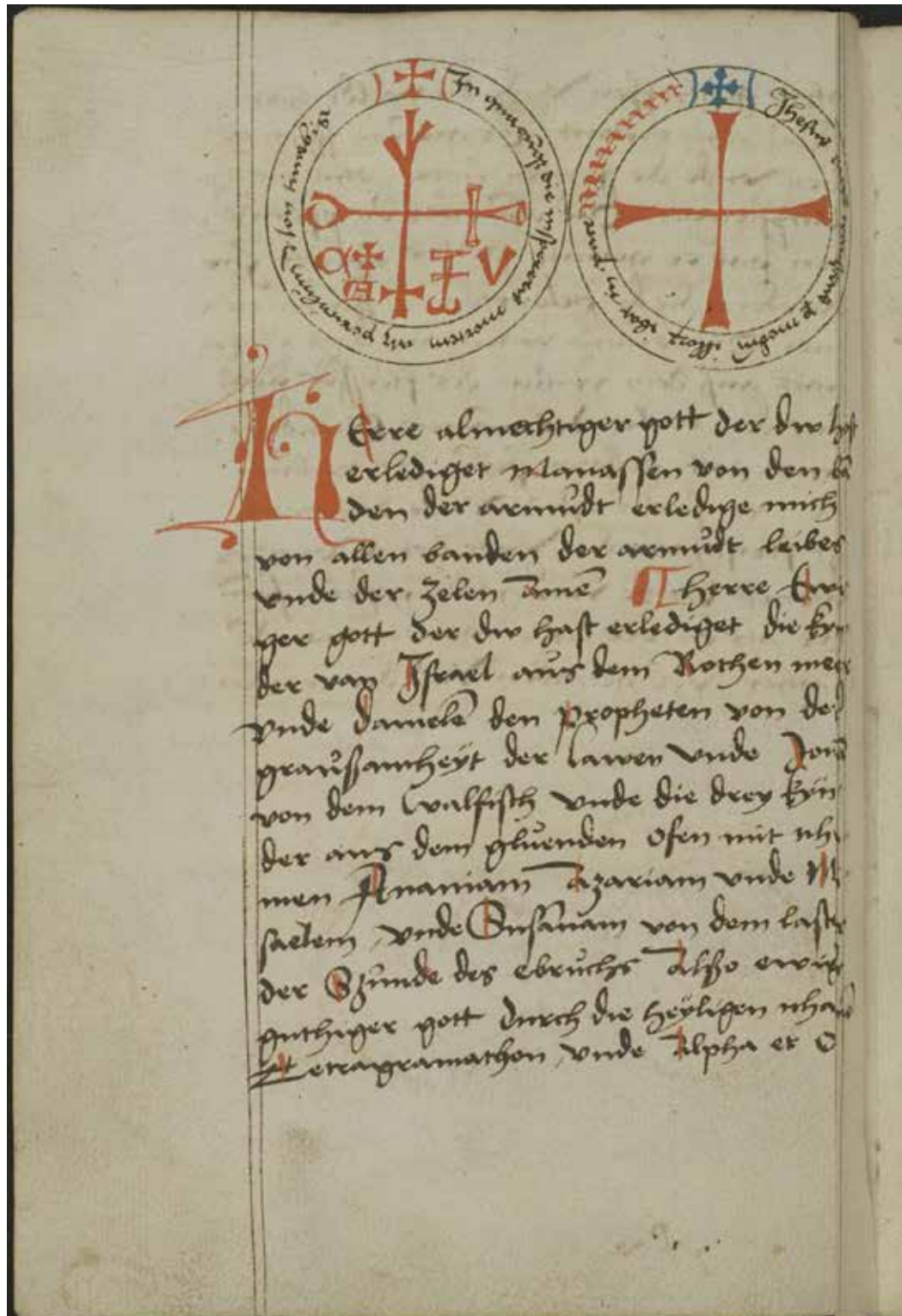


Fig. 7: Dresden, Landesbibliothek, Mscr. Dresd. M. 206, fols 55^v/56^r, original size.

Tzo bit ich dich darvollest mich behu
 tzen vor allem luffte vnde gefencknis leyb
 vnde der Ozele. Diffe karacteres vng
 ey der fwe heyt dyr guth vor den boffen
 weyft vnde vor alle waffen. a. k. b. y. a.
 y. k. 
 a. p. z. y. a. y. v. e. t. d. o. o. e. p. z. 7. o. o.
 t.  n. p. a.  a. s.  k. e. s. t.  p. a. n. t. h. e.
 z. b. y. e. y.  In dem rharney des
 vauzere vnd des Ojins vnde des hey-
 ligen geistes. **Amel**

Die linea 10 mal als lang be-
 ding die arm lang des hey-
 ligen fcon Kreuzes dar an vnsere
 heere Jhesu cristus mit fseme gotliche
 armen gespanet vnde gelenget wart
 vnd dar an Jernuechtig gemenglet
 vnde wer die lang fret vnde fse ul-
 te thage an ficht der mag mitst gedot
 nach erwordt von der gotlichen barm-
 herzigkeit vnsere lieben heren Jhesu
 cristus.



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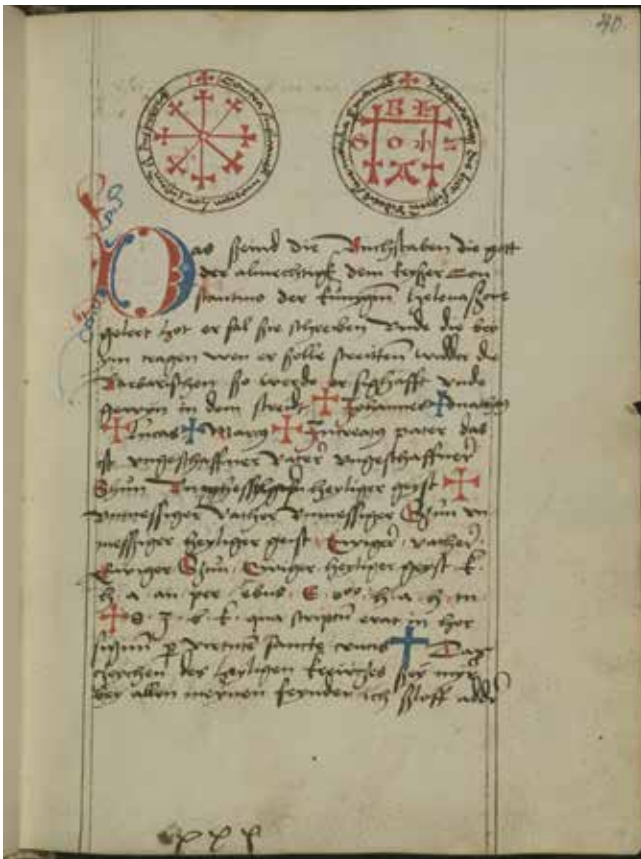


Fig. 8: Dresden, Landesbibliothek, Mscr. Dresd. M. 206, fol. 40^r.

against every kind of physical or spiritual captivity,³⁵ against all enemies,³⁶ against the devil, sorcery (*czoubernis*) and thunderstorms³⁷ etcetera. In contrast, there are only three texts that take effect in a different way. In the first one, the reader needs to pronounce certain holy names.³⁸ In the second one, he needs to look at the figure of the ‘Measure of the Holy Cross’ (*Longitudo Corporis Christi*) every day (Fig. 7).³⁹ The third text

³⁵ Cf. SLUB, Mscr. Dresd. M. 206, fol. 45^r.

³⁶ Cf. SLUB, Mscr. Dresd. M. 206, fol. 46^r.

³⁷ Cf. SLUB, Mscr. Dresd. M. 206, fol. 47^r.

³⁸ ‘Cum aliquis vadat ad pugnandum dicat + Anthipa + Arabrast + Asta...’ (‘When someone goes to fight, he shall say + Anthipa + Arabrast + Asta...’) SLUB, Mscr. Dresd. M. 206, fol. 44^r.

³⁹ ‘Vnde wer die leng eret vnde szie alle thage ansicht der mag nicht gedöt nach ermordt ...’ (‘And whoever honours this length and worships it every day cannot be killed or murdered ...’), SLUB, Mscr. Dresd. M. 206, fol. 56^r. This textual amulet belongs to the tradition of the *Longitudo Corporis Christi*, in which a fraction of the measure of the body of Christ or of the Holy Cross is depicted. For the textual history of the *Longitudo Corporis Christi*, cf. Boroffka 2017, 77–176; Spilling 2014, 184–217.

takes effect if somebody carries the text with him or reads the texts or hears the text being read.⁴⁰

The agency of the textual amulets is explained and justified by a number of historical narratives (*historiolae*). Already the first text of the *Fundamentum* gives ‘the letters, which the almighty God taught Emperor Constantine, the son of Queen Helena. He shall write them down and carry them with him. Whenever he fights against the barbarians, he will be victorious and win the battle.’ (Fig. 8).⁴¹ Other texts are said to go back to an unnamed angel,⁴² the archangel Raphael⁴³ or Saint Coloman⁴⁴ and one even to Jesus Christ himself. This text is ‘the letter of our Lord Jesus Christ, which he wrote with his divine hands to King Abgar’.⁴⁵ Like these, all texts profess that their agency is based on the power of God. Two texts give the aforementioned measurements of the holy cross⁴⁶ and at least eleven texts use holy names.⁴⁷ Others are just excerpts or pericopes from the Gospels: Luke 1:5–17, Luke 3:1–6, John 1:1–14 (Fig. 13) and Mathew 1:1–16.⁴⁸ But in one way or

⁴⁰ ‘Das szeyn heylige nhamen [!] wer szÿ geschriben bey im tregt adder szÿ liest adder horet leszen, deme mag nit geschaden vnde wirt erlediget von allen szeynen veÿnden szie szeyn sichtigk adder vnsichtig.’ (‘These are holy names; whoever carries them written on his person or reads them or hears them read will suffer no damage and he will be freed from all his enemies, be they visible or invisible.’), SLUB, Mscr. Dresd. M. 206, fol. 59^r.

⁴¹ ‘Das szeind die buchstaben die gott der almechtigk dem keyszer Constantino der künigin Helena szone gelert hot. Er sol szÿ schreiben vnde die beÿ ym tragen. Wen er szolle streitten widder die barbarischen szo werde er sighafft vnde gewÿn in dem streidt.’ SLUB, Mscr. Dresd. M. 206, fol. 40^r.

⁴² Cf. SLUB, Mscr. Dresd. M. 206, fol. 46^r.

⁴³ SLUB, Mscr. Dresd. M. 206, fol. 56^v.

⁴⁴ SLUB, Mscr. Dresd. M. 206, fol. 61^r. In German literature, Columbanus is identified with St. Coloman of Stockerau (d. 1012), cf. Jacoby 1927; Bolte 1904, 435f.; Klapper 1907, 13. Skemer identifies him as St. Columban (543–615), cf. Skemer 2006, 202–203, 208–209, fig. 81.

⁴⁵ ‘Hi vaht ahn die epistel vnszers herren Ihesi Cristi, die er mit szeynen gotlichen henden geschriben hot dem Konÿge Abagaro’, SLUB, Mscr. Dresd. M. 206, fol. 47^r. For other Abgar amulets, cf. Hoffmann and Heiles 2016, no. 4.14.11; Skemer 2006, 96–104, 290–291; Brozoky 2003, 50. On the Abgarbrief in general, cf. Stübe 1927; Jacoby 1941.

⁴⁶ Cf. SLUB, Mscr. Dresd. M. 206, fols 52^v, 56^r. For the text on fol. 52^r; cf. Boroffka 2017, 89 with transcription in footnote 348. My transcription is also available online: <https://www.arteslitteratur.de/wiki/Länge_Christi>.

⁴⁷ Cf. SLUB, Mscr. Dresd. M. 206, fols 41^r, 42^v, 43^v, 44^v, 45^v, 48^v, 52^v, 53^v, 58^v, 62^r, 63^v.

⁴⁸ Cf. SLUB, Mscr. Dresd. M. 206, fols 49^v–51^r (Luke 1:5–17), 51^v (Luke 3:1–6), fol. 54^v–55^r (John 1:1–14), fol. 62^r–63^r (Mathew 1:1–16). The Gospel of Mark is announced in a headline on fol. 60^r, but the text itself is missing.



Fig. 9: Dresden, Landesbibliothek, Mscr. Dresd. M. 206, fol. 45^v, original size.

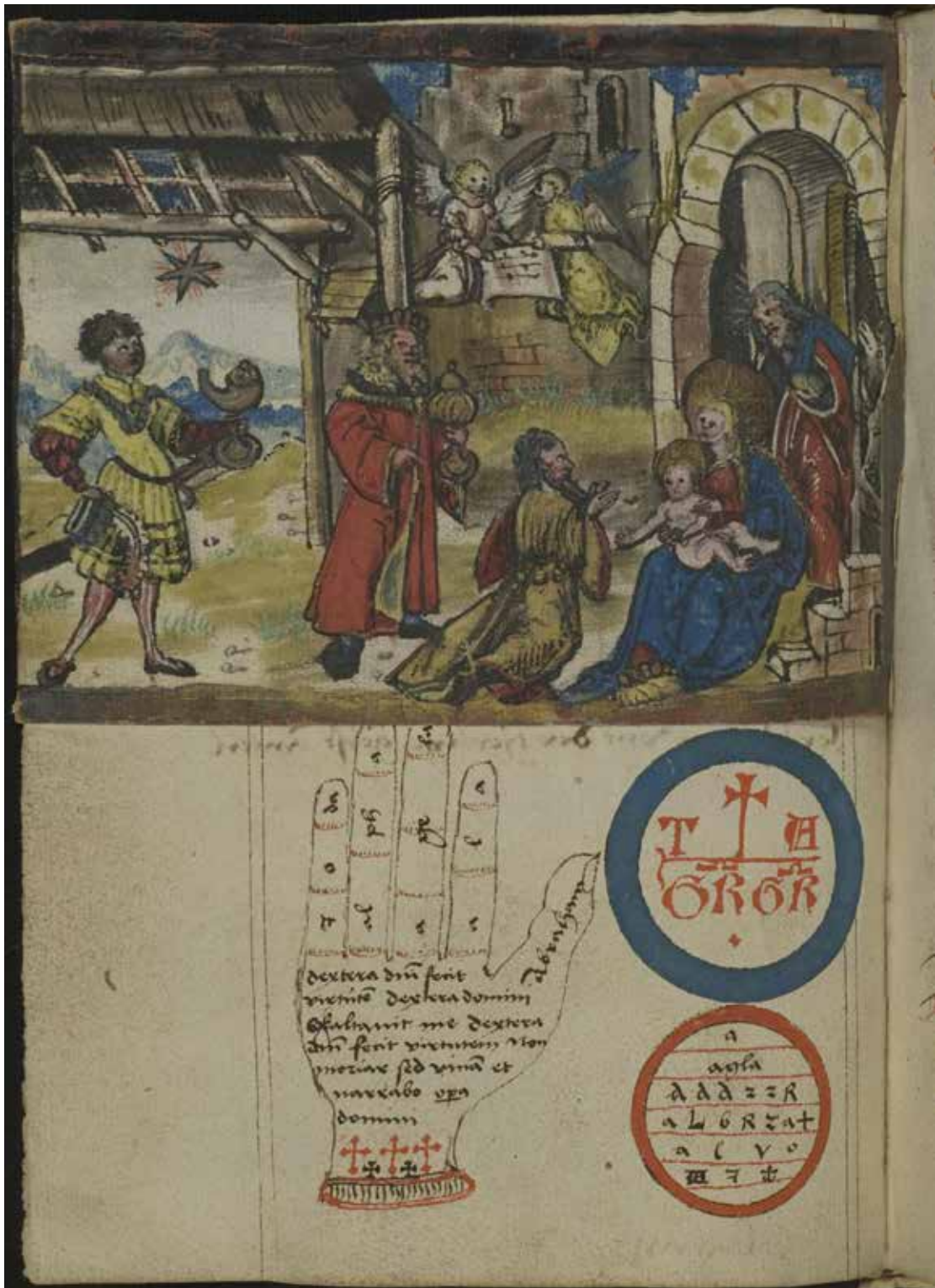


Fig. 10: Dresden, Landesbibliothek, Mscr. Dresd. M. 206, fol. 59^r, original size.

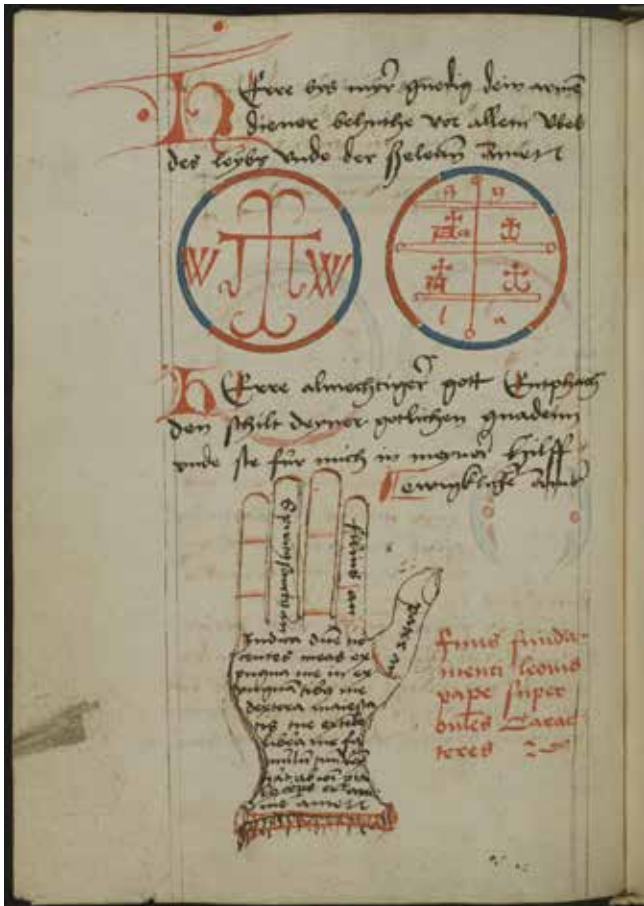


Fig. 11: Dresden, Landesbibliothek, Mscr. Dresd. M. 206, fol. 64^v.

another, all texts relate to God, who is often explicitly asked for help and protection.

The whole collection is arranged for one person, Reynhard Trugses, who might have written the text, too. Reynhard is the ‘speaker’ of the texts, which often have the form of petitionary prayers (Fig. 6):

Das seyn die waren szegen für alle waffen, ‘• a • g • c • n • m • c • b • E • p • k • s • p • q • s • Amen in panna • fameth sol • e • b • c • o • t • y • o • parilis emanuel by arit • E • est • c • ci •’, das sie nit mögen dyr geschaden an fleisch an bluthe vnde an allen deynen geliedern † [drawing of a sword] Ich bit dich heyliger got, das dū mich Reynhart Trugszes behuttest durch die heyligen karacteres vnd dūrch die heyligen wort, ‘† Thobal † gut † guth † gathan’, vor allem vbell leybs vnd der szelen. Amen. Herre ewiger gott hymlicher vather nit verlas mich, wan dw bist eyn fürer meynes lebens, das ich nit valle in die angesicht meyner veynendt. Vnd behūth mich fur dem gewalt meyner feyndt, das sie sich nit frewen meýner trübsal, szunder gib fried der disze wort bey im szey tragen. Friede vnde heyl

der szie bey im ist haben vnd geszüntheýt des leybes vnde des lebens der warlicher dor an ist geloüben. In dem nhamen gottes vathers vnd des szühns vnde des heyligen geystes. Amen.⁴⁹

This is the true benediction against all weapons, ‘• a • g • c • n • m • c • b • E • p • k • s • p • q • s • Amen in panna • fameth sol • e • b • c • o • t • y • o • parilis emanuel by arit • E • est • c • ci •’, that they should not harm your body, your blood or your limbs. † [drawing of a sword] I beseech you holy God that you protect me through the holy characteres and through the holy words, ‘† Thobal † gut † guth † gathan’, against all evil of the body and the soul. Amen. Lord, eternal God, heavenly Father don’t leave me, because you are a guide of my life, so that I don’t fall into control of my enemies. And protect me against the force of my enemies, so that they will not be delighted by my misery. But give peace to him who carries these words with him. [Give] peace and salvation to him who has them with him and [give] health of body and life to him who truly believes in it. In the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Reynhart’s name appears especially in the beginning of the collection in almost every text and altogether 18 times.⁵⁰ Unspecific phrases like ‘der disze wort bey im szey tragen’ (‘who carries this word on his person’)⁵¹ are used only to specify the terms of the agency of the texts. Other names or a placeholder for names are never used.

The textual and pictorial composition of our collection is very similar to that of single-leaf textual amulets from the thirteenth to the seventeenth century. According to Page ‘the earliest surviving textual amulets with multiple figures date from the thirteenth century and are portable, densely written objects folded multiple times and intended to be carried on the body.’⁵² Comparable German-Latin artefacts from the fifteenth and sixteenth/seventeenth centuries were studied and published by Pogliani⁵³ and Klapper,⁵⁴ exemplars

⁴⁹ SLUB, Mscr. Dresd. M 206, fols 40^v–41^r.

⁵⁰ Cf. SLUB, Mscr. Dresd. M. 206, fols 40^v, 41^r, 42^r, 42^v, 43^r, 43^v, 44^r, 45^r, 49^v, 51^r, 52^r, 53^v, 57^r, 60^r (2×), 62^r, 64^r, 64^v.

⁵¹ SLUB, Mscr. Dresd. M. 206, fol. 40^v.

⁵² Page 2019, 440.

⁵³ Pogliani 2009.

⁵⁴ Klapper 1929, 164–167.

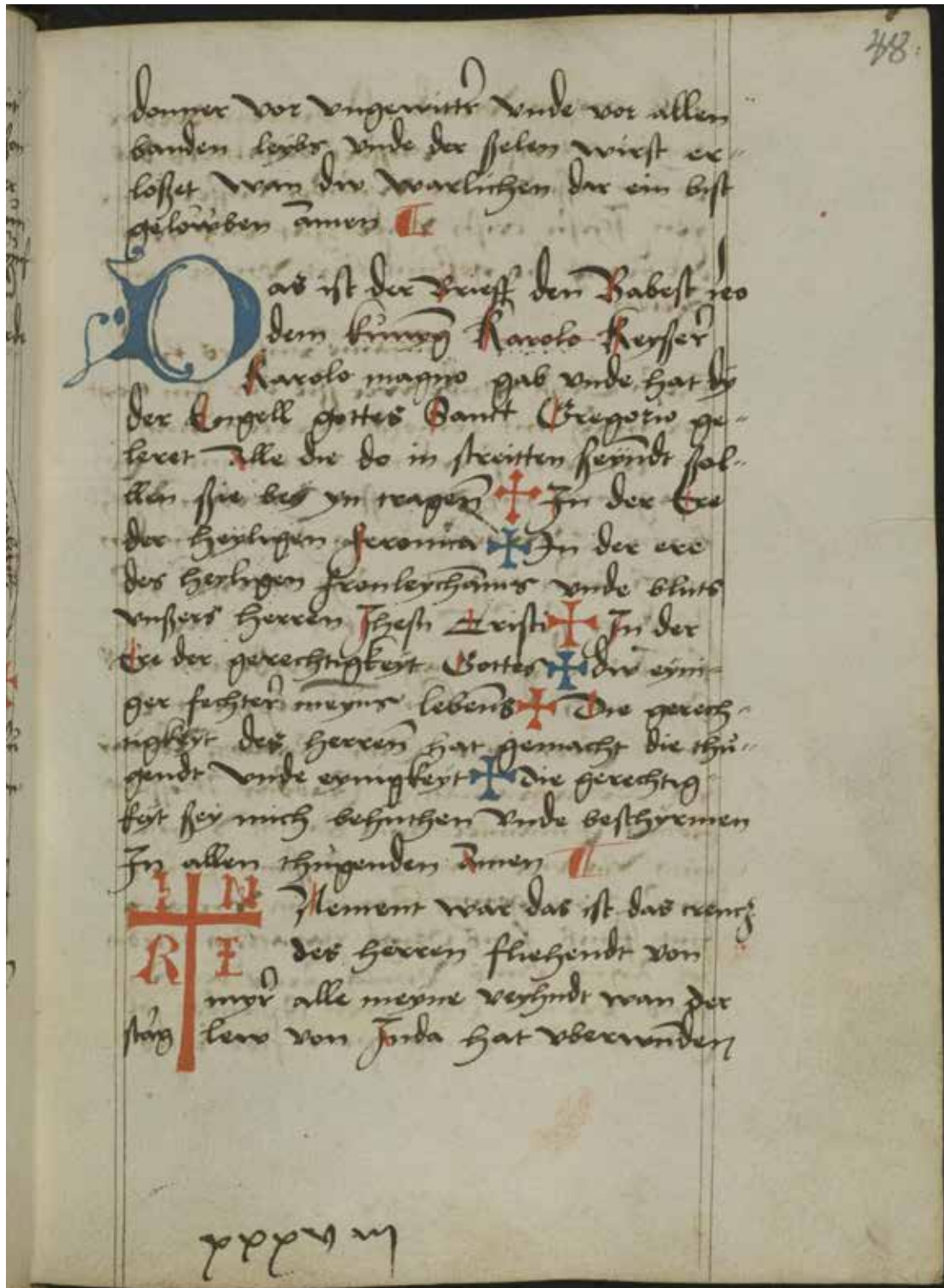


Fig. 12: Dresden, Landesbibliothek, Mscr. Dresd. M. 206 fol. 48r, original size.

from fourteenth- to seventeenth-century England by Skemer.⁵⁵ Like these, our collection is a ‘concatenation of scriptural quotations, divine names, common prayers, liturgical formulas, Christian apocrypha, narrative charms or *historiolae*, magic seals, word and number squares, *characteres* (non-standard or magical script), devotional images, crosses and other religious symbols’.⁵⁶

The *Fundamentum Leonis pape super omnes characteres* shares, for example, several texts and features with a Latin parchment amulet of the Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Hamburg (SUBHH) (Figs 14 and 15).⁵⁷ The textual amulet with the shelf mark Cod. in scriin. 31, Fragm. 19 was produced in Southern Germany in the first half of the fifteenth century.⁵⁸ It is a large-format sheet of parchment (66 × 51 cm) with five closely written columns and a frame in which magic seals and depictions of the twelve apostles alternate with texts in red and black. The amulet is also illustrated with depictions of the Passion, including the Crucifixion of Jesus, and the four evangelists. In the centre of the bottom half there is an extensive circular diagram of magic seals. The sheet was folded seven times to a format of 33.5 × 9.5 cm. Judging from the wear on the reverse side of the amulet, it was most probably worn on the body. It was made to protect a certain Heinricus, whose name is marked in red several times and who is the speaker of the petitionary prayers of this amulet. Like the *Fundamentum*, the text includes the beginnings of the Gospels of John and Mathew and other biblical texts, the heavenly letter from Jesus to King Abgar⁵⁹ and the *Kaiser-Karl-Segen* that Pope Leo gave to Carolus Magnus.⁶⁰ There are also two versions of the *Longitudo Corporis Christi*⁶¹

and several texts with holy names, also including Hebrew names of God⁶² and the 72 names of Christ⁶³.

There are no structural differences between the composition of the textual amulet for Heinricus and the text for Reynhard Truges. Both compilations were produced to protect one specific person and both tell us that they were meant to be carried on the body of this person. But unlike the amulet for Heinricus, the amuletic texts for Reynhard are just one part of a codex. Was the whole codex meant to be carried around? And how does this amulet compilation relate to the other texts of the codex?

Context

Although some parts of the codex *Mscr. Dresd. M. 206* existed separately for some time, this is not true for the amulet compilation. It begins in the middle of a quire and ends in the middle of another quire. In its codicological unit, it is surrounded by texts on divination and ritual magic. There is no evidence that the amulets ever existed without the other texts of the second codicological unit. In fact, they are not only connected by materiality and the caprice of the scribes: the amuletic texts and the texts on ritual magic were written by the same author or translator. The beginning of the Gospel of John is used three times in this manuscript. On fols 54^v–55^r it is part of the *Fundamentum Leonis pape super omnes characteres*. Here, the text of the Gospel (John 1:1–14) is framed by the Latin phrases that the priest (*Inicium sancti ewangelii secundum Johannem*, ‘The beginning of the Holy Gospel according to John’⁶⁴) and the server (*Gloria tibi, domine*⁶⁵ / *Deo gracias*,⁶⁶ ‘Glory be yours, O Lord! / Thanks be to God’) would say when the priest read the Gospel as the Last Gospel at the end of mass after the blessings (Fig. 13).⁶⁷ In this situation, he would genuflect at the words *Et verbum caro factum est* (‘And the Word was made flesh’), which are marked at fol. 55^r by its Latin wording. The excerpt of the Gospel of John is here

⁵⁵ Skemer 2006, 199–214, 285–304.

⁵⁶ Skemer 2015, 127.

⁵⁷ SUBHH, Cod. in scriin. 31, Fragm. 19. Digital images of the manuscript are available in the Internet Archive: <<https://archive.org/details/CodScriin0031Fragm19>>.

⁵⁸ Cf. Brandis 1972, 83–84. Brandis dates this amulet according to its script. Spilling 2014, 208 dates it to the 14th century without giving reasons.

⁵⁹ ‘Beatus es Agabar rex qui me non uidisti ...’, SUBHH, Cod. in scriin. 31, Fragm. 19, col. 1.

⁶⁰ ‘Epistola quam Leo papa misit fratri suo Karulo regi ...’, SUBHH, Cod. in scriin. 31, Fragm. 19, col. 4.

⁶¹ ‘Hec linea quatuor’, SUBHH, Cod. in scriin. 31, Fragm. 19, col. 3. Cf. Spilling 2014, 208–210.

⁶² ‘Primum nomen domini Hea idem fortis ...’, SUBHH, Cod. in scriin. 31, Fragm. 19, col. 2 and 4. Cf. SLUB, Mscr. Dresd. M. 206, fol. 52^r.

⁶³ ‘Omnipotens sempiterna maiestas ...’, SUBHH, Cod. in scriin. 31, Fragm. 19, col. 4. Cf. SLUB, Mscr. Dresd. M. 206, fols 48^v–49^v.

⁶⁴ SLUB, Mscr. Dresd. M. 206, fol. 54^r.

⁶⁵ SLUB, Mscr. Dresd. M. 206, fol. 54^r.

⁶⁶ SLUB, Mscr. Dresd. M. 206, fol. 55^r.

⁶⁷ Cf. Fortescue 1909; Jungmann 1962, 554–559.

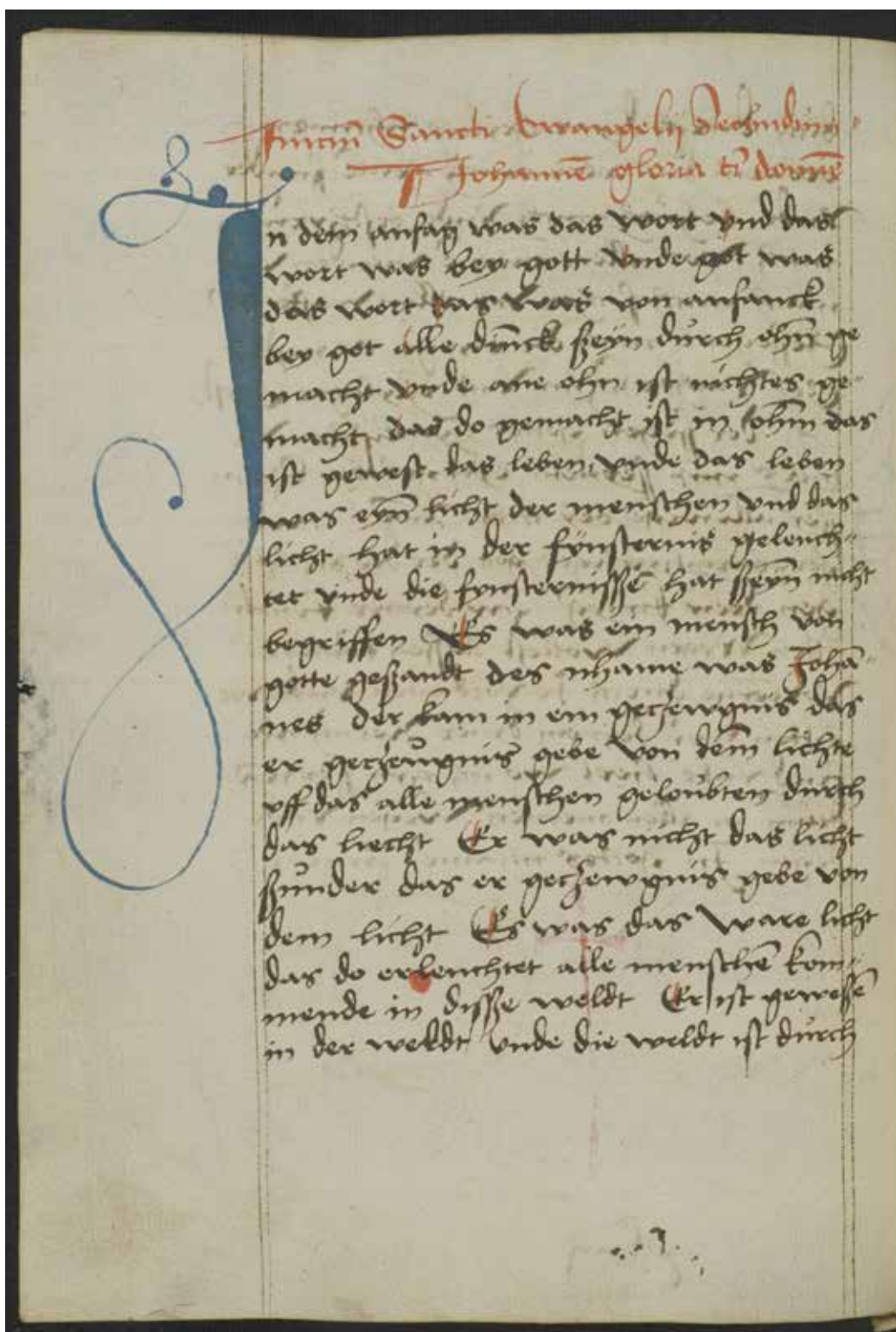


Fig. 13: Dresden, Landesbibliothek, Mscr. Dresd. M. 206, fols 54^r/55^r, original size.

ohn geschaffen Ende die welt hat
 sein nit erkant *Et quia in seyn ey-*
 gen ende die seymen haben ohn nicht
 entpfangen Die ohn aber entpfänge
 den gab er gewalt gottes kinder zu
 werden die do gelonken in seymen nra-
 men Die do nicht waren aus dem bluthe
 nach auß dem willen des fleisses noch
 aus dem willen des manes *Kindes*
 aus gott geboren sein *(Et verbum*
ca. x. factu est) Ende das wort
 ist fleisch worden Ende got in uns ge-
 wonet Ende wir haben gesehen sein
 wie als die ere des eingeboren von de
 vater vol gemaden End der wuchert
Deo genis p. istos sermones sancti Euan-
gely Indulgent nobis dñs iustus jhs
opt. omnia nostra remissa atq. delicta 20



Handwritten initials or mark.



Fig. 14: Hamburg, Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek, Cod. in scrin. 31, Fragm. 19, recto, 66.0 × 51.0 cm.



Fig. 15: Hamburg, Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek, Cod. in scriin. 31, Fragm. 19, recto (detail).

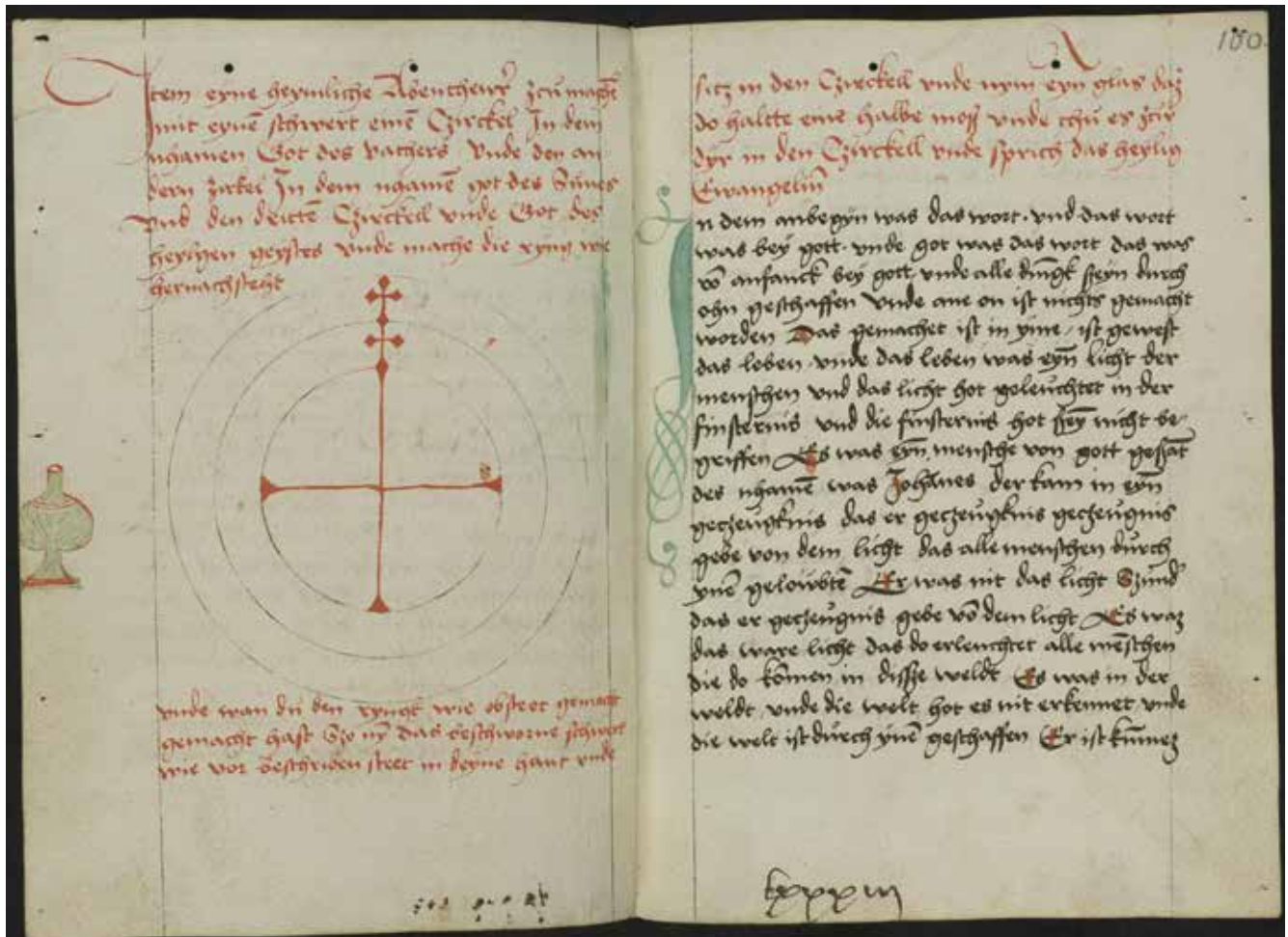


Fig. 16: Dresden, Landesbibliothek, Mscr. Dresd. M. 206, fols 99^v/100^r.

inserted as a blessing text and is explicitly meant to give indulgence to its reader.⁶⁸ But on fol. 100^v, the Gospel text is used in another way (Fig. 16). Here it is part of a conjuration of the devils *Astarot*, *Berit* and *Belzebub*,⁶⁹ who should be banned into a bottle and answer questions to the practitioner of this magical ritual. The same applies to fol. 109^v: the text of John is here part of the invoking of *Sathan*, *Belzebub*, *Ruffe* and *Rubyn*,⁷⁰ who are supposed to make a coat fly and transport the practitioner to any place he wants. In these two instructing texts, the text of the Gospel written down on paper as has no unmediated agency. It is here integrated in a handbook on ritual magic. Here the reader is addressed with

⁶⁸ ‘Per istos sermones sancti ewangelii indulgeat nobis dominus noster Jhesus Cristus vniuersa nostra crimina atque delicta’. (‘Through these words of the Holy Gospels, our Lord Jesus Christ gives us indulgence for all our sins and vices’). SLUB, Mscr. Dresd. M. 206, fol. 55^r. On the apotropaic agency of John 1:1–14 cf. Rosenfeld 1962; Ruh 1983.

⁶⁹ SLUB, Mscr. Dresd. M. 206, fol. 100^r.

⁷⁰ SLUB, Mscr. Dresd. M. 206, fol. 109^v.

second-person singular imperatives, and the placeholder ‘N’ is used instead of the practitioner’s name or the concrete place name of the destination.⁷¹ The conjurations have no agency until they are spoken in the right ritual, in the centre of a distinct magic circle and in combination with other conjuring texts. However, the wording of all three versions of John 1:1–14 is almost the same. All versions derive

⁷¹ ‘Sprich dissze nachgeschriben wort vnde preyt den mantel vff die erden vnde sprich also: “Ich beschwere dich Sathan ... Nu beschwer ich euch alle vier + Belzebub + Sathan + Ruffe + vnde Rubin, das jr kommet szchnel vnde stille vnde furet mich vff disszem mantel gehn N adder wo hyn ich will haben ... Also szolt jr mich N furen vnde leyttten vff disszem Mantell ...” Vnde sprich funff pater noster vnde funff aue Maria vnde setze dich evff den mantell. Vnde wie du dich szetcest also bleyb szitzen vnde kreutz dich niecht mehr vnd sprich: “Wolauff Belzebub, Sathan, Ruffe, Rubin. Das er Luciper walt” (‘Speak these following words and spread your coat out on the earth and speak thusly: “I invoke you, Satan ... Now I invoke you all four: Beelzebub, Satan, Ruffe, Rubin, that you come swiftly and quietly to bring me on this coat to N or wherever else I want ... So shall you guide and lead me N on this coat ...” And speak five “Our Fathers” and five “Hail Marys” and sit down on the coat. And when you have sat down, so remain seated and do not make the sign of the cross any more and speak: “Good health, Beelzebub, Satan, Ruffe, Rubin. Lucifer shall command it.”’), SLUB, Mscr. Dresd. M. 206, fols 108^r–110^r.

from the same German template, as the transcription and the variant list in the appendix show. Especially the texts on fols 54^v–55^r and 109^r–109^v are almost identical, while all three versions differ significantly from other German translations.⁷² Therefore, both the amulet collection and the collection of instructions on ritual magic were most probably composed by the same man and most likely for Reynhard Trugeses and this manuscript. The *Fundamentum Leonis pape super omnes caracteres* was meant from the beginning to be accompanied by other texts with magical agency. Even if these texts needed to be spoken out in mass⁷³ or in magical ritual, they are powerful and should possibly potentiate the apotropaic agency of this codex.

The Codex *Dresden, Landesbibliothek, Mscr. Dresd. M. 206* was certainly produced to have (at least) two functions.

On the one hand, it functioned as a manual for divination and ritual magic. On the other hand, it was meant to be a powerful apotropaic magical agent. Its sheer presence effected supernatural protection. Despite its 136 leaves, the codex – 20 centimetres high and just three centimetres thick – is still small enough to be carried around by someone on his body. The requirements of travelling might also explain the extraordinary binding: it spares the usual but bulky wooden boards and its flap protects even the fore edge of the book block against dirt and destruction. In this form, the codex was a perfect *vade mecum* offering both advice and protection in every difficult situation.

⁷² Cf. Rosenfeld 1962; Schönbach 1904, 124–137.

⁷³ Cf. SLUB, Mscr. Dresd. M. 206, fol. 2^r, cited above in note 10.

APPENDIX

Transcription of the Last Gospel (John 1:1–14) from fols 54^v–55^r (A), with textual variants from fols 100^r–100^v (B) and 109^r–109^v (C)

Translation

1. *Inicium sancti ewangelii secūndūm Johannem. Gloria*
2. *tibi, domine.*

Beginning of the Gospel of John. Glory be to the Lord.

3. In dem anfang was das wort. Vnd das wort was bey
4. gott. Vnde got was das wort. Das was von anfanck bey
5. got. Alle dinck szeÿn dūrch ohn gemacht vnde ane ohn
6. ist nictes gemacht. Das do gemacht ist in ohm, das
7. ist gewest das leben. Vnde das leben was eyn licht der
8. menschen. Vnd das licht hat in der fÿnsternis geleuchtet
9. vnde die fÿnsternissze hat szeÿn nicht begriffen. Es
10. was ein mensch von gotte gesandt, des nhamē was
11. Johannes. Der kam in ein geczewgnis, das er geczeūgnis
12. gebe von dem lichte, vff das alle menschen geloubten
13. durch das liecht. Er was nicht das licht, szūnder das
14. geczewgnis gebe von dem licht. Es was das ware licht,
15. das do erleuchtet alle menschen, kommende in dissze
16. weldt. Er ist gewezen in der weldt vnde die weldt ist
17. dūrch [fol. 55^r] ohn geschaffen vnde die weldt hat szeÿn
18. nitt erkant. Er qwam in szejn eÿgen vnde die szejnen
19. haben ohn nicht entpfangen Die ohn aber entpfyngen,
20. den gab er gewalt gottes kinder zew werden. Die do
21. geloubten in szejnen nhamen, die do nicht waren aus
22. deme bluthe, nach aūsz dem willen des fleyszses, noch
23. aus dem willen des mannes, szūnder aūsz gott geboren
24. szeÿn. (Et verbum ca + ro factum est.) Vnde das wort
25. ist fleisch worden. Vnde hot in vns gewonet. Vnde wÿr
26. haben geszehen szeÿn ere als die ere des eingeboren
27. von dem vather vol genaden vnd der warheÿ

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made. What was made in him, that was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the light, that all men might believe through the light. He was not that light, but was sent to bear witness of that light. That was the true light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the children of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. (*Et verbum caro factum est.*) And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

28. *Deo gracias. Per istos sermones sancti ewangelii*
29. *indulgeat nobis dominus noster Jhesus Cristus*
30. *vniūersa nostra crimina atque delicta. Amen.*

*Thanks be to God. Through these words of the Holy Gospel our Lord Jesus Christ absolves us for all our sins and vices Amen.*⁷⁴

⁷⁴ The English translation is based on the King James Version (KJV) of the Bible. It was altered in a number of places to correspond better to the original text in Early New High German.

Variants

- 1 Inicium ... 2 domine:** *vacat BC.*
- 3 anfang:** *anfag A, anbegyn B, anfangk C.*
- 5 Alle:** *Vnde alle B.*
- 5 ohn¹:** *jen C.*
- 5 gemacht:** *geschaffen B.*
- 5 ohn²:** *Jhen C.*
- 6 gemacht:** *gemacht worden B.*
- 6 Das do gemacht:** *das gemachet B.*
- 6 ohm:** *yne B, yem C.*
- 6 das ... 7 ist:** *ist B.*
- 8 Vnd das licht ... geleuchtet:** *Vnd das licht hot geleuchtet in der finsternis B.*
- 12 vff das:** *das B.*
- 12 geloubten ... 13 liecht:** *durch ynyn gelobten B.*
- 13 szunder:** *szun= C.*
- 14 Es:** *Er C.*
- 15 kommende:** *die di kommen B.*
- 16 Er ist gewesen:** *Es was B.*
- 16 vnde ... 17 geschaffen:** *vacat B.*
- 17 ohn:** *Jenen C.*
- 17 szeyn:** *es B.*
- 18 erkant:** *erkennet. Vnde die welt ist durch ynen geschaffen B.*
- 18 qwam:** *ist kummt B.*
- 18 eygen:** *eygenthum BC.*
- 19 ohn:** *jnen B, jen C.*
- 19 empfangen:** *erkant B.*
- 19 Die ... empfyngen:** *Aber die yhnen empfangen han B.*
- 19 ohn:** *Jen C.*
- 20 den:** *das C.*
- 20 gab er:** *hot er geben B.*
- 22 fleyszes:** *fleisches BC.*
- 23 szunder:** *alleyne B.*
- 24 szeyn ... est:** *vacat B.*
- 24 das ... 25 fleisch:** *der szohn gottes ist mensche B.*
- 25 Vnde ... gewonet:** *vacat B.*
- 27 von dem:** *des B.*
- 28 Deo ... 30 delicta:** *vacat BC.*
- 30 Amen:** *vacat C.*

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Article

Can Miniature Qur'ans Be Considered Magical Agents?*

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Fig. 1: Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Cod. Arab. 1114 (3.5 × 3.7 × 1.5 cm, 400 folios). An octagonal miniature Qur'an, probably Ottoman, fifteenth to sixteenth century. Printed in its original size.

Copies of the Qur'an in small sizes no more than 9 cm long when the work is closed were made as early as the tenth century.¹ The few early specimens that still exist are sometimes fragmentary and are vastly outnumbered by the extant miniature Qur'ans produced between the fourteenth

and nineteenth century. More than half of these² are cut to a peculiar octagonal form (see the examples in Figs 1–3), which I primarily interpret as an attempt to achieve a handy roundness of the object.³ They appear not only as codices,

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¹ On the proposed size limits for miniature Qur'ans, see the section on prerequisites below. Probably one of the earliest examples is from The Nasser D. Khalili Collection of Islamic Art: acc. no. Qur 430. One page measures 7.3 × 6.0 cm and is filled with no less than 30 lines of Abbasid-era script. Cf. Déroche 1992, No. 82.

² My corpus contains more than 500 small manuscripts with Qur'anic content from major libraries and collections in Europe and the Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi Kütüphanesi in Istanbul, as well as several pieces sold by the auction houses Sotheby's and Christie's. Approximately 160 of them qualify as miniature Qur'an manuscripts, roughly two thirds of which are octagonal codices. Based on the number of collections not considered here, especially in libraries in the Middle East, I expect that more than a thousand specimens will have survived to this day. The oldest octagonal miniature Qur'an of which I am aware is kept at the Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi Kütüphanesi in Istanbul; its shelf mark is E. H. 450 and it has been dated to 1494. Cf. Karatay 1962, No. 417.

³ Another explanation of this form tentatively presented by Coffey 2010, 110 n. 12 is that the floorplan of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem possibly served as inspiration. For a longer discussion on the origin of the octagonal shape, see Berthold 2021, 87–94. I have written about the sensory properties of miniature Qur'ans in Berthold 2020.



Fig. 2: Copenhagen, The David Collection, acc. no. 41-1999 (8.3 × 8.0 × 3.0 cm, 300 folios). The first (right) and second (left) surah in a miniature Qur'an on blue paper, surrounded by a frame with floral decoration on a gilded background. The surah titles are written above the main written area and the numbers of verses of each surah are given below. Iran, 1671. Printed in its original size.



Fig. 3: Copenhagen, The David Collection, acc. no. 41-1999 (8.3 × 8.0 × 3.0 cm, 300 folios). The last surahs in the same Qur'an as Fig. 2, their headings in golden panels written in red ink. Iran, 1671. Printed in its original size.

but as scrolls (Figs 4–5)⁴ and even as foldable textile sheets (Figs 6–7). These manuscripts were produced in practically every part of the Islamic world, but predominantly in Iran, the Ottoman Empire and India. However, as their minute writing is not appropriate for convenient reading or recitation, they must have served another purpose or even multiple purposes because otherwise their wide dissemination cannot be explained properly.⁵ One of those purposes – their involvement with ‘magical practices’ – is the subject of this paper, although it should be borne in mind that other modes of usage also existed. Going beyond the age of manuscripts, printed miniature Qur’ans are probably even more widespread nowadays than their handwritten precursors in pre-modern times and can be bought at little cost, even in online shops. They are carried or worn close to the body or hung around rear-view mirrors in cars.⁶

After touching upon the question of which manuscripts qualify as miniature Qur’ans, a concept of magic and religion will be discussed briefly that is taken from cognitive science, which will help the reader understand the role that miniature Qur’ans played in the lives of the people who produced and used them in the past. An attempt will be made to demonstrate that miniature Qur’ans were very likely perceived as agents in the sense that they were meant to influence supernatural entities. Their proximity to other talismanic practices in terms of morphology and content makes it highly probable that they were used in similar ways.

With regard to terminology, a ‘talisman’ is understood to be an object that is believed to avert evil, heal and/or bring good luck by virtue of its materiality or because of the signs inscribed on it. The term ‘amulet’, following Hamès 2007, designates a talismanic pendant that can be carried or worn on the body or hung on a wall in the house. Hence, every amulet is a talisman in this paper, but not vice versa.

⁴ A recent study on scrolls, including complete Qur’ans, is in Nünlist 2020.

⁵ To the best of my knowledge, the only notable dedicated publication so far (and one from which my own work has greatly benefitted) is Coffey 2010.

⁶ For a short study of 1980s car-amulet practices in Jerusalem, see Abramovitch and Epstein 1988. For recent scholarship on printed miniature Qur’ans, see the contributions in Myrvold and Parmenter 2019.

Fig. 4: Oxford, Bodleian Libraries, MS Arab. G 14. Beginning of a Qur’anic scroll on paper measuring 356.0 × 7.5 cm. The panel filled with larger script contains the first surah and the first verses of the second one, which is then continued below in minute script. Printed in its original size.





Prerequisites: a matter of size

It is difficult to propose a general definition for miniature Qur'ans. What exactly counts as being a 'miniature'? Should small but not tiny portable Qur'ans intended for private reading – which I will call 'pocket Qur'ans' here for the sake of simplicity – be included? (See Figs 8–10 for example.) Is it necessary for such small works to contain the entire Qur'an? Can other texts like prayers or talismanic symbols be included as well? How relevant are the forms of usage in which miniature Qur'ans are involved and which distinguish them from other forms of book use? After all, an object that was not designed with a magical purpose in mind could still be used as such, and vice versa. On the other hand, objects that are different in nature, but have a similar appearance (e.g. small books with Qur'anic surahs and prayers)⁷ might be used in the same 'magical' practice as a miniature Qur'an. It is clear that both morphological and usage-related characteristics would have to be considered in a definition. One convenient but simplified answer would be to say that Qur'ans that are too small for comfortable reading qualify as miniature Qur'ans. How conveniently a text can be read depends more on the size of the script than on its overall dimensions, however, so strictly speaking, a very large piece of writing material covered in small script would still fit this definition, but could hardly be called a miniature Qur'an unless it was folded together. Having outlined these problems, I will refrain from proposing a strict definition here; rather than that, several characteristics will be listed which *indicate* that a given manuscript qualifies as a miniature Qur'an, especially when taken together:

⁷ For a brief description of these predominantly Ottoman 'prayer books', see below, Sobieroj 2007, 66–69, and Berthold 2021, 16–18.

Fig. 5: Oxford, Bodleian Libraries, MS Arab. G 14. A section from the same Qur'anic scroll as in Fig. 4. The large script, which is actually made up of minute writing, shows the beginning of the 'Throne verse' Q (2:255), a verse frequently used on talismans. Printed in its original size.

1. The manuscript contains the complete text of the Qur'an.
2. When closed (like a codex) or folded (like a piece of cloth), the longest side of the object is 9 cm or less in size.⁸ Rolled-up scrolls can be up to 12 cm wide and 3 cm in diameter.
3. The line spacing is 3 mm or less. The letters without ascenders and descenders may not even be higher than 1 mm.⁹
4. There is evidence of a mode of usage other than reading, e.g. a matching case or metal cylinder for carrying, creases in a textile Qur'an resulting from folding it together, or simply a lack of traces of use on the inside (like the typically stained lower edges on the paper where the user's thumbs held the codex or the pages were turned), perhaps in contrast to worn edges and corners on the outside.
5. The object's shape may be irregular, e.g. a scroll, an octagonal codex or a foldable piece of cloth (see Figs 1–7).

Judging by the data from library and auction catalogues, plus the 20 or so specimens which I had the opportunity to scrutinise, it appears that most miniature Qur'ans in codex form are either single-text manuscripts or contain up to three additional prayers (Arab. sg. *du'ā'*) after the Qur'anic text (usually in the hand of the primary scribe). Hence this group can easily be distinguished from the small Ottoman prayer books, for example. Besides Qur'anic surahs and prayers, the prayer books frequently contain magical squares, seals and other talismans as well.¹⁰ Thus they border on miniature Qur'ans as a cultural phenomenon, as do fields like the general treatment of copies of the Qur'an in Muslim societies and, of course, the morphology and use of amulets and other talismanic objects. All of this will be reflected in the following analysis, even though miniature Qur'ans in the narrow sense – scrolls and codices containing the whole Qur'anic text, small enough to be carried around in a little container – are the main focus.

⁸ The measurements taken from my corpus indicate a subtle but noticeable gap between what I called 'pocket Qur'ans' and actual miniature ones. The former are, on average, no shorter than 10 cm on their longest side (in codex form), while the latter, especially octagonal ones, begin at around 8 cm and are typically even smaller, around 5 cm.

⁹ In this respect, pocket Qur'ans differ from miniature ones, too, as their line spacing is approx. 6 mm on average.

¹⁰ Sobieroj 2007, 69–70. One notable exception is preserved in the Indiana University Collections (Lilly Library, Adomeit Miniature Islamic Manuscripts C9). This 4 × 4 cm octagonal manuscript was probably made in eighteenth- to nineteenth-century Iran. Despite its similarity to actual miniature Qur'ans, it only contains Qur'anic excerpts. The words of the verses appear to be randomly arranged on the page. See Coffey 2010, 97–99.

Before approaching the complex issue of what qualifies as 'magical' practice within the scope of this paper, it seems necessary to repeat that miniature Qur'ans cannot be reduced to a purely talismanic function; as a few sources indicate, they served other purposes as well. The German polymath Adam Olearius, for instance, reported that small Qur'ans were worn as part of the festive headgear of men participating in a Shī'ī procession commemorating the death of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (d.660), the Prophet Muḥammad's cousin, son-in-law and later caliph. The event Olearius described took place in Azerbaijan during Ramadan in 1637.¹¹ Two centuries later, the adventurer Richard Francis Burton travelled undercover to Mecca. He stated in his *Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to El-Medinah and Meccah* (1855–1856) that small Qur'ans, called 'Hamail' (from Arabic *ḥamā'il*, denoting the 'things that are worn', e.g. a belt, but also used as a singular term denoting an amuletic pendant among Turkish- and Persian-speaking people¹²), were considered a token of pilgrimage and worn especially by Turkish Muslims. Carried inside a velvet or morocco case, the Qur'an was suspended by a cord so it hung on the right-hand side of the body.¹³ Miniature Qur'ans attached to Turkish military flags (sg. *sancak*, the basis for the frequently used term 'Sancak Qur'an' applied to miniature Qur'ans), a practice attested by a few written sources¹⁴ and extant originals kept at Topkapı Palace in Istanbul, indicate that they acted as symbols of the divine sanctioning of Ottoman politics and conquests – besides having possible functions as morale boosters or good-luck charms for the troops.

A model for understanding magical and religious thinking

When pondering the question of whether or not miniature Qur'ans were used in magical practices or were even perceived as magical agents, two major preconditions have to be considered.¹⁵ First, 'magical' practices in the broadest sense – including the use of talismans – were widespread in the Middle East (and elsewhere, of course) long before

¹¹ Olearius 1656, 436.

¹² On the term *ḥamā'il*, see Hamès 2007 and Anetshofer 2018, 189. This term was also used to refer to the prayer books, as shown below.

¹³ Burton 1874, vol. 1, 135 and 232–233.

¹⁴ Coffey 2010, 83–84 and Berthold 2021, 149–157.

¹⁵ For a more extensive discussion of 'magic' in Islam with regard to miniature Qur'ans, see Berthold 2021, 105–126.

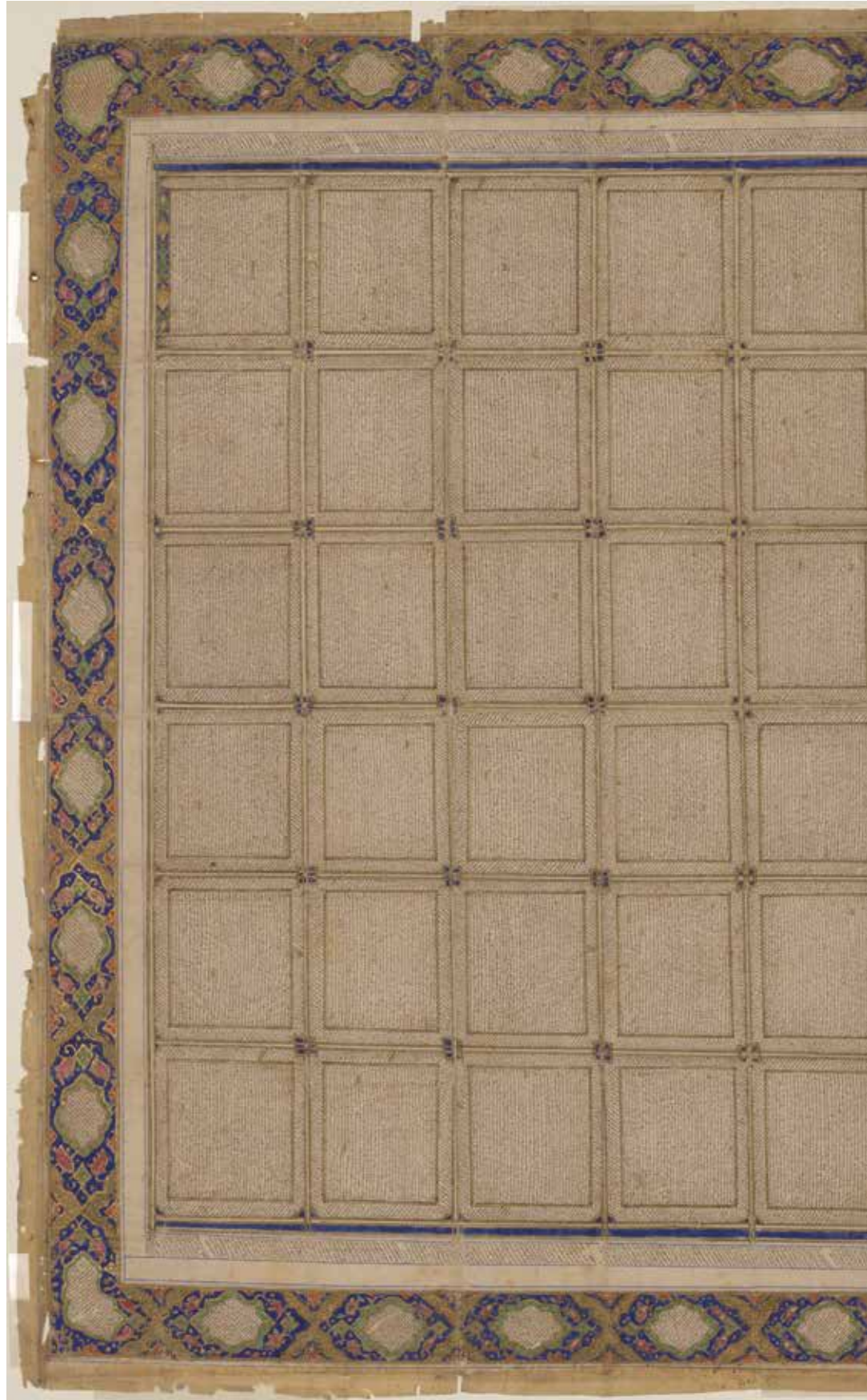


Fig. 6: Dublin, Chester Beatty Library, MS 1612. An Ottoman Qur'an on linen written in minute script. Total size approx. 68×54 cm. The creases indicate that it was just 7.5×5.5 cm in size when folded up.





Fig. 7: Dublin, Chester Beatty Library, MS 1612. Detail from the Ottoman Qur'an on a textile, containing the end of the second and the beginning of the third surah. Printed in its original size.

the advent of Islam.¹⁶ Naturally, some of them continued to exist, often in a somewhat Islamicised form. The production and use of amulets and talismans, a plethora of divination practices, interpretation of dreams and omens as well as astrology and alchemy were common in all corners of the Islamic world, and most parts of society were involved in them one way or another.¹⁷ If miniature Qur'ans were, indeed, used for magical practices, as I will argue, they have to be understood as part of this wide and diverse field, sharing features and characteristics with related customs and drawing on the same concepts regarding their function and legitimisation. This leads to the second aspect, namely the discussions among Muslim scholars about which practices were considered irreconcilable with religious law and which could be tolerated. The common denominator seems to have

been that only beneficial ('white') magic was tolerable, if at all.¹⁸ The use of Qur'anic words and phrases for talismans was permissible and even encouraged because of its efficacy,¹⁹ even though it could be argued that they primarily acted as a legitimising cover for practices that were neither Qur'anic nor part of the Prophet's tradition. It is therefore to be expected that simply wearing a small Qur'an close to one's body was hardly considered 'practising magic' by Muslims; an emic understanding of the term will therefore not confirm the hypothesis presented in this paper. It has been argued that a substantive definition of magic, i.e. that it encompasses certain phenomena and not others, will not withstand the test of cross-cultural analysis as it could constantly be challenged with formerly unknown examples of magical or religious practices. This approach would also inherit discourses on magic led by authors writing from either an internal perspective (e.g. by practitioners) or – more often – from an external perspective that polemically aims to red-line and condemn magic. This itself would not be very problematic for a study concerned with the Islamic world, seeing as we find similar types of discourse there.²⁰ Still, the existence of so many phenomena that could simultaneously be explained from a religious and magical perspective suggests that using them to form categories is problematic.²¹

Instead of that, I wish to draw on some concepts derived from cognitive science, as presented by Konrad Talmont-Kaminski.²² As he argues, a dichotomy between religious or magical beliefs and the knowledge of empirical facts is a modern perspective at best. Both are obtained by the same cognitive mechanisms which allow humans to rationalise the world around them, like problem-solving and agent detection heuristics, in order to improve their chances of survival. Religion and magic are therefore, in principle, no less rational.²³ This helps to explain why religious and magical

¹⁸ Fahd 1997, 568–571.

¹⁹ Ruska et al. 2000, 501.

²⁰ Otto 2018, esp. 526–538.

²¹ Bernd-Christian Otto and Michael Stausberg suggest speaking of 'patterns of magicity', i.e. analysing individual phenomena like talismanry; see Otto and Stausberg 2013, 10–11.

²² Talmont-Kaminski 2013.

²³ Talmont-Kaminski 2013, 9–11 and 39–42. His differentiation between empirically verifiable cognition (which leads to knowing what is 'true') and 'by-products' (which lead to religious and magical beliefs) is based on the assumption that only the former provide a tangible evolutionary advantage;

¹⁶ Schaefer 2006, 7–20. For the continuation of pre-Islamic amulet practices in Islamic times, cf. Schienerl 1988, 10–18.

¹⁷ An overview of recorded beliefs and practices can be found in Maddison and Savage-Smith 1997 and Leonie 2016.



Fig. 8: Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Cod. Arab. 1116, fol. 3'. Incipit page of an exquisitely made and well-preserved Ottoman 'pocket Qur'an' penned on paper by the calligrapher Shaykh Ḥamdullāh around 1480–1490 (see Rebhan and Riesterer 1998, no. 15). The page measures 13.0 × 8.5 cm. Printed in its original size.

beliefs mostly mirror the concepts and ontological categories of the 'natural' world, but are 'minimally counter-intuitive',²⁴ which can be understood as adding a 'twist' to these concepts and categories. Carrying a weapon, for example, increases one's chance of prevailing against physical opponents, but reducing the weapon to a small pendant hanging around one's neck might still help against demons, even though the weapon's small size and the invisibility of the enemy would



Fig. 9: Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Cod. Arab. 1116, fol. 146'. A page from the same 'pocket Qur'an' as in Fig. 8 showing a section from the eleventh surah. The script is fully vocalised and gold discs mark the intersections between the individual verses. Small red letters indicate where pauses are compulsory, permissible or forbidden when reciting the text. The marginal note in gold ink marks the beginning of the twelfth of 30 parts of the text, intended for reading a section a day in the month of Ramadan, for instance. Printed in its original size.

be counter-intuitive elements.²⁵ That humans tend to apply already known ontologies and categories to new phenomena also explains why religious or magical practices tend to follow similar patterns through time and in different parts of the world.²⁶ This will help with inferring the role played by miniature Qur'ans from related beliefs and practices later.

see 79–80. However, he attests religions a significant pro-social function; see 98–99.

²⁴ Talmont-Kaminski 2013, 53–58. The term 'minimally counter-intuitive' goes back to Pascal Boyer.

