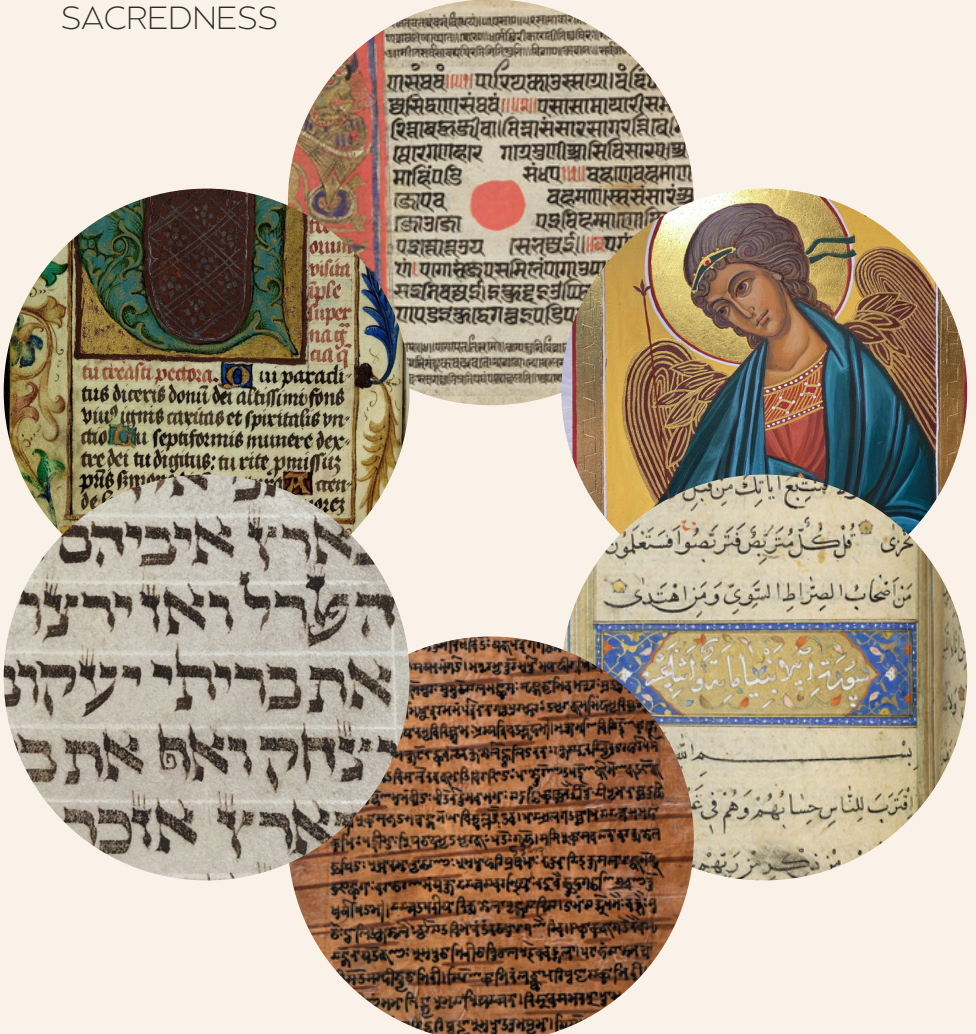


CREATING MORE HOLINESS

23rd-25th
Sept. 2024

BOOKS, SCROLLS AND ICONS AS CARRIERS OF
SACREDNESS



Cover images from the top continuing clockwise:

1) Prakrit in Jaina-Devanāgarī script on paper, ca. 1500 CE, Ms. or. fol. 1708, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, f.49r.

2) Iconic representation of the angel Gabriel, in private hand, permission granted from the owner to display image

3) Holy Qur'an (17th C), Univeritätsbibliothek Heidelberg

<https://doi.org/10.11588/diglit.55230#0008>

4) Sanskrit in Śāradā script on bark, 17th century CE, Ms. or. quart. 1162, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, f.5r.

5) Tora scroll, Ashkenazi, Ms.or.134, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin

6) German prayerbook (16th C), Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg

<https://doi.org/10.11588/diglit.6250#0010>



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ABOUT TOROLL

Materialized Holiness



Annett Martini in Bologna

ToRoll: Materialized holiness is a collaborative research project to examine the production of ritually pure Torah scrolls as an extraordinary codicological, theological, and sociological phenomenon of Jewish scribal culture. The project includes the digital edition of selected scribe literature from antiquity until the modern era, paleographical analyses of the letter crownlets and particular forms of lettering, analyses of the inks and the materials used for writing medieval Torah scrolls of European provenance, and qualitative interviews with contemporary scribes.

