UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO
DIPARTIMENTO DI SCIENZE
DELLA MEDIAZIONE LINGUISTICA
E DI STUDI INTERCULTURALI

SMeLSI

Universität Zürich UZH

Outline

The mid-eighth through to the late ninth century witnessed an important shift in the status and role of the written word in Arabic-language scholarship. A situation in which texts were largely produced out of, and intended for use in, an oral, pedagogical setting gradually gave way to one in which they were increasingly composed to be read independently. For this purpose, they had to communicate in such a way that they were comprehensible to the reader without the presence of the composer or a student who had read the text with the composer. Gregor Schoeler describes this process as a move from a 'literature of the school for the school' to a 'literature for a reading public'. Of course, the transformation did not stop at the end of the ninth century: from the tenth century onwards, ever more books contain elements such as contextualizing introductions, presentations of key technical terms, a more systematic organization of material and the deployment of tools to aid the reader in navigating the text, such as cross-references, section headings, and tables of contents.

Building on the results of our Zurich meeting (*Putting the House of Wisdom in order*, 19-20 February 2016) and the forthcoming publication stemming from it (*Asiatischen Studien – Études Asiatiques* 71, 2017), this workshop aims to consider the textual culture of the Abbasid period from the point of view of how its texts were designed to be read and what ideals of composition were in play.

We shall attempt a cross-cultural, cross-disciplinary perspective, seeking ideas and tools for analysis from specialists of other areas and periods and with a particular focus on non-European cultures. In particular, we wish to take seriously Anne Blair's idea of "too much to know:" it seems to us that the challenges posed to medieval Arab writers, and the strategies they employed to overcome these, may be helpfully compared (in quality, if not quantity) to the situation of information overload which intellectual enterprise has often faced, and is perceived acutely again today following the advent of the internet. As in the medieval Arabic case, parallel to the production of a higher amount of material, technological progress also makes it possible to process ever larger amounts of information. This in turn also allows material to be utilised in ways hitherto impossible or unthought, and to ask new questions of it.

The perspective of the "information age" may also be used another way, which is more specific to pre-modern Arabic texts: due to its size and character, this corpus is both attractive and challenging for newly developed digital analytical tools, and the methods that employ them. The process of "distance-reading" the corpus can itself provide insight into previously obscured working strategies of pre-modern authors who were facing information overload.

General Information

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ISTITUTO CONFUCIO
UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO
米兰国立大学孔子学院

CARC
CONTEMPORARY ASIA RESEARCH CENTRE

Navigating the House of Wisdom
How to write a good book in the medieval Middle East

Università degli Studi di Milano
Polo di Mediazione – aula T3
Piazza Indro Montanelli, 1 – 20099 Sesto San Giovanni (MI)
May 25-26, 2017

Day 1:   Thursday, 25th May 2017

13:30–14:00   Welcome
Gianni Turchetta – Università degli Studi di Milano
Director, Dipartimento di Scienze della Mediazione e di Studi Interculturali

Introduction
Letizia Osti and James Weaver

14:00–15:30   Panel 1: Processing
Discussion: **Sarah Savant** – Aga Khan University London

Paolo Ceravolo – Università degli Studi di Milano
Deactivating the information trap

Maxim Romanov – Universität Leipzig
Of a network and a node, or why do we need a corpus and computational Methods?

15:30–16:00   Break

16:00–16:45   Panel 2: Rules
Discussion: **Antonella Ghersetti** – Università di Venezia "Ca' Foscari"

Chaoqun Lian – Peking University
Out of disorder: language planning in the modern Arabic-speaking world

16:45–18:15   Panel 3: Selection
Discussion: **Alessandra Lavagnino** – Università degli Studi di Milano

Isabel Toral – Freie Universität Berlin
Sorting the pearls of wisdom: The *Unique Necklace* by Ibn 'Abd Rabbih

Barbara Bisetto – Università di Milano-Bicocca
Basic tools for reading Du Fu: on the composition of the anthology *Du lü yanyi* (XIV c.)

Day 2:   Friday, 26th May 2017

9:00–10:30   Panel 4: Retrieval
Discussion: **Lale Behzadi** – Universität Bamberg

Johannes Thomann – Universität Zürich
From serial access to random access: tables of content, chapter headings and hierarchical text structures in 4th/10th-century scientific books

Pernilla Myrne – Göteborgs Universitet
Arranging, presenting, and reading erotic knowledge: from *Jawāmiʿ al-ladhdha* (4th/10th c.) to al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505)

10:30–11:15   Panel 5: Visualisation
Discussion: **James Weaver** – Universität Zürich

Hinrich Biesterfeldt – Ruhr-Universität Bochum
How to climb in a tree – forms and functions of *tashjīr* in Arabic manuscripts

11:15–11:45   Break

11:45–13:15   Panel 6: Ranking
Discussion: **Lidia de Michelis** – Università degli Studi di Milano

Julia Bray – University of Oxford
al-Āmidī and his comparative analysis (*muwāzana*) of the poets Abū Tammām and al-Buḥturī

Florinda De Simini – Università di Napoli "L'Orientale"
Navigating the Ocean of Dharma: History, Authorship, and Tradition in a Sanskrit Work from Medieval Bengal

13:15–14:15   Break

14:15–15:30   Panel 7: Storing
Discussion:
Maaike van Berkel– Radboud University Nijmegen
Letizia Osti – Università degli Studi di Milano

Sarah Savant – Aga Khan University London
A book is a box

15:30–16:00   Break

16:00–17:45   Final discussion