²⁵ Schienerl 1988, 60–62, argues that even iron – the typical material used for blades – would be considered effective against supernatural creatures.

²⁶ Cf. the term 'pattern(s) of magicity' proposed by Otto and Stausberg 2013, 10–11.



Fig. 10: The slipcase preserved with the manuscript Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Cod. Arab. 1116, made of cardboard covered in leather. Apparently, it was not supposed to be carried by itself as a pouch, but it may have been tucked inside one.



Fig. 11: Hamburg, Museum am Rothenbaum – Kulturen und Künste der Welt (MARKK), inv. no. 13.18:35. An amulet container from East Africa; probably late nineteenth/early twentieth century.



Fig. 12: Two types of *bāzū-band* cases for wearing on the bearer's sleeve; Afghanistan, Iran or India, late nineteenth/early twentieth century. Private collection (octagonal case 5.7 × 5.7 × 2.1 cm, oblong cases 7.3 × 1.4 × 1.4 cm, not counting the hinge and lugs).



Fig. 13: Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Preußischer Kulturbesitz, ID no. I. 3618 (4.0 × 3.8 × 2.1 cm, including the hinge). A miniature Qur'an case made of iron with gold inlay; probably Iran, nineteenth century. The construction is slightly different from *bāzū-band* cases, not least because it is higher. Some Qur'an cases also have a loop in the centre of the lid.

In order to distinguish between religious and magical beliefs, Talmont-Kaminski proposes that while the former focus on transcendent ends (e.g. the forgiveness of one's sins by God, guaranteeing salvation after death), magic is mostly supposed to affect the perceivable world (e.g. to protect one from snakebites or win another person's love). Regardless of whether the ends are transcendent or mundane, religion and magic both ask for the help of or employ supernatural entities.²⁷ Actual established religions, however, are almost

²⁷ Talmont-Kaminski 2013, 63–64.

always what Talmont-Kaminski – following Ilkka Pyysiäinen – calls 'magico-religious complexes' as they contain beliefs and practices that fall into both categories.²⁸ Adapting this framework to miniature Qur'ans, it would mean that if it could be shown that these objects were (and are) thought to influence a supernatural entity in order to affect the perceivable world, this would qualify as a magical belief among Muslims. Even more relevant to the topic of this paper, it would also imply that the people using miniature Qur'ans attributed an agency to these objects.

Muslim scholars have used different categories to distinguish between religion and magic. The simple act of praying to God for good health, for instance (a mundane effect) would not be considered to lie outside religion. Ibn Khaldūn (d.1406) even considered miracles (*karāmāt*) like those performed by Sufi saints as being part of religion because in this case humans received divine help, which they would use to affect the here and now. In magic, in his opinion, psychic force and demons would be employed.²⁹ Ibn Khaldūn was critical of practices like talismanry, however, and considered some Sufis to be exaggerators if they delved into magic too deeply in his understanding.³⁰ This is interesting to note since, as Liana Saif points out, magic tended to be justified in the Islamic world from the thirteenth century onwards as a power that God granted to devotees of mysticism, such as Sufis. Before that, it was understood as part of the natural universe that could be explored and tamed through study.³¹

Magical practices related to miniature Qur'ans in the Middle East

Before elaborating on magical agency, a few examples from the Islamic world will be mentioned to illustrate the use of talismans carried on the body as amulets.³² As the magical

²⁸ Talmont-Kaminski 2013, 48 and 64–65.

²⁹ Fahd 1997, 570.

³⁰ Saif 2017, 336.

³¹ Saif 2017, 297 and *passim*.

³² The focus will not be on other talismanic practices here, such as dissolving the ink of a written amulet in water so it can be drunk as a remedy against sickness, a practice basically identical to the one in which inscribed



Fig. 14: New York, Brooklyn Museum, acc. no. 1997.3.37. Portrait of a female member of the Shah's family wearing *bāzū-band* amulet cases on her sleeves; Iran, late nineteenth/early twentieth century.

aspects of miniature Qur'ans are, if anything, talismanic or amuletic (because the Qur'an was worn as a pendant), I consider not only the small Ottoman prayer books but 'normal' talismans made of stone, metal or written paper the closest relatives of miniature Qur'ans.³³ Peter W. Schienerl has convincingly pointed out the unbroken currents in the production and use of amulets from antiquity to the present day. In Egypt, which became part of the Islamic world as early as the seventh century, amulets have been used for millennia. Prayers or apotropaic formulas written on strips of papyrus were tucked inside small metal cylinders which, as Schienerl argues, were miniature versions of tubes to store or transport normal manuscript scrolls.³⁴ These cylindrical

talismanic metal bowls are used. For more information on the latter, see Langer 2013, for example.

³³ Miniature Qur'ans share production-related characteristics with normal-sized copies of the Qur'an, of course, which are equally venerated.

³⁴ Schienerl 1988, 17–29.

amulet containers were often decorated and had one or more lugs through which a cord could run. Similar containers were used in neighbouring regions like Carthage and Greece, with additional ornamental pendants or even talismanic inscriptions on the outside. Unlike the old Egyptian cases, they could now be carried horizontally due to them being fitted with lugs or be given other shapes and forms such as rectangular boxes.³⁵ These practices were not abolished with the advent of Islam, a fact to which several strikingly similar amulet containers attest that can be dated to the nineteenth century (Fig. 11).³⁶ However, the writing material had become paper and the content of the talismanic texts was now based on Islamic formulas: by invoking the names of God, angels or prominent religious figures and by quoting passages proclaiming God's might or prayer-like verses from the Qur'an, these texts were believed to repel evil and call for divine help.³⁷ The talisman could, then, be considered a constant enunciator of apotropaic texts.

The whole Qur'an, which most Muslims still consider the most important religious text of all on the grounds of

³⁵ Schienerl 1988, 17–29.

³⁶ See the examples in Leoni 2016, 85–86. There are also examples of amulet cases from the Sahara region mentioned by Schienerl 1988, 44–59.

³⁷ Ruska et al. 2000, 501 and Gruber 2016, 38–44.

Fig. 15 (right above): Leipzig University Library, B. or. 193, pp. 1–2 (according to an inked Western pagination; an additional foliation in pencil miscounts leaves at least twice and has therefore not been included here). First double page of an Ottoman prayer book, beginning with the 36th surah, called *yā' sīn*. A single folio is 10.2 × 7.2 cm in size. Printed in its original size.

Fig. 16 (right below): A double page from the same manuscript as Fig. 15, Leipzig University Library, B. or. 193, pp. 389–390, showing Muḥammad's 'Seal of Prophecy' (*mūhr-i nūbüvvet*) on the right. Besides the Prophet, the four 'rightly guided caliphs' are also mentioned. The fourth and last of them, 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, is grouped together with the names of his sons Ḥasan and Ḥusayn, both of whom are important to Shī'ī Muslims. Unlike the double page depicted in Fig. 15, the paper of this double page shows traces of use, almost certainly due to readers touching the seal with their foreheads or fingers in the hope of benefitting from its positive effects (see Rudy 2018 on traces of physical contact in European manuscripts). The diagram on the left is in the shape of the Arabic letter 'ayn, which the name 'Alī starts with, for instance (for a brief explanation of this kind of diagram, see Karolewski 2016 and Gruber 2019). Printed in its original size.

its perfection and inimitability, would have been the most influential or active talisman of all. This can be assumed quite safely, not only because it contains all the verses that were believed to be apotropaic, but because it was believed to be an eternal text containing all the concepts, truths and laws of relevance³⁸ – it was (and still is) much more than the sum of its verses. This is confirmed or implied by Western eyewitnesses like Edward W. Lane, who observed the ‘Manners and Customs of Modern Egyptians’ in the early nineteenth century. He wrote that ‘The most esteemed of all “ḥegábs” (or charms) is a “muṣ-ḥaf” (or copy of the Qur-án)’, while other written charms merely contained passages of the Qur’an, names of angels, numerals or diagrams.³⁹ In a similar vein, in his 1927 travel report, William Seabrook wrote that wearing a copy of the entire Qur’an was ‘as if a devout Catholic had the medals of all the saints strung around his neck’.⁴⁰

Were miniature Qur’ans believed to act in a magical way?

Despite the scarcity of explicit evidence, one may safely argue that miniature Qur’ans were believed by many of their Muslim owners to possess apotropaic functions, like a talisman. They were thought to influence demons and even God so as to avert evil or bring the bearer good luck in this world, thus qualifying as objects of magical belief by the modern concept outlined above. Besides relying on reports from outside the Muslim community, like those of the European travellers mentioned above, the argument made here is based on the similarity to other magical practices, primarily the use of written talismans in the Islamic world.⁴¹ Many of these employ Qur’anic text and prayers, be it on small engraved stones or metal pendants, on inscribed ‘magical’ bowls from which water can be drunk as a remedy for sickness (as the liquid is believed to absorb the healing power of the words), on shirts to provide protection in battle or on paper or a textile which can be rolled up or folded and worn on the body.⁴² This degree of intimacy was achieved by sewing them into clothing or tucking them

into metal pendant cases. These cases not only demonstrate continuity in the use of amulets from antiquity to the modern age, as described earlier, but they are a prime example of the phenomenological and morphological overlap that exists with carrying or wearing miniature Qur’ans on one’s body. Many of the specimens that still exist are made of silver and were produced in the nineteenth century, mostly in Iran, but also in Yemen and the Islamic West. The cases for paper amulets are approx. 7–10 cm long and tubular with either a circular or hexagonal cross-section or have other shapes, such as that of an octagonal box with a diameter of 4–8 cm and a height of 1.3–2 cm (see Fig. 12 for an example).⁴³ The latter two types thus resemble the cases for miniature Qur’an manuscripts of the scroll and octagonal codex form respectively (Fig. 13). The similarity includes the lugs through which cords or ribbons could run to suspend or tie the cases to the bearer’s arms (hence the Persian term *bāzū-band*, meaning ‘armband’; see Fig. 14).⁴⁴ Although containers for miniature Qur’ans tend to be slightly bigger because of the larger size of the manuscripts and their thickness – both the scroll format in cylindrical containers and the octagonal ones in corresponding cases – there are a few examples of *bāzū-band*-type boxes for miniature Qur’ans, thus blurring the line between paper amulet and Qur’an containers.⁴⁵ It illustrates just how intuitive it may have been for pre-modern Muslims to transfer their established belief in the efficacy of amulets to that of Qur’an manuscripts in an amulet form – which would then have had the same – or rather, even more – efficacy.

³⁸ Welch 1986, 402 and 425–427.

³⁹ Lane 1860, 247.

⁴⁰ Seabrook 1927, 48–49. For a longer list of accounts, see Berthold 2021, 135–140.

⁴¹ Maddison and Savage-Smith 1997, 132–134.

⁴² For a short overview of magical practices in the Islamic world, see Gruber 2016. One Qur’an written on linen measuring approx. 68 × 54 cm is kept at the Chester Beatty Library in Dublin (MS 1612, see Figs 6 and 7). Based on the visible crease lines in the fabric, I would estimate its size when folded to be approx. 7.5 × 5.5 cm.

⁴³ The height of the octagonal case of the specimen in Fig. 12 is too low to contain most octagonal Qur’an manuscripts for which I have measurements. The lid is inscribed using a niello technique with the throne verse (2:255), a section of the Qur’an found frequently on talismans. On the sides one can find the names of the Prophet, his daughter Fāṭima, her husband ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib and their sons, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn, all of whom are important figures for Shī‘ī Muslims.

⁴⁴ Newid and Vasegh Abbasi 2007, 268. Portraits from the Qajar era in Iran (late eighteenth to early twentieth century) suggest that the cases were, in fact, tied to the sleeves of garments. They often existed as pairs and were worn that way as well.

⁴⁵ Maddison and Savage-Smith 1997, 144–145. There are octagonal miniature Qur’ans in two volumes, e.g. Khalili Collection of Islamic Art, acc. no. QUR315 (A and B). Even if they were not worn like paired *bāzū-bands* as described in Maddison and Savage-Smith 1997, 145, they at least correspond to them morphologically. Cf. Lot 37 in Christie’s, *Sale 6940, London, October 2004, Islamic Art and Manuscripts*, available online: <<https://www.christies.com/lotfinder/lot/minature-two-part-quran-iran-19th-century-4351207-details.aspx?from=searchresults&intObjectID=4351207&sid=fb375025-7e32-4686-8abd-59250bbb34ab>>. Originally, however, the cases for this pair of octagonal miniature Qur’ans do not seem to have been made for these manuscripts as they are considerably larger in size. I have since found more evidence of the *bāzū-band*-like wearing of miniature Qur’ans; see Berthold 2021, 96–100, 120–122 and 137.



Fig. 17: Leipzig University Library, B. or. 107, unfoliated. A so-called ‘Seal of Solomon’ (*mühr Süleymān*), preceded by an instructional text (right-hand page) and the instructions and graphical representation of a magical square (on the left) in an Ottoman prayer book measuring 13.5 × 9.4 cm.

The ‘pocket-size’ manuscripts⁴⁶ mentioned above are mostly of Ottoman origin and serve as a second example of manuscripts acting as agents in a similar way to miniature Qur’ans. These small books typically contain excerpts from the Qur’an (see Figs 15 and 18), prayers with explanations in Turkish, and talismans like the ‘Seal of [Muḥammad’s] Prophecy’ (*mühr-i nübüvvet* in Ottoman Turkish; see Fig. 16),⁴⁷ the ‘Seal of Solomon’ (*khātam Sulaymān* or *mühr Sulaymān* in Arabic; see Fig. 17),⁴⁸ depictions of ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib’s legendary

bifurcated sword Dhū l-Faqār, and magical squares.⁴⁹ The selections of surahs differ in detail, but usually centre around surahs 1, 36, 48, 67, 78 and 112–114,⁵⁰ which declare God’s omnipotence, recount his miracles and describe which benefits He bestows upon His believers, while the non-believers are punished. Surahs 113 and 114 begin with the prayer-like formula ‘Say: I seek refuge with the Lord of Daybreak’ and ‘Say: I seek refuge with the Lord of Mankind’ respectively. These multiple-text manuscripts are not only ‘siblings’ to miniature Qur’ans because of their size and Qur’anic content, though, but were also worn on the body for personal protection. According to paratexts added to them, e.g. by Western soldiers who wrote a note, some of these manuscripts now in European libraries were taken as booty

⁴⁶ Again, this data is from my own corpus, which started with a maximum length of 14 cm as a criterion for inclusion. Most of these prayer books, more than 140 of which I have recorded, are smaller than this, typically 8–12 × 7–10 cm.

⁴⁷ This is a representation of the mark of apostleship which the Prophet is believed to have had between his shoulder blades. See Gruber 2013, 4, where she also quotes this instruction from a nineteenth-century seal depiction: ‘whoever rubs the seal on his face morning and night will be absolved from eighty years of sins; and whoever looks at the seal at the beginning of the month will be safe from all misfortune’. It appears as if the manuscript shown in Fig. 16 bears witness to such practices.

⁴⁸ Maddison and Savage-Smith 1997, 60. This seal also serves as a graphical representation of the actual seal that King Salomon is believed to have owned.

⁴⁹ Sesiano 2002.

⁵⁰ This assessment is based on the contents of some 30 specimens from Leipzig University Library. The following shelf marks are some examples: B. or. 182, 185, 188, 189, 191–196 and 199. The works can be viewed online here: *Qalamos* <<https://www.qalamos.net/content/>> (accessed 1 November 2022).



Fig. 18: Oxford, Bodleian Libraries, MS Laud Or. 15, fol. 3^v. First page with the beginning of the 36th surah in an unusually small Ottoman (?) prayer book; the manuscript measures 7.1 × 4.2 cm. Printed in its original size.

after battles with the Ottomans.⁵¹ It is very likely they are the same kind of books briefly described by the Serbian janissary Konstantin Mihailović (c.1430s–1480s), a witness of the wars fought by the Ottomans on the Balkans. In his memoirs, he wrote that the ‘heathens’ have ‘small books which they treasure like sanctuaries and call hamâyil, meaning “gospel”. They wear them under the arm, especially in wartime, and they are decorated with a depiction of Zülfikâr, the sabre. They claim that the image of the sabre helps them in battle’.⁵² One prayer book now kept in the Bodleian Libraries, Oxford actually features a depiction of Dhū l-Faqār (Fig. 19).

This indicates that there was a tradition of small-sized codices with substantial Qur’anic content being carried by Ottoman Muslim soldiers in the hope of them having apotropaic effects. The quality of the preserved specimens themselves is often at the lower end of the spectrum, with little illumination, normal-sized script and thus much less text than in proper miniature Qur’an copies (otherwise they would have become too thick and unwieldy). As they contained sections that were clearly designed to be read (e.g.

⁵¹ Such secondary entries can be found in Forschungsbibliothek Gotha, Ms. Orient. A 517 (inserted on a separate leaf) and A 789; Bodleian Libraries Oxford, Ms. Bodl. Or. 194 (fol. 116^v); and Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Ms. or. oct. 181 (fol. 100^v), for example. Further evidence and more information on manuscripts taken as booty which are now in German libraries is provided in Sobieroj 2007, 62–66 and Seidensticker 2017, 76–80.

⁵² Lachmann 2010, 69, translation into English by the author.



Fig. 19: Bodleian Libraries, MS Laud Or. 15, fol. 45^r. Depiction of the sword Dhū l-Faqār in the same prayer book as Fig. 18. The legendary sword is discernible because of its bifurcated tip; the text simply calls it a sword, Arab. *sayf*. It appears at the end of a short Qur’anic section based on verses 8:45 and 47:4, which tell believers to be steadfast and strike their enemies, before citing from 57:25 that iron was brought to mankind as a powerful and useful gift. At the bottom, a line in Arabic asks for protection for the keeper of this book (*hāmīl*, etymologically related to the term *hamāyil*). Printed in its original size.

Arabic prayer texts with Turkish instructions, *ṣerḥ*),⁵³ these multiple-text manuscripts were not exclusively talismanic in nature. Their diverse contents also mean that they cannot have merely been a cheaper alternative to complete miniature Qur’ans, even if one assumes the latter would have been considered more effective apotropaia. The fact that they were explicitly regarded as amulets is, however, clear from Konstantin Mihailović’s description and the term *hamāyil*. A catalogue of the library of Sultan Bayezid II (r. 1481–1512) written in Arabic lists several items called *hamā’il ad’iyya* (‘prayer-pendant’) and *hamā’il malfūf* (‘scroll pendant’), which could denote such amuletic prayer manuscripts.⁵⁴ If so, their mode of usage formed the origin of the label, which, in turn, connected them to other amulets or amulet containers called *hamā’il* or *hamāyil* respectively and thus to magical beliefs and practices.

As mentioned at the beginning, the talismanic or amuletic capacity of miniature Qur’ans is by no means their only

⁵³ On average, the manuscripts analysed only had seven lines per page, with approx. 1 cm of line spacing.

⁵⁴ Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Oriental Collection, Török F. 59, pp. 45–46.



Fig. 20: Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Ms Török F. 59, p. 15. Detail from the list of Qur'an manuscripts in the library of Sultan Bayezid II, mentioning a few Qur'ans 'the size of an amulet' or 'in the size of a pendant', next to others in Damascus or Samarkand format.

characteristic and may not even be their most prominent feature. Wearing one could be a sign of personal religious devotion, the token of a pilgrim (following Burton's description), and last, but not least, fashionable if produced by skilled scribes and illuminators and encased in a finely decorated silver container.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, they contain the Qur'anic text, which forms the essential message of God to mankind, including declarations of God's might and how he helps those in need, both of which were used in various sorts of talismans. In terms of their material properties, miniature Qur'ans appear in the size of pre-existing types of amulets. The inventory of Sultan Bayezid II's library (Fig. 20) contains entries in which some Qur'ans – most likely miniature ones – are described as 'the size of pendants' ('*alā qiṭ' at al-ḥamā'il*').⁵⁶ Their shape, which was often octagonal, made them handy and gave them the quality of a piece of jewellery, which indicates that they were probably worn or carried rather than read as they were also kept in fittingly decorated cases that featured lugs or loops to attach a cord. It therefore seems reasonable to assume that miniature Qur'an manuscripts which could easily be carried on one's body were believed to act as talismans, to avert evil (e.g. the evil eye) and possibly even to bring good luck – just like other common amuletic pendants.

One can go further than that and state that an amulet – and thus a miniature Qur'an as well – can be understood as an apotropaic actor or agent. On the one hand, this can be argued from the presence of the Qur'anic text preserved on or inside the object. It evokes the authority of God, the creator and

commander of all beings. By preserving the prayers asking for God's help in the here and now, or the praise of his powers, the object contains the crystallised act of worship. It also acts as a representative of God, whose words are contained in it, thereby asking for or benefitting from God's authority in warding off evil. As this means that the object is supposed to influence supernatural beings and make them intervene in this world, it qualifies as a magical agent. On the other hand, people who use miniature Qur'ans as amulets possibly attributed a form of agency to them, either consciously or unconsciously. After all, it is a natural human cognitive mechanism to look for agents rather than accidents as causes of certain phenomena in the environment. This 'hyperactive agency detection device', as it is called by Talmont-Kaminski (following Stewart Guthrie and Justin Barrett), is in his view one of the main reasons for the development of religious and magical beliefs in the first place.⁵⁷ It was probably more than a depreciative remark from the outside when Konstantin stated that the Muslims believed the Dhū l-Faqr talismans in their *ḥamāyil* aided them in battle. The agency ascribed to the small amuletic prayer books was not entirely different to that ascribed to miniature Qur'ans.

Conclusion

Humans, one could summarise, consciously or unconsciously assume living agents to be the cause of certain phenomena. Muslims wearing amulets or miniature Qur'an manuscripts very likely believed that these objects actively influenced supernatural beings by repelling evil spirits or attracting good luck through divine intervention, for example. According to the categories presented above, this would qualify as a magical belief as it is

⁵⁵ For a more elaborate interpretation of miniature Qur'ans as a phenomenon, see Berthold 2021, 157–162.

⁵⁶ Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Oriental Collection, Török F. 59, pp. 14–16. 'Amulet' might be an alternative translation to 'pendant'.

⁵⁷ Talmont-Kaminski 2013, 85–86.

focused on mundane ends. In the terminology of the people using them, it was probably not assumed to be magical as the practice was based mostly on Qur'anic verses, invoking the names of God or of religious characters from Islamic history. Still, the connection between amulet use and wearing both miniature Qur'ans and the small Ottoman prayer books was noted and expressed – at least by Turkish- and Persian-speaking people – by the label *ḥamā'il* or *ḥamāyil*, which was given to all of these objects as they could be carried on the body. The amuletic functions of miniature Qur'ans could

be inferred with some certainty from the widespread use of similar talismanic objects and associated practices in Muslim societies. This assumes that the people would have transferred familiar concepts to new contexts. However, these beliefs are also attested by reports from European observers. If one then considers the animistic tendencies in human cognition, it is no stretch to conclude that miniature Qur'ans, like other forms of amulets and talismans, were assumed to act in favour of their owners or users.

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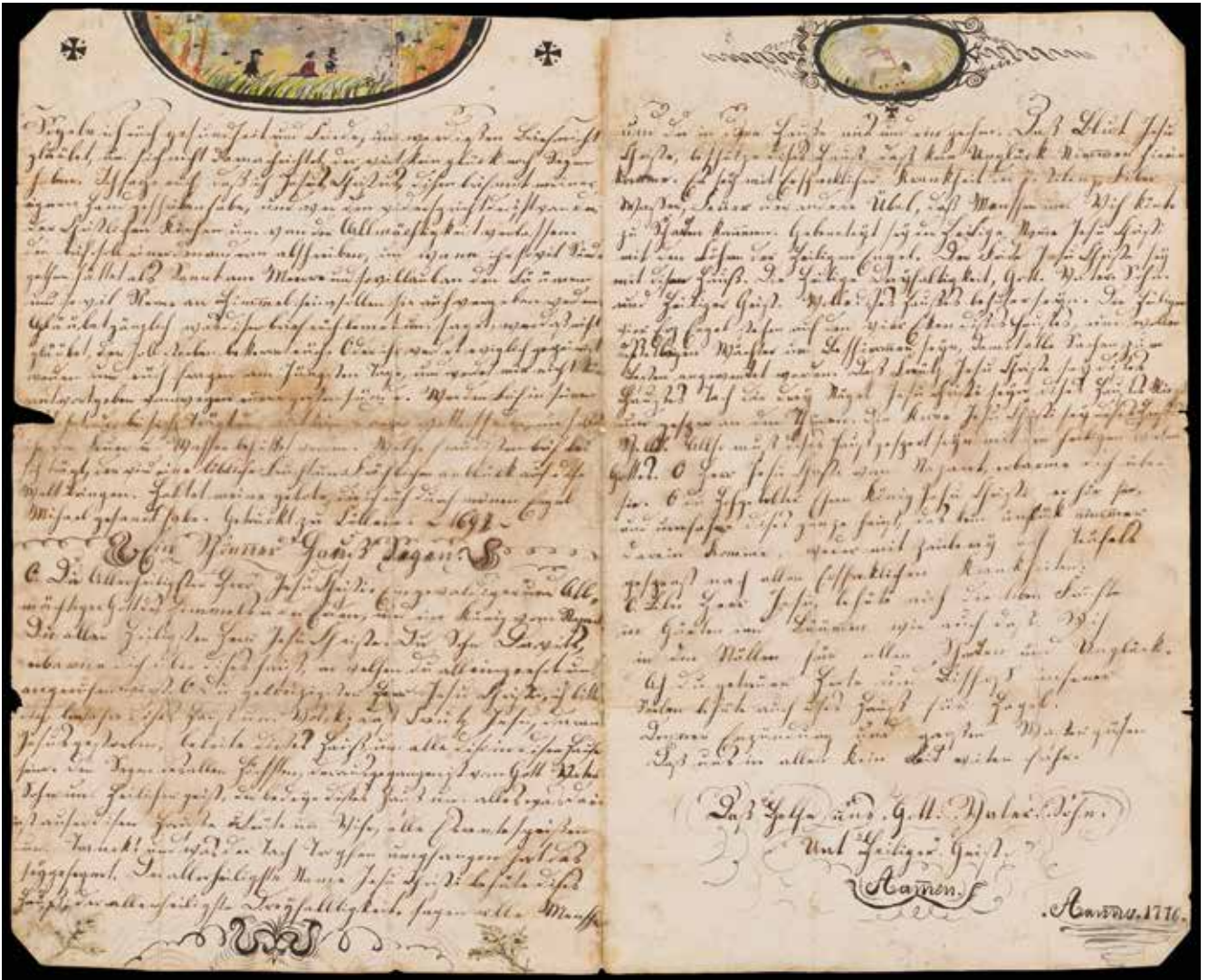
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A 'letter from Heaven', written in Ernströda near Gotha, Thuringia, and dated 1776, Berlin, Museum of European Cultures (Staatliche Museen zu Berlin – Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Museum Europäischer Kulturen), ID no. I (33 J) 176/1963, pages 2 and 3. For pages 1 and 4 of the same letter see cover image and the accompanying caption on the imprint page. Photography Christian Krug.

Article

'... even the bravest person has his own little superstition.'¹

On the Material Nature and Magical Purpose of Heavenly Letters in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Century

Sabine Kienitz | Hamburg

After the First World War broke out in 1914, the German War Ministry in Berlin began issuing *Verlustlisten* – official lists stating the names of German soldiers killed or missing in action, including the date this happened.² To supplement these lists, the *Zentralstelle für Nachlaßsachen* (Central Office for Soldiers' Effects) also published information about unidentified members of the armed forces³ in a bid to put a name to men who had died on the battlefield or in a military hospital.⁴ For lack of any official documentation, detailed descriptions were made of objects that had been found on the deceased, such as wedding rings or pocket watches.⁵ These are extremely helpful in shedding light on the material aspects of everyday life in wartime.⁶ The lists of objects show that soldiers carried all kinds of personal effects around with them even when they were stationed at the war

front, photographs⁷ and letters⁸ being just two of the possible items. Presumably these things were able to give them some consolation and emotional warmth in the face of danger. The large number of rosaries, pictures of the Virgin Mary and medals of saints that were found in the breast pockets, wallets and uniforms of fallen soldiers is a clear indication of how widely Christian practices were accepted, most of which are Roman Catholic.⁹ In addition to these, however, items relating to popular devotional practices are also listed, which count as 'forms of subjective belief'¹⁰ and were officially disapproved of by the Church.¹¹ The finds that once belonged to soldiers include a fair number of letters known as *Himmelsbriefe* in German – 'heavenly letters' or 'letters from Heaven'. These are handwritten amulets or phylacteries,¹² which were 'worn in a small pouch round one's neck (and) only taken out in a

¹ Buddecke 1918, 52–53. The English translation is from Kilduff 2012, 75.

² Kienitz 2008, 43–45.

³ *Unermittelte Heeresangehörige, Nachlaß- und Fundsachen*, Nr. 1, 1 October 1916, supplement to *Armee-Verordnungsblatt: Verlustlisten*, Berlin 1916, 1–4. Institut für Sächsische Geschichte und Volkskunde Dresden (ISGV; Institute for Saxon History and Cultural Anthropology), Nachlass Adolf Spamer ('Adolf Spamer Estate') NaAS/K91/M1: *Notizen, Abschriften und Quellensammlung zum Thema Himmelsbriefe, Schutzbriefe*. This supplement to the normal lists of casualties was published at the beginning of each month from October 1916 till October 1919. Regarding the official handling of casualties' effects, see Schmidt 1918, 39f., 43.

⁴ On the role and function of (illustrated) lists of fallen or missing soldiers in general, see Artinger 2000, Adam 1985 and Kienitz 2008.

⁵ Many of these finds were personalised by monograms or watchmakers' symbols and were able to give relatives clues about the names of the owner or the workshop and producer. The lists of the effects that had been found were divided into alphabetical lists of names and abbreviations on the objects and a separate list that included the numbers of watches and repairs. According to regulations, these items were supposed to be handed over to the relatives of the deceased person, being his or her personal property. Regarding the handling of finds, also see Schmidt 1918, 41–44, especially p. 43.

⁶ See Fuchs, Gygi and Ulrich 2002.

⁷ On the social role of photography in the construction of family identities, see Bourdieu 2006, 31.

⁸ See list no. 14 from 1 November 1917. In this case, extracts from letters are quoted (modes of address, greetings, family relations, etc.) that were regarded as specific to the relationship and identification of the deceased person. In connection with this, also see the debate in the First World War about what became known as *Jammerbriefe* (roughly, 'gloomy letters') and the exhortation to the general public to the effect that women should only send their male relatives in the field *Sonntagsbriefe* ('Sunday letters') in order to keep them emotionally stable: 'Da kann und soll der Brief von zu Hause der Schutzengel sein, indem er das deutsche Heim, die Kinder und vor allem die deutsche Frauen-Liebe und -Treue dem Manne wieder lebendig vor die Seele malt.' ('Letters from home can and should act like a guardian angel by enabling a man to imagine his German home, his children and above all his wife's love and loyalty in vivid terms.') Malita von Rundstedt, *Der Schützengraben der deutschen Frau*, 1916, 6, cited in Tramitz 1989, 97.

⁹ Schlager refers to the specifics of Catholic practices regarding consecrated medals and saints' pictures; Schlager 2011, 63–91.

¹⁰ See Knoblauch 1999, 186.

¹¹ See Korff 2005, 26.

¹² See Kriss-Rettenbeck 1963, 34–36.

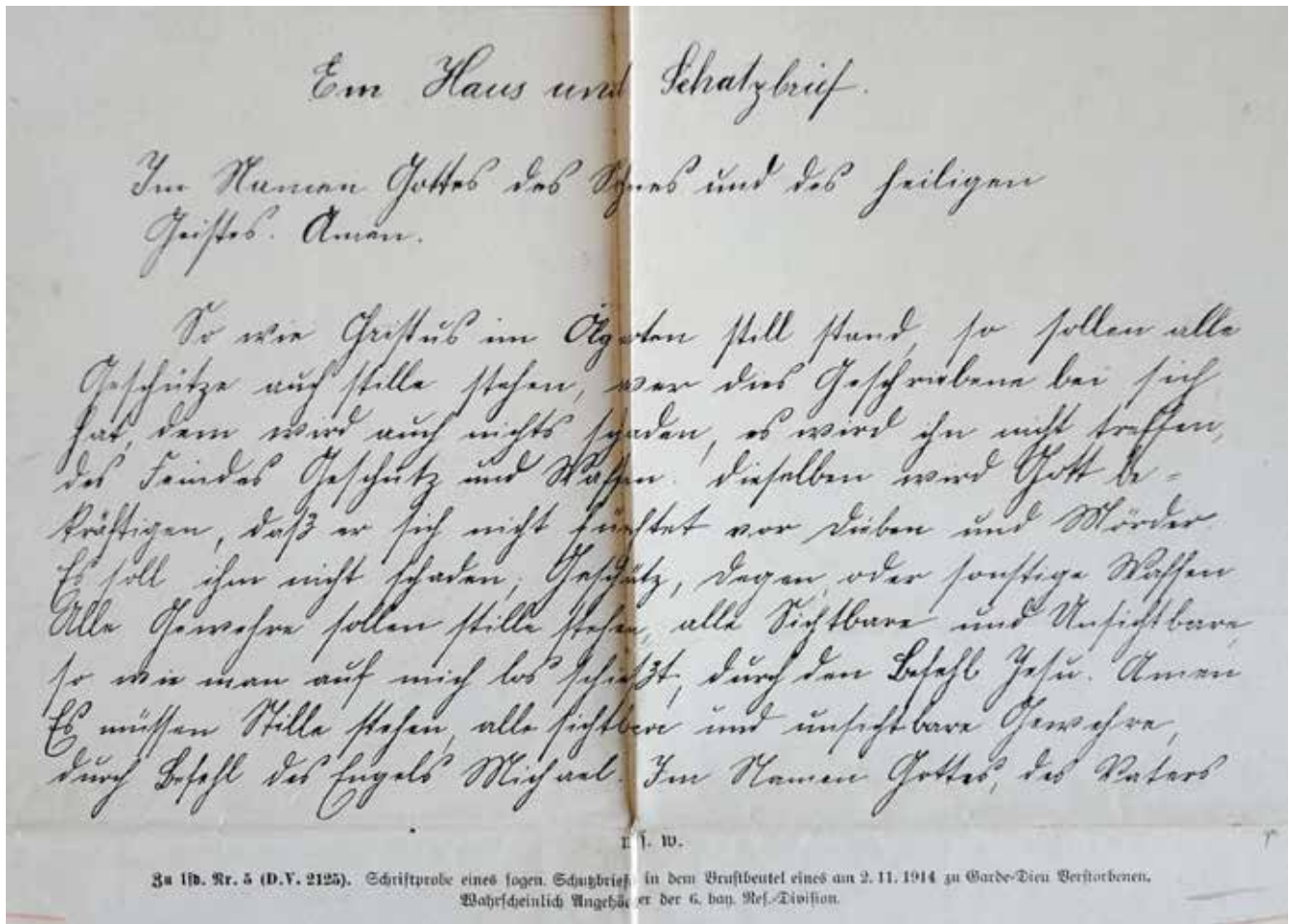


Fig. 1b: *Nachlaß- und Fundsachen*, Nr. 1, 1. Oktober 1916, *Armeeverordnungsblatt: Verlustlisten*, 1-4. ISGV Dresden, NaAS/K91/M1. 'Ein Haus- und Schutzbrief. Im Namen Gottes des Sohnes und des heiligen Geistes. Amen. A letter of protection that includes the holder's home.' ('In the name of God the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, amen.'). Excerpt from the samples of writing from 1 October 1916.

moment of acute danger' in order to be read.¹³ The illustrated supplement to *Bayerische Verlustliste* No. 325 dated 27 December 1916 depicted three of these small manuscripts as 'samples of writing' in the hope that the original authors would recognise their own handwriting and then be able to provide some personal information about the recipients (Fig. 1). It is these letters from heaven that are the subject here – a genre of apotropaic magical manuscripts to which a protective effect was attributed for several hundred years in the face of all kinds of threats, even weapons. The contents of these pieces of writing are important in understanding how they were used in the past. Most of them claim to have been written by Jesus Christ or God Himself and then brought down to Earth by the Archangel Michael, and promise men they will survive wars and assure women they will have a smooth birth in return for them leading a God-fearing life

as a Christian.¹⁴ In this study, I shall employ cultural and codicological approaches with respect to the material and handwritten nature of these artefacts in an attempt to clarify the basis for ascribing such a magical quality to them and how this efficacy was achieved and perceived in the course of producing, distributing and using these letters.

The subject at hand: heavenly letters and their contents

From a theological point of view, heavenly letters belong to the genre of *revelatory literature*.¹⁵ They were studied by scholars of religion, history and philology in the nineteenth and early twentieth century.¹⁶ Bible scholars, theologians,

¹⁴ Some authors assume that these texts belong to the genre of chain letters Cf. Rauchegger 2010.

¹⁵ See Speyer 1970.

¹⁶ Cf. the overview in Köhler 1898, which attempted to reconstruct the historical origin as well as the reception and the different ways in which the letter was transmitted. 'Doch kann als sicher gelten: Der Brief stammt aus

¹³ Cf. Prümer 1916, 80.

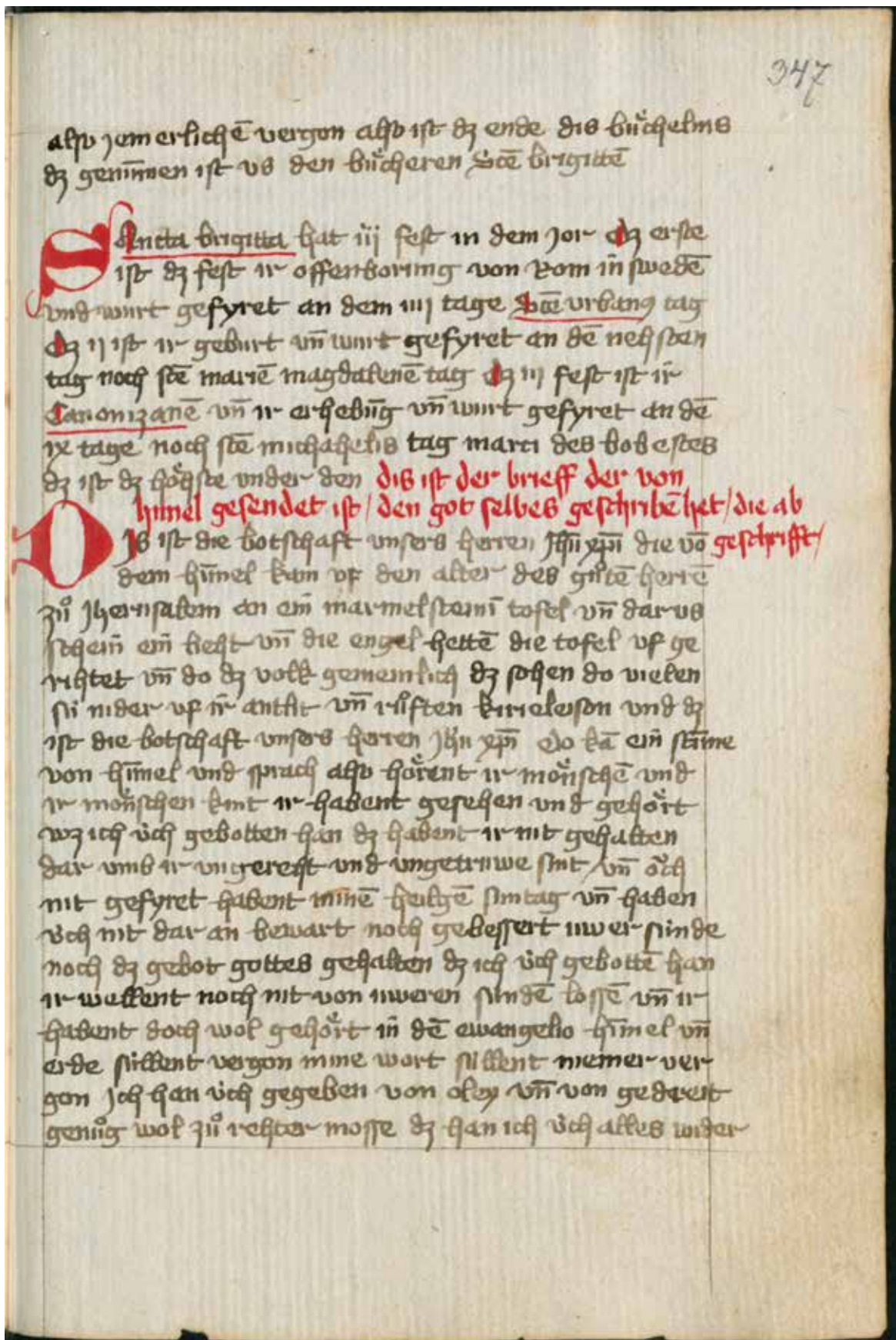


Fig. 2: 'Dis ist der brieff der von himel gesendet ist / den got selbes geschribet / die ab geschriffet' ('This is the letter sent from Heaven / which God Himself wrote / the copy'). *Lives of the Saints*, mid-15th c., manuscript volume, paper, Staatsbibliothek Berlin, Ms. Germ. qu. 189, 417 leaves, fols 347^r–349^r, here fol. 347^r.

Orientalists and church historians in particular documented individual finds of ancient¹⁷ and medieval¹⁸ exemplars in their publications. These discoveries were mostly manuscripts made of parchment or paper, or single-sheet prints from the fifteenth century onwards (Fig. 2), which were part of codices whose exact origin and history of reception were practically unknown.¹⁹ In contrast, the survival of most of the manuscripts discussed in this article is due to their being collected by clergymen, theologians and both laymen and experts in folklore in Germany, Austria and Switzerland, people who took an interest in the phenomena of magic and superstition in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. These two areas of focus determined the interests, interpretation and handling of the artefacts by the collectors themselves. To date, about fifty originals have been identified in archives, museums and libraries, although their age and exact origin still have to be clarified. The vast majority of the handwritten copies that were used as magical aids probably only exist in the form of copies for scholarly purposes now or have just been published as transcripts in anthropological journals.²⁰

dem Orient, dringt von hier nach Gallien, dient den kirchlichen Interessen zur Fixierung des Sonntags als Sabbathfeier, wird in (Mont) St. Michel deponiert und gelangt durch Wallfahrer in Verkürzung nach Schwaben bez. Köln und Straßburg, wo er Anfang des 17. Jahrhunderts wiederholt gedruckt wird. Habent sua fata libelli! Auch Christi Briefe haben ihre Schicksale!’ (‘But one thing is certain: the letter comes from the Orient, manages to get to Gaul from here, serves the Church’s interests in establishing Sunday as a Sabbath celebration, it is deposited in (Mont) St Michel and is taken to Swabia via a shortcut – or rather, to Cologne and Strasbourg – by pilgrims, where it is printed a number of times at the beginning of the 17th century. Habent sua fata libelli! Even Christ’s own letters go through a lot!’). Köhler 1998, 119. Also see Stübe 1918.

¹⁷ Cf. Ewald 1847; Delehaye 1899; Bittner 1906; Dieterich 1911; Graf 1928.

¹⁸ See s.v. ‘Himmelsbrief’ in *Handschriftencensus: Eine Bestandsaufnahme der handschriftlichen Überlieferung deutschsprachiger Texte des Mittelalters* <<http://www.handschriftencensus.de/werke/592>> (Survey of Manuscripts, last seen on 20 November 2022). My thanks to Marco Heiles for this information. Apart from that, see the *Manuscripta Mediaevalia* manuscript database with references to thirteen copies of *Himmelsbriefe* in multiple-text manuscripts <[http://www.manuscripta-mediaevalia.de/?alles:"himmelsbrief"](http://www.manuscripta-mediaevalia.de/?alles:)> (last seen on 20 November 2022). I am grateful to Felix Heinzer for this information. See Dieterich 1911 as well; this author quotes an example of a letter from Heaven from 1451 written on parchment, which is documented in the *Liber de reformatione monasteriorum* (II c. XIX, p. 699f.), which belonged to the Augustinian provost Johannes Busch. Dieterich 1911, 247. Besides that, see Kolb 1897 as well.

¹⁹ Stübe refers to a heavenly letter ‘printed in Cologne at Clemens Arnold’s, 1604’, also printed in Scheible 1847; see Stübe 1918, 22 and Köhler 1898, 117. On heavenly letters from Anglo-Saxon England, see Hebing 2012.

²⁰ In 1911, the medievalist Walther H. Vogt said that he had looked through a hundred exemplars; see Vogt 1911, 587. Various examples of handwritten copies made for scholarly purposes can be found in Adolf Spamer’s estate at

Building on this practice of collecting such works, the religious scholar Rudolf Stübe (1870–1930) presented a comprehensive, systematic historical study of these manuscripts and the history of their ownership, which also included textual criticism and followed a sound theological approach.²¹ Stübe recreated the structure of these texts, which were written in the style of a letter in which either God or Jesus personally addressed individual human beings in His capacity as an author and writer. It was claimed in many similar ways in the letters that God or the Son of God had the ability to write messages – the title such letters have often goes as follows: ‘Letter from Heaven, written by My own holy hands ...’.²² Alternatively, the letter in question was said to have been written by Jesus Christ Himself ‘in His own beautiful hand’²³ – and at the same time this phenomenon was cited as an argument for the manuscript’s true power:

Ich sage euch, daß Ich, Ich Christus diesen Brief mit meiner göttlichen Hand geschrieben habe. Wer dawider spricht, der ist verflucht von der christlichen Kirchen und von meinem Göttlichen Angesicht verlaßen.²⁴

I tell you that I, I Christ, have written this letter with My divine hand. Anyone who contradicts Me shall be cursed by the Christian churches and forsaken by My divine face.

In addition, Stübe identified the various types of manuscripts as well as the individual parts of texts from which a heavenly letter could be composed in formulaic terms.²⁵ Besides containing confirmation of its divine origin, the place where it was found and the year it first appeared, the letter included a reminder to observe Sundays as a day of rest – this is often

the Institute for Saxon History and Cultural Anthropology (ISGV) in Dresden, whose staff I would like to thank for their generous support during my research.

²¹ See Stübe 1918. Vogt 1911 takes a similar approach.

²² Cited in Vogt 1911, 592.

²³ Cf. ‘Haus- und Schutzbrief’, ISGV Dresden, NaAS/K91/M1.

²⁴ ‘True copy of the letter’, Museumslandschaft Hessen Kassel (MHK; Museum of Hessian History in Kassel) 74 A 4, inv. no. 1928/176 (Fig. 3). According to the inventory card, the artefact was made in Hamelin in 1790 and passed into the Museums’ possession in 1928. I am grateful to Martina Lüdicke, MHK, for this information.

²⁵ In detail, these include the types known as ‘Gredoria’, ‘Sunday letters’, ‘Holstein letters’, the ‘Mount of Olives blessing’/‘Blessing of weapons’, the ‘Count’s amulet’ and ‘Charlemagne’s blessing’. Cf. Stübe 1918, 7–9 and Vogt 1911, 589. On ‘Charlemagne’s blessing’ see Marco Heiles’ contribution in this volume as well.

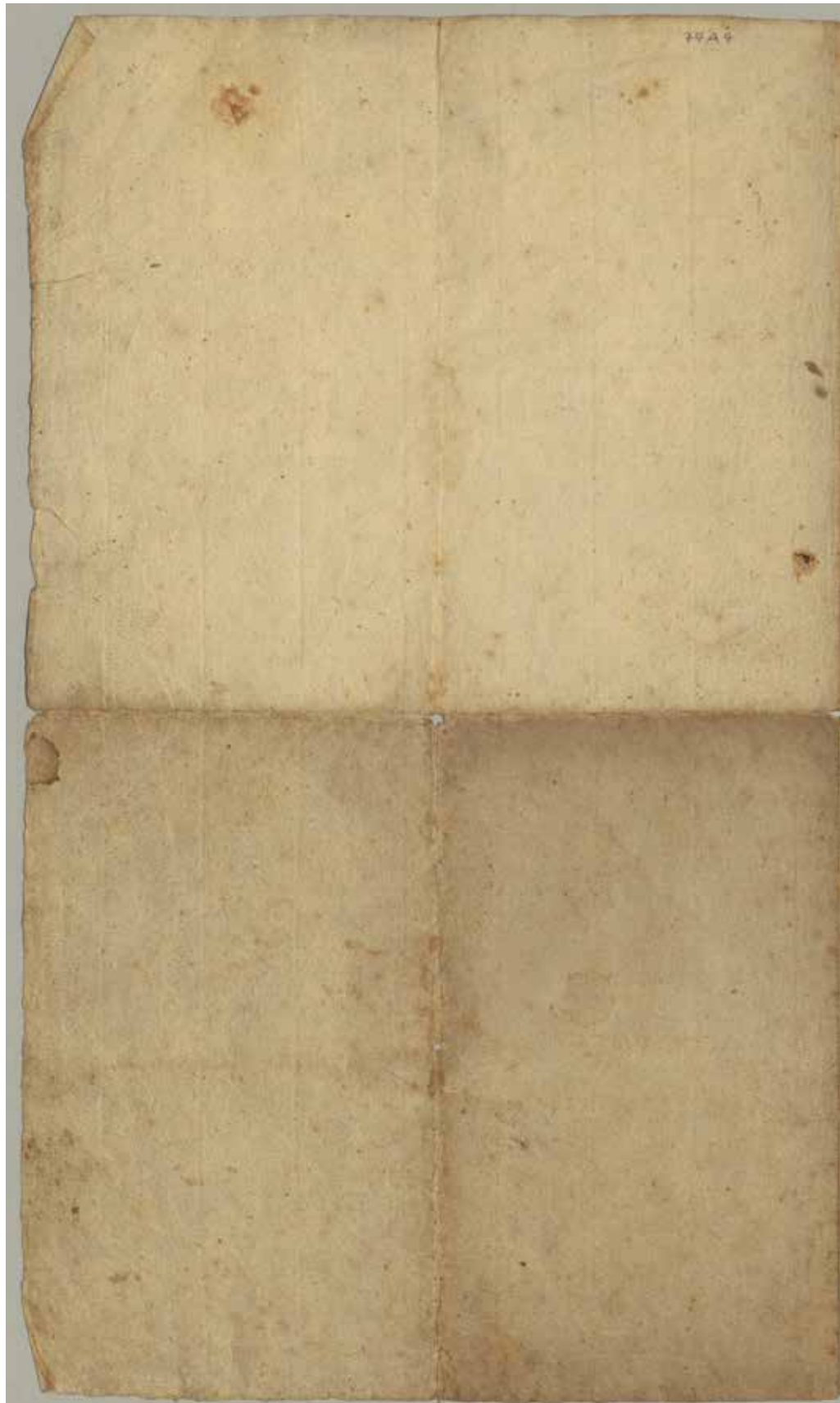


Fig. 3a: 'Wahrer Abdruck des Briefes, welchen Gott mit eigener Hand mit güldenen Buchstaben geschrieben und uns durch seinen Heil. Engel Michael zugesandt' ('True copy of the letter which God wrote in golden letters with His own hand and sent to us through his holy angel Michael'). Dated 1790, found in Hamelin, Museumslandschaft Hessen Kassel (MHK), folklore collection, 74 A 4, recto, inv. no. 1928/176.

Wahrer Ahdeneck des Jovierdes,
 Welcher Gold mit eigener Hand und güldenen
 Zeichen haben geschrieben, sind mit demselben Geil.
 Engel Michael zugesandt, geschrieben in dem Maß Gemine
 dem Jovierdes gemacht, in dem M. Michael's Buch, in
 dem die Götter sind, da man jenen in dem Buch, so
 wieder er kann lesen, was er abgeschrieben wil, zu dem
 nicht er sich, und sich auf selben auf, und laubet also:
 Das am Danksagung geschrieben ist, ist demnach: Das also gebiete
 ich euch, daß ich die Danksagung nicht an demselben Ort
 laubet, sondern eine Arbeit ist: Es sollt sein, daß die
 Bücher, gelesen mit demselben Buch, und eine Augenblicke
 nicht geschrieben, nach einer Gasse kaufen, nach demselben
 die von Welt zu sehen, auf dem einen Buch, in dem
 Namen geschrieben, nicht glauben, daß dieses Buch
 mit güldenen Hand geschrieben, sind von Jesu Christo
 zugeschrieben ist, daß ich nicht ist die in dem Buch
 geschrieben, Es gibt sich nicht, da man eine Arbeit
 geschrieben, um am Danksagung in dem Buch zu lesen,
 und mit demselben Buch, nicht sein. Was ich ist, das nicht
 ist, so will ich nicht schreiben und geschrieben, und
 geschrieben ist, daß ich die Danksagung,
 nicht zu demselben Buch, geschrieben in dem Buch,
 geschrieben, jedenwärtig, Gena und All, für eine
 Gena und All, nicht nicht, daß sie nicht
 geben werden. Danksagung nicht kessig, bei man
 Namen, Kessig, nicht nicht, nach Gold und
 Buch

1728/1776
 1728/1776

1728/1776

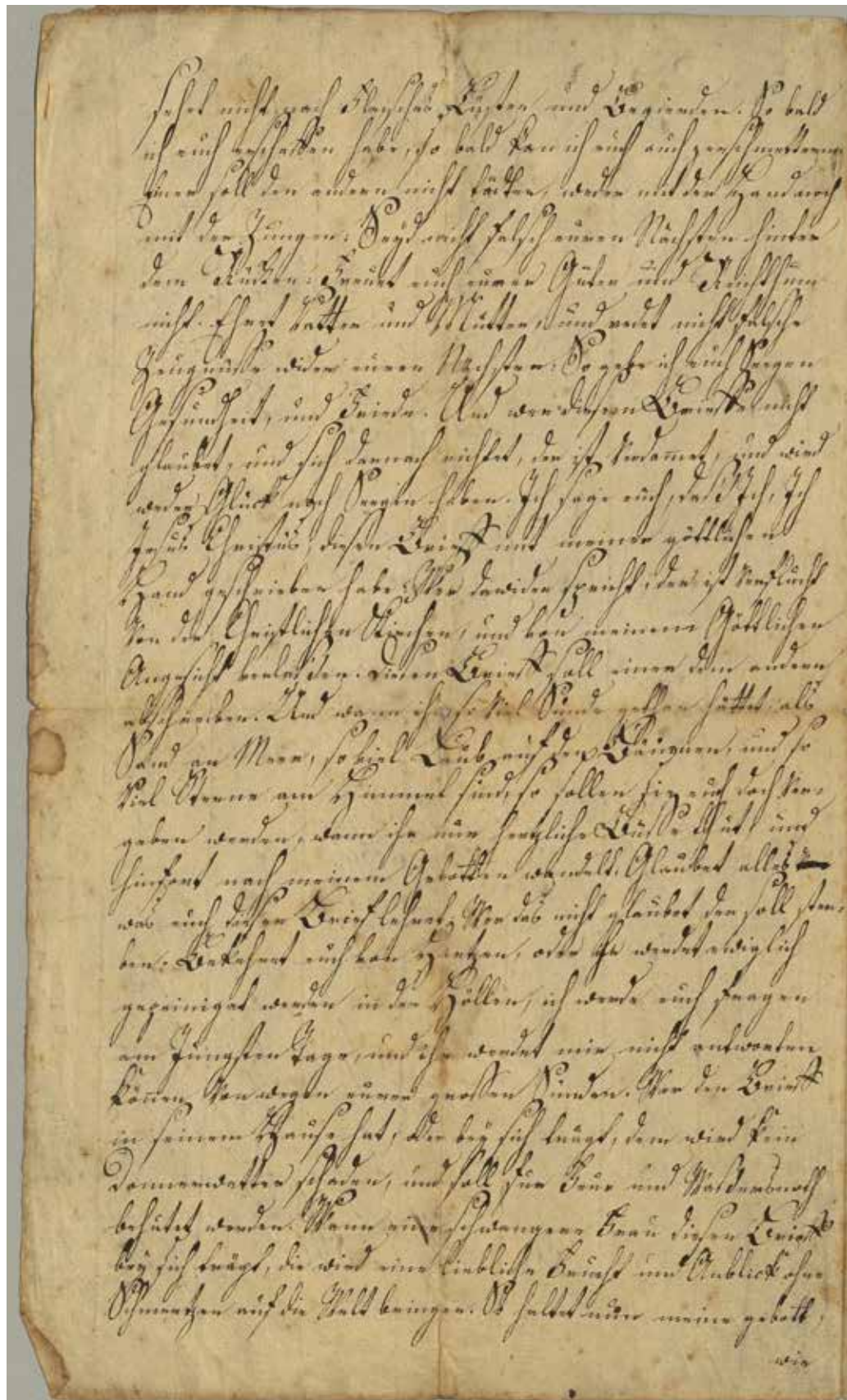


Fig. 3b: 'Wahrer Abdruck des Briefes, welchen Gott mit eigener Hand mit güldenen Buchstaben geschrieben und uns durch seinen Heil. Engel Michael zugesandt' ('True copy of the letter which God wrote in golden letters with His own hand and sent to us through his holy angel Michael'). Dated 1790, found in Hamelin, Museumslandschaft Hessen Kassel (MHK), folklore collection, 74 A 4, verso, inv. no. 1928/176.

ein ich auch meinigen Engel Michael gesandt habe.
H. H. Jesu Christi
Amen Amen

74 A 4 Kort. 20. 10. 10 ML	Inventar-Nummer: 1928/176.	In Raum:	Platten-Nummer:
	Art der Erwerbung:	Sammelungsgruppe: Graphik.	Maße: 35,5 : 11,5 cm.
Gegenstand: Himmelsbrief.		Marke, Meisterzeichen:	
Werkstoff und Verarbeitung: Handschrift.			
Datierung: (Ort, Zeit, Meister) 18. Jahrh. Famula 1790.			
Wahrer Abdruck des Briefes, welchen Gott mit eigener Hand mit goldenen Buchstaben (2 Blätter)			
Bemerkungen:			

Fig. 3c: 'Wahrer Abdruck des Briefes, welchen Gott mit eigener Hand mit goldenen . . . (2 Blätter.)' ('True copy of the letter which God wrote in golden . . . [2 pages.]'). Inventory sheet of 74 A 4, inv. no. 1928/176, Museumslandschaft Hessen Kassel (MHK), folklore collection.

found in letters entitled *Sonntagsbrief* ('Sunday letter') – along with a threat of punishment should the reader fail to observe this Christian duty. This is the message in the 'Hamelin Letter', for instance, which dates to the year 1790 and is documented in the ethnological or folklore collection of the Museum of Hessian History in Kassel (Fig. 3):

Wer am Sonntage arbeitet, der ist verdammt. Und also gebiete ich euch, daß ihr des Sontags nicht arbeitet an euren Gütern auch sonst eine Arbeit thut: Ihr sollet fleißig zur Kirche gehen, mit Andacht beten und eure Angesichter nicht schmincken noch eure Haare krausen noch Hoffart für der Welt treiben auch von eurem Reichthum den Armen mittheilen, und glauben, daß dieser Brief mit göttlicher Hand geschrieben,

und von Jesu Christo ausgesandt ist, daß ihr nicht thut wie die unvernünftigen Thiere. Ich gebe euch sechs Tage darinnen eure Arbeit fortzusetzen, und am Sontage in die Kirche zu gehen, und mit Andacht Gottes Wort hören: Werdet ihr das nicht thun, so will ich euch strafen mit Pestilenz, Krieg und theurer Zeit.²⁶

Anyone who works on a Sunday shall be damned. And so I command you not to work on your goods on Sundays or do any other work; you shall go to church [instead], pray with devotion, and not powder your faces, or curl your hair, or be haughty or let the poor know how wealthy you are; and you

²⁶ MHK, 74 A 4, inv. no. 1928/176.

must believe that this letter was written by a divine hand and sent out [to you] by Jesus Christ, that you do not do as the foolish beasts do. I give you six days in which to continue your work, and to go to church on Sunday, and to hear with devotion the word of God. If you do not do this, I shall punish you with pestilence, war, and the hardest of times.

Besides Christians' duty to observe Sundays, the Ten Commandments were also important here. The letters also contained instructions as to how the recipient should deal with the document so that it could have a positive effect for the user. The standard wording was as follows: 'Get someone else to make a copy of this letter'.²⁷ Different versions of this wording are rarer, such as this note: 'Whoever reveals this letter to people will be well rewarded for it and leave this world cheerfully'.²⁸

Using the so-called *Mount of Olives phrase*, the letter evoked and formulated its own positive effect in many different variations and thus the real purpose of the protective spell (Fig. 4):

Im Namen Gottes des Vaters und des Sohnes und des heiligen Geistes Amen. So wie Christus in Ölgarten stille stand, sollen alle Gewehre stille stehen. Wer dieses Geschriebene bei sich trägt, den wird nichts schaden es wird Gott (ihn) beschützen auf (vor) Dieben und Mördern es sollen ihnen nichts (anhaben) Geschütze Degen und Pistolen; alle Gewehre müßen stille stehen, alle durch den heiligen Engel Michael im Namen des Vaters des Sohnes und des heiligen Geistes Amen. Gott sei mit mir! Wer diesen Segen bei sich hat der wird vor Gefahr geschützt bleiben [...]. Wer diesen Brief bei sich hat der wird nicht gefangen noch durch des Feindes Waffen verletzt werden. [...] kann er nicht gestochen noch geschossen werden auch am Leibe verletzt werden und Fleisch und Gedärm sollen in ihm ungeschädigt bleiben.²⁹

In the name of God the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, amen. Just as Christ stood quietly in the Garden of Olives, so shall all rifles be silent. The person who carries this piece of writing on them will not be harmed by anything;

God will protect (him) from thieves and murderers; nothing will (hurt) him; guns, swords and pistols – all guns must stop shooting, ... all thanks to the holy angel Michael; in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, amen. God be with me! Whoever has this blessing with him will remain protected from danger [...]. Whoever has this letter on him shall not be captured, nor shall he be wounded by his enemy's weapons: [...] he cannot be stabbed or shot, nor can his body be wounded, and his flesh and guts shall stay unharmed.

Furthermore, an imaginary owner of the letter in the text gave advice on how to convince doubters of its effectiveness and usefulness, for example by copying the letter and hanging it around a dog's neck; any attempt to kill the dog would fail – proof of the document's real power. In the final section, God (the 'author' and 'writer') listed the draconian forms of punishment that threatened all those who refused to comply with the instructions and requirements in the letter:

Damit ihr euch hütet vor Sünden, mit Gutem den Feiertag haltet und in der Gottesfurcht lebet, werdet ihr die ewige Seligkeit erlangen, thut ihr dies aber nicht, so werde ich euch strafen mit Feuer, Pest, Hunger und Krieg, und mit einer anderen Strafe. Ich werde aussetzen einen König wieder den andern, die Tochter wieder die Mutter, einen Herrn wieder den andern, einen Bruder wieder den andern, eine Schwester wieder den andern, eine Stadt wieder die andern, und werde alsdann meine Hand von euch zurücknehmen, wegen eurer Ungerechtigkeit, werde ich euch ergreifen und vertilgen hernach mit Donner und Blitz und zweischneidigen Schwertern auf die Erde herabfahren.³⁰

So that you may guard yourselves against sin, spend the holiday doing good things and live in fear of God, you will attain eternal happiness, but if you do not do this, I will punish you with fire, plagues, hunger and war, and with another form of punishment. I will set one king against another, a daughter against her mother, one lord against another, one brother against another, one sister against another, one city against another, and then I will draw My hand away from you because of your injustice, and I will seize you and then destroy you with thunder and lightning and send double-edged swords plunging down upon the Earth.

²⁷ ISGV Dresden, NaAS/K50/M2/14. As the paratext shows, the letter originates from the German Erzgebirge ('Ore Mountains') c.1900.

²⁸ Copy of a letter from Johann Philip Weltner, written 'anno 1734'. ISGV Dresden, NaAS/K91/M1.

²⁹ 'Haus- und Schutzbrief', ISGV Dresden, NaAS/K91/M1.

³⁰ 'Letter written by My own hands', ISGV Dresden, NaAS/K91/M1.

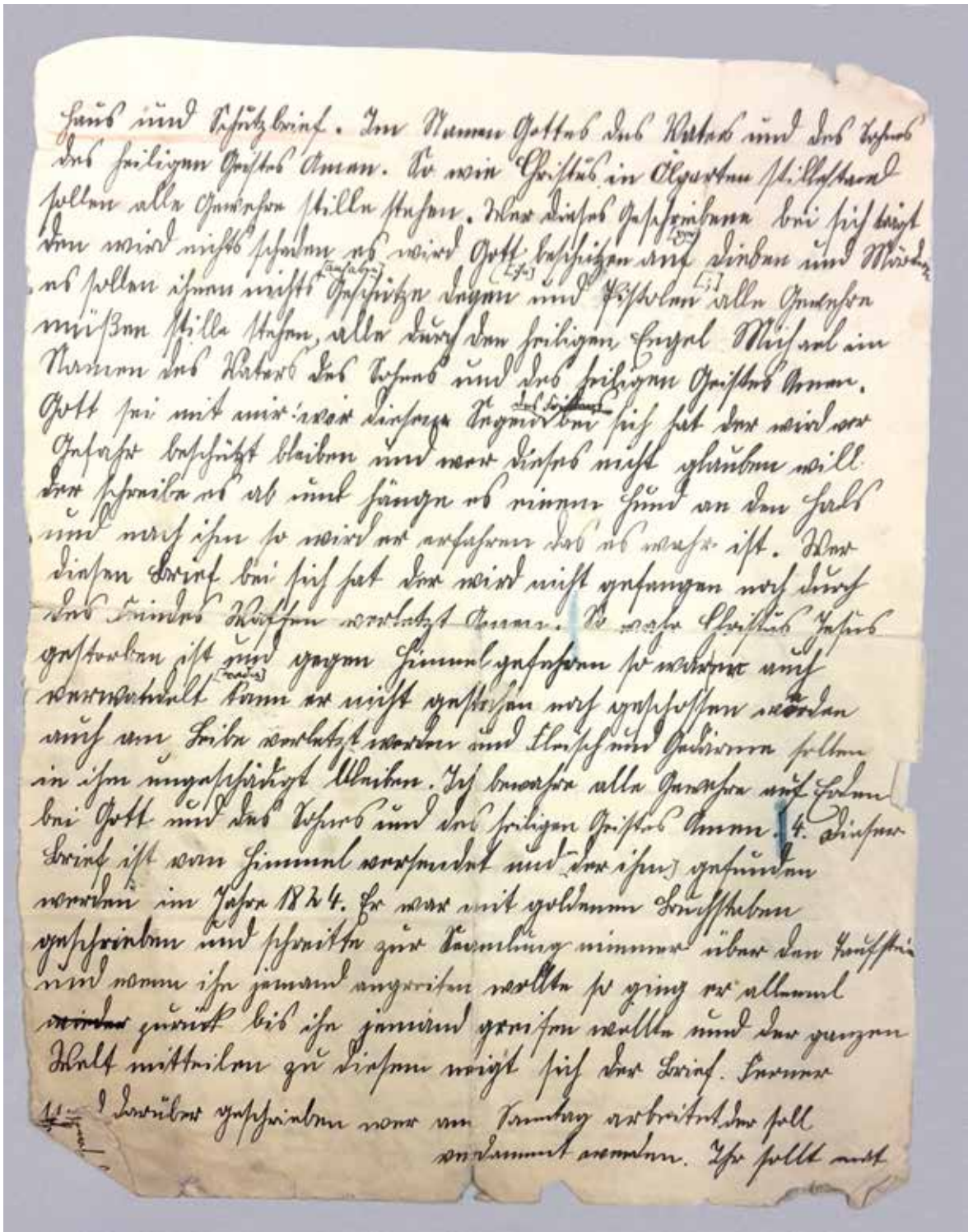


Fig. 4a: 'Haus- und Schutzbrief. Im Namen Gottes des Vaters und des Sohnes und des heiligen Geistes Amen. So wie Christus in Ölgarten stillestand sollen alle Gewehre stille stehen.' ('Letter of protection that includes the holder's home. In the name of God the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, amen. Just as Christ stood quietly in the Garden of Olives, so shall all rifles be silent.'). Paper, undated, ISGV Dresden, NaAS/K91/M1, recto.