A primary objective of the project is to further integrate central research fields of Jewish Studies into the inter- and transdisciplinary research discourses, and to open them up for methodological approaches with the help of the Digital Humanities. For processing new research questions, the project combines the academic expertise from Jewish Studies with the methods of material research, the social sciences, and art history, as well as with the future-oriented approaches of information technology.

THE TEAM

Besides Annett Martini, the ToRoll team is made up of six post-docs, three PhD students, one sociologist, one student researcher and, as of now, three interns.

The project is being supported by the Federal Ministry for Education and Research for a period of four years (2022-2026) in the funding line Small Disciplines - Strong Together. It is based at the Institute for Jewish Studies at the Free University Berlin with five researchers and supported by experts of the project partners - the Federal Institute for Materials Research and Testing (BAM) and the Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT). Together with external project partners - the Mainz Academy of Sciences and Literature, the Berlin State Library - Prussian Cultural Heritage, and colleagues from the Institute for Art History at the Free University Berlin -, we are working on a digital repository of knowledge that will be made available equally to the national and international research communities as well as to the interested public for use and scientific advancement in open access.

Annett Martini

Principal Investigator

Annett Martini has been exploring the significance and role of Tora scrolls and scribal traditions in the medieval works from the circle of the Hasidei Ashkenaz: the Sefer Hasidim as well as works by Yehudah he-Hasid's Kitrei Otiyyot or Eleazar of Worms' Sha'ar tagi. She is moreover working on a historical-critical edition of Sefer Tagin and of Sefer Alfa Beta by Yom Tov Lippmann.

Dana Eichhorst

Post-doc

Dana Eichhorst is working on a critical edition of Sefer Tagi attributed to Eleazar of Worms. She is also ToRoll's TEI specialist enabling the detailed analysis of scribal literature through digital tools.

Danah Tonne & Germaine Götzelmann

Post-docs

Danah Tonne and Germaine Götzelmann from KIT design and implement the research data infrastructure for the project that enables sustainable data storage, joint annotation and computer-assisted analysis of Torah scrolls and scribal literature. With their team, they are researching a so-called Virtual Torah Scroll, in which the anomalies and rules for ritual writing practice are to be made visible and traceable.

Zina Cohen

Post-doc

Zina Cohen is based at the BAM. With her project team, she analyses medieval Torah scrolls located in libraries and collections across Europe, Israel and North America. Zina Cohen also conducts ink and other material analyses to complement the project's research into the historical, mystical and halakhic significance of Torah scrolls, tagin and otiyyot meshunnot.

Emese Kozma

Post-doc

As our newest team member, Emese Kozma brings year-long experience in editing texts and working with manuscripts. She has been working with Annett Martini on the edition of Sefer Tagin and Yom Tov Lippmann's Sefer Alfa Beta.

Rebecca Ullrich

Post-doc

Rebecca Ullrich's area of research are the rabbinical sources from antiquity to medieval times.

Silvana Greco

Sociologist

Silvana Greco looks at scribal practice through a sociologist's lens and conducts and analyses interviews with present-day Jewish scribes.

Katharina Hadassah Wendl

PhD researcher

Katharina explores the genre of scribal guides and handbooks in the 19th century. Focusing on one of the most influential modern scribal guides, Keset HaSofer, she explores its halachic agenda as well as the pedagogical and organisational considerations that influence the writing of practical guides for scribes of the 19th century.

Laura Frank

PhD researcher

Laura Frank is part of the KIT team and is working on the digital research data infrastructure consisting of the digital repository, the web annotation server, the annotation interface, and the Virtual Torah Scroll. Furthermore, she conducts research on automatic recognition of decorated letters in medieval Torah scrolls.

Anne May Dallendörfer

PhD researcher

Anne May is creating an updated critical edition of the medieval scribal manual Baruch She-Amar written in Hebrew in 14th century Germany.

Aram Abu-Saleh

Student researcher

Aram Abu-Saleh is supporting the team in many valuable ways, helping with the material analysis preparations, conference organisation and tagin annotations.

