From the Rising of the Sun

The O Collection at Uppsala University Library

Text
Emil Lundin

Editors
Helena Backman and Krister Östlund
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Often, but not always, a library is a physical building. A library, however, is always also a kind of metaphorical building, with protecting roofs, thick walls, many rooms, nooks, and connecting corridors. Busy librarians organise and curate growing information resources, nowadays increasingly in a virtual reality. In an old library, rich in collections, one generation succeeds another. New ways of working and new perspectives on collections meet older systems still needed to be able to find items, develop the collections, and make them accessible.

The O collection is among the many treasures of Carolina Rediviva. For centuries, the collection has grown and been used in research. It might be seen as one of many rooms in the labyrinthine Uppsala University Library.

All the rooms of the library are interlinked, both metaphorically and in the physical world, and in a library every collection, every room, represents part of the entirety of human thought and endeavour. I am fascinated by the search for a whole made up of these parts. New insights emerge and more knowledge is gathered as one delves deeper into a collection. In the poem ‘Romanska bågar’ (‘Romanesque arches’), the Swedish Nobel Prize Laureate Tomas Tranströmer writes about the many rooms of the human soul, talking of ‘vault after vault opened endlessly’ (transl. Robert Bly). Sometimes I think in the same way about a big library, rich in collections.

Uppsala 22 September 2023

Lars Burman
Director of Uppsala University Library
From the Rising of the Sun: The O collection

**Sol oriens**

As far as the rays of the sun. East and West, *oriens et occidens*. ‘From the rising of the sun to its setting’, chants the psalmist (Psalm 113:3). Dhu al-Qarnayn of the Quran traveled far and ‘reached the setting-place of the sun’ (Quran 18:86). Uttermost edges, an unknown world. The cardinal directions of a compass also give directions on older, more mental maps, and point towards regions that the mind, especially the imagination, has more often traversed. The navigations of the Vikings to Grikia, the accounts of northerners by Ibn Fadlan, the *terra ignota* and the voyages of James Cook with his new charts and maps are all later than the myths surrounding distant lands, more recent than the fascination with what lies beyond familiar space and time. Not only have new vehicles, radio waves, cameras, and the Internet paved ways to the unfamiliar in the East and West, but they have also lessened the distances in our mental maps and among us on Earth. Tile on *Carta marina*, the uttermost Thule, is today as demystified as the unknown land in the south, *Terra Australis Incognita*. How the light of the kerosene lamp, and of the later electric light bulb, have opened up new territories we shall not explore in detail here.

Words, text, and literature are comparable to older thoughts about geography to the extent that neither needs to reflect an actual reality in order to make an impression on humans. The *O* collection at Uppsala University Library takes its beginning partly in inquisitiveness, later in hypothesis, partly in the thirst for knowledge, later in the sweet bouquet of having made the unknown more known, both on Earth and in Heaven. Hebrew came into focus early, with an inherent position at the university due to the Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament. Greek and Latin they already knew at the time. *Professores* ‘of the oriental languages’, as they were long called, *linguarum orientalium*, knew the other ‘languages from the East’. Since the 1620s, these included Hebrew, Aramaic, and Arabic, and during the 1700s were added Ethiopic, Persian, and Turkic, along with cuneiform studies (Assyriology),
and in time many other languages. Books were needed. Professors, explorers, preachers, missionaries, and others have – like the Linnaean disciples – collected and brought home flowers in the form of texts. These were often manuscripts, texts that in their form, wording, and binding exist in only a single copy. In many parts of the world, not least in the areas of present-day Ethiopia, handwriting cultures would survive for a long time, even into our own days. And in the space left by the Islamic ban on images, Arabic calligraphy has stood out with a particular brilliance. Gutenbergian prints look dull in comparison. The Quran should still to this day be written by a calligrapher, and print copies be facsimiles of his skillful hand.

This catalogue presents texts in the form of books, sheets, and scrolls from the O collection, perhaps named after the place that the Hebrew Bible and the Arabic Quran, though with different points of departure and conceptualisations, both call mizraḥ shemesh and maṭliʿ al-shams, ‘the rising of the sun’ – 

The thematic collection

The manuscripts are classified in the ‘thematic collection’ under the letter O. Call numbers, or the shelfmarks according to which the collections of a library are organised, catalogued, and subsequently located, are often arbitrary. Often they are given a secondary meaning among those who work with the collections. Codices orientales? Orientalia? If that is what O stands for, what does it signify?

The reason why Swedish historical material after the year 1697 has been catalogued under the letter F is unrelated to the English word ‘Fire’, even though the castle Tre Kronor burnt down in 1697 together with the greater part of the royal archives from the Middle Ages. The O collection, on the other hand, is easier to connect historically to the words Orient, oriental, or the like. This shelfmark is, however, relatively recent in the 400-year history of the library. It was first confirmed in print catalogues in the 1970s. As an example, a manuscript presented here can be mentioned, The Harp of Praise, Ṭargā僻� Ṭana Ṣē (አርጋኖ捺፡ ሺዳሴ።), an office to the Virgin Mary in Classical Ethiopic. Probably written sometime during the 15th century, it was donated to the library on 3 September 1894 and first catalogued as ‘Etiopisk handskrift n. 5’; Zetterstéen gave it the sign X in 1899, but when Löfgren published his catalogue of Ethiopian manuscripts in Sweden in 1974, it had been incorporated into the collections under its present shelfmark, O Etiop. 10. The number here is somewhat arbitrary
but unique to the object in question. As for the O in O Etiop., something more overarching had happened since the 19th century.

Classification and indexing
All public libraries have a need to codify and systematise their collections so that librarians, book fetchers, and patrons can quickly and easily find whatever they are seeking. The systems underlying the arrangement of a collection have varied geographically and over time. In the 18th century, the nobility in Sweden often arranged their private book collections by subject, beginning with the Bible and theology. The volume of printed output would eventually grow, sciences branch out, and researchers specialise. With the 19th century, new needs would emerge.