Einem Christen dem Namen mittheilen ich soll ich sollt
 sein wie ein Unschuldigem ich gebatte mich ich sollt mich
 nicht dazu verhalten ~~und~~ und verhindern sollt ich ~~ich~~
 Gottes Wort ansehn. Worin ich das nicht bin so wend
 ich mich starker Lust lang und wenig. Ich gebatte daß ich
 am Wenden abend nicht spät verhalten. Jedoch sei es all
 ohne jüdy sollt für sein Reden Thier mit bei mir
 Namen bei Gold und Silberstein für Wasser laß und
 Langen dem so was ich mich verhalten haben kann ich
 mich verhalten und verhalten. Ich nicht selbst mit
 das jüdy nicht das ich nicht verhalten und kein selbst
 sich jüdy nicht gebatte wie der seinen Thier. Das
 nicht ist der sein ich stünde. Das diesen nicht
 verhalten und verhalten ist das ist verhalten von mit
 und verhalten und nicht kein Thier mich haben. Ich
 nicht ab daß Jesus Christus verhalten sollt mit jüdy
 nicht jüdy sein verhalten hat mich ich nicht verhalten das
 soll verhalten sein und nicht offen fort das ist verhalten
 von allen Thier diesen nicht von dem anderen nicht jüdy
 verhalten. Ich nicht ich Kinder sollt wie dem von dem
 nicht von dem sollen sollen mich verhalten werden
 wie das nicht verhalten wird diesen Thier stünde verhalten mich
 nicht werden ich stünde und jüdy verhalten werden von
 jüdy nicht verhalten wie von dem Thier verhalten gebatte nicht
 mich diesen nicht im jüdy hat das hat mich nicht dem kein dem verhalten
 nicht. Wenn eine sein diesen nicht bei sich nicht wie nicht jüdy nicht bei
 nicht nicht bringen. nicht alle gebatte nicht jüdy bei dem Thier nicht
 nicht im Namen Jesus Christus

Fig. 4b: ISGV Dresden, NaAS/K91/M1, verso.

The ideal sequence of textual elements presented here can only be found in this form in a few heavenly letters, however. The opposite is generally the case, actually: a review of both handwritten and early printed documents from past centuries found in the archives revealed that no two texts are alike and that the number of variations that exist in them is very high. According to Stübe, the archival copies could be classified according to their age on the basis of just this differing text structure. Starting from a ‘pure letter from Heaven’ of the Gredorian³¹ type serving as a kind of ‘original version’ and template which contained a text designed uniformly, he said the copyists had used different models and each turned them into new variants in the course of the centuries. The more recent the exemplars were, the more the original text had been expanded in the process of copying it. Most of all, changes were made to it and repetitions were created, which Stübe assumed to be an indication of ‘strong, uncontrolled and uncultivated growth of the text’.³² He came to the conclusion that modern letters of this kind from the nineteenth and twentieth century ‘unite different subjects and motifs in a way that is completely arbitrary’.³³ In the following discussion, I will concentrate on the variety known as the Holstein type, which Stübe says had existed ever since 1791, the beginning of the revolutionary wars in France, and which had been widely used as ‘a heavenly letter for the World War’.³⁴

Magical artefacts: cultural and codicological questions

In the following, my focus is not on the theological or philological, text-critical treatment of these artefacts, but rather on the question of the production and practical use of such ‘magical’ manuscripts, the protective power of which was highly controversial in the First World War. Contemporary critics regarded the fact that many of these letters had been found on the bodies of dead soldiers as fundamental proof of their ineffectiveness,³⁵ and yet copying a heavenly letter by hand for the writer’s husband, brother,

father or friend as a personal gift before they went off to do service almost seems to have been a female duty on the ‘home front’, as it were, even in the early twentieth century.³⁶ The primary question, then, is what made people believe in the notion of letters having innate magical power and whether – or rather, how – this imaginary power was bound to the specific material nature of these documents. Based on a material-culture analysis of the artefacts, this study will combine codicological questions about the use, design and symbolic character of writing with an interpretive approach from cultural anthropology that looks at the perspectives of the various parties involved and their respective practices and interpretations. The different levels of historical knowledge production, which overlap in the material, must be considered in a differentiated way, however. One of these levels concerns the specific historical practice kept up by soldiers and their womenfolk in the context of the wars fought in the nineteenth and twentieth century. In this case, we need to ask questions about the respective social, cultural and institutional framework in which the manuscripts were produced and used as apotropaic aids. The second level refers to the rationalising strategies of interpretation and objectification of the second and third order with which scholars in the nineteenth and twentieth century classified and evaluated the historical existence and use of heavenly letters within existing time frames and their own disciplinary context.

Theologians and anthropological ‘players’: some methodological questions and perspectives

Consequently, our sources of information should always be examined with a view to how the scholars who were making specific points positioned themselves in relation to the practices that users actually adopted and how they drew attention to themselves as enlightened academics with their interpretations of what people understood to be strategies of action. On the one hand, this is about the position of the theologians, who strictly distinguished between faith and superstition and decried the use of and belief in heavenly letters as pure superstition. It was primarily representatives of the Protestant Church who criticised heavenly letters as remnants of an outdated Roman Catholic practice, viz.

³¹ The term ‘Gredoria’ comes from the official title of some of the letters, but it does not actually mean anything in any language. Some scholars speculate that it might have been a malapropism of the Latin term *gloria* (‘glory’, ‘praise’). See Figs 7, 8 and 13.

³² Stübe 1918, 10.

³³ Stübe 1918, 5.

³⁴ Stübe 1918, 10.

³⁵ Modersohn 1915.

³⁶ See Foerster 1915, Krickeberg 1915, Staby 1915 and Stübe 1917, among others. Also see the contemporary accounts in the newspapers regarding the use of heavenly letters: „Unpolitischer Tagesbericht“ (‘apolitical daily report’) 1915; ‘Briefkasten („letterbox“), Frage (“question“) 83’ 1916, ISGV Dresden, NaAS/K91/M1.

venerating the saints, and thus as evidence of a misguided superstitious practice. On the other hand, we find the representatives of an early line of anthropological research who had their own agenda, parallel to the theologians'; although they did not engage in the same kind of heated disputes as the theologians concerning the correct religious interpretation of such letters, they did regard the soldiers' practices in the field from a scientific viewpoint as well, putting them down as 'Soldatenaberglauben' ('soldier's superstition').³⁷ The Swiss ethnologist Hanns Bächtold (1886–1941), for example, interpreted heavenly letters as proof of 'a strange mixture of different faiths, in which ecclesiastical views intermingled with mystical, spiritualistic ideas and remnants of ancient folk religion'.³⁸ They were regarded as a sign that archaic parts of 'folk belief' and the population's 'true character' or 'ethnic soul' had survived into modernity, parts which were each reactivated as a specific form of popular religious belief under wartime conditions. Bächtold's German colleague, the anthropologist Adolf Spamer (1883–1953), in contrast, viewed *Himmelsbriefe* much more rationally, saying they were 'expressions of people's lives [...] that the war keeps on spilling over towns and villages every day'.³⁹ In his opinion, these documents ought to be collected systematically as evidence of what modern wartime life is like and provide future generations with information not only about the bloody part of the war, but about 'the entire population's spiritual life in terms of its feelings, thoughts and behaviour'.⁴⁰

Heavenly letters as part of manuscript cultures: their production, distribution and usage

Bearing all this in mind, it is expedient to adopt a critical view of the practice of collecting and assessing the value of heavenly letters in the past and present. We shall now turn to the magical manuscripts themselves, the main focus of this article. What is of particular interest here is their layout and the way the texts were designed, along with the connection

between the materiality and the performative aspects⁴¹ of these pieces of writing, 'addressing the agentive roles played by the text and the material of the written sign'.⁴² As well as examining the physical and material aspects of these historical artefacts, the social aspects of their materiality will also be looked at here to investigate 'the necessity of studying the materiality of ancient texts in their physical and social contexts', in a similar way to the archaeologists Joshua D. Englehardt and Dimitri Nakassis.⁴³ What was the (professed) agency of these letters due to? Or rather, how was it actually produced? Under what conditions were these letters produced, *by* whom, and *for* whom? In what ways were they used? And how can the relationship between content, materiality and written form on the one hand and the presumed or hoped-for effect of the artefacts on the other be grasped in concrete terms? If all these different aspects are taken into account, then the question arises of whether (or rather, how) heavenly letters functioned as active components of a network of players, ideas and actions, a network in which 'idea, behaviour and artefact' were related to each other and were 'co-dependent'.⁴⁴ The assumption here is that their agency primarily becomes visible in the connection – i.e. the dynamics – existing between these different aspects and relations. Presumably, the power of magical manuscripts was neither intrinsic nor unilaterally evocable, but arose in the interaction between the levels just mentioned.

Three aspects will be examined in more detail in the following section. The first one concerns the *production* of heavenly letters, or the 'emergence of an artefact in the hand of the producer'.⁴⁵ How meaningful is the handwriting that was used to the agency of the artefact? What role did handwriting play in a letter's effectiveness? How exactly was the writing (or rather, copying) done? And what does the term *copying* actually mean in this case? How is the copying reflected in the text itself – in its wording, the patterns it contains and its layout, and is it possible to trace the process

³⁷ Cf. Spamer 1915, 48f. See Bächtold 1917, 17–22 on letters of protection. Cf. the multi-part essay by an unknown author as well, which explicitly refers to literature on cultural anthropology, H. M. 1919 and Beitzl 1937.

³⁸ Bächtold 1917, 2.

³⁹ Spamer 1915,3; see Kienitz and Müller 2020.

⁴⁰ Spamer 1915, 51.

⁴¹ See Bryan Lowe's talk, 'Performing a Manuscript in the Ninth Century and Translating It in the Twenty-first: Methodological Reflections for Manuscript Studies', at the conference *Varieties and Patterns of Manuscripts in Medieval Japan*, 21–22 August 2018, at the Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures, University of Hamburg.

⁴² Englehardt and Nakassis 2013, 10.

⁴³ Englehardt and Nakassis 2013, 11.

⁴⁴ Knappett 2002, 100.

⁴⁵ Knappett 2002, 101.

in the manuscript? The second aspect is the *distribution* of such letters, meaning how the artefacts were embedded in social relationships, so it is concerned with the material side of social networks in a sense. What role do forms of human relationships such as kinship play? What role does the gender of the recipient and that of the letter-writer play in the making and use of a manuscript and the power attributed to it? Thirdly, the actual *usage* (or ‘consumption’) of these written artefacts is addressed in view of the fact that they were believed to possess divine power by the parties involved, who all wished for protection. In what ways were the letters actually used? Are there any instructions on using them ‘correctly’ in the manuscripts themselves or were these discussed elsewhere? And where and how were the letters worn as amulets? As a look at the archival sources makes clear – both at the objects themselves and at the narratives about the respective ways in which they were worn – the active use of the letters clearly had an effect on the material of which they were made, especially the surface of it (Fig. 5). What we therefore also need to clarify is whether and how traces of their use and the aura and effect they have are connected and, in a further step, what role the scholarly forms of reception play in objectifying these interpretations.

Magical lettering: the connection between writing and magical power

It is helpful to consider theological and philological theories on the magical power of writing to address these questions. If one follows the argumentation of the Swiss theologian Alfred Bertholet (1868–1951), then the ‘Machtgeladenheit’ (‘power-chargedness’)⁴⁶ or ‘Machthaltigkeit’ (‘innate power’)⁴⁷ of writing is based on the idea of a numinous, divine authorship of these texts and on the ‘magical’ presence the characters have on the piece of paper. In addition, these properties are also based on the notion of the artefacts possessing a potentially miraculous agency. Initially, the social factor of having only limited access to reading and writing played an important role here. According to the Danish folklorist Bengt Holbek (1933–1992), it was primarily the illiterate part of the population that interpreted the process of writing as a kind of magical practice. As he argues, the ‘writing itself, the very letters, were seen as magical. The effect is not associated with the text of the writing, but with the writing

as such’.⁴⁸ The idea behind this was that the writer could also exercise power over the characters he produced himself: ‘What appears to me to be the most characteristic feature of the folklore about writing is that writing is interpreted as a physical act of power. [...] a form of rhetoric, in which the being one wants to influence becomes physically bound to the medium one writes upon’.⁴⁹ If one follows this line of argumentation, then the power of writing was not only founded in the ‘visual signs’⁵⁰ themselves, but was equally bound to the process of writing and the nature of the writing surface. As writing for everyday purposes became more popular, however, people gradually stopped attributing magical power to objects.⁵¹ In place of that, the notion of writing possessing magical power in the sense of *ephesia grammata* (mysticism surrounding letters) was transferred to combinations of letters that appear strange or incomprehensible.⁵² Rudolf Stübe spoke of a *Wortzauber* (‘magic of words’) formed by ‘meaningless phrases, rows of letters, syllables, [and] complexes of sounds that have a magical effect’.⁵³ The attribution of power and agency to writing was thus transferred ‘to some *special* writing because ordinary writing has lost its nimbus;



Fig. 5a: ISGV Dresden, NaAS/K70/M3/1, folded together.

⁴⁶ Cf. Bertholet 1949, 7.

⁴⁷ Bertholet 1949, 13.

⁴⁸ Holbek 1989, 191. The narratologist Sabine Wienker-Piepho also assumes that the ‘ambivalent aura of writing’ is primarily due to the fact that ‘the ability to write, writing and what is actually written’ was attributed a ‘high, numinous value’ by large parts of the rural population, Wienker-Piepho 2000, 330.

⁴⁹ Holbek 1989, 192.

⁵⁰ Englehardt and Nakassis 2013, 11.

⁵¹ On the importance of writing in everyday culture, see Goody 1986.

⁵² Bertholet 1949, 14f. and 35.

⁵³ Stübe 1918, 45.

wird von der Feind^{en} Dagegen nicht verlohren werden
 Vorwissen ist das Gutes Schrift^{en} für sich geschrieben ist und
 von Himmel gesessen ist auf Boden gemachelt kann nicht
 gesessen nicht gesessen werden. Fließ und Gedächtnis kann
 nicht verlohren werden. Ich schreibe es. Fortsetz und Dagegen
 auf dieser Welt bei den Lebenden Gott dem Vater dem
 Höchsten dem heiligen Geiste. Ich bitte im Namen Jesu
 Christi Leide, daß keine Engel kommen. für für was Silber, Gold
 oder Eisen. Gott im Himmel weiß von diesem für, im
 Namen Gottes des Vaters, des Sohns und des heiligen Geistes.
 Dieser Brief ist von Himmel gesandt und 17. 17. in Gold
 geschrieben worden, er ist mit goldenen Buchstaben
 geschrieben und geschrieben über dem Lichte des Lichts.
 wenn man ihn gesehen wollte wie er zurück bis 1791.
 wird mit dem Gedanken umging sich ihn abzusprechen
 und andere mitzubringen zu den wichtigsten für sich und
 darin stand, was am Anfang verbricht, das ist von
 dem Himmel gesandt und verlohren werden.
 in die Hände geben und lesen mit Andacht, von einem
 Priester soll es die Amen sein, und soll nicht sein
 wie die unbestimmte. Ich gebe auf 6 Tage zum
 Arbeiten, was am 7. Sonntag soll es gesen und Gottes
 Wort sein. Dann ist das nicht willig auf Menschen
 mit Kostbarkeit, keine Zeit und Mühe. Ich bitte das für
 Vermeidung nicht so spät verlohren. Ich bitte das für
 seine Tugenden bitte daß die ihm vergeben werden
 dem schreibe ich sich bei an
 Silber, selbst auch nicht die
 geschrieben die ich auf gesen
 Kellern mit einem Zingel
 werden einem Häufchen
 und Feinden über diesen

Fig. 5c: ISGV Dresden, NaAS/K70/M3/1, verso.

it is used by too many'.⁵⁴ The idea of – or rather, desire for – written communication with God was also based on this symbolic glorification of writing. Letters from Heaven, for example, were regarded as 'a particularly revealing chapter of the apotheotic idealisation of writing and literacy', similar to the biblical portrayal of God handing down the Decalogue to Moses on tablets of stone or clay.⁵⁵ Seen against the backdrop of the historical debate on God's ability to write, these letters served as evidence that Christ himself had written a letter to the faithful, the particular power of which had to be shared and maintained by specific forms of reproduction.⁵⁶

Production: the power of handwriting

First of all, a central aspect of this genre of manuscripts will be examined in terms of the letters' production, namely the question of the link that exists between the production and distribution of heavenly letters and the agency ascribed to them, and what dynamics existed that influenced this relationship. According to the 'fable about their origin', as Vogt called it,⁵⁷ the very existence of such letters was based on the idea of a handwritten copy (Fig. 6). Although the individual sections of heavenly letters vary, depending on what type of letters they are,⁵⁸ one consistent feature of them that is important in all the surviving manuscripts is that they tell their own history, according to which each letter was written by Christ or God Himself and brought down to Earth by the Archangel Michael. The letters we are concerned with here mention different places and dates when people were first confronted with them in their 'original' form, which obviously relate to different wartime events as well. Legend has it that these divine appearances always took place in a church. The heavenly letter 'hovered in the air'⁵⁹ above the baptismal font, avoiding any attempts by those present to catch and possess it. Written in 'golden characters',⁶⁰ it

only turned to the person who wanted to copy it: 'It moves away from anyone who wants to snap at it, but it tilts towards anyone who wants to copy it and then opens itself up'.⁶¹ As we can see here, the reproduction of the original version by the handwritten copy is already part of the legend about its creation, including the 'fact' that it may not be touched because of its divine origin.⁶² In the letter itself, it explicitly states that it should be copied and passed on to someone else as a result of any human encounter with it: 'This letter shall be copied [and passed on] from person to person ...', it said – a clear instruction by virtue of which the power of the protective magic associated with the artefact was meant to be preserved.

This wording only changed in later versions created in the nineteenth century, parallel to the emergence of mass production, and it was then amended as follows: 'This letter shall be passed on from one person to another in written or printed form ...'.⁶³ In this case, the variant of the handwritten copy is still mentioned as being a prerequisite for the recipient to be able to benefit from the letter's divine power. But the reference to the letter being distributed as a printed version suggests that both possible forms of reproduction – handwriting and printing – were available at that time and were also taken into consideration in the instructions on how users should handle the original letter. A number of questions arise here concerning the change of media just mentioned, especially regarding the relationship between handwriting and printing, not to mention the validity of and power ascribed to the different versions.⁶⁴ Did this transition from handwriting to printing only take place in one direction or did both variants continue to exist parallel to each other? In this case, we need to look for pointers as to whether a change from printing to handwriting was also possible after moving from handwriting to printing, or whether (and if so, how) these medial variants can be linked to the respective context in which the letters were used.

⁵⁴ Holbek 1989, 192. The emphasis is in the original version.

⁵⁵ Wienker-Piepho 2000, 321.

⁵⁶ Regarding the issue of whether God and His son can actually write, see Spener 1844 and Bertholet 1949, 10.

⁵⁷ Vogt called this section the 'fable about their origin' (598) or the 'fable of the heavenly provenance of the Sunday letter'. Vogt 1911, 586, 609–11.

⁵⁸ See the accounts in Olbrich 1908, Abt 1909, Vogt 1911 and Stübe 1918 on the matter.

⁵⁹ Stettler 1985.

⁶⁰ The note that the letter was written in 'golden characters' needs to be examined in more detail with regard to the meaning and use of golden

characters in medieval Gospels, for instance. See Trost 1991. I would like to thank Bruno Reudenbach for this information.

⁶¹ Branky 1902, 150.

⁶² Speyer 1970, 38.

⁶³ This example is from John 1900, 51.

⁶⁴ See Benne 2015, 26–28.

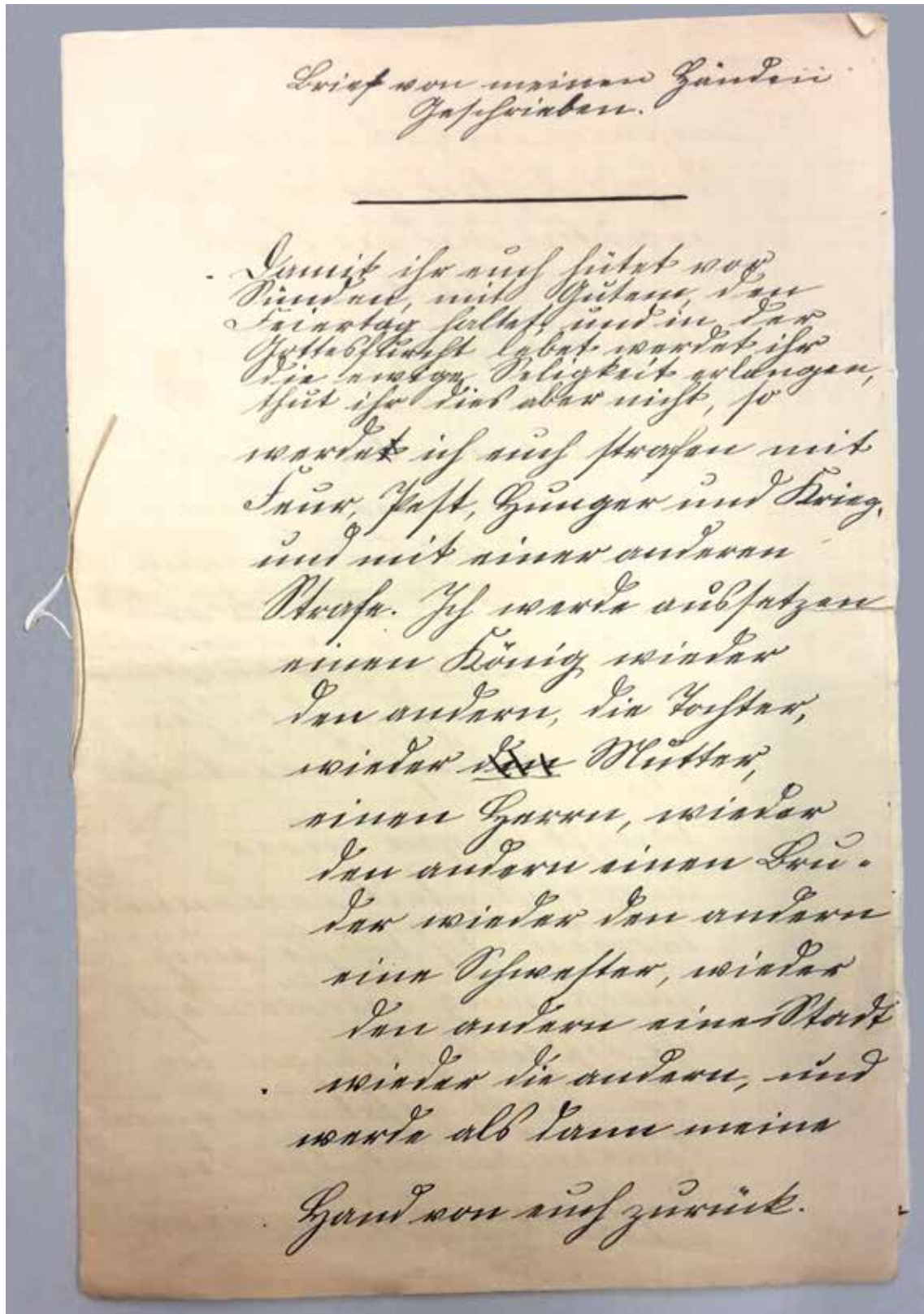


Fig. 6a: 'Brief von meinen Händen Geschrieben' ('Letter written by My own hand'). In German Kurrentschrift. ISGV Dresden, NaAS/K91/M1. Eight pages in all, here p. 1.

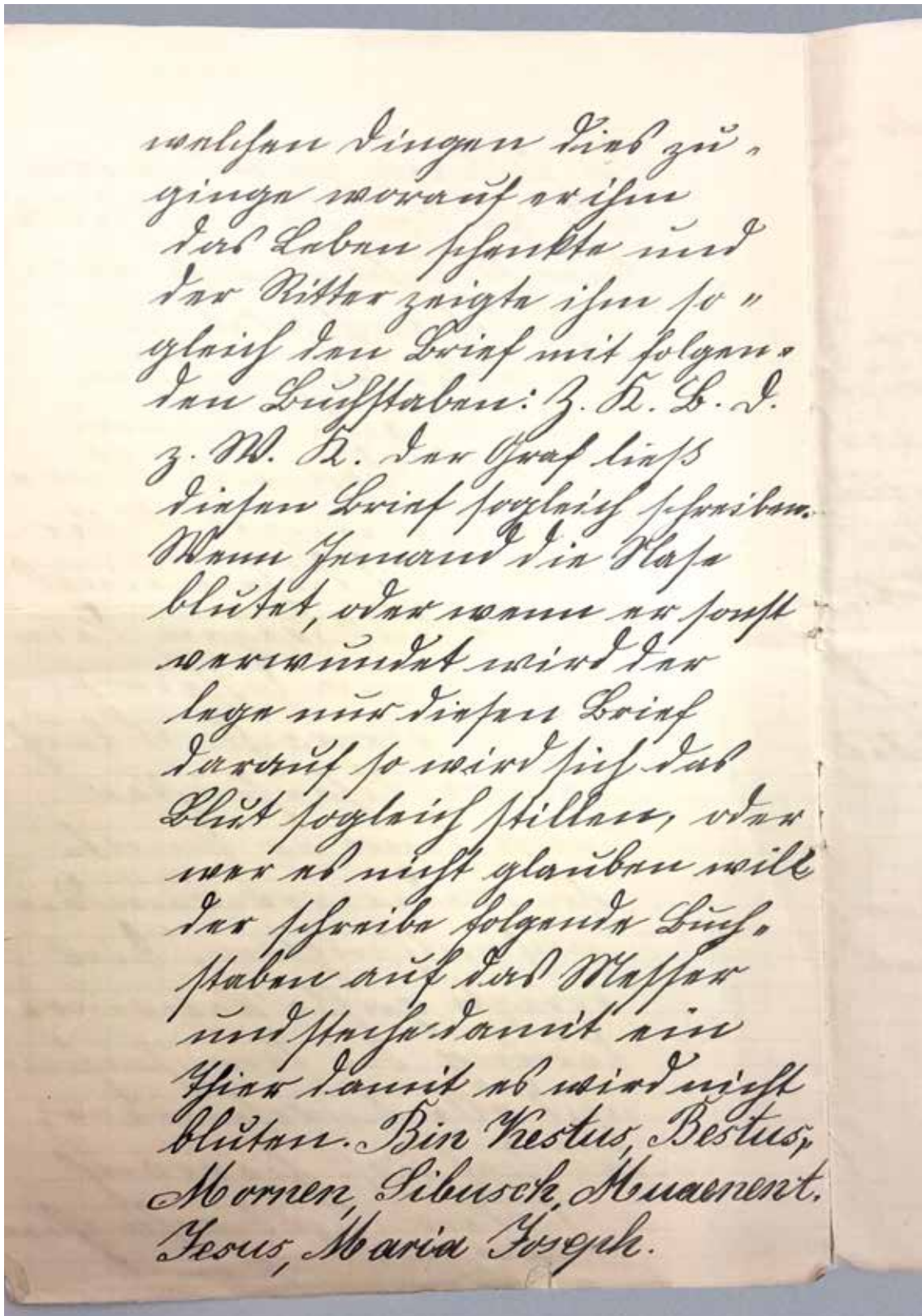


Fig. 6b: ISGV Dresden NaAS/K91/M1. The writer changed to Latin script to write the magic words 'Am Kestus, Bestus, Mornen, Sibusch, Muaenent, Jesus, Mary Joseph' on p. 6.

The practice of copying letters: rules for making an authorised copy

What exactly did this copying look like, what conditions was it subject to and how did the copying affect the layout of the letters? The power of writing did not just catch people's attention in a religious context, but in connection with *magical* words and phrases as well, which were particularly intriguing, it seems. According to contemporary experts on folklore and theology, the writing of magical words was a key factor in their power because spoken language was considered transitory and ephemeral. 'If a magical effect is to last, then just saying the spell out loud is usually not enough; it has to be recorded, [i.e.] written down', noticed the Wrocław theologian Adolf Wuttke (1819–1870) in his standard work on current superstition among Germans, *Der deutsche Volksaberglaube der Gegenwart*.⁶⁵ In a further step, Stübe compared the process of copying with the transferral of saints' mortal remains or lending of relics in the Middle Ages, practices by which 'the sphere of influence' these artefacts had could be increased. In his interpretation, 'distributing the letter by copying it [...]' was 'a form of "transmission" through which the power of the letter was to be increased'.⁶⁶

The copying and duplication of the original letter was thus part of the attribution of magical power to it in two respects. According to this logic, the owner of a heavenly letter was responsible for the agency of his copy himself and ought to carefully consider whom he gave it to for the purpose of copying it. Anyone who lent the letter to a person who quite obviously did not believe in its protective effect – such as a sceptical folklorist or a theologian who rejected the whole thing as mere superstition – ran the risk of his own 'original copy' losing its effect this way. If it turned out that the letter of protection did not work in the face of danger, then the bearer himself was to blame because of his attitude. The literature on folklore research provides a host of examples of this kind. The criminologist and folklorist Albert Hellwig (1880–1950), a lieutenant and member of an ammunition column, searched for heavenly letters during his stay in the field and reported in 1916 about an encounter he had had with two brothers who had each received such a letter from their mother.⁶⁷ One of the brothers, the gunner Karl E., had

reluctantly lent his own letter to Hellwig for him to copy it – 'all the more so since I made no secret of the fact that I did not believe in its effectiveness', Hellwig explained. Later, when Karl was seriously wounded despite him carrying his letter from Heaven around with him, both brothers had apparently interpreted the injury as punishment for lending the letter to someone who did not believe in its miracle power. Another explanation about the loss of its power that Hellwig recounted was that 'a mistake had been made while copying the letter, which rendered the whole letter ineffective'.⁶⁸ The folklorist Karl Olbrich (1865–1931), who served in the war as an officer, discovered that his boy did not even want to show him his heavenly letter: 'But I can't show you that!' was always the response he got, from which Olbrich concluded that 'the spell loses its power by being made known to others'.⁶⁹

According to the contemporary logic of those who used heavenly letters, then, copying was not just copying, but its performance and effectiveness were linked to the context and the writer's intentions and legitimisation (to him- or herself). The reason for feeling that a letter had lost its magical quality due to its unauthorised reproduction was the fact that the copyist's intention of making a copy of it for scientific purposes was obviously believed to be likely to damage its aura. Collectors required precise copies of such letters to be made, but not because it was important to them to preserve the letter's value as a magical 'gift' – on the contrary. The type of mechanical copying that was called for thus did not follow the instructions or use the set phrases formulated in the manuscript itself to lend it its magical power. As we can argue here with reference to Alfred Gell, the lack of miraculous power in this case was due to the fact that the purely technical character of a copy made for reference purposes in the sense of *indexicality* was not the same as authentication, i.e. the simultaneous transferral of meaning to the newly created manuscript in the sense of *iconicity*.⁷⁰ Here it becomes clear that there were different categories of authenticity and that those who used the letters had to differentiate exactly and decide who was entitled to copy the letter in such a way that not only a *technical* copy of it was created, but a copy that could become an effective original

⁶⁵ Wuttke 1869, 166. See Nemeč 1976, 99–104 as well.

⁶⁶ Stübe 1918, 43.

⁶⁷ Hellwig 1916, 47ff.

⁶⁸ Hellwig 1916, 51.

⁶⁹ Olbrich 1917, 144.

⁷⁰ See Knappett 2002, 108. Knappett refers to Alfred Gell's terminology and argumentation here.

itself. In order to produce such power and create ‘authorised copies’,⁷¹ the intention behind the process of copying had to be one that re-authenticated the letter in handwriting terms by believing in it and distinguished it in its function as a ‘divine gift’ from a mere copy made for its own sake.

Samples of writing and writing skills

As many of the archived examples of heavenly letters show, the writing skills of their authors varied considerably. If the artefacts are judged according to codicological and palaeographical criteria, then certain letters such as the one handed over to the Museum of Hessian History in Kassel in 1928 exhibit a high degree of skill at writing (Fig. 3). This particular letter, which is apparently from Hamelin and was penned in 1790, is a ‘true copy of the letter which God wrote in golden letters with His own hand and sent to us through his holy angel Michael ...’.⁷² This is evident from the regular handwriting, which is clearly legible, the regularity of the line spacing, the low number of mistakes and corrections it contains and the regular page layout. The fluent use of German *Kurrentschrift* (a style of cursive handwriting once used in Germany) also indicates that the author was an experienced writer. The ornamentation of the capital letters in the title line indicates that the writer was familiar with official writing and probably worked in an office, which is additionally confirmed by the reclamantes, i. e. by the way in which the handwriting runs from one page to the next (as in an official document) and it always runs up to the margin, but no further.

The folkloristic collectors also recorded and commented on the writers’ (lack of) skills in very clear terms. Albrecht Dieterich, a philologist and religious scholar (1866–1908), found that a ‘most awkward hand’ had been at work in the majority of heavenly letters he examined.⁷³ Karl Olbrich, a German officer posted to the front who collected a large number of such letters, believed he could even tell how quickly the author of a letter had written it from its appearance; he noted ‘what painstaking care’ the copyists had taken to reproduce them slowly, letter by letter, word

by word.⁷⁴ The original *Himmelsbriefe* from Adolf Spamer’s collection in Dresden also show a lack of routine in writing and presenting texts, as their layout and handwriting reveal.⁷⁵

In addition, however, the differences between an *original* from a soldier’s possessions and a copy made *for scientific purposes* are clearly apparent in the artefacts themselves. On the one hand, there are obvious traces of use, which shall be discussed in more detail in a moment. On the other hand, the letters that were actually used as amulets were mostly designed without any margin, as if the front and back of the unlined paper had to be filled up right to the edge of the page. The writing is clumsy and the lines are not spaced apart evenly; some of them even overlap. The fact that many of these texts contain insertions and corrections suggests that the copy was made in a hurry or the content was actually dictated to the writer and that little attention could be paid to writing perfectly or even carefully to transfer the contents of one original letter to another one.⁷⁶

Copyists’ mistakes: ‘slips of the pen’⁷⁷ and ‘inventive arbitrariness’⁷⁸

Only when these letters are transcribed carefully does it become clear that the process of copying a text – which was partly meant to recreate originality – was often nothing more than a mechanical exercise. The copies were obviously intended for personal use and meant to be magical, and the way they were organised was rather disorderly. Even contemporary experts assumed that this could have been a case of ‘fleeting and thoughtless copying [...] by untrained hands’⁷⁹ since the writer obviously lacked a deeper understanding of the subject matter. Apart from the malapropism of individual terms, this was indicated by omissions of words. There are cases, though, where parts of sentences or even whole paragraphs have been copied twice, which Olbrich reckons must either have been due to lack of attention or the idea of two passages being better

⁷¹ Wienker-Piepho 2000, 324f.

⁷² Museum of Hessian History in Kassel, Volkskundesammlung (Ethnographic Collection), 74 A 4, inv. no. 1928/176. The year 1790 is not mentioned in the letter itself, so this information probably comes from when it was first documented and possibly refers to the year the letter was created.

⁷³ Dieterich 1901, 10.

⁷⁴ Olbrich 1917, 145.

⁷⁵ See ‘Ein Graf hatte einen Diener’ (‘A count had a servant’). ISGV Dresden, NaAS/K70/M3/1 (Fig. 4).

⁷⁶ Bertholet, however, refers to the duty a writer has towards the written text and to ‘the emphasis placed on [producing] the most accurate version of the written text possible if it is to have full effect’; see Bertholet 1949, 32.

⁷⁷ See Dieterich 1901, 10.

⁷⁸ See Wuttke 1869, 168.

⁷⁹ Olbrich 1897, 91.

than just one, making the magic stronger.⁸⁰ However, certain slips of the pen suggest that the spelling mistakes could have been due to a dialect or unclear pronunciation, which would mean that the texts may have been written down from memory and in the copyist's own dialect or dictated (this would explain mistakes like 'Gereina'/'St. Gemeine' instead of 'St. Germain', 'Madenburg in Prussia' instead of 'Magdeburg',⁸¹ 'Preisen' instead of 'Preußen' [Prussia], 'Perlen' instead of 'Berlin' and 'Resetenz' instead of 'Residenz').⁸² Julius Jordan, a vicar from Warendorf who received a copy of a heavenly letter from a dying craftsman while working as a hospital chaplain, interpreted exactly this kind of mistake as the result of a long-term copying process and thus as a phenomenon to do with perception: 'The numerous variants, which are certainly more than just spontaneous spelling mistakes, really are characteristic witnesses of a long journey from one hand to the next'.⁸³ However, there are also indications that these could be deliberate regional adaptations that were intended to authenticate the 'fable of origin' by naming familiar sites and significant dates of military campaigns and wartime events in the region (e.g. 'found in Rendsburg', 'found in Magdeburg' or 'found in Berlin').⁸⁴ In many cases, though, the place names mentioned were simply made up ('Rödergau', 'Rudena', 'Redamu', 'Wanda' and countless others). The fact that a copyist was inexperienced in writing down the words of a text he read or had read out to him on a blank sheet of paper and occasionally failed to understand the meaning of the sentence either is shown by mistakes like 'Goldstein' instead of 'Holstein', 'kann nicht gehangen werden' instead of 'kann nicht gefangen werden', 'Ölgraben' instead of 'Ölgarten' and 'Tägen' rather than 'Degen' or

'Segen'.⁸⁵ This equally applies to the adoption of terms that were spelt correctly, but did not make sense at that particular point in the text. In another case, the intended haemostatic effect of a letter from Heaven we see in the words 'wenn einem die Nase blutet' ('if one's nose bleeds') got changed to the more ominous 'wen einem die Strafe blutet' ('whoever awaits punishment'), possibly because the capital letter *N* could also be read as *St* in German cursive script at the time.⁸⁶

While many of the folkloristic collectors and reporters tacitly corrected these apparent errors when the transcribed copies were being published in order to present a coherent, well-written text, in 1901 Dieterich specifically addressed 'slips of the pen' he had identified himself and by doing so made readers aware that he had adapted the original himself to make it more understandable for them. In one letter from Heaven that he had a copy of, for example, it originally said that the letter 'über der Tanche flätig strebte', which is utter nonsense; in Dieterich's opinion, though, it ought to have said 'über der Taufe ... schwebte', which means 'hovered over the baptismal font'. Nonetheless, Dieterich had to admit that some of the passages in the text had remained a mystery to him, however: 'was sich in flätig verbirgt, kann ich nicht sagen' ('I can't say what *flätig* is supposed to mean').⁸⁷

Both the manuscript examples and the comments in them suggest that the reason why those who wrote the letters replaced terms with others was mainly because they did not understand the content; they changed words with which they were not familiar or which they simply were unable to decipher in the handwritten pattern of text. By doing this, they altered the content, creating new elements, some of which were mysterious, incomprehensible words that reinforced the numinous character of the text for contemporary recipients in the course of further copying and distribution.⁸⁸ In one case, for example, a writer had modified the passage about the baptismal font, turning it into something that sounded miraculous: 'über Tausende zu Statagami' (literally, 'about thousands to statagami'). Another writer added meaningless 'magical' words to it and used Latin script to mark the magic in them: 'Bin Kestus, Bestus, Mornen, Sibusch, Muaeent. Jesus, Maria Joseph' (literally, '[I] am Kestus, Bestus, Mornen, Sibush, Muaeent.

⁸⁰ Olbrich 1897, 91. In a version of the text from 1908, Olbrich goes into more detail about the crude compilation of the text 'according to the principle of "two is better than one"'. One of the letters he examined could therefore 'serve as a textbook example of how our compiled letters of protection might have come into being in the first place'; see Olbrich 1908, 48.

⁸¹ Dietrich 1911, 248.

⁸² References to slips of the pen and misreadings can particularly be found in Vogt 1911, 609f. Kirchner called for the texts to be read out loud, as he presumed 'one will realise what sense is hidden in the nonsense if one surrenders [sic!] to the sound of the phonetics and not to their written form'; Kirchner 1908, 21.

⁸³ Jordan 1908, 335.

⁸⁴ See Köhler 1898, 117 on this point; he developed the thesis that one 'adapts the place where [the heavenly letter] was found to the place where it is needed so as to sanctify it'.

⁸⁵ See Vogt 1911, 618 regarding these examples.

⁸⁶ See the commentary in Schütze 1912, 345, 352 on this point.

⁸⁷ Dieterich 1901, 10.

⁸⁸ Bertholet 1949, 34–36.



Jesus Christus zu finden ist
 Im Wort, da man von Jesu liest,
 Denn gibt Heil und Seligkeit
 Dem, der ihn kernet allezeit.
 Wer sich des Namens Jesu nicht,
 Der wird durch Jesum Christi nicht,
 Jesu, des lebten Heilstein,
 Dem heyligen Heilstein
 Sei Lob und Preis! O Jesu mich,
 Erhöhe du uns stets durch deinen Gehil,
 O du mein Herr Jesu, deine Hand,
 Daß uns Heil, Trost, Tod nicht fehl.

Was ist des Tod, ungetrich ist der Tag,
 Die Stund' auch niemand wissen mag,
 Drum tren' auf Gott und den' habe
 Daß jeder Stund' die letzte sei.
 Im Leben habe guten Will,
 Und laße den, der Tod die ist.

Herr dich wie Deyen in Schwanden
 Das ist die ganze Bollkommenheit,
 So geht es zu in aller Zeit,
 Tu mir die Welt, ich tu dir Welt,
 Hilf mir auf, ich hilf dich nieder,
 Ehr' mich groß, ich schänd' dich nieder,
 Sage nicht alles, was du weißt,
 Glaube nicht alles, was du hörst,
 Suche nicht alles, was du siehst.

Oh Welt, dies ganze Land beweist
 Wie Jener, Schanden und Gelaß,
 Mit thum' auf Segen über uns noch,
 Hab uns den einen Wert erhebt,
 Den Jesu! durch des Namens kein
 Gilt mir ein heil' Gedenken;
 Erhebe mir bei uns letzten Zeit,
 Wenn meine Seel' in deine Hand'.

Himmels-Brief,
Wird genannt Credoria.

Ein schönes christliches Gebet, alle Tage und Stunden zu beten.

GOTT beehret, Hoffnung, erheit, ich Gott, ich bin, verlich mich nicht. Wer Gott
 verstant, hat noch gehat, den will er nicht verlassen; ob schon die Feinde dich verfolgen
 und haßen. So trau auf Gott, er wird dich auch in seiner Hand verhalten. Je größer die Noth,
 je näher ist Gott. Trist und ist, Gott und die Krone nicht vergh. Gottes Güte und Treu
 ist alle Wogen an. Was Gott zu erheben, kann Niemand anerkennen. Gott läßt die
 Seinen sitzen, aber nicht verziehen. Ich trau' auf Gott, allein, menschliche Hilfe ist zu fern.
 Gott noch wohl Hilfe und Rat, wenn Weisheit's ein Ende hat. Was Gott lang' seine Sachen
 an, so wird es guten Fortgang ha'n. Gott hat' vor' Augen und sein Wort, dann geht die's
 wohl so hier als dort. Wer willig gibt den Armen, dessen reich sich Gott erkennen. Wer zum
 Himmel ist erhoben, stüch täglich Danks und Loben. Ruhen, Krone, Ehre, Reichthum und Noth,
 ist aller Christen täglich Noth. Im Unglück hat' ein' Barmhertzigkeit, auf Gott trau', es wird werden
 gut, je besser, als man hoffen thut. In die, Herr Jesu, Gottes Sohn, steh' meines Deyens
 Freund' und Barmh. Mein Leben, mein Trost, mein höchstes Gut ist mir, Herr Christ, dein
 treues Blut. Seg' und lorge nicht zu viel, es geschieht doch, was Gott haben will. Der
 Heiligen Deyen auf Rosen geht, wenn's mitten unterm Kreuz steht. Bezage nicht im Kreuz
 dein, nach Regen folgt Beweinchen. Herr Jesu, der läßt Name den, erquick' mir die Seele
 mein. Herr Jesu Christi mein Trost und Freund', ich trau' auf dich zu jeder Zeit. O komm
 Christ, bi' mir' und weid', bald kommst herauf die gute Zeit. Wohllich kommst der wohl über
 Nacht, in' allen Noth ein Ende macht. Reichthum verliessen nicht, Klassen gehen ermt nicht.
 Betr' ein, und läßt' dich kein, arbeite für, trau' auf Gott allein, die Sorge laß Gott beschien
 kein' Kren.
 Gott, der du keine Laß im Himmel hast zu wohnen,
 In Weis einig bist, dreieinig in Personen:
 Gott Vater, Sohn und Heil'g, all' die dich rufen an,
 Kein Gott mir' ohne dich den Himmel geben kann.

Trud u. Verlag von Gustav Kühn in Neu-Ruppin.

Fig. 8: 'Himmelsbrief genannt Gredoria' ('Letter to Heaven called "Gredoria"'). Picture sheet no. 202, Gustav Kühn, Neuruppin, Picture-sheet no. 202, c.1880, 39,5 x 32 cm, collection at the Museum of European Cultures (MEK), Berlin.

COPLIA oder Abschrift

D. C. C.

Himmels-Briefs,

so Gott selbst geschrieben, und auf St. Michaels-Berg in Britannia vor Sanct Michaels Bild hangt, und niemand weiß, woran es hangt, welcher mit goldenen Buchstaben geschrieben, und von dem heiligen Engel St. Michael dahin gesandt worden, und wer diesen Brief will anrühren, von dem weicht er: wer ihn aber will abschreiben, zu dem neigt er sich, und thut sich gegen ihn auf.

Sehet an die Gehorche Gottes, so Gott durch den heiligen Engel Michael dahin gesandt hat.



H gebiete euch, daß ihr an den Sonntagen nicht arbeitet, weder in den Gärten, noch Häusern, ihr habt denn eine sonderbare Erlaubnis. Ihr solltet zur Kirche gehen, und mit Andacht beten, und sollt vollbringen das, was ihr die ganze Wochen durch versäumt habt, und seht auch keine sonderbare Ding wirken an dem Sonntag, und von eurem Reichthum den Armen mittheilen; glaubet, daß der Brief von meiner göttlichen Hand geschrieben worden, von mir Jesu Christo ausgesandt, damit ihr nicht lebet wie die unvernünftigen Thiere. Ich habe euch in der Wochen aufgesetzt sechs Tag, darinnen zu vollbringen eure Arbeit, und den Sonntag zu sechern, ihr sollt fleißig zur Kirche gehen, insonderheit zu der heiligen Mess, die Predigt und Gottes Wort anhören; wo ihr nun dieses nicht thun werdet, so will ich strafen mit Pestilenz, Krieg und Theurung. Ich gebiete euch, daß ihr an den Samstagen nicht spät arbeitet, von meiner Mutter wegen, und am Sonntag Morgens früh: ein jeder Mensch, jung oder alt, soll zur Kirche gehen, zu der heiligen Mess, und mit großer Andacht beten für seine vergangene Sünden, auf daß sie ihm mögen vergeben werden; begehret nicht Silber oder Gold in Bosheit; schwöret nicht bey meinem Namen fleischlicher Begierden, dann ich euch gemacht hab, und auch wieder zerschneiden will, keiner soll den andern tödten mit der Zungen hinter seinem Rücken. Nicht freuet euch eurer Güter, oder Reichthum, verachtmählet nicht arme Leute, eurer Vater und Mutter, habt lieb den Nächsten wie euch selbst, und gebet nicht falsches Zeugniß, so gebe ich euch Gesundheit und Freude, und wer den Glauben kann, und nicht recht hält, derselbe ist verlohren. Wer an einem Wochentag arbeitet, der thut eine große Sünd, und denselben werd ich bestrafen. Ich sage euch durch den Mund meiner Mutter, der christlichen Kirche, und durch das Haupt Johannes meines Taufers, daß ich wahrer Jesus Christus den Brief mit meiner göttlichen Hand geschrieben habe, und wer diesen Brief hat, und nicht offenbaret, der ist verdammt von der christlichen Kirche, und verlassen von meiner Allmacht. Diesen Brief soll einer von dem andern abschreiben, und wer so viel Sünden gethan hätte, als Sand am Meer, und viel Laub und Gras auf Erden ist, und auch so viele Stern in dem Himmel, wann er beichtet und hat Reu und Leid über seine Sünden, so wird er davon entbunden. Ich gebiete euch bey dem Bann, daß ihr diese Besopiel haltet, so habet ihr Hülfe von mir, und glaubt gänzlich, was der Brief euch lehret, und wer das nicht glauben will, der wird umkommen und sterben in dem Blut, also daß er geplaget wird, und seine Kinder werden eines bösen Todes sterben. Belehret euch, oder ihr werdet endlich gepeiniget werden in der Höll, und ich werde euch fragen am jüngsten Tag, ihr aber werdet mir keine Antwort geben, von eurer großen Sünden wegen; Wer nun einen solchen Brief in seinem Hause hat, oder bey ihm trägt, der soll von mir erdhret werden, auch kein Donner noch Wetter mag ihm schaden; und soll auch vor Feuer und Wasser verhäret werden. Welche schwangere Frau diesen Brief bey ihr trägt, die bringt eine liebeliche Frucht und fröhlichen Anblick auf die Welt, haltet meine Gebote, soth euch durch den heil. Engel Michael gesandt und kund gethan habe, Ich wahrer Jesus Christus. Amen.

Gedruckt zu Cölln am Rhein bey Arnold Clemens im Jahre 1802.

Fig. 9: 'Copia oder Abschrift des Himmelsbriefs' ('Copy or transcript of the letter from heaven'). Dated Cölln (Cologne) 1802, paper, woodcut, 44,1 x 37,5 cm, letterpress printing. TVKM 27637, Tiroler Landesmuseum, Volkskunstmuseum, Innsbruck, Austria.

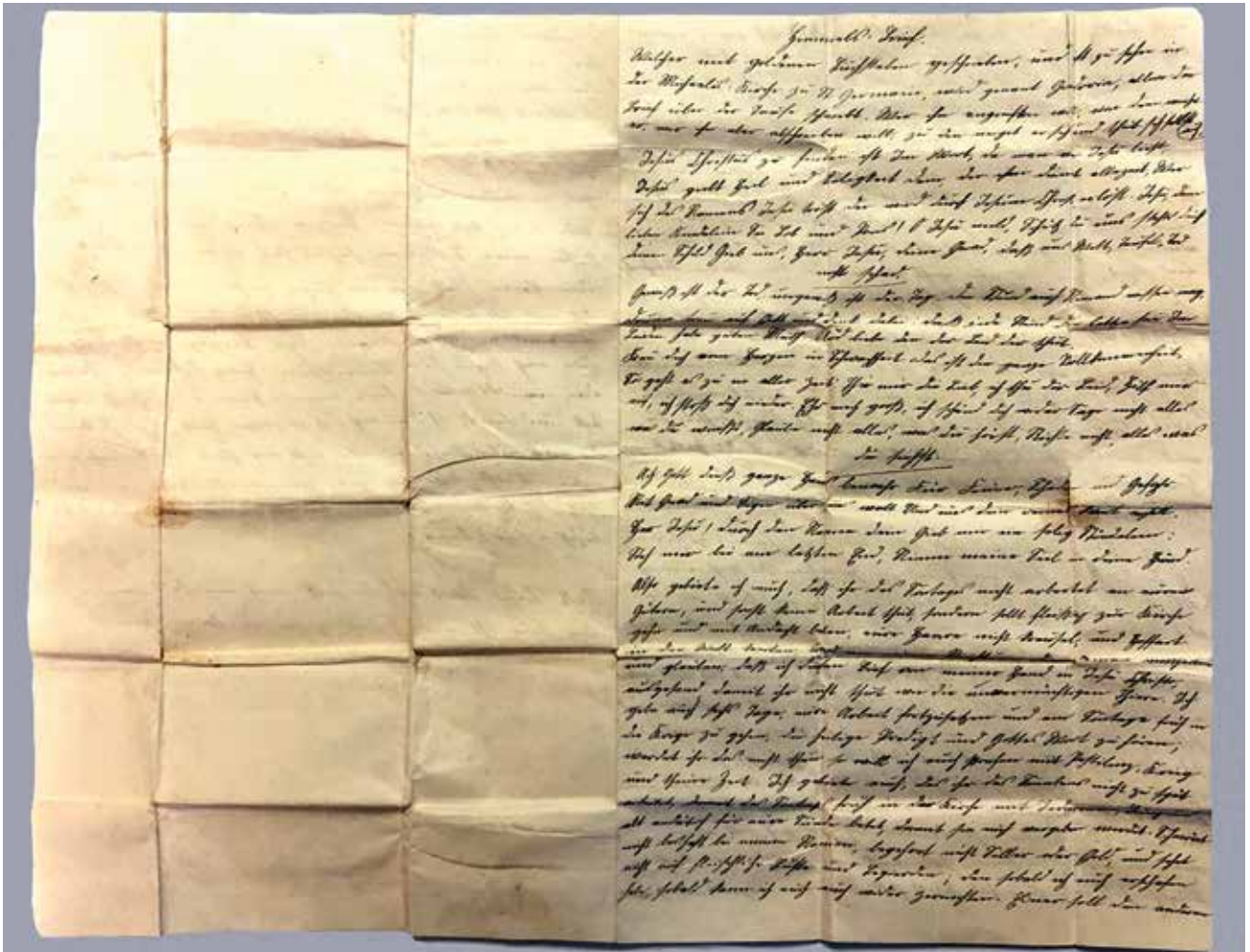


Fig. 10a: 'Himmelsbrief' ('Heavenly letter'). Written by Minna Heller for her husband Ernst Friedrich Heller, undated, but probably August 1914. Moritz Private Archive, Erfurt, recto.

Jesus, Mary and Joseph').⁸⁹ In his comments on the matter, Wuttke assumed that texts that had once been meaningful had been 'changed into something completely meaningless' by copying, and called this process 'inventive arbitrariness'.⁹⁰ In Englehardt and Nakassis' view, misunderstanding the original like this 'created gaps or contingencies that necessitated textual innovation to preserve the coherence of the text as a complex whole'.⁹¹ In cases of this kind, they state, 'copying then means producing new meaning'.⁹² So the process of copying documents did not automatically preserve their contents and pass them on to others. In his own analysis, the medieval historian Walther H. Vogt (1878–

1951) therefore also assumed that the protective letters that soldiers carried on them in the twentieth century 'should not be regarded as a direct continuation of seventeenth-century letters', but were 'essentially new entities' that had been re-assembled, supplemented and transformed on the basis of different templates.⁹³ He explained the incomprehensibility of texts with the thesis that the phenomenon was now in its final stage, in the process of 'constant deterioration'.

The oral and handwritten processes of passing on the contents of such manuscripts outlined here, which were characterised by the development or lack of both reading and writing skills, indicate that the result of producing texts of this kind was by no means stable and lasting, but transitory and constantly changing. This is why it is necessary 'to see writing not as an artefact that once invented remains stable but as an

⁸⁹ See the 'Letter written by My own hands', ISGV Dresden, NaAS/K91 M1 (Fig. 6b).

⁹⁰ Wuttke 1869, 168.

⁹¹ Englehardt and Nakassis 2013, 15.

⁹² Ibid., 10.

⁹³ Vogt 1911, 617.

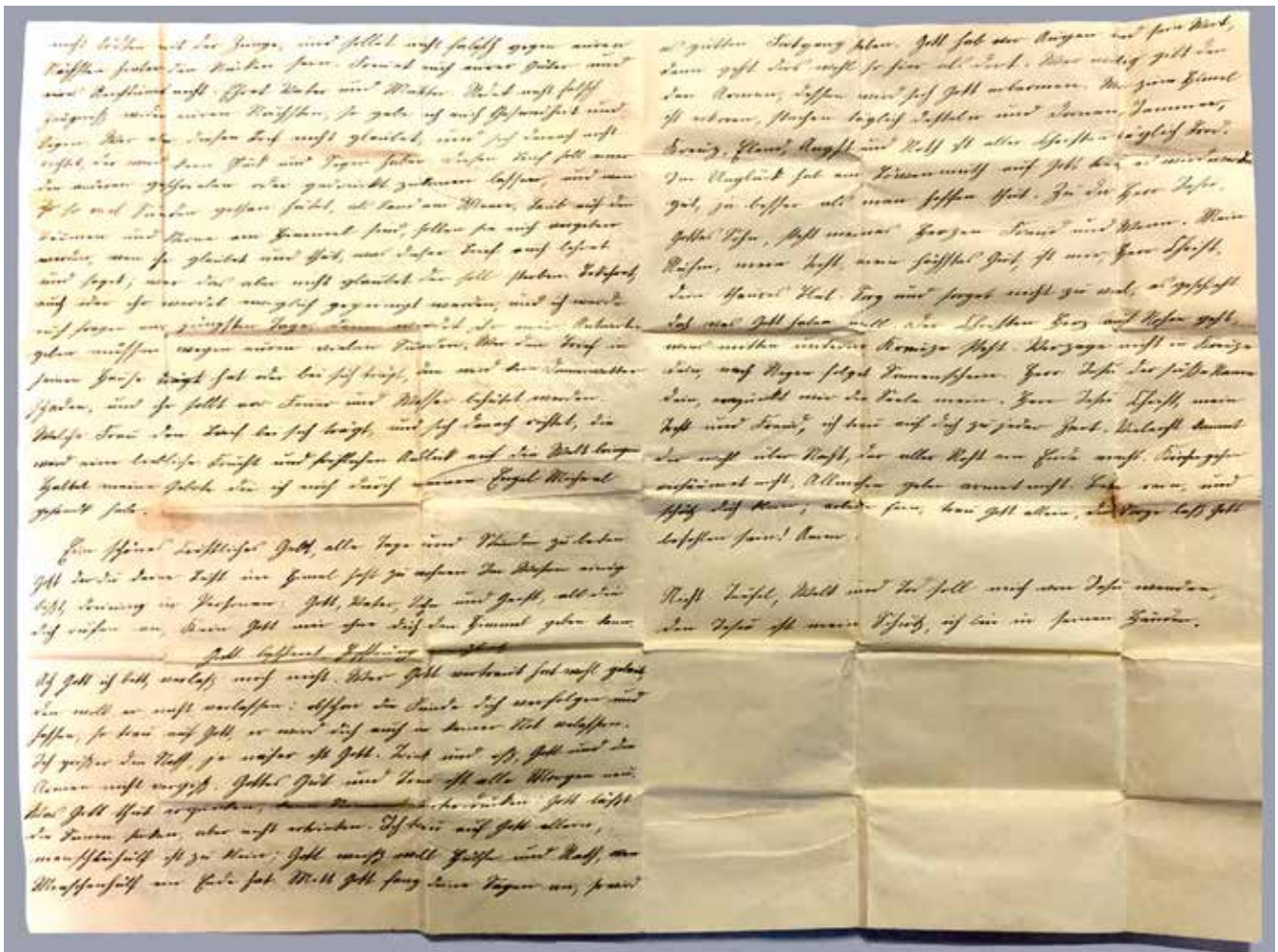


Fig. 10b: 'Himmelsbrief' ('Heavenly letter'). Moritz Private Archive, Erfurt, verso.

ongoing process', as Englehardt and Nakassis notice.⁹⁴ Like Korff, one could also speak of a 'religious bricolage' here.⁹⁵ What this refers to is 'the "tinkering" combination of different styles of thinking and forms of practice, the linking of ritual pictorial traditions (use of amulets and talismans) to modern technology, the juxtaposition and interweaving of parapsychological forms of knowledge and those handed down in regional cultures', all of which should be counted as 'ways of processing wartime reality'.

It was not until mass printing was established on an industrial scale – from the middle of the nineteenth century onwards – that conditions for (re)producing heavenly letters stabilised and faulty copying was largely prevented from happening. Walther Vogt's hypothesis was based on this fact – that it was the transition to printing and mass production that had a homogenising effect on the

contents of letters of this type. Above all, however, he said that the possibilities of individually adapting the content that were still available in handwritten manuscripts had thus been eliminated, just like any dialectal or regional 'peculiarities'.⁹⁶ Even so, the question yet to be clarified here is what kind of relationship existed between technical reproduction and the handwritten manuscript, or rather, which artefact the user ultimately ascribed greater power to.

Distribution: heavenly letters and the material nature of social structure

This second part of my article is concerned with the embedding of heavenly letters in the respective contemporary forms of social relations and the question of whether and how such letters reflected the materiality of the social element at the same time. What role did social relationships such as friendship and kinship play, and what role did the gender of the recipient and the producer play in the creation, power

⁹⁴ Englehardt and Nakassis 2013, 8.

⁹⁵ Korff 2006, 12.

⁹⁶ Vogt 1911, 618f.

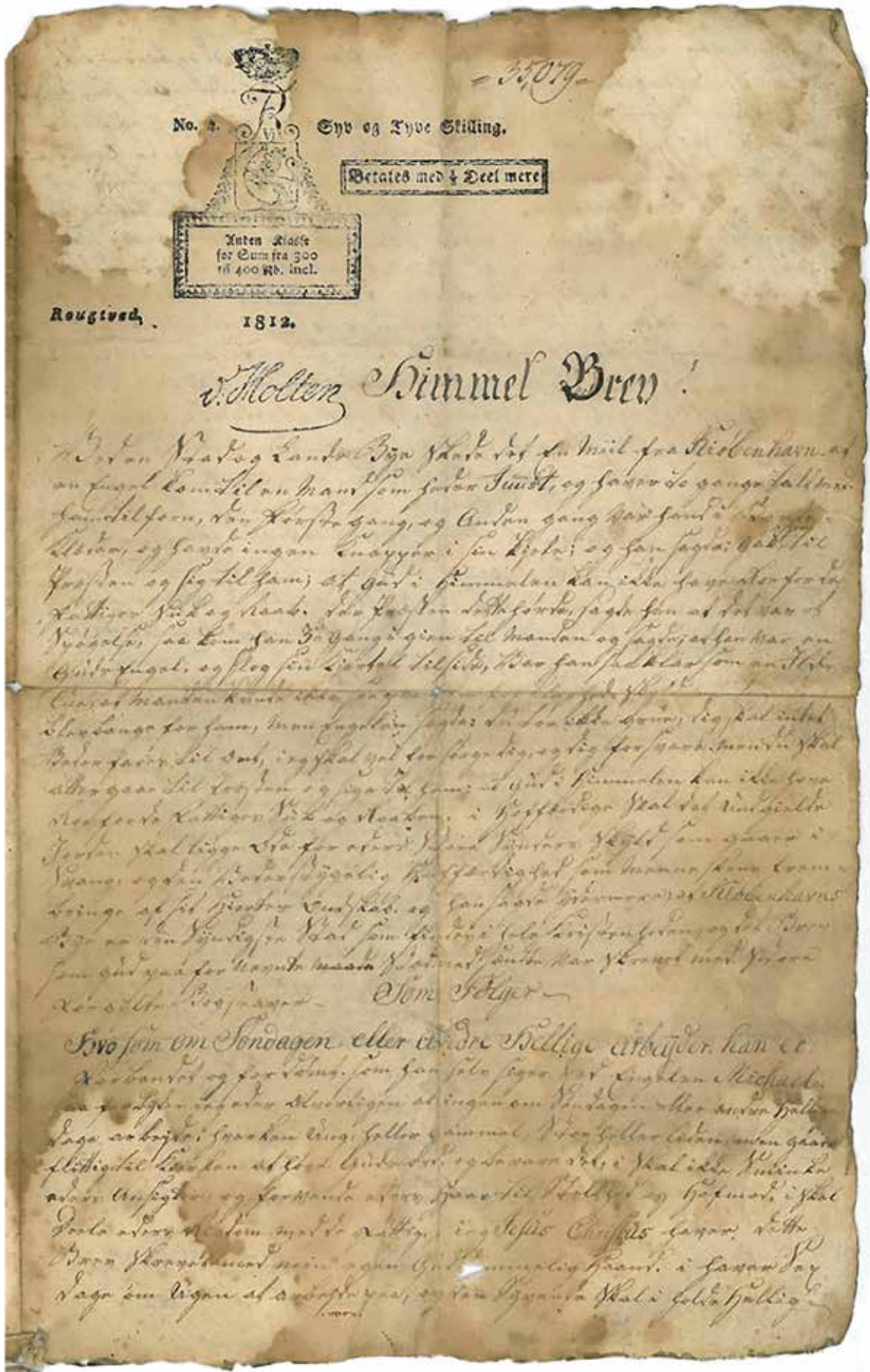


Fig. 11a: 'Himmel Brev!' ('Heavenly Letter!'). Dated 7 April 1813, Trøndelag Folk Museum, Trondheim, Norway, p. 1.



Fig. 11c: 'Himmel Brev!' ('Heavenly Letter!'). Dated 7 April 1813, Trøndelag Folk Museum, Trondheim, Norway, p. 4.

and actual use of the manuscript? If the recipient ever had to make use of the instructions formulated in a letter, then one of the central provisions applied, namely to pass the letter on to someone else as a template for the next copy and thus to share the 'secret' knowledge about its protective magic with others. The only prerequisite for this was that all those involved tacitly believed in its power. The second important point to note was that the letter was meant to be circulated as a copy and passed into the cycle of social relations. Consequently, these letters were transferred on a face-to-face basis, i.e. personally and by actual contact, both in connection with emotionally close forms of relationships (kinship and love relationships) and as 'valuable gifts' to friends.⁹⁷ We even know of an actual case in which one person gave a heavenly letter to his 'enemy': in his war diaries, Friedrich von Frankenberg-Ludwigsdorf described his initial mistrust when an old woman had secretly given him a letter of protection in

⁹⁷ Olbrich 1897, 91.

French while he was visiting Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris in 1870. The fact that she had asked him beforehand whether he spoke any French indicates that the bearers assumed that the amulet not only had to be worn, but actually read as well in order to be effective.⁹⁸

The above example makes it clear that these letters were not only the result of existing relationships and served to strengthen them, but they also established relationships themselves. If, like Marcel Mauss, one interprets a letter from Heaven as a specific type of *gift*, then this process also refers to the 'inherently material nature of social structure'.⁹⁹ It is precisely this form of circulation – from person to person – that makes the social dimension of these manuscripts visible. In other words, the circulation of these material objects was part of the social dimension of writing.

This raises many questions that can hardly be clarified in detail here, since although the objects themselves have been handed down, the individuals who passed them on and their specific strategies and reasons for doing so are hard to identify. So the question of what rules applied here or how ritualised these actions were – how a person got access to a letter, who actually wrote the letters and put them in envelopes, who handed them over, sent them off or sewed them into uniform jackets, and when – is likely to remain unresolved.¹⁰⁰ The Hessian folklorist Carl Heßler, however, provided us with a number of details about the actual production conditions and the materials used:

Man trägt sie, in Täschchen von grauem Leinen eingenäht, auf der bloßen Brust. Beim Nähen des Beutelchens muß grauer Zwirn verwendet werden, und der Faden ist so lang zu nehmen, daß kein Knoten gemacht zu werden braucht. Bei der ganzen Arbeit darf kein Wort gesprochen werden. Das Band, das zum Tragen des Beutelchens um den Hals geschlungen wird, muß ebenfalls von grauer Farbe sein.¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ Frankenberg 1870, 191.

⁹⁹ Englehardt and Nakassis 2013, 6.

¹⁰⁰ See the example from the Second World War: Maximilian Schels, 'Der Himmelsbrief: Die Geschichte von Johann Pirzer': 'An old woman from the village gave his mother a piece of paper, which she sewed into the breast pocket of his new uniform'; <http://www.meihern.de/html/body_der_himmelsbrief.html> (28 November 2022).

¹⁰¹ Heßler 1904, 534. See the picture of a small bag of this kind on p. 104 and in Moritz 2014, 52.

They are carried in small bags made of grey linen and worn on one's bare chest. Grey thread must be used to sew the bag and the thread must be long enough for a knot to be unnecessary. One is not allowed to say a word while all the work is being done. The ribbon wrapped around the neck to carry the bag must also be grey in colour.

In this description, we can again see that the folklorist collectors themselves were actively involved in the production and presentation of forms of folk magic and superstition. Korff says that the folklorist 'expert' always acted like a kind of *mythomoteur* in this case.¹⁰² Here, as in many other places, it is hardly possible to distinguish between what was handed-down factual knowledge and what, in turn, was the folkloristic reinterpretation of an everyday action as a practice interpreted as being 'magical'.