CREATING MORE HOLINESS

Programme
23rd-25th September

Location: Online, Time Zone GMT+2



Monday, 23.09.2024

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Robert Vanhoff
- 14:45-15:15 Ottoman Calligraphy and the Art of Worship
Bilal Badat
- 15:15-15:45 Torah Written by a Robot
Marc Michaels

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Thea Gomelauri
- 16:45-17:15 "Honored in Like Manner:" The Creation of Icon and Gospel Holiness during Byzantine Iconoclasm
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- 18:00-18:30 Adornment and Holiness: The Price of Sacredness in Byzantium
Benoît Cantet
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Session 1

- 14:00-14:30 Qeduššah vs. Sanctitas: The Manufacture of Holy Books from the Perspective of the Ḥasidei Ashkenaz
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- 14:30-15:00 The Inscriptions of the Ereniyó Visual Graphic System: Dimensioning Time and Space in the Abakuá Society
Marcela Andrade

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Aida Gasimova
- 16:30-17:00 Icons as Protective Shields and Triumph-Inducing Sacred Objects at the Frontline – On the Role and Function of Russian Orthodox Icons in the Russian-Ukrainian War
Olga Tomyuk

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Kitty Millet
- 18:15-18:45 Text as Relic: What Renders Gertrude of Helfta's Auto-hagiography Sacred?
Ella Johnson
- 18:45-19:15 Holiness and Radicalization in Slimane Benaissa's "The Last Night of a Damned Soul" (2003)
Mohamed Amine Khoudi

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Session 1

14:00-14:30 From the Ben Ezra Synagogue in Cairo to the Manhole Covers in Tel Aviv, Hebrew Letters in Mundane Context as Carriers of Holiness

Mark Farnadi-Jerusalmi

14:30-15:00 The Prohibition or Obligation to Write a Sefer Aftarta (scroll of excerpts from the Hebrew Prophets)

Katharina Hadassah Wendl

Break 15:00-15:30

Session 2

15:30-16:00 Holiness Despite Itself? The Strange Career of Tsene-Rene
Gil Ribak

16:00-16:30 Mass-produced Protections: Azimat in Early Printed Books in the Malay World

Tiara Ulfa

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17:15-17:45 Black Fire on White Fire. Narratives on the Divine Act of Writing in Medieval Judaism

Dana Eichhorst

17:45-18:15 A Sacred in Turkish Culture: Arabic Alphabet

Betül Okatali

18:15-18:45 **Reflection and Discussion**

CREATING MORE HOLINESS

Abstracts

23rd-25th September

Location: Online, Time Zone GMT+2



Monday, 23.09.2024

A Once and Future Holiness: Displacement and Hope in Tiberian Jewish Scribal Memory

Robert Vanhoff

(Canada: Torah Resource Institute)

In early 10th century Tiberias, two brothers labored together to produce a beautiful and ornate codex of the Pentateuch, known today as the First Leningrad Bible (Russian National Library, Ms. EVR II B 17). This work of Shlomo and Ephrayim ben Buya'ah exemplifies their complete mastery in the discipline of Jewish scribal achievement called Masorah during a time of Islamic hegemony in the Holy Land. It is a thoroughly Jewish religious product best understood in light of larger trends in Arabic book culture.

I focus on five features of this priceless artifact which indicate senses of both displacement and hope in the scribes' negotiation of the problem of Jewish powerlessness: the use of Temple imagery, special treatment of the Tetragrammaton, hinted specialness of the Temple mount, preservation of alternative recitation traditions, and the sentiments captured in the brothers' dedicatory colophons. Together, these features show historians of religion and bookmaking how, living under Muslim rule, pious Jewish scribes could create a holy object (a Sefer Torah) which was simultaneously marked with memories of loss and of longing for a future holiness. In that age to come, the memories of holiness preserved in this particular codex would be rendered obsolete by the presence of a rebuilt Jerusalem and a restored Temple service.

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Ottoman Calligraphy and the Art of Worship

Bilal Badat

(Germany: University of Tübingen)

This paper explores how the strict and codified rules governing the practice of Ottoman calligraphy had a profound impact on the

production and reception of calligraphic objects. It argues that the sacred perception of Islamic calligraphy within the Ottoman context significantly shaped the practice of calligraphy, resulting in the infusion of ritualistic and pietistic practices into the production of calligraphic objects, including Qur'ans, prayer books, and many other forms of sacred text. Through an examination of Ottoman primary sources such as works of calligraphy, biographical dictionaries, and Ottoman treatises devoted to the art of calligraphy, this paper demonstrates that the practice of calligraphy was widely regarded as a form of worship, thus endowing calligraphic objects with an aura of sacrality and reverence. Finished works were not only seen as an expression of the calligrapher's religious devotion but also as repositories of divine blessings rooted in the rituals associated with their creation. The sacred practices to be explored in this paper include the ritualistic preparation of tools and materials, ziyārah (pilgrimage) and grave visitation, supplication, pen-burial, and the practice of mystical seclusion.