The single most influential library theorist of all time is Melvil Dewey (1851–1931). In the 19th century, he presented the principles of a system that is today used in more than 200,000 libraries in at least 135 countries. Before this, books had had to be rearranged with new accessions, but in Dewey’s new system, books were to be arranged by subject in an expandable, hierarchical, and seemingly transparent numerological decimal system. Books with a number such as 492 in this system would deal with Afroasiatic languages, because, briefly put, 400 is language and linguistics, 90 is non-European languages, and 2 is Afroasiatic languages: 492. Simple, and clever, one may think. ‘Theoretically, the division of every subject into just nine heads is absurd’, he admitted in the preface to the first article detailing the system (1876). To the novice librarian it comes with a mixed impression of comfort, relief, and frustration that he also admits that ‘[t]heoretical harmony and exactness has been repeatedly sacrificed to the practical requirements of the library or to the convenience of the department in the college’. A glance at the system proves Dewey right in this. It is both logical and irrational, theoretical and pragmatic. That ‘Other languages’ (90) share the same decimal level as, for example, English (20), German (30), French (40), Italian (50), Spanish (60), and Latin (70) says a whole lot about the Eurocentric West of the 19th century, and probably bothers more than just theoreticians – though it is a mild example of the worldviews sampled by the earlier iterations of the system. It also tells a whole lot about the print material in western libraries at the time.

As a collection or a system increases in scope and complexity, the need to revise and recalibrate its categories will grow too. Beginning from scratch can be too time consuming, and all too often is. Archives are on all levels
full of both sensible and less-sensible thinking and thoughts. With modern computerised aids, it is now easy to find the book, the reference, the passage needed here and now, but only if the material is available through entries in digital search engines. The material needs to be systematised in digital form. That, using the computer, we can categorise, catalogue, and search with only two numbers – one and zero – rarely comes to mind. The thought of doing so may have struck Melvil Dewey, who perhaps deemed it too absurd. This binary system is at any rate impossible to learn by heart. We surf on higher levels of the code.

Eastern languages?

Manuscripts are catalogued in various ways. There are archives from more or less prominent persons and personalities, donations from collectors of a particular type of literature, individual book gifts, purchases, and more. How to systematise all this has, as mentioned, varied over time. The $O$ in the $O$ collection probably stands for an adjective from the Latin word for ‘east’, collectio manuscriptorum orientalium, or the like, ‘the collection of Eastern manuscripts’. This type of phrase is found in unpublished handwritten catalogues of the 18th century and ties in with the professores linguarum orientalium of the time, ‘professors of the Eastern [i.e., oriental] languages’, with whose travels, erudition, and teaching the collection shares an intimate past. For those in the know, the phrase was exact enough in less formal contexts. The Latin word itself refers to the rising sun, sol oriens. A similar etymology of the word ‘east’ can be found in many of the languages represented in the $O$ collection: Arabic $\text{šarq}$, for example, ‘sunrise’, ‘east’, شرق, is a word that Persian also borrowed. The fact that the longitude that cuts Sweden in half, meridian 15° 00’ east, passes east of Mora, the small municipality of Anders Zorn (1860–1920) in the heart of Dalecarlia, runs just west of Sweden’s seventh-largest city, Örebro, passes east of Rome and the greater part of Sicily, and continues further to divide Libya and situate Tripoli as a western city in relation to Mora, is more of an academic interest in this context. The Eastern, or Oriental collections, of course, do not on etymological grounds exclude manuscripts from countries as far west as Spain or Morocco, even though we have a modern map close at hand. Here, the language of the text has been the decisive factor, with the practical requirements of the library more than likely being contributing ones.

The greater parts of the $O$ collection consist of Arabic (just over 500 manuscripts), Ottoman Turkish (just under 500), Persian (about 300),
Ethiopic (about 80), and Hebrew/Aramaic (about 70) manuscripts. Also included is the somewhat peculiar O okat., a shelfmark that the seasoned librarian by sheer habit reads as ‘Oriental manuscripts, uncatalogued’ [Swe. okatalogiserade]. This part of the collection is nevertheless carefully catalogued and contains texts in Pali, Tibetan, and Sanskrit. This shelfmark, like all others, organises the collection and makes it searchable, but in the sense of its formative semantic substance the name is certainly absurd. The designation is nonetheless exact and quick to write, and probably has its historical explanation hidden somewhere in the archives, too.

**Catalogues and O**

It takes more than a computer and a Wi-Fi connection to freely navigate the present collections. Approximately 15 per cent of the O collection is searchable on the online platform Alvin today, although the goal is to have everything not only catalogued, but also available to read online in high-resolution images.

The first catalogues were written by hand. The list from around 1730 with the later title *Collectio manuscriptorum orientalium* has been tacitly mentioned already (Bibl. arkiv M:24). The thitherto printed catalogue does not mention ‘the oriental collection’, *collectio orientalis*. In 1706, the first print catalogue was made, in Latin of course. The word ‘orient’ is altogether absent from its long title, but the catalogue describes all the Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Greek, and Latin manuscripts brought home by Johan Gabriel Sparwenfeld (1655–1727) from his journeys. As the praxis of the day suggested, a holy book is listed first, the Quran. So accurate did Carl Johan Tornberg (1807–1877) consider the Arabic, Turkish, and Persian manuscripts to be described here that 150 years later, again in Latin, he stated in his catalogue (1849), ‘content with this book, in describing most of the Sparwenfeldian manuscripts I have been more brief’.¹ Some of the library’s manuscripts are to this day best described in this anonymously authored catalogue from the first years of the 18th century.

Tornberg’s (1849) is the first comprehensive catalogue and is entitled ‘the Arabic, Persian, and Turkish Codices of the Royal University Library of Uppsala’, *Codices arabici, persici et turcici Bibliothecæ Regiæ Universitatis Upsaliensis*. We can assume that they spoke of oriental manuscripts in less formal contexts, but such wordings would have been non-descriptive in the

¹ ‘Hoc libro contentus, in plerisque codicibus sparwenfeldianis describendis brevior fui’ (Tornberg 1849:xv).
This was also before the addition of the O to the shelfmark, but Tornberg introduced one part of the designation that is still in use: Sp. can be mentioned as an example, with Sp. standing for Sparwenfeld and indicating provenance. With Tornberg also came designations such as Vet. for vetus, ‘old’, and Nov. for nova, ‘new’, meaning that the manuscript had been added to the collections after 1800. He did, however, not catalogue everything, and more accessions would come. Everything must be described, eventually.

