

# CREATING STANDARDS: ORTHOGRAPHY, SCRIPT AND LAYOUT IN MANUSCRIPT TRADITIONS BASED ON ARABIC ALPHABET

Workshop at the Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures (CSMC)  
University of Hamburg  
10–11 October 2013, Warburgstr. 26, 20354 Hamburg

Convenors: **DMITRY BONDAREV** and **ALESSANDRO GORI**

The workshop will investigate the presence (or absence) of processes of standardisation in orthography, handwriting and page layout in major manuscript traditions written in different variants of Arabic alphabet/Ajami. The workshop will assess possible roles of language, culture and religion as triggers of these standards and conditions for transcoding mechanisms which develop through time and space.

Languages were written in Arabic-based scripts from the very beginning of Islam with varying degree of standardisation in styles, layouts and orthography. Development of standards in orthography is particularly difficult to generalise if we consider the following examples: (a) Persian orthography became standardised very early in its history of writing; (b) Berber developed orthographic consistency at an early stage of introduction of writing but the Berber orthography underwent a decline and changed into a different spelling system; (c) Ottoman Turkish and Malay in Jāwī script apparently did not develop spelling standardisation, whereas (d) Old Kanembu was written with varying degree of consistency depending, among other factors, on frequency of linguistic items.

In the history of Latin-based orthographies, administrative and political decisions, centralised powers and influential cultural centres are common factors of standardisation. However, in manuscript traditions based on Arabic script these factors, where relevant, were not necessarily the only catalysts of standardisation and therefore it is important to explore other possible conditioning forces. Thus, the workshop will particularly address the positive and negative roles played by language, religion and manuscript production in the formation of standards.

Language and religion are saliently related in Islam through the concept of the highly standardised Classical Arabic as the language of the Holy Qur’ān, the Word of God transmitted in Arabic script. Therefore, one of the initial questions to address would be

- The extent to which this language/religion set influenced (non-)standardised writing in non-Arabic languages.

Possible influence of manuscript production on standardisation will be explored by addressing

- The existence of specific aspects of manuscript production (such as selection of formats, copying procedures and dictation practices) that fostered or impeded standards in Ajami.

The workshop will also discuss orthographic standardisation in relation to models of scripts and manuscript layouts. Script styles were either borrowed in “pre-standardised” form (as Nasta‘līq borrowed from Persian to Ottoman Turkish, or Barnawī from Old Kanembu to Hausa) or designed and codified locally (like Sūqī in Northern Mali), and the standardised scripts were often related to the respective conventional layouts and registers/genres (as, for example, was the case of the Dīvānī and Siyākat scripts in Ottoman Turkish). However, standardisation of script, layout and orthography (SLO) do not necessarily go in step and the relation between the standard of the script and layout, on the one hand, and the standard of orthography, on the other hand, is not always obvious. The extent to which the three entities of the SLO set are related will be another topic for the workshop exploration.

Thus, we will ask questions such as

- Are there common conditioning factors of standardisation of the SLO as a unified set?
- Are script, layout and orthography independent from each other?
- Or do they influence each other’s standardisation?

An interesting line of discussion would be to consider the opposite direction of influence, i.e.

- Does the process of standardisation induce any salient changes on manuscript production, religion and language?

Finally, we will touch on some typological issues, such as

- Are there universal sets of factors which trigger standardisation? Or are these factors culture-specific?

## PROGRAMME

### Thursday 10th October

- 09:00 Registration
- 09:15 – 09:30 Introduction. DMITRY BONDAREV (Hamburg)  
and ALESSANDRO GORI (Florence)
- 09:30 – 10:15 ESTHER-MIRIAM WAGNER (Cambridge) *Writing Judaeo-Arabic* (p.10)
- 10:15 – 11:00 PAOLO LA SPISA (Genova) *Towards new standards in Christian Arabic texts: some examples from the south Palestinian monasteries* (p.6)
- 11:00 – 11:15 Coffee Break
- 11:15 – 12:00 PAOLA ORSATTI (Rome) *Persian language in Arabic script: the formation of the orthographic standard and the different graphic traditions of Iran in the first centuries of the Islamic era* (p.8)
- 12:00 – 12:45 JAN SCHMIDT (Leiden) *The Development of the Arabo-Persian Script and Ottoman-Turkish Manuscripts 1300-1800* (p.9)
- 12:45 – 13:30 BRANKA IVUŠIĆ (Hamburg) *Seven languages in one (manu)script: the case of ÖNB A.F. 437* (p.5)
- 13:30 – 14:30 Lunch
- 14:30 – 15:45 IRINA KATKOVA (St. Petersburg) *Traditions of manuscript writing in Arabic Malay (Jawi) in Indonesia (Western Sumatra)* (p.6)
- 15:45 – 18:00 Break
- 18:00 – 19:00 (Thursday series lecture) AMIDU OLALEKAN SANI (Lagos) *Standardisation of Yoruba Ajami script: catalysts and obstacles in a scriptoria narrative* (p.8)
- 20:00 Workshop Dinner