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Torah Written by a Robot

Marc Michaels

(United Kingdom: University of Cambridge)

In 2014 the media universally reported that a robot in a Berlin museum had written a Torah. However, this description was very far from reality, from both a physical and spiritual perspective. This paper explores the halakhic implications of this endeavour, what could have been done differently to better approximate a Torah scroll, and the connection between art and the sacred. Ultimately showing how the absence of human kavannah (spiritual intention) prevents the creation of holiness.

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Sacred Jewish Books in Medieval Georgia: The Lailashi Codex and the Bret Bibles

Thea Gomelauri

(United Kingdom: University of Oxford)

The history of Jewish settlement in Georgia goes back to Nebuchadnezzar's conquest of Jerusalem in 586 BCE followed by the Babylonian exile. Despite being the world's oldest continuously inhabited Jewish settlement, very little is known about their literary treasures. The first documentalist who revealed information about the cult of Holy Books of Georgian Jewry to the Western world was Joseph Judah Chorny (1835-1880), a young Maskil from Minsk (Belarus). Thanks to the curiosity of this Jewish ethnographer, we learn about three miracle-working Hebrew manuscripts in Medieval Georgia which were venerated by Jews and Christians, but their content and secrets have been concealed from public light for centuries. These gems of the Jewish scribal heritage hold the utmost significance not only for Georgian-Jewish history, and manuscript studies but also the development of sacred rituals. My paper will introduce the above-mentioned holy manuscripts and will discuss factors contributing to their formation as liturgical objects.

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"Honored in Like Manner:" The Creation of Icon and Gospel Holiness during Byzantine Iconoclasm

Chelsea Connelly

(USA: Yale University)

In 869-70 CE, the Fourth Council of Constantinople declared that "the holy images of our Lord Jesus Christ shall be honored in like manner as the gospel book." Two centuries before this statement, gospel books were the primary sacred object of Byzantine Christianity and Christian image veneration was still nascent. How did icons come to be equivocated with Christian gospel books by the end of the Byzantine iconoclastic controversy? By analyzing the rhetoric of the iconoclastic debates as well as examining the use of icons and gospel books in both rituals and artistic representation, I argue that the rise of icons as sacred objects only came by building on the status of gospel books. In particular, I show how Byzantine iconophiles used the materiality and

process of manufacture of both gospel books and icons to relate the objects together and make their holiness interdependent. Those writing in defense of icons often compared the similarity of the materials with which both icons and books were made and drew comparisons between scribes and artists. This paper addresses the question of how gospel books turned icons into sacred objects and how icons in turn changed the sacred nature of gospel books.

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Adornment and Holiness: The Price of Sacredness in Byzantium

Benoît Cantet

(France: Université Paris)

In Byzantium, Christ was sometimes called *Kosmêtôr*, mostly understood as "Creator of the world", but using the wordplay between the word *kosmos* (the world) and *kosmon* (ornament), he was also thought as the One that adorns the world". So, in that case, any artefact, icon or manuscript being adorned by precious material and/or an epigram must have been considered sacred and any ornament was the sign of the sacredness of the object it was on. Things were a bit more complicated, there were both symbolic and social aspects and, at the same time, a real pragmatism of the Byzantines themselves towards icons, books, and precious ornaments.

In this paper, I aim to investigate the process of sacredness and its limits in Byzantium in the middle and late byzantine period, by studying both the artefacts and the epigrams. I will first present the symbolics of the materials (pearls, gold, silver or purple silk) that were associated not only with sacred figures, but also with preeminent patrons; then, I will show the complexity of the situation when adornments had to be destroyed, as the artefact was sometimes able to defend itself, or ritual and canonical reasons had to be crafted., I aim to investigate the process of sacredness and its limits in Byzantium in the middle and late byzantine period, by studying both the artefacts and the epigrams. I will first present the symbolics of the materials (pearls, gold, silver or purple silk)

that were associated not only with sacred figures, but also with preeminent patrons; then, I will show the complexity of the situation when adornments had to be destroyed, as the artefact was sometimes able to defend itself, or ritual and canonical reasons had to be crafted.

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A Symphony of Inquiry into Shiite Sacred Script: Delineating the Boundaries between Writings and the Holy Book

Javad Fakhkhar Toosi

(Canada: University of Toronto, Ontario)

A holy book embodies divine revelation. Various religions express perspectives, shaping reverence for their holy books. This study focuses on the Shia sect's stance on the physical manifestation of revelation, the Holy Book. A book has pages, covers marking its start and end, and more. In Shia beliefs, the written content is separate from the book. Muslims prioritize the sacred text, leading to implications: sanctity lies in the writings, not the book; buying/selling the book is allowed, but trading writings is forbidden; receiving payment for writing is prohibited, but preparing other book elements is allowed.

