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CENTRE FOR THE
STUDY OF
MANUSCRIPT
CULTURES

The Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures (CSMC)

announces a Lecture

by

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University of Cologne

Transliteration of Multi-Language Arabic-Script Corpora and the Bravanese Manuscript Tradition

I will give an overview of two strands of my research. Firstly, I will discuss transliteration of multi-language Arabic-script corpora, based on the proceedings of the TASIA symposium, which took place at University of Cologne, April 06-07, 2010. The papers of the proceedings (Mumin & Versteegh 2014) discuss various features of the use of Arabic script to write African languages, with most data deriving from manuscripts. Since the papers discuss writing traditions in Arabic script for 16+ African languages, up to 107 additional graphemes occurred of which up to 20 could not be represented digitally in the Unicode revision current at that time. Accordingly, the editors decided that a cross-linguistic system of transliteration was needed together with a multi-layered annotation in order to enable comparative approaches and typological studies of the linguistic data on writing contained in these papers. But we also realized that there were limitations to what such annotations could achieve. In the talk, I will try to demonstrate the approach we eventually opted for, and the limitations we encountered.

In the second part of this talk, I will give some impressions from the Arabic script manuscript tradition of the Brava, a coastal town of Somalia where a Bantu language called Chimiini was spoken exclusively. While the Bravanese have had a significant writing tradition, both endo-glossic and exo-glossic, this culture seems to have become moribund after the introduction of a Roman/Latin script based orthography for Somali, the lingua franca of Somalia, and even more so after the flight of a large number of Bravanese following the outbreak of war in Somalia. While our research project focused on features of language contact in Chimiini¹, I have come across few manuscripts and have tried to document these together with their use, e.g. within a traditional schooling tradition, a practice which continues also outside of Somalia.

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Room 0001

Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures

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¹ „Sprachdokumentation des Chimini (Bantu, G.40, Kenia- Somalia) mit Schwerpunkt auf Sprachkontakthänomenen“ under the lead of Prof. Dr. Gerrit J. Dimmendaal