### Friday 11th October

- 09:15 – 10:00 NURIA MARTÍNEZ-DE-CASTILLA (Madrid) *Uses and written practices in Aljamiado manuscripts* (p.7)
- 10:00 – 10:45 LAMEEN SOUAG (Paris) *Why Kabyle never developed a standard Arabic orthography* (p.9)
- 10:45 – 11:00 Coffee Break
- 11:00 – 11:45 DMITRY BONDAREV and NIKOLAY DOBRONRAVIN (Hamburg and St. Petersburg) *Standardisation tendencies in Islamic manuscripts annotated in Kanuri, Hausa and Soninke: a comparative study* (p.5)
- 11:45 – 12:30 GIORGIO BANTI (Naples) *The Harari Ajami tradition: its development through three centuries* (p.4)
- 12:30 – 13:00 Closing Discussion

## ABSTRACTS

GIORGIO BANTI (Univeristy of Naples)

### *The Harari Ajami tradition: its development through three centuries*

Harari, the southern Ethiosemitic language of the city of Harar in central Ethiopia, has been written in Ajami script from at least the 17th century. The earliest dated manuscript known to the present author with a copy of a prose text in Old Harari, *Kitāb al-farāyid (KalF)*, is from 27th Raġab, 1112 H. = 7th January 1701. But this witness of the *KalF* cannot be regarded as the archetype of this text because of several philological reasons, and the first written witnesses of the *KalF* must have been older. Some religious hymns in Old Harari are attributed to poet-saints such as *sheekh* °Abdulmālik that are said bay Harari legends to have lived centuries earlier, at the time of *sheekh* Abādir, for whom Wagner (2005) suggests the 13th century on the basis of a number of genealogies from Harar. Yet the manuscripts with copies of these hymns go back to the 18th century or later.

Nevertheless, the time span covered by the existing Harari documents in Ajami from the earliest manuscripts to the contemporary printed editions of the Harari *Mawlūd* which include a varying number of blessings and hymns by old and contemporary Harari authors, makes it possible to observe several facts about a number of phenomena, which will be discussed in this presentation:

- a) changes in how the Arabic and special Ajami letters have been used for representing the Harari sounds and the position of Old and Contemporary Harari Ajami within the patterns of Ajami isographs in the Horn of Africa, i.e., not only how Harari Ajami developed through time, but its similarities and differences vis-à-vis the other known Ajami traditions for writing Ethiosemitic and Cushitic languages in the region;
- b) changing and stable features of a more orthographical nature, i.e., how the letters are used, for instance the use of the so-called *alif otiosum* after *waw* in words ending in *-o* or *-u*, what is written separately and what is written as a single orthographic word, etc.;
- c) changing and stable features in the page layout of prose vs poetic Harari Ajami texts, both in manuscripts and in printed books.

At the same time, a few words will be said about the concept of standardization, a word that has been frequently used with very different meanings by general linguists, and even by sociolinguists, when speaking about languages. When used for writing, it may require a few refinements.

### **A few references**

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  - (2010). ‘The literature of Harar until the end of the 19th century’, *Civiltà del Mediterraneo* 16-17: 149-181.
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DMITRY BONDAREV and NIKOLAY DOBRONRAVIN (University of Hamburg, University of St. Petersburg)

*Standardisation tendencies in Islamic manuscripts annotated in Kanuri, Hausa and Soninke: a comparative study*

Written evidence for Kanuri (and its variety Kanembu), Hausa and Soninke in Arabic script goes back to the 17th (Kanuri/Kanembu) and 18th (Hausa and Soninke) centuries. These three languages of West Africa belong to different linguistic families (Nilo-Saharan, Afroasiatic and Niger-Congo respectively) but their contacts with Arabic as the major language of Islam has resulted in a common lexical heritage and in a similar writing system based on Arabic script (Ajami). The Kanuri/Kanembu and Soninke manuscripts were mainly produced at the eastern (Borno) and western (Senegambia) extremes of West African Islam while the Hausa manuscript tradition developed between these two poles, possibly with varying influence from each side. Thus, the Hausa script style as it is known today derives from the Borno calligraphic tradition, whereas techniques of glossing the Arabic texts in Hausa were possibly influenced by the Soninke scribes. All the three manuscript traditions developed recognisable standards in the script style and page layout, the former being more region specific, the latter more universal. Although orthographic conventions were usually not unified, there were tendencies for consistent spelling of the most frequent linguistic items, such as pronouns and locative markers. Our presentation will discuss such common and specific features of script, layout and orthography as conditioned by manuscript production, religion and language.