What defines the holy book? What characterizes the holy text? Which possesses holiness? Shiite scholars concluded a discussion titled "Buying/Selling Quran." They permit transactions solely for the book's covers, pages, decorations, etc. Money shouldn't exchange hands for motifs and writings. Scholars view writing as a paper attribute, separable in mental analysis, thus beyond the transaction scope. These fatwas separate the book from its writings, shifting focus from the holy book to the holy text.

This study, using analytical-descriptive methods to gather evidence from Shia sources and applying inferential methods to derive results, aims to:

1. Comprehend the meaning of the holy book.
2. Discern the essence of the holy text.
3. Grasp the concept of holiness between the two.

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Tuesday, 24.09.2024

Qeduššah vs. Sanctitas: The Manufacture of Holy Books from the Perspective of the Hasidei Ashkenaz

Annett Martini

(Germany: Free University Berlin)

Former research already pointed to the fact that the Sefer Hasidim – The Book of the Pious – was the richest medieval source for Jewish scribal practice. Indeed, the encyclopedic work which reflects the religious practice of the pious strand of German Jews in 12th and 13th century gives manifold insights not only into material but also ethical and religious issues with respect to preparing, writing, and storing holy books as well as their respectful handling. Especially the choreography of behaviours related to sacred texts, which was refined by the Hasidei Ashkenaz to a remarkable degree, exhibits a heavily ritualized character. The objective of this paper is to shed light on a hitherto neglected aspect of the pious programme of the Hasidei Ashkenaz. It will be argued that the flourishing monastic culture with its highly professional scriptoriums was a pivotal trigger for the Hasidei Ashkenaz to conceive an extensive canon of regulations with regard to many aspects of manufacturing and handling the holy texts.

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The Inscriptions of the Ereniyó Visual Graphic System: Dimensioning Time and Space in the Abakuá Society

Marcela Andrade

(Brazil: National Museum, Federal University of Rio de Janeiro)

The Abakuá Society is a brotherhood with specific ceremonies and an internal structure based on its foundational narrative about the associative creation of the sacred drum Ekué in Cuba. A fundamental part of its rituals involves writing the graphic elements of the holy visual system Ereniyó on different surfaces such as the men's skin, sacred

trees, ground, temple door, and attributes that represent each high-position member in its hierarchy. The writing act is performed with chants and prayers in the ritual language - brícamo- from the bantu-congolese branch. Writing, then, is an essential vehicle of agency between the practitioners and the ancestors and can be done using sacred yellow chalk (ngomo), symbolizing life, or white chalk symbolizing death. Examining the forms of composition of the meaning in their ritual ceremonies, I will seek to analyze the dynamics that the interlocutors named "resizing". These dynamics inform modulations in the symbolization and creation process of its "visual sacred idiom". They are concerned with the conceptions of time and space that simultaneously conceptualize epistemic changes for the Abakuá rituals.

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Consuming Texts as Ritual

Joyan Tan

(USA: University of California, Davis)

Texts are read, not eaten. In some striking examples of religious texts, however, words become food and, through consumption and digestion, have miraculous effects on bodies. In this paper, I compare the sotah ritual first recorded in Numbers 5:12-31 and later in early tannaitic discussions, with a sixth-century Taoist text, Essentials of the Practice of Perfection. The sotah ritual records a method of determining whether a woman had sexual intercourse with a man other than her husband. In the ritual, she drinks a concoction of holy water, dust and erased writing that determines her innocence. The Essentials describes a ritual for treating disease. The priest visualizes with an exorcistic seal and recites spells, and the patient then swallows talismans containing writing from the seal. Why are these writings eaten rather than read? What accounts for the miraculous efficacy of words consumed? What role do the religious authorities play in both instances? I consider these questions and show how words and writing take on a different function and set of semiotic meanings when placed within specific ritual settings. I further show how

this unusual comparison of two texts from different cultures sheds light on the contours of materiality and ritual performance, opening up an exciting space of possibilities.

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Holy Book – Holy Face

Aida Gasimova

(Azerbaijan: Baku State University)

Due to the profound and influential role of the Qur'an in Muslim societies, Qur'anic motives and ideas constitute a significant component of the literary tradition, notably contributing to the prevalence of Qur'anic motifs in Sūfī-Hūrūfī poetry. This paper posits that the spectrum of Qur'anic motives and ideas serves not only as a primary key to understanding the Sūfī-Hūrūfī tradition but also as a means of illustrating the elevated status of the sacred book within society—a revered icon of material culture. More specifically, the portrayal of the holy face of Divine/Human Beauty, representing a metamorphosis of Divine Scripture, emphasizes the profound sanctity of the Qur'an. This correlation extends to associated beliefs, rites, and rituals, including but not limited to the following actions and elements: The holy face serves as a reflection of various aspects of the Qur'an, encompassing the process of recitation (qir'āh), memorization (ḥifz), and completion (khatm) along with their associated rituals. The face embodies the commentary (sharh) on the Qur'an. Material elements of the Mushḥaf including writing surfaces, inks, pens, colors, writing styles, book binding are mirrored on the face.