The university yearbook from 1892 testifies that a person from the ‘outside’, a philosophy candidate at the time, had made his ‘rich insights’ available to the library. In his subsequent foreword, the then well-known translator and professor Karl Vilhelm Zetterstéen (1866–1953) wrote that in 1895, the chief librarian Claes Annerstedt (1839–1927) had asked him to make a complete description of the yet-uncatalogued oriental manuscripts. As a supplement to Tornberg came the first of two parts 35 years later, but here also the O sign is absent both from the title and from the shelfmarks of the manuscripts described, Die arabischen, persischen und türkischen Handschriften der Universitätsbibliothek zu Uppsala […] nebst einem Anhang, hebräische, syrische und samaritanische Handschriften enthalten (1930–35). During these years, he had already described the library’s Ethiopic manuscripts, twelve at the time, in ‘Die Abessinischen Handschriften […]’ (1899), and the Hebrew and Aramaic manuscripts in Verzeichnis der hebräischen und aramäischen Handschriften […] (1900), but new accessions also in these languages had been made over the years.

Between Tornberg and Zetterstéen, in the second half of the 19th century, the library had begun to organise manuscripts according to their subjects in a local system whereby ‘Swedish history after the year 1697’ was given the arbitrary letter F, and medieval Latin manuscripts, to mention another example, were given the shelfmark C. The letter F probably has no etymological connection to the subject. It certainly has no linguistic links to the semantic field of the English lexical item fire, ‘eld’ in Swedish. 2 C could admittedly originate in Codices medii ævi latini, ‘Latin medieval codices’, but whether there are etymological grounds for this designation is unclear; also unclear is when the O came to be used. The ‘thematic collections’ – each subject of which is catalogued with a letter of the alphabet – had begun in 1867 under the chief librarian Carl Gustav Styffe (1817–1908). The work was to continue under his successor Annerstedt. ‘And one

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2 In fact, E designates ‘Swedish history before the fire’; and to add fuel, ‘after’ is efter in Swedish, and ‘before’ is före.
ought to remember’, Annerstedt wrote about his predecessor in 1921, ‘that here, it was not only about arranging thousands of manuscripts, which together formed a whole, but hundreds of thousands of larger or smaller loose parts, originating from the most diverse, often unknown quarters of the earth’ (Author’s transl.). The organisation of all manuscripts according to the letters of the alphabet is of course absurd. He never mentioned that.

When Oscar Löfgren (1898–1992) published his *Katalog über die äthiopischen Handschriften [...]* in 1974, the shelfmark *O* was already accepted, and the manuscripts came naturally to be designated with *O* Etiop., followed by a unique number for each object. The years 2012–2016 saw the printing of the most recent catalogues, those of Ali Muhaddis (1949–) in Persian and English of the Persian manuscripts in the collection. When in the preface Muhaddis does not expand on the letter *O*, but continuously uses this shelfmark, it is a silent testament to the passing of time, and to the pragmatism in how the millions of items housed in a library happen to be arranged. Today, all the *O* manuscripts have a designated place in one of the library buildings, a convenient way to find them.

**The history of pragmatics**

In the linguistic struggle between economy and accuracy, precision has won in academic contexts, such as in book titles, but economy and pragmatics have been focal in the world of librarians, where a fast workflow is a must and the manuscripts are part of daily life. The prefix *o* is a lexical negator in Swedish. To speak of the *O* collection would sound like speaking of a ‘non’ or ‘uncollection’ – *O-samlingen, osamlingen?* Today, we speak of the *C* collection, *C-samlingen*, never of the Codices collection, but I do hear ‘the Oriental collection’. More precise name suggestions turn out to be impractically long. ‘In all the work, philosophical theory and accuracy have been made to yield to practical usefulness. The impossibility of making a satisfactory classification of all knowledge as preserved in books, has been appreciated from the first, and nothing of the kind attempted’ – thus said Dewey in his preface, even before his system had left the dock and become public. Maybe *uncollection* would have made sense, after all.

Part pragmatics, part history, that is. What is important is that we can find what we are seeking. The *O* collection contains some of the library’s most valuable manuscripts. A selection for a booklet of the kind before you cannot be made without simultaneous rejection. Should we show the oldest manuscripts? Perhaps the most beautiful, luxurious, the ones with
a lot of gold? Maybe display a range of various formats of texts? Isn’t it preferable to emphasise what was important at the time and in the place of the objects’ cultural origin? But we also have texts of academic interest, documentation of historical, religious, and perhaps linguistic interest. To choose fewer than 20 from a collection a hundred times larger, every text of which is unique and irreplaceable, is a challenge of its own. That not all ‘oriental’ manuscripts are catalogued under $O$ is another detail.

This booklet shows, among other things, one of the oldest dated Qurans preserved from the western Islamic world, copied in 1090, bought and brought to Sweden by Jacob Jonas Björnstål (1731–1779). Also shown here is the old depiction of the Kaaba in Mecca, which Michael Eneman (1676–1714) brought to Sweden, as well as a unique $ilan$, or $Tabula Sephi-rotica$ as it was formerly named, a 2.5-metre-long parchment $rotulus$ with pictures and texts of the Kabbalistic sephirot, most likely with Nicholaus Bergius (1658–1706) as its provenance.

The $O$ collection has been acquired through purchases and donations. To this day, new accessions of manuscripts are still being made. Since 2014, both new and old manuscripts have been catalogued digitally on Alvin, while old posts both from the aforementioned print catalogues and from unpublished supplements to these catalogues are continuously being revised and added to this online platform.