This is also the case with regard to contemporary studies according to which gender – as a relational reference system – controlled the way in which people dealt with heavenly letters and their character as gifts. Based on the reports available to him and his own observations, Olbrich assumed that a letter of this kind was meant to be handed over to the recipient by someone of the opposite sex, which usually meant that women copied it for the men who were related to them.¹⁰³ This observation that those who handed over such letters 'were always women'¹⁰⁴ then led to the assumption that women were predestined or even obliged to copy and pass them on because of their own gender. According to Olbrich, this act could be 'explained by the loving woman, who is more inclined to believe in the supernatural and would [therefore] like to give an amulet to the man going off to war'.¹⁰⁵ Ultimately, almost every (male) author repeated the theory that 'weak, hysterical women'¹⁰⁶ were more susceptible to superstition than men, which is exactly why the female sex was the author of texts and procurer of gifts – as Otto Herpel, a village priest in Hessa, wrote in 1916, 'die

Weiber sind's – ob "fromm" oder "ungläubig" – die den Brief mit heißen Köpfen abschreiben' ('it's worked-up women who make copies of the letter, regardless of whether they are "devout" or "disbelievers"').¹⁰⁷ These observations are probably responsible for normative instructions appearing, according to which a heavenly letter would only become magical if it was written by a member of the opposite sex.

These examples seem to confirm the theory that social relations materialised in these manuscripts. A host of questions arise here nonetheless, both regarding the social reference spaces in which these gender stereotypes prevailed and regarding writing traditions which assumed a normative character themselves, especially in the context of war and threats, and in turn were influential enough to make social behaviour take place. Essentially, family relationships and dependencies were at the heart of this behaviour, such as women's concern about the war making them widows or having to bring up their children alone without a male breadwinner to help. Hellwig, reporting on his folkloristic research at the war front, reflected on the positions that married and unmarried combatants were in. He also mentioned the situation of women at home and the threat that war posed to them as a specific starting point for magical practices:

Günstig für den Aberglauben ist eigentlich nur, daß die meisten von uns Weib und Kind zu Hause haben, daß sie infolgedessen den Kriegsgefahren doch nicht so unbefangen und verhältnismäßig gleichgültig gegenüberstehen wie die jungen unverheirateten Burschen und daß sie auch, bald mehr, bald minder, unter dem Einfluß ihrer Frauen stehen, die ja dem Aberglauben gegenüber im allgemeinen recht zugänglich zu sein pflegen und auch das größte Interesse daran haben, daß ihr Mann, der Vater ihrer Kinder, gesund und unverletzt heimkehrt.¹⁰⁸

The only thing favourable for superstition, really, is that most of us have wives and children at home, so they are not as impartial and indifferent to the dangers of war as the young unmarried lads are and they are influenced by their wives to a varying extent – women who seem to be quite open to superstition, generally, and are particularly interested in

¹⁰² See Korff 1996 on the role of lay folklorists and experts as *mythomoteurs* in the creation of ideas and symbols in folk culture. Regarding the term itself, see Smith 1986, 15.

¹⁰³ Olbrich 1897, 91.

¹⁰⁴ Olbrich 1917, 143. Klapper 1925, 244: 'The following letter of protection was written by a woman on a quarto sheet of paper which was folded lengthwise three times and crosswise four times and [obviously] carried around a great deal'.

¹⁰⁵ Olbrich 1897, 91.

¹⁰⁶ See Hellwig 1916, 47.

¹⁰⁷ Herpel 1916, 34f.

¹⁰⁸ Hellwig 1916, 24.

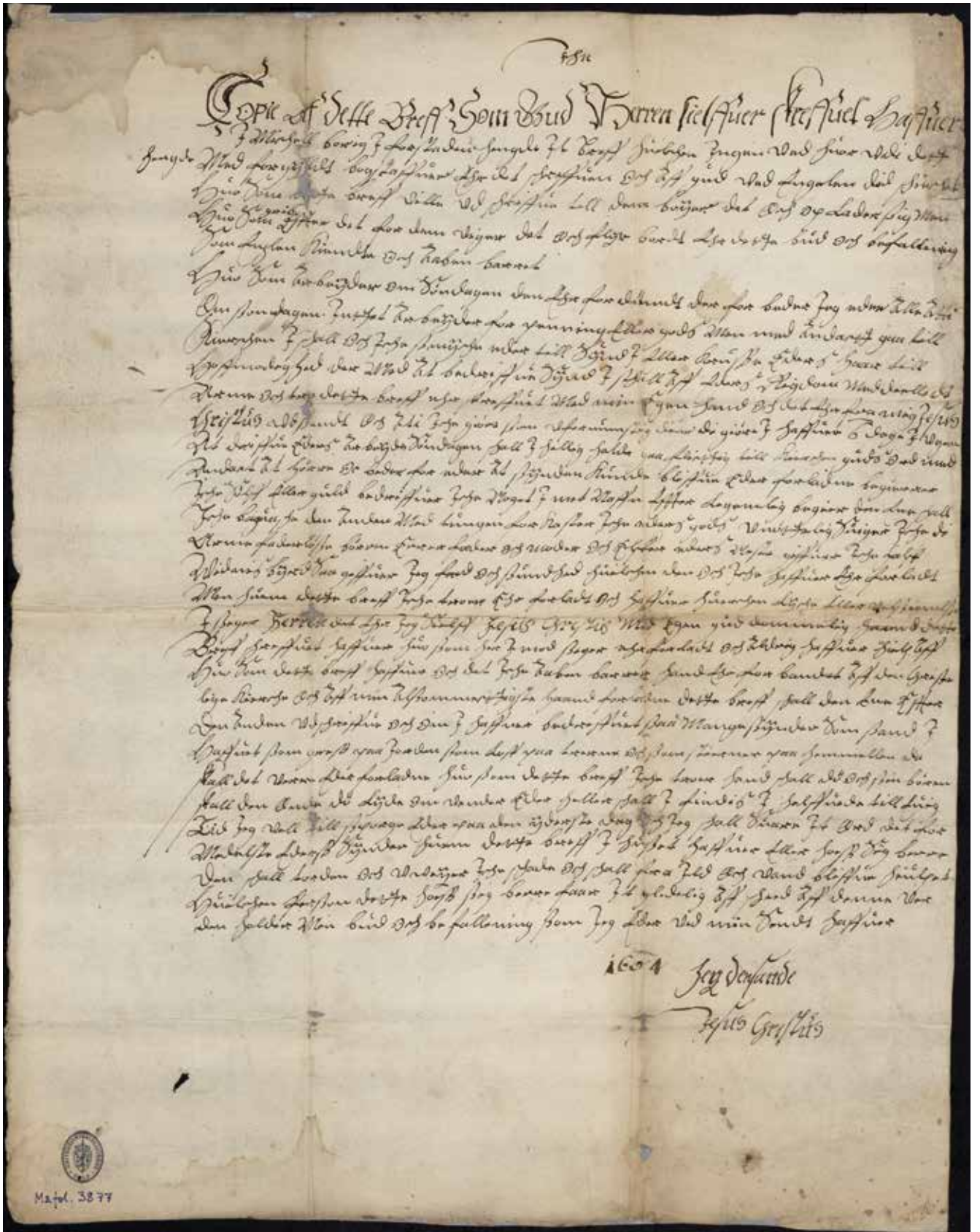


Fig. 12a: 'Copie af dette Breff' ('Copy of this Letter'). Dated 1604, National Library of Norway, Ms. fol. 3877, recto.



Fig. 12b: National Library of Norway, Ms. fol. 3877, verso.

their husband – the father of their children – returning home healthy and unharmed.

The type of social relationship that existed thus preceded the production of the letters. It could be confirmed by handing the artefacts over, however, or it could be displayed openly by all the participants. The process of copying a letter by hand was an unusual form of private writing in itself, especially for women in a social class where education had little value, so it was a particularly meaningful act with which the writer made her mark in the recipient's life as well by virtue of her own handwriting.¹⁰⁹

This is yet another example of the social dimension that manuscripts possess: the social relationship materialises in the manuscript because a direct connection is created between the writer and the recipient of the letter. One of the few cases in which this material form of reassurance can be seen in a specific relationship is the story of the factory worker Ernst Friedrich Heller and his wife Minna from Trusen in Thuringia.¹¹⁰ When her husband died in a military hospital in 1916 after being injured by shrapnel and losing a leg, she became a widow – at the age of 29 and with three

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Englehardt and Nakassis 2013.

¹¹⁰ Moritz 2014.

young children to look after (four by the end of the war). She received her husband's personal effects, including the 'letter from Heaven' she had given him in a little, hand-sewn bag like almost all of the women in the village, apparently, copied from another letter (Fig. 10).¹¹¹ In the family history, it says that Minna had looked after her husband's letter 'as if it were a relic' in the years that followed.

The letters were also passed down from one male to the next within the family. Their circulation was therefore also subject to the generational principle, by means of which the effect and effectiveness of the manuscript were proven or invoked: if the father, grandfather or even the great-grandfather had gone to war with a heavenly letter on him and had survived the ordeal, then it was thought that the son, grandson or great-grandson would also benefit from its proven power.¹¹² In this case, too, it was usually a female member of the family who passed it on to the next male in the family who was drafted for military service. So not only did women copy the letters, they also kept them and were responsible for their proper safekeeping and transmission. In his last letter to his mother, Max Immelmann, the famous German WWI fighter pilot, confirmed that he had received her letter and its special contents:

Also dieses Blatt soll ich immer bei mir tragen? Wenn ich das mit jeder Glücksblume, jedem Kleeblatt usw. täte, hätte ich immer einen kleinen Gemüsegarten bei mir. Außerdem müsste ich dann, um gerecht zu sein, die mir geschickten Rosenkränze, Kruzifixe und andere Talismänner bei mir haben. Es gibt eben zu viele junge Mädchen, die solche sinnigen Einfälle haben. Sicher alles sehr feinfühlig, junge Damen. Das eine ist zweifellos: Die Wünsche sind alle gut gemeint, und das freut mich bei all diesen Sendungen.¹¹³

¹¹¹ Moritz 2014, 54. In this book, Moritz reconstructs the life history of her great-grandfather on her mother's side on the basis of archives and letters. I am grateful to Marina Moritz for her support.

¹¹² See the copy of the accompanying letter with which a woman by the name of Geiger had lent her son's headmaster a heavenly letter that he had asked to copy. She pointed out that the original letter had not only helped her husband survive the war, but it had saved other men's lives as well. Here is the English translation: 'Headmaster, my husband has been out there ever since the beginning of the war, & has often been in danger, & has always managed to get out of it with God's help, & like me, my husband says it's because of the letter, & the gentlemen I have given the letter to are still alive. This letter has already been carried around in 4 campaigns, & all those who carried it on them have come back again. But you really do have to believe in the letter.' ISGV Dresden, NaAS/K91/M1.

¹¹³ Immelmann 1916, 127.

So, I should always carry this letter on me, should I? If I did that with every flower that was meant to bring me luck, every four-leaf clover and suchlike, then I'd always have a little flower garden with me. To be fair, I'd have to have all the rosaries, crucifixes and other talismans I've been sent on me, too. There are just too many young girls around who have such apt ideas – I'm sure they're all very sensitive young ladies. One thing is for certain: all these wishes are well meant, and I'm pleased about that as I've got so many.

Immelmann's example shows us that the recipients of such letters often responded rather reservedly to these magical gifts. In letters they sent to their families, many soldiers said that they were only carrying the heavenly letter they had been given for the sake of their relatives, which led Hellwig, an enlightened folklorist, to the conclusion that not everything that appeared to be superstitious to outsiders was actually evidence of superstitious practices. This interpretation can also be understood as an attempt to free male recipients from the suspicion of being superstitious and to attribute full responsibility for the letter to the female members of their family, as Hellwig argued that the amulet itself 'is not proof of the wearer being superstitious, but of the person for whom the amulet is being worn'.¹¹⁴ If one takes a closer look at the material state of the artefacts, however, the question is how distanced rationality that is interpreted as being masculine could be reconciled with the traces of wear on such letters and thus with the intensity of these pious practices.

Consumption: aura and effect

The final part of my article will therefore focus on the aspect of consumption and thus on practical use of heavenly letters. Once again, the question is to what extent the power ascribed to these artefacts was doubly justified by their materiality, or rather, how far usage of the manuscripts altered their materiality so that the notion of them possessing some sort of magical power can be interpreted as the result of their aesthetic reception. A key feature of the strategies for using heavenly letters is the practice of wearing them since, as the examples show, they had to be acquired and worn in a particular way. The proximity of the magical object to the body proves to be important in this context.

The fact that these magical manuscripts always exerted a certain fascination is also evident from the collectors'

descriptions. While theologians were rather harsh and derogatory in their judgement, it is clear from the almost emotional reactions shown by folklorist researchers that they were impressed by the auratic effect of the objects. The anthropologist Karl Wehrhan (1871–1939), teacher and co-publisher of the *Zeitschrift des Vereins für Rheinische und Westfälische Volkskunde* ('journal of the association for Rhenish and Westphalian ethnography'), is cited here as representative of many others: 'Before me lies a letter of protection written on a sheet of paper the size of a small letter. The handwriting is fairly legible, but rather hesitant; three and a half pages are densely filled'.¹¹⁵ What he found particularly striking was the 'number of errors it contains, a sign of the agitation and haste with which it was copied; it was most likely produced in the eleventh hour before departing for the battlefield'. The letter was dated to the 'historically momentous day of 1 August 1914, when the Great War broke out', and hence to that point in time when 'all superstitious beliefs were reawakened as if from the darkness of the grave and rose towards the light in brilliant vibrancy'. It could be seen from the state of the letter that it had then

[...] mit ins Feld gewandert. Viermal eingeknickt oder zusammengefaltet, um in der Brieftasche oder wahrscheinlich in der Geldbörse bzw. dem Brustbeutel Platz zu finden, trägt er an den Knicken die Spuren der Zeit an sich, Risse und Löcher; der Schweiß hat ihn mürbe gemacht, und an einigen Stellen fällt er deshalb bei rauher Berührung auseinander wie Zunder.

[...] wandered into the battlefield as well. Creased or folded together four times to fit into a wallet or probably a purse or neck pouch, the creases bear the tracks of time, tears and holes; sweat has made it brittle, and it disintegrates like cinder in some places if handled roughly.

It is these obvious signs of wear and tear that make it possible to reconstruct the difference between copies produced for research purposes and 'originals' carried in the war. This included the folding, since the initial size of the paper used

¹¹⁴ Hellwig 1916, 33–35.

¹¹⁵ Wehrhan 1916, 67. The letter belonged to a soldier from the Rhineland who was seriously wounded in action, and which was given to him by a teacher who was himself a member of the society and had attended to the wounded man in his capacity as medical sergeant.

to write on could not be conveniently transported.¹¹⁶ Wuttke also elaborated on the external appearance of these ‘written amulets’. According to his description, the objects examined by him were mostly ‘quartos, folded four to eight times and tucked into a canvas cover; some are whole books stitched together to form octaves or half-octaves, some are folios, folded together like letters, some are strips of paper the width of a finger, but long, rolled up to the size of a bean, featuring small writing that is almost illegible’.¹¹⁷ Cultural historian Joseph Klapper (1880–1967) cited two examples of fifteenth-century manuscripts he had found in the State and University Library of Breslau (Wrocław). He saw the creases as an indication that one of the manuscripts ‘had once been folded three times, hence worn for protection’. The other one had been used to line the inside of the two wooden covers of a manuscript. It was also clearly written ‘on a sheet of paper at one point folded four times width-wise and once height-wise’, which had later been cut.¹¹⁸ A legal expert concerned with the subject of superstition in the context of crime-solving described the materiality of a heavenly letter studied by him in some detail:

Bezeichnend ist, daß das auf einen ganzen Bogen geschriebene Schriftstück so klein zusammengefaltet war, daß es in einen Brustbeutel ging, wie ihn z.B. Soldaten tragen. Es ist offenbar viel benutzt und lange herumgeschleppt, denn es ist in den Kniffen vielfach schon ausgebrochen und unleserlich geworden.¹¹⁹

It is significant that the document written on a whole sheet was folded up so small that it fitted into a neck pouch like those worn by soldiers. It has obviously been well used and carried around a lot, for it has several tears along the creases where it is now illegible.

¹¹⁶ The folds are also found in printed exemplars and are an indication that these artefacts were also worn on the body as amulets. Cf. single-leaf print from Göttingen, 1720, which has clear traces of four folds on the back page. The inner pages are lighter in colour than the last two outer pages and are also soiled from wear. (Fig. 13; see also Figs 7 and 9).

¹¹⁷ Wuttke 1869, 170.

¹¹⁸ Klapper 1929, 136f. Klapper refers to data from two manuscripts, Hs. IV F 13 and Hs. I F 644, which were accessible in the State and University Library of Breslau (Wrocław) at the time of their publication.

¹¹⁹ Schütze 1912, 351.

One of the principal reasons for identifying and classifying this document as an original, apart from the handwriting and the paper, was the manner in which it was folded. This allowed the experts to conclude that the manuscript had been packed in a small pouch or ‘carefully wrapped in paper upon the chest, as an amulet, as it were’¹²⁰ or ‘upon the bare heart’¹²¹ and thus carried as a letter of protection or blessing.¹²² Based on how they were folded and their covers, the cultural anthropologist Lenz Kriss-Rettenbeck (1923–2005) identified these manuscripts as *phylacteries*, i.e. small slips of paper inscribed with salvific passages which have been traced back to the second century CE and were also prevalent in a Christian context.¹²³ Despite the use of Christian symbols and texts, these documents were controversial in the eyes of the Church and were repeatedly banned as evidence of a ‘pagan’ belief in the power of amulets. According to Kriss-Rettenbeck, the custom of carrying amulets for protection against war, weather and disease became established in Europe from the seventeenth century onwards and was particularly popular in Protestant circles. Instructions on how phylacteries should be worn were a key characteristic of these amulets. In order to be effective, heavenly letters had to be worn on the body, specifically ‘directly on the body, on the chest, on the navel’,¹²⁴ a practice which had an impact on their physical condition due to the contact with the bearer’s skin and the hygiene conditions typical of the time and context. According to the experts, the ‘fissures and the dark colouring of part of the back page’ found in numerous exemplars were a clear sign that they really had been ‘worn upon the bare chest’.¹²⁵

The Thuringian theologian Victor Kirchner also referred to the external traces visible on the objects in the following analysis:

Vor mir liegt Brief B. Daß er vergilbt, beschmutzt und zerrissen ist trotz des starken dabei verwendeten Papiers, ist gewiß auch das Zeichen hohen Alters. Der eigentliche Grund aber ist ein anderer, man hat wirklich ihm gegenüber befolgt,

¹²⁰ Jordan 1908, 334.

¹²¹ Herpel 1916, 35f.

¹²² Schnerring 1915; Wuttke 1869, 166 also cites the instruction: ‘The letter must always be carried on one’s person’.

¹²³ Kriss-Rettenbeck 1963, 34–36.

¹²⁴ Wuttke 1869, 166.

¹²⁵ Seyfarth 1913, 143.

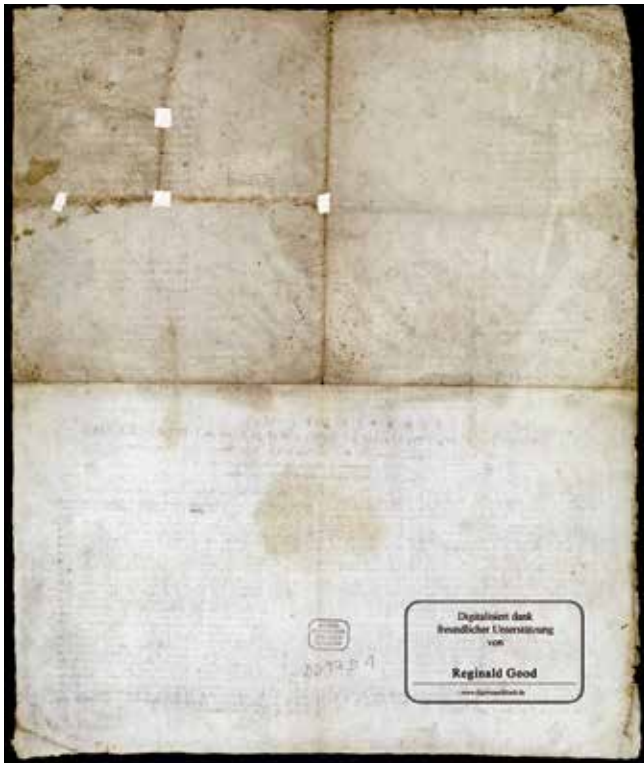


Fig. 13b: Niedersächsische Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek, DD97 D 1, verso.

was er ‚unter dem Strich‘ (!) in Nr. 26 fordert: Wer diesen Brief bei sich trägt Man könnte gar Vermutungen darüber aufstellen, wo er am Körper getragen sein wird. Das eine Blatt ist einfach zusammengefaltet. Von innen heraus, ist der Brief – sit venia verbo – verschwitzt, gebräunt und von da aus naturgesetzmäßig gebrochen und gerissen!¹²⁶

Before me lies letter B. The fact that it is yellowed, soiled and torn despite the strong paper is undoubtedly due in part to its advanced age. But the real reason is a different one; what it demands ‘below the line’ (!) in no. 26 – ‘Whoever wears this letter upon him ...’ – has been truly adhered to. One could even speculate as to where on the body it will have been worn. One of the sheets has been folded once. From the inside out, the letter is – sit venia verbo [pardon the word] – soaked with sweat, discoloured and from there naturally fissured and torn!

There could only be one explanation for this in his eyes: ‘We are actually dealing with Protestants wearing amulets here. Horribile dictu!’

¹²⁶ Kirchner 1908, 64f.

As an obvious consequence of the practice of wearing the letters, ‘consumption traces’¹²⁷ were identified which altered the surface texture and the material: ‘(S)urfaces of the object receive physical imprints or traces from the activities in which they are caught up’. Knappett speaks here of a ‘patina of experience, of accumulated knowledge’¹²⁸ which becomes inscribed in the object through practical use, resulting not only from the proximity to the body and continuous wearing, but also from passing down the objects through the generations from one user to another. In other words, the physical substance could also embody ‘age, influence and something like “wisdom”’.¹²⁹ These signs of use thus became the object of an aesthetic reception in their own right and changed the meaning of the artefact and the power ascribed to it. Olbrich confirmed this hypothesis on the basis of his personal observations:

Besondere Wertschätzung genießen die alten, vergilbten, schweißdurchtränkten Briefe, welche bereits in früheren Kriegen getragen wurden und ihre Kraft schon wiederholt bewährt hatten.¹³⁰

The old, yellowed letters, soaked in sweat, which were already worn in earlier wars and had repeatedly proven their power, are held in particularly high regard.

Art historian Friedbert Ficker (1927–2007) also reported that his father had kept his handwritten exemplar of a heavenly letter from the Second World War in his *Soldbuch* (pay book) and that it showed signs of intensive use: ‘The paper is worn through along the folds in some places, and the upper edge has been damaged by a number of small tears. The impact of moisture has also left its mark and the legibility of the writing has been partly compromised due to the smudging of the brown ink’.¹³¹ Even as an academic in the twenty-first century, Ficker was obviously not entirely able to avoid interpreting the magical power of the object, whose history had only been disclosed to him by his mother. The concluding comment on his find among the many objects left by

¹²⁷ Knappett 2002, 101.

¹²⁸ Knappett 2002, 108.

¹²⁹ Gell 1998, 231, cited in Knappett 2002, 108.

¹³⁰ Olbrich 1917, 143.

¹³¹ Ficker 2007, 193.

his father certainly sounds as if he put his survival down to the fact that he was in possession of a letter from Heaven:

Abschließend sei noch vermerkt, dass der Träger des Schutzbriefes 1939 einberufen wurde und die gesamte Kriegszeit als Soldat heil überstanden hat. In der amerikanischen Frühjahrsschlacht 1945 zerfetzte ihm ein ca. 20 cm langer Granatsplitter ohne weitere Verletzungen den Mantel über der Brust und durchschlug den Bauch seines neben ihm hockenden Kompaniechefs mit tödlichem Ausgang.¹³²

Finally, it should be mentioned that the wearer of the letter of protection was called up in 1939 and survived the whole of the war uninjured although he was a soldier. During the battle with the Americans in the Spring of 1945, a piece of shrapnel approximately 20 cm in length shredded the coat over his chest, without causing injury, and severed the stomach of his company commander crouched next to him, with a fatal outcome.

Concluding thoughts

The specific examples from just two centuries indicate that while the production of these ‘magical’ manuscripts was subject to certain rules and interpretive patterns, as was the way in which they were used and perceived, they were still handled individually and tailored to subjective religious practices which existed in parallel with belief systems shaped by the Church. This was definitely linked to a certain pragmatism which labelled heavenly letters as nonsense and superstition from various angles, but also recognised their value in an emergency and thereby accepted them as ‘useful fiction’.¹³³ With regard to the experiences of the First World War, the use of heavenly letters to boost the morale of the troops was even viewed in a positive light. The impression was that the faith in such manuscripts

[... hat sich] als ein sehr wirksames Gegengift gegen die Todes-furcht erwiesen und muss daher als ein psychologischer Faktor gebucht werden: Furcht und Todesschauer hatten für die Gläubigen ihre Macht vollständig eingebüßt, und mancher überlieferte Zug von Heldenmut und Todesverachtung, von

Tollkühnheit und rücksichtslosem Draufgängertum mag seine Wurzeln im Wahnglauben haben.¹³⁴

[...] proved to be a very effective antidote to the fear of death and must therefore be booked as a psychological factor: dread and fear of death had been completely divested of their power in the minds of the faithful, and some traditional traits of valour and contempt of death, of recklessness and careless bravado may have their roots in delusion.

If men were made more courageous by these magical aids, according to the unanimous opinion of contemporary observers, they should by all means use them.¹³⁵ This approach was validated by Hans-Joachim Buddecke (1890–1918), among others – a highly decorated German fighter pilot who confessed to following superstitious practices despite his deep faith in God:

Man suche bei jedem Flieger – man wird immer irgend etwas finden, meist einen ganz schmutzigen Brustbeutel, mit komischen Sachen darin, ohne die es eben nicht geht, und auch der mutigste Mensch hat seinen kleinen Aberglauben.¹³⁶

You can look at every aviator – you will always find something, usually a very soiled neck pouch with strange things in it, which the wearer just can’t do without. Even the bravest person has his own little superstition.

Many questions inevitably remain unanswered at this point. The aspect of inscribing magical power into these manuscripts requires further investigation along with the issue of how such unspectacular handwritten notes, some of which were barely legible, came to be ascribed a protective function. There is also a lack of clarity concerning the transition from manuscript to mass circulation through wood printing and the comeback of handwritten letters based on printed ones. There are indications that printed heavenly letters that were purchasable from publishing houses in Wissembourg/Alsace and Neuruppin¹³⁷ were received by the general public with great acclaim in the nineteenth century,

¹³⁴ H. M. 1919, 365.

¹³⁵ Staby 1915.

¹³⁶ Buddecke 1918, 52f. The English translation is from Kilduff 2012, 75.

¹³⁷ See Jaenecke-Nickel 1962, 140f.

¹³² Ficker 2007, 194f.

¹³³ Geertz 1987, 89.

especially when there were rumours of an approaching war. The question here concerns the correlation between the modernisation and standardisation brought forth by mass production and the special regard for individually produced manuscripts, and how exactly printing contributed to the broader dissemination and wider use of these magical objects.¹³⁸ Further issues arise on account of the evidence we have of heavenly letters being used beyond the national borders focused on in this article. In Norway and Sweden, for example – two Protestant countries– numerous museums

house heavenly letters whose history still needs to be researched. Nineteenth- and early twentieth-century folk literature alludes to the existence of heavenly letters in an even broader European context than this, along with the belief in their apotropaic function, namely in Estonia, Russia and Ukraine.¹³⁹ The wave of emigration to the United States in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries also brought heavenly letters to American battlefields as well, and there is evidence that they were also used by soldiers in the Second World War.¹⁴⁰ These traces are all worthy of further investigation.

¹³⁸ See Benne 2015, 28.

¹³⁹ See Poldmäe 1938 and Zayarnyuk 2006.

¹⁴⁰ See Earnest, Earnest and Rosenberry 2005, 232–45; Fogel 1908; Oda 1949.

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Article

Malleable Magic: Medieval Arabic Block Printed Amulets and Their Audiences

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At first, the topic of Arabic block printed amulets seems to fall outside the focus of ‘*manuscripts* as magical agents’. If, by the term ‘manuscript’ we understand an object created and written by hand using a writing instrument then, by definition, block prints are not themselves manuscripts. On the other hand, given the fact that their identity as mass produced magical devices has only been revealed within the last century and a half¹ and that many, until much more recently, had apparently been misidentified as or had been presumed to be manuscripts, then perhaps we should view them as worthy of inclusion in the present discussion. In addition, the means of their production might have involved a handwritten text and if the block prints were produced in such a manner, then they may be seen as *copies* of manuscripts, at one remove from the original but retaining many of the features of the handwritten form.

More precisely, one theory holds that matrices for the block printed texts were created in the following way.² First, the words of a text were written in dark ink on a very thin sheet of paper. A blank printing block – presumably wood – was then coated with glue and the written surface of the sheet pasted face down onto it. Then, with the dark ink of the text on the paper serving as a guide, the block was carved so as to leave the text raised in relief. Finally, the remaining paper was removed and ink was applied to the raised surface of the block; paper pressed against it produced a printed version of the text.

That Muslims in the early Middle Ages (c.700–1000 CE) were producing printed texts, while not a very recent discovery, is one that was for a long time not widely known or accepted. This is true particularly in the West where credit for the invention of printing traditionally has been assigned



Fig. 1a: Copenhagen, The David Collection, acc. no. 85/2003, 86.6 × 4.5 cm.

¹ Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall may be the first European scholar to see, in two Arabic texts from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, evidence that the Arabs were practicing some form of printing; see Hammer-Purgstall 1852. Since then, evidence for Arabic knowledge and practice of block printing in the early Middle Ages has steadily mounted. See Schaefer 2006, 21–41 and Schaefer 2014 for an overview of modern scholarship on the subject.

² See Bulliet 1987a, 433.



Fig. 1b: Copenhagen, The David Collection, acc. no. 85/2003, split into two parts.

to Johannes Gutenberg (c. 1398–1468 CE) whose publication of the Bible and other books using moveable type ushered in an era of widespread literacy in Europe. As we now know, the creation of multiple copies of texts by mechanical means had been practiced for quite some time before Gutenberg in East Asia.³ It was long thought that Muslims in the Middle East, despite their early adoption of papermaking from the Chinese, had either rejected printing technology or somehow remained ignorant of it in spite of its clear close relationship with papermaking farther east. We now know the situation to have been rather different.

A majority of the surviving examples of Arabic block printing are amulets, texts on paper that were believed by their owners to provide them protection from danger or to secure advantages in navigating their way through the world. In terms of size, most have the dimensions of a modern bookmark, being rectangular strips of paper longer than they are wide. Some examples are larger, resembling in dimension a column of text in a newspaper. A few exceptional examples are more than a meter long and are composed of several strips of paper pasted together end to end (Fig. 3). Others may be square (Fig. 4) or round (Fig. 5). The script styles that one finds also vary. The simplest forms have one script style with the text running horizontally across the paper. More elaborate examples may have two or more script styles. A composition frequently found combines a heading using the monumental Kufi script⁴, either in relief or as negative space surrounded by the inked surface, followed by a simpler, more angular style of lettering.⁵ Some block prints are comprised only of text while others include decoration in the form of frames surrounding the text or sections of it, geometric designs, vegetal designs (leaves or flowers), or some combination of such things. Most of the block printed amulets are printed using black ink but occasionally red or – very rarely – green ink⁶ is used for some parts of the text (Fig. 1). In other

³ Tsien 1985 is a good starting point for learning about the history of printing technology in Asia. See also Barrett 2008.

⁴ Kufi script is the earliest literary Arabic script and in character resembles Gothic black letter script. It evolved over three centuries (700–1000 CE) into ever more elaborate forms and is eventually replaced by other script styles. For examples, see Jazayeri 2017 and Khan 2017. Also very useful is Blair 2006.

⁵ On calligraphy and the use of Kufi script, the oldest calligraphic style of the Arabic script, in Arabic magic see Schaefer 2006, 41–51 and Porter 2010.

⁶ I am aware of only one example of the use of green ink in a block print. This amulet is currently to be found in Davids Samling/The David Collection in Copenhagen (accession number 85/2003) (Fig. 1). An illustration of it also appears in the catalog *Islamic Calligraphy* (Catalogue 27) from the antiquary dealer Sam Fogg (London, 2003). It was apparently acquired by



Fig. 2: Cambridge University Library, T-S NS 306.27, 16.8 × 11.1 cm.

instances, red ink has been added by hand to small sections of the text or its design elements (Fig. 2).

Did their users think that the amulets were imbued with certain powers over or influences with unseen, supernatural or divine powers? If so, what features of the amulets marked those powers? And what has changed in their agency over time? Do they still possess ‘magical’ powers? In this paper, I shall explore how the agency of the block prints, magical and otherwise, has altered over time and suggest some ways in which their agency has acted upon different audiences in different and unexpected ways.

Object oriented ontology (O.O.O.) tells us that all objects have their own histories, their own biographies, their own

relationships.⁷ Certain proponents of O.O.O.⁸ (also known as ‘triple O’) hold that some objects exist independently of humans. However, objects do interact with or upon humans to varying degrees, while others may owe their existence to human actions – either intentional or unintentional. Here, I am specifically addressing members of this last category that, once set loose in the world, become actors in their own right. Viewed in this way, objects possess agency, the capability to affect or interact with other objects in a variety of manners.⁹

As a sub-set of the objects operating in the world, manuscripts belong to a group of objects created by humans for specific reasons and, one might argue, with particular intentions in mind. Like other objects made by humans, however, manuscripts sooner or later act in ways that their creators never intended. For example, a text describing the solution to a mathematical problem quickly changes from an announcement of a scientific breakthrough to a document of historical interest and then perhaps even to evidence for erroneous reasoning. Magic manuscripts constitute an even smaller group of objects within this sub-set and have the distinct characteristic of being intended to elicit action from entities which are and are not of this world or which are, at any rate, thought to exist outside the range of the five human senses – except for rare instances when, according to some belief systems, they may assume shapes that are perceptible to people.

I have in mind here powers thought to be divine and supernatural in form. In Islamic terms, such powers are exercisable only by Allah or, through Him, by His agents (i.e. angels) or by the Jinn. The Jinn, whose existence is attested in the Qur’an, are inhabitants of an unseen world – a mirror of our own.¹⁰ They are conceived of as beings capable of interacting with and altering human affairs but their interactions may be controlled or directed by the employment of magic. The magic could be worked on the actions of both humans *and* the inhabitants of the unseen worlds. For this reason, among others, magic in Islam has, since its beginning, been a subject fraught with danger and

⁷ See Martin Heidegger’s *Sein und Zeit* (Heidegger 2001; first published 1927, with many subsequent editions and translations). Also, more recently, Harman 2002 and the sources given there.

⁸ The primary developer and proponent of this philosophical outlook is Levi R. Bryant. See his *The Democracy of Objects* (2011). It has been taken up by others as well including the authors cited here.

⁹ On this idea, see Bennett 2010 and Shaviri 2011 and the works cited therein.

¹⁰ See MacDonald et al. 2012.

The David Collection in that year. Its provenance is unknown but both the museum and the Fogg catalog ascribe to it an Iranian origin and date it to the eleventh or twelfth century CE.



Fig. 3: Mainz, Gutenberg-Museum, GM 03.1 Schr, 124.6 × 7.4 cm; left: whole; right: split into two parts.

viewed with suspicion.¹¹ Ultimately, it was decided – by consensus – that the use of magic in Islam was valid only if it were used for the *benefit* of humans. The use of magic to cause harm was not permitted. White magic and not black magic, in other words, was acceptable. Arabic amulets are the embodiment of ‘white’ magical practice in Islam.

At this point I must interject some definitions so that it is clear what I am talking about. Let me draw a distinction, first of all, between amulets and talismans, both of which can be considered to possess magical powers, or agency. For this paper, I define a talisman as an object which, by its nature or form, is believed to contain or provide access to a specific power. A lucky rabbit’s foot for Americans or the *cornicello* or *cornetto* for Italians are examples and they fall outside our area of interest here. Amulets, on the other hand, carry supplications in verbal or symbolic graphic form seeking specific outcomes in a person’s life.¹² As such, and under the accepted Muslim rules¹³ for composing a valid amulet, one or more passages from the Qur’an, a prayer or prayers containing specific wording or phraseology, and a list of at least some of the so-called ‘Beautiful Names’ of Allah¹⁴ ought to be included with any supplication. In addition, they may include mystical letter combinations, and so-called ‘magic numbers’, a series of numbers understood to embody – or able to call forth – certain powers.

One such example is held by the Gutenberg Museum in Mainz (Fig. 3).¹⁵ This is an exceptional specimen of the art for several reasons. First, it is one of the few complete block

¹¹ On magic in Islam, see, for example, Savage-Smith 2004 and Fahd 2012. In Islam, seeking assistance or special favor from any being other than Allah is believed to constitute polytheism (*shirk*) so asking one of the Jinn or a Muslim Saint (*wali*, pl. *awliyā*) is technically forbidden. However, in practice this prohibition has been enforced only among the most orthodox or ‘fundamental’ practices of the faith. In the present day, the Wahhabis are among the strictest adherents of this view.

¹² In point of fact, often a converse terminology is to be found: Strictly speaking, amulets are objects or collections of objects to which special powers are attributed. Talismans, on the other hand, are objects (including paper) onto which characters or figures are carved or engraved. However, to avoid confusing the reader, the word ‘amulet’ is here used in the narrower sense of talisman.

¹³ The standard ‘handbook’ of rules for amulet composition is Aḥmad al-Būnī’s *Shams al-Ma’ārif* which is now recognized to be a compendium of treatises on amulets dating to the thirteenth century.

¹⁴ In Islamic tradition, Allah has ninety-nine names which convey a sense of His powers and attributes. In Arabic these are known as *al-Asmā’ al-Husnā*, ‘the Beautiful Names’. Interestingly, there is no universal agreement on what the ninety-nine names are. Several variants exist. See Gardet 2012 and Akkach 2015.

¹⁵ Mainz, Gutenberg Museum, GM 03.1 Schr. See Schaefer 2006, 103–110.



Fig. 4: Cambridge University Library, Mich. E.33 (magic square), 18.4 × 11.5 cm.

printed Arabic amulets to have survived; second it is one of the largest in size; third it is unusual in that it contains Qur'anic citations (*Sūrat al-Baqarah* [2:225]), ll. 11–21 on the amulet), mysterious letters (l. 21) and 'magic numbers' (l. 81).

The so-called 'mysterious letters' (*al-muqaṭṭa'āt* or *al-ḥurūf al-muqaṭṭa'āt*) are constituted by fourteen disconnected Arabic letters that appear in various combinations and numbers (as few as one, as many as five) at the beginning of twenty-nine of the Qur'an's 114 suras. Their meaning and significance has been debated since the Qur'an was first written down.¹⁶ Moreover, the Arabic can be used as an alphanumeric system in which each letter has a numerical value (so A=1, B=2, C=3 and so forth). In the amulets, the sums of the numerical values of these letter combinations have mystical or magical significance. Sometimes they appear as multiples of the same letter (e.g. TTTT); at other times words themselves are given numerical significance. The letters of the name of God,

¹⁶ On this, see Massey 2003.



Fig. 5: New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, acc. no. 1978.546.37, 7.4 × 7.0 cm.

Allah, for example, have the numerical value of 66. Words with the same numerical value are considered to have special esoteric powers. Numerals are also used and, together with the alphabetic letters, are said to constitute 'magic numbers'.¹⁷ Most block printed amulets contain one or two such features, but very few exhibit all. This example from the Gutenberg Museum is a complete amulet containing 83 lines of text. A handwritten line of vertical text is found at the top. The characters in the printed text range from 0.2 to 1.0 cm in height. This piece is composed of three separate strips of paper joined end to end. The topmost strip bears a partial watermark showing three crenellations, a mark which can be traced to early fifteenth century Italy (1436–1444).¹⁸ Since we have almost no historical sources which describe these artifacts, this example provides us with a possible *terminus ad quem*, a date for the latest production of such block prints. In addition to the three features mentioned above, many of the block printed amulets contain other features commonly found in handwritten amulets. In so doing, they follow in the tradition of amulet-making that preceded the use of mechanical means of production.

¹⁷ A full discussion of this subject is beyond the scope of this article. For a clear and fairly thorough explanation of the topic of numbers and alphanumerics found in amulets, a good starting point is Canaan 1937. Also useful is Savage-Smith 2004, xxxv–xxxvi and the sources cited there.

¹⁸ The watermark resembles no. 3984 ('Cloche très allongée') in Briquet 1923, see Schaefer 2006, 103f.

There are for example, ‘magic squares’, grids of square or rectangular cells comprised of equal numbers of rows and columns, as found in the amulet Mich. E.33 (Fig. 4)¹⁹. Presumably having been part of the contents of the famous Cairo Genizah or an Islamic Genizah²⁰, this amulet, though only partially preserved, shows a rather elaborate decoration at the top. The square frame contains a circle inside of which is a double trefoil design whose conjunctions create a six-pointed star. Inside this is a second smaller circle containing a so-called magic square comprised of nine cells, each containing a number from one to nine. Nine-cell squares in which the sums of the integers when totaled horizontally, vertically or diagonally is fifteen are believed to be connected to fertility or pregnancy.²¹

Other amulets show designs thought to have particular protective powers. Examples of these designs would include circles, frequently containing text (Fig. 5), stars or interlocking quadrilaterals (Fig. 6), or ‘teardrop’ shapes (Fig. 7). All of these shapes were believed to enhance the power of an amulet. Aḥmad al-Būnī’s (d. 1225) *Shams al-Ma’ārif wa-Laṭā’if al-’Awārif* (‘The Book of the Sun of Gnosis and the Subtleties of Elevated Things’), a major source for information about constructing amulets in the Muslim tradition, is replete with illustrations of circles, squares and other geometric forms to be used in conjunction with specified amuletic texts.²² One of the most extensively decorated block printed amulets known to us, the amulet in Figure 5 exhibits several design elements.²³ An outer ring of elliptical lozenges and diamonds



Fig. 6: New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, acc. no. 1978.546.32, 23.0 × 8.2 cm.

¹⁹ Cambridge University Library, Mich. E.33. See Schaefer 2006, 76–79.

²⁰ The provenance of this piece, and of the Michaelides collections in general, is unclear. However, this block print is similar to others found in the Genizah. See Clackson 1994. In Judaism, the term *genizah* denotes a depository for books and manuscripts that are worn-out or are taken out of use for other reasons. As the sanctity of the Hebrew script prohibits the mutilation of written material, such items are instead collected in a *genizah* and later buried ritually, see Beit-Arié 1996. The vast material found at the now so-called Cairo Genizah of the Ben-Ezra Synagogue in Fustat (Old Cairo) constitutes one of the most important manuscript discoveries relating to pre-modern Mediterranean Jewry and its Muslim majority society. On the Cairo Genizah see Horowitz et al. 2007, Reif et al. 2010 and Reif 2000; on Islamic Genizah-like practices see Sadan 1986.

²¹ Mathematically, 15 is the smallest possible ‘magic constant’ or ‘magic sum’ in the simplest magic square of a 3×3 grid. On magic squares in the Islamic context see e.g. Needham 1980, Sesiano 2012, Ahrens 1917, and Ahrens 1922.

²² Available in numerous versions. For this paper, the edition al-Būnī 2005 was consulted. But see now the transcription and translation into Spanish by Coullaut Cordero 2009. On al-Būnī and his magical-esoteric works see also Gardiner 2012.

²³ New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1978.546.37. See Schaefer 2006, 209–212.

surrounds a circle containing a line of text in simple script. Inside this is another ring containing a line of text in Kufi script in reverse (bas relief).²⁴ Finally, there are eighteen horizontal lines of text in the innermost circle. The characters of the center text range from 0.1 to 0.2 cm in height, a remarkable technical achievement.

Figure 6 shows the top of a longer amulet.²⁵ At the center of the decorated area is a six-pointed star, a hexagram, often called the ‘Seal of Solomon’,²⁶ containing two lines of text. Surrounding this is a line of text in Kufi in reverse reading: ‘Glory to Allah, Praise be to Allah, there is no god but Allah’. It appears that this section of the amulet was created using a separate printing block because the design is skewed slightly in relation to the rest of the text. This may be a clue to the way in which such amulets were created.

Figure 7 is an amulet composed of two pieces of paper pasted together end to end.²⁷ A teardrop design contains a line of Kufi text in reverse running around the inside perimeter of the form. Four lines of simple text are at the center. The rectangular form below this shape contains a spiral line of text running from the outer edge to the middle and constitutes a portion of verse 255 from sura two (*al-Baqarah*) of the Qur’an. This arrangement of text is similar to that found in so-called ‘magic bowls’ or ‘incantation bowls’ which feature inscriptions of sacred text on their interior surfaces.²⁸ Water or other fluids drunk from such bowls were believed to carry the curative effects of the holy words into the body of an ill person.²⁹ The complete amulet comprises 116 lines of text. We must consider the agency of the amulets when attempting to explain their survival. That these objects had agency³⁰ at the time of their creation can only be deduced through indirect evidence.³¹ For many – if not for most – Muslims in the

²⁴ See Porter 2010.

²⁵ New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1978.546.32. See Schaefer 2006, 193–196.

²⁶ On the magical use of the Seal of Solomon, see Winkler 1930, 119–132, Porter 1998, 145–146, Porter 2011, 166–169 and Fernández Medina 2012, 175–187.

²⁷ New York, Columbia University, Rare Book & Manuscript Library, P. Col. inv. 705b. See Schaefer 2006, 169–176 and Bulliet 1987b.

²⁸ Cf. now Giunta 2018 and already Spoer 1935, and Canaan 1936.

²⁹ See the discussion on this topic in Zadeh 2009, 464–465.

³⁰ What Jane Bennet calls ‘thing-power’. Bennett 2010.

³¹ This is to say that, to my knowledge, there are no recorded medieval testimonials from amulet owners regarding the efficacy of the extant block printed amulets. That the block printed amulets (or at least some) exist today

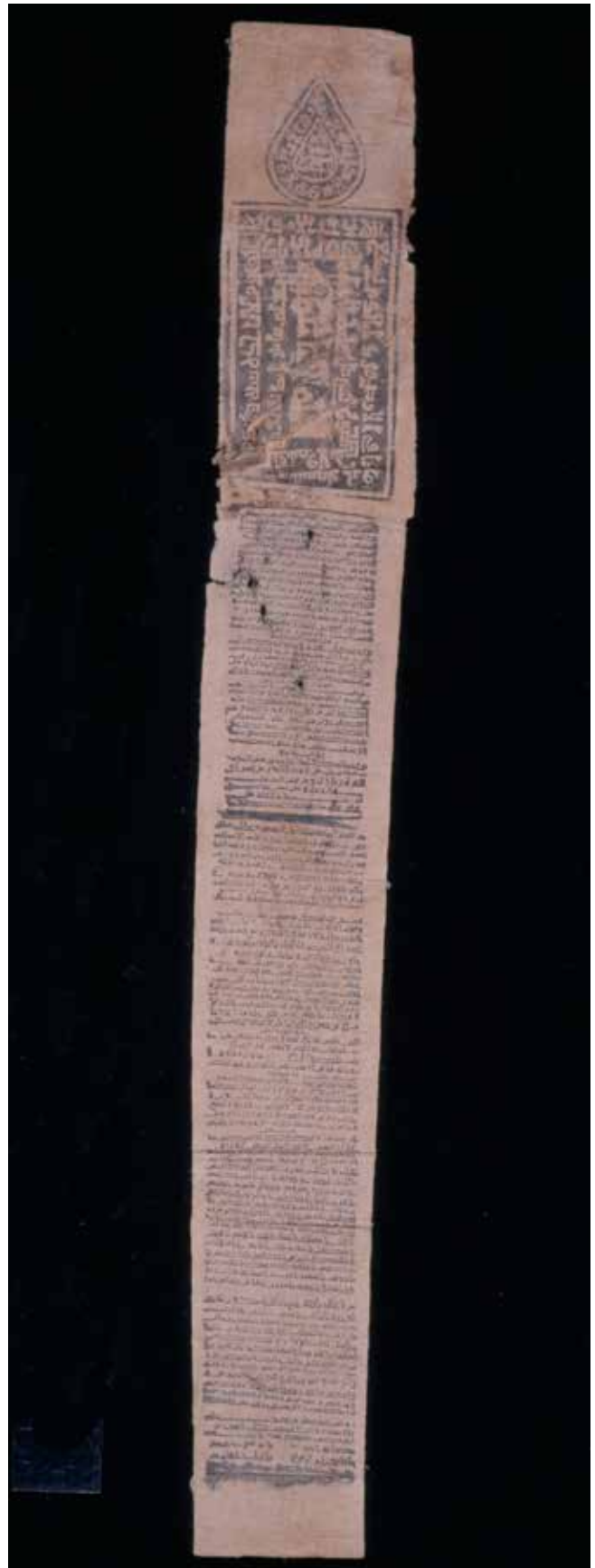


Fig. 7: New York, Columbia University, Rare Book & Manuscript Library, P. Col. inv. 705b, 42.5 × 5.5 cm.



Fig. 8a: Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Res/A.or.88.2023, 31.5 × 6.4 cm.



Fig. 8b: Salt Lake City, J. Willard Marriott Library, University of Utah, Or. P.1563', 32.8 × 5.9 cm.

medieval period, magic was a real force in the world, a force that originated in a realm beyond the five senses.³² Many Muslim religious authorities as well as popular beliefs reinforced the idea of the influence of magic in the human world. In order to secure benevolent intercession or to prevent malevolent action by the inhabitants of the unseen world, one had to know how to address them. Amulets, properly constructed, could do this. Steven Shaviro³³ tells us that objects often interact with one another *aesthetically* and that this aesthetic interaction depends on affect. The definition of ‘affect’ that seems most well suited to this context is that of ‘... a non-conscious experience of intensity; ... a moment of unformed and unstructured potential.’³⁴ In this sense, a prospective customer might understand the appearance in an amulet of certain characteristics as embodying the proper, permissible, and relevant magical powers. They would in turn influence him or her to trust its promise of efficacy, and to purchase and use that amulet. If the buyer then perceived that the amulet actually produced the desired effect or effects, then the amulet would increase in value and it would be more likely to be preserved and protected from damage or destruction. The *affective* power would be increased and this would lead to a greater effort on the part of its owner to protect it. In other words, the perception that an amulet’s agency – the perceived effectiveness of its advertised intent – was successful probably enhanced its chances of survival; those that failed to protect their bearers were more likely to be lost, discarded or destroyed – although the element of serendipity cannot be eliminated entirely. There was, in brief, an affective aspect to the human-amulet relationship.

However, over time the agency of the surviving amulets, the nature of their affect, evolved due to the changing context of their existence and their relationship to the humans to whose attention they came. Their value to us as protective devices is arguably less than it was for those who wore them six or seven hundred years ago. Our attitudes toward magic have changed significantly. Magic is now relegated to the status of entertainment, as sleight-of-hand, and to the venues of film and

literature, its practice limited to the likes of Harry Potter and the denizens of Hogwarts, for example. How, then, does the amulets’ agency exert itself upon us? Certainly, their aesthetics continue to appeal to us, but probably for different reasons than they did for the original purchasers. For us, they are evidence for certain practices and beliefs in a particular culture at a particular time in history. We value them for what they might tell us about people who lived centuries ago, whose actions, interactions, and modes of living were governed by a different understanding about how the world functions. They surprise us in that they force us to change our own understanding of what knowledge and technology was available to Arabic speaking people living in the Middle East in the tenth, eleventh, twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Because they have rested in museum and library collections, often for hundreds of years, masquerading as manuscripts or, in many cases as manuscript fragments, they were neglected or overlooked, perhaps regarded as ephemeral, insubstantial or insignificant. In the archives or collections, they joined a different assemblage of objects, their survival dependent more on what they were – or were perceived to be – than on what magic power they were thought to hold.

Jane Bennett prefers the term *assemblages* for such collections of objects: ‘... ad hoc groupings of diverse elements of vibrant materials of all sorts’.³⁵ Bennett would characterize this new way of being for the amulets, that is, objects residing in an archive and preserved because of their socio-historical importance, as ‘entering an *assemblage*’, a more complex body or mode. As a mode, she says, it (i.e. the archive or collection) ‘... suffers the actions on it by other modes ...’ and, ‘... if it is to persist, [it] must seek new encounters to creatively compensate for the alterations, or affections it suffers’.³⁶ These *assemblages*, Bennett continues, possess an ‘... ability to make something happen ... [that] is distinct from the sum of the vital force of each materiality considered alone’.³⁷ At the same time, because each member of the *assemblage* maintains its own idiosyncratic energy, it tends to create instability in the *assemblage* that allows for – or even demands – that the *assemblage* change or even ‘die’.

If we look at the block prints in this light, then we find them at a point where they have emerged from hiding, thrown off their disguises as it were, and revealed themselves to be something other than manuscripts. This, I would argue, is

may be because people thought they were effective enough to preserve them so that they might enjoy their protection for as long as possible.

³² Belief in supernatural powers and the human potential to influence them is known to have existed in cultures predating Islam. On the role and place of magic in Islam itself, see Savage-Smith 2004, ‘Introduction’ and Dols 1992.

³³ Shaviro 2011.

³⁴ Shouse 2010. For further reading on this idea, see the sources listed there as well as Massumi 2002 and Gregg and Seigworth 2012.

³⁵ Bennett 2010, 23.

³⁶ Bennett 2010, 22.

³⁷ Bennett 2010, 24.



Fig. 9a: Salt Lake City, J. Willard Marriott Library, University of Utah, Or. P.1561', 26.0 × 12.5 cm.

because their affective power was finally strong enough to attract the 'assemblage of people' interested in manuscripts, or manuscript-like objects and to interact with them. This is clearly a different group of people from the one that would have been interested in the amulets at the time they were created. What has been the result of this new set of interactions?



Fig. 9b: Salt Lake City, J. Willard Marriott Library, University of Utah, Or. P.1561' (backside).

Aside from providing us with a new and exciting perspective on the historical evolution of printing technology,³⁸ the block printed amulets also exert their agency in other subtle ways. One way they do this is by re-establishing previous relationships with other block prints.

³⁸ On this see e.g. Schaefer 2014.



Fig. 9c: Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, P.Vindob. A. Ch. 12.145, 5.1 × 6.9 cm.

Figures 8a and 8b display two copies of the same amulet probably made from one printing block.³⁹ After a few hundred years, they have ended up in two different collections several thousand miles apart. They clearly have had different experiences in their ‘journeys’. The paper of the Munich example on the left is more tattered along its edges and shows more wear. The example from the University of Utah, on the other hand, is better preserved, but notice that there is a ‘ghost shadow’ of the decorative heading at the top on the bottom part of that example. The location and form of the ink imprints indicate that it is very likely that they

³⁹ Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Res/A.or.88.2023 and Salt Lake City, J. Willard Marriott Library, University of Utah, Or. P.1563r. On the latter see Muehlhaeusler 2008, 544–550.

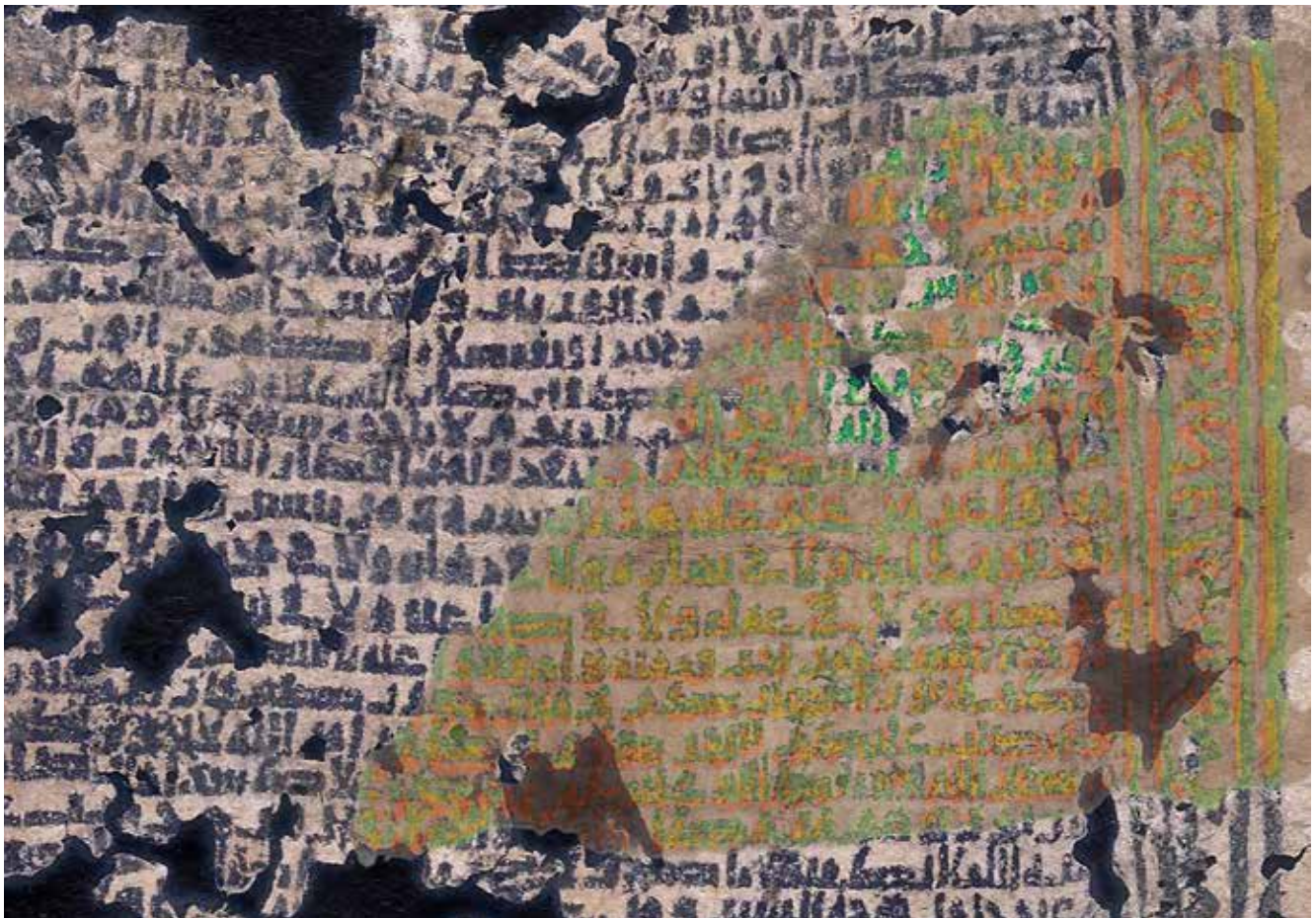


Fig. 9d: Photographs of the two amulets mounted above one other that show they are two different prints from the same printing block.



Fig. 10: Stamp bearing the name of the *Qaysariya* (a sort of warehouse) of Almería in Spain.

originate from folding the amulet.⁴⁰ In the case illustrated here, two copies of the same block print, long separated and residing in archives on two different continents, are now re-united, at least conceptually, for the first time since they were peeled from the matrix that gave them their form. Figures 9a, 9b, 9c and 9d show another example of two copies of the same Amulet printed from the same printing block that have clearly experienced a different trajectory of materiality and are brought together here once again.⁴¹ The piece from the Austrian National Library, while much smaller, is clearly in better condition. This amulet is multilingual, containing a text in Hebrew, Syriac, Arabic and Coptic running around the perimeter of the piece inside the frame created by the two sets of parallel lines. This seems to suggest that the appeal of these amulets extended beyond the Muslim Arabic-speaking community to Jews and Christians.⁴²

The lower right-hand corner of the University of Utah amulet exhibits faint wrinkles across the center and on the lower right margin (Fig. 9b). Wrinkles like these often appear in the block



Fig. 11: Toronto, Aga Khan Museum, AKM 508, 7.2 × 5.5 cm.

prints and may be related to the printing process or to the amulet being folded to fit into a container, as is probably the case here. Once having exercised their affect, the block prints interact with us in ways that they never have before. They are no longer simply objects imbued with or accorded magical powers, they are now elements of a collection of manuscripts, historical, cultural texts, thus emerging into a new and different *assemblage* of objects with a new affective agency.

We now speak of block print collections, at once removing the individual pieces from their previous associations and reconfiguring them into new groupings. Their images are reproduced, their texts copied out, translated, studied and puzzled over. The amulets are joined with other block printed Arabic texts – commercial stamps, for example (Fig. 10)⁴³ – and by their ‘thing-power’,⁴⁴ to use Bennett’s term, assure their continued existence as objects valued for their aesthetic appeal, their affective agency, as well as for their capacity to tell us something of importance about the circumstances of their creation. Their ‘magic’ as an element of their agency has less appeal for us insofar as their perceived effectiveness

⁴⁰ See Muehlhaeusler 2008, 544.

⁴¹ Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, P.Vindob. A. Ch. 12.145, see Schaefer 2006, 140–142, and Salt Lake City, J. Willard Marriott Library, University of Utah, Or. P.1561r, see Muehlhaeusler 2008, 541f.

⁴² See Muehlhaeusler 2008, 541; see e.g. Meyer and Smith 1999 and Mößner and Nauwerth 2015 for Coptic magical rituals and texts.

⁴³ Figure 10 presents a stamp bearing the name of the *Qaysariya* (a sort of warehouse) of Almería in Spain. It shows the Islamic year 750 (1349–1350 CE) and so can be dated precisely. It was first published by Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall in 1852 as an example of Arabic printing technology, but caused a scholarly debate about the validity of such a claim. The current whereabouts of this object are unknown. See Schaefer 2006, 27, Schaefer 2014, 2f., and Hammer-Purgstall 1852.

⁴⁴ Bennett 2010, xvif.

against danger is concerned and more for the kind of magic they embody. Their *abracadabra-alakazam-simsalabim*-ness appears quaint but their form, the language and images they bear, and their aesthetic appeal stir our interest nonetheless. As Peter Miller recently noted, we ‘... approach objects today with very different expectations ... [W]e expect them to have biographies, even agency and influence. When we talk to them, we assume they will answer with affective, human echoes.’⁴⁵

They tell us stories and they help us to perhaps better understand our place among the larger assemblage of objects that make up our world. The block prints, like all other objects, are neither immutable nor inert; they change and transform both in material terms and in the power they exert. They once constituted elements of *assemblages* which included a human ‘host’ upon whose well-being their own survival depended as much as their ‘thing-power’ protected those who wore them. Produced with an intention of reassuring their bearers of divine protection or guardianship in the then future, a forward-looking agency, they now are protected by us. They urge us to discover their origins by looking back toward the past. In a sense, their current agency echoes the means of their creation: the pieces of paper that bear their texts were pulled from a mirror-image of that text and we are guided by them to seek out those matrices, their mothers so to speak. In addition, just as they were once

reproduced in multiples, they (or their images, their avatars) are reproduced in print and electronically, entering different *assemblages* in altered forms. Is this what they want? Is their aim to reproduce and thus survive or even propagate?

Of course, their biographies are incomplete. We cannot know for certain what *assemblages* they have joined with or parted from over the intervening centuries and each, as the two cases I have shown here indicate, has its own ‘life story’. Was one found to be inadequate in what it had claimed it would do? Did it travel to Mecca for the annual pilgrimage? Was it then discarded when its owner suffered a misfortune the amulet promised to protect him or her against? Was it stolen and sold or traded to someone who was more interested in the metal case that enclosed it (Fig. 11)⁴⁶?

Or was it treasured and protected, handed down through generations until some desperate need drove its owner to sell it to a collector who, curious to see if the case contained an amulet, had it opened and found a block printed text? What agency can we ascribe to an *assemblage* of objects with such varied histories? We must keep in mind that we, too, are *assemblages*, also with agency and that like all *assemblages*, we are fluid and ultimately transitory. What meaning there may be in this grouping of block printed amulets and the people who are interested in them will in turn be debated and transformed by other future *assemblages*.

⁴⁵ Miller 2016, B12.

⁴⁶ Toronto, Aga Khan Museum, AKM 508. Here the amulet, composed of eighteen lines of text in the style of script one frequently sees in the block prints, has been removed from its lead case. The relationship between amulet, case and person has thus been altered irreversibly. On this specimen see Leoni 2016, 42f., D’Ottone 2013, and Regourd 2007.

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Fig. 10: Qaysariya stamp from Almeria, Spain (1349–50 CE). Provenance unknown. Image reproduced from Josef von Hammer Purgstall (1852), ‘Sur un passage curie de l’Ithathet’, *Journal asiatique*, ser. 4, 20: 252–255.

Fig. 11: © Aga Khan Museum, Toronto, Canada.

SECTION II

Manuscripts Shaping Communities

Wolfenbüttel, Herzog August Library, BA I, 156, fol. 10^r. This is a visitors' book covering the period from 1877 to 1901; paper, 24.0 × 12.7 cm. Already renowned for its invaluable collection of manuscripts and printed books in the seventeenth century, the library started keeping visitors' books in 1667, which every user had to sign. The books contain entries by people from all walks of life: famous scholars, students, writers, noblemen and travellers, sometimes from countries as far away as America. Although the signees never met each other in person as they lived at different times and in different places, they became a 'virtual' community through the guest book, united by having seen the material and immaterial treasures of the library with their own eyes. For more on the library's visitors' books, see Rößler, Hole, and Marie von Lüneburg (eds) (2021), *Bitte eintragen! Die Besucherbücher der Herzog August Bibliothek 1667–2000* (Wolfenbüttel: Herzog August Bibliothek).

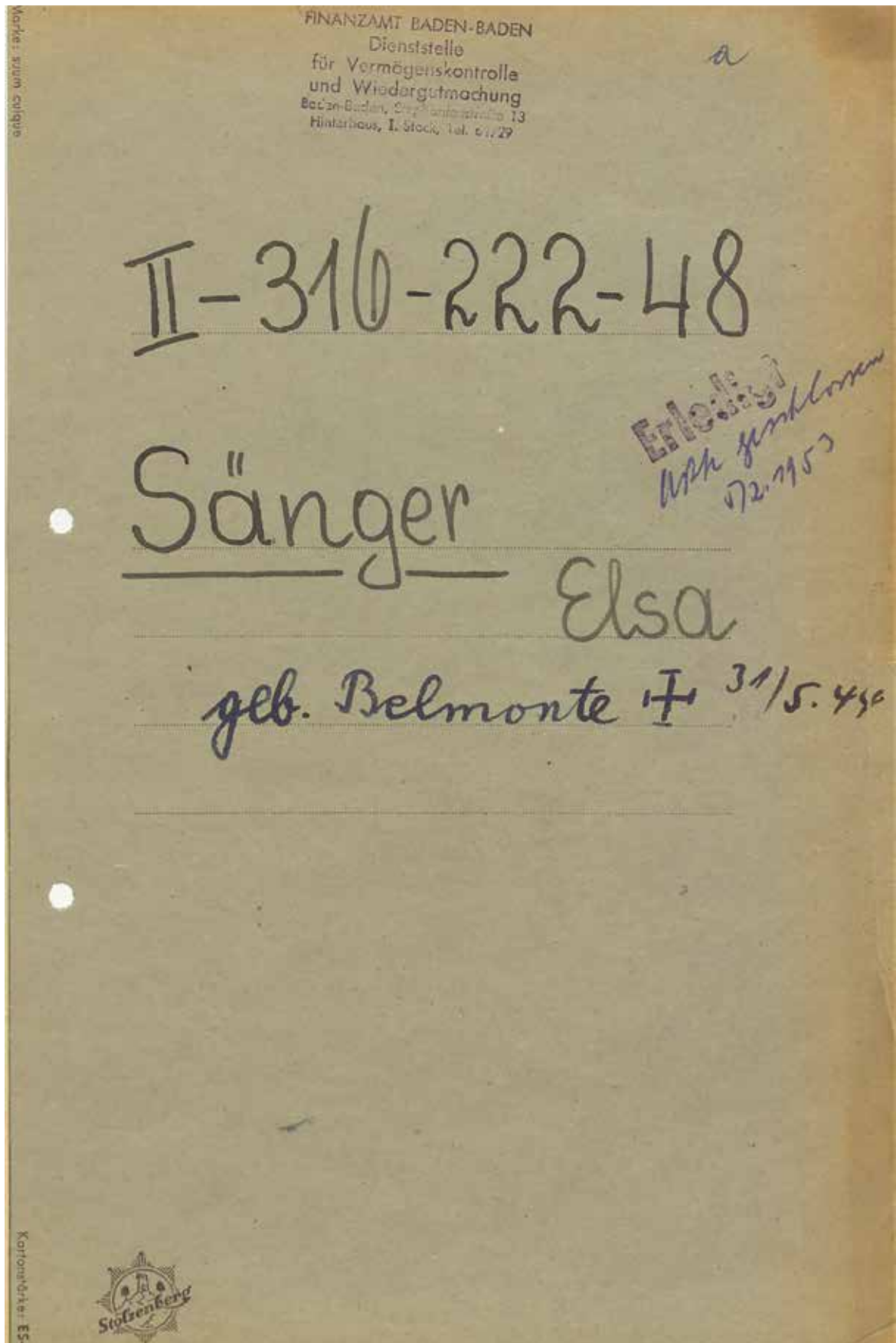


Fig. 1: Baden-Württemberg Regional Archives, Freiburg State Archives (Landesarchiv Baden-Württemberg, Staatsarchiv Freiburg, StAfr), file cover of document F 196/2 No. 4652. The images in this article are from different files from F 196/2 No. 4652 belonging to the same dossier.