Like the holy book, the face also was fashioned by the eternal creator embodying roles such as Painter (muṣawwir), Scribe (kātib), Engraver (naqqāṣ), and Editor (muḥarrir). The utilization of the holy book for practices like foretelling and clairvoyance is closely tied to the concept of 'ilm al-firāsah (physiognomy). The use of the Qur'anic verses as talismans and amulets is also manifested on the Face.

My paper will focus on Azeri Turkic literature, a prolific branch of medieval Turkish literature, exemplified by eminent poets such as

‘Imāduddīn Nesīmī (d. 820/1417-18), Jahān Shāh Haqīqī (d. 871/1467), Shāh Ismā‘īl Khatā‘ī (d. 930/1524), and Muḥammad Fudūlī (d.963/1556) among others.

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Icons as Protective Shields and Triumph-Inducing Sacred Objects at the Frontline – On the Role and Function of Russian Orthodox Icons in the Russian-Ukrainian War

Olga Tomyuk

(Germany: Martin-Luther University, Halle-Wittenberg)

The research project examines the functioning of mechanisms, practices and narratives that are used by dignitaries, clergy and believers of the Russian Orthodox Church in the context of the current Russian-Ukrainian war in media discourses in order to attribute a sacred victorious, miraculous and glorifying role and function to certain icons and in this way maintain the constituted specific sacrality. Based on research approaches to the materiality of religion, which focus on the continece and polyvalence of sacred objects and make the dissolution of these characteristics dependent on the respective specific historical context, this project attempts to describe some case studies of images of saints as part of a specific religious practice in the context of war and to point to overarching attribution processes.

This proposed topic is based on the observation that icons are ascribed the potential of miraculous effects in the present day, that they are brought to the frontline and set up for worship in field churches and distributed to soldiers in the form of patches which, according to reports, have even protected their bearers from bullets. Corresponding narratives and miracle stories are also spread on Russian government and Russian orthodox media channels and in Russian-language media, where, among other things, donations for the production and dispatch of such patches to the front are encouraged. The act of painting icons also testifies to the object-related sacralization of the current Russian-Ukrainian war. For example, an icon painter created an icon of Ilija Pečerskij in which

soldiers of the Russian armed forces who died in a missile strike by the Ukrainian armed forces near Makiyivka are depicted behind the saint - including the son of a Russian Orthodox priest at whose request the icon was painted. Based on these observations, it will be shown that icons in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian War are detached from their dynamic and fluid quality as arbitrary signs and stylized in reports as victorious media, which are intended to establish a connection to the transcendent and therefore are purposefully integrated into religious rites of the military clergy and the Russian armed forces at the front.

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The Prohibition or Obligation to Write a Sefer Aftarta (scroll of excerpts from the Hebrew Prophets)

Katharina Hadassah Wendl

(Germany: Free University Berlin)

In synagogues, the public reading of the Torah on Shabbat, Jewish festivals and fast days is followed by a shorter reading of excerpts from the Hebrew Prophets, called Haftarat. While it is undisputed, in halachic literature, that the Torah needs to be written on a scroll made of parchment, there is more debate about the exact form and shape of the prophetic readings. Additionally, there is a diversity of traditions regarding the length and verses to be read during each public reading of the Hebrew Prophets. Halachic authorities are especially in dispute as to whether there is a prohibition or an obligation to write a Sefer Aftarta, a collection of excerpts of the Hebrew Prophets intended for their public reading. This presentation will analyse and discuss the reasons for these diverging opinions and explore religious, economic and technological considerations of (not) writing a Sefer Aftarta. Connecting the issue of Sifrei Aftarta (plural for Sefer Aftarta) to discourse about levels of sanctity within Jewish scribal traditions, contemporary as well as historical practice will be considered.

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Text as Relic: What Renders Gertrude of Helfta's Auto-hagiography Sacred?