A librarian or an archivist knows where every single object is located in the library, or will for any given epoch at least know ways to find it. As more material becomes searchable digitally, the internal task of listing and cataloguing continues. The bookshelf becomes virtual and perhaps even the most obscure manuscript browsable, perhaps even translated by a computer. Much remains before everything in the library’s collections can be found through a search engine, however. In the library at large, there are millions of texts one simply cannot yet find online. Perhaps the searchability of everything online will remain an abstract ideal target even in the future. The path towards this is nonetheless being paved by librarians, present to guide users through the mazes of the collections. My colleagues, past and present, have made it all possible in practice. The structural theories were absurd to begin with, but are all somewhat helpful, after all.
It is not the things themselves that disturb men, but their judgements about the things.
(Επικτητος, Encheiridion [Handbok i livets konst])

In service,
Emil Lundin

List of print catalogues in chronological order


**Online**

*Alvin: Plattform för digitala samlingar och digitaliserat kulturarv = Platform for digital collections and digitised cultural heritage — alvin-portal.org*

**References**


Dewey, Melvil (1876). *A classification and subject index for cataloguing and arranging the books and pamphlets of a library*. Amherst, MA: Case, Lockwood and Brainard.


Uppsala University Library. Bibliotekets arkiv [= the Library Archives].
الله تعالى في الآية:

والمسير.
والدليل المعلوم.
والسعي المزروع.
وال봐 السباع.

أعزناً بثناها لواضع ماالمرء ما

يوم تمور السماوات، مورًا وتثور في الاراض.

وما يفوت للكبرين.

تتوضأ على يوم ينجم الالوان، يختصر

هذا القار، الذي كتبه، استقبلت

النص، ثم لا نتصور إسلامًا.
The Quran

This Quran is considered among the oldest dated Qurans from the western Arab world, i.e., Maghreb (north-western Africa), Spain, and Portugal. The manuscript is dated to the month of Jumādā I in the year 483 according to the Islamic calendar, corresponding to July in the year AD 1090. The binding is of a later date. It contains Surah 52–106, from Sūrat al-Ṭūr to the end.

The manuscript is written in black ink that has turned brown with time and with vocalisations in red, blue, and yellow. Arabic is a Semitic language. Most Semitic languages are written from right to left with consonantal alphabets. Vowels are a later addition, and if they are written out, they are therefore added around and within the consonantal skeleton. This is known as vocalisation. An example in Arabic is the group of consonants frq, for which a dozen vocalisations and meanings are plausible. Context is decisive in our reading for whether we should, for example, read the word ‘difference’, farqun, or a verb such as ‘to separate’, faraqa, or ‘be terrified, afraid’, fariqa:

Because of this ambiguity, holy texts such as the Hebrew Bible and the Quran eventually had to be vocalised. Very few other text types are vocalised in Semitic languages.
There are also different ways to shape the individual consonants. The Arabic alphabet, for example, is also used for Persian. In this Quran, the Maghrebi script is used. This script is characterised by tall horizontal letters extending above the line and word-final letters descending below in rounded semicircles into the line below. The letter \( f \) has a diacritic dot underneath, whereas \( q \) has a dot above. These differences from modern types are illustrated by the word for ‘difference’, \( f_rq \): ڢرڧ in unvocalised Maghrebi script, but \( فرق \) in modern print typeface. Like vocalisation, these diacritic signs are a later addition to the writing system. In this old manuscript, their use is not consistent.

The headings are in Kufic script. This script takes its name from the city of Kufa, located in modern-day Iraq. Among Swedish students of the 19th century, the perceived strangeness and illegibility of the letter forms gave rise to a secondary meaning in the noun \( kuf \), plural \( kufar \): ‘oddball’, ‘nerd’, or ‘weirdo’. This word is still in use today.

The manuscript was bought in Rome in June 1771 by the orientalist and traveller Jacob Jonas Björnståhl (1731–1779). His name is abbreviated in the shelfmark O Bj. 48.

In verse 66:12 of the Quran we find the five consonants \( wktbh \). The modern standardised Quran from Egypt in the 1920s has the vocalisation \( wa-kutubihi \), ‘and his books’. This Quran has the singular, ‘and his writing/book’, \( wa-kitābihi \) (last word on line three). The fifth line has a heading in Kufic script.

O Bj. 48, fol. 38r, line 1b–4:

وَمَرْيَمَ اَبْنَتَ عِمْرَٰٰنَ ٱلَّتِىٓ أَحْصَنَتْ فَرْجَهَا فَنَفَخْنَا فِيهِ مِن رُّوحِنَا وَصَدَّقَتْ بِكَلِمَـٰتِ رَبِّهَا وَكُتُبِهِۦ وَكَانَتْ مِنَ ٱلْقَـٰنِتِين

The Cairo edition:

وَمَرْيَمَ اَبْنَتَ عِمْرَانَ ٱلَّتِيَ أَحْصَنَتْ فَرْجَهَا فَنَفَخْنَا فِيهِ مِن رُوحِنَا وَصَدَّقَتْ بِكَلِمَاتِ رَبِّهِ وَكُتُبِهِ وَكَانَتْ مِنَ الْقَانِتِين

Pickthall’s translation: ‘And Mary, daughter of ‘Imran, whose body was chaste, therefore We breathed therein something of Our Spirit. And she put faith in the words of her Lord and His scriptures, and was of the obedient.’
The city of Mecca with the Kaaba in the centre

Painting in oil or tempera on canvas,
87 × 112 cm, circa 1700
Shelfmark: UU 2372

This painting shows the holy city of Mecca with the Kaaba in the centre. The Kaaba, the ‘cube’, is the name of the building over the holy black stone, a destination for pilgrims. This unusually early and unique painting provides a detailed picture of the mosque and its ritual function. The surrounding city is built in South Arabian style. Around the city is a stylised landscape with dense hills and scattered buildings. In the upper-right corner of the painting the city of Jeddah can be seen. Buildings and places have explanatory red inscriptions in Arabic and Ottoman Turkish. The painting shows an absence of humans, perhaps out of respect for the Islamic prohibition on depicting living beings.

