

The Cluster of Excellence  
**Understanding Written Artefacts**  
cordially invites you to the workshop

## **Manuscripts with Sample Letters in Late Medieval Eurasia**

Monday, 8 April 2024, 1:00 pm – 5:45 pm CEST  
Tuesday, 9 April 2024, 9:00 am – 2:30 pm CEST

Warburgstraße 26, 20354 Hamburg

Hybrid Event

Organised by  
David Durand-Guédy (Universität Hamburg)

Registration:

<https://www.csmc.uni-hamburg.de/en/register/workshop51>

Letter-writing manuals were prevalent throughout late medieval Eurasia. They were called *munsha'āt* in Arabic and Persian, *shuyi* in Chinese or the *summa dictandi* in the Latin West. Many include sample letters, or standard phrases adapted for specific contexts or recipients.

Such manuscripts have been studied by specialists within their respective areas, but rarely in comparison with similar artefacts from other manuscript cultures, and never at the scale of Eurasia. This workshop will be a first endeavour to bridge this gap by bringing together experts from various area studies.

This first meeting will primarily focus on the materiality, formatting, and structure of manuscripts from the eleventh to the fifteenth centuries. Research questions include: What do these manuscripts look like? How is the page visually organized? How are the sample letters (or sample sentences) combined with didactic explanations or *lemmata*? Do the authors offer explicit guidance on the graphical aspects of letter writing? What are the categories for different types of letters, and how are they presented?

## Programme

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**Monday, 8 April 2024, 1.00 pm – 5.45 pm**

1:00 – 1:10 Konrad Hirschler (Universität Hamburg)  
*Welcoming remarks*

### Session 1

Chair: Janina Karolewski (Universität Hamburg)

1:10 – 1:45 David Durand-Guédy (Universität Hamburg)  
*Keynote Talk: Manuscripts with Sample Letters in Late Medieval Eurasia: Sources, Research, Problems*

1:45 – 2:30 Alexander Riehle (Harvard University)  
*Collections of Sample Letters in Byzantium: Types, Manuscripts, Uses*

2:30 – 3.00 Coffee Break

### Session 2

Chair: Uta Lauer (Universität Hamburg)

3:00 – 3:45 Jean-Pierre Drège (EPHE, Paris)  
*Letter-writing Guides in Medieval China*

3:45 – 4:30 Markus Rüttermann (Hemmoor / Kyoto)  
*Manuscripts with Sample Letters. Reflections on Japanese Developments between the Eighth and the Eighteenth Centuries*

4:30 – 5:00 Coffee Break

### Session 3

Chair: tba

5:00 – 5:45 Frédéric Bauden (Université de Liège)  
*How and Why It Matters: Material, Visual, and Descriptive Elements in Works Containing Copies of Documents from the Mamluk Period*

**Tuesday, 9 April 2024, 9.00 am – 2.30 pm**

**Session 4**

Chair: Philippe Depreux (Universität Hamburg)

9:00 – 9:45 Benoît Grévin (CRH-UMR 8558, Paris)

*Collections of Letters Related to Ars Dictaminis in Latin Europe  
(1080-c. 1450): Typology, Structure, Evolution*

9:45 – 10:30 Jürgen Paul (Universität Hamburg)

*Well-Formatted Letters, Sayings, and Phrases. The Manuscript Chester  
Beatty Ar 3968*

10:30 – 11:00 Coffee Break

**Session 5**

Chair: tba

11:00 – 11:45 Emad Sheikh Al-Hokamaee (University of Tehran)

*Emphasizing Sacred Names (momtāz-nevisi): The Adoption of a Chinese  
Practice in Iranian Epistolary Tradition (13th-16th Centuries)*

11:45 – 12:30 David Durand-Guédy (Universität Hamburg)

*Writing Manuals and Letter Collections in pre-Ottoman Anatolia*

12:30 – 1:00 Lunch Break

1:00 – 2:00 Roundtable Discussion (closed event)

2:00 – 2:30 Irina Wandrey

*Presentation of CSMC's Collection of Written Artefacts (closed event)*

## Abstracts and Contributors

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**Frédéric BAUDEN (Université de Liège)**

*How and Why It Matters: Material, Visual, and Descriptive Elements in Works Containing Copies of Documents from the Mamluk Period*

Monday, 8 April 2024, 5:00 pm – 5:45 pm

Various manuals and collections of letters composed by prominent actors of the Mamluk state chancery have been preserved. At the same time, some biographies of the sultans written by historians who were active at the state chancery also include official documents. Several of these sources were edited during the last century, thus contributing to improve our knowledge of the way the Mamluk chancery worked and which types of documents it issued. However, the editing process has not always taken into account the material and visual elements that the copyists of these texts seemed to reproduce faithfully. The aim of this paper is twofold. First, it will review the various material and visual elements, together with other physical details provided by the authors, found in a wide range of manuscripts. Thanks to this analysis, it will be shown how the copies of these texts can help us better understand the significance of these physical elements. Second, it will demonstrate that even though these are only copies of official texts, some of them can be regarded as faithful to the original when it has been preserved, thus granting to these works a historical value.

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**Jean-Pierre DRÈGE (EPHE, Paris)**

*Letter-writing Guides in Medieval China*

Monday, 8 April 2024, 3:00 pm – 3:45 pm

In a country where rites and etiquette have been constituent elements of Chinese society since ancient times, epistolary conventions obviously do not escape the set of conventions that govern relationships between individuals. This intervention will focus on the guides for letter-writing (shuyi, that is Letters and ceremonies) from a series of manuscripts dating from the ninth-tenth centuries. Most of them, discovered at the beginning of 20th century in a Dunhuang oasis, are kept in the Bibliothèque nationale de France and in the British Library. These are the only manuals of correspondence

available to us for medieval China, and as such, they provide us with a unique perspective on the vitality of epistolary practices across both private and public spheres of life during this period. These manuscripts have been primarily examined for their content, with several detailed studies published in Chinese in recent years. More precisely, we will focus on a manual subject to a particular layout.

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**David DURAND-GUÉDY (Universität Hamburg)**

*Writing manuals and letter collections in pre-Ottoman Anatolia*

Tuesday, 9 April 2024, 11:45 am – 12:30 am

Inshā' works are compilations of documents (letters and/or decrees) typically composed by chancellery secretaries. Their primary aim was to provide templates, sometimes with explicit instructions on how to craft the documents. Persian inshā', which thrived in Khurasan (Eastern Iran) during the 6th/12th century, spread to Anatolia where the chancelleries of the new Turkish states exclusively used Persian. The earliest examples in this region date back to the 13th century. These works offer insights into how stylistic norms were adopted and, if necessary, adapted. They are crucial for understanding the political history of the regions involved, but also the social history of the "Persography". This presentation will examine Anatolian manuscripts from the 13th to the 15th centuries, comparing them to