Article

Following a Form: The Transmission Path of a Graphic Artefact in a Compensation Procedure in the Post-war German Fiscal Administration*

Sina Sauer | Hamburg

Official procedures in administrative bodies have long been subject to certain principles, rules and patterns of action, but they also depend on paper documents – even in the digital age. Manuals and rules on bureaucratic workflows instruct the official procedures and provide guidelines to staff. Clear hierarchies and file plans ensure a consistent framework exists for these bureaucratic processes. During the period of German nation-building following the National Socialist era and the Second World War, there were two special features that characterised the German administration. Firstly, the whole administrative structure was now subordinated to the Allied authorities. Thus, the decision-making power lay in the hands of several foreign governments that lacked regional, habitual and infrastructural knowledge. The second peculiarity was the issue of reparations, a new field of administrative work for civil servants. Initially, it was primarily a matter of managing confiscated Jewish assets, a task of national importance for which no experience and hardly any legislative guidelines existed at the time.

New official documents and forms had to be developed for this purpose to make the legal situation processable administratively. More and more forms had been used in German administration since the office reform began in 1896.¹ The aim of this reform was to speed up daily affairs and generally make bureaucratic workflows in

administration more efficient.² The forms were increasingly used as a rationalisation tool to facilitate administration³ and continue to be used today. In the case dealt with here, they were particularly employed to collect, manage and evaluate information about the expropriation of Jewish assets up to May 1945.

An examination of the forms used for declaring what property had been seized during the Nazi period can provide researchers with a number of insights about the documents' usage. What processes required these forms to be employed in the procedure? What traces of usage can be found on the forms? How were the forms filled in? How were they transmitted and edited? Which actors become visible or remain invisible on the forms?

On the basis of a case study on the compensation procedure concerning Elsa Saenger (1878–1944), a German Jew,⁴ this article attempts to reconstruct the transmission path of a form within the legal framework of a compensation process for Jewish property in 1948/49 involving various national

² Cf. Wuenschel 1929, 17–18.

³ In scholarly literature, letters of indulgence from 1455 are cited as the first early types of forms. In these cases, only the individual salutation had to be entered or other minor adjustments had to be made. At the end of the eighteenth century, tax forms were developed which still perform the most important administrative task today. In these forms, the design changed from a one-dimensional continuous text to a two-dimensional typical form (Schwesinger 2007, 56–58). Further comprehensive forms for standard tasks were issued from the middle of the nineteenth century onwards. Forms were meant to be used for 'recurring cases of a similar nature'. Menne-Haritz 1999a, 136. All translations into English were done by the author, except in those cases where another source is given.

⁴ The case study deals with the posthumous compensation proceedings on behalf of Elsa Saenger, who was expropriated before and after her deportation (in October 1940) and murdered in Auschwitz in 1944. The files on her compensation proceedings are archived at the Baden-Württemberg Regional Archives, Freiburg State Archives (Landesarchiv Baden-Württemberg, Staatsarchiv Freiburg, StAFr): F 196/2 No. 4652, F 166/3 No. 2613, P 303/4 No. 1389.

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¹ The 'office reform' began with a first circular on 20 May 1896 and influenced the rules of procedure of the Reich ministries from 1927 until well into the 1930s. Cf. Menne-Haritz 1999a, 15, 135. In the following, this article refers to both: contemporary literature (Maetz 1930, Grull 1929, Wuenschel 1929) and later literature on the history of bureaucracy (Hochedlinger 2009, Riles 2006, Menne-Haritz 1999a, 1999b, 1996).

authorities and institutions. The micro-historical approach of a specific form serving as ‘an epistemological model’⁵ reveals the problems of such an official course of action in the post-war period, in which attempts were made to administer and process the new task of awarding reparations without the possibility of drawing on any pre-existing experience or legislation.

This study is based on the hypothesis that forms are not only passive information carriers, but function as actively involved actors that ‘anticipate and enable certain actions by others’.⁶ By requesting a specific action from each user, a form simultaneously arranges these users into an administrative community. In this case, the term *community* includes all actors from the administrative world involved in this procedure. The term ‘process’ is used in its administrative sense here and is taken to mean a single, but co-operative decision-making process. How a process should be handled and controlled was laid down in internal rules of procedure.⁷

The creation and use of a form

After the end of World War II, the Allied forces sought ways to implement their prepared plans in terms of administering and dealing with the outcomes of Nazi expropriation policy. Before the British Military Government drafted a corresponding restitution law, they wanted to clarify the property control that had already begun in 1946, which also included the expropriated property of former victims of Nazi persecution.⁸ Consequently, on 20 October 1947 they issued *General Order No. 10* on the basis of Military Government Law No. 52 on blocking and controlling property.⁹ This order declared that persons deprived of their property as a result of National Socialist persecution should either have their property returned to them or be compensated for it. Form *MGAF/P* (‘Military Government Allied Forces/Property’) was created as a consequence of this order (Fig. 2). In this form, individuals were supposed to declare what assets had been confiscated from them by the German authorities

or which expropriation processes they were aware of.¹⁰ In official communication, the Regional Tax Office referred to the form as ‘MGAF/P’ (Fig. 8). This document also served as an application for re-establishing the applicant’s former financial circumstances,¹¹ which is why it was unofficially referred to as a ‘Wiedergutmachungsantrag’ (‘claim for compensation’) in the authorities’ internal communication (Fig. 7).

First and foremost, a form is something neutral to its users as it appears to request some objective information. It also represents efficiency and transparency.¹² This is why so many people who had been persecuted by the Nazi regime filled in declarations again after 1945, even though they had lost their assets precisely through the agency of such forms earlier on.¹³ After 1945, form *MGAF/P* seemed to signify victims’ hope for justice and reparations and the attempt to build up citizens’ confidence in the bureaucracy of the new German state.

For the Allies and the German tax authorities, the purpose of form *MGAF/P* was to determine the extent and value of seized assets, the original and current situation of the assets and the circumstances of their seizure. From the authorities’ viewpoint, a form was an instrument with which to obtain information in preparation for an official decision.¹⁴ In their role as passive information carriers, forms like *MGAF/P* were supposed to help both the Allied and the German administration to gain an overview in order to see the extent to which restitution, compensation or indemnification was possible. Assets and seizures were supposed to be categorised and standardised this way in order to manage the high number of items that had been received. In 1948, many of these *MGAF/P* forms circulated in the British sector of occupied Germany. People who had been persecuted by the Nazi regime, their heirs, lawyers and institutions such as the

⁵ Ginzburg 1992, 101.

⁶ Riles 2006, 21.

⁷ Cf. Menne-Haritz 1999, 96.

⁸ Cf. Lillteicher 2007, 69.

⁹ General Order No. 10 on the basis of British Military Government Law No. 52 on blocking and controlling property; EHRI: European Holocaust Research Infrastructure <https://portal.ehri-project.eu/units/de-002409-b_1-0_0-b_1_7530_pr_3_14>.

¹⁰ ‘It is contemplated, however, that shortly thereafter the submission of detailed reports of such blocked property will be required’. Cf. *Handbook for Military Government in Germany Prior to Defeat or Surrender*, Dec. 1944, Part III, 340 Blocking Control (d).

¹¹ Cf. Lillteicher 2007, 69.

¹² See Graeber 2016.

¹³ With the ‘Decree on Registering the Property of Jews’ (*Verordnung über die Anmeldung des Vermögens von Juden*) of 26 April 1938, Jewish citizens had to disclose all their material assets (jewellery and other valuables containing precious metals) and hand them over in the subsequent ‘Leihhausaktion’ (‘pawnshop action’). Cf. Banken 2009, 314.

¹⁴ Cf. Maetz 1930, 140.

Jewish Claim Conference¹⁵ used the forms in two ways: to ‘declare’ what assets had been seized and to reclaim them. Several forms were often submitted in parallel for or by each person in one and the same procedure; a separate form had to be filled in for each claim for restitution, e.g. one for seized securities, one for property (real estate) and another one for bank accounts. Hence the form required people to differentiate between different kinds of property.

It was with this form that the compensation process began for Elsa Saenger. The proceedings lasted approximately 20 years and involved various parties at the tax authorities in the cities of Freiburg in the south of Germany and Hamburg in the north as well as two military governments – the British and the French – in the period from 1948 to 1966. The form mentioned here is now part of a bundle of files that contains about a hundred folios in each case and is stored at the State Archives in Freiburg and Hamburg. The asset-declaration forms were also handed over to the banks in the British occupation zone by the British Military Government with the aim of obtaining information about seized property in order to block it.¹⁶ It is for this reason that the form in the case examined here was filled in by Rudolf Herms, who was the owner and custodian of Herms & Co., a Hamburg-based bank. In accordance with the British *General Order No. 10*, he was obliged to report any expropriations he had witnessed in his position as bank custodian. In addition to the order of the British Military Government, there was another reason for him completing the form, however. The question of his legitimacy to act on behalf of Elsa Saenger reveals a tragic history concerning his own family and the company.

When the process of ‘Aryanisation’ began, the Jewish-run bank house H. A. Jonas Söhne & Co. was signed over to the non-Jewish son-in-law Rudolf Herms, and from 15 September 1941, it was run under the name of ‘Herms & Co.’, thus creating an internal ‘Aryanisation’ within the

family.¹⁷ Due to his personal experience,¹⁸ Herms dedicated himself to the task of taking care of compensation and restitution of the confiscated assets of the survivors in his family and his former Jewish clientele after the war. On the basis of this information, it can be assumed that the bank also attempted to recover Elsa Saenger’s confiscated assets. Hence, his motive for filling in the form may have additionally been based on personal initiative and a sense of justice.

The transformation from a blank form to a completed one: problems and solutions

The form this study is concerned with has the lengthy title *Declaration by present owner or custodian of property which has been subject to transfer in accordance with paragraph 1 of General Order No. 10*. It is a printed form that is written in English with a German translation. The form was designed in a DIN A4 format.¹⁹ It was intended for the applicants to take it home and fill it in by typing their answers in the gaps using a typewriter. In reconstructing the transformation from a blank to a completed form, however, it became apparent that the form’s originators did not consider certain aspects, which can be attributed to a lack of experience in preparing forms for the declaration of assets. A closer look will show how the declaration form was visually organised and how it shaped the way in which the applicant could respond.²⁰

The form has a non-uniform design (Fig. 2). The response fields are pre-defined in the introductory section with lines prompting details about the local situation of the assets and the applicant’s personal data. In sections I and II, the space for answering is simply blank, with no lines at all. Both fields request information to be provided on the confiscation of immovable or movable property. The applicant cited securities amounting to 10,500 Reichsmark as well as further payments amounting to 5,198.77 Reichsmark as assets which had been ‘transferred’ to Deutsche Bank, Baden-

¹⁵ The *Jewish Claims Conference* was founded in 1951 and represented the claims of seized heirless assets, among other issues. The organisation is still active in the field of education and negotiates compensation payments. See <<http://www.claimscon.de>> (accessed 20 November 2022).

¹⁶ There were other specific forms addressed to banks and other financial institutions: MGAB-(I) 1, MGAF-I (2), and MGAF-I Series A and B. Cf. *Handbook for Military Government, Instructions to Financial Institutions*, No. 2.

¹⁷ See Hamburg State Archives (Staatsarchiv Hamburg, StAHH), 621-1/77_13.

¹⁸ Rudolf Herms’ mother-in-law Emmy Jonas emigrated in 1939, his wife Elisabeth Herms née Jonas barely escaped deportation, and his three sisters-in-law and their families were murdered in concentration camps. Cf. StAHH, 621-1/77_8 and 621-1/77_9.

¹⁹ The DIN norms for paper sizes were introduced in 1922 as a result of standardisation processes (DIN stands for ‘Deutsche Industrie-Norm’, from the German Institute for Standardisation). Cf. Hochedlinger 2009, 119f.

²⁰ Cf. Brenneis 2006, 46.

MGAF/P B

This Form should be completed in triplicate and forwarded to the Landrat of the Kreis or Oberbürgermeister of the Stadtkreis in which the Declarant is resident.
Dieser Vordruck ist in dreifacher Ausfertigung bei dem Landrat des Kreises oder Oberbürgermeisters des Stadtkreises, in dem der Erklärende wohnt, einzureichen.
In cases where the space provided is insufficient a supplementary page, bearing the number of the paragraph and sub-paragraph, should be annexed.
Reicht der vorgesehene Raum nicht aus, so ist ein mit der Ziffer des betreffenden Absatzes und Unterabsatzes versehenes Ergänzungsblatt beizufügen.

DECLARATION BY PRESENT OWNER OR CUSTODIAN OF PROPERTY WHICH HAS BEEN SUBJECT TO TRANSFER IN ACCORDANCE WITH PARAGRAPH 1 OF GENERAL ORDER No. 10
Erklärung des jetzigen Eigentümers oder Verwalters von Vermögen, das unter Artikel I Absatz 1 der allgemeinen Verfügung Nr. 10 fällt

Location of Property Örtliche Lage des Vermögens

(a) Land Deutschland (b) Kreis Hamburg (c) Gemeinde Hamburg

Description of Person making Declaration Personalien des Erklärenden

(a) Surname (in Block Capitals) Herms & Co. (b) ~~Crossed Name~~ (Vor der Arierisierung hieß unsere Firma "H. A. Jönke & Co.")
Familienname (in großen Blockbuchstaben)
(c) Address Hamburg 26, Neuerwall 26/28 (d) ~~Address~~
Anschrift
(d) Employment Bankfirma (e) ~~Identity Card No.~~
Beruf Ausweis-Nummer

I. IMMOVABLE PROPERTY 1. UNBEWEGLICHES VERMÖGEN

(a) Description of Property
Nähere Bezeichnung des Vermögens

(b) Location of Property
Örtliche Lage des Vermögens

(c) Brief description of circumstances in which transfer was made (if known)
Kurze Angabe der Umstände, unter denen das Vermögen übergegangen ist (soweit bekannt)

(d) Name and present address of person dispossessed (if known)
Name und jetzige Anschrift des (der) Geschädigten (soweit bekannt)

(e) Name and present address of person or persons to whom transfer was made (if known)
Name und jetzige Anschrift der Person(en), auf die das Vermögen übergegangen ist (soweit bekannt)

(f) Name and present address of person or persons from whom the property was acquired (if different from (e))
Name und jetzige Anschrift der Person(en), aus deren Hand das Vermögen erworben wurde (falls verschieden von (e))

II. MOVABLE PROPERTY II. BEWEGLICHES VERMÖGEN

(a) Description of property Wertpapiere lt. Aufstellung auf der Rückseite
Nähere Bezeichnung des Vermögens ferner Zahlungen RM 5.198,77

(b) Location of property Polizeidirektor, Abt. Jüdisches Vermögen, Baden-Baden
Örtliche Lage des Vermögens

(c) Brief description of circumstances in which transfer was made (if known) Obige Werte wurden übertragen bzw. überwiesen an Deutsche Bank Fil. Baden-Baden z. Verfügung des Polizeidirektors gem. Schreiben d. Polizeidirektors Baden-Baden v. 24.7.41
Kurze Angaben der Umstände, unter denen das Vermögen übergegangen ist (soweit bekannt)

(d) Name and present address of person dispossessed (if known) Fr. Elsa Saenger, früher Baden-Baden, Werderstrasse 5
Name und jetzige Anschrift des Geschädigten (soweit bekannt)

(e) Name and address of person or persons to whom the transfer was made (if known) siehe II b
Name und Anschrift der Person(en), auf die das Vermögen übergegangen ist (soweit bekannt)

(f) Name and present address of persons from whom property was acquired (if different from (e)) ./.
Name und jetzige Anschrift der Person(en), aus deren Hand das Vermögen erworben wurde (falls verschieden von (e))

Date Hamburg
Datum 19. April 1948

Signed Herms
Unterschrift Oppert / Custodian (Eigentümer) (Verwalter)

HERMS & CO.
Hamburg

1501 5/2000

Pss. (Hq) 7817 A 9 / 50 N / 3 - 48

Fig. 2: Declaration of property for Elsa Saenger (recto).

Baden on 24 July 1941 based on an order issued by Baden-Baden's police commissioner. However, the gaps in the form were often too short to allow the claimant to enter adequate answers. Hence, the person had to improvise. Sometimes the respective category was crossed out with several 'x's or the paper got drawn into the typewriter several times in order to achieve the smallest possible line spacing. It was virtually impossible to write the required 'brief description of the circumstances in which transfer was made' (see section IIc, Fig. 2) in the available space, particularly with a typewriter.

As for other questions, there was not enough space for them at all. Those who designed the form had apparently reckoned with this because there is a note in the header line of the form that says: 'In cases where there is insufficient space, a supplementary page bearing the number of the paragraph and sub-paragraph should be included as an annex' (Fig. 2). The applicant made use of this option to reply to section IIa, but then listed the expropriated securities on the back of the form (Fig. 3). One might ask why the form was drawn up so thoughtlessly and whether there was actually no intention to provide enough space for the replies. After the applicant had filled in all the gaps using a typewriter, he recognised two mistakes he had made: he had forgotten the 'a' in 'Elsa', which he then added by hand, just like the word 'Frau' ('Mrs.').

Transmission path of the form

Being the bank's official representative, Rudolf Herms himself signed the form he had received from the British Military Government on 19 April 1948 and probably submitted it to the chief administrative officer of the district (*Landrat*) or to the Lord Mayor (*Oberbürgermeister*). The form subsequently made its way through several administrative bodies, starting with the Control Commission for Germany (British Element)/ Central Claims Registry of the British Military Government. Since the seized property was located in Baden-Baden, which belonged to the French occupation zone, the British Military Government transmitted the declaration to the French Military Government. The latter sent the form – via a wrong address in the Rhineland-Palatinate – to the responsible Baden State Office for controlled assets (*Landesamt für kontrollierte Vermögen Freiburg*), which then delegated the task to the Regional Tax Authority (*Finanzamt Baden-Baden*), as illustrated in Figure 4.

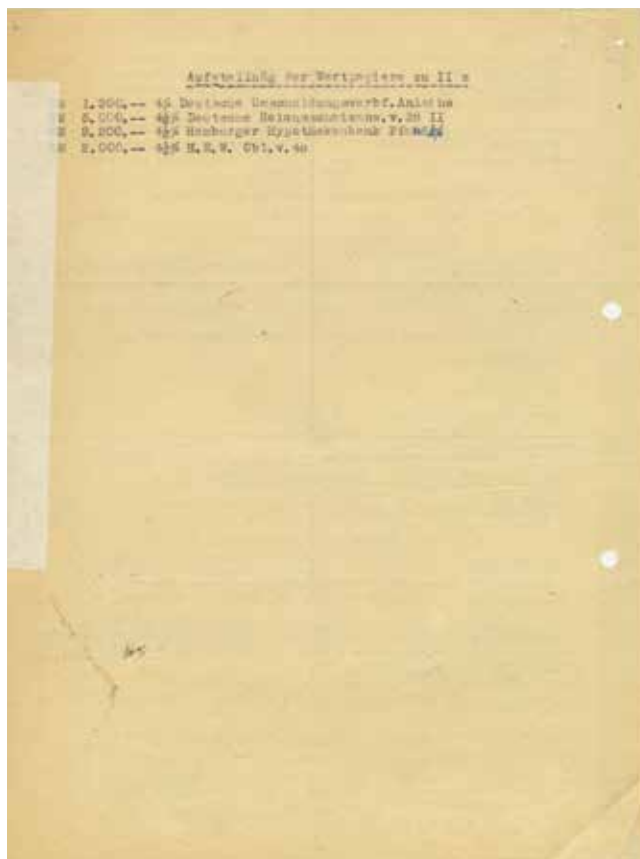


Fig. 3: Declaration of property for Elsa Saenger (verso).

Visual organisation of the accompanying texts with reference to normative administrative semantics

Although the asset-declaration form contained so much information in its questions and answers, it did not actually speak for itself; each person dealing with the form had to write another letter explaining the pending task related to the form. These accompanying texts were subject to specific standards of formatting, which had also been laid down in the official German 'office reform'. This reform had created new guidelines for the preparation of outgoing reports, which included all communications between the authorities as well as from an authority to an external body. The accompanying texts that the German authorities issued in the case examined here all comply to the characteristics of a report as a subcategory of a letter. The paper size corresponded to DIN A5, which is half of DIN A4. Due to an official specification, the paper used for the forms was to be treated as a limited resource,²¹ which is the reason why these short accounts were written on half-page sheets. In addition, the respective authority always kept a duplicate

²¹ Cf. Grull 1929, 126.

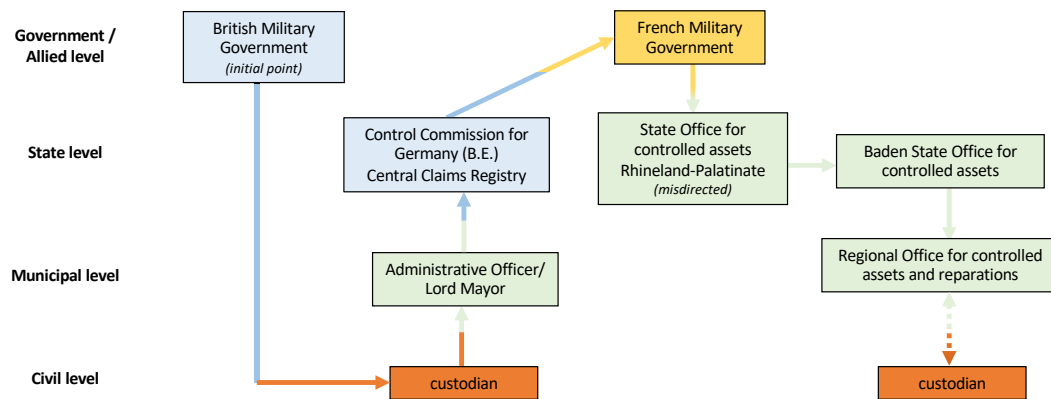


Fig. 4: Transmission path of the form.

of each original letter for its own documentation. The thin carbon copy paper used for this purpose was also used in the original correspondence, as the accompanying letter from the Regional Tax Office shows (Fig. 8). The layout of the reports put the place and date at the top right, the sender's name at the top left and the journal number and recipient's address below that.²² The examples shown here demonstrate that the individual authorities dealt with these requirements in different ways. Elements called 'subject' and 'reference' were introduced with the incipient office reform, although they did not appear as designations at that time. This changed in the following years and became common practice later, as the accompanying letters by the German administration testify (Figs 6–8). On the State Office's accompanying letter, the sender, 'Nr.' signifying the journal number, and the place and address were part of a pre-print developed in the course of 'standardisation of business transactions in the offices of the authorities' (Fig. 7).²³ The pre-print left some gaps where the characteristic data for the individual transaction were to appear. This visual organisation of the page was part of the process of rationalising bureaucratic measures, which was intended to facilitate and accelerate workflows.

Nationality and languages

The form was written in English, but included a German translation as well. This bilingual approach shows that the form was developed by the British, but was also intended for use by the German authorities. The required categories had to be understandable for people from both language groups.

²² Cf. Menne-Haritz 1999a, 135–136.

²³ Grull 1929, 126.

The Central Claims Registry then regarded the French Military Government as being responsible, which is the reason why the form was sent to the French administration. The latter then wrote their own accompanying letter, which, according to the criteria of German administrative science, was a template on which certain elements were pre-printed: the header with the name and address of the sender, the place, and a line to insert the respective date with a rubber stamp or in writing. The subject was also pre-printed in capital letters: 'DEMANDE DE RAPPORT D'ENQUÊTE' with a German translation in capital letters directly underneath ('Ersuchen um Vorlage eines V-Berichts').

The unit 'file number' was pre-printed in both languages ('Référence à rappeler' / 'Aktenzeichen') along with instructions. The rest of the DIN A4 sheet, which was about half the page, was left blank to enter the name of the person from whom the property had been confiscated and to provide further instructions. Requesting so-called V-reports (the term is a combination of German and English words; V stands for 'Vermögen', i.e. assets) was a common occurrence by the French Military Government. That is shown by the fact that it had developed a form for facilitating the process. Only individual items of data had to be entered (the date, recipient, name of the person concerned with the assets, and other instructions). After that, the page still contained plenty of space for stamps, signatures and other comments. At the end of the page there was an additional field entitled 'attachments' in both languages.

Hence, the form moved from one occupation zone to another, so on its mission it was not only connected with the English and German language, but also with French. The French officials were expected to be able to read and edit the

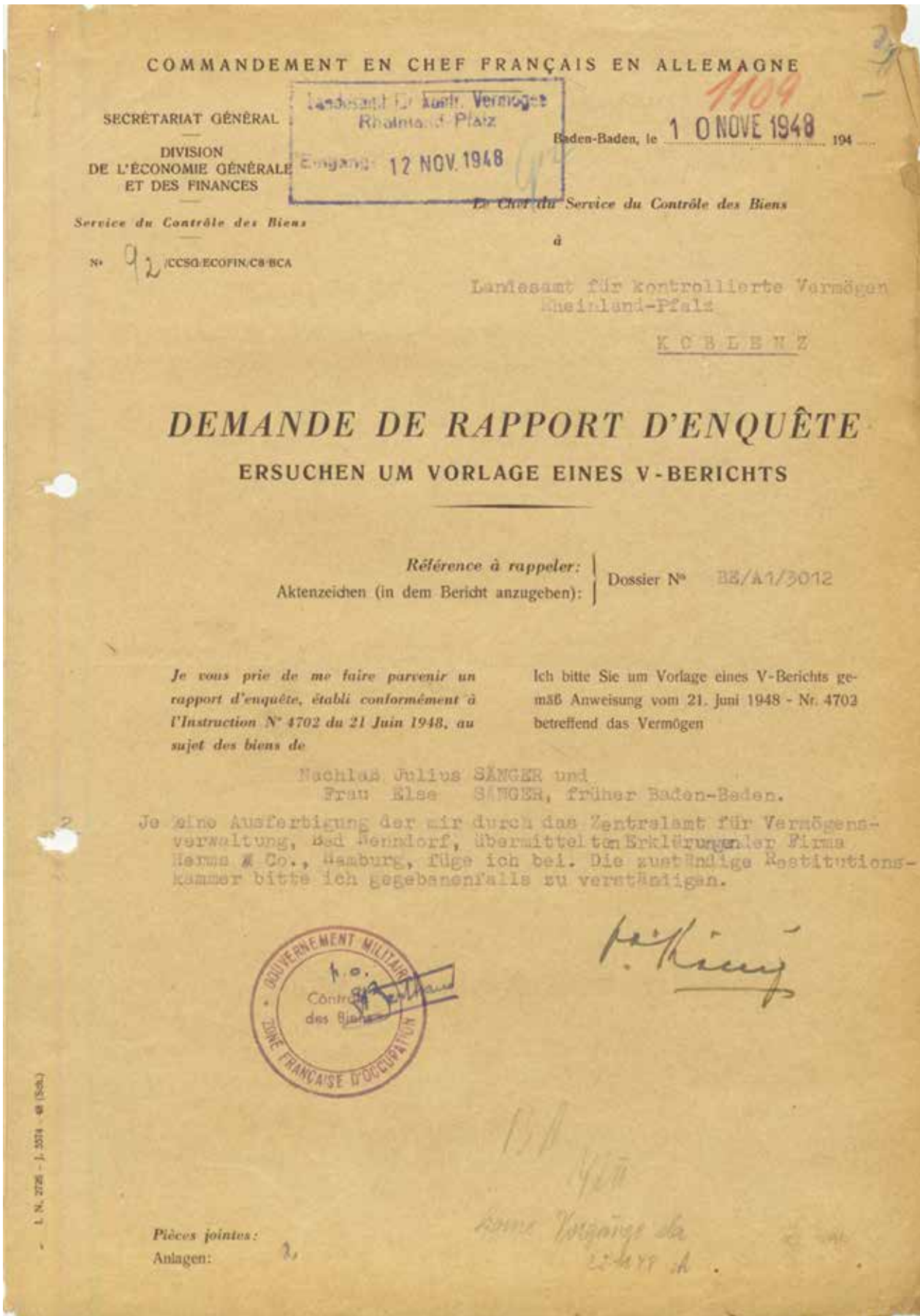


Fig. 5: Accompanying letter by the French Military Government.

form in English or German. Although it referred to an order from the British occupation zone, the French authorities accepted the form instead of insisting on working with their own documents. (This would have meant that the applicant had to fill in a new form, thus complicating the ongoing process as well as the agency of the form enormously. Although this measure was not adopted, the form from the British occupation zone was promptly incorporated into their own administrative cycle.) The French wrote their own accompanying letters in their own language along with a corresponding German translation (Fig. 5), so the inclusion of the French occupation forces increased the range of languages in the procedure from two to three.

Scripts and notes on the documents as traces of use

There are four different types of writing on form *MGAF/P* that reveal different layers of time and processing. The pre-printed 'questions' with space and lines provide the basis. By inserting answers with a typewriter, the applicant added a second writing level, and a third writing level with his signature, the crossing-out of a section not applicable to him and his handwritten corrections. The handwritten note 'Bitte zurücksenden' ('Please return') added by a staff official in Sütterlin script represents the fourth level (Fig. 2). Sütterlin handwriting was developed in Germany in 1911 to simplify the 'German script' used up to then. After supporting the 'German script' from 1933 onwards, the Nazis then banned it in 1941, in the middle of the Second World War, along with Sütterlin script. It was replaced by Antiqua, a form of Latin script. The reason for the Sütterlin ban was that the script used in the German Reich should also be readable outside the German-speaking area, which was particularly important for the Nazi decrees and orders.²⁴

As far as the transmission path of the form is concerned, the use of Sütterlin script seems to reveal something about the relationship between the sender and recipient. The handwritten note shows that the author wrote the note and the instructions in his usual handwriting, regardless of any conventions. The note also indicates that its author knew who the later recipient of the form was, as he had to assume that Sütterlin script was still legible for the next addressee. This indicates that the compensation administration, although not having a routine yet, relied on bureaucratic communities that may have existed since the National Socialist administration.

The form was annotated with further remarks as well as paraps, i.e. abbreviations of a signature, in order to document that somebody had taken part in the process, to document the next addressee's own work step or to add further instructions (e.g. 'Please return'). The rules of procedure of an authority laid down precisely the functional responsibilities 'which carry out an examination with defined tasks and make the results available in the form of notes as premises for subsequent exercise by other responsibilities'.²⁵ The letter from the Regional Tax Office (the executing authority) contains a note about the whereabouts of the papers – mostly either 'Wv.' (= 'Wiedervorlage', i.e. 'For resubmission') or 'Z.d.A.' (= 'Zu den Akten', i.e. '[To be added] to the files'). In this case, one resubmission was set for 10 December 1948 and another for 20 December 1948 (Fig. 8). The resubmission itself refers to the fixing of a date, but also to the passing of deadlines and the repetition of work steps.

The markings on the accompanying texts confirm that special passages have a specific meaning. A sign at a certain point on the document was to be understood without further explanation because these points were fixed. The layout 'generalizes the implicit meaning of notes or entries in stamps',²⁶ which can be seen as another group of markers. The marking of the entrance of a form into the procedure or the office desk was a common operation, which was the reason for using a rubber stamp. In addition to the receipt stamp, the documents examined here also contain company and official stamps. They indicate that there were so many procedures in the respective company or office that these markings were required to facilitate and shorten the workflow by the mechanics of a prepared stamp, e.g. recording the date of all incoming documents of the day.

Numbers and numbering systems – traces of systematisation and archiving

The documents contain numerical traces of use, some of which can be assigned, while others cannot. On form *MGAF/P*, the numbers 'P521' and 'I/2604' appear in the lower right-hand corner, probably referring to an internal numbering system (Fig. 2). The accompanying text prepared by the French Military Government (Fig. 5) is also sufficiently equipped with numbers: above the submission date of the letter, which is stamped (the stamp contains the year, but the pre-printed

²⁴ Cf. Gutzwiller 1992, 415; and Beck 1991, 479.

²⁵ Menne-Haritz 1999b, 96.

²⁶ Menne-Haritz 1996, 55.

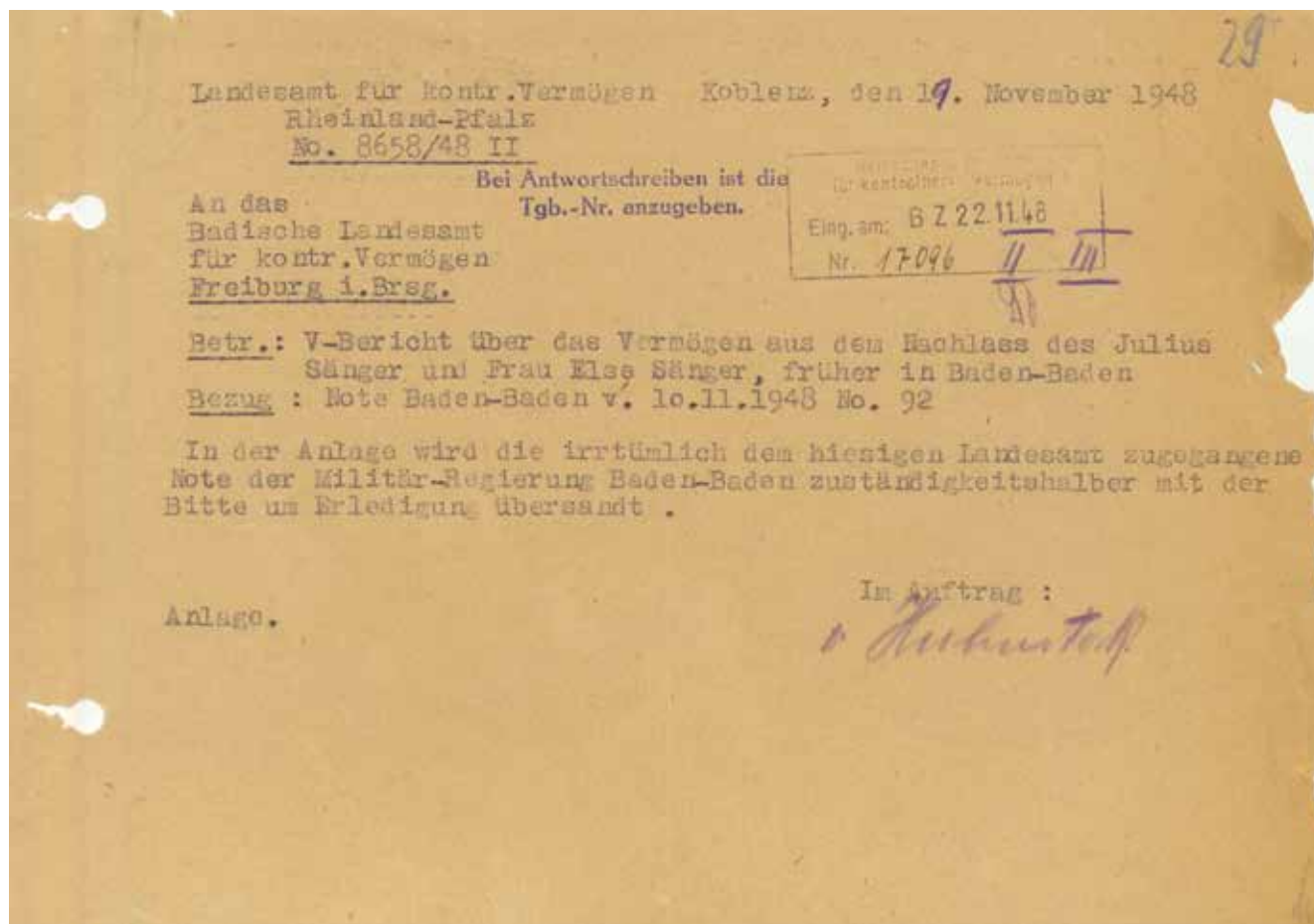


Fig. 6: Accompanying letter by the Rhineland-Palatinate State Office.

form already inserted the year as ‘194...’, so the information was doubled), the number 1109 is documented in red. The letter itself contains the seemingly consecutive number 92. In addition, a separate reference number was also provided (BE/A1/3012).²⁷

Even the State Office that was *not* responsible and had only received the form by mistake assigned its own journal number (8658/48 II) when forwarding it (Fig. 6). This was received by the responsible State Office, where the process was given its own journal number again (17096; Fig. 7). These different reference/journal numbers show that each authority employed its own system. As a result, however, each institution had its own reference number for one and the same case, which had to be considered for further processing, and this in turn led to errors and additional work instead of rationalising the cases.

²⁷ In its accompanying letter to the Tax Office, the State Office asked for a file number to be assigned to the transaction. In the course of further investigation, each authority also assigned its own file number to the case as an additional numbering, order and identification system.

There are consecutive page numbers in the upper right-hand corner that serve as pagination (Figs 2–8; the numbers are not consecutive on the documents shown here since they are taken from different files on the same procedure within which they are consecutive). Using these page numbers, all the documents in the same file were marked once the decision had been made before the procedure was discarded, i.e. sent to be archived. The pagination therefore refers to archiving practices and thus the intention that the files might be needed again at a later date. The fact that some numbers were overwritten shows that the individual documents were taken apart, re-sorted and put together again by different editors.

Bureaucracy and the semiotics of colours

In addition to containing various types of writing and numerical notes, the annotations and comments in the documents vary in colour, some being more colourful than others. Different colours are used for incoming, company and official

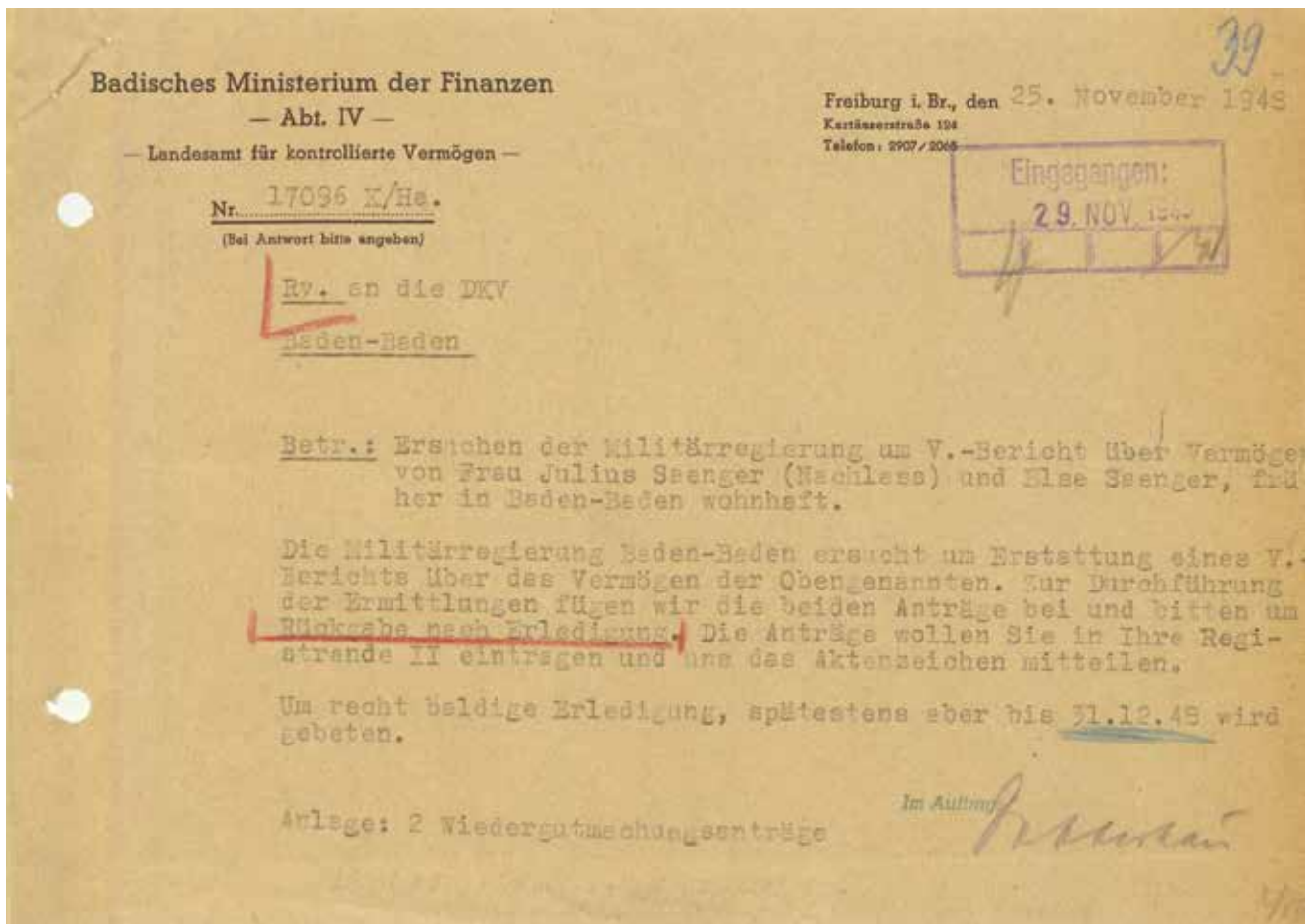


Fig. 7: Accompanying letter sent by Baden's State Office for Controlled Assets.

stamps (red, violet and blue).²⁸ Important information was underlined in different colours as well (sometimes using red crayon, sometimes blue, as in Fig. 7), annotations were noted in colour ('Wv.' and the corresponding date in red crayon), paraps in blue and green, and signatures in blue or black. Colour codes play an important role in the representation of cultural knowledge, and official administration routines are no exception. Coloured scripts are a general component of forms in everyday administrative practice.²⁹ Which colours the individual hierarchical levels had to use was governed by different office regulations.³⁰ Ever since the 20th century, German rules of procedure had assigned 'the green pencil to the Minister, the red pencil to the State Secretary and the

blue pencil to the Head of Department for notes'.³¹ In the case of the present study, the applicant signed the declaration form in blue ink. He acted outside the regulatory world and therefore did not have to comply with the colour coding.³²

The colour of the receipt stamp used by the Control Commission, the central organ of the British Military Government,³³ was red.³⁴ Since it acted on behalf of a State Secretary, the colour assignment fits here. The letters sent by the two State Offices are signed in a blue crayon and could help to identify the signer as the head of department. The

²⁸ N.B. Colours can change over time. The stamping ink mentioned refers to the time of investigation in 2018.

²⁹ Cf. Berwinkel 2016.

³⁰ Cf. Hochedlinger 2009, 126.

³¹ Hochedlinger 2009, 92. The translation of the quote into English is my own.

³² Colour coding was (and still is) a phenomenon of the German authorities. Neither the British nor the French administration worked with defined colours, and there was probably no particular significance in the colours used.

³³ See Mayring 1999 on the Control Commission.

³⁴ The declaration of property for Elsa Saenger was submitted together with the declaration of property for her husband, Julius Saenger, who had died in 1929. The Control Commission's receipt stamp can be found on the application for Julius Saenger. See StAFr 196/2 No. 4652.

5

Baden-Baden, den 1. Dezember 1948

An das
Bankhaus Herms u. Co
Hamburg 38
Neuer Wall 26/28

Betr.: Wiedergutmachung Elsa Saenger, Baden-Baden, Werderstr. 5.

Sie haben am 19.4.48 an die Zentralmeldestelle eine Anmeldung auf Formblatt MGAF/P über Vermögen abgegeben, das unter Art.I/Abs.1 der allgemeinen Verfügung 10 fällt.

Diese Anmeldung wurde uns über die Kontrollkommission für Deutschland und die franz. Militärregierung zur Bearbeitung zugeleitet. Es ist in ihr davon die Rede, dass aufgrund einer Verfügung des Polizeidirektors von Baden-Baden vom 24.7.41 von Ihnen für Elsa Saenger, Baden-Baden, Werderstr. 5 Wertpapiere über nom. RM 10.500.- und einen Betrag von RM 5.198.77 an die Deutsche Bank Filiale Baden-Baden zu Händen der Abteilung jüdische Vermögen beim Polizeidirektor überwiesen werden mussten.

Als Beleg für die Wiedergutmachungsansprüche bitten wir um Übermittlung einer Abschrift der Verfügung des Polizeidirektors vom 24.7.41, und, falls dies aus dieser nicht schon hervorgehen sollte, um Angabe, um welche Zahlung (Judenvermögensabgabe, Reichsfluchtsteuer, allg.Vermögensverfall) es sich handelte.

WV 11/11/48

Fig. 8: Accompanying letter by the Regional Tax Office (recto).

Baden-Baden, den 1. Dezember 1948

Wir wären Ihnen für eine baldige Antwort, möglichst bis zum 10.12.48, dankbar.

An das
Bankhaus Herms u. Co
Hamburg 38
Neuer Wall 26/28

(Dr. Voigt).

Betr.: Wiedergutmachung Elsa Saenger, Baden-Baden, Werderstr. 5.

Sie haben am 19.4.48 an die Zentralmeldestelle eine Anmeldung auf Formblatt MGAF/P über Vermögen abgegeben, das unter Art.I/Abs.1 der allgemeinen Verfügung 10 fällt.

Diese Anmeldung wurde uns über die Kontrollkommission für Deutschland und die franz. Militärregierung zur Bearbeitung zugeleitet. Es ist in ihr davon die Rede, dass aufgrund einer Verfügung des Polizeidirektors von Baden-Baden vom 24.7.41 von Ihnen für Elsa Saenger, Baden-Baden, Werderstr. 5 Wertpapiere über nom. RM 10.500.- und einen Betrag von RM 5.198.77 an die Deutsche Bank Filiale Baden-Baden zu Händen der Abteilung jüdische Vermögen beim Polizeidirektor überwiesen werden mussten.

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WV 11/11/48

Fig. 9: Accompanying letter by the Regional Tax Office (verso).

use of the red colour for notes on the letter from the Tax Office ('Wv.', see Fig. 8) as well as the underlining on the application form do not fit into this colour scheme, however. The fact that they were added in red probably does not indicate the status of the clerk who was involved, but refers to the relevance to the internal processing of the case and was meant to be spotted quickly when the file was resubmitted. The colours used here therefore only partially help to assign outgoing documents and markings to the hierarchical setting of the people involved in the correspondence. This is not necessary, actually, since most of the letters are signed and bear the name of the person who wrote them.³⁵

Conclusion: bureaucrats – a secret community?

More than half a year after Rudolf Herms – one of the main actors involved in the process – had submitted the form to the authorities, he received a reply from the Tax Office. This occurred at the beginning of December 1948. Nothing had happened during this time from his perspective, but a great deal had happened within the administration. The traces of use in the form of writing, numbers and colours on the documents refer to the different levels and positions of those involved and to the chronological sequence of events. The form required certain actions to be taken by each addressee: filling it in, forwarding it, signing it, correcting it, and creating cover letters to go with it. It thus generated numerous communication processes itself: the bank had to send the form, the British Allies had to classify and transmit it, the French Allies had to order further reports to supplement the form, the misdirected form had to be put back on the right course again, the German State Office had to delegate its processing internally, and the German Tax Office needed further information and therefore had to contact the applicant again.

By studying the 'visual presentation'³⁶ of things like notes and stamps in different kinds of writing and colours on the form as proof of its use and circulation and by examining the accompanying letters, it is possible to identify the form as a highly relevant non-human 'agent'. This non-human agent took over the tasks that humans would otherwise have had to do, e.g. in a one-to-one conversation with the applicant,

which would not have been possible due to the distances and the differences between all the bureaucratic authorities concerned.³⁷ With its entry into the 'administrative world', the form shaped a specific kind of community which was not only inaccessible to the applicant, but *remained* completely hidden to the outside world. The participants in this community were part of the official course of bureaucratic business, which worked beyond the outside world and was closed off from it.³⁸ The form thus created an 'inside' and an 'outside' perspective. In Max Weber's sociological terminology, the world of administration represents a world of 'secrecy'³⁹ that communicates by using its own linguistic and graphic semantics, which in turn contributes substantially to its autonomy and constitution.⁴⁰

The form that the British Military Government produced and processed was created in response to the historic crimes that Nazi Germany had perpetrated and with the aim of providing a legal basis for compensation transactions. The drafting of such forms shows that the authorities expected a large number of people to initiate legal claims of this kind, which are dealt with in this document. The form was intended to enable and structure the classification and categorisation of expropriations that had taken place. It thus relates to the attempts to standardise the way in which Nazi crimes were dealt with in post-war German compensation practices, which in turn refer to comparability and uniformity as features of the bureaucratic system.

³⁵ The exact positions these persons had in the official hierarchy were listed in the respective rules of procedure of the individual authorities and departments.

³⁶ Menne-Haritz 1999a, 334. The translation of the quote into English is my own.

³⁷ The question of the extent to which the forms can be classified as 'non-human actors' in the sense of Bruno Latour's Actor-Network Theory (ANT) opens up further research perspectives: 'Every time you want to know what a nonhuman does, simply imagine what other humans or other nonhumans would have to do were this character not present'. Cf. Latour 1992, 229.

³⁸ Cf. Graeber 2016, 222.

³⁹ Weber 1972, 572.

⁴⁰ Cf. Schirrmeister 2004, 116.

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Article

Customised Manuscripts to Shape a Community of Readers? Overbeck's Collection of Rental Manuscripts from Palembang (Indonesia)*

Jan van der Putten | Hamburg

In the course of the nineteenth century, lending libraries or manuscript-rental shops seem to have gained a firm footing in the local literary market of several urban centres in the Malay world. In the shadow of a thriving indigenous printing industry predominantly producing lithographic reproductions of manuscript texts in a few urban centres, a number of Malay copyists carved out a niche in the market by continuing the Chinese custom of producing writing on demand and distributing the products among family members, friends and peers.¹ The ownership of manuscripts and access to them were both embedded in a network of human relationships which appear to have been increasingly accompanied by monetary transactions as the encroachment of the colonial system deepened. Handwritten and printed texts were relatively rare in the literary production of the Malay world, which was still firmly rooted in its oral basis, and access to them was difficult and had to be negotiated with the owner or custodian of the collection in question. In the absence of public libraries and bookshops catering to the needs of an indigenous audience in the early nineteenth century, the general public was dependent on specialists to read, perform and explain the content of the tales and treatises.²

Gradually, circumstances changed with the ongoing colonial encroachment by the Dutch in Indonesia and the

British in peninsular South-east Asia, introducing vernacular education systems that spread literacy in Malay in Roman script and also promoted Arabic script, particularly in British Malaya. Missionaries supported such 'modernising' efforts by not only teaching pupils basic reading and arithmetic, but also training the children and young adults to write, translate, print and bind texts into artefacts that could be stored, traded and distributed easily. These efforts mixed with and also displaced earlier literacy fostered in the traditional literary centres of the palace and religious institutions. Towns became the new cultural centres where manuscripts were produced and distributed from, where colonial masters exploited indigenous workers, where foreign traders settled and thrived for many generations, and where newcomers arrived in throngs to innovate and subvert standards, while itinerant troupes of performers, adventurers and artists mixed all the existing traditions into an eclectic potpourri of forms, languages and styles.

Fin-de-siècle Palembang in the southern parts of the Indonesian island of Sumatra was one of those colonial towns where many different peoples and cultures converged. It was the place of the legendary Mount Siguntang where the great-great-grandchildren of the 'two-horned' (Dhul Qarnayn) Alexander the Great reportedly descended to Earth to turn the rice panicles into gold with silver stalks and found the first Malay kingdom of Srivijaya, the origin of the Malay royal lineage. During its long history, Palembang became a Chinese pirate lair in the fifteenth century, later to be conquered by Javanese forces whose cultural dominance of its royal house had a sustained influence on the elite culture of the court. In the early nineteenth century, British (and later Dutch) troops took the town by force, ransacked the court and its library and exiled Sultan Baharuddin, who was a well-reputed patron of the arts and wrote his own poems.

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¹ Ulrich Kratz (1977), Teuku Iskandar (1981) and Henri Chambert-Loir (1984, 1991) were the first scholars to discuss the existence of lending libraries in the Malay world in a more than cursory manner, while Salmon (1981) and Kumar and Proudfoot (1996) indicated the continuation of Chinese practices in copying manuscripts for commercial purposes. More recently, I published a preliminary paper about the changing practices of the Malay manuscript economy (Putten 2017), which this paper also builds on.

² Cf. Proudfoot 2002.



Fig. 1: Koninklijk Instituut voor de Tropen, The Netherlands, KK 141-03-02, Schetskaart van de Gemeente Palembang. Map of Palembang in 1930, for an online copy, see Leiden University Libraries <<http://hdl.handle.net/1887.1/item:2012662>>.

The manuscripts of the Palembang library were taken to Batavia and, consequently, were partly dispersed among several collections and partly lost. After Dutch imperialist pacification and consolidation in South Sumatra, Arab and Chinese merchants established themselves more firmly in Palembang, which thrived again in the second half of the nineteenth century, making the town one of the main nodes in the Arab-dominated shipping network spanning the Malay Archipelago.

Ever since early times, Palembang has been a place where people settled to trade forest and mining products from the interior for cloth, silver and other goods transported up river. On the north and south banks of the River Musi, merchants and members of the local elite built compounds that developed into neighbourhoods (*kampung*), which the Dutch numbered for administrative purposes. They divided the *kampungs* into up- (*Ulu*) and downstream (*Iilir*) settlements which correspond with the south and north river banks respectively. Chinese, Arab and other settlers had built their homes here in the vicinity of other compounds where the extended family of the Sultan lived. Quite a few of the *kampungs* were known as either elite Palembang or Hadrami-Arab neighbourhoods where certain families had their main residence and businesses. These groups had an important influence on the spread of literacy within the

town through their activities in an indigenous education system that was religious in nature. A census carried out in the mid-1850s indicates that among the professions in the indigenous community, 67 persons earned a living as a professional letter-writer and/or copyist of the Qur'an (*koran- en briefeschrijvers*), which were trades that were obviously connected, while 46 others indicated that they were teachers.³ The Islamic educational system that some of the Hadrami families maintained in certain neighbourhoods disseminated basic skills in reciting the Qur'an, of course, but also in basic reading, writing and arithmetic among the children who would be sent to the religious centres (*langgar*) by their parents.⁴ These skills were necessary to administer trade with the interior, which was a major source of income for many of the families that lived in town.

Seen against this backdrop of trade and learning that the town shared with other urban centres in regions such as Batavia, Singapore and Surabaya, it does not come as a surprise to learn that Palembang was one of the pioneers of printing in the Dutch East Indies. In 1855 a Dutch official in Palembang sent a lithographed Qur'an to the colonial authorities in Batavia. The Qur'an was printed by a certain Kemas Haji Muhammad Azhari on a press he had brought back on his return voyage from Mecca. Subsequently, the Royal Batavian Society of Arts and Sciences invited the Malay language official stationed in Riau, Hermann von de Wall, to write about this Qur'an and the possibilities a free indigenous press could have regarding the 'intellectual progress of the native population'. Von de Wall gave a detailed description of the layout, the Malay introduction, which displays rules on how to recite the Arabic words, and of the gold-embossed leather covers of the ornate publication. Based on information provided by the Dutch District Officer, von de Wall disclosed how Kemas Muhammad Azhari had procured the press in Singapore for 500 guilders and how proficient the native printer was at printing with it, as he showed the District Officer by printing a short poem during his visit. The language official also commented upon the Lahore-style scribal hand used for copying it for the lithographic process and that copies of the Qur'an sold at a price of 25 guilders a piece.⁵

³ Cf. Storm van 's Gravesande 1856, 466–467.

⁴ Cf. Peeters 1995.

⁵ See Wall 1857.

Around this time, the Dutch colonial authorities had issues with freedom of publishing by subjects in the colonies⁶ and only allowed Bruining the printers and the firm E. J. L. Führi & H. M. van Dorp to set up shop in Batavia in the late 1840s after protracted negotiations. This step meant a breach in the monopoly held by the colonial printing establishment, the *Landsdrukkerij*, which the authorities had carefully guarded in order to retain complete control over what texts would circulate *en masse* in the colony. Over the next few years, however, the government would enforce new regulations that were stricter governing the production and circulation of printing, which also made it more difficult for indigenous people to print books in the Dutch East Indies.⁷ The Batavian Society, eager to embrace more tolerant regulations,⁸ had therefore asked the Malay language specialist, who gladly obliged. However, Dutch local authorities had missed out on earlier developments in Palembang when the same Kemas Muhammad Azhari had already been reproducing the Qur'an in the late 1840s on a press procured in Singapore. From the colophon of the Qur'an produced in 1848, six years prior to the one discussed and welcomed by the Dutch commentators, we learn that not only the printing press was imported from Singapore, but also the knowledge needed to handle it properly, in the person of Ibrahim ibn Husain, who originated from Sahab Nagur and was taught by Abdullah Munsyi at Keasberry's missionary school in Singapore.⁹ It seems that colonial censorship and intelligence services were not as rigid and (water-)tight as is often surmised in these early years of the colony.

The town of Palembang has produced substantial numbers of Malay and Javanese manuscripts which have been preserved in various repositories. This makes Palembang an important node in the literate networks that constitute the Malay world.¹⁰ As mentioned above, substantial parts of the rich royal collection of manuscripts were taken by Dutch troops and transported to Batavia, where the manuscripts were divided up among several collections in the course of time. In an appendix in his edition of two Malay renderings

of Arabic texts by Shihabuddin and Kemas Fakhruddin written in Palembang in the late eighteenth century, the Dutch scholar G. W. J. Drewes presented an extensive, annotated list of titles that were produced in Palembang or connected to it.¹¹

Islamic treatises on jurisprudence, mysticism and other fields of religious knowledge seem to constitute most of the topics in these manuscripts, but Palembang also gained a reputation for its narrative poems of the adventurous and romantic type. Other kinds of texts were mainly produced by members of the extended royal family at the royal court or outside it.¹²

This rich heritage has been preserved to this day, not only in the post-colonial repositories that exist in Jakarta and Leiden, but in Palembang itself, which houses quite a number of small private manuscript collections. The majority of these collections have already been digitised and studied by a team of researchers at the Universitas Indonesia.¹³ Other efforts to preserve the city's manuscripts have also been undertaken. Most recently, the DREAMSEA Programme had the opportunity to access several collections in October 2018 in order to preserve the content and make it easily accessible for scholars and other interested parties.¹⁴

It is against this relatively rich literary backdrop that we find a local print shop, which printed texts typographically for the Palembang market,¹⁵ and at least one lending library, which were both run around the turn of the twentieth century. Ulrich Kratz has made some concise but interesting comments about a manuscript rental shop, focusing on two manuscripts that originated from the 1880s,¹⁶ and a few years later the same scholar published a detailed description of the rental manuscripts in the small Palembang collection procured by the German scholar and trader Hans Overbeck in the 1920s.¹⁷ The

⁶ Proudfoot 1995.

⁷ See Fasseur 1976.

⁸ See Groot 2009, 289 for more information about the issues surrounding the Dutch colonial press and the Batavian Society.

⁹ See Peeters 1996 and Putten 2006.

¹⁰ Cf. Putten 2018.

¹¹ Drewes 1977, 198–244.

¹² Iskandar 1996, 431–507.

¹³ Ikram 2004.

¹⁴ The DREAMSEA Programme is a programme carried out by the Center for the Study of Islam and Society (CENSIS) at the Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University (UIN) in Jakarta and the Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures at the University of Hamburg, funded by Arcadia, to digitise endangered manuscripts in South-east Asia. For more information about the digitised manuscripts in Palembang, see <<https://dreamsea.co/>>, accessed on 30 January 2021.

¹⁵ Proudfoot 1982.

¹⁶ Kratz 1977.

¹⁷ Kratz 1980.

manuscripts in this collection will be discussed in more detail in this paper in an attempt to establish how they may have been customised to serve as one collection to be rented out to the general public, as the manuscripts have similar characteristic features that may have been added later. I argue that by adding characteristics concerned with their layout and binding, an anonymous cultural entrepreneur seems to have given the collection a similar appearance that is easy to recognise as belonging to him or her. In turn, this infuses the manuscripts with the agency to attract a certain clientele interested in borrowing them. These plans obviously failed, though, as the local entrepreneur sold the collection to Overbeck in the 1920s. Overbeck stated that the manuscripts originated from a Malay lending library that was forced to close down because there were not enough readers who used it.¹⁸

This Palembang lending-library collection is also of particular interest because a few of the manuscripts contain lists (albeit concise ones) with the names of those who borrowed them and several other details.¹⁹ I will start with a short description of the physical appearance of the manuscripts and continue by focusing on a certain model of illumination, the deluxe leather bindings and what we can conclude from the names mentioned in the bindings of some of the manuscripts.

The collection

Overbeck's collection of manuscripts from Palembang, which are now part of the National Library of Indonesia's collection, comprise seven original Malay manuscripts that mainly contain narratives related to the Javanese narrative tradition used in the shadow-play repertoire. With reference to the detailed description of the individual texts in the manuscripts provided by Kratz and observations I made about the collection,²⁰ it is possible to make three subdivisions within this collection to gain a better understanding of the provenance and use of the manuscripts: ML 513 and ML 516 as group one, ML 506, 508(b), 514, 515 and 517 as group two, and ML 508(a&c) as the third sub-group.

In his earlier article about the lending library in Palembang,²¹ Kratz focused on the manuscripts encoded as

'ML 513', *Hikayat Galuh Digantung*, and 'ML 516', *Hikayat Tumenggung Ario Wonggo*, items copied in the 1880s and previously owned by two brothers, Kemas Abdul Hamid and Kemas Ali bin Kemas Hasan, who lived in Kampung 7 Ulu. The brothers wrote several ownership statements in Arabic and Latin script on the flyleaves and endpapers of their respective manuscripts, which they signed. To these statements they added some rules for borrowers to follow. The rental price amounted to 10 cents a day except for Thursday nights,²² with a minimum rental period of one day (less would only damage the valuable asset – it was already turning black [from soiling], while the middle of it was still clean – and the reader would not be able to finish the reading anyhow, so the owner stated).²³ It was stipulated that relatives also needed to pay and that readers should take good care of the valuable items, the loss of which would have to be compensated by a charge of 20 guilders. Readers were not allowed to read the manuscript too close to an oil lamp or in the presence of small children [?]. In ML 516, another note was added to the almost identically formulated admonitions: 'A note to all of you: if you want to rent [borrow] this tale, you may visit [me to borrow it]. If I don't know you [already], you should bring some proof [of identity] with you. If you don't bring any, don't be cross with me, but you won't get it. Just so you know'.²⁴ These admonitions were further highlighted in two almost identical *syair* (rhymed narrative structures) added at the beginning of the texts, which was a fairly common practice for rental manuscripts.²⁵

What is of particular interest here is that both manuscripts were luxuriously bound in leather in an Islamic way that was

²² Thursday nights are believed to be auspicious in the Islamic world, as it is possible to have one's prayers answered. Perhaps this is the reason no fee was charged. The text on the flyleaf of ML 513 reads: *malam juma'at tidak masuk sewah jika siang mesti masuk sewah* ('No fee will be charged on Thursday nights, [but] during the day a fee must be paid').

²³ The Malay text on the flyleaf of the front cover of manuscript ML 516 reads: [...] *Dan lagi saya // pesan kalau maca tida' sampai habis tida' usa sewa ini surat sebab rusa'sa // ya punya barang mulanya suda hitam tengahnya masi s-y-h[?]* putih sebab itulah saya pesan [...].

²⁴ The Malay text on one of the first pages of manuscript ML 516 reads: *dikasih ta'u kepada tuan sekalian kalau mau' sewah kayak // boleh datang tetapi kalau belum kenal hendaklah tuan // bawa' keterangan kalau tidak adah keterangan janganlah tuan // kecil hati kepada saya mesti tidak dapat supayah ta'u.*

²⁵ Kratz 1977 quotes the text of this *syair* along with a comparison between the two versions. See Chambert-Loir 2013 on the use of *syair* in the rental manuscript in the Fadli collection from Batavia.

¹⁸ Kratz 1980, 91.

¹⁹ For a discussion about the phenomenon of lending libraries, see Fermanis 2018, Putten 2017, Iskandar 1981, Kratz 1977.

²⁰ Kratz 1980, van der Putten 2017.

²¹ Kratz 1977.



Fig. 2: ML 513, the opening pages of the *Hikayat Galuh Digantung*.



Fig. 3: ML 516, *syair* at the beginning of the text *Hikayat Tumenggung Ario Wongso* in a similar double-lined frame to the one used in ML 513. The headpieces for which there was space have not been added. The envelope flap of the leather binding is also visible on the left-hand side.

quite common, replete with an envelope flap and tooling.²⁶ Another striking similarity is that the opening pages of the prose text in ML 513 and the *syair* in ML 516 are enclosed in comparable double-lined frames. The distinction between the manuscripts is that the former is adorned with a rather abstract floral pattern as a headpiece (Fig. 2) and the latter seems to be unfinished, as the space reserved for a possible similar pattern was left blank (Fig. 3). The aforementioned

²⁶ See Plomp 1993 and Scheper 2015 for details about Islamic bindings from South-east Asia.

characteristics – the names of the (original) owners, their statements on the flyleaves, the bindings and headpieces – clearly mark these two manuscripts as being one subdivision of the collection.

The characteristic of being bound in quite expensive leather bindings with decorated headpieces of the two facing pages at the start of the manuscript is shared with almost all of the other manuscripts in this collection. This brings us to the second sub-group of this collection, which comprises the following five manuscripts: ML 506 *Hikayat Maharajah Boma*, ML 508(b) *Hikayat Bambang Tok Sena*, ML 514 *Hikayat Pendawa Lebur*, ML 515 *Hikayat Pendawa Lebur* and ML 517 *Hikayat Indranata*. These manuscripts form one group united by the similar floral pattern of the headpieces in the two facing pages at the beginning of four manuscripts, with the exception of ML 515, which has a slightly different illumination. It seems very clear that one artist was responsible for all of these illuminated headpieces, as an identical palette of watercolours was used consisting of blue, red, yellow, grey and brown, and the patterns, which are very European in style, are very similar to each other (Figs 4–7).

Furthermore, the calligraphically designed first word of the text – *al-kissah* ('the story') – is identical in each of these manuscripts. The examples of this word in ML 514 and ML 517 are clearly written in the same hand (Figs 6 and 7).

The latter manuscripts (ML 514 and ML 517) are more closely connected through their former owner, who inscribed his name on them: Muhammad Safi'i, Kampung 9 Ulu. He rented out the manuscripts under similar conditions as those mentioned in the ones owned by the two brothers in Kampung 7 Ulu in the 1880s. These two manuscripts stand out from the others because they include a short list of borrowers' notes



Fig. 4: ML 506, *Hikayat Maharajah Boma* with clearly a different hand on the first page and an embellished and rubricated *al-kissah*.



Fig. 5: ML 508(b), *Hikayat Bambang Tok Sena*, with the illuminated facing pages of the opening.



Fig. 6: ML 514, headpieces of the *Hikayat Pendawa Lebur*.



Fig. 7: ML 517, illuminated facing pages of the *Hikayat Indranata*.

serving as flyleaves in the manuscript ML 514 (see below for a discussion of these), while the other manuscript (ML 517) has a puzzling feature: the ornamentation on its blue leather covers has been cut out (Fig. 8). One possible reason for this is that the owner or someone else wanted to reuse these tooling ornaments for another book, but it is highly unusual nonetheless.