BRANKA IVUŠIĆ (University of Hamburg)

*Seven languages in one (manu)script: the case of A.F. 437, the Austrian National Library*

The presentation will concentrate on a single multilingual manuscript of the late 16<sup>th</sup> century, probably from the farthest northwestern territories of the Ottoman Empire at that time. It is a multi-text manuscript of a very heterogeneous content apparently written by one hand only.

The presentation will focus on one section of the manuscript which contains the Ten Commandments, the Lord's Prayer and the Apostolic Creed according to Lutheran tradition, written in Turkish, (Serbo-)Croatian, Hungarian, German and Latin.

I will discuss the solutions found by the scribe when using Arabic script for writing in European languages and I will show that his degree of consistency increased during the production of the manuscript. His system of conventions will be compared to the Ottoman writing and layout as well as to conventions in Latin, Glagolitic and Cyrillic scripts. It will be demonstrated that the arrangement of the Christian texts shows both parallels and differences to those in non-Arabic-script books (e.g. Christian Catechisms). Finally, I will address the question whether there are any differences in writing, linguistic features, and layout between religious and secular texts in the European languages sampled in the manuscript.

IRINA KATKOVA (St. Petersburg Institute of Oriental Manuscripts)

*Traditions of Manuscripts Writing in Arabic Malay (Jawi) in Indonesia (Western Sumatra)*

In Malay Peninsula, Arabic script became one of the most common scripts for Malay and other Indonesian languages after the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The process of its introduction was closely connected to the expansion of Islam. Two types of Arabic Malay are known: Jawi/Arabic Malay and Pegon/Arabic Javanese.

The presentation will address the process of standardisation of Malay/Jawi written in Malay-Minangkabau in Arabic script as attested in manuscripts from Western Sumatra. The traditional manuscript writing in Jawi has been preserved in Sufi surau (Islamic study centres) and therefore religion forms one of the factors of the development of Jawi script in this region. The presentation will also explore paratextual aspects of manuscript production in Western Sumatra (illuminated front pages, metrical markers, layouts and features associated with the process of copying) and will compare these aspects with the Arabic tradition, distinguishing local peculiarities and universal sets of factors which trigger standardisation.

PAOLO LA SPISA (University of Genova)

*Toward New Standards in Christian Arabic Texts: Some Examples from the South Palestinian monasteries.*

In the manuscript culture of Christian Arabic milieu, language and religion are closely related as is the common case in the whole Arabic-Islamic world. This is especially true, I think, in the Greek Orthodox Church, or rather in the Palestinian Arabic Melkite Church. Of course, the extent to which the language and religion have influenced the Christian Arabic standardization process is still to be investigated. After Blau's linguistic investigations on Sinaitic Christian Arabic manuscripts (Blau 1966-1967), scholars usually refer to Christian Arabic with the term of Christian Middle Arabic. Since the standardization process of Middle Arabic concerns not only linguistic elements but also orthographic and palaeographic features, the standards of this kind of written Arabic would be reflected also in scripts and layouts. While the standardization process could be considered a general phenomenon, the reasons that start it are peculiar to each culture. In the case of the Christian Middle Arabic,

the need to build a different cultural and religious identity within the Arab-Islamic societies can be considered the main driving force for standardization.

I will try to demonstrate my thesis taking as an example the precious MS. *Sin. Ar. 154* (VIIIth century) which contains the oldest Arab Christian apologetics known by scholars so far. In the study of this manuscript I will highlight the interrelation among script, orthography and layout in the creation of a standard *usus scribendi* adopted in the South Palestinian Melkite monasteries (Samir 1990-91, Monferrer-Sala 2010, La Spisa 2012). All of these elements will be compared with those preserved in some other similar Arab Christian *codices* belonging to the same milieu, in order to demonstrate that *Sin. Ar. 154* is not an isolated case but presents a way of writing which was typical of the ancient Palestinian amanuensis tradition.