Ella Johnson

(USA: St. Ambrose University, Davenport, Iowa)

While a saint's text does not commonly serve as their relic in medieval hagiographies, the rendering of the vita as efficacious is not entirely uncommon. Helfta scholars, for instance, have noted how Gertrude the Great's Herald of Divine Love may be rightly understood as her relic. Posthumous miracles are attributed to her book rather than to her tomb or pieces of her body. Furthermore, it is one part of her book specifically, book 2 of her Herald, her auto-hagiographical account, that seems to work miracles. Several references are made in other parts of the Herald to book 2, including accounts of its veneration in the liturgy by members of Gertrude's religious community. This paper will explore the handling and performative function of Gertrude's auto-hagiography, the circumstances of its writing, and the theological concepts associated with it. In doing so, the paper will draw comparisons to other medieval vitae that have been designated as curative and efficacious, thus contributing to our general theological understanding of sacred texts as representative of the divine.

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Holiness and Radicalization in Slimane Benaïssa's "The Last Night of a Damned Soul" (2003)

Mohamed Amine Khoudi

(Algeria: Mouloud Mammeri University of Tizi Ouzou)

This presentation explores the issues of holiness and radicalization in Slimane Benaïssa's *The Last Night of a Damned Soul* (2003). The novel belongs to the old genre of the terrorist novel, which has kept renewing itself in the last two decades after the catastrophic events of 9/11 to cope with the complex and global threat of terror, which plagues the contemporary world. Benaïssa exploits the terrorist novel's capacity for transformation in order to dramatize the mindset of the main character, Raouf, and represent the latter's transformations into a radical, terrorist figure.

The Algerian author includes Qu'ranic references to suggest Raouf's rediscovery of Islam. Benaïssa's use of Qu'ranic references prompts the following questions: How does the author exploit the Qu'ranic references to portray the protagonist's radicalization process? What is the relation between Raouf's radicalization and his religious teachings? How does Benaïssa define holiness in the novel? In what ways the Qu'ranic references introduced in the narrative re-examine the "terrorist novel" and transgress its conventions? Given Benaïssa's transnational context, the answers to those questions will open new perspectives to the "terrorist novel" and its relationship to holiness.

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Wednesday, 25.09.2024

From the Ben Ezra Synagogue in Cairo to the Manhole Covers in Tel Aviv, Hebrew Letters in Mundane Context as Carriers of Holiness

Mark Farnadi-Jerusalími

(Israel/France: École pratique des hautes études, Paris)

"Our Masters taught: He who enters the bathroom – takes of his tefillin."
(Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Berakhot 23A)

Is the prohibition of bringing the phylacteries to the bathroom, a blanket prohibition regarding everything written in Hebrew and/or with Hebrew letters, which are considered holy in Jewish tradition? Or is it only holy writings in the limited sense, and especially the Torah scrolls, tefillin and mezuzot that are forbidden from being disgraced in such a way?

Is there holiness to the letters themselves, or are these writings considered holy because of their content?

Why were administrative documents in Medieval Cairo kept in the genizah of the Ben Ezra Synagogue? The question of the sanctity of profane writings in Hebrew became even more common since the mass production of Hebrew texts caused by the invention of printing in the 15th century and the establishment of Hebrew printing houses, and then the revival of the Hebrew language and its use in all areas of life. Is it allowed to bring a Hebrew newspaper into the bathroom? Why did Rabbi

Rokeah, the ‘Belzer ruv’, avoid stepping on manhole covers with Hebrew script in Tel Aviv?

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Sacred Phenomena and Profane Objects

Kitty Millet

(USA: San Francisco State University, California)

Bruno Schulz opens *Sanatorium under the Sign of the Hourglass*, with an anonymous narrator, who recalls his Father studies a mysterious text. He “rubs” its pages, tracing the words and letters so intensely that “The Book’s” emanations transform Father’s study into the site of another Eden. The son witnesses the wind breathing on its pages until they “flutter” and creatures “fly,” liberated, around the room. They saturate it with colors, sounds, the *Sinnlichkeit* of a hidden, secret world. Schulz calls it a “Book of Radiances” and scholars associate it with Kabbalah’s Zohar. However, by the end of the volume, Schulz names it as *Księga Stworzenia*, or *The Book of Creation*, older than the Zohar, but still a part of the Jewish mystical tradition. He suggests its words, letters, are sacred phenomena, dormant until stimulated through reading. Materialized in profane objects, these sacred essences redeem his narrator from “the chaos” within: redemption is a property of the written, “the Book,” an archive, an immanent repository, that awaits a “true reader.” My paper explores how Schulz, a secular Jew, repositions both orthodox and heretical kabbalahs in order to posit writing in modernity as a sign of redemption.