The painting was probably purchased in Cairo by Johan Silfwercrantz (d. 1712) and brought to Sweden in 1714. Silfwercrantz was travelling with the priest and theologian Michael Eneman (1676–1714) at the time. Eneman accompanied Charles XII to the Ottoman Empire in 1709 and became the Swedish legation’s chaplain in Constantinople. The painting was bought by Uppsala University in 1717.
Egyptian grammar (Arabic and Coptic)

كتاب مختصر في قواعد اللغة المصرية

kitāb mukhtaṣar fī qawā'id al-lugha al-miṣriya

Paper, 100 folios, 27 × 19 cm, 17th century
Shelfmark: O Nov. 558

The full title of the book in translation is: *A brief book on the grammar of the Egyptian language, its system, and the difference between Bohairic and Saidic (Sahidic).* ‘The Egyptian language’ refers to Coptic, a language originating in the Egypt of the pharaohs. It ceased to be used as a spoken language sometime in the 17th century, that is, in the same century this manuscript was written. Coptic, however, is still used as a liturgical language in the Coptic Orthodox Church.

The manuscript has suffered various types of damage over the years, most conspicuously severe water damage. The damage to the text looks different from what we are used to seeing in Western manuscripts. Fortunately, the book is mostly bilingual in both Arabic and Coptic, so the text is nonetheless largely comprehensible. In Europe, iron-gall ink has been used for black text since antiquity. The colour fades over time, from a black to a characteristic brownish colour scale common in medieval Latin manuscripts. This ink is waterproof. The Islamic world also knew of variants of iron-gall ink since the beginning of Islam. In North Africa, the Middle East, and Asia, however, as well as in this manuscript, carbon-based ink has also been used for black text on paper, ostraca, and other materials. This ink is not waterproof, which is why the text in this manuscript has been damaged. What looks like mould is only smeared ink.
Hebrew and Aramaic
The Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament – biblical terminology of course differs between communities, denominations, and religions. This manuscript begins with the Torah (the Pentateuch, Greek: πεντάτευχος), i.e., the Five Books of Moses, both in the original Hebrew and with the Jewish Aramaic translation entitled Targum Onkelos, as well as with a commentary by the famous French Rabbi Shlomo Yitshaqi (1040–1105), also known under the acronym Rashi. The Five Scrolls, Megillot (‘scrolls’) are the Song of Songs, the Book of Ruth, the Book of Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, and the Book of Esther. Haftarot are selected readings from the biblical Prophets.
The texts of the manuscript are written in what is called *textus inclusus*, ‘enclosed text’, in which translation and commentary surround the central Hebrew biblical text. Like most Semitic alphabets, Hebrew and Aramaic are written without vowels. Exceptions to this are holy texts in which vowels are indicated by dots and dashes added to the consonantal skeleton. The biblical text, both the original Hebrew and the Aramaic translation, is written in a square script that is very similar to modern Hebrew print consonants. It is vocalised and therefore very easy to read, despite water damage to the first part of the manuscript.
1 Mos 1:1–2a

Hebrew (left)

be-reshit bara elohim et ha-shamayim ye-et ha-arets ye-ha-arets bayetah tohu ya-vohu ye-hoshek ‘al pene tehom […]

Aramaic (right)

be-qadmin bera <alaha> yat shemaya ye-yat ar’a ye-ar’a hawat tsadya ye-reganya ya-hashokha ‘al ape tehoma […]

[NKJV]: In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep.
A Kabbalistic Tree

Ilan

Parchment rotulus, 247 × 70 cm, probably 17th century
Shelfmark: O Hebr. 33:3

This rotulus deals with the mystical Kabbalistic system and its ten sefirot, or the ten attributes illustrated by an ilan, a ‘tree’ (plural ilanot). An ilan depicts the actions and attributes of God in the form of a tree of life. This beautifully illustrated roll is large, almost 2.5 metres long, and with letters the size of a coin or two. Only about a dozen ilanot of this type are preserved to this day. The oldest is from around AD 1500.

The rotulus came to the library during the days of Johan Kemper (1670–1716). In 1701, Kemper was employed as a teacher of Rabbinic Hebrew at Uppsala University. He had converted to Christianity in 1696 and was particularly interested in Semitic linguistics and the Kabbalah. The acquisition lists in the University Library Archives show that many precious and rare Hebrew prints and manuscripts were acquired during his time at the university. A considerable proportion of these deal with Jewish mysticism and Kabbalah, teachings inseparable from the Hebrew language and its understanding. This ilan was probably acquired through a donation from the priest and theologian Nicholaus Bergius (1658–1706) or from his estate.

Of the approximately 45,000 words on the parchment, the following exemplify a mere 28:

Out of the secret of the wise and discerning ones is known the secret of voweling [nikud] and vowels [tenu‘ot]; they are ten, five against five, and they are like a soul to the letters for they move [yeni‘a] the letters like a human soul which is moving the body. All the secrets of the Kabbalah and the Holy Names depend on the voweling [nikud].
The front of this leaf presents two prayers, one in Aramaic and one in Hebrew. In the centre is the first verse of Psalm 67, with the remaining verses forming a seven-branched candelabrum, a menorah. This type of object is called a shiyiti, which literally means 'I have set'. A shiyiti is a Kabbalistic devotional object for meditation on the name of God, YHWH.
The verb *shiṿiti* is from Psalm 16:8: *Shiṿiti YHWH le-negdi tamid* (‘I have YHWH set before me always’). At the top on the back of the leaf, the word *shiṿiti* is surrounded by the phrase ‘Know before whom you stand’. On the back of the object is also the mystical name of God, centred and in big letters: יהוה – YHWH. This name may not be pronounced. According to an old Jewish reading practice the name is replaced in recitation with the word *adonay* (‘my Lord’), אדוני. Pronounced as a verb, however, the consonants in the name of God can be translated as ‘he is’, *yahrweb*, or *yi-ḥyeḥ*, which echoes God’s answer to Moses to the question of whom Moses had met: ‘I am who I am’ (Exodus 3:14).

יהוה

‘I am’

YHWH, *adonay, ‘eḥyeḥ* – In the circle on the bottom half of this side, the consonants from these three Hebrew words are mixed, one letter after the other, to form new words. Numerology and words are central building blocks of Jewish mysticism and Kabbalah, in which the name of God has a special role.