## References

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- La Spisa 2012 = Paolo La Spisa, 2012. “L’oeuvre théologique de Sulayman al-Gazzi: un autre exemple de moyen arabe standard?”. Lidia Bettini, Paolo La Spisa (eds), *Au-delà de l’arabe standard: moyen arabe et arabe mixte dans les sources médiévales, modernes et contemporaines*. *Quaderni di Semitistica* 28. Firenze: Dipartimento di Scienze dell’Antichità, Medioevo e Rinascimento e Linguistica – Università di Firenze, pp. 209-225.
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NURIA MARTÍNEZ-DE-CASTILLA (The Complutense University of Madrid)

### *Uses and written practices in Aljamiado manuscripts*

In the 15th-17th centuries, the Spanish Islamic communities, Mudejares (until 1502) and Moriscos (from 1502) developed an interesting written production: manuscript copies in a particular variety of Spanish in Arabic script. Most of them were copies of Arabic manuscripts translated into Spanish probably in the 13th to 14th centuries, when the Arabic was still a known and spoken language.

There are around 200 extant aljamiado manuscripts in different public and private libraries, mainly in Europe. These copies are in varying degree of preservation, some complete, some fragmentary, being represented by unitary and miscellanies manuscripts. Their content consists of copies of the Qur’ān, hadith, fragments of juridical texts, magic and numerous

edifying texts. There are both monolingual manuscripts written in Arabic and bilingual manuscripts in Arabic with Aljamia translation,

A comprehensive study of these manuscripts will enable us to better understand the Morisco cultural and religious practices, their relationship with the Qur'ān and the way in which they maintained ties with the dār al-islam of their time.

PAOLA ORSATTI (University of Rome)

*Persian language in Arabic script: the formation of the orthographic standard and the different graphic traditions of Iran in the first centuries of the Islamic era*

We have little information about how and when the Arabic script was adopted for writing the Persian language. Indeed, the most ancient original written records (both books and documents) of Persian in Arabic script are relatively late: 11<sup>th</sup> century A.D. For the early Islamic period, the majority of the extant documents in New Persian emanating from religious minorities in the Iranian territory is written in Hebrew, Syriac, or Manichean scripts. These Persian documents, written with alphabets different from the Arabic one, can indirectly contribute to reconstructing when and in what way the Arabic-Persian orthographic standard came into existence. They are also representative of the cultural dynamics between the different ethnic and religious minorities living in Iran. The presentation will also address some aspects of the Persian manuscript tradition in Arabic script such as the layout of the text and other writing habits, which often represent distinctive features, ideologically marked, of an ethnic and/or religious identity.

AMIDU OLALEKAN SANI (University of Lagos)

*Standardisation of Yoruba Ajami script: catalysts and obstacles in a scriptoria narrative*  
(Thursday series lecture)

The Yoruba ethnic group is found predominantly in south-western Nigeria and is next to Hausa-Fulani block in terms of numerical strength in the country. The earliest evidence of the presence of Islam among the Yoruba, and hence of literacy in Arabic, goes back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century. According to Ade Ajayi, the earliest documented history of the Yoruba, albeit now lost, was made in the 17<sup>th</sup> century in Yoruba language written in Arabic script (Ajami) (Ade Ajayi 2006). Except for the fragmentary poetical bequests of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Islamic verse maker Badamasi Agbaji (d. circa 1891) (Hunwick 1995; Reichmuth 1998), little or nothing of the pre-colonial materials in Yoruba Ajami is known to have survived, in spite of the confirmation by the Christian curia that Arabic based Yoruba script was reasonably established by the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, and this was during the search for a script for the production of Christian literature among the natives (Johnson 1921; Ade Ajayi 1960). But for medicinal recipes, vaticinations of geomancy (*khatt al-raml*) practitioners, incantations in Yoruba Ajami belonging to the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, no serious works in Yoruba Ajami have yet come to light.

For my presentation, however, some codices of the *qasida* (Ode) by Badamasi, and a late 20<sup>th</sup> century paraenetic verse by an unknown author (circa 1979) illustrate how Yoruba

authors in Ajami have sought to standardize its orthography, especially for phonemes and vocables for which there are no exact or near exact equivalents in the Arabic alphabet. My paper will examine the linguistic and metalinguistic factors which are deployed in the standardization of Yoruba Ajami. My paper will try to evaluate the current efforts at standardization in the larger context of the precedent by ISESCO and Mohamed Chatatou (1992) aimed at standardizing the script for Arabic based African languages, which efforts were anyway based on Farsi and Urdu adaptations for which reason their adventure was of abbreviated success if not outright failure.