The dates when the copies were completed or those mentioned in the ownership statements of all five items in this sub-group, 1903 (ML 506), 1916 (ML 508(b)), 1906 (ML 514), 1903 (ML 515) and 1908 (ML 517), indicate that the lending library was in operation in the first few decades of the twentieth century. The characteristics enumerated for grouping these five items together indicate quite clearly that

these manuscripts were indeed part of one homogeneous collection. However, there are a few other characteristics that complicate this picture. First of all, there are only two manuscripts that include statements of ownership by Muhammad Safi'i of Kampung 9 Ulu. The other items in this sub-group lack any indication of ownership, but they do contain some other data that tells us something about their provenance. ML 506 provides us with a detailed – and interesting – copying history of the text, as the scribe wrote his name, Muhammad Akip of Kampung 23 Ilir, on every twentieth page of the manuscript along with a number to indicate he had copied another twenty pages that day. In conjunction with the colophon at the end of the text (page 390), these notes indicate that Muhammad Akip bin



Fig. 8: ML 517, blue cover with tooling cut-outs.

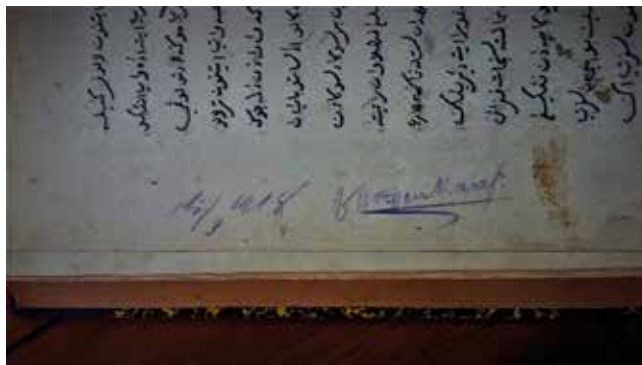


Fig. 9: ML 506, p. 164 of the manuscript showing a signature along with the date, 15 March 1918 CE.

almarhum (the late) Muhammad Asim bin almarhum paduka nenenda Marewa finished the copying in the month of Rajab 1321 H (September–October 1903 CE). On a few pages we also find another name written in the right-hand margin, combined with the date of 15 March 1918 in one instance, which is possibly an indication that the manuscript had changed hands that day (Fig. 9). There are more scribbled notes in the margins of some of the other pages as well, one of which reads 4 Oeloe (Ulu), a designation of the Kampung where the (new?) owner lived.

What is far more intriguing than the illegibility of these names, though, is the clearly different hand that started writing the text of ML 506 (Fig. 4). This calligraphy evidently was not done by Muhammad Akip, who carried out the rest of the copying. The most significant feature that ties these items into the same sub-group is the inclusion of a similarly designed and coloured headpiece in the opening pages of four manuscripts. The owner of two items (ML 514 and ML 517) wrote down his name, but the other manuscripts do not have any such proof of ownership in them. Now, here in ML 506, we encounter Muhammad Akip as the copyist of practically all the text in the manuscript except for page one, which was written by another scribe. We can only speculate about the reason why the scribe stopped writing after finishing the first page under the headpiece, or possibly even adding the writing at a later stage, but the catchwords at the bottom of page one were repeated by Muhammad Akip as the first words of the next page, showing that the text continues without any disruption.

The last item belonging to this sub-group 2, ML 508(b), is part of a multiple-text manuscript containing three different texts that were put together at a later stage. Based on the type of illumination seen on the opening pages, texts (a) and (c) may be grouped together (Figs 10 and 11), while

text (b) evidently can be ascribed as belonging to the group discussed above. The three texts in this manuscript comprise a two-page *syair* about a visit by the Javanese vice-president of an Islamic organisation for trade and religion and an anecdote about one of its members (text a), an unfinished copy of the *Hikayat Bambang Tok Sena* (text b), and a copy of the *Hikayat Raden Gandawarya* (text c). The three texts were copied in different hands and state different years of copying and/or indications of ownership.

Text (a) may be connected to the establishment of a local branch of Sarekat Islam, the Islamic trade and political organisation, in the 1910s. It mentions 14 Rabiulawal 1332 H (10 February 1914 CE) as the date of the Javanese vice-president's visit and, interestingly, fills the headpiece with information on where the *syair* could be procured: 'Whoever wants to buy the Syair Syarikat Islam can come to Mr Haji Khatib's shop at Kampung Sekanak Sungai Tawar'.²⁷ The unfinished text (b) is concluded with the following ownership statement: 'The mark of this tale (*alamat hikayat*) of Kiagus Haji Agus bin Kiagus Abang of Kampung 2 Ulu, [who] was able to buy it from the Chinese named Baci in Kampung 4 Ulu on 15 Jumadilawal 1334'.²⁸ This is a clear indication of the involvement of local elite and Chinese members of the population in Malay literary practices, something that has

²⁷ The Malay text reads: *siapa // suka mau' beli syair // Syarikat Islam boleh dating di // toqoh [sedekah?] Ci' Haji Khatib Kampung Sekanak Sungai Tawar*. The reading of *toko* ('shop') is uncertain; it seems to say *sedekah* ('alms'); see Kratz 1980, 93 as well.

²⁸ The Malay text reads: '*alamat hikayat Ki Agus Haji Agus bin Ki Agus Abang // Kampung 2 Ulu perigi kecil[?] dapat beli sama orang // Cinah nama Baci Kampung 4 Ulu adanya // Tanggal 15 Jumadilawal tahun 1334* (19 March 1916 CE; the year may also be read as 1337H, which would yield 16 February 1919 CE).

also been noticed with respect to the clientele of the Fadli lending library in Jakarta.²⁹

The third text, (c), concludes with a colophon stating that a certain Kemas Ahmad in Kampung 3 Ulu finished composing the tale at half past five on Saturday afternoon, 3 Jumadilawal 1336 H (14 February 1918 CE).³⁰ The paper on which texts (b) and (c) are written has six holes punched near the middle of the folio, indicating that these manuscripts had been joined in a previous binding. These elements show that the manuscripts were revamped, obviously in Palembang prior to their acquisition by Overbeck in the 1920s.

One manuscript belonging to sub-group 2 of the collection remains to be discussed, which again is similar, but has a few distinct features of its own. This is ML 515, which contains the Malay translation from a Javanese tale entitled *Hikayat Pendawa Lebur*,³¹ on folio-sized paper in a brown leather binding with tooling and an envelope flap. The beginning of the text in the manuscript is also embellished with illuminated headpieces, but different colours have been used and it is designed like a banyan tree (*waringin*), representing the tree of life in heaven, as the caption under the headpiece explains in addition to naming the title of the tale (Fig. 12). The text starts with a *syair* in two columns divided by two vertical lines, which informs the reader that the author translated the tale from Javanese and briefly states the content of the tale. The text, which spans more than 440 pages, shows quite a few embellished or otherwise highlighted punctuation words marking a new section of the text. Such visually enhanced words are quite common in Malay manuscripts and seem to become more decorative in the manuscripts in the Batavia lending-library collection, although perhaps less



Fig. 10: ML 508(a), start of the *syair* with a headpiece containing details of where to buy the *syair*.



Fig. 11: ML 508(c), start of the *Hikayat Raden Gandawarya* with a similar headpiece to ML 508(a).

frequently in the Palembang manuscripts discussed here.³² The text ends in a triangular-shaped colophon in which the scribe identifies himself as Tahir bin Ali from Kampung 19 Ulu. He states that he finished the copying on 7 Ramadhan 1321 H (27 November 1903 CE). He also adds that if family members and friends wish to ‘use’ (*memakai*) the tale, they should come to his home, where they should also return it. A few pages after this colophon, which contain a *syair*, Nong bin Syam from Kampung 11 Ulu signed his name as the new owner of the manuscript in 1909. On the flyleaf of the back cover, we find a note in blue pencil stating that Usuf and Abdul Hamit, both of Kampung 8 Ulu, rented out the manuscript. Unfortunately, no more details about the date or year are mentioned.

The text in this manuscript clearly relates to most of the others in this small collection and so does the layout and binding. As in some of the other items in this collection, we find proof of a change of ownership here, indicating that manuscripts were valuable items that were traded within the local community. There is also proof of borrowing by an individual whose residence was quite near the owner’s home, as we may surmise that Usuf and Abdul Hamit borrowed the manuscript from Nong bin Syam. As mentioned earlier, lists with names of borrowers were also included in the manuscript. This is a point that will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

²⁹ See Chambert-Loir 2013, 21–24.

³⁰ Kratz 1980, 93.

³¹ The relationship between the texts in manuscripts ML 514 and ML 515, which have been ascribed the same title, require further research. Making reference to Drewes, Kratz mentions a five-volume manuscript, which complicates the issue even more (1980: 95–96).

³² Cf. Putten 2017, 191.

Borrowers' notes

The sources of our knowledge about the existence and daily affairs of lending libraries in the Malay world stem from the collections procured by colonial officials looking for study materials for the libraries of their home institutions. For them the manuscripts from lending libraries may have been a last resort, a possible desperate catch in their quest to find written materials about and produced by people in the Malay world. These were not the richly decorated manuscripts from the palace tradition or exquisitely adorned religious manuscripts – the manuscripts in these collections, which some colonial officials did buy eventually, were ephemera to be used and then discarded like newspapers

or other such short-lived media. Fortunately, the proprietor and manager of the Fadli collection in Batavia decided to sell his collection to officials of the Batavian Society and did so in two batches in 1889 and 1899 respectively.³³ A few other manuscripts once owned by small-time entrepreneurs made their way into the repositories of the institutions in a much more random and individual manner, mostly through the legacies of scholars such as Hermann Neubronner an der Tuuk, Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje and Richard James Wilkinson.

The most obvious indication that a manuscript was meant to be rented out in its former life was admonitions and regulations added by the owner, who might have copied or bought the manuscripts for the purpose of making a living. The owner would clearly state his or, sometimes, her name in a note on the flyleaf of the manuscript along with some details about how to handle the valuable object, where to return it and how much it would cost per day. Such signed statements may be repeated quite frequently and highlighted in *syair* form at the beginning or end of the text in the manuscript, as we also find in the manuscripts from Palembang. The frequency of such statements – or simply Muhammad Bakir's signature in the manuscripts he copied for his rental business – suggest that he rented the manuscripts by the



Fig. 12: ML 515, *Hikayat Pendawa Lebur* with an illuminated headpiece on the opening pages.

quire rather than as individual bound objects.³⁴ Borrowers were cautioned to handle the manuscripts with care, as they were the assets of their owner. The entrepreneur and copyist Muhammad Bakir was quite brutal in voicing the spells he issued in his manuscripts to punish wrongdoers, threatening them with a number of diseases if they damaged his manuscripts.³⁵ Lending out manuscripts from their home in Kampung 7 Ulu, Palembang in the 1880s, the two brothers Kemas Ali and Kemas Abdul Hamid also warned people not to write in them, as these were already deteriorating due to the usual wear and tear caused by all the borrowers.³⁶

These warnings were intended to prevent such damage to the manuscripts. The general lack of notes, comments or other marks by the users in the preserved manuscripts might suggest that readers were obedient followers of the rules, but many other factors may also be added as reasons for the lack of marginalia.³⁷ The admonitions by the owners do seem to suggest that there was a common practice of sorts, namely

³⁴ See Chambert-Loir 2013, 5 and Putten 2017, 187.

³⁵ See Putten 2017, 191.

³⁶ The Malay text in pencil on fol. 2^r of ML 516 reads as follows: *Dan lagi saya kasih ta' u kalau sewa janganlah tuan // kasih tulisan pada ini kayat suda kerusakannya orang sewa // dia tulis di sini jadi rusak orang punya barang // dia bikin gampang punya orang tidak pikirkan punya orang // kalau rusak sekarang saya pesan dengan sebetulnya.*

³⁷ Cf. Mulaika Hijjas 2017.

³³ Chambert-Loir 2013.

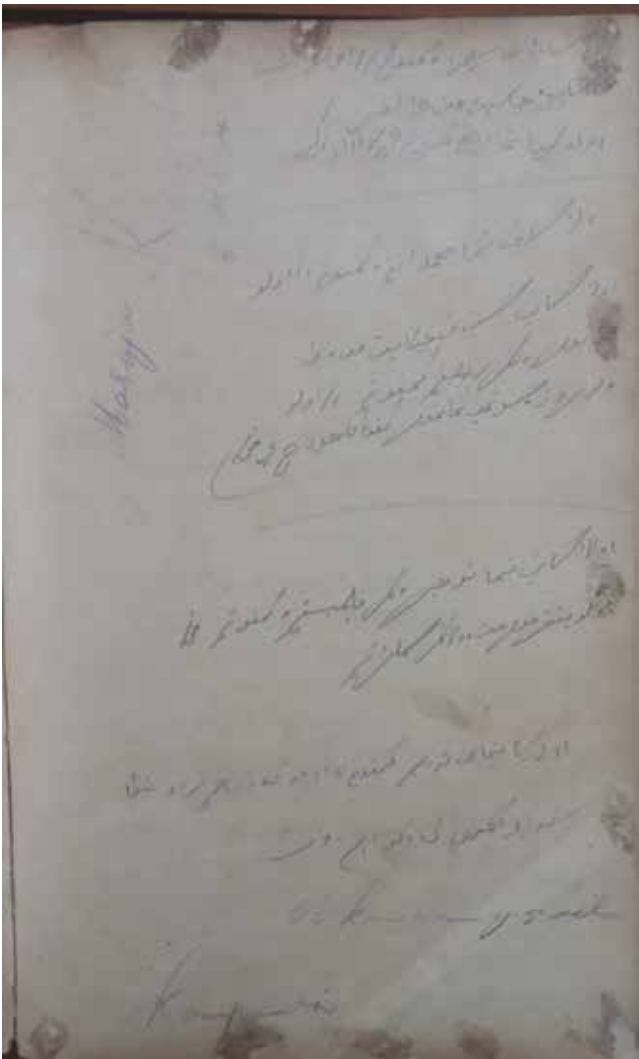


Fig. 13: ML 514, flyleaf at the end of the manuscript with a list of borrowers.

using blank spaces in manuscripts for doodles, scribbles or other purposes. The fact that these are rarely or no longer found in the preserved manuscripts may be due to their reduced attractiveness for collectors in the past, as the manuscripts would fetch a lower rental or selling price. It may be that active copyists such as Muhammad Bakir would make a new, ‘clean’ copy of the text to keep it attractive for their clientele and discard the old, ‘tainted’ duplicate of the text.

Although readers’ scribbles are rare, it is even rarer to find notes in which readers wrote down their opinion about what they had read as a service to the next borrower in a pre-modern, ‘Good reads’ fashion. This makes Rasyimah’s note – found in a copy of the *Hikayat Syah Firman* circulating in the town of Tanjungpinang in Riau in 1863 – so unique:

‘Hikayat Tuan Puteri Nur Lelah was borrowed by Rasyimah on the fourth day of Rabiulawal in the Dutch year 1863 and was read for two nights. Just before the third night it was returned to

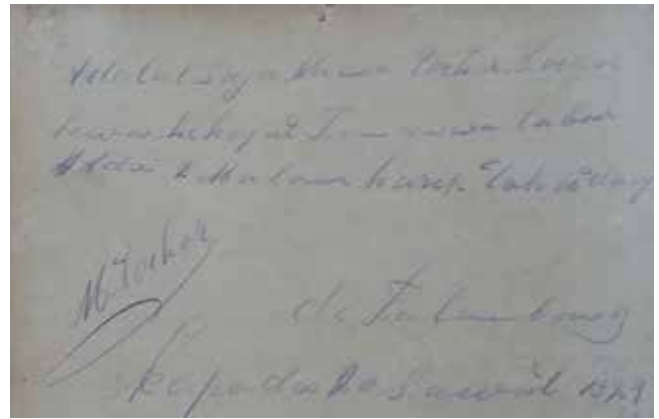


Fig. 14: ML 514, note on the flyleaf by Muhammad Tahir in Latin script.

its owner. We express our profuse thanks for that, because we greatly enjoyed hearing about the exploits of Syah Firman and his brother, together with their wives Tuan Puteri Indera Seloka and Tuan Puteri Nur Lela Cahaya. Then it was returned’.³⁸

Occasionally we do come across names of borrowers and possibly dates when they borrowed the items. Adding notes of this kind would have been part of the library’s user management policy or general records and such lists would probably not have been kept together with each manuscript or been part of it. The inclusion of these notes may have been caused by the need for paper for repairing or rebinding the manuscript. Possibly the paper contained old notes that had already served their purpose and could be discarded, or indeed were included in the manuscript on purpose so that the records were kept with the item. Whatever the reason for their inclusion, in ML 514, one of Muhammad Safi’i bin Muhammad Saleh’s manuscripts, we can find notes comprising borrowers’ names, places of residence and sometimes a year and date and the title of the text added on the folio pages that form the connection between the book block and the back cover of the manuscript (Figs 13 and 14). There are at least twelve people who signed their names and stated their place of residence on the paper during a period of 19 months between the first and last date mentioned in these statements (29 Rabiulawal 1328 – 20 Sawal 1329 H; 10 March 1910 – 14 October 1911 CE). All of them were males living in the south end of the town (*ulu*), near but not in the same *kampung* as the owner in Kampung 9 Ulu. One of the clients may have left us with some more personal data than just his name, as he seems to have signed the ‘register’ twice, once in Latin characters that state his name as Toeher Soedoe. He rented the *Hikayat Pendawa Lebur* for two nights and ‘may want to

³⁸ Quoted from Mulaika Hijjas 2017, 233.

read it again', a note says.³⁹ The other note is in modified Arabic script (Jawi) and is easier to read: 'My name is Tuhir. [I live] in the town of Palembang, in Kampung 13 Ulu, [a] respected [person?] in Semarang'.⁴⁰ The list is proof that the manuscript was borrowed more or less on a regular basis in a very local area and did not cross the Musi River, which flows through the city of Palembang. In fact, apart from the copyist of ML 506, who identified himself as Muhammad Akip of Kampong 23 Ilir, all the people who were either (former) owners or borrowers of the manuscripts can be traced to one of the Ulu neighbourhoods. This emphasises the restricted area of circulation of the manuscripts and the closeness of the relationships between the owners and borrowers.

Epilogue

The manuscripts and the information that can be garnered from them give us some insight into the reading culture of an urban centre in the Dutch East Indies around the turn of the twentieth century. Most of the texts in these manuscripts are Malay renderings of Javanese narratives connected to the shadow-theatre repertoire. All of the manuscripts show signs of intensive use, which suggests heavy borrowing and frequent reading. The German scholar and businessman Hans Overbeck reportedly acquired the lending library's manuscripts in one purchase in Palembang in the 1920s.

Statements in the manuscripts indicate their ownership by different individuals in a variety of neighbourhoods in the town of Palembang over a period ranging from 1883 to 1918. Despite this diversity, the manuscripts show conspicuous similarities in terms of their layout, illumination and binding, which turns the items into quite a homogeneous manuscript collection. One possible cause for such homogeneity is that an indigenous, anonymous entrepreneur in Palembang acquired the seven manuscripts from their respective owners and made the items part of a single collection that his customers would recognise easily. If this line of reasoning is indeed valid, then the new owner infused the manuscripts with a certain agency to offer them to people living in his vicinity as a portfolio with

³⁹ The notes are quite hard to decipher, as they are written in fading pencil or ink and may have endured quite some wear and tear. The note Muhammad Tahir Sudu wrote here seems to read *Adalah saja nama Toeher Soedoe // sewa hekajat Pandawa Laboeh // Ada 2 malam harip tahoe oelang // M. Toeher (signature) // di Palembang // kapada 20 Sawal 1329* ('my name is Tuhir Sudu. I rented the Hikayat Pandawa Lebur for two nights [and] would like to do so again [?]'). The note was signed M. Tahir, Palembang 14 October 1911.

⁴⁰ The Jawi note seems to read *adala saya nama Tuhir di negeri Palembang di Kampung 13 // Ulu yang terhormat di negeri Semarang*.

entertaining reading material that connected members of the community. When these efforts proved to be unprofitable, he sold the customised collection to the German scholar.

The flyleaves of some of the items in the collection contain notes that their borrowers occasionally added. The multiple-page list that was included in manuscript ML 514 may be the entrepreneur's administrative list, allowing him to see who had borrowed the manuscript on what dates. It may have been a second list that was intentionally included with the manuscript, not uncommon in western libraries, or accidentally included when the manuscript was rebound. Whatever the reason may have been to include it, the list shows in a concrete and almost tangible way a community of readers who all lived at the south end of town, very near the original owner of the manuscript. It also provides the clearest indication of how this one manuscript brought a small community of readers together who shared the experience of borrowing and reading it. I suggest that the agency apparently contained by this manuscript is also valid for the whole collection of seven manuscripts, which connected interested people in Palembang and made them into a reading group, giving them a similar experience of sharing the same texts which, conventionally, were read out loud in front of one's family and friends.

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Article

Baiben Zhang (Hundred Volumes Zhang): A Scribal Publisher in Nineteenth-century Beijing*

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Introduction

The scholarly narrative of literary production in late imperial China is dominated by print. Studies of publishing from the Song (960–1279) to the Qing (1644–1911) dynasty have shed much light on the social and cultural impacts of commercial woodblock printing, and have mapped the book trade from both the sides of production and reception.¹ Yet the enduring market for handwritten books, and their copious production outside of elite circles, remains little inspected.² This article

explores a special corner in this field: the commercial production of entertainment literature by a prolific scribal publisher of late Qing Beijing.³

Early twentieth-century collectors in the Beijing area noticed the name ‘Baiben Zhang’ (Hundred Volumes Zhang) because it was ubiquitous. The shop, which produced manuscripts of texts spanning the range of northern genres of popular performing literature, belonged to a milieu of establishments in the city specialized in producing handwritten books of stories and songs for sale. Among the vast collection of books gathered by the Academia Sinica from the Beijing area during the Republican era (1912–1949), there were thousands of manuscripts produced by Baiben Zhang.⁴ There is also evidence to suggest that, among the two major collections of performance literature from Qing Beijing that became dispersed in the mid-1920s, the Chewangfu 車王府 (Mansion of Prince Che) and Shengpingshu 昇平署 (Court Theatrical Bureau) collections, significant numbers of manuscripts originally came from

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The manuscripts examined in this article contain a mix of ‘simplified’ and ‘traditional’ characters. In citing text from them, I have generally tried to replicate the forms; as the subject of orthographic variation is not the focus of this study, however, I have not replicated every variant, but have in a few cases employed the closest approximations available.

¹ Woodblock printing, which was present in East Asia by the early eighth century, was the dominant form of printing in China well into the nineteenth century. On the book trade in late imperial China, see Brook 1999, Brokaw 2007, Brokaw and Chow 2005, Chia 2002, Chow 2004 and Ōki 2004, among others; see also, Ding 2002, He 2013, Hegel 1998, Hsiao 2007, Keulemans 2014, Lowry 2005, Son 2018, Widmer 2006 and Wan 2020 among the growing number of studies by literary scholars that engage intensely with print culture. Monographs in Chinese on print shops (*shufang* 書坊) include Qi 2007 and Cheng 2008. Essays in Bussotti and Drège 2015 expand the view to the large field of non-commercial printing.

² Joseph McDermott, while arguing for the ascendance of printed books over manuscripts in the Yangzi delta in the sixteenth century, emphasizes

the lasting role of manuscript culture in facilitating access to books and its continued presence in the lives of readers (McDermott 2006, 43–82). Writing on an earlier period, Christopher Nugent discusses the market circulation of poetry manuscripts in the Tang dynasty (618–907) (Nugent 2011, 214–221).

³ By ‘commercial production’ I refer to the systematic production of books for sale on the open market, which in this case can be clearly established from Baiben Zhang’s extant manuscripts, including sales catalogs. On the potential ambiguities of the term ‘commercial publisher’ in the case of print publishing, see Chia 2002, 6–7 and McDermott 2015, 112–115. I employ the term ‘entertainment literature’ to refer to a wide range of literature spanning the genres of drama and storytelling. The term has the benefit of not discriminating against social classes. I am inspired here by a conversation with Wilt Idema (6 July 2017, Leiden), who suggested the term in lieu of ‘popular literature’.

⁴ See ‘Xumu 序目’, in Li Jiarui 1933, 5. Li recorded ‘over 3000 varieties’ (*sanqian yu zhong* 三千餘種) of Baiben Zhang manuscripts collected from the Beijing area. The term *zhong* suggests titles instead of volumes (there could be multiple volumes to a title). On the Academia Sinica collection, see note 45 and Appendix 1.

Baiben Zhang and similar outlets.⁵ The sheer quantity of manuscripts of commercial origin from a single area should draw our attention to their social and geographic context, as well as to the handwritten mode of production that made them available to readers and collectors.

Modern notions of publishing, in Chinese as in Japanese, are informed by strong associations with printing, as suggested by the very term *chuban* 出版 ('to publish') in reference to the printing block.⁶ But if one takes a more encompassing view of publishing as a process by which texts are made available to communities of readers, the scribal medium facilitated the propagation of a variety of literature in late imperial times.⁷ Just as manuscripts constituted a desired medium for distributing literature

within exclusive coterie,⁸ so handwritten copies made a variety of entertainment literature available to wider communities of readers. A recent survey of the extant corpus of youth books (*zidi shu* 子弟書), a genre of verse narrative popular in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century north China, has highlighted the overwhelming proportion of handwritten texts in this genre in comparison with printed ones, while shedding light on a niche market for this literature dominated by Beijing's scribal producers.⁹ The findings signal a large commercial landscape for the production of manuscripts in other genres of Chinese vernacular literature as well, whose detailed terrains remain to be explored.

The shops that produced handwritten books of entertainment literature in Qing Beijing were many and varied. Probably the most scholarly attention has been given to the lending shops of the late Qing that made a business of renting books of drum ballads and court-case fiction, exclusively hand-copied and catering to daily reading.¹⁰ An early study by Li Jiarui has described the rental of manuscripts at so-called 'steamed bun shops', whose exact

⁵ The Chewangfu collection comprises a massive corpus of plays, ballads and fiction that surfaced in the second-hand book market of Republican-era Beijing, and that came into public attention when the books were acquired in large numbers by Beijing's Kongde Xuexiao 孔德學校 (a secondary school named after the French philosopher Auguste Comte) in 1925 for its library. The precise identity of 'Prince Che' remains debated among scholars. On the provenance of this corpus, see Huang 2008, 140–151; for an overview of twentieth century Chinese scholarship on it, see Miao 2002. Huang Shizhong relates that, among some 285 manuscripts from this corpus which he studied at Peking University, a number bear traces of Baiben Zhang stamps that have been washed out incompletely, and he suggests that a larger number of them originally came from Baiben Zhang and other shops (Huang 2008, 149–51). As Huang's survey is limited to one genre (*zidi shu*), just what proportion of all the manuscripts in the Chewangfu corpus has commercial origins is a subject that has yet to be investigated. The Shengpingshu was established in 1827 (after the previous Nanfu 南府) as the central institution for managing theatrical entertainment at the court, and it remained in function until 1924, when the Puyi emperor was ousted from the palace. At this time, the bureau's large collection of manuscripts also became dispersed. Among Shengpingshu manuscripts in the present collection of Beijing's Palace Museum (merely a part of the vast original collection of the bureau), there are 26 items bearing Baiben Zhang stamps and 53 additional ones likely of the same provenance, judging from the layout of their title pages (see photo reprints in *Gugong zhenben congkan* vols 697–699). The proportion of manuscripts of commercial origin in this corpus likewise needs investigation. On the history of Shengpingshu, see Ye 2012, 15–56; on the dispersal of the manuscripts in the 1920s and subsequent efforts to gather them, see Xiong 2011.

⁶ See Kornicki 2006, 23–24.

⁷ See Love 1993, 35–37, on 'publish' in the sense of 'making public' (restoring an older meaning of the term), which is central to his conceptualization of 'scribal publication' in seventeenth-century England. In his pioneering work, Love categorized scribal publication into three kinds – 'author publication,' 'entrepreneurial publication' ('copying manuscripts for sale by agents other than the author') and 'user publication' (non-commercial replications) (Love 1987; 1993). In this scheme, the entrepreneurial productions that are the focus of this study make up only one form of scribal publication. Love does not make a case for quantity, but the large numbers of extant manuscripts from Baiben Zhang provide food for thought on this topic as well.

While late imperial China differs markedly from early modern England, the concept of scribal publication is useful for thinking about its varied spheres of manuscript production and circulation. In a study of scribal and print publication in twelfth-century China, de Weerd 2016 utilizes Love's terms to discuss 'author publication' by the scholar Wang Mingqing 王明清 (b. 1127), 'user publication' by his minor official friends, and the special case of scribal publication by the court for its own collections (de Weerd makes a case for the relatively quick acceptance of print in twelfth-century China compared with seventeenth-century England, given the different political statuses and relationships between manuscript and print media in the two cases; she points out importantly that in twelfth-century China, manuscript was not an alternative to print). In the later, Qing period, well-known works of literature such as *Dream of the Red Chamber* and *Strange Tales of Liao-zhai* circulated for decades in manuscript copies before being printed and continued to do so after print publication. On local and rural levels, copying and circulating materials by hand continued to constitute an important part of participation in the literate community, and served various social functions. The emphasis here on a 'community of readers' still excludes the vast amount of handwritten materials that were part of everyday reading and writing, produced to generate merit or served administrative functions, among other things.

⁸ Hegel 1998, 157–162.

⁹ Lu 2018. It remains to be seen whether the youth book was a special case. For comparison, one might look at the drum ballad (*guci* 鼓詞), another popular northern genre for which Beijing was a major center of production in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. While the texts did circulate locally through a variety of manuscripts, in this case their print production across varied locations (in the form of woodblock imprints and lithographs) was more substantial, judging by numbers of extant titles (see Wan 2020, 22, 34–38, 49–53).

¹⁰ On Beijing's lending shops, see Li 1936; Zhang 1996b, 448–451; Sahar 1998, 125; Pan 1999; Cui 2017, 231–241; and Wan 2020, 36–37. There were also lending shops that rented out hand-copied novels in Fuzhou and Canton in the early 1800s; see McDermott 2006, 96–98.

nature remains contested; dates on extant manuscripts suggest that they were a popular phenomenon of the mid-nineteenth to early twentieth century.¹¹ But lending shops were far from the only kind of scribal businesses that existed in late Qing Beijing. From around the same period, many other venues offered manuscripts of entertainment literature for sale. The impressive variety of their offerings can be discerned from extant books of popular songs, prosimetric stories, and various regional operas bearing the stamps of these establishments.¹² Together they corroborate the existence of a thriving market for handwritten books nourished by the vibrant cultures of musical and theatrical entertainment in nineteenth-century Beijing.

In this study, the term ‘scribal publisher’ is used to describe Baiben Zhang and other venues that sourced, produced, and sold handwritten copies of entertainment literature, which can be ascertained on the basis of evidence from their manuscript products. By being responsible for this entire chain of activities, they were veritable publishers, whose range of products suggest not one but multiple clienteles with varying needs, purchasing powers, and interests in the entertainment offerings of Qing Beijing. In the sense that their books were produced through organized scribal production, they were also ‘copying houses’. While I also refer to them as ‘shops’, in recognition of their commercial nature, they are to be distinguished from bookshops that

¹¹ In his early study (1936), Li Jiarui suggests that the ‘steamed bun shops’ (in Chinese: *mantou pu* 饅頭舖, or more colloquially, *zhengguo pu* 蒸鍋舖) that rented out manuscripts of drum ballads and fiction were regular neighborhood shops that sold steamed buns. Zhang 1996b suggests rather that they were a different entity. In his account, they were shops that specialized in selling glutinous rice figurines (*jiangmi mianren* 江米麵人) of theatrical inspiration; he tells of storefronts in old times being decorated with banners inscribed with the names of opera scenes. At the door fronts, assortments of figurines clad in theatrical costumes were stuck all over the parapets on the city walls of a wooden model of the underworld city Fengdu 豐都. The model is known as a *hushi louzi* 斛食樓子 (‘house of offerings’—*hushi* refers to food for feeding the dead used in both Buddhist and Daoist rituals). The rental of manuscripts at these shops was initially a side business.

The dated manuscripts from lending shops that were described by Li Jiarui date between the years 1862 and 1908. Zhang 1996b, 449, cites a passage from *Yanshi jibi* 燕市積弊 published in the Xuantong era (1909–1911) in the *Jinghua xinbao* 京華新報 newspaper describing the popularity of lending shops, which suggests that they were still around at that time. Zhang suggests that they died out around 1926, a few years after the demise of Baiben Zhang and other shops, but provides no information on how he obtained these dates (Zhang 1996b, 451).

¹² Many such manuscripts can be found in the Sokodo Bunko 雙紅堂 collection in the library of the Tōyō Bunka Kenkyūjo 東洋文化研究所 at Tokyo University; they come from the former collection of the Japanese collector Nagasawa Kikuya 長澤規矩也 (1902–1980) (they are photo-reprinted in Huang and Ōki 2013). For a brief overview of the commercially produced manuscripts in this collection, see Huang 2011, 146–150.

solely stocked and sold books; as we will see, the sales of manuscripts took place at regular temple markets as well as at the shops. Baiben Zhang is chosen as the focus of this first study for having the richest sources in extant manuscripts and anecdotal literature; further study of the vast corpus of extant manuscripts may reveal multiple kinds of scribal enterprises and business models.

The story of Baiben Zhang is one intimately linked to a place in time. This article thus begins with portrayals of Baiben Zhang in anecdotal accounts, and the world of temple fairs with which it is remembered by contemporaries and later collectors. In the absence of dates on the manuscripts themselves, these sources help to establish the shop’s flourishing in nineteenth-century Beijing while breathing imagination into the figure of its proprietor Zhang. Proceeding from literary sources to manuscript objects, this article next presents Baiben Zhang as a full-fledged business. Stamps and catalogs provide glimpses into practices from branding and sales to scribal production; the variety of extant products points to the scribal publisher’s participation in multiple entertainment cultures. The article concludes with reflections on Baiben Zhang the shop, its business model, and the factors that contributed to its success in an age commonly perceived to be dominated by print.

Part 1, Baiben Zhang in anecdotal sources

At the beginning of a sales catalog, Baiben Zhang advertises its products in a plethora of entertainment genres:¹³

本堂專抄名班昆弋、二簧、梆子、西皮、子弟岔曲、趕板、翠岔、代牌子、梨腔、小曲、馬頭調、大鼓書詞、蓮花落、工尺字、東西兩韻子弟書、石派大本書詞。真不二價，不悞主顧。逢七逢八，在護國寺東碑亭。逢九逢十，在隆福寺西角門祖師殿。本堂寓北京西直門內大街，高井兒胡同，東小胡同，路北門。世傳四代，起首第一，四遠馳名。

This house specializes in copying [the scripts] of famous troupes performing [operas sung to the music of] *kun* and *yi*,

¹³ The following text comes from Academia Sinica, ms Tj30-232, fols 1^r–1^v; the punctuation is mine. The manuscript has been rebound. The scholar Fu Xihua 傅惜華 (1907–1970) cites the same ad on the first folio of a sales catalog from Baiben Zhang entitled *Erhuang xi mulu* 二簧戲目錄 (Catalog of *erhuang* opera) in his private collection (now at the Chinese National Academy of Arts 中國藝術研究院 in Beijing) (Fu 1954a, 319). The subject of sales catalogs such as these will be discussed in detail in the next part of this article.

erhuang, *bangzi*, and *xipi*; the bannermen's ditties, [including] *ganban* and *cuicha*; linked tunes, lute songs, airs, port tunes, big-drum tales, the-lotus-falls, [as well as] scores, youth books of the eastern and western styles, and big books of ballads in Shi [Yukun] style.¹⁴ [The manuscripts] are true to price, and not sold for less; we do not fool our customers. Every seventh and eighth day, we are at the Eastern Stele Pavilion at the Huguo Temple; every ninth and tenth day, we are at the Ancestral Master's Hall inside the Western Corner Gate of the Longfu Temple.¹⁵ Our house is located north of the East Little Alley, [which extends from] the Tall Well Alley, [which shoots off] the Main Street inside Xizhi Gate. Having been in operation for four generations, we are number one in the business, and our name is known far and wide.

Here is a picture of Baiben Zhang the business, with an impressive spectrum of literature that it copied and sold. Judging by the fact that at least one of the named genres did not evolve until the nineteenth century, the catalog would date to that time or later, when many forms of drama and storytelling flourished on the stages and streets of the capital.¹⁶ From extant catalogs, we know that a number of other shops similarly sold hand-copied books of songs and stories, though we know far less about them than about Baiben Zhang. The shop has left its traces not only on considerable quantities of extant manuscripts but also in a wealth of anecdotal sources: a mid nineteenth-century guidebook to Beijing, a song about a trip to a temple fair, notes by two early twentieth-century collectors, and a compilation of miscellaneous accounts of the Qing. While colored by literary imagination, these sources together attest to the shop's flourishing in the

nineteenth century and provide telling glimpses into the urban world of entertainment to which it belonged.

The specificity with which Baiben Zhang gives its address in the ad calls us to first imagine it on a map (Fig. 1a). Qing Beijing was built on the Ming city, comprised of the Inner City with the Imperial City at its center and the Outer City to its south. In the mid-seventeenth century, the new Manchu regime reorganized Beijing demographically and politically, so that the Inner City would be dominated by the bannermen populations in its service, while non-Banner populations were relocated to the Outer City.¹⁷ Much of the city's commercial activity became concentrated in the areas outside the Inner City's three southern gates, and from the late seventeenth century onwards, playhouses clustered in these areas, with the neighborhood south of Xuanwu Gate in the western section of the Outer City becoming a hub of actors' homes and entertainment activities.¹⁸ In close vicinity, Liulichang, with its many booksellers and publishers, emerged as a prominent center of the book trade by the late eighteenth century.¹⁹

Baiben Zhang's home near Xizhi Gate, in the northwestern corner of the Inner City (Fig. 1b, enlarged detail), was curiously distant from these sites of commercial activity, while striking for its proximity to regular gatherings of amateur performances by Inner City bannermen.²⁰ The earliest such gatherings are known to have existed in the Qianlong era (1736–1795), and these 'clubs' were important channels of entertainment in the Inner City, meeting in princely mansions and on temple grounds that afforded

¹⁴ The list includes an assortment of musical genres in both drama and storytelling, as well as various types of tunes. Li 1933, which describes many of them, includes excerpts from texts contained in Baiben Zhang manuscripts. In the physical context of the books, these terms are perhaps best understood as labels or descriptions of types of products; I have seen a number of them on the title pages of manuscripts. Just how these products corresponded to performed genres will need further investigation.

¹⁵ 'Every seventh and eighth day' includes the seventh, eighth, seventeenth, eighteenth, twenty-seventh, and twenty-eighth days of the month; likewise, 'every ninth and tenth day' includes six days of the month. These are the schedules of regular temple markets at the two temples.

¹⁶ The 'big books of ballads in Shi Yukun style' refer to a form of prosimetric storytelling that derives its name from the famed nineteenth-century Beijing storyteller Shi Yukun 石玉昆 (to be discussed in detailed in the next section). 'Big drum tales' is another nineteenth-century genre of verse narrative. Fu dates the catalog in his collection to the end of the Qing (Fu 1954a, 321; see note 90).

¹⁷ On the relocations of early Qing Beijing and the spatial segregation of the city, see Elliott 2001b, 98–105 and Naquin 2000, 289–298. On the history of the Eight Banners and Banner populations, see Elliott 2001b, 39–88.

¹⁸ On the neighborhood of Xuannan 宣南 as a hub of actors' homes, see Wang Zhengyao 2014, 68–90. From the late seventeenth into the late nineteenth century, the Qing court prohibited commercial playhouses from being established in the Inner City, but attempts at regulations were in part futile; theatrical activities found their way in, and bannermen, who were prohibited from attending commercial playhouses, frequently crept out. See Goldman 2012, 69–76.

¹⁹ See the articles in the special issue of *East Asian Publishing and Society* 7.2 (2017) on Liulichang and Qing book culture; also see Reed 2015. The classic study of Liulichang is Sun 1962.

²⁰ Known as *piaofang* 票房, these were meetings where aficionados of music and theater performed for each other. 'Amateur' is used here not in the sense that performers were less skilled than professional actors and storytellers, but in the sense that they were not paid: to be invited to perform was rather an honor. In this regard, the term *piaofang* is to be distinguished from its present-day connotations of commercial performance and its modern meaning as 'box office'. See Cui 2017, 243–274, which includes a discussion on amateur gatherings in modern-day Beijing.

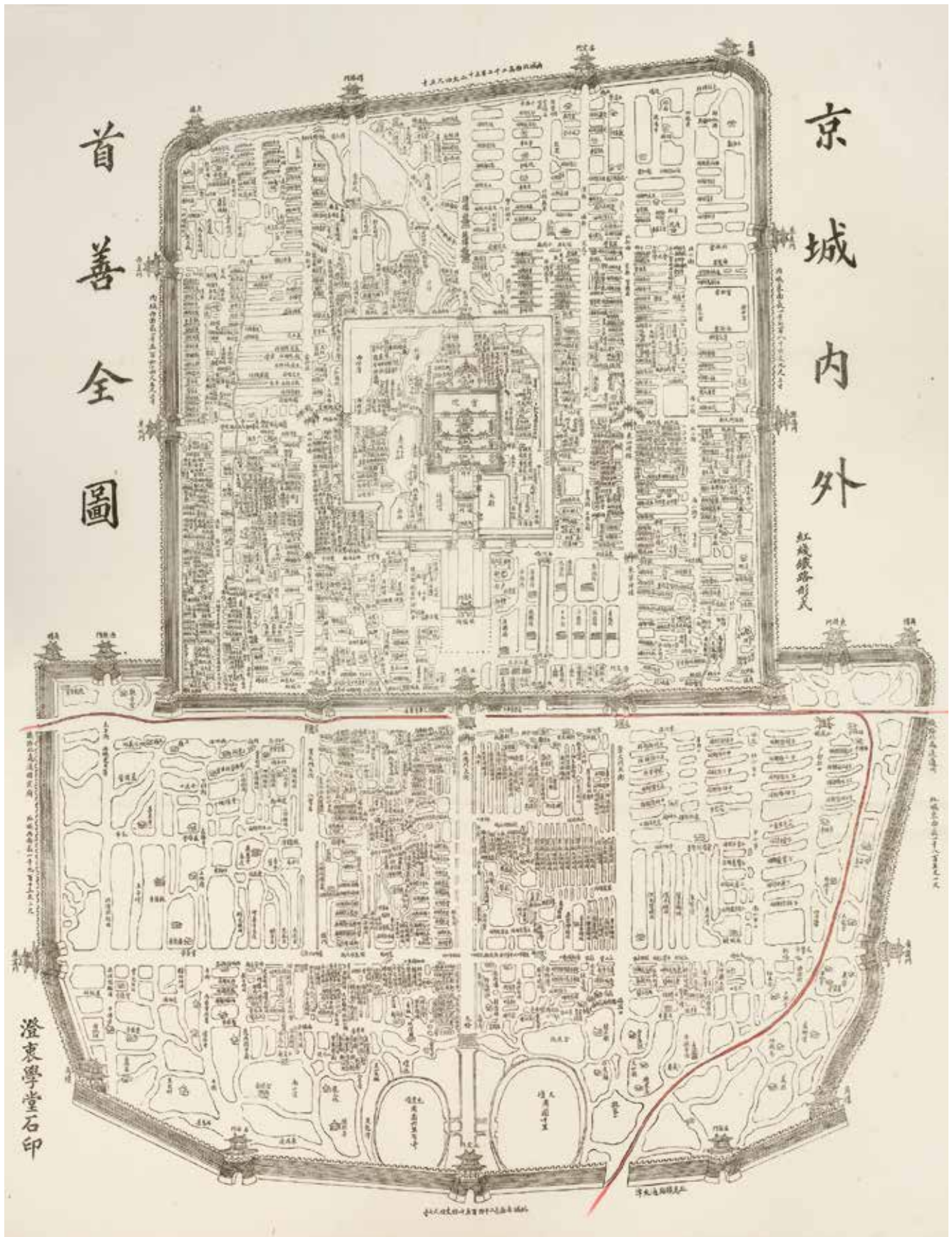


Fig. 1a: The Inner City and Outer City. Lithographed map of Beijing, early 20th century. Private collection, Hamburg. Original size: 63 x 56 cm.

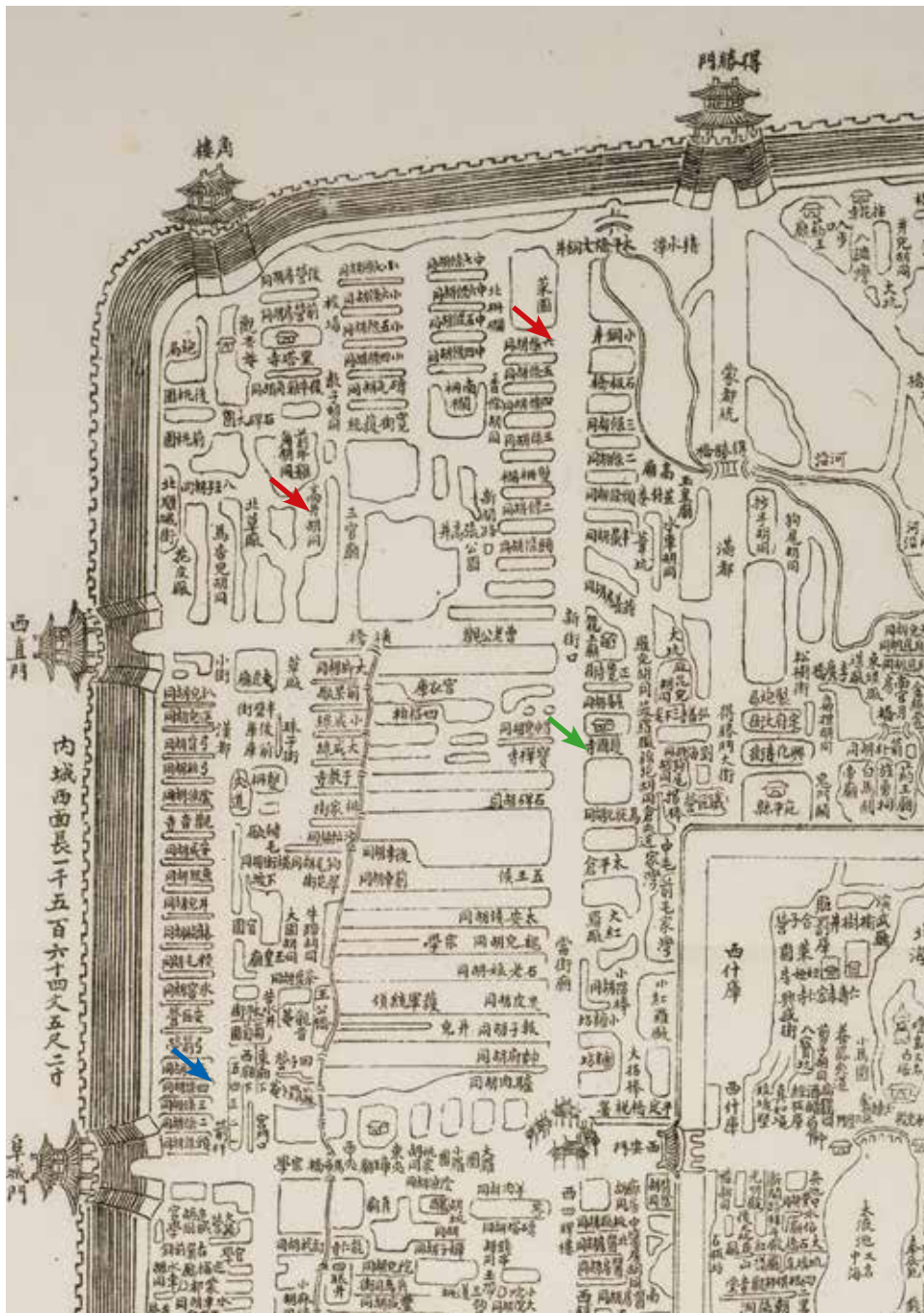


Fig. 1b: enlarged detail: Northwestern section of the Inner City. Baiben Zhang's two known addresses are marked with red arrows. Huguo Temple is marked with a green arrow. The address of another scribal publisher, Leshantang 樂善堂, is marked with a blue arrow.

privacy and protection from state surveillance. Gatherings took place around performances of eight-cornered drum songs (*bajiao gu* 八角鼓) and youth books (*zidi shu* 子弟書), popular forms of storytelling entertainment in bannermen circles, while they also increasingly included performances of scenes from plays, spurred by the popularity of commercial theater and restricted access to them in the Inner City. The theatrical activities of these clubs reached their height in

the late nineteenth century, with over a dozen new clubs having been established in the Guangxu era (1875–1908).²¹ Gatherings took place almost entirely in the western section of the Inner City, with a major cluster in its northwestern section – in close vicinity to Baiben Zhang.

Located just south of Baiben Zhang's home, the Huguo Temple (Huguo si 護國寺) was the site of one of the most important temple markets of Qing Beijing. The location must have made it convenient for the shop to transport its products to the fairs where it regularly sold its manuscripts. Along with the Longfu Temple (Longfu si 隆福寺) in the eastern part of the city, the Huguo Temple hosted markets on regular days of the month from the mid-eighteenth century into the first decades of the twentieth century.²² On these occasions, which were popular outlets of commerce and entertainment for Inner City residents, people from all over mingled and all kinds of things were sold. The fairs were also important sites for the circulation of books, which as early as Ming times took place at floating markets throughout

²¹ See Liang 2018, 14–18, which includes a map.

²² On the two temples and their fairs, see Naquin 2000, 29–31, 115, 629–632; Beijing shi dongcheng qu yuanlinju 2002, 253–268; see also Wei 2018 on the Longfu Temple and the world of commerce associated with it during the Qing and Republican eras.

the city.²³ Being attached to the ritual calendar meant that the sales of manuscripts were part of a larger flow of commodities linked to shared cycles of cultural time and to the locality.²⁴ In anecdotal sources, Baiben Zhang is almost always remembered in connection with the fairs.

The figure of a Mr. Zhang at the temple markets who hand-copied songs for sale appears in the nostalgic reminiscences of an elderly gentleman of Beijing, Xiaolianchi Jushi 小蓮池居士 ('Gentleman of the Little Lotus Pond'), a collector of youth books at the turn of the twentieth century. The youth book was a genre of musical storytelling that flourished in Qing Beijing, associated with the city's bannermen and performed at private amateur gatherings, as well as at teahouses and other sites of entertainment.²⁵ Sometime during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as they faded from performance, the texts came to be collected by readers with great nostalgia. In a preface to a collection of songs dated 1922, Xiaolianchi jushi recalls:

[...] 則謂子弟書始自韓氏，殆無不可。先生者，嘉道間嘗游于京師東郊之青門別墅，所謂拐棒樓也者。所製曲，厥肆競為刊版。廟市有張姓，亦勾稿鈔鬻之。余兒時，都市猶不乏厥肆刊本，劇社亦間有歌之者。每一思維，青鏡年來，長安惟重桃李，此曲人間無聞久矣。

[...] Thus it can be said that the genre of the youth book originated with Mr. Han.²⁶ Sometime between the Jiaqing [1796–1820] and Daoguang reigns [1821–1850] the master

had visited the Blue Gate Mansion in the eastern suburbs of the capital, which was known as the Cane House. As for the lyrics that he composed, Liulichang's shops competed to print them. In the temple markets, there was a man of surname Zhang, who also sought out the texts, which he hand-copied and sold. When I was a boy, in the city markets there was no lack of woodblock-printed youth books from Liulichang's shops, and at theatrical gatherings they were still occasionally sung. Every so often, I think back upon those days; since I have become an old man, people in the capital have cared for nothing but sensuous music. These songs have long been lost among men.²⁷

Mr. Zhang is remembered in connection with the songs of a bygone era, as one who hand-copied songs for sale while the shops of Liulichang competed to print them. In his time, the aging Xiaolianchi jushi was not the only one to remember the music and the books. His preface appears in an anthology of a hundred works in twenty fascicles, edited and compiled by a friend and fellow collector, Jintai Sanweishi 金臺三畏氏 ('The Thrice-Reverent One of the Golden Terrace'), another gentleman of Beijing.²⁸ In his preface, Sanweishi expresses his gratitude to Xiaolianchi Jushi for letting him copy works from his collection, and relates the fate of his own collection of youth books, which had once numbered over one hundred but had in the meantime become dispersed during the sieges on the capital in the year 1900. The present anthology, he wrote, was the result of great efforts to reclaim

²³ Writing in the Wanli (1573–1620) era, Hu Yinglin 胡應麟 (1551–1602) records book markets that gathered with the schedule of the metropolitan examinations and also took place on a monthly basis at the City God's Temple in the western part of the city (see Hu 1958, 56).

²⁴ Temple markets as sites of book distribution have yet to be more fully studied. The experiences of buying books at temple fairs appear in a number of anecdotal accounts by Qing literati: in his essay from the Qianlong era on Liulichang, Li Wenzao 李文藻 (1730–1778) includes a description of booksellers at Longfu Temple (Li 1769, 31); a contemporary, Dai Lu 戴璐 (1739–1806), reminisces on the temple fairs at the Ciren Temple 慈仁寺 in the Outer City, long gone by his time, which in their glory days in the early Qing saw the likes of the great scholar-official Wang Yuyang 王漁洋, who went there regularly in search of books (see Dai 1796, 62–63). See also He Hai 1995, 45–52 and Wei 2018, 79–82 on the Longfu Temple and its book markets and print shops.

²⁵ While I employ the translation of 'youth book' for *zidi shu* 子弟書 in this article (see Elliott 2001a, 279, note 1, on this interpretation), the genre has also been translated as 'scions' tale' and 'bannermen tale' (see Goldman 2001 and Chiu 2018, respectively). Cui Yunhua suggests that the genre evolved at private amateur gatherings and was later adopted by professional performers and became more commercialized (Cui 2005, 92–97).

²⁶ The preface begins with remarks on the musical origins of the youth book genre and proceeds to the writer Han Xiaochuang 韓小窗, who is cited in a

number of youth book texts as their author. The translated passage continues in this vein ('Mr. Han' refers to Han Xiaochuang). On the works attributed to this prolific early composer of youthbooks and questions surrounding his biography, see Huang et al. 2012b, vol. 10, 4468–4479.

²⁷ Huang et al. 2012b, vol. 10, 4455. The italics are mine. The preface is signed 'On the day of the Chongyang Festival in Autumn 1922, written by the Gentleman of the Little Lotus Pond at Hanyanmao Studio, Shichahai' 壬戌之秋重陽日小蓮池居士書於什刹海漢嚴卯齋. The manuscript, *Lütang yinguan zidi shu baizhong zongmu* 綠棠吟館子弟書百種總目 (Comprehensive catalog of a hundred youth books compiled by the Poetry Studio of the Green Pear Trees), is only partially extant; it is presently held at the Capital Library of China and comes from the former collection of Wu Xiaoling 吳曉鈴 (1914–1995) (shelfmark *yi* 己 486).

²⁸ As with Xiaolianchi Jushi, the real name of Sanweishi is unknown; Sanwei is his courtesy name and Lütang yinguan 綠棠吟館 ('Poetry studio of the green pear trees') is his studio name. 'Sanwei' 三畏 comes from *Analec*s 16.8, 'Confucius said, "The gentleman has three things he stands in awe of. He stands in awe of the Mandate of Heaven, of persons in high positions, and of the words of the sages"' 君子有三畏: 畏天命, 畏大人, 畏聖人之言 (Watson 2007, 116). Jintai 金臺 ('golden terrace') here refers to Beijing. Judging by his words in the preface, Sanwei had intended that the collection be printed, but this seems to have never happened.

the works. In the ‘Fanli’ 凡例 (Editorial principles) section, Sanweishi recalls:

是種詞曲在咸、同以來，頗盛興一時，故前門外打磨廠一帶鋪肆，多有刊板出售者。此外如東城之隆福寺，西城之護國寺，有所謂百本張者，亦出售此項鈔本之書目。自庚子兵燹以後，而廠肆既相繼歇業，則百本張亦杳如黃鶴焉。...

Since the Xianfeng [1851–1681] and Tongzhi [1862–1874] reigns, this genre of songs was rather in vogue, and so many of the shops in the Damochang area outside of Qianmen had them carved and printed for sale. There was, in addition, the so-called ‘Baiben Zhang’ at the Longfu Temple in the eastern part of the city and the Huguo Temple in the western part of the city, who sold catalogs of hand-copied youth books. But ever since the sieges of the Gengzi year [1900], the shops of Liulichang shut down one after another, and Baiben Zhang was also gone like the yellow cranes ...²⁹

This passage gives the most precise dates for Baiben Zhang in extant sources, linking the sales of manuscripts to the heyday of youth book performances in the late nineteenth century, and marking 1900 as a clear date for when it ceased. While it is ambiguous whether ‘Baiben Zhang’ refers to a person or a shop, the specificity with which Sanweishi recalls the sales catalogs suggests that he was intimately acquainted with the books. Like the account of Xiaolianchi Jushi, Sanweishi’s narrative subtly positions the manuscript-seller of the temple markets apart from the commercial print shops of the Outer City. It relates the abrupt decline of all to the fate of the city: rather than changes brought about by print technology, the reason later scholars often give for Baiben Zhang’s decline, these notes by a contemporary witness tell a different story.³⁰

²⁹ Huang et al. 2012b, vol. 10, 4460. The yellow crane, associated with transcendence, is a metaphor for the irretrievable. The allusion is probably best known from the poem *Huanghelou* 黃鶴樓 (‘Yellow Crane Tower’) by Cui Hao 崔顥 (d. 754): ‘That man of old has already ridden white clouds away, / And here in this land there remains only Yellow Crane Tower. / The yellow crane, once it has gone, will never come again, / But white clouds of a thousand years go aimlessly on and on...’ (Owen 2000, 828).

³⁰ Later scholars have attributed the decline of Baiben Zhang to the advent of lithography; see Fu 1954a, 317, and Zhang 1996a, 446. Zhang dates Baiben Zhang’s closing to around 1921, but unfortunately does not give further information. Corroborating Sanwei’s account of 1900 as the date when Baiben Zhang closed shop, this year is given on the inside case covers of a series of Baiben Zhang manuscripts by their collector, signed Nahata, as the time when he had them rebound (Capital Library, *yi* 乙 448; these manuscripts are discussed in more detail in the last section of this article). The fact that by then Baiben Zhang manuscripts were clearly collector’s

Besides the reminiscences of these collectors, Baiben Zhang is mentioned in books from its own time. A lively narrative of shopping at a temple fair can be found in *Wandering through the Huguo Temple*, a youth book composed probably in the early to mid-nineteenth century.³¹ The song, which recounts a wealthy gentleman’s wanderings through the Huguo Temple on the day of a fair, takes the reader along for a dazzling tour of the objects, foods, and performances that he sees.³² There, the Zhang brothers make a curious appearance:³³

至東碑亭見百本張擺着書戲本
他翻扯了多時，望着張大把話云：
我定抄一部施公案
還抄一部綠牡丹，亞賽石玉昆
張大不語扭着個臉
又見張二在傍邊擺着泥人
他說：這人兒眉眼兒精神兒做的真奇特
就只是哄孩子拿在家中，一會兒工夫就稀爛無存
張二說：石頭的也怕碰，不然咱們將鉄人鑄
他說：哎呀呀，我可拿不起來，那宏挺沉

When [the gentleman] came to the Eastern Stele Pavilion and saw Baiben Zhang with books of tales and plays laid out, He perused them for a long time and said, looking at Zhang Da: ‘I’d like to order a copy of *The Cases of Judge Shi*, And also a copy of *The Green Peony*, just as if Shi Yukun [had told the story].’ Zhang Da did not say anything and frowned;

items suggests that they were no longer part of the circulating entertainment literature.

³¹ The approximate date can be inferred from known biographical information about the text’s author, who is mentioned in the story itself to be Helüshi 鶴侶氏 (‘Mr. Companion to the cranes’), or Aisin Gioro Yigeng 奕廣 (1809–1848), twelfth son of Prince Zhuang 莊親王 (Mianke 綿謀, 1763–1826). On his life and other works, see Chen 2003b, 76–77, Chiu 2018, 236–257, and Huang-Deiwiks 2000, 65–66. Guan 1991, 17, dates this text to the period spanning the Daoguang (1821–1850) and Xianfeng (1851–1861) eras.

³² One skillful reading has highlighted the multi-media and multi-sensory nature of this marketplace, where performances and objects were likewise commodities (Keulemans 2014, 113–124). This song has also been treated in Chiu 2019, 52–53 and 276–278; Wan 2020, 34–36.

³³ Several manuscripts of this work are extant, including a Baiben Zhang manuscript held at the Chinese National Academy of Arts. See Huang et al. 2012a, 427–428. The text cited below is taken from *Guang Huguoosi 逛護國寺*, Fu Sinian Library, ms no. T652, photo-reprinted in *Suwenxue congkan* vol. 398, 614–638 (the cited text appears on 620–621). The punctuation is mine; the line breaks are made after those in the manuscript.

Then [the gentleman] saw Zhang Er beside him, with his display of clay figurines.

[The gentleman] said: ‘These figures have such exquisite expressions!

Only, if one were to bring them home to entertain the children, They’ll be beat up into a mash in no time.’

Zhang Er replied: ‘Why, even stone would fear being smashed – lest we mold the figures from iron!’

The gentleman said: ‘My goodness, I won’t be able to pick those up, they’d be much too heavy.’

The scene vividly portrays an encounter between the gentleman and the Zhang brothers. The man’s exchanges as he wanders through the temple market show that he was a regular there, but not always welcomed by proprietors, especially as he flaunts his wealth and worldly knowledge but fails to commit to purchasing. While the scene appears as part of a literary representation, we notice two things: the manuscripts and figurines were on display at a stall of sorts and sold side by side, and the gentleman came to a decision to ‘order copies’ (*dingchao* 定抄) of specific titles after perusing books on display – possibly model books or catalogs. *The Cases of Judge Shi*, of which the gentleman wanted a copy, belonged to a group of court-case stories that was widely popular in nineteenth-century Beijing, propagated through performances, handwritten copies, and printed books.³⁴ *The Green Peony* was the title of a well-known martial arts novel that was widely printed during the same period, while the mention here of the famed Beijing storyteller Shi Yukun 石玉昆 (fl. Daoguang era, 1821–1850) would rather seem to point to a prosimetric version of the

³⁴ The cases of Judge Shi are the subject of an early court-case adventure novel with a preface dated to 1798; on extant printed edition, which all date to the nineteenth century, see Ōtsuka 1987, 169–170. The stories were also the subject of plays and prosimetric performances in the Beijing area (see Zhao 1936 and Miao 1998a, 109–110; Wan 2009, Wan 2010, and Wan 2020, which also discuss *The Green Peony*). Just what kind of text is requested by the gentleman in this scene is a topic for investigation, as is the relationship between the varied media of performance, manuscript and print in the circulation of court-case stories in the Qing. On this topic, see Blader 1977; Cui 2008; Keulemans 2014; Miao 1998a and 1998b; and especially Wan 2020.

A glimpse into the connected realms of oral and manuscript circulation can be had from a preface to the court-case novel, *The Cases of Judge Peng*: ‘The *Cases of Judge Peng* is copied all over the capital. In broad streets and shallow alleys, it is narrated everywhere as an extraordinary tale appetizing to all. Therefore there are countless storytellers performing this tale at temple fairs, with audiences packed so thickly that they form a solid wall and the listeners forget that they are tired...’ (translation from Keulemans 2014, 90; the source cited, ‘*Peng gong’an xu*’ 彭公案序 [Preface to *The Cases of Judge Peng*] by Sun Shoupeng 孫壽彭, in Ding 1996, vol. 3, 1616, comes from a 1892 imprint by Benlitang shudian 本立堂書店).

story closely related to performance.³⁵ Later in the narrative, the gentleman wanders to the stall of another bookseller, Tongletang 同樂堂 (‘House of mutual delight’), which, like Baiben Zhang, had ‘books of tales and plays’ (*shuxi ben* 書戲本) on display.³⁶ There, the proprietor presents his client with two newly composed works by Helüshi, one of which is *Wandering though the Huguo Temple*. ‘These two new tales are rather witty’ (*zhe liang hui xinshu dao huixie* 這兩回新書到談諧), pleads the proprietor eagerly.³⁷ In the marketplace of books, a story that is new and up-to-date is apparently a desirable commodity.

The floating sites of the temple fair stalls and the image of Mr. Zhang the person are likewise evoked in an expanded edition of the popular nineteenth-century guidebook, *Dumen jilüe* 都門紀略 (Records of the Capital), which introduced the sights and shops of the capital to sojourning merchants and other visitors.³⁸ An entry ‘Baiben Zhang’ appears in a section on ‘Skills’ 技藝, amid a list of curiosities ranging from tooth-pulling medicine to wrestling performances:

此人所賣者，皆是細小之物，但其樣式、材料，皆照市廛所用之大傢俱無二，能做大作小，曲盡其妙。雖為供搢紳少年之玩賞，而其心思之精巧，可謂極矣。在東西廟及廠甸等處出攤。

³⁵ Wan 2009, 10–11, points out textual affinities between the novels *The Green Peony* and *The Cases of Judge Shi*. On nineteenth-century imprints of the former, see Wan 2009, 133; the appendix in the same book lists performance-related versions of the story, including two manuscripts containing drum ballad versions. In the context of the passage, the mention of the storyteller Shi Yukun seems to suggest that the story was also transmitted in the form of a Shi-style tale, a prosimetric genre of storytelling named after him (to be discussed in more detail later in this article). Shi’s biography remains sketchy despite his legacy as a storyteller; see Keulemans 2014, 65–95, on his legacy. *Zhongguo quyi zhi* 1999, 654, gives Shi’s dates as c.1797–c.1871.

³⁶ The story divulges that the proprietor ‘newly added small pictures [in the books] in the hopes of striking it rich’ 近日他新添小畫想發財 (*Suwenxue congkan* vol. 398, 630), so he was selling illustrated books. It is not clear to me whether Tongletang’s books were hand-copied or printed.

³⁷ *Suwenxue congkan* vol. 398, 630. The other work mentioned is *The Worldly Fellow* (*Shidao ren* 時道人), which like *Wandering through the Huguo Temple* portrays a man of many pretensions; for extant versions of this text, all of which are manuscripts, see Huang et al. 2012a, 420–421.

³⁸ On *Dumen jilüe* (original preface by Yang Jingting 楊靜亭 dated 1845), which was printed numerous times in the late nineteenth century, see Naquin 2000, 464–467; Mokros 2017, 149–154. The version I have consulted is an expanded edition, entitled *Xinzheng Dumen jilüe zaji* 新增都門雜記, dated Tongzhi 4 (1865), printed by an unspecified Liulichang print shop; the line *Liulichang shufang cangban* 琉璃廠書坊藏板 (‘the blocks are kept by the print shop at Liulichang’) appears on the cover. It is digitized from the collection of the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin. The punctuation in the Chinese text cited below is mine.

What this person sells are all trifles, yet in style and material they are just like the full-sized furniture of the city shops; made smaller in size after the likeness of the big objects, they are utterly exquisite. Though they are for the amusement of youths from well-to-do families, utmost thought has been put into their making. They are sold on display at the Eastern and Western Temples and in the Changdian area,³⁹ among other places.

Here Mr. Zhang appears as a seller not of manuscripts, but rather of exquisite miniatures. The description of ‘youths from well-to-do families’ who purchased the objects for amusement is a particularly suggestive one. As a guidebook that boasts insider’s looks into the capital’s shops – and that thrives on its own fashioning of what is caché – its description probably contains a measure of exaggeration. At the same time, the passage reveals something about the status of the miniatures as collectibles; one may imagine the manuscripts to have had a similar status and clientele.