יהוה

אדוני

How this parchment leaf reached the library is unknown. It is mentioned in the earliest handwritten catalogues.
‘Ets ha-Hayim

‘The Tree of Life’

Paper, 37 × 23 cm, second half of 18th century

Shelfmark: O Hebr. 27

This richly illustrated luxury manuscript contains Hayyim Vital’s (1542–1620) Kabbalistic text ‘Ets ha-Hayim, ‘The Tree of Life’, an introduction to and expansion of Isaac Luria’s (1534–1572) Kabbalistic system. Of seven known similar manuscripts in the world, this copy is the most beautiful. The frontispiece shows Aaron and Moses from the Hebrew Bible. In small script underneath their feet the name of the copyist is written: Israel. From the other known manuscripts, we learn that Rabbi Israel ben Asher Buchbinder was born in Seltz, Lithuania, but was active in Altona, Hamburg. Since he dated some of his manuscripts, we also know that he flourished during the mid-18th century. The perfected qualities of this undated copy place it timewise among the later ones from his hand.

The manuscript was donated to the library in 1834 from the estate of the national antiquarian Jonas Hallenberg (1748–1834).

On the title page under the depictions of Aaron (to the left) and Moses (to the right), we read the name of the copyist.

In my hands’ work to be glorified I wrote this.
I am the writer, Israel, son of my master, my father, our teacher, the rabbi, Asher, his memory for [eternal] life in the world to come.
אל חפץ משבעת
מיסטה והודיה יתפדו

[Text in Hebrew]

[Footer]
Classical Ethiopic (Ge‘ez)
**Ketābāt: Ethiopian magic scrolls and amulets**

In the Horn of Africa, auspicious talismans are procured by a trained and experienced specialist, a dabtarā. These talismans are objects with text, geometric symbols, and depictive imagery. The traditional term for an Ethiopian talisman image is ṭalsam in both Classical Ethiopic and Amharic (මልሳም, ṭa-l-sa-m), from the Greek telesma via the Arabic ṭilasm (τέλεσμα, طلسم). The word is also used in a wider sense for the object per se, which in Ethiopic, Amharic, and Tigrinya is also called a ketāb (ከታብ, ke-tā-b). The talisman can be a necklace, wall amulet, or scroll. Its purpose is to help protect the owner against illnesses and the evil eye, demons, and various other threats and ailments. The fishing net of the wise King Salomon and its ability to trap demons is a recurring theme on Ethiopian talismans.

At least two written languages are used on these talismans: the basic language is usually Classical Ethiopic, Ge’ez, a Semitic language attested since the third century AD. A ketāb typically begins with the text ‘In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit’. Herein are also found so-called magical words and names of angels, ‘asmāt, and words that are occasionally said – and sometimes correctly – to be Hebrew in origin, qālāt. The name of the owner can be written in a third language.

Ethiopic is read from left to right, and unlike most other old Semitic alphabets, the Ethiopic script contains vowels by default. The alphabet is syllabic, which means that a letter represents both a consonant and a subsequent vowel: ኢ ha, ኣ hu, ኦ hi, ራ hā, ይ hé, ከ he (or ኪ), ኢɾ ho, and so forth. The hundreds of letter shapes created in this system have remained remarkably stable throughout history, with no significant differences between the most modern printed books and manuscripts from late antiquity (5th–7th centuries). In the talismanic art, however, we also find another alphabet – oddly shaped letters that modern scholars have named ‘spectacle script’, Brillenbuchstaben in German. These letters, like the ም asmāt, qālāt, ṭalsam, texts, and imagery, all contribute to the object’s efficacy.

Talismans are produced in connection with rituals in which every word has a meaning. Should an ailment later reappear, the owner could bring the talisman to a literate dabtarā so that its texts and prayers could be pronounced anew. The training to become a dabtarā begins in childhood. In addition to the art of writing, prayers, and powerful words, he also learns traditional medicine and the music of the church. They – dabtarāt or dabāter, which are the two plural forms – are also cantors in the church.
Many talismans are rolls. The Latin term is *rotulus*. In English, the phrase ‘magic scroll’ has often been used. This English term is not very accurate. Technically, a scroll is opened and read horizontally with text in vertical columns of text. A *rotulus*, on the other hand, is opened vertically and read in vertical columns similarly to a supermarket receipt. Moreover, the word ‘magic’ is also problematic in this context, as magic cannot easily be defined vis-à-vis religion. This is particularly true in the Horn of Africa, and in Ethiopian Christianity, in which talismanic art has formed an integral part of popular belief for centuries, if not millennia, even before the introduction of Christianity.
This *ketāb* has helped a woman named ‘Amda Māryām Dastā. The verso side begins ‘In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit’. Following these words are *asmāt*, symbols, and a cryptogram of $7 \times 7$ fields.
The recto side features a Solomonic net surrounded by a short text spiraling outward, a salām, or peace stanza in five lines addressed to Christ. The text is the fifteenth of 30 stanzas of the prayer Malke’a Masqal, ‘Image of the Cross’ (መልክዐ፡መስቀል።), in which each stanza is addressed to a body part of the crucified Jesus.

The first line of the fifteenth stanza of Malke’a Masqal reads:

\[
\text{አለም፡አለና፡ihilimisor፡ሸለስ፡ለወይላ::}
\]
\[
\text{salām la-gaboka kwināta Langinos za-wag’o}
\]

Peace to your side, which the spear of Longinus pierced

The spiral continues with a number of ‘asmāt repeated seven times each, ‘ihilimisor [...] ledemenāsor [...] fāledāmā’as [...]; the entire text is surrounded by seven geometrical symbols, each with seven legs.
Ketāb

ክታብ

Parchment, 42 × 24 cm, 19th century
Shelfmark: O Etiop. 47

This *ketāb*, or ṭalsam, features a text dealing with King Solomon, his net, and demonic powers. The text also features ‘asmāt and qālāt. In the first column we read magical words: ‘ayās, ‘ayābas, ‘ayaba’as, ‘adedā’él, šatakalā, šu’élšu, tašatāšar, šalāhom, ša’atu, zebel’ātu, and ‘amānu’él. The last word here resembles the Hebrew ‘iman’el of Isaiah 7:14 and 8:8, ‘God with us’, עִמָּנוּאֵל.