JAN SCHMIDT (University of Leiden)

*The Development of the Arabo-Persian Script and Ottoman-Turkish Manuscripts 1300-1800*

The Ottoman principality, expanding from north-western Anatolia from the 14<sup>th</sup> century onward, inherited the Persian manuscript culture of the Rum-Seljuq and Ilhanate states and the Ottomans further developed what was there already: the various types of script used in letters, documents and manuscripts in different genres. The same continuation and little change is to be observed in the outward aspect of codices. What was new was the adoption of Turkish as the language of government and literature. For the spelling of Turkish words, the Ottomans partially continued orthographic traditions existing in Central Asia. Not much standardization is to be observed in the orthography during the following centuries – Arabic and Persian elements in Ottoman Turkish remained as they had been inherited and changes in the spoken language percolated to written texts. Fundamental changes in book formats, spelling and the layout of texts only occurred in modern times: during the 19<sup>th</sup> century manuscripts increasingly gave way to printed books and in 1928 the Arabo-Persian script gave way to a newly invented Latin one when at the same time international numerals were adopted. This paper will present a survey of these developments illustrated by some sample pictures.

LAMEEN SOUAG (LACITO, CNRS, Paris)

*Why Kabyle never developed a standard Arabic orthography*

The usage of Arabic script differs strikingly between the two most prominent Berber languages, Kabyle and Tashelhiyt. Both regions in the pre-colonial period relied for literacy on a network of rural Islamic schools using the Arabic script; in both regions 19<sup>th</sup> century materials were frequently printed in Arabic; and primary schooling in both regions is currently predominantly in Arabic. Yet, whereas Tashelhiyt speakers have at least twice developed and used fairly standardised Arabic-based orthographies, Kabyle texts in the Arabic script appear to be overwhelmingly dominated by ad hoc orthographic strategies sharing only a few broad principles. Most strikingly, despite the apparent near-perfect congruence between Arabic and Berber vocalic phonology, no Kabyle writers appear to have reached a self-consistent solution to the problem of vowel representation, and gemination frequently poses problems; 19<sup>th</sup> century sources differ with one another even on the representation of /g/. The absence of standardisation appears to reflect not only sociolinguistic factors – notably, the overwhelming preference for writing and reading in

foreign languages – but also linguistic ones; the presence of phonemic schwa combined with the absence of phonemic vowel length makes Kabyle's vowel system less congruent to Arabic, and naïve transcription efforts more ambiguous.

ESTHER-MIRIAM WAGNER (University of Cambridge)

### *Writing Judaeo-Arabic*

Judaeo-Arabic is the name given to a variety of Arabic language forms used by Jews that differ from those employed by their Muslim and Christian neighbours. In addition to the specific cultural environment and segregation of non-Muslim communities, Jews were not bound to the same degree as their Muslim counterparts to the literary ideal of *al-'arabiyya*, the Arabic standard language based on the Qur'ān and Muslim religious literature, and thus they created their own written language forms, probably also fuelled by a desire to segregate themselves linguistically from the Muslim population. The use of the Hebrew alphabet meant that particular Arabic orthographical traditions were easily abandoned, and it also facilitated the influence of Hebrew norms on written Judaeo-Arabic. On the other hand, Muslim standards were occasionally applied as a means to alter the register of written Judaeo-Arabic texts, and thus, the proximity to Muslim traditions varies considerably in the different genres, and throughout time.

This paper will explore the various standardisation processes which Judaeo-Arabic underwent in the course of its written language history. Standardisation efforts were made as early as the 9th century, with Saadiah Gaon's popular translation of the Bible into Arabic often credited as the standard work that became the norm for literary Judaeo-Arabic for the next centuries. Economic prosperity in 11th-century Fatimid Egypt produced a large middle class of Jewish traders who forged their own writing conventions in their extensive mercantile correspondence, displaying a strong influence of contemporary Muslim letter writing norms. This contrasts sharply with letter writing in the Ayyubid empire in the 13th century, letters begin to exhibit a much stronger influence of Hebrew norms. These differences can be correlated to the integration of Jews within Egyptian society: with advancing segregation of non-Muslim parts of the population under Ayyubid rule, Hebrew influence became much stronger from the 13th century onward.

The paper will also discuss issues such as the differences in writing standards used in the various genres of Judaeo-Arabic, the mechanisms of how Arabic was transcoded in the Hebrew alphabet, and how the cursivity of the Arabic script influenced Hebrew handwriting.