Still another account of Baiben Zhang can be found in the extensive anecdotal collection *Qing bai leichao* 清稗類鈔 (A categorized compendium of miscellaneous accounts from the Qing dynasty), compiled in the Republican era, which gives a lively account of Zhang the man. He is the protagonist of an entry entitled ‘Niefen 捏粉’ (Squeezing dough). The entire entry is translated below.⁴⁰

近畿所傳捏粉之術。匠心獨運。鬚眉畢現。雖油畫鉛畫毛筆畫等。方之蔑如也。其法取麵粉一團。與求畫者對案坐。目不轉瞬。私自於袖底捏其形狀。捏成。取出。則面部上之一凹一凸。一紋一縷。無不纖微適合。擅此技者。光緒朝為津人張姓。張初為人鈔錄戲曲。顧記聞極博。能將各曲本互異之處。折衷改正。期於盡善而止。以是得名。津人稱之曰百本張。自百本張之號出。而其真姓名轉隱。後改學捏粉。精其技。然性傲僻。非遇囊空爨絕。持金求之。不應也。時天津巨富首推海張五。張一日踵門往訪。乞借五千金。海張五拒之。張曰。君不應我。能無後悔乎。曰。何悔之有。張退。乃依海張五之身量長短肥瘦。捏成一形。置之通衢。而插草標於其首。曰。出賣海張五。過者驟

見之。以為真海張五也。即而視之。乃啞然失笑。詢其價值。則以五千金對。少一文不售也。海張五素以財力雄視一方。聞之。引為大辱。而又莫可如何。乃潛使門客。如數購之。而與張言和焉。張晚年目盲。偶墜地。折傷肢體。不能營舊業。遂困頓以死。

The art of ‘squeezing dough’ transmitted in recent times is a display of utmost skill. [The dough-artist can portray his subject] down to every strand of his brow and beard. Though there is oil painting, painting with pigments,⁴¹ and brush painting, they are all looked down upon by him. The way it is done is as follows: he takes a ball of flour and asks the client to sit across the table from him. Without looking down for a second, he squeezes the dough into the subject’s likeness covertly under his sleeves. When he is finished and takes out the figurine, there is not a single dent and bulge, line or crease on it that does not match exactly [the subject’s] face.

In the Guangxu era, one who was adept at this was a Mr. Zhang of Tianjin. In the beginning, he had copied operas for people, and was therefore extremely knowledgeable in all manners of things. He could reconcile and correct the differences among the various librettos to the point of perfection, and got his name from this; the Tianjinese called him ‘Hundred Volumes Zhang’.

Once the name ‘Baiben Zhang’ got out, his true name became obscure. Later on he switched his profession and learned to squeeze dough. He became adept in the art, yet being proud and aloof in his nature, he would not accede to pleas with cash unless he was depleted of funds and on the brink of starvation. At the time, Hai Zhang Wu [‘loaded Zhang Wu’] was the richest among the billionaires of Tianjin, and one day Zhang deigned to visit his door, imploring to borrow five thousand cash. Hai Zhang Wu refused. Zhang said: ‘So you don’t agree. Will you really not have any regrets?’ Hai Zhang Wu replied, ‘What can there possibly be to regret?’

Zhang left, and afterward he molded into shape a figure matching the height and girth of Hai Zhang Wu, which he stood up on the main thoroughfare with a straw sign stuck on its head that said, ‘Hai Zhang Wu for sale’. Passers-by, struck by it, took it to be the real Hai Zhang Wu; upon further

³⁹ Changdian 廠甸 can refer to a particular section of the Liulichang area or to Liulichang more generally.

⁴⁰ Xu Ke 1917 (rpt. 1966), vol. 5, ‘Gongyi lei’ 工藝類 (Category on crafts), 44–45. I have reproduced the division of the paragraphs in the Chinese text in accordance with the reprint, but have parsed them into sections in the English translation for smoother narrative flow.

⁴¹ Tentative translation of *qianhua* 鉛畫; it is not clear to me which technique it refers to and whether it comes from a Western artistic tradition (as oil painting does) or a Chinese one (as brush painting does). In premodern Chinese texts, *qian* 鉛 can refer to pigments used for the beautification of the face or for correcting documents.

examination, they would break into laughter. When asked the figure's price, Zhang would reply 'five thousand cash', and would not sell it for a dime less. Hai Zhang Wu, who had dominated the land with the power of his wealth, found this tremendously humiliating when he heard about it, but could do nothing. He secretly sent a retainer to buy the figure for the asked price and made peace with Zhang.

Zhang became blind in his old age. On one occasion, he fell and broke his limbs. Being unable to maintain his livelihood, he died in poverty.

In this account, Mr. Zhang was the protagonist of a delicious story of a humble artisan who outwitted a rich man, possessed of perfect skill in his trade yet not making obeisance to wealth and power. The story, with its colorful characters and narrative flourishes, has the flavor of hearsay rather than historical fact.⁴² Given that in all the other sources, Baiben Zhang was located in Beijing, the compiler here most probably confused its proprietor with a contemporary of the same surname, Zhang Changlin 張長林 (courtesy name Mingshan 明山, 1826–1906) of Tianjin, who was a skilled maker of theatrical figurines. Just like the dough-artist recounted in the story, Zhang Mingshan was known to have possessed the skill of squeezing clay into the likeness of real persons while sitting across from them. His theatrical figurines were apparently collected by foreign visitors for high prices and displayed in museums; he was also said to have made 'little portraits' (*xiaozhao* 小照) for people.⁴³

That the *Qing bai leichao* confused the two Zhangs, one from Beijing and one from Tianjin, probably has something to do with the fact that Baiben Zhang had at one point sold miniature figurines, as corroborated by the accounts in the youth book and in the guidebook *Dumen jilüe* cited earlier. The art of making theatrical figurines was popular in many

⁴² The *Qing bai leichao*, first printed in the Republican era, was the product of a complex process of compilation. In the section on editorial principles preceding the main text, the compiler Xu Ke 徐珂 (1869–1928) divulges that its sources ranged from his personal jottings to books in his private collection, and still to newspapers, which often did not record their sources in detail. Xu further noted that, 'when it comes to what is chronicled, I do not dare to boast about the thoroughness of evidence, but have mostly made it a point that [stories] possess beginnings and endings' 凡所記載。固不敢以考證精詳自詡。要以具有本末者為多。See 'Fanli' 範例 (Editorial principles), 2–3, in Xu Ke 1917 (rpt. 1966), vol. 1.

⁴³ See Zhang Dao 張燾 1884 (rpt. 1986), 65. *Zhongguo xiqu zhi* 1999, vol. 2, 933, mentions extant figurines approximately 30 centimeters high at the Chinese National Academy of Arts in Beijing. Whether Zhang's theatrical figurines are present in overseas collections is a topic for further investigation. On the modern-day continuation of the Zhang family business, see Johnson 2015.

areas of China in the nineteenth century, both in Jiangnan and the north, and the existence of commercial workshops that produced both manuscripts and figurines is a topic that merits further exploration.⁴⁴ Like figurines, manuscripts were handmade objects; while differing in their raw materials, the two trades shared a common connection with a world of entertainment, which generated continual demand for fine, handmade, collectable things.

While the *Qing bai leichao* anecdote tells the story of a proud artisan who had utter disregard for commerce, it can also be read as an ironic comment on the power dynamics of the urban marketplace. Whatever we might make of the story and the other anecdotes before it, we can observe a few things about Baiben Zhang the business: its links to the world of theater and storytelling performance; its life connected to the temple fairs; its urban, commercial setting; and its date in the mid- to late nineteenth century. While these sources provide rich food for the imagination, in the next part of the article we examine extant manuscripts for a glimpse of the real-life operations of Baiben Zhang. They go far beyond the figure of Zhang the man, real or imagined, to reveal a full-fledged business operation.

Part 2, The operations of a scribal publisher

Extant manuscript sources reveal Baiben Zhang to have been a leading producer in what was a highly competitive business of copying manuscripts of entertainment literature for sale. Thousands of manuscripts gathered during the Republican era, scattered among various collections in Asia today, attest to the quantity and variety of output from scribal producers of Qing Beijing.⁴⁵ For all their wealth, the commercial origins of

⁴⁴ Likewise, the topic of how traditional clay sculpture flourished alongside other varieties of portraiture from painting to photography merits further study. On portraiture (painting) in the Ming and Qing, see Ruitenbeek 2017.

⁴⁵ While the subject of collections merits a study of its own, a note is due on Beijing's special place in this history. In the 1920s and 1930s, the city was a locus of activity among China's elite, whose intense interest in the literary past outside of the canons was accompanied by active efforts to collect, on both institutional and private levels, diverse kinds of vernacular literature ranging from drama and fiction to folk songs and stories (see Hung 1985). In the collections that formed in this period, the antique book dealers of Liulichang played a major role. Baiben Zhang manuscripts were ubiquitous and appeared in many different collections. Notable figures to mention include Liu Fu 劉復 (Liu Bannong 劉半農) (1891–1934), who together with his assistant Li Jiarui 李家瑞 (1895–1975) collected thousands of manuscripts from Baiben Zhang for the Academia Sinica (see Fu 1954, 329, prefaces in Liu and Li 1932 and in Li 1933, and Wang Fansen 1998, 124–130; also see Børdahl 1999 and Zeng 2010 for general background on the collection, presently at the Fu Sinian Library at Academia Sinica in Taipei). Fu Xihua 傅惜華 (1907–1970) and Wu Xiaoling 吳曉玲 (1914–1995), both Beijing natives from a slightly later generation of scholar-collectors, privately



Fig. 2: Baiben Zhang manuscript, title page and back cover, Waseda University Library, Fūryō Bunko, *bunko* 文庫 19 F400 Z79. Baiben Zhang stamps (red and black) appear in the center of the title page. To the left, from top to bottom, the written characters indicate 'Song on opium' (the title), 'Moon over the West River' (the tune), 'Five hundred' (the price).

these manuscripts have not yet been systematically examined, while many of the books have lost their original appearance in the course of collection and preservation. With further study pending, this section of the article takes a first look into the operations of Baiben Zhang as a scribal publisher. Three aspects are examined: branding, sales, and scribal production.

Branding

That selling manuscripts of entertainment literature was a competitive business is attested by the variety of stamps branding the manuscript products. Stamping was a common

collected many Baiben Zhang manuscripts (their collections are kept today at the Chinese National Academy of Arts and the Capital Library of China, respectively). Finally, among Japanese sojourners to China in the Republican era, the notable Nagasawa Kikuya 長澤規矩也 (1902–1980) collected many Baiben Zhang manuscripts (they are presently at the Sokodo Bunko at Tokyo University and the Nagasawa Bunko at Kansai University; on Nagasawa's collection, see Huang 2013). A full count has yet to be made of how many Baiben Zhang manuscripts are extant. Besides the libraries mentioned above, manuscripts are also held at the Fūryō Bunko at Waseda University, the National Library of China, Peking University, and the Palace Museum in Beijing. There are also items in Tianjin, Hebei, and St. Petersburg.

practice for branding handcrafted goods;⁴⁶ on manuscripts of commercial origin, a stamp bearing the name of the shop typically appears on the title page.⁴⁷ In his early study, Fu Xihua had enumerated nine different kinds of stamp and stamp combinations from Baiben Zhang, the greatest variety among known shops.⁴⁸ Several kinds of common stamps can be seen today. The most elaborate one is a rectangular stamp with the characters 'Baiben Zhang' in the middle

⁴⁶ These include paper; see Chang 2012 on papermakers' stamps found in printed books and manuscripts from the Qing dynasty. See Huang 2008, 151, on stamps containing the characters *Renlihe ji* 仁利和記 that he noticed inside two youth books, which have also been found by the scholar Boris Riftin (Li Fuqing 李福清) inside a handwritten copy of the novel *Gu wangyan* 姑妄言 (Words of delusion) held in Russia. Huang suggests they are the stamps of a papermaker.

⁴⁷ In this article, I refer to the first page of extant manuscripts bearing the title of the text as the 'title page'. In many cases, they were probably the front covers, but it is possible that some manuscripts also had covers that originally went over the title page but became lost in the process of being rebound. Typically, the genre of the text is labeled below the title, along with the price of the manuscript.

⁴⁸ Fu 1954a, 317–319.



Fig. 3: Baiben Zhang stamp, from the title page of *Zidi shu mulu* 子弟書目錄 (Catalog of youth books), Capital Library of China, *yi* 乙 459.



Fig. 4: Baiben Zhang stamps on the title page of *Chuzi tan zidi shu* 厨子嘆子弟書 (A cook's laments, a youth book). Capital Library of China, *yi* 乙 448, vol. 2.

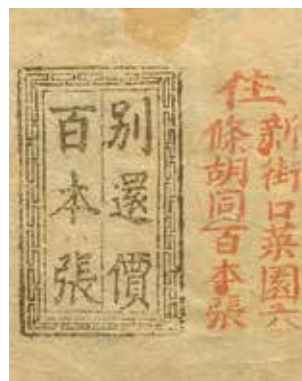


Fig. 5: Baiben Zhang stamps on the first inside folio of a catalog of youth books, Capital Library of China, *yi* 乙 473.

occasion (Fig. 5) I have come across a stamp stating ‘Baiben Zhang, located at Xinjiekou / Vegetable Garden Alley Number Six’ (*zhu Xinjiekou Caiyuan Liu- / tiao Hutong Baiben Zhang* 住新街口菜園六 / 條胡同百本張). Given that the two addresses are in close proximity to each other in the northwestern section of the Inner City, they were probably not different ‘branch’ sites, but rather indicate that the shop changed its location over time. The latter address was most probably the earlier one.⁵⁰

Fu Xihua has noted still other stamps on the front of manuscripts.

(Fig. 2); the ornamental frame contains the motifs of plum blossoms, bamboo, pines, and chrysanthemums interspersed among the characters *tong sou wu qi* 童叟無欺 (‘[we] do not fool the young or the elderly’) in the left column and *yan wu er jia* 言無二價 (‘no less than the stated price’) in the right. A character at the top of the frame and another at the bottom make up the word *shichuan* 世傳 (‘passed on for generations’). On manuscripts I have seen, the stamp impressions measure between 3.7 by 5.7 cm and 3.9 by 5.9 cm. Often this stamp is accompanied by another stamp on its right side, stating ‘from the Qianlong era to today; we don’t sell for less, so don’t haggle’ *you Qianlong nian qi zhi jin / shaoqian bumai bie huanjia* 由乾隆年起至今 / 少錢不賣別還價 (Fig. 2).⁴⁹

Besides the stamp of Baiben Zhang with floral decorations, there is another black stamp bearing Baiben Zhang’s name that appears on the title pages of manuscripts (Fig. 3). Measuring approximately 2.7 by 4.6 cm, it bears a frame of geometric patterns and contains six characters in the middle, in two columns and divided by a line, stating ‘don’t haggle / Baiben Zhang’ (*bie huanjia / Baiben Zhang* 別還價 / 百本張). This stamp may appear alone or in combination with another red stamp giving the address of the shop. Most commonly seen is the address of Tall Well Alley (Gaojing Hutong 高井胡同) on the Main Street inside Xizhi Gate (Xizhimen Dajie 西直門大街) (as in Fig. 4), but on one

One stamp has *bie huanjia / Baiben Zhang* 別還價 / 百本張 enclosed by a simple double-line rectangular frame, which Fu suggests to date to the earliest time in the life of the shop; at times it is accompanied by a red stamp below it, stating ‘look carefully / no returns’ (*dang mian kan ming / na hui bu huan* 當面看明 / 拿回不換).⁵¹ There exists still another red stamp that states, ‘Patrons, please correctly distinguish [the products of] Baiben Zhang: “I readily make Huqiu [style] playthings; the theatrical figurines represent the joyous scenes of musical performance”; then [the manuscript] is genuine’ (*fan cigu zhe renzhun Baiben Zhang ziji cheng zuo Huqiu wan / wu xiren dai su xingyue xirong bian shi zhen buwu* 凡賜顧者認準百本張: 自己成做虎丘頑物, 戲人代塑行樂喜容, 便是真不悞).⁵² The curious couplet contained in these lines, while referring to the theatrical figurines sold by Baiben Zhang, may have served another function. Possibly it was a code for clients

⁴⁹ This has led scholars to believe that Baiben Zhang existed since the Qianlong era, but perhaps it is best interpreted as an advertisement until other sources are found. Here and below, I use “/” to indicate the divisions of columns as they appear in the stamps.

⁵⁰ On the manuscript in which the latter stamp appears, see note 80. This is the earliest known catalog of youth books, and an exception also in the sense that it is preserved with its original cover and binding, with no title page but the stamp appearing on the first inside folio. This stamp was not described by Fu Xihua and would appear to be an addition to the nine types of stamps and stamp combinations he enumerated. The same applies to the stamp depicted in Fig. 4; Fu describes several stamps containing the same Gaojing Hutong address, but they are worded slightly differently (Fu 1954a, 318–319).

⁵¹ Fu 1954a, 317–318; image 331.

⁵² Fu 1954a, 317–318. The punctuation is mine. Fu parses the lines differently (自己成做虎丘頑物戲人, 代塑行樂喜容).

to affirm the authenticity of the products, but just how exactly this functioned remains to be investigated.⁵³

Besides stamps on the title pages, there are also those that appear on the back of manuscripts. There is a long red stamp, with densely packed text in three columns and measuring 1.8 by 8.4 cm (Fig. 6):

本堂書戲岔咄⁵⁴，當日挑看明白，言明隔期兩不退換，／
諸公君子莫怪。由乾隆年起至今，少錢不賣。住西直／
門內高井胡同中間東小胡同東頭路北，張姓行二。

[If you wish to purchase] the stories and songs of this house, carefully select [the books] on the day of purchase; we have the express policy of not accepting returns or exchanges of items past the date, and seek you gentlemen's understanding. From the Qianlong era to the present, we have not sold our products for less than the stated price. [Our shop] is located north of the eastern end of the East Little Alley, midway down Tall Wall Alley inside Xizhi Gate. [My] surname is Zhang; [I am] second in the family line.⁵⁵

These lines caution customers, again, that once sold, manuscripts are not to be returned or exchanged. The instructions to 'carefully select [the books] on the day of purchase' suggest that customers were given the chance to examine products before making purchasing decisions. This calls to mind the temple market displays for which Baiben Zhang was known, where probably selections of

products were readily available for purchase.⁵⁶ The no-return policy may be directed against customers who take manuscripts home simply to read and then return them, and distinguishes Baiben Zhang from lending shops.⁵⁷

The resemblance between the name of Baiben Zhang and that of a certain 'Baiben Gang' 百本剛 ('Hundred volumes strong') has led one scholar to suggest that the latter may

have been an early incarnation of Baiben Zhang.⁵⁸ Like Baiben Zhang, Baiben Gang has a variety of stamps. The most striking one is a rectangular black stamp that appears on the title pages of manuscripts,



Fig. 6: Baiben Zhang stamp on the last folio verso, *Qianjin quande zidi shu di ba hui* 千金全德子弟書 第八回 (Virtue's rewards, a youth book, the eighth chapter), National Library of China, 107299.



Fig. 7: Baiben Gang / Yijuantang stamp on the title page of *Yuzan ji zidi shu san hui* 玉簪記子弟書 參回 (The golden hairpin, a youth book, the third chapter), Capital library of China, yi 乙 506.

⁵³ Lei Mengshui, who worked in Liulichang bookshops in the Republican era, tells of a practice used by antiquarian bookshops to encode prices using couplets. Books had both clearly marked prices and 'secret' prices, denoted by combinations of characters selected from special ten-character couplets known only to insiders. With significant differences between the marked prices and 'secret' prices, the system privileged distinguishing customers (Lei 1988, 70–71). The Baiben Zhang couplet is clearly something else, but the last line ('then [the manuscript is genuine]') suggests that it served some kind of authenticating function.

⁵⁴ This character, of uncommon orthography, stands here for the character *qu* 曲 ('tune'); in the present context, *chaqu* 岔曲 ('song') seems to refer to songbooks generally, while elsewhere it denotes a genre, such as when it is referred to as *zidi chaqu* 子弟岔曲 ('bannermen's ditty'; ref. the ad cited earlier). The character *qu* 咄 also appears in the title of a Baiben Zhang sales catalog of 'port tunes' (*matou diao* 馬頭調), where it is used interchangeably with the character *qu* 趣 (see *Matou diao shangqu mulu*, Appendix 2).

⁵⁵ National Library of China, ms no. 107299. The punctuation is mine. This stamp is also described in Fu 1954a, 318. One might note that, in *Wandering through the Huguo Temple*, there were two Zhangs – the younger brother, Zhang Er ('Zhang number two') was the one who sold clay figurines.

⁵⁶ Given that sales catalogs from Baiben Zhang list hundreds of titles, it is hard to imagine that it had all its products on display. Probably sales took places through a combination of purchases on the spot and pre-ordering through sales catalogs; this topic will be discussed in detail in the next section.

⁵⁷ One might also take into account the books' physical features. Manuscripts from lending shops are often made of durable, thick paper to stand wear and tear, while bearing elaborate stamps detailing lending policies such as daily exchange of books and loss of the initially paid deposit with their untimely return (Li 1933, 161). Baiben Zhang manuscripts, in contrast, tend to use thin paper, which corroborate their status as collectibles rather than books for frequent use. Sun 1999 has described Baiben Zhang as a lending shop, but does not provide evidence for this and seems to have confused some sources.

⁵⁸ Huang 2008, 150–151.



Fig. 8: Baiben Gang / Yijuantang stamps inside a rebound set of manuscripts. On the left, a black stamp and red stamp appear on the title page of *Mashang lianyin zidi shu shiyi hui shi'er hui* 馬上聯姻子弟書 十一回 十二回 (Love on the battlefield, a youth book, the eleventh and twelfth chapters). On the right, two red stamps appear on the verso of the last folio of the previous volume, presently bound together with this one (in the center: stamp with the characters 'Baiben Gang ji'; on the bottom left: circular stamp). National Library of China, 119984.

with the characters *Yijuantang / Baiben Gang* 億卷堂 / 百本剛 ('House of million scrolls / Hundred volumes strong') inside a frame of geometric patterns (Fig. 7). The frame and double column design make the stamp highly reminiscent of a common Baiben Zhang stamp (Fig. 3). Four tiny characters

are embedded in the left part of the frame, spelling out *jingdu di yi* 京都第一 ('number one in the capital'); another four characters are embedded in the right part, which would most probably have said *tian xia chi ming* 天下馳名 ('famed under



Fig. 9: Yijuantang stamp, from the title page of *Mashang lianyin zidi shu jiu hui shi hui* 馬上聯姻子弟書 九回 十回 (Love on the battlefield, a youth book, the ninth and tenth chapters). National Library of China, 119984.

heaven’).⁵⁹ The stamp, measuring 2.7 by 5.4 cm, is slightly longer than the Baiben Zhang stamp of similar appearance (2.7 by 4.6 cm).

There are also several red stamps from Baiben Gang. On the title pages of manuscripts, the black stamp is sometimes accompanied by a red stamp containing the characters *Yijuantang ji* 億卷堂記 (‘mark of the House of Million Scrolls’) inside a square frame of geometric patterns (Figs 8 and 9).⁶⁰ On the back of manuscripts, two additional kinds of red stamps can be found. One depicts the characters *Baiben Gang ji* 百本剛記 (‘mark of Hundred Volumes Strong’) (Fig. 8), and measures 1.9 cm wide and 4.7 cm long; the other is a circular stamp with a geometric frame encircling the same characters, with a diameter of 3.2 cm (see Figs 8 and 10).⁶¹ Whether ‘Hundred Volumes Zhang’ and ‘Hundred Volumes Strong’ were indeed affiliated calls for further investigation; it is possible that they were competitors.⁶²

⁵⁹ In the figure, the first character is not discernible on the rebound title page of the manuscript (*Yuzan ji zidi shu* 玉簪記子弟書, Capital Library, *yi* 己 506), but can be inferred from the parallel wording.

⁶⁰ This combination occurs on the title pages of several manuscripts that contain chapters from a youth book (*Mashang lianyin zidi shu* 馬上聯姻子弟書, National Library of China, 119984; the text is fourteen chapters long). In their present form, the manuscripts have been rebound together into two volumes; some of the title pages have been removed.

⁶¹ Huang 2008, 150, tells that he had seen this stamp on various manuscripts at Peking University.

⁶² Admittedly, it is much harder to come across Baiben Gang manuscripts today. Wu 1982, 152, notes their rarity.



Fig. 10: Circular stamp on the back cover of the last manuscript in a set of manuscripts rebound together (*Lulin yuan quan shisan hui* 路林緣 全十三回; *Lulin yuan* in thirteen chapters), Capital Library of China, *ji* 甲四 1317, vol. 4.

Stamps from many other shops can be seen on extant books today. Besides Baiben Zhang, the shops Bieyetang 別埜堂 (‘The idyllic house’) and Jujuantang 聚卷堂 (‘House of accumulated scrolls’) leave the largest numbers of extant manuscripts. Bieyetang employed simple stamps with two four-character lines; one stamp advertises ‘The mark of Bieyetang / distinct from the rest’ (*Bieyetang ji / yu zhong bu tong* 別埜堂記 / 與眾不同), while another states ‘The seal of Bieyetang / distinct from the rest’ (*Bieyetang bao / yu zhong bu tong* 別埜堂寶 / 與眾不同).⁶³ Similarly, the stamp of Lao Jujuantang 老聚卷堂 (‘The old House of accumulated scrolls’) advertises: ‘Lao Jujuantang / Number one in the business’ (*Lao Jujuantang / qishou diyi* 老聚卷堂 / 起首第壹).⁶⁴ Possibly related to Lao Jujuantang, the shop Jujuantang 聚卷堂 has a ‘Li of Jujuantang’ (*Jujuantang Li* 聚卷堂李) stamp, with the characters encased by a frame of geometric patterns (Fig. 11).⁶⁵ Stamps existed as well for

⁶³ An example of the first stamp can be seen on the manuscript KS 4-056, Fu Sinian Library, *Caochuan jie jian kuaishu* 草船借箭快書 (Stratagem of the straw boats, a fast tale); the stamp impression measures 2.5 by 4.9 cm. An example of the latter stamp can be found on the title page of a catalog of youth books held at the Chinese National Academy of Arts, reproduced in Huang 2012, 3. *Bao* has the common meaning of ‘treasure’, but in this context it most likely refers to ‘seal’.

⁶⁴ An example of the stamp can be found on the title page of a manuscript at the library of the Tōyō Bunka Kenkyūjo, *Sokodo bunko gikyoku* 雙紅堂 戲曲 234, *Chunxiang naoxue* 春香鬧學 (Chunxiang causes a riot at school); it is reproduced in Huang and Ōki 2013, vol. 29, 55. The stamp impression measures 1.8 by 4.2 cm; the manuscript has been rebound.

⁶⁵ Li is a surname – probably that of the proprietor of the house. The stamp appears on the title page of a Jujuantang sales catalog among the set of manuscripts with shelfmark *yi* 乙 1008, Capital Library of China, entitled

Tongletang 同樂堂 ('House of mutual delight'), Jingyitang 景異堂 ('House of unusual sights'), Dunhoutang 敦厚堂 ('House of honesty'), Yanghetang 養和堂 ('House of nourishing harmony'), and Huijutang 匯劇堂 ('House of collected plays').⁶⁶ And there was another Baibentang 百本堂 ('House of hundred volumes') located in the Outer City, outside of Zhengyang Gate, which apparently sold medicine along with manuscripts of works in genres very similar to those Baiben Zhang sold.⁶⁷ While most of these shops leave few traces other than a few stamped manuscripts, they provide inklings into the diversity of the manuscript market. In the next section, we look at the variety of products offered by Baiben Zhang and its model of sales from catalogs.

Products and sales

In his early study of Baiben Zhang, Fu Xihua had observed its special function of both producing and distributing

Bajiao gu shidao qu lianzhu diao paizi qu qingdan 八角鼓 時道曲 連珠調 牌子曲清單 (Clear list of linked tunes: eight-cornered drum songs, tunes-of-the-times, jingles); the catalog is rebound together with other manuscripts.

⁶⁶ An example of the Tongletang stamp can be seen on manuscript T1-001, Fu Sinian Library, *Shu Luohan zidi shu* 數羅漢子弟書 (Counting the arhats); the Jingyitang stamp appears on KS 2-029, Fu Sinian Library, *Yuni he* 淤泥河 (The muddy river); manuscripts containing stamps from the other shops are photo-reprinted in Huang and Ōki 2013, vol. 15; also see Huang 2011, 146–150. Huang categorizes books from Yanghetang among manuscripts of theatrical troupes and aficionados, but the neat, regular handwriting in the manuscripts suggests rather that they were produced by a copying house (see photo reprints in Huang and Ōki 2013, vol. 7, 38–324).

⁶⁷ See the manuscript at the library of the Tōyō Bunka Kenkyūjo, *Sokodo bunko gikyoku* 雙紅堂 戲曲 108, *Po Hongzhou* 破紅洲 (Thwarting the siege of Hongzhou), reproduced in Huang and Ōki 2013, vol. 15, 488. This Baibentang has two elaborate stamps. One of them describes its location 'outside of Zhengyang gate in the capital' (*jingdu Zhengyang men wai* 京都正陽門外), and contains the characters *Baibentang Chen ji* 百本堂陳記 ('mark of [Mr.] Chen of Baibentang') in the middle. In smaller characters, it lists the shop's offerings, which include products in the genres of *xipi* 西皮, *erhuang* 二簧 [the character *huang* is not legible but can be inferred], and *dagu shu* 大鼓書.

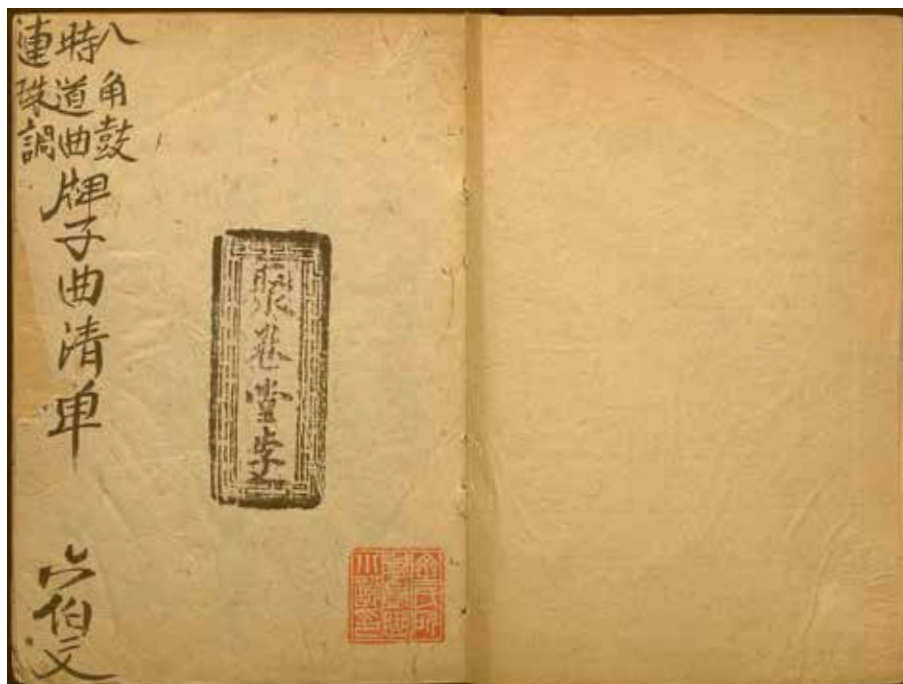


Fig. 11: Title page of a Juuantang sales catalog, *Bajiao gu shidao qu lianzhu diao paizi qu qingdan* 八角鼓 時道曲 連珠調 牌子曲清單 (Clear list of linked tunes: eight-cornered drum songs, tunes-of-the-times, jingles). Juuantang's stamp appears in the center. Capital Library of China, yi 乙 1008.

manuscripts for sale, a model that was shared by other shops.⁶⁸ Extant sales catalogs provide telling glimpses into their common business model of selling manuscripts from lists of titles. The catalogs, labeled with prices like other manuscript products, were clearly intended to be sold, and must be distinguished from internal inventories of any kind. By my estimate, there are at least twenty extant catalogs from Baiben Zhang, and several catalogs from Leshantang 樂善堂, Bieyetang 別墅堂, and Juuantang 聚卷堂.⁶⁹ Below, I provide a preliminary survey of Baiben Zhang catalogs, with attention to their dates, prices, and repertoires of products.⁷⁰ Dates for extant catalogs corroborate Baiben Zhang's flourishing in the late nineteenth century. Like other manuscript products, catalogs do not bear dates, but approximate dates can be inferred from a combination of circumstantial evidence, including titles based on historical events and known information about genres of musical and

⁶⁸ Fu 1954, 317. See also Stevens 1973, 23, which translates 'Baiben Zhang' as 'Omnibus Jang' and refers to it as a 'copying house'.

⁶⁹ Besides Baiben Zhang, only Leshantang's address is known; see note 108. Judging from the fact that manuscripts produced by the two other shops were also collected from the Beijing area in the early twentieth century, they were probably also located in Beijing.

⁷⁰ For a full list of extant catalogs, see Appendix 2.



Fig. 12: Title page, *Erhuang xi mulu* (Catalog of *erhuang* opera), Capital Library of China, *yi* 己1008. The manuscript has been rebound and given a new cover; notes by Wu Xiaoling on the inside cover (right) tell of his acquiring the manuscript in August 1972 in the Haiwangcun (Liulichang) area of Beijing.

theatrical performance. Among all the shops we know of, Baiben Zhang seems to have had the greatest variety of products. Its sales catalogs are extant for *erhuang xi* 二簧戲 (*erhuang* opera), *gao qiang xi* 高腔戲 (*gaoqiang* opera), *dagu shu* 大鼓書 (big-drum tales), *matou diao* 馬頭調 (port tunes), and *zidi shu* 子弟書 (youth books); probably there were also catalogs of products of other kinds.⁷¹ Fu Xihua, who had an impressive knowledge of performed repertoires, dated the various catalogs in his personal collection to the Tongzhi (1862–1874), Guangxu (1875–1908), and Xuantong eras (1909–1911).⁷² More recently, a scholar has dated Baiben Zhang’s catalogs of youth books between the Xianfeng era (1851–1861) and 1900.⁷³ Still another study has dated a Baiben Zhang catalog of *gaoqiang* opera to the beginning of the Guangxu era (1875–1908).⁷⁴ Together, these studies locate the shop in the late nineteenth century,

⁷¹ See Appendix 2. Fu 1954a suggests that the shop must also have had a catalog for *bangzi* 梆子 opera. In the list above, *erhuang xi* and *gaoqiang xi* describe theatrical repertoires (to be discussed in detail below), while *dagu shu* and *zidi shu* are related genres of verse narrative. *Matou diao* is actually not a genre, but rather indicates a type of tune; these ‘port songs’ were popular in the capital already in the early nineteenth century and disappeared some time before the 1930s, and were known to have been sung by courtesans (see Li 1933, 77–80 and Wang 2008).

⁷² See Fu 1954a, 319–328.

⁷³ Chen 2003a, 19–20; Chen 2003b, 50–52; Chen 2017, 52–54.

⁷⁴ Fan 2010.

while calling for further investigation into its evolution in time.

What information does a sales catalog contain? Generally, it contains a list of titles in a particular genre or type of tune (which we may think of as a ‘product line’), along with corresponding prices. Like other manuscript products, it typically features a title page stamped with the name of the house; next to the stamp, the title and price of the catalog are written (Fig. 12).⁷⁵ The majority of extant catalogs refer to themselves as *mulu* 目錄 (‘catalog’) in their titles, and occasionally *dan* 單 (‘list’) or *qingdan* 清單 (‘clear list’).⁷⁶ The main unit of account for prices listed in the catalogs is the *diao* 吊 (‘string’), with one *diao* being equivalent to one thousand units of cash.⁷⁷ Prices under one *diao* are simply written as numbers in increments of a hundred, i.e., *babo* 八伯 [百] ‘eight hundred’

for eight hundred cash; amounts over one *diao* are indicated by a number, with the ‘hundred’ assumed, i.e., *yi diao er* 一吊二 (literally, ‘one diao two’) for ‘one diao and two hundred cash’.⁷⁸

A varied sample of Baiben Zhang catalogs can be found in the collection of the Capital Library of China, including three catalogs of youth books, a catalog of *erhuang* opera, and a catalog of *gaoqiang* opera. All adopt a similar layout in which prices are listed below the titles, five to a page.

⁷⁵ The figure depicts a catalog of *erhuang* opera, shelfmark *yi* 己1008, Capital Library of China. Measuring 14.6 by 10.8 cm, it has been trimmed and rebound together with another catalog.

⁷⁶ See Appendix 2. Fu 1954a, 326–328, lists two catalogs of port tunes that contain the terms *shangqu dan* 上趣單 and *shangqu mulu* 上嘯目錄 in their titles. According to Fu, *shangqu* means the songbooks were ‘of utmost flavor’ (a literal interpretation of the characters), but the colloquial nature of the term may call for a different interpretation.

⁷⁷ The *diao* is a unit of account that is used in many places but is satisfied by different amounts of actual cash (in the form of copper coins) depending on the cash system used. On the *diao* as a unit of account in Beijing, see King 1965, 60–62 and 160–162. While *diao* literally means ‘string’, in the context of the prices listed in the catalogs, it would refer to a unit of account rather than a physical string of coins.

⁷⁸ This is the price on the title page shown in Fig. 12.

Table 1: Baiben Zhang catalogs in the collection of the Capital Library of China.

Title	shelfmark	number of folios	number of titles
<i>Gaoqiang xi [mulu]</i> 高腔戲[目錄]	<i>ding</i> 丁 6610	21	204
<i>Erhuang xi mulu</i> 二簧戲目錄	<i>yi</i> 己 1008	27	270
<i>Zidi shu</i> ⁸¹ [子弟書目錄]	<i>yi</i> 己 1008	32	319
<i>Zidi shu</i> ⁸² [子弟書目錄]	<i>yi</i> 己 473	27	262
<i>Zidi shu</i> 子弟書目錄	<i>yi</i> 己 459	32	314

They contain between 204 and 319 titles and between 2 and 32 folios (Table 1).⁷⁹ Manuscript *yi* 己 473 is a rare example of a Baiben Zhang book preserved with its original cover and binding; given that it contains no title and is stamped on an otherwise blank first folio, it seems to be an exceptional case (Fig. 13).⁸⁰

Probably it would be useful to begin with the two catalogs of *xi* (‘drama’ or ‘opera’).⁸³ Beijing of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was a flourishing center for drama, with performances taking place everywhere from the court to commercial theaters and teahouses, and still to temples and merchant guilds that regularly sponsored plays in regional traditions. The variety of dramatic genres in which Baiben Zhang offered products reflects the diversity of sounds present in the capital – from the lasting presence of Kun opera, the genre from Jiangnan favored by elites, to various regional musical traditions of more humble origins that would eventually find their way into the distinct ‘sound of



Fig. 13a: Original cover and binding of a catalog of youth books ; Capital Library of China, *yi* 乙 473.

⁷⁹ The third catalog (catalog of youth books, shelfmark *yi* 己 1008) is incomplete; see note 81.

⁸⁰ This catalog, *yi* 乙 473, Capital Library of China, is the earliest of Baiben Zhang’s youth book catalogs. See notes 101, 112, and 120.

⁸¹ This catalog is incomplete, and has been rebound together with the *erhuang xi mulu* (with the same shelfmark). The title page is missing; the title in brackets above is my description. One folio has been ripped out at the end. An identical Baiben Zhang catalog held at the Chinese National Academy of Arts reveals that it should have 5 more titles, making for a total of 324 titles (Chen 2003b, 50).

⁸² The catalog does not contain a title.

⁸³ I use ‘drama’ and ‘opera’ interchangeably to refer to the theatrical traditions of *xi*, which are invariably also musical in performance.



Fig. 13b: Baiben Zhang stamp appears on the first inside folio; Capital Library of China, *yi* 乙 473.



Fig. 14: Page layout with titles in the top row, numbers of volumes in the middle row, and prices in the bottom row. Stamp impressions appear above many titles. Capital Library of China, *yi* 己 1008, fol. 13^v and fol. 14^r (right to left).

Peking’ as described by late nineteenth-century observers from the south.⁸⁴ While much ink has been spilled over the histories of these genres, the processes of textual production associated with them remain little studied. Extant manuscripts and printed plays reveal multiple routes by which texts traveled between stage and page, as well as various agents – private, imperial, and commercial – involved in their production and consumption. The role of scribal publishing in this larger picture has yet to be fully explored.

Erhuang opera, originally a regional form, rose to great popularity in the capital in the course of the nineteenth

⁸⁴ See Wang 2014, 192–193, on the ‘sound of Peking’. On the diverse genres of opera in Beijing and their hierarchy in the eyes of the educated elite, see Goldman 2012, 115–119 and 129–131. Goldman 2001, 77–78, suggests that the texts contained in Baiben Zhang’s manuscripts resembled performed versions, and speculates that audience members may have used the manuscripts as libretti to follow what was being performed (she cites Qi Gong’s recollections of his childhood experiences; see Qi 1983, 313–314). Also cited is an intriguing passage by the playwright Chen Moxiang 陳墨香 (1884–1943) from his *Guanju shenghuo sumiao* 觀劇生活素描 (Sketches from a theatergoer’s life) of c.1934, which portrays the typical figure of a bottom-rate theater enthusiast: ‘He buys a handful of hand-copied play scripts from Baiben Zhang and then, without any attempt to differentiate, he treasures them as though they embodied the rule of law, and then, ass-backwards, he starts criticizing this and pontificating about that....’ (Goldman 2001, 78). Note that this passage postdates the time of Baiben Zhang; the cheap price of the manuscripts during the Republican era (probably through the second-hand book market), as well as clientele such as the figure described above, may have contributed to perceptions of these manuscripts as cheap books, but the status and prices of the manuscripts in their own time are likely to have been much higher (see the discussion to follow).

century.⁸⁵ The relatively large number of extant catalogs of titles in this genre suggests that it was a major product line for Baiben Zhang.⁸⁶ The present catalog (Fig. 12) contains over two hundred titles of *erhuang* opera, varying between one and eight volumes. Each page contains five columns and three rows, with titles in the top row, numbers of volumes in the middle row, and prices in the bottom row (Fig. 14). Stamp marks reveal signs of use. A circular red stamp appears above more than 80 of the 270 titles; many of these same titles are also marked with an ink dot. These overlapping marks possibly indicate two sides of a business

transaction, or a collector stamping the items already acquired.

While the manuscript is labeled as a catalog of *erhuang* opera, it also contains fifty-one titles from the repertoire of *Kunqiang* (Kun opera), a form originally from the Kunshan area in Jiangnan that came to be widely celebrated as an art genre in the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and that retained its associations with elite culture in later times.⁸⁷ In Qing Beijing, Kun opera was one of two genres sanctioned by the court, and was performed in commercial theaters as well as the palace well into the late nineteenth century, at the same time

⁸⁵ Strictly speaking, *erhuang* refers to a modal system (or its main mode); *erhuang* and *xipi* 西皮 together form the *pihuang* 皮黃 musical system, the basis of what is presently known as Peking opera. There are differing accounts of the origin of the term *erhuang* (Wang 1934, 43–49). The performance of *erhuang* music in the capital has been traced back to 1790, when troupes from Jiangnan brought new regional sounds to the Qianlong emperor’s stages. Zhu Jiajin suggests that, at the beginning of the Guangxu era (1875–1908), troupes still did not refer to themselves as performing *erhuang* and *xipi*. According to Zhu, the earliest appearance of the term *erhuang* in the records of the Court Theatrical Bureau is in the year 1869; records from the following year mention *erhuang xi* being added to the program (Zhu 1995, 90; 92).

⁸⁶ Fu 1954a describes two different *erhuang xi* catalogs in his collection. Several catalogs at the Fu Sinian Library, whose shops are unknown, are also catalogs of *erhuang xi*.

⁸⁷ In spite of its perceived image of refinement, *Kunqiang* was performed by commercial troupes in Beijing during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in a manner that often incorporated musical styles from other operatic genres (see Goldman 2012, 116–117, 129–131). In the Kunshan area, there is a rural tradition, dating to the late nineteenth century, of *Kunqiang* being performed by often illiterate professional musicians in the agricultural off-season (Swatek 2002, 139–140).

that *erhuang* and other regional musical traditions rose to great popularity.⁸⁸ The breakdown of *erhuang xi* and *Kunqiang* titles in our catalog – 219 for the former and 51 for the latter – points to a time when *erhuang* had taken ascendance; that titles in both genres were listed suggests that they were directed to the same parties of musically versed clients. Toward the end of the catalog, under the heading ‘Kun melody’ (*Kunqiang* 昆腔), the titles are listed with a second tier of prices for texts marked with notation – ‘with music and beats’ (*dai gongche banyan* 代[帶]工尺板眼) or simply ‘with beats’ (*dai banyan* 代板眼) (Fig. 15).⁸⁹

These products were clearly intended for singing; possibly they appealed to audiences familiar with the tradition of recital singing known as ‘pure singing’ (*qingchang* 清唱).⁹⁰



Fig. 15: Capital Library of China, *yi* 己1008, fol. 26^v and fol. 27^v, list of *Kunqiang* titles. Prices for manuscripts with musical notation are noted in the middle tier.

⁸⁸ The ascendance of *erhuang* and *xipi* over *Kunqiang* in the course of the nineteenth century is a favorite topic among historians of Chinese drama, though just when and how this happened remains subject to debate. Zhu Jiajin observes that, as late as 1877, *Kunqiang* troupes constituted a significant proportion of commercial troupes registered with the Court Theatrical Bureau (four out of eleven); he suggests that in Beijing, *Kunqiang* did not fully give way to *erhuang* and *xipi* until the end of the Guangxu era (1875–1908) (Zhu 1995, 90; 95–96).

⁸⁹ *Gongche* notation, which employs Chinese characters to denote notes on the scale, was a common form of musical notation in the nineteenth century, and is still used today among village musicians in north China (Jones 1995, 120). *Banyan* indicates rhythm, with *ban* being the strong beats and *yan* being the weak beats.

⁹⁰ Beginning with Ye Tang 葉堂 (1736–1795) in the late eighteenth century, elite practitioners defended the recital tradition of ‘pure singing’ in response to the popular, staged Kun opera performed by commercial troupes (Goldman 2012, 129–131). It is not clear to me where Baiben Zhang products lay on this axis (I have not seen any manuscripts containing a *Kunqiang* text), and whether the two tiers of products, with and without notation, would have appealed to different interests (i.e., reading and singing). In the catalog, the prices given for *Kunqiang* products marked with notation range from two to more than four times as much as the same work without notation. While *erhuang* titles listed include complete plays, the titles listed in the *Kunqiang* section appear to be individual scenes from plays, with no volumes given (even though in both musical traditions there is the practice of performing short scenes from longer works, known as *zhezixi* 折子戲). In his study, Fu Xihua had described two *erhuang xi* catalogs in his collection, which had variations in their *erhuang xi* listings but contained an identical list of over sixty *Kunqiang* titles at the end (*yi* 己 1008 contains fifty-one, but being rebound, it is possible that the folios are not complete). According to Fu, these titles reflected those performed in Beijing theaters at ‘the end of the Qing’, when *Kunqiang* was in decline (Fu 1954, 320–21). On the other hand, he suggested that the *erhuang xi* titles contained in one catalog included dramas popular in Beijing venues before the Xianfeng (1851–1861) and Tongzhi (1862–1874) eras. Would this suggest that not all the *erhuang xi* products were contemporaneous to performances?

Manuscripts intended for singing can also be found among Baiben Zhang’s products of *gaoqiang xi* 高腔戲, or *gaoqiang* opera. Known in the capital since the early Qing, *gaoqiang* opera and Kun opera were the only genres officially approved by the court through the mid-nineteenth century, when the former saw a revival with princely patronage.⁹¹ A Baiben Zhang *Gaoqiang xi mulu* (Fig. 16) has been dated to the early Guangxu era (1875–1908) partly on the basis of theatrical roles contained in it, which do not appear in sources before that time.⁹² The small booklet of 21 folios contains over 200 titles, beginning with auspicious plays and followed by titles listed according to role. Comparison between the titles in the catalog and the known repertoire of a late nineteenth-century troupe reveals many overlaps, corroborating the catalog’s date in the same period.⁹³ Would the products have been intended for amateur singers? Extant manuscripts containing specialized notation for singing *gaoqiang* opera suggest this may have been the case. A printed insert found at the back of a Baiben Zhang

⁹¹ The musical system of *gaoqiang* is also known as *Yi qiang* 弋腔 or *Yiyang qiang* 弋陽腔, after Yiyang, Jiangxi, where it is believed to have originated in the early Ming dynasty (1368–1644) before spreading through the empire to mix with local musical traditions and develop different forms. On *gaoqiang* and the court’s attempts to regulate performed genres in the capital, see Goldman 2012, 115–116. On its revival in the mid to late nineteenth century, see Wang 1934, 75–76.

⁹² Fan 2010, 122–125.

⁹³ Fan 2010, 125–128.



Fig. 16: Title page, catalog of *gaoqiang* opera, Capital Library of China, *ding* 丁 6610.



Fig. 17: Title page, catalog of youth books, Capital Library of China, *yi* 己 459.

manuscript, which most likely would have been included in many other manuscripts, gives detailed instructions on how to vocalize the notations – consisting of dashes, circles, and combinations of them.⁹⁴ A handwritten version of this text, inside a reference booklet on the pronunciation of characters in singing, includes an additional line at the beginning: This book of *gaoqiang* opera is entirely the authentic text of the Hecheng troupe, with no inconsistencies...’ 此高腔戲本俱係和成班真本並無錯落。⁹⁵

The catalogs from Baiben Zhang which have received the most scholarly attention to date are those of youthbooks (*zidi shu*), the northern genre of verse narrative widely popular among the bannermen populations of Beijing during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.⁹⁶ This was a genre that thrived as both a literature and a form of performing art, propagated through private gatherings of amateur singers as well as through performances in

teahouses and other commercial venues.⁹⁷ Its popularity is attested by thousands of extant manuscripts, ranging from personal copies made by amateurs and aficionados to commercial copies from scribal publishers.⁹⁸ The large quantity of manuscripts of the latter kind draws attention to the important role played by shops such as Baiben Zhang in the evolution of the literature, while handwritten sales catalogs from various shops, including Leshantang and Bieyetang, reveal the impressive variety of titles in scribal circulation.⁹⁹ Judging by the numbers of extant books, Baiben Zhang was by far the leading producer of youth books in the Qing, whether manuscript or print; *zidi shu* must have been one of its most important product lines.¹⁰⁰

While Fu Xihua made the earliest attempt to date the catalogs,¹⁰¹ later scholars have made further progress by studying the titles contained in them. The stories that touch on datable events of the nineteenth century have made rough chronological orderings possible. The scholar Chen Jinzhao has divided extant

⁹⁴ This single folio appears at the end of a Baiben Zhang manuscript of *Kaotong* 拷童 (*Sokodo bunko gikyoku* 雙紅堂 戲曲 65; photo-reprinted in Huang and Ōki 2013, vol. 7, 20–37). The instructions reveal that many of the notations have to do with ‘singing’ (*chang* 唱) or ‘accompanying’ (*bang* 幫) (*gaoqiang* is known for having chorus sections). The notations are not unique to Baiben Zhang manuscripts, but can also be found in products from other houses such as Yanghetang (Huang and Ōki 2013, vol. 7, 38–324).

⁹⁵ I have not been able to track down the Hecheng troupe. The manuscript belongs to a set of rebound booklets, with shelfmark *Sokodo bunko gikyoku* 雙紅堂 戲曲 333, at the library of the Tōyō Bunka Kenkyūjo (reproduced in Huang and Ōki. 2013, vol. 15). It is undated; labeled as a *Jiantuan ziben* 尖團字本 (Book of characters with pointed and rounded sounds), it is a reference booklet containing lists of characters and their pronunciations for singing.

⁹⁶ For an overview of scholarship on this genre, see Chiu 2018, 16–19.

⁹⁷ See note 25.

⁹⁸ *Zidi shu* was also printed by woodblock print publishers and, toward the end of the Qing, by lithographic publishers, but manuscripts dominate the extant corpus by far. For a survey of extant *zidi shu* by the numbers and more detailed discussion on the role of commercial scribal publishing, see Lu, 2018.

⁹⁹ The Leshantang catalog will be discussed below. Fu 1954b, 14–15, dated the Bieyetang catalog to the Xuantong era (1909–1911), while Chen 2003b, 52, suggests it dates before 1900.

¹⁰⁰ See Lu 2018, 106–108.

¹⁰¹ Fu 1954a and 1954b.

Baiben Zhang catalogs into three types, with the earliest dated to the Xianfeng era (1851–1861); catalogs of a second type date between that time and 1886; and the latest and the most commonly seen variety dates between 1886 and 1900 (Fig. 17).¹⁰² Given that many works take historical events as their subject, including those that took place in Beijing, it is possible that scribal publishers capitalized on current events of public interest to market new texts. Interestingly, the vast majority of titles on historical events are extant only in handwritten form; as manuscripts of commercial origin are generally not dated, however, we do not know the actual amount of time it took between the events' occurrence and their appearance in the literature.¹⁰³

The earliest extant catalog of youth books, from the shop Leshantang of Beijing, provides clues about how sales catalogs functioned. This catalog has been dated to the Daoguang era (1821–1850).¹⁰⁴ In an ad at the beginning of the manuscript, Leshantang extols the superiority of its texts in a market abundant with those of others:

本堂抄賣子弟書詞，并有石派帶讚新書，授自名人較正，情理符合，書義精微，非等閑之論也。別家或有是書，希惟應名獲利，書中章句、大畧均與石書相反。本堂數年來精工採訪，遂得數底，幸與石書相合。照顧者方知斯言不謬耳。諸公賜顧，詳認樂善堂為記。今將子弟書名、石韻書名，集成目錄，開載清楚，以備諸公選用，準定貨真價實。外抄名班戲本曲詞，另有目錄，一應俱全，不悞主顧。¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² See Chen 2003a, Chen 2003b, and Chen 2017, 52–54. The three catalogs of youth books at the Capital Library of China represent each of these types. *Yi* 己 473 is an example of the earliest type; the catalog contained in *yi* 己 1008 is an example of the second type; *yi* 己 459 belongs to the latest type. In conversation, Chen has described a fourth and latest type, examples of which include a catalog held at the National Library of China (5 October 2018, Taipei). I have not seen this item.

¹⁰³ Historical events touched on by texts in manuscripts from Baiben Zhang include: the banning of theater in the Inner City in 1799, the uprisings led by Jahangir Khoja in Xinjiang in the 1820s, the prostitution scandal at a Beijing temple of 1838 involving banner men and nobility, military corruption in 1841–1842, and the uprising of Hong Xiuquan (from 1851). There are manuscripts from Bieyetang that contain a text on French incursions in Vietnam in 1883–1884 (*Yuefa jiaobing* 越法交兵, Vietnam fights France). For extant works based on Qing dynasty stories, see Huang et al. 2012a, 341–434.

¹⁰⁴ On the date of this catalog, see Chen 2003b, 50–51. Chen suggests that it dates to some time between 1836 and 1838, given known biographical information about Helüshi 鶴侶氏, author of a work contained in it (*Shiwei tan* 侍衛嘆, Lament of the imperial guardsman), and the fact that the catalog does not contain the work *Lingguan miao* 靈官廟 (The Lingguan temple), which is based on scandals at a Beijing temple in 1838.

¹⁰⁵ Fu Sinian Library, Tj 27-212, fol. 1^r–fol. 2^r. The punctuation is mine.

This house copies and sells youth books and new Shi-style tales with sections of rhyming verses. Having been edited by well-known persons, [the stories] are true to sentiment and moral principle, and their messages are subtle and exquisite; they are not works of the ordinary variety. Other houses purportedly offer these tales, but they only tout the name for profit's sake, while the lines in their books and the plots likewise differ from the [true] tales of Shi [Yukun]. Only after several years of painstaking research has this house been able to obtain several manuscripts; fortunately, they concur with Shi's tales.¹⁰⁶ Discerning patrons know that our claim is true to the word. Patrons, carefully discern the mark of Leshantang. Now we have compiled a catalog of youth books and Shi-style tales, and have clearly listed [the available titles] for your selection and use. We promise that the products are genuine and true to the price. In addition, we copy the scripts and lyrics of the famous troupes, for which separate catalog(s) exist. Everything is available upon demand; we do not fool our customers.

The ad reveals the shop's involvement in the entire process of textual production, from seeking out texts and editing them to issuing catalogs containing available titles for patrons. Besides youth books, the shops apparently also sold plays and song books ('scripts and lyrics of the famous troupes') from separate catalogs. We might observe many similarities between this ad and the Baiben Zhang ad cited earlier. Just as that ad provided a detailed address for the shop, so at the end of Leshantang's catalog, information is given on the days and sites of its sales:

本堂抄本，遠近馳名。每逢七八，在護國寺後西角門。平常在阜成門內、宮門口內、四條胡同東口內、西頭路北門、首貼樂善堂王家便是。或開廟日遇風雨天，在家發賣。

¹⁰⁶ The exact nature of these hard-won manuscripts is not clear to me. The Chinese text simply has the term *di* 底, which literally means 'bottom' or 'base'; it can refer to a handwritten draft on which a printed text is based (*digao* 底稿) or to a version of a text from which copies are made (*diben* 底本). Possibly these were manuscripts transcribed or derived from performances. I interpret *Shi shu* 石書 ('Shi's tales') to refer to actual performances by the storyteller, given that the catalog probably came from his time. Note that the text employs a different term, *Shi yun shu* 石韻書 ('Shi-style tales') to refer to the books containing these tales.



Fig. 18: List of Shi-style tales at the end of a catalog of youth books, labeled 'Shi style' (*Shi pai* 石派) at the top. Capital Library of China, yi 己 473, fols 25^v and 26^r.

The manuscripts of this house are famed everywhere. On every seventh and eighth day,¹⁰⁷ we are at the Western Corner Gate at Huguo Temple. On ordinary days, look for [Mr.] Wang's Leshantang, the first shop on the north end of West End Lane, inside the eastern entrance of the Fourth Alley in Gongmenkou, inside Fucheng Gate. When there is inclement weather on temple fair days, we sell from home.¹⁰⁸

A word ought to be said here about the 'Shi-style tales', of which 22 titles are included at the end of Leshantang's catalog. The Shi-style tale, referred to in catalogs as *Shi yun shu* 石韻書 or *Shi pai shu* 石派書, is a genre of prosimetric storytelling related to the youth book, that is known to have flourished during the Daoguang and Xianfeng eras and ceased at the beginning of the Republican period.¹⁰⁹ The popularity of these stories in performance appears to have stimulated demand for the texts,

¹⁰⁷ This would mean the seventh, eighth, seventeenth, eighteenth, twenty-seventh, and twenty-eighth days of the month.

¹⁰⁸ Fu Sinian Library, Tj 27-212. The punctuation is mine. Leshantang's address is not far from Baiben Zhang's Xizhimen address in the western section of the Inner City.

¹⁰⁹ For an overview of this genre, see Chen 2002. While the Shi-style tale is sometimes referred to as *Shi pai zidi shu* 石派子弟書 ('youth book in the Shi style') in manuscripts (Chen 2002, 389), the actual relationship between the two genres has to be investigated. A special feature of these tales are sections of rhyming verse known as *zan* 讚; the first line in the cited passage thus refers to 'new Shi-style tales with sections of rhyming verses' (*Shi pai dai zan xin shu* 石派帶讚新書). Chen 2002, 11–12, notes the distinct visual layout of these verses in hand-copied books.

which, as Leshantang's ad reveals, were sought after by scribal publishers who competed to obtain authentic versions. Catalogs of youth books from the various houses typically end with a list these longer works (Fig. 18). A single sheet of unknown date, stamped by Baiben Zhang, announces a list of available and forthcoming titles that it has taken great effort to obtain:

風波亭一部現有

九頭案以後，從南俠暗行、婆子哭墓起，合計六十餘本，要者定抄。再，本堂有數樣石韻之書未能得全，現在託人挽轉。全行得妥，較正明白，再行定抄可也。

The title *The Pavilion of Trouble* is readily available.

As for the plot after *The Case of the Nine Heads*, from *Secret Ventures of the Southern Knight* to *The Old Woman Weeps at the Grave*, there are a total of over sixty volumes. They can be copied to order upon demand. Moreover, there are a number of Shi-style tales that this house has not been able to obtain in their entirety; at present we have employed someone to look for the missing parts, and the texts can be copied to order once they are complete and corrected.¹¹⁰

The titles referred to in the passage belonged to the cycle of stories about Judge Bao that were widely popular in the capital in the nineteenth century, judging by the many versions of extant texts.¹¹¹ The ad not only provides important clues into the textual evolution of these stories, but also reveals that *dingchao* 定抄, or 'copying to order', was the standard way in which manuscripts were produced and sold. In the Leshantang catalog, the final title listed is *Longtu gong'an*

¹¹⁰ See Appendix 3 for the complete advertisement. Li 1934, 19, mentioned an ad by Baiben Zhang seeking texts of Shi-style tales. Possibly he is referring to this same item, although this seems to be an announcement rather than a call for texts.

¹¹¹ For a discussion of the titles listed in the ad and the textual evolution of Judge Bao stories, see Chen 2003b, 71–76. See also Miao 1998b, 209–211, on differences between Shi-style tales and drum ballad versions of the stories. On Judge Bao stories in Ming and Qing fiction more generally, see Bauer 1974, Blader 1977, Hanan 1980, Ma 1973, Ma 1975, and Ma 1979, 214–218; also, see Ge 2010 and Idema 2009 for ballads on Judge Bao from an earlier period.

龍圖公案 (*Cases from the Academician of The Dragon Hall*), an extended collection of Judge Bao court-case stories; under the title it says: ‘copied and sold by section; a separate catalog exists; copied to order’ 按段[段]抄賣, 另有目錄, 要者定寫.¹¹² We might also recall the anecdote from *Wandering through the Huguo Temple* in which the protagonist ordered copies of *The Cases of Judge Shi* and *The Green Peony*. For these longer works related to storytelling performance, then, ‘copying to order’ was a common procedure; it remains to be investigated whether it also applied to shorter works and to other genres besides the Shi-style tale.¹¹³

While pre-ordering appears to have dictated one sector of sales, there is evidence to suggest that shops like Baiben Zhang kept regular stocks of manuscripts. Apart from the sales catalogs discussed above, two items in the collection of the Fu Sinian Library at Academia Sinica appear to have been internal inventories. The first is a booklet of nine folios from an unknown shop, written in one hand, with running lists of titles.¹¹⁴ Small triangles drawn beneath each title, indicating tallies, reveal that the first seven folios were part of an inventory.¹¹⁵ The titles are grouped under headings



Fig. 19: Two titles marked for ‘copy-to-order’ (*dingchao* 定抄) at the top. Capital Library of China, *yi* 已 473, fols 16^v and 17^r.

¹¹² Fu Sinian Library, Tj 27-212, fol. 15^v. The punctuation is mine. It seems that the scribe who copied this manuscript wrote *jia* 段 in lieu of a very similar character, *duan* 段 (‘section’). It is possible that the character *jia* 段 was written as a homophone for *jia* 價 (‘price’), in which case *an jia chao mai* 按段抄賣 would mean ‘copied and sold according to price’. But *jia* 價 (rather than *jia* 段) does appear elsewhere in the same manuscript (fol. 2^r, in the line *huo zheng jia shi* 貨真價實 ‘the products are genuine and true to price’).

¹¹³ In manuscript *yi* 已 473, Capital Library of China, the term *dingchao* is written above several titles of youth books, which suggests that they were available on a copy-to-order basis (Fig. 19). The titles are: *Kao hong* 拷紅 (2 *hui* [chapters], 1 *diao*), *Xuejiao guanhua* 薛蛟觀畫 (2 *hui*, 800 cash), and *Feixiong meng* 飛熊夢 (5 *hui*, 1 *diao* 800 cash). Compared with other titles in the catalog, these titles were not particularly long or expensive, and it is not clear to me presently why they were singled out. But they do suggest that at least some *zidi shu* titles were copied to order.

¹¹⁴ Fu Sinian Library, Tj 31-240. The folios have undergone preservation (backing has been applied) and the binding is from a later time; the folios may have originally belonged to a larger set of papers. The digitized version at the Fu Sinian Library is incomplete and does not accurately reflect the correct orders of folio rectos and versos.

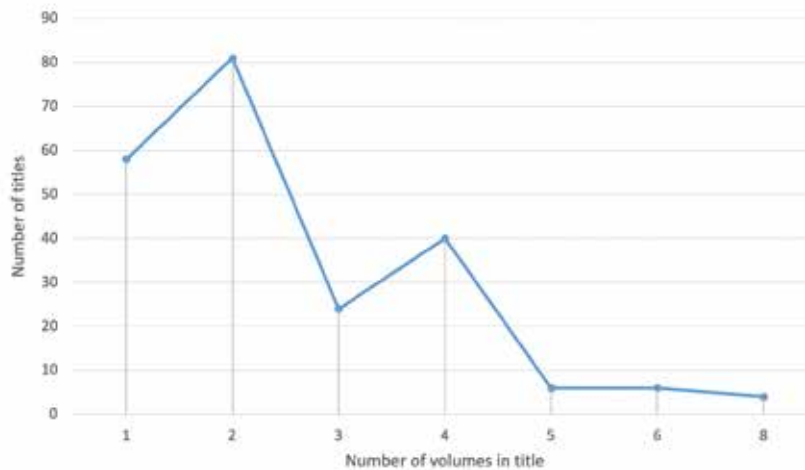
¹¹⁵ On the last two folios, instead of tallies below each title, single triangles are drawn above selected titles, which suggests that these folios were part of something else – a secondary inventory. They are written in the same hand

containing the names of genres, including *Chuan xi* 川戏 (Sichuan opera), *ganban* 赶板 (swift beats), *lianhua lao* 蓮花落 (the lotus falls), *zidi shu* 子弟书 (youth books), *kuaishu* 快书 (fast tales), *Kun Yi xi* 昆弋戏 (Kun and Yi opera), *paizi* 牌子 (linked tunes), *dagu* 大古[鼓] (big drum), and *matou* [diao] 馬頭 (port tunes); the titles number well over 500 in total.¹¹⁶ While we do not know which shop the inventory comes from, its impressive variety of stocked titles supports the thesis that shops like Baiben Zhang produced books in multiple genres at the same time. In another inventory containing a list of 52 titles on a single folio,¹¹⁷ notes written under several titles reveal where manuscripts were kept: under

as the first seven folios and adopt a similar layout of listing abbreviated titles in multiple rows on a page.

¹¹⁶ The count is made from lists contained in the first seven folios; besides the categories named, there are three more kinds of *xi* 戏, or dramas (I am not able to make out the writing before the character *xi* in each case), and a certain kind of tune (*diao* 调). In the headings, the name of the genre is sometimes followed by the term *di* 底 (‘base’), e.g., *ganban di* 赶板底 (‘‘base copies’’ of *ganban* [titles]). The last two folios contain titles in the genres of *erhuang* 二簧, *Kun Yi xi* 昆弋, *kuaishu* 快书, *zidi shu* 子弟书, *dagu* 大鼓, *matou* [diao] 馬頭, *paizi* 牌子, and *quandiao* 全调. The fact that *kuaishu* and *zidi shu* are listed separately suggests that the nine folios may date to sometime during the Guangxu era (1875–1908), when *kuaishu* evolved apart from *zidi shu* into an independent genre (Chen 2017, 53; 2003b, 70).

¹¹⁷ Fu Sinian Library, Tj 28-225, fols 1^r–1^v. This single folio has been bound together with another thirteen folios from one or more sales catalogs, but clearly does not belong together with them. Which shop it comes from is unknown, and I have not yet identified the genre(s) to which the titles belong.

Chart 1: *Erhuang xi* titles by number of volumes.Table 2: Prices ranges in copper cash for *erhuang xi* titles.

Volumes (<i>ben</i>) in title	Lowest price	Highest price
1	300	500
2	400	2,000
3	1,000	1,400
4	1,000	2,000
5	1,400	2,000
6	1,800	3,500
8	4,000	4,800

one title, it says ‘there are [copies] at the temple’ (*miaoshang you* 庙上有); under another, ‘base copies of this are kept at the Wei Room’ (*shi dizi zai Wei wu* 是底子在未屋); under still another title, ‘there are no base copies of this’ (*shi dizi wuyou* 是底子无有). The ‘base copies’ possibly referred to manuscripts that were kept in-house – perhaps drafts from which copies for sale could be made.¹¹⁸ We might recall the prefatory remarks in the Leshantang catalog that say its products were ‘completely available upon request’ (*yi ying ju quan*). This would have implied that it possessed the texts for all the titles, ready to be copied to order, and possibly that it stocked ready-to-sell copies; the unknown house to which the above inventory belonged apparently

had multiple sites of storage for its manuscripts, including at the temple.¹¹⁹

We might imagine that shops such as Baiben Zhang had multiple sectors of sales at the height of their careers – from pre-copied manuscripts at temple fairs to products copied to order (such as the longer works of Shi-style tales). We unfortunately have no extant sales records, but the prices and lengths of titles listed in catalogs offer some clues into production patterns. A survey of two sample Baiben Zhang catalogs may provide some food for thought. Of the 219 *erhuang xi* titles contained in the catalog of *erhuang* opera examined earlier in this article, the majority are between one and two volumes (*ben* 本); a total of sixteen titles are five volumes or longer (Chart 1).¹²⁰ The prices range between 280 cash for the cheapest one-volume title to 4,800 cash for a complete play in eight volumes, while the variation in prices among titles with the same number of volumes suggests that the price was not determined by length alone (Table 2). Of note is that the price of the catalog itself, written on its title page at 1,200 cash, is much higher than the one-volume products listed inside it, which range between 280 and 500 cash. If we look at a second catalog, a catalog of youth

¹¹⁹ The unnamed site of storage for the titles other than the ones described may well be the home shop. Interestingly, the Shi-style tale does not appear among the many categories listed in Tj 31-240. The folios may have been incomplete, but it can also be due to the fact that these longer works were copied to order instead of being stocked for sale.