This and the following three wall amulets were made by an artistic dabtarā for a woman who must have been wealthy enough to afford their procurement. Her name was later replaced by another name, Walatta Māryām, ‘Daughter of Mary’.
The 24-cm-tall image at the top of this *ketāb* depicts a rider and a serpent-like creature. In the West, thoughts may perhaps go to Saint George and the Dragon, but on Ethiopian soil it could just as well be Saint Susenyos and Werzelya, a demon threatening newborns. At the bottom of the amulet are depicted an angel, a malevolent demon with children in its grasp, and a man with a processional cross.

The text is separated into three columns by decorative squiggles and eyes. In the first column of the amulet, we read magical ‘*asmāt* and so-called spectacle script. In the second column, calls go out to angels and prophets, apostles and the 72 disciples, 200 *pāppāsāt* or patriarchs and bishops, 318 righteous from the Church Council of Nicaea, and 200 righteous from the Council of Ephesus. By the end of the column is a hymn to the angel *Fānu’ēl*, or Phanuel. This angel is mentioned in the apocryphal Book of Enoch as one of the four voices in praise of God together with the better-known Michael, Raphael, and Gabriel (1 Enoch 40). The Book of Enoch is part of the canon in the Ethiopic Orthodox Church and, despite being quoted in the Greek New Testament (Jude), its text is only preserved in its entirety in Classical Ethiopic.

The angel Phanuel ‘is set over the repentance and hope of those who inherit eternal life’ (1 Enoch 40:9). He is one of the exorcist angels who repel demons, so his depiction is frequent in *ketābāt*, where he is often portrayed with wings and a sword.

The third column is introduced by the words

*ወትቤ፡ እግዝእትነ፡ ሐላያም፡ በነገረ፡ ዶብራይስጢ*[

wa-tebé 'egze'tena Māryām ba-nagara 'ebrāyesi [...]

‘And then said our lady Mary in Hebrew …’

Following this are a number of ‘*asmāt* and *qālāt*. The first magical word is *safosoroyārosabo*. The word may seem ad hoc, but it is also found in the first column of *O Etiop. 45*. 
It is understandable that the image of an angel would scare away demons, but why should a demon be afraid of a creature that looks like himself? Jaques Mercier recounted in *Ethiopian Magic Scrolls* (1979) that a learned dabtarā once was asked this ‘naïve’ question. He answered that the image does not depict a demon, but is an angel disguised as a demon in order to attack his enemies more easily. With the knowledge that the depicted creature is an angel, our experience when confronted with the threatening image can be likened to a therapeutic catharsis. The terror we feel when faced with an image that revives memories from a nightmare is nothing compared to what the evil demon will suffer at the hands of our benevolent angel in disguise.

Depicted on this wall amulet is a creature with raised palms and a cross on the top of his head. The eyes are encircled by two serpents. The motif is a recurring one in talismanic art.

The text is about protection from demons and illness. In the second column we read the Legend of Saint Susenyos (Sisinnios) and the malevolent Werzelyā, the demon of infant mortality.

Reference
Book of Marian prayers

አርጋኖነ : የ·ሔ. የ·
'Argânona weddâsé
Parchment, 153 folios, 23.5 × 20 cm, 15th century
Shelfmark: O Etiop. 10

'Argânona weddâsé (‘The Harp of Praise’), also known as ‘Argânona Dengel (‘The Harp of the Virgin’), is a prayer book in honour of Mâryâm (Mary) with offices for all the days of the week. Ethiopia is sometimes called the country of Mary. Devotion to the Mother of God has a special place here. With Jesus still an infant, the Holy Family is believed to have fled Herod not only to Egypt (Matthew 2:13–23) but also to Ethiopia. A prayer to God addressed through the Holy Virgin is sure to be granted, as she is most dearly loved by her firstborn son Jesus.

The book was donated to Uppsala University Library on 3 September 1894 by August Bergman, a Swedish missionary in Beleza. Typical of Ethiopian manuscripts, it has a bag in which the book can be transported or hung on a wall. The leather strap of the bag and the leather that once adorned the wooden covers of the manuscript have been lost to the centuries.
Persian
Collection of poetry

Majmū’ah
Paper, 14 × 11.5 cm, September 1494
Shelfmark: O Nov. 95

Composite manuscript with two Persian divans, i.e., poetic works: Divān-i Ḥāfīz by Ḥāfīz (ca. 1320–1390) and Divān-i Shāhī by Amīr Shāhī Sabzavārī (d. 1453).

With many colours and magnificently gilded, this manuscript is a splendid example of Persian bookbinding: oriental binding in dark brown leather with flap, richly gilded on the front and back covers as well as on its coloured pages. The headings and frames are also in gold. All this gold gives this small book a hefty weight of 725 grams.

The manuscript was completed in Constantinople on 4 Jumādá I, 879 AH, which corresponds to 16 September 1494 AD. The volume had belonged to the French diplomat Henri Fournier (1821–1898), envoy to Stockholm in 1862 and later ambassador to Rome and Constantinople. After Fournier’s death, his widow Blanche Fournier donated the manuscript to the library. The shelfmark with Nov., Latin Nova (‘new’), indicates that the book was acquired after the year 1800 and was considered a new accession when it was catalogued.
Rubā‘īyat–i Khayyām

 رباعيات خيام

Paper, 194 folios, 18.2 × 10.8, 17th century
Shelfmark: O Nov. 42


Despite its name, the poems are written in eight hemistiches, or half-lines with alliterations, rhymes, and assonances. The poems deal with life’s major questions, its joys and sorrows, often within a religious framework. They also frequently refer to alcohol, an image of divine intoxication among Sufis. Others have described Khayyām as an atheist and understood his wine as the alcoholic drink from the grape. The manuscript also contains a collection of poems, a dīvān, by Amīr Shāhī Sabzavārī (d. 1453).