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Holiness Despite Itself? The Strange Career of Tsene-Rene

Gil Ribak

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The *Tsene-rene* (*Come Out and See*) is by far the most popular Yiddish book ever published. This highly prevalent anthology of stories and commentaries on the Hebrew Bible, organized according to the weekly Torah readings in the synagogue, appeared in more than two-hundred

editions since the early 17th century across Europe, and later in the United States, Israel, and elsewhere. Though widely known as the "women's Bible", the author, Yankev ben Yitskhok Ashkenazi of Janów (Poland), aimed the book at the vast majority of Jews, women and men alike, who could read little Hebrew. Yet despite the author's intention, over the years, another common name for this anthology was "Vayber khumesh" (Women's Pentateuch). Hypothetically, this book should have been relegated to marginality and oblivion in the world of Ashkenazi Jewry. Within that Jewry's distinct hierarchy between the sacred and the profane, male and female, Hebrew and Yiddish, Tsene-rene should have been at the bottom. Yet not only was it neither forgotten nor disregarded, but it also became a seyfer (a religious book of importance) on its own merit; what was meant by its author as a learning aid to unlearned Jews had attained a level of holiness. My paper examines how this case of Yiddish Vox populi came to be despite entrenched attitudes about gender roles and what is considered genuine erudition. Among other historical and social reasons, much of Tsene-rene's great popularity had to do with its appearance, illustrations (see an example below), various typescripts, and other features which both helped to widen its appeal and achieve a degree of sacredness.

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Mass-produced Protections: Azimat in Early Printed Books in the Malay World

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This paper delves into the transformation of sacred symbols, particularly Azimat (talismanic designs), in the Malay world during the turn of the 20th century with the advent of printing. Traditionally, Azimat functioned as powerful protective talismans linked to revered Islamic figures. To know or use it, one requires certification (Ijazah) from spiritual mentors, thus upholding an atmosphere of confidentiality and sanctity. However, the rise of mass production through printing brought about a seismic shift

in the dissemination of these sacred symbols. This paper investigates the implications of mass-producing Azimat within early printed books. The study grapples with the profound changes that printing introduced to Malay society's media consumption habits, as manuscripts evolved into widely circulated lithographic books. This transition not only altered the accessibility of sacred and secret knowledge but also transformed the very nature of Azimat – from closely guarded talismans to components of printed manuals, complete with usage instructions. The paper seeks to answer critical questions surrounding the consequences of printing sacred texts for broader consumption. It scrutinizes the intersection of spirituality, divination, and the printing industry, probing how the mass production of once-exclusive knowledge has redefined the sacred and altered the dynamics of divination practices in the Malay world.

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Black Fire on White Fire. Narratives on the Divine Act of Writing in Medieval Judaism

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Hebrew sources from late antiquity and the Middle Ages attest to the idea of a primordial Torah with which the world was created. As the Hebrew letters are inseparable from the Torah, they too are at times considered essential elements of divine creation and revelation in Jewish tradition. Moreover, the Torah is deemed as divine law and therefore of divine origin. In the rabbinical exegesis of the Bible, the Torah is described, inter alia, as being written by God with fire: "It was written with letters of black fire on a surface of white fire." This association of the Torah with divine fire affected the legal interpretation of the Jewish religious laws, for instance in relation to the study of the sacred text or with regard to purity regulations concerning the physical contact with a Torah scroll. Alongside a historical contextualization of the Hebrew sources in which narratives of the divine act of writing occur, the lecture pursues the question of whether and to what extent these narratives may

be related to the medieval development of a Torah scribe's writing practice.

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A Sacred in Turkish Culture: Arabic Alphabet

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The Arabic alphabet is more than a writing system for the Turkish nation, it has a symbolic value identified with language, religion and culture. This alphabet, which has been used for centuries, has left deep traces in Turkish culture. The respect for the Arabic alphabet stems from the fact that it is the language of the Holy Quran. This respect, combined with the distance arising from the fact that Arabic is not the native language of the Turks, has turned into a kind of sanctity. This sanctity is reflected in their daily lives in practices that differ from those of Arabs and other Muslim nations; Qur'anic mushafs are kept in special cases, placed in high places and not touched without ablution. Osman Bey's ability to establish the six-century-long Ottoman state is attributed to the fact that he did not put his feet up in a room where there was a mushaf. In time, this sanctity extended beyond the content of the text to the symbolism of the alphabet and letters used in the writing. For example, texts written in Ottoman Turkish are respected regardless of their content, because the script itself has become sacred.

Examples of this situation can also be found in popular culture. The use of Arabic letters in spells and rituals in Turkish horror films is due to the mysterious and mystical aspect of these letters for the Turkish people.

In conclusion, the Turkish sacralisation of the Arabic alphabet involves a wide range of elements ranging from the evolution of language to religious context and cultural heritage. This text aims to provide an in-depth perspective by bringing together linguistic, religious and cultural elements to understand the sanctity of the Arabic script in Turkish culture.

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