¹²⁰ The data contained in Chart 1 and Table 2 below is gathered from *Erhuang xi mulu, yi* 已 1008, Capital Library of China. I have not included the *Kunqiang* titles contained in it in this discussion, as their lengths are not given in the catalog.

¹¹⁸ This is to interpret the term *dizi* 底子 in the sense of *diben* 底本, ‘base manuscript’ (refer to note 106).

Chart 2: *Zidi shu* titles by number of volumes.

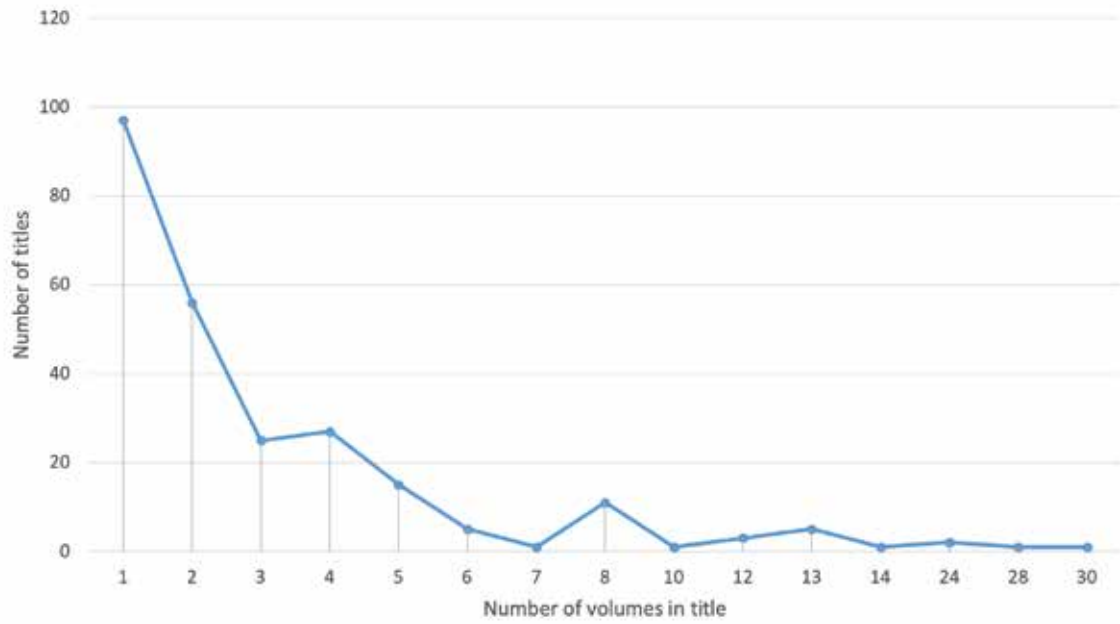


Table 3: Prices ranges in copper cash for *zidi shu* titles.

Chapters (<i>hu</i>) in title	lowest price	highest price
1	400	1,000
2	700	4,000
3	900	1,600
4	1,400	2,000
5	1,800	2,000
6	2,000	2,000
7	2,600	2,600
8	2,000	3,000
10	3,600	3,600
12	4,400	4,400
13	4,400	4,800
14	5,000	5,000
24	7,000	7,200
28	11,200	11,200
30	12,000	12,000

books, the patterns are similar.¹²¹ Among a total of 251 titles of youth books, those containing one or two chapters (*hui* 回) constitute the majority of the products, even though the longest titles go up to thirty chapters (Chart 2). As in the catalog of *erhuang* opera, there is a good deal of variation in prices for titles of the same length (Table 3). What proportion of the shop's actual income came from shorter works and what proportion from longer ones? Does the range of products and prices allude to different sales sectors and different kinds of clientele – from individuals browsing books at temple fairs to wealthy households and institutions which could afford to keep libraries and private troupes of performers?

Probably it would be most telling to understand the prices listed in the catalogs compared with external prices of the same period. What first has to be said is that, despite the apparent wealth of price information contained in sales catalogs, they are more difficult to interpret than would appear, given the monetary fluctuations in Beijing in the second half of the nineteenth century and the absence of precise dates for the manuscripts.¹²² We might nevertheless attempt a tentative comparison between manuscripts in relation to other reading materials and the cost of going to the theater at the beginning of the Guangxu era (1875–1908). A Baiben Zhang catalog of *gaoqiang* opera which has been dated to the beginning of this period lists prices for manuscripts ranging from 400 cash to sixteen *diao* (the equivalent of 16,000 cash).¹²³ From the same time, the price of a ticket at the theater varied between 600 cash for the cheapest seats in the 'pond' to 18,000 for the most expensive private balcony seats.¹²⁴ The lowest-priced

manuscripts, then, were slightly more affordable than the cheapest tickets to the theater.

For low-income residents of the city, both would have been luxuries. In his study of the wages of unskilled laborers, Sydney Gamble cites rates for daily wages fixed by Beijing's carpenters' and masons' guilds for unskilled workers, giving the figure of 140 cash for the years 1862–1877 and 160 cash for 1877–1887, with the amounts including both money wage and food money.¹²⁵ Taking these figures into account, a manuscript priced at 400 cash would have been the equivalent of several days' wages. Longer works in multiple volumes would hardly have been affordable for low-income city workers; probably they were expensive for many of the capital's bannermen as well, especially those who ranked low in the official hierarchy and had moderate incomes.¹²⁶

Compared with other reading materials, the lowest-priced manuscript products from the *gaoqiang* opera catalog were far from the lowest on the rung. This is clear when we compare their prices with those of hand-copied literature rented out at lending shops. For the price of purchasing one Baiben Zhang manuscript at 400 cash, one could rent 44 volumes of entertainment literature, with a 9-cash rental fee per volume in 1875.¹²⁷ To own a Baiben Zhang manuscript, then, was something quite different from having access to leisure reading materials, especially considering that some of the titles it sold may have been available through

status. 'Pond' seats, those on the ground level directly opposite the stage, were the cheapest tier and were seen as occupied by the most vulgar fans; the wealthiest patrons occupied seats in the upper balconies to the side of the stage, separated by screens, also known as 'officials' seats'. See Goldman 2012, 77–84.

¹²⁵ Gamble 1943, 66–67.

¹²⁶ A capital bannerman's income consisted of a combination of silver and grain from the Qing state, and sometimes also income from land (Elliott 2001b, 194–95). But there was a great deal of social and economic disparity among the bannermen population of Beijing; many lower-class bannermen, especially those who did not have positions in the government, struggled financially in the late Qing (see Zheng 2018, 78–126). Elena Chiu suggests that the longest youth books from Baiben Zhang would have been out of the reach of most lower-class bannermen, given their incomes (Chiu 2018, 285).

¹²⁷ Li 1936, 162, notes this price from the cover of a manuscript of *Tian ci fu* 天賜福 (Heaven bestows blessings) from the lending shop Sanmeizhai 三美齋, dated to 1875. According to stamps from various lending shops that detailed their policies, readers commonly paid an initial deposit to the shop and were then able to rent out books, exchanging one volume for the next on a daily basis. The manuscript from Sanmeizhai was apparently lent out for exchange every two days. There were also penalties for losing a book; the price for a hand-copied volume of the *Sanguozhi guci* 三國志鼓詞 (Drum ballad on the Chronicle of the Three Kingdoms) from the lending shop Juwenzhai 聚文齋, of unknown date, was one *diao* (*ibid.*). Li mistakes 1 *diao* for 100 cash (instead of 1,000 cash) and others have inherited this error.

¹²¹ The data contained in Chart 2 and Table 3 below is gathered from *yi* 己 473, Capital Library of China. In the discussion, I have not included the eleven titles of Shi-style tales listed at the end of the same catalog. While the unit employed for *zidi shu* titles is 'chapter' (*hui*), for the Shi-style tales, length is given in volumes (*ben*). Lengths are given for only some of the latter titles; they vary between six and forty volumes.

¹²² On Beijing's cash system in the late nineteenth century, see King 1965, 58–65, 158–163, and 215–218. On changes in prices, wages, and costs of living, see Peng 2013. The serious inflations during the Xianfeng period (1851–1861) make it especially tricky to compare prices before and after the period.

¹²³ The manuscript is *ding* 丁 6610, Capital Library of China. On its dating, see Fan 2010. In the following comparison of prices, the understanding is that they all refer to the same units of account local to Beijing.

¹²⁴ These figures are given by Shen Nanye 沈南野 in his *Xuannan lingmeng lu* 宣南零夢錄 (Record of scattered dreams of Xuannan), cited in Wang 1934, 81. Shen writes retrospectively from the early 1920s, relating that he was eleven years old in 1875. The commercial theaters of the Qing were sites of mixed social composition, with the various types of seats differentiated by price and associated with theatergoers of varying social

rental.¹²⁸ The expensive pricing of Baiben Zhang products is confirmed when we look at how affordably priced printed materials could be in the second half of the nineteenth century.¹²⁹ In the capital, an issue of a printed gazette – a common vehicle for the official news – cost as little as 7 cash in 1878; the total cost of a year’s worth of gazettes, 3,746 cash, would have been sufficient for purchasing merely a handful of Baiben Zhang’s medium-priced titles.¹³⁰ From these comparisons we might rather get a sense of the manuscripts as collectibles; this is echoed by the visual appearance of the pages, which, compared with cheaper sorts of printed and handwritten materials with writing squeezed densely onto the page, stand out for their spacious margins, large characters, and general aesthetic appeal (Fig. 20).¹³¹

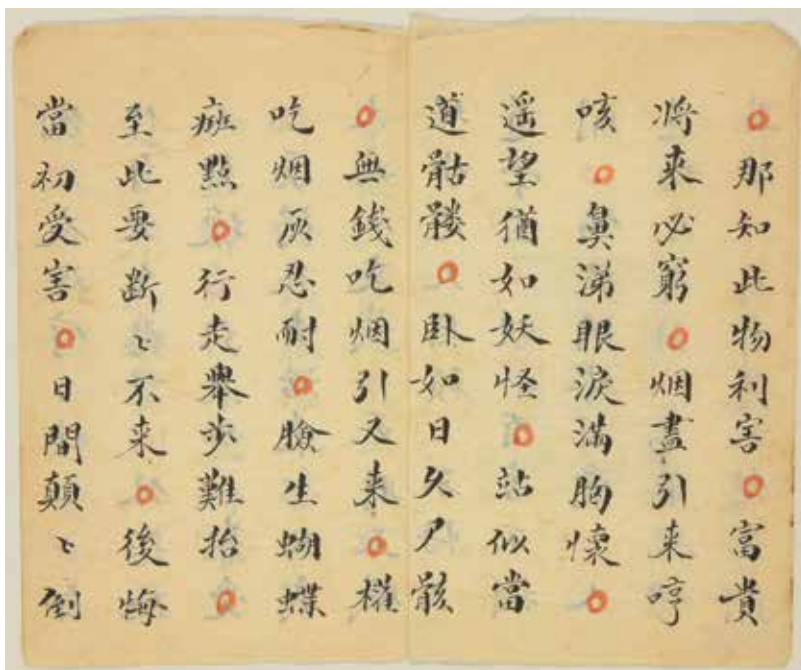


Fig. 20: Page layout with large characters and punctuation, inside a Baiben Zhang manuscript ('Song on opium'). Waseda University Library, Fūryō Bunko, *bunko* 文庫 19 F400 Z79, fols 1^r and 2^r.

¹²⁸ While the lending shops were known to have rented out longer works of drum ballads and court-case fiction, some also rented out books of songs (Zhang 1996b, 450–451). Two items in the Sokodo Bunko (*Sokodo bunko gikyoku* 雙紅堂 戲曲 265 and 266, photo-reprinted in Huang and Ōki 2013, vol. 32, 368 and 523), bearing stamps of a Yongfa caiyuan 永發菜園 (The ever-flourishing vegetable garden), contain collections of port tunes (*matou diao*) and eight-cornered drum songs (*bajiao gu*), respectively; a note on the last folio recto of one of them, cautioning patrons not to rip or write over the text, suggests that the book was intended for rental (Huang and Ōki 2013, vol. 32, 520). Zhang 1996b, 451, suggests that youth books were also available at lending shops, which he divided into two kinds in accordance with the different types of manuscripts they offered, but this has to be corroborated by further evidence.

¹²⁹ A survey of catalogs from commercial and government print publishers reveals just how cheap printed books could be in the late Qing (Zhou 2005, contains a list of such catalogs; also see Li 2010).

¹³⁰ See Mokros 2016, 93–152, on gazettes in the capital. The prices above come from Osawa 2004 (cited in Mokros 2016, 142), who described them as contained in a note filed with a set of gazettes from Juheng Baofang 聚恆報房 kept at the Östasiatiska museet in Stockholm. The figure of 3,746 cash includes the price for the gazettes (7 cash each, with 338 issues printed in 1878, making a total of 2,366 cash) and the price for twelve book covers (at 115 cash each, making 1,380 cash in total). Juheng Baofang was one of the main publishers of printed gazettes in the late Qing; issues viewable through the digital collection of the National Library of Australia range between several to about a dozen folios in length (see *Jing bao* 1898). I am grateful to Emily Mokros for information on Juheng Baofang. The affordability of printed gazettes is corroborated by other sources from the period. There were varying tiers of quality among gazettes; manuscript gazettes continued to circulate alongside printed ones in the late nineteenth century, while often sold at much higher prices (Mokros 2016, 133–145).

¹³¹ While it has been suggested that Baiben Zhang manuscripts were 'cheap' compared with certain novels (Cui 2005, 153; Chiu 2018, 285), these novels may well have been the exception.

The existence of catalogs points to the likelihood that a significant part of sales consisted of orders beyond single items. This is suggested by the many signs of use in extant catalogs, from stamp marks to numbers and dots marking titles and prices.¹³² The shop apparently encouraged purchases in bulk: at the end of one catalog of youth books, a note lists discounts for purchases exceeding ten *diao*, a hundred *diao*, and a thousand *diao*.¹³³ These prices would not have been affordable for city residents of ordinary means. If we take into consideration who would have been able to afford the very large orders, we might recall that scores of Baiben Zhang manuscripts were present among the former collection of the Court Theatrical Bureau.¹³⁴ The shop's location in the western section of the Inner City, in a neighborhood close to

¹³² Many of the catalogs held at Academia Sinica contain Suzhou numbers and various other marks suggesting signs of use. All the books have been rebound, however, some quite chaotically, with scattered folios from multiple catalogs. As such, they will need to be studied very carefully.

¹³³ The discounts were for ten percent, twenty percent, and thirty percent, respectively. See Huang et al. 2012b, vol. 10, 4378; the collation notes cite a Baiben Zhang catalog in the former collection of Nagasawa Kikuya. I have not seen this manuscript, and am not aware of similar discounts advertised in other Baiben Zhang catalogs.

¹³⁴ Given the increasing contact between the palace and the city's commercial troupes in the course of the nineteenth century, it is not surprising that the court also sourced texts from commercial establishments in the city. On the mutual influence between the palace and commercial theaters, see Ye 2012, 226–227.

prominent bannermen households, suggests that well-to-do Inner City residents may also have been among its clients.¹³⁵

More in-depth study is due on the sales catalogs from Baiben Zhang and other scribal publishers. Further study should yield more insights into the precise dates of the shops and their evolving lines of products, as well as their possible connections to the world of commercial theater in nineteenth-century Beijing. On a practical level, the catalogs call attention to the manner of production that made possible books in great variety. In the next section, this article examines scribal hands in manuscript products for glimpses into the processes of organized scribal production.

Scribal Production

While anecdotal sources might lead us to imagine a Mr. Zhang assiduously sitting at his desk and copying day and night, both the quantity and variety of extant manuscripts suggest that Baiben Zhang was (or became) a much larger operation involving organized scribal production. The number of scribes employed over the course of the house's lifetime of operation has yet to be ascertained – this may have to wait for an efficient method of sorting handwriting samples in the hundreds – but a glimpse of scribal production can be had from a look at even a small group of manuscripts. In the discussion below, we examine a selection of youth books from Baiben Zhang in the collection of the Capital Library of China. Given the quantity of extant manuscripts in this genre from the shop, they would seem to be a reasonable place to begin studying its productions.

Baiben Zhang's youth book manuscripts adopt a long, rectangular format (Fig. 21) and a regular layout to the text, with four columns on each page, each divided into two sections (Fig. 22). Each section of a column, corresponding to a sung line, contains space for seven characters, while longer lines are written partially in double columns using smaller characters. The handwriting is neat and formal, with the individual characters clearly legible and in a regular size, being the work of seasoned scribes who were practiced in writing neatly and consistently if not always elegantly.¹³⁶

¹³⁵ See Liang 2018, 18–19, on princely mansions in the western section of the Inner City.

¹³⁶ Varying degrees of calligraphic grace can be found among scribal hands in Baiben Zhang manuscripts. Regardless of calligraphic merit, they were copied by practiced hands, and one might try to appreciate the writing in terms other than 'superior' or 'inferior' calligraphy. One might argue that the scribes valued different qualities (e.g., formal consistency of the characters, efficiency of writing) than those who practiced calligraphy as an art (e.g.,

The regularity of the hands in the manuscripts is such that sometimes it is difficult to distinguish one hand from another. In identifying hands, it is thus useful to find markers besides handwriting that display individual idiosyncrasies.

A common feature of manuscripts are L-shaped symbols that appear at the ends of lines, marking regular divisions of text within each chapter (*hui* 回).¹³⁷ While the functions of these symbols have yet to be well understood, here they provide an efficient means for distinguishing scribal hands. In spite of variations for each copyist at different times and with the change of the writing brush, there are points on the 'L' where pressure is applied consistently by the individual scribe, in many cases quite distinctly (Fig. 23). The amount of space between the marks and the characters, as well as their size in relation to each other, can also assist in this investigation. Where comparison of the L-shaped symbols yields questions, comparison of characters – focusing on the ways that the same strokes are written – can be further employed to distinguish one scribal hand from another.

The manuscripts examined here belong to a set of Baiben Zhang manuscripts rebound into six volumes.¹³⁸ The inside case covers of the two cases that enclose them are signed by the collector Nahata 納哈塔 and dated Guangxu 26 [1900]; his inscription inside the second case, which holds volumes five and six, states that the books were rebound at that time.¹³⁹ The bottom and top edges of the folios have been trimmed,

variation, expressive grace). Boltz 2012/2013, citing inspirations from Bernhard Bischoff on Latin paleography, proposes a spectrum of formality for thinking about handwriting styles in early Chinese manuscripts; the presence of a neat, formal 'book hand' implies a high status for the object regardless of its textual content. Along this line of reasoning, the formal handwriting style in Baiben Zhang manuscripts would corroborate their status as collectibles.

¹³⁷ These L-shaped symbols can be found not only in manuscripts from Baiben Zhang, but also in those from other houses. It has been suggested that they marked divisions of episodes (*lao* 落) within each chapter, facilitating both the reading and performance of youth books; it is also possible that they indicated repetition (Cui 2005, 21–22). Similar L-shaped symbols can be found in manuscripts of other kinds of performance-related literature, such as ritual handbooks.

¹³⁸ They have the common shelfmark of *yi* 己 448, Capital Library of China.

¹³⁹ In his inscriptions, Nahata also listed the contents of the volumes contained in each case. Generally, they correspond to how the volumes presently appear, with the exception of volume five, which contains a text in twenty-four chapters not listed by Nahata (it is a copy of the youth book *Yuanyang kou* 鴛鴦扣 [The bond of matrimony]). Possibly the collector did not include it in his list because he was not able to identify it; there is no title page which precedes the folios of text in their current form. It is also possible that the volume was rebound again after Nahata's time. Besides Nahata's seals, manuscripts also bear the seals of Wu Xiaoling, to whom they belonged before being transferred to the Capital Library. There are also the seals of a certain Yinqiu shanguan 吟秋山館 (Fig. 21).



Fig. 21: Title page of *Chuzi tan zidi shu*, in Capital Library of China, yi 己 448, vol. 2. The stamp of the collector Yinqiu shangguan 吟秋山館 appears at the top. The manuscript has been trimmed and is rebound in a volume with other manuscripts.

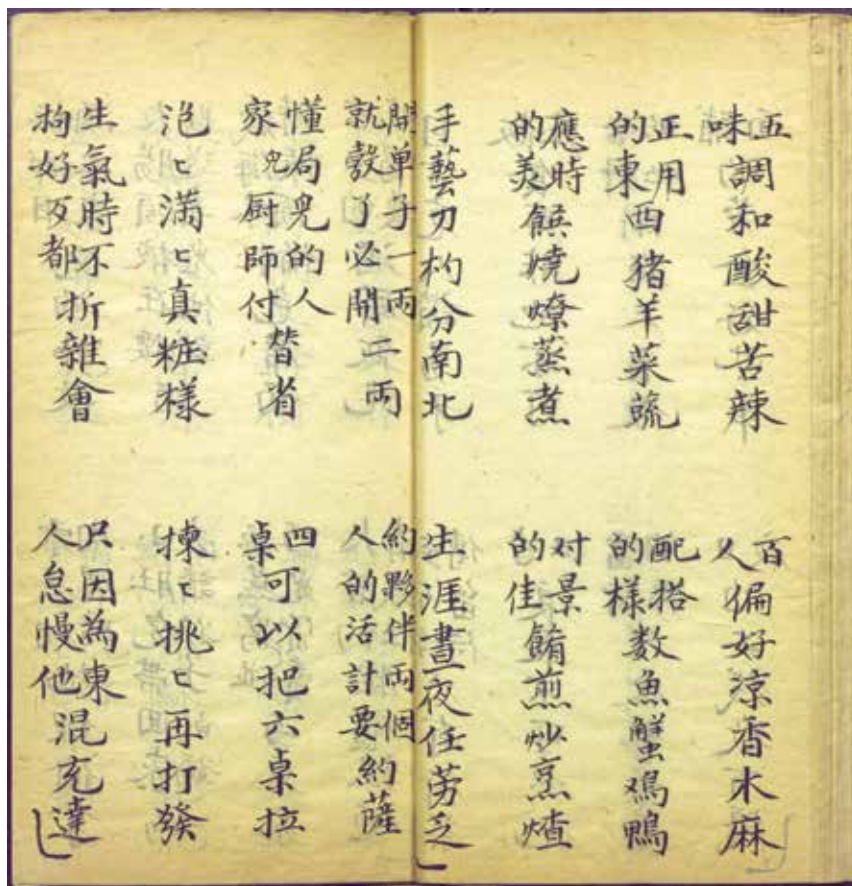


Fig. 22: *Chuzi tan zidi shu*, fol. 1^r and fol. 2^r. L-shaped symbols appear in the bottom left corners of each page.

so their original dimensions would have exceeded the current measurements (11.2 by 20.5 cm).¹⁴⁰ The six volumes each contain what were originally multiple manuscripts. In the first four volumes, 26 titles are represented, including many short texts ranging from five to eight folios long.¹⁴¹ The fifth and sixth volumes each contains two titles of significant

¹⁴⁰ The case covers signed by Nahata measure 12.0 cm by 20.7 cm – the length being only slighter greater than the current length of the folios. Possibly they were trimmed by Nahata or were already trimmed by the time they came into his hands.

¹⁴¹ Besides these short texts, there are longer titles which are only partially represented – e.g. the title page indicates that the manuscript is part of a sequence by labelling the title with *touhui* 頭回 (‘first chapter’) or *yuan* (‘prime’) 元. It is not always clear to me whether each chapter originally formed one codicological unit. In a few cases, multiple chapters have been bound together into the volume, but only the title page for the first chapter is present. In the case of *Changban po zidi shu* 長坂坡子弟書 (The battle at Changban Hill, a youth book), two title pages are present, one labelled as *touhui* (the first chapter) and one as *erhui* 二回 (the second chapter), so each chapter was originally one manuscript. But this does not seem to apply universally, as there are also instances where the chapters of a text run continuously and do not match page divisions (so multiple chapters would have been bound together).

length.¹⁴² The analyses below will examine the scribal hands in a selection of the manuscripts for clues into the processes of production.

In the manuscripts contained in the first four volumes, at least fourteen hands can be distinguished, based on the L-shaped symbols that appear in them (Fig. 24).¹⁴³ Interestingly, when one compares the handwritten titles on each of the title pages (one might pay special attention to the final three characters *zidi shu* 子弟書 which appear in all of them), recurring idiosyncracies in the execution of certain

¹⁴² Volume five contains *Qianjin quande zidi shu* 千金全德子弟書 (Virtue’s rewards, a youth book), in eight chapters, and another work (presently identified as *Yuanyang kou*) in twenty-four chapters; the chapters range from four to six folios in length. Volume six contains *Qiao dongfeng* 俏東風子弟書 (The fair east wind, a youth book), in twelve chapters, and its sequel in eight chapters (the title page is fragmented, so only the first two characters of the title, *Xu Qiao* 續俏, are preserved); the chapters range from six to seven folios in length.

¹⁴³ In this count, I include only the hands that are clearly distinguishable to me; possibly more hands can be found with closer scrutiny. Generally, a unit of one chapter seems to have been copied by one scribe.



Fig. 23: Two hands with variations, from manuscripts contained in Capital Library of China, *yi* 已 448, vols 6 and 2, respectively. Top row, left to right: *Qiao dongfeng zidi shu* 俏東風子弟書 (The fair east wind, a youth book), 11 *hui*, fol. 3^v, fol. 4^r; 12 *hui*, fol. 1^r, fol. 2^r. Bottom row, left to right: *Chuzi tan zidi shu*, fol. 1^r, fol. 2^r; *Changsu tan zidi shu* 長隨嘆子弟書 (The servant's lament, a youth book), fol. 1^r, fol. 2^r.

strokes suggests that they were all written in one hand (Fig. 25).¹⁴⁴ If it is indeed true that one person signed all the titles, the manuscripts would belong to a common span of time. This also provides clues about the division of labor: there were multiple copyists and a single title-signer; the latter was possibly the possessor of the house stamps, the organizer of labor division, and the proprietor of the shop.¹⁴⁵ A survey of a larger sample of manuscripts should reveal whether there were changes in the title-signer; whether the fourteen hands seen here were recurring hands; and with more detailed surveys of handwriting (not only the L-shaped symbols, but also the characters), we may have clues about the growths and declines in the size of the scribal staff over the course of Baiben Zhang's lifetime.

We can glimpse the collaborative process of copying a multi-chapter text through the case of *Qiao dongfeng zidi shu* 俏東風子弟書 (The fair east wind, a youth book), a youth book in twelve chapters.¹⁴⁶ In their present, rebound form, the entire 12 *hui* are bound together and form the first part of a larger volume; the chapters number 7 folios each, with

each *hui* starting on a new folio.¹⁴⁷ What is very interesting is that four scribal hands were involved in copying this 12-*hui* text (Fig. 26). The first seven *hui* are by a single scribe, then *hui* 8 is in a distinctly different hand. *Hui* 9 and 10 are copied by yet a third copyist. *Hui* 11 is again in the hand of the first scribe, but only the first folio and fol. 2 recto; fol. 2 verso is left blank,¹⁴⁸ and then, beginning with fol. 3^r, the remainder of *hui* 11 is in a different, fourth hand. This last copyist also completed *hui* 12. This raises the question whether the copyists in fact sat in the same room and took turns copying, which seems plausible given the return of the first scribe and then what seemed to be an abrupt departure in the middle of *hui* 11. Did he go on lunch break between *hui* 8 and *hui* 11 – when 21 folios, or 336 lines, were copied in his absence by his colleagues? And then, when he set about copying again, did some urgent task call him away, such that he had to leave the better part of the remaining two *hui* to yet another colleague?

The presence of multiple hands in other multi-chapter manuscripts from Baiben Zhang suggests that this case was not an exception. Rather, the phenomenon points to the efficiency and flexibility of organized scribal production, with scribes able to easily resume each other's work, while texts were copied in accordance with a standard layout. This would have most easily taken place at a workshop or other site of organized copying. Many questions are open: given the hundreds of titles advertised by Baiben Zhang in its catalogs, did copyists specialize in certain genres of texts or certain titles? For manuscripts sold with musical notations, was there a division of labor between copyists and notators – with the task of annotation requiring familiarity with musical performance? How was work allocated in other ways? And just how big was the Baiben Zhang operation at a given point in time – how many people were involved in the various roles of editing, copying, annotating, cover-signing, stamping, binding, inventory-keeping, temple-fair staffing, account-keeping, and delivering? These are questions for future investigation.

¹⁴⁴ For example, one might observe how the horizontal stroke is consistently written with a bend and how the final stroke of the mouth (*kou* 口) radical is always elongated. I am grateful to Uta Lauer for these observations and for pointing out to me that the idiosyncracies are consistent.

¹⁴⁵ Huang Shizhong, who first noticed the phenomenon of a repeated hand signing the title pages of manuscripts, has suggested that this person may have been the proprietor of the shop (Huang 2008, 151).

¹⁴⁶ Capital Library of China, *yi* 已 448, vol. 6.

¹⁴⁷ It is not clear to me how the manuscripts would originally have been bound (whether each *hui* was its own volume, or whether several *hui* were bound into one volume).

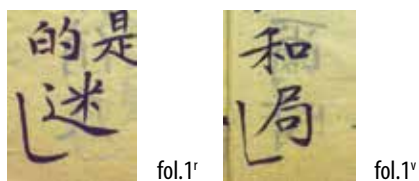
¹⁴⁸ Comparison with a manuscript (from the Chewangfu corpus) of the same title, contained in Huang et al. 2012b, vol. 8, 3109, shows that eight lines were skipped here.

Scribe 1



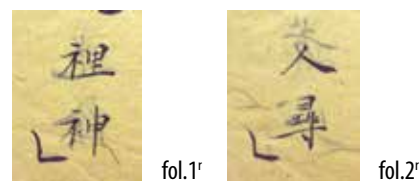
Fengyiting zidi shu, juan shang
鳳儀亭子弟書 卷上

Scribe 6



Nüshiwei tan zidi shu 女侍衛嘆子弟書

Scribe 11



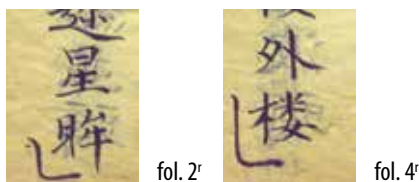
Fengxian zidi shu 鳳仙子弟書

Scribe 2



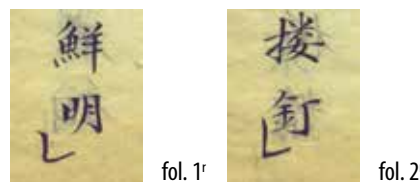
Huli sichun zidi shu, yuan 狐狸思春子弟書 元

Scribe 7



Guang erzha zidi shu 逛二閘子弟書

Scribe 12



Shaoshiwei tan zidi shu 少侍衛嘆子弟書

Scribe 3



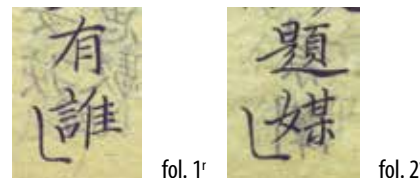
Guanzhen tan zidi shu 官箴嘆子弟書

Scribe 8



Zuanxuzilun zidi shu 纂鬚子論子弟書

Scribe 13



Yu'er xianhua zidi shu 玉兒獻花子弟書

Scribe 4



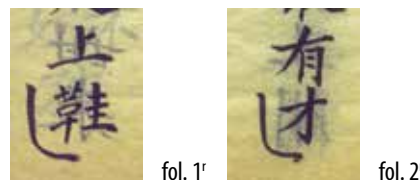
Qiongui tan zidi shu 窮鬼嘆子弟書

Scribe 9



Chuzi tan zidi shu 厨子嘆子弟書

Scribe 14



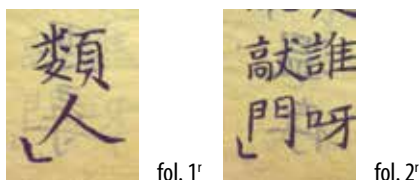
Yanzhizhuan zidi shu, touhui
胭脂傳子弟書 頭回

Scribe 5



Sanxuan yapailing zidi shu 三宣牙牌令子弟書

Scribe 10



Xuchaojieyin zidi shu, touhui 續鈔借銀子弟書 頭回

Fig. 24: Scribal hands in fourteen youth book manuscripts, from Capital Library of China, yi 已 448, vols 1–4.

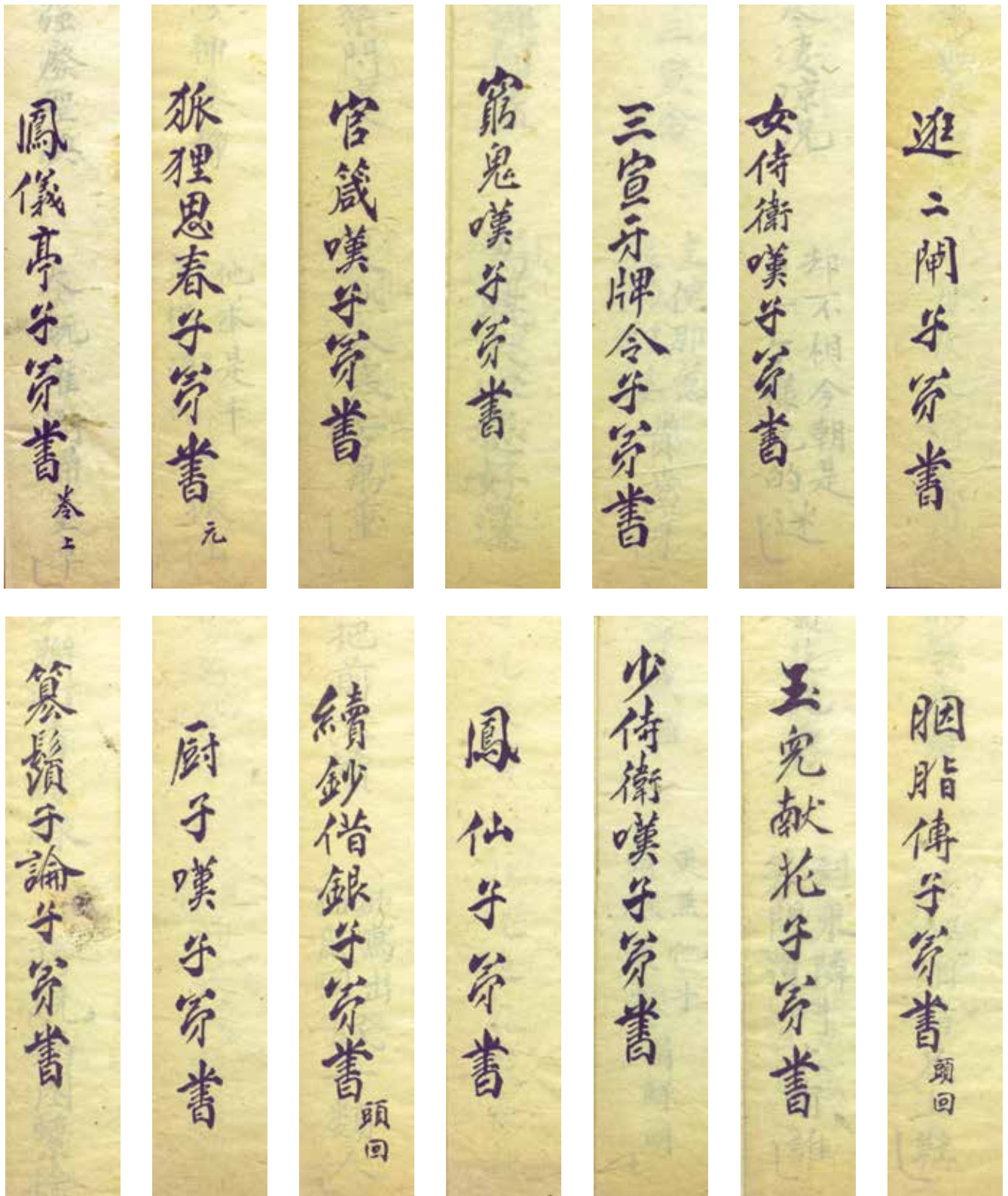


Fig 25: Handwritten titles on the title pages of fourteen youth book manuscripts, from Capital Library of China, yi 己 448, vols 1–4.

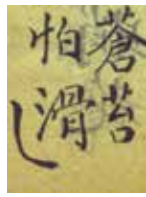
Scribe A



hui 1, fol. 1^r



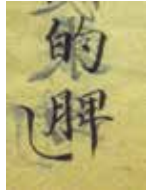
hui 2, fol. 1^r



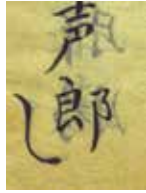
hui 3, fol. 1^r



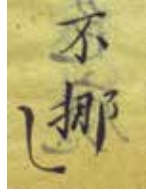
hui 4, fol. 1^r



hui 5, fol. 1^r



hui 6, fol. 1^r

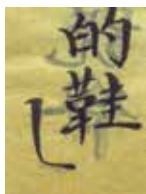


hui 7, fol. 1^r

Scribe B

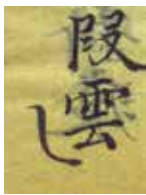


hui 8, fol. 1^r

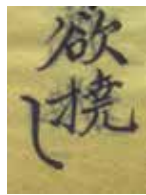


hui 8, fol. 2^r

Scribe C

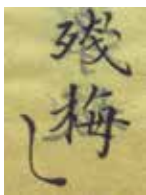


hui 9, fol. 1^r

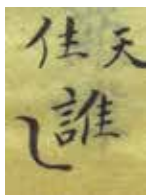


hui 10, fol. 1^r

Scribe A

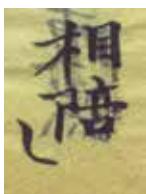


hui 11, fol. 1^r

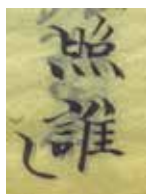


hui 11, fol. 2^r

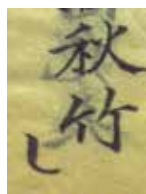
Scribe D



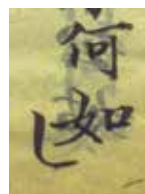
hui 11, fol. 3^v



hui 11, fol. 4^r



hui 12, fol. 1^r



hui 12, fol. 2^v

Fig. 26. Scribal hands in a 12 hui (chapter) text, *Qiao dongfeng zidi shu*, from Capital Library of China, yi 己 448, vol. 6.

Conclusion

From anecdotal sources to manuscripts, this article has attempted to piece together a picture of Baiben Zhang's operations, while much remains to be understood – from the evolution of the scribal publisher over time to its role in the larger circulation of entertainment literature in Qing Beijing. While it may have been an outstandingly successful case, Baiben Zhang belonged to a milieu of shops that thrived on the sales of handwritten books. We might pause for a moment to reflect on the scale of their productions and the conditions that made it possible.

A sense of scale can be had from a survey of the extant literature of youth books that was so popular in Beijing in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.¹⁴⁹ Among thousands of extant items, the significant proportion that bears signs of their commercial origin suggests that scribal publishers dominated the market for books in this genre. Whether by number of texts or variety of titles, the figures for extant manuscripts of commercial origin far exceed those for woodblock-printed books, pointing to Beijing's scribal publishers – Baiben Zhang foremost among them – as the leading producers of this popular regional literature. What is important to note is that the youth book was but one of a spectrum of products offered by Baiben Zhang; judging by the quantity of extant manuscripts in this genre alone, the shop's overall output must have been enormous indeed.¹⁵⁰

The success of Baiben Zhang leads us to reflect on the urban context in which it thrived, given Beijing's vibrant cultures of entertainment; its large population of leisurely consumers, from bannermen to sojourners; and the ready pool of literate laborers in the capital, from examinees to clerks. In such a context, the advantages of a business model based on hand-copying books would have been many: from locally sourced texts to local scribal labor to a local clientele, it avoided the cost of transporting woodblocks and books while keeping products new and up-to-date. With the ease of scribal production – requiring only brush, paper, desk and copyist – it needed little initial investment, while the flexibility of handwritten production makes possible an

enormous variety of products copied on demand. If profit did not come from a huge number of copies of a single text, variety made up for it, while the wide availability of scribal labor and value attached to the calligraphic medium may have together contributed to high profit margins for the manuscripts as collectibles. In some sense, Baiben Zhang's success can be attributed to an old scribal technology put to use in a new urban context, where the changing vogues of entertainment – which saw their height in late nineteenth-century Beijing – generated desire for an ever-increasing variety of books.

Baiben Zhang and other scribal publishers formed a special milieu in China's changing book markets of the nineteenth century. In a time when new printing technologies came to be widely adopted and when commercial print publishers sought out new markets and audiences, they point to the lasting presence of a thriving, local book market tied intimately to the cultural life of the city.¹⁵¹ Beijing's uniqueness as a locale must have been part of the story. The fondness with which Baiben Zhang is remembered with its temple markets in anecdotal sources calls attention to cycles of culturally shared time, whose own ebbs and flows in connection to technological change need further study. Just as people from far and wide came together in the space of the fair, so the books belonged to a larger flow of commodities, mixing old and new, cheap and extravagant, handwritten and printed, invented and recycled. It is within this larger context that they must be studied next.

¹⁴⁹ For detailed figures supporting the statements in this paragraph, see Lu 2018.

¹⁵⁰ For reasons that will be explored elsewhere, the youth book was privileged by collectors in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and they are much more accessible today as a corpus in libraries and archives than books in many other genres that were also important product lines for Baiben Zhang. The list in Appendix 1 gives the breakdown by genre for a large group of manuscripts collected in 1929; there the count of *zidi shu* comes after *Kun Yi* and *erhuang*.

¹⁵¹ On China's changing book markets of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see Brokaw and Reed 2010.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Texts contained in Baiben Zhang manuscripts discovered
by Liu Fu in 1929¹⁵²

- 570 *erhuang* 二簧
 460 *Kun Yi* 昆弋
 314 *zidi shu* 子弟書
 250 *matou diao* 馬頭調
 125 *ganban* 趕板
 122 *chaqu* 岔曲
 96 *dagu shu* 大鼓書
 85 *paizi qu* 牌子曲
 31 *lianhua lao* 蓮花落
 28 *kuaishu* 快書
 12 *Huguang diao* 湖廣調
 8 *qinqiang* 琴腔
 3 *xijiangyue* 西江月
 2 *bianguan diao* 邊關調
 2 *Fujian diao* 福建調
 2 *Jinan diao* 濟南調
 2 *shiduohua* 十朵花
 2 *taipingnian* 太平年
 2 *danghuchuan* 蕩湖船
 2 *dasijing* 大四景
 1 *Laoting diao* 樂亭調
 1 *xianhua diao* 鮮花調
 1 *qunqu* 群曲
 1 *shibeijiu* 十杯酒
 1 *shachuangwai* 紗窗外
 1 *xiujiuzhou* 綉九洲

Total: 2,124 texts

¹⁵² Fu 1954a, 329, recounts that Liu Fu 劉復 discovered over 80 sacks of Baiben Zhang manuscripts at an unnamed Liulichang bookshop in 1929. Probably the categories in the above list (which range from names of genres to types of tunes) come from labels that are commonly found on title pages of manuscripts. Judging by Fu's wording, the numbers should refer to counts of distinct texts in each category, and not physical volumes (the term he uses is *zhong* 種 ['kind']). Fu notes that these books were all purchased by the Institute of History and Philology of the Academia Sinica under Liu's suggestion, but mistakenly records that they were lost in a shipwreck. A search for 'Baiben Zhang' through the Fu Sinian Library's electronic catalog today reveals several hundred items – there may be many more that were not catalogued as such but in fact come from Baiben Zhang.

Appendix 2: Extant sales catalogs and other lists from various scribal publishers¹⁵³

Table 1: Sales catalogs, listed by house.

Title ¹⁵⁴	Collection and shelfmark (where known)
Baiben Zhang 百本張	
Catalog of youth books	Capital Library of China, <i>yi</i> 己1008 ¹⁵⁵
<i>Erhuang xi mulu</i> 二簧戲目錄 (Catalog of <i>erhuang</i> opera)	Capital Library of China, <i>yi</i> 己1008
<i>Gaoqiang xi mulu</i> 高腔戲[目錄] (Catalog of <i>gao qiang</i> opera)	Capital Library of China, <i>ding</i> 丁6610
<i>Zidi shu mulu</i> 子弟書目錄 (Catalog of youth books)	Capital Library of China, <i>yi</i> 己473
<i>Zidi shu mulu</i> 子弟書目錄 (Catalog of youth books)	Capital Library of China, <i>yi</i> 己459
<i>Erhuang xi mulu</i> 二簧戲目錄 (Catalog of <i>erhuang</i> opera)	Chinese National Academy of Arts ¹⁵⁶
<i>Erhuang xi mulu</i> 二簧戲目錄 (Catalog of <i>erhuang</i> opera)	Chinese National Academy of Arts ¹⁵⁷
<i>Dagu shu dan</i> 大鼓書單 (List of big-drum tales)	Chinese National Academy of Arts ¹⁵⁸
<i>Gaoqiang xi mulu</i> 高腔戲目錄 (Catalog of <i>gao qiang</i> opera)	Chinese National Academy of Arts ¹⁵⁹
<i>Matou diao shangqu dan</i> 馬頭調上趣單 (Catalog of port tunes)	Chinese National Academy of Arts ¹⁶⁰
<i>Matou diao shangqu mulu</i> 馬頭調上嘯目錄 (Catalog of port tunes)	Chinese National Academy of Arts ¹⁶¹
<i>Zidi shu mulu</i> 子弟書目錄 (Catalog of youth books)	Chinese National Academy of Arts ¹⁶²
<i>Zidi shu mulu</i> 子弟書目錄 (Catalog of youth books)	Chinese National Academy of Arts ¹⁶³
Catalog of big-drum tales	Kansai University, L23 D 6478 ¹⁶⁴
Bieyetang 別堃堂	
<i>Geyang kuaishu mulu</i> 各樣快書目錄 (Catalog of various fast tales)	Chinese National Academy of Arts ¹⁶⁵
<i>Zidi shu mulu</i> 子弟書目錄 (Catalog of youth books)	Chinese National Academy of Arts ¹⁶⁶
Catalog of youth books	Hebei University Library ¹⁶⁷
Juuantang 聚卷堂	
<i>Bajiao gu shidao qu lianzhu diao paizi qu qingdan</i> 八角鼓時道曲連珠調牌子曲清單 (Clear list of linked tunes: eight-cornered drum songs, tunes-of-the-times, jingles)	Capital Library, <i>yi</i> 己1008 ¹⁶⁸
Leshantang 樂善堂	
Catalog of youth books	Fu Sinian Library, Tj27-212 ¹⁶⁹

¹⁵³ All the items listed below are manuscripts. I have assembled this provisional list from archival visits and various secondary sources, but there may be still more items that are extant. Typically, sales catalogs from scribal publishers contain lists of titles with prices and are themselves marked with a price. Below, they are listed by house where known, and ordered alphabetically by collection. Catalogs from the Fu Sinian Library whose provenance needs further research are listed separately. Finally, in cases where the status of an item is not clear to me (e.g. I have not seen it and a secondary source says that it does not contain prices), or where it is clearly a list of a different kind (e.g., an inventory), I have indicated this in a footnote and listed the item under the section ‘Other’ at the end of this appendix. The catalogs of youth books have thus far received the most scholarly attention; see Chen 2003b, Cui 2005, 117–119, and Huang 2012, 2–3, which includes photo reprints of pages from several of them. Huang et al. 2012b, vol. 10, has made available the catalogs from Bieyetang and Leshantang in typeset form and includes a list of titles collated from several Baiben Zhang catalogs. The collation notes do not, however, point out all the differences between the list and what is contained in the manuscripts used for collation.

¹⁵⁴ The titles on manuscripts are listed (in italics) where known; otherwise a description is given.

¹⁵⁵ *Yi* 己1008 contains a series of manuscripts from Baiben Zhang and Jujuantang, rebound into nine volumes. The title accompanying this shelfmark in the library’s electronic catalog is *Jujuantang Li, Baiben Zhang suochoao zaqu* 聚卷堂李、百本張所抄雜曲 (Miscellaneous songs copied by Jujuantang Li and Baiben Zhang). This and the next item have been rebound together into one volume; it is missing its title page.

¹⁵⁶ This catalog is described in Fu 1954a, 319–321. Manuscripts from Fu Xihua’s personal collection, which went to the Chinese National Academy of Arts, are not presently accessible to the public.

¹⁵⁷ See Fu 1954a, 321–322.

¹⁵⁸ See Fu 1954a, 325.

¹⁵⁹ Fan 2010, 123, citing Zhang Geng 張庚 and Guo Hancheng 郭漢城 (eds),

Zhongguo xiqu tongshi 中國戲曲通史 (Zhongguo xiqu chubanshe, 1992), 918, reveals that this catalog is held by the Materials Office of the Drama Research Institute at the Chinese National Academy of Arts 中國藝術研究院戲曲研究所資料室.

¹⁶⁰ See Fu 1954a, 326–327.

¹⁶¹ See Fu 1954a, 327–338.

¹⁶² See Fu 1954a, 322–324.

¹⁶³ See Fu 1954a, 324–325.

¹⁶⁴ Huang 2011, 147 mentions that Nagasawa Kikuya had acquired two catalogs, one being a catalog of big-drum tales from Baiben Zhang (the other item is unspecified). This would seem to be the item with shelfmark L23 D 6478, described as *Daiko shū daimoku oyobi enryō* 大鼓書題目及演料 (Titles and prices of big-drum tales) in the Kansai University library online catalog. Elsewhere, Huang describes a Baiben Zhang ‘changben mulu’ 唱本目錄 at Kansai from the former collection of Nagasawa (see Huang 2013, 8), but does not specify its title or the genre(s) contained in it, so it is not clear to me if there are in fact two Baiben Zhang catalogs at Kansai.

¹⁶⁵ Chen 2003a, 24 and Chen 2017, 51–54 and 149.

¹⁶⁶ See Fu 1954b, 14–15.

¹⁶⁷ Cui 2005, 119.

¹⁶⁸ This particular catalog contains lists of titles and volumes, without prices; given that the title page is labeled with a price, I have classified it as a sales catalog.

¹⁶⁹ The library’s electronic catalog gives its title as *Zidi dagu shu mulu* 子弟大鼓書目錄 (Catalog of youth books and big-drum tales), following what is written on the first folio inside the book, but this folio does not belong with the others (the book has been rebound and the original title page is no longer extant). This is a catalog of youth books and does not contain big-drum tales.

Table 2: Catalogs at the Fu Sinian Library for further study.¹⁷⁰

Title in the library's electronic catalog	Shelfmark
<i>Dagu shu mu</i> 大鼓書目	Tj27-210
<i>Dagu shu mu</i> 大鼓書目	Tj27-211
<i>Zidi shu mulu</i> 子弟書目錄	Tj27-213
<i>Dagu shu mulu</i> 大鼓書目錄	Tj27-214
<i>Zidi dagu shu mulu</i> 子弟大鼓書目錄	Tj27-215
<i>Dagu shu mulu</i> 大鼓書目錄	Tj27-216
<i>Dagu shu mulu</i> 大鼓書目錄	Tj28-217
<i>Dagu shu mulu</i> 大鼓書目錄	Tj28-218
<i>Za paizi mulu</i> 雜牌子目錄	Tj28-219
<i>Matou diao mulu</i> 馬頭調目錄	Tj28-220
<i>Erhuang mulu</i> 二簧目錄	Tj28-221
<i>Zaqu mulu</i> 雜曲目錄	Tj28-222
<i>Zaqu mulu</i> 雜曲目錄	Tj28-223
<i>Matou diao mulu</i> 馬頭調目錄	Tj28-224
<i>Matou diao mulu</i> 馬頭調目錄	Tj28-225
<i>Matou diao mulu</i> 馬頭調目錄	Tj28-226
<i>Kunqiang mulu</i> 昆腔目錄	Tj29-227
<i>Gaoqiang, Kun qiang mulu</i> 高腔.昆腔目錄	Tj29-228
<i>Gaoqiang, Kun qiang mulu</i> 高腔.昆腔目錄	Tj29-229
<i>Gaoqiang, Kun qiang mulu</i> 高腔.昆腔目錄	Tj29-230
<i>Gaoqiang mulu</i> 高腔目錄	Tj29-231
<i>Erhuang, Kunqiang mulu</i> 二簧.昆腔目錄	Tj30-232
<i>Erhuang mulu</i> 二簧目錄	Tj30-233
<i>Erhuang mulu</i> 二簧目錄	Tj30-234
<i>Zengbu erhuang mulu</i> 增補二簧目錄	Tj30-235
<i>Xin erhuang mulu</i> 新二簧目錄	Tj31-236
<i>Erhuang mulu</i> 二簧目錄	Tj31-237
<i>Za qu mulu</i> 雜曲目錄	Tj31-238
<i>Matou diao mulu</i> 馬頭調目錄	Tj31-239

Table 3: Other.

Description	Collection and shelfmark (where known)
List of songs in various genres	Chinese National Academy of Arts <i>qu</i> 曲 309.60 / 0.198 ¹⁷¹
Inventory	Fu Sinian Library, Tj28-225 ¹⁷²
Inventory	Fu Sinian Library, Tj31-240 ¹⁷³
Copy of a catalog of youth books (?)	Hebei University Library ¹⁷⁴
Catalog of youth books (?)	National Library of China, <i>wen</i> 文 571 ¹⁷⁵
Catalog of youth books (?)	Unclear ¹⁷⁶
Catalog of youth books (?)	Unclear ¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁰ These are catalogs at the library whose provenance needs further research. For each item, I have given the title listed in the library’s online catalog, but they do not in all cases accurately reflect the content of the books. All the manuscripts have been rebound, and most are missing their original covers/title pages. A number contain partial folios from what originally were multiple catalogs. Tj27-210, Tj27-211, Tj27-213 and Tj30-234 contain title pages bearing Baiben Zhang stamps, but in at least one case (Tj27-213), the differences in paper suggest that the folios did not originally all belong together. I did not find stamps from copying houses in the other items, but they share the usual sales catalog format of listing prices beneath titles. I have arranged the list by shelfmark.

¹⁷¹ This item, dated to 1886, is described as *Ganban paizi kuai shu chaqu matou diao geyang qumu* 趕板牌子快書岔曲馬頭調各樣曲目 (List of various swift beats, linked tunes, fast tales, ditties, and port tunes) in Huang 2012, 7; also see Chen 2017, 51–54. It is not clear to me if it is in fact a sales catalog from a scribal publisher, as these manuscripts are hardly ever dated.

¹⁷² This single sheet, containing a list of abbreviated titles with notes, is rebound together with a sales catalog.

¹⁷³ This item of nine folios contains running lists of titles in various genres, with triangles indicating tallies. The first seven folios form one inventory, and the last two form another.

¹⁷⁴ Chen 2000, 221 note 20, suggests this may be a later-made copy of a sales catalog from Baiben Zhang (but gives no further details).

¹⁷⁵ The library’s electronic catalog gives the title of this item as *Zidi shu mulu* 子弟書目錄 (‘catalog of youth books’) and describes it as a manuscript in two volumes, dated between the second half of the nineteenth century and the early Republican period. No further information is given, but very possibly this is a sales catalog from a scribal publisher.

¹⁷⁶ This item is described in Huang 2012, 2, as a Baiben Zhang catalog of youth books from the former collection of Nagasawa Kikuya. The photo reprint of a page from the manuscript included with the description shows that titles and numbers of chapters are listed, but not prices, so it is not clear to me if it is in fact a sales catalog. The original cover of the manuscript is apparently missing (ref. Huang et al. 2012b, vol. 10, 4358). Huang does not specify the present location of this item.

¹⁷⁷ Huang 2012, 2, describes this item as a Baiben Zhang catalog with a later cover signed by the collector Lütang yinguan 綠棠吟館, ‘Complete list of youth book verses, a base copy from Baiben Zhang’ (*Zidi shu ci qu quanmu Baiben Zhang diben* 子弟書詞曲全目 百本張底本). That it is described as a ‘base copy’ raises the question whether it is in fact a sales catalog. Huang does not specify the present location of this item.

Appendix 3: Announcement from Baiben Zhang¹⁷⁸

計開石派書列後

風波亭一部現有

九頭案以後，從南俠暗行、婆子哭墓起，合計六十餘本，要者定抄。再，本堂有數樣石韻之書未能得全，現在託人挽轉。全行得妥，較正明白，再行定抄可也。

今將未能得妥之石派書名列后

四郎探母	五本十六回
三矮奇聞	三本九回
義俠記	十本三十回
混元盒	兩本六回
鳳儀亭	兩本六回
長坂坡	兩本六回
下河南	五本十五回
長生殿	兩本六回
二心閨 <small>即真假幻</small>	兩本六回
二度霖	八本三十二回
仙俠緣 <small>聊齋紅玉</small>	兩本六回
綺閣春 <small>聊齋馬介甫</small>	四本十二回
謗閨醒夢	兩本六回
撞天婚	兩本六回

京都百本張具¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁸ I am grateful for Prof. Chen Jinzhao for generously sharing this source with me. I do not know the shelfmark for this item at the Fu Sinian Library. The text appears to be complete on a single sheet of paper. The punctuation below is mine.

¹⁷⁹ The characters *jingdu Baiben Zhang* 京都百本張 come from a stamp, while the character *ju* 具 is handwritten.

List of pending Shi-style tales to follow

The title *The Pavilion of Trouble* is readily available.

As for the plot after *The Case of the Nine Heads*, from *Secret Ventures of the Southern Knight* to *The Old Woman Weeps at the Grave*, there are a total of over sixty volumes. They can be copied to order upon demand. Moreover, there are a number of Shi-style tales that this house has not been able to obtain in their entirety; at present we have employed someone to look for the missing parts, and the texts can be copied to order once they are complete and corrected.

For the moment, those incomplete Shi-style tales are listed as follows:

Silang Visits His Mother, 16 chapters in 5 volumes

Marvels of the Three Midgets, 9 chapters in 3 volumes

The Knights' Chronicle, 30 chapters in 10 volumes

The Box of Primordial Chaos, 6 chapters in 2 volumes

The Phoenix Pavilion, 6 chapters in 2 volumes

The Battle at Changban Hill, 6 chapters in 2 volumes

Going down to Henan, 15 chapters in 5 volumes

The Palace of Everlasting Life, 6 chapters in 2 volumes

Battle of the Two Minds (i.e. *The Illusion of Reality*), 6 chapters in 2 volumes

The Second Bloom, 32 chapters in 8 volumes

The Fairy and the Knight (or *Hongyu*, from *Strange Tales of Liaozhai*), 6 chapters in 2 volumes

Spring at the Pavilion (or *Ma Jiefu*, from *Strange Tales of Liaozhai*), 12 chapters in 4 volumes

Reprimanding Yama and Waking from the Dream, 6 chapters in 2 volumes

A Marriage by Heaven's Arrangement, 6 chapters in 2 volumes

From Baiben Zhang of the Capital

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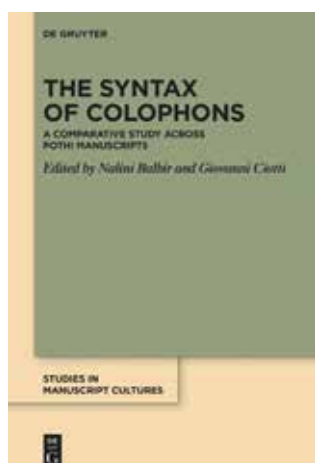
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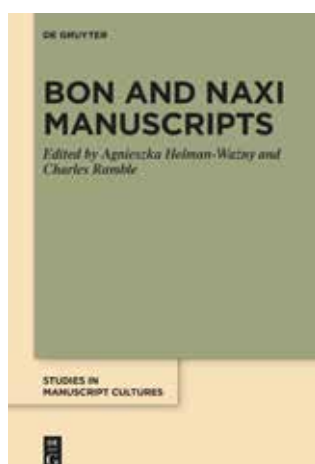
New Release



27 – *The Syntax of Colophons: A Comparative Study across Pothi Manuscripts*,
Edited by Nalini Balbir and Giovanni Ciotti

This volume is the first to attempt a comprehensive and cross-disciplinary analysis of the manuscript cultures implementing the pothi manuscript form (a loosely bound stack of oblong folios). It is the indigenous form by which manuscripts have been crafted in South Asia and the cultural areas most influenced by it, that is to say Central and South East Asia. The volume focuses particularly on the colophons featured in such manuscripts presenting a series of essays enabling the reader to engage in a historical and comparative investigation of the links connecting the several manuscript cultures examined here. Colophons as paratexts are situated at the intersection between texts and the artefacts that contain them and offer a unique vantage point to attain global appreciation of their manuscript cultures and literary traditions. Colophons are also the product of scribal activities that have moved across regions and epochs alongside the pothi form, providing a common thread binding together the many millions of pothis still today found in libraries in Asia and the world over. These contributions provide a systematic approach to the internal structure of colophons, i.e. their ‘syntax’, and facilitate a vital, comparative approach.

New Release



28 – *Bon and Naxi Manuscripts*,
edited by Agnieszka Helman-Ważny and Charles Ramble

The present volume offers a dozen studies of manuscripts of the Tibetan Bon and Naxi Dongba traditions across time and space. While some of the contributions focus on particular features of manuscripts from either tradition, others explicitly bridge the two by considering common codicological and material aspects of selected examples or common themes in the content of the texts. This is the first primarily object-based study to deal with the cultural history and technology of books from the two traditions. It discusses collections of Bon and Naxi manuscripts, the concepts and history of both traditions, the science and technology of book studies as it relates to these collections, the relationship between text and image, writing materials, and the historical and archaeological context of the manuscripts’ places of origin. The authors are specialists in different fields including philology, anthropology, art history, codicology and archaeometry. The contributions shed light on trade routes, materials and technologies as well as on reading practices and ritual usage of Bon and Naxi manuscripts.

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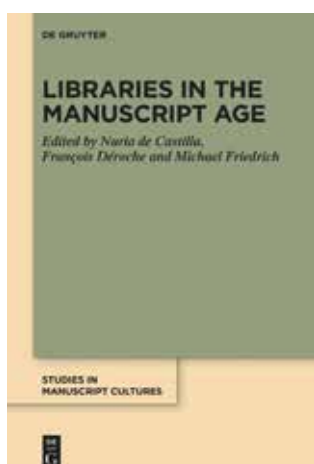
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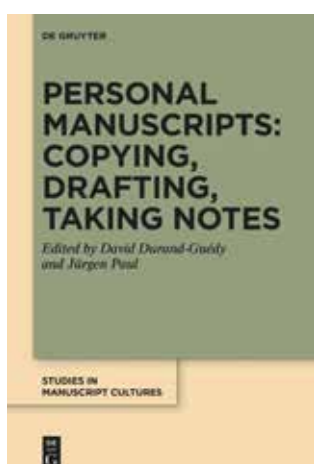


29 – *Libraries in the Manuscript Age*,

Edited by Nuria de Castilla, François Déroche, and Michael Friedrich

The case studies presented in this volume help illuminate the rationale for the founding of libraries in an age when books were handwritten, thus contributing to the comparative history of libraries. They focus on examples ranging from the seventh to the seventeenth century emanating from the Muslim World, East Asia, Byzantium and Western Europe. Accumulation and preservation are the key motivations for the development of libraries. Rulers, scholars and men of religion were clearly dedicated to collecting books and sought to protect these fragile objects against the various hazards that threatened their survival. Many of these treasured books are long gone, but there remain hosts of evidence enabling one to reconstruct the collections to which they belonged, found in ancient buildings, literary accounts, archival documentation and, most crucially, catalogues. With such material at hand or, in some cases, the manuscripts of a certain library which have come down to us, it is possible to reflect on the nature of these libraries of the past, the interests of their owners, and their role in the intellectual history of the manuscript age.

Forthcoming



30 – *Personal Manuscripts: Copying, Drafting, Taking Notes*,

Edited by David Durand-Guédy and Jürgen Paul

Some manuscripts have been produced for the personal use of their scribe only; whereas a number of them are valued as autographs, most have been ephemeral and were discarded. Personal manuscripts were not written for a patron, commissioner, or client. They are personal copies, anthologies, florilegia, personal notes, excerpts, drafts and notebooks, as well as family books, accountancy notebooks and many others; these forms often being mixed with one another.

This volume introduces a number of such manuscripts in a comparative perspective, from Japan to Europe through the Middle East, with a focus on the Near and Middle East.

The main concern is the possibility of identifying typical features of such manuscripts in terms of materials, visual organization and content. In attempting this, both the conditions of production and traces of the manuscripts' use are taken into consideration, with particular attention to their material aspects.

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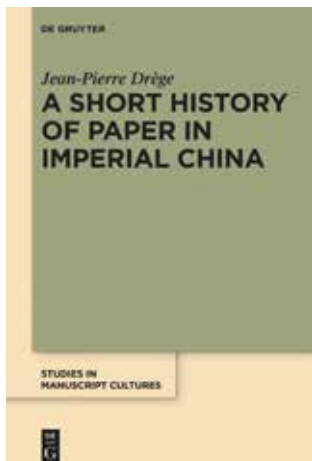
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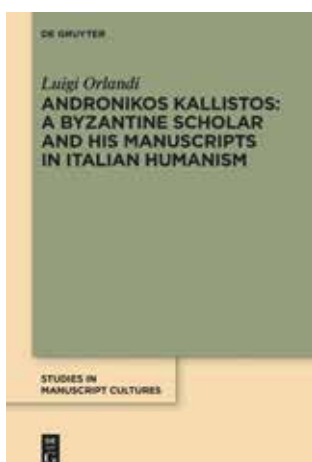
31 – *A Short History of Paper in Imperial China,*

Jean-Pierre Drège

Paper has become the most common writing material worldwide in the course of a two millennia history. This study provides a magisterial synthesis of recent scholarship and original insights into the origins of papermaking and its subsequent history in imperial China, including a wide range of archaeological evidence and literary sources. The volume introduces the materials and technologies of paper production and presents the cultural history of paper in traditional China.

A comprehensive survey of literary sources on the production and use of paper is undertaken starting with the ongoing debate about the origin and genesis of paper, which was fuelled by recent archaeological discoveries of paper or proto-paper from the last two centuries BCE. In addition to its having become a popular writing material produced in many different qualities for both handwriting and printing, it also served as a material for wrapping or decorating, money and numerous uses in everyday life, such as umbrellas, windows, clothing, wallpapers, curtains and kites. Precious paper contributed to the aesthetics of calligraphy and painting, catering to the taste of the educated elite and artists.

Forthcoming



32 – *Andronikos Kallistos: A Byzantine Scholar and His Manuscripts in Italian Humanism,*

Luigi Orlandi

The interest in Andronikos Kallistos, a leading personality among the Greek émigrés who participated in Italian Humanism, arose at the end of the nineteenth century within the frame of the studies on Byzantine scholars of the Renaissance. Researchers have only glimpsed the depth of Kallistos' erudite personality. To date, nearly 130 manuscripts have been found bearing evidence of his work as a copyist and philologist. Adopting a synergistic approach to historical, philological, codicological, and paleographic data within this framework, this monograph study aims to fulfil the following tasks: outlining an updated biography; defining Kallistos' scribal activity better by means of a thorough examination of all surviving manuscript sources; attempting to reconstruct the development of his book collection; acknowledging Kallistos' scholarly activity both as a teacher and philologist; making an inventory of all the manuscripts which bear traces of his writing; and, finally, publishing Kallistos' works.

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