The book is bound in a richly decorated so-called Islamic binding with a characteristic flap that envelops the book, covering the fore-edge and about half of the front cover. Its decorative pattern is similar to the cover, giving a unity of style.

The book was bought in Constantinople on 15 October 1825 by Albrecht Ihre the younger (1797–1877), Secretary of the Swedish legation in Constantinople in 1824, chargé d’affairs in 1827, and grandson of the philologist and historical linguist Johan Ihre (1707–1780). The Ihre family’s book collection was donated to the library in instalments in the early 20th century.
Khamsah by Niẓāmī Ganjavī

Khamsah
Paper, 601 folios, 17.7 × 12.5 cm, AD 1439/40
Shelfmark: O Vet. 82

This manuscript contains the Khamsah (‘quinary’) by the Persian poet Niẓāmī Ganjavī (1140/41–1202/03). The title ultimately comes from the Arabic word for ‘five’ (خمسة) and the work consists of five poetic narratives. The third narrative is a love story about Layla and Majnun. The manuscript is illustrated with 52 miniatures probably painted in present-day Iran, possibly in Shiraz. It is dated to 843 according to the Islamic calendar (AD 1439/40).

The Brazilian-born Dutchman Ludwig Fabritius (1648–1729), envoy of the Swedish King Charles XI to Persia three times between 1679 and 1700, bought the manuscript in what is now Iran. The book was donated to the library after Fabritius’ death.

The young Layla and Majnun study in the same class in school. The teacher is in the centre in front of Layla with a bookstand. Behind Layla sits Majnun with a book in his lap. To the right of the teacher are three other pupils.
Majnun was called Qays before falling in love with Layla. When his father had asked Layla’s father for her hand in marriage with his son, Layla’s father had refused, saying that Qays was ‘mad’, majnūn in Arabic. In the hope of restoring Majnun to his senses, his family brought him to the Kaaba in Mecca, but Majnun could only pray that his love for Layla would increase.
Lovesick and disillusioned, Majnun has left his family and fled into the desert. He asks the raven how it can be all dressed in black. Can its sorrow be greater than his? Unresponsive, the bird flies away.
Ottoman Turkish
Süleymân Belḳıs nâme

سليمان بلقيس نامه

Paper, 224 folios, 35.4 × 24.3 cm, 16th century [?]
Shelfmark: O St. 5

This poem about King Solomon (Süleymân) and the Queen of Sheba (Belḳıs) was composed by the Turkish poet Firdevsi-i Rumî (b. circa 1453) by order of Sultan Selim I in the early 1500s. The poet, researcher, and historian Firdevsi is also known by the nickname Uzun, ‘the tall one’, in Arabic طويل, tawil, and in Ottoman Turkish فردوسی طويل, Firdevsi-i Ṭavîl, and اوزون فردوسی, Uzun Firdevsi. The manuscript begins with a prayer, followed by a description of historic events at the time of the work’s composition, including the wars of Selim I.

The Ottoman Empire spanned a period of more than 600 years, circa 1299–1922, and is also called the Turkish Empire. Until 1928, texts in Ottoman Turkish were written in the Arabic, or rather the Perso-Arabic alphabet. The spoken and written language differed substantially: with a huge percentage of the written vocabulary coming from Persian and Arabic, Ottoman texts were largely unintelligible to the general illiterate population. In 1928, the Latin alphabet was adopted for writing modern Turkish.

The manuscript was acquired by the legation chaplain Adolf Fredrik Sturtzenbecker (1757–1784) in Constantinople in March 1783. His many manuscripts were bequeathed to the university in 1785.
Şehnâme

‘The Book of Kings’
Paper, 305 folios, 39.3 × 25 cm, dated AD 1620
Shelfmark: O Cels. 1

Persian culture permeated the Turkish Ottoman Empire. The Persian poet Firdawsî, or Abû al-Qāsim Firdawsî (934–circa 1025 AD), wrote the enormous Shâhnâmah, ‘the Book of Kings’, which contains about 50,000 rhyming couplets about the history of the Persians from the first man to the battles with the hereditary enemies of Turan and on to the Muslim conquest in the seventh century. This national epic, with its dramatic episodes and battle scenes, offers generous inspiration for miniatures.

This manuscript contains a Turkish translation, Şehnâme, by a person named Medhî, or Madhi, and is dedicated to Sultan Osman II (1605–1622). The scribe’s name is Juri (جورى), but the many artists behind the illustrations are anonymous. In the work’s 29 miniatures, Chinese influences can be seen in the dragons and flowers.

The manuscript was completed in Türkiye in 1029 AH (AD 1620). It came to the library as a testamentary gift from the brothers Gustaf Celsing (1723–1789) and Ulrik Celsing (1731–1805), who were both envoys in Constantinople.
کتاب گوگی بهتر را به راز داشته که واقعاً به شما بیشتر کمک می‌کند.

اسکندر وریزی، از کتاب گوگی بهتر را به راز داشته که واقعاً به شما بیشتر کمک می‌کند.
Syriac Aramaic
Liturgy handbook for priests

ʻ-Taṣṣa d-kāhne

Paper, 177 folios, 21.5 × 14.5 cm, undated
Shelfmark: O Hebr. 48

If manuscripts had eyes.

In 1915, five hundred Aramaic-speaking Christians fled to Elizavetpol in the Caucasus, where they were cared for by the Swedish physician Dr. Ferdinand Fähræus. When he was about to return to Sweden in 1923, he was presented by the priest of the displaced with this book as a token of their gratitude. The humble manuscript is a worn and water-damaged manual for a priest in the Nestorian church (the Church of the East).

Our struggles are only partially committed to text, our innermost secrets perhaps never entrusted to letters. There is an exlibris with a picture of a bookshelf saying ‘hic vivi taceant, hic mortui loquuntur’ (‘here the living be silent, here the dead are speaking’). The phrase is particularly apropos among the metres of shelves of manuscripts in a library. We can all too easily forget the individuals who, over the centuries, have lived next to the texts. Sometimes the object tells the more important story.

The manuscript was donated to the library in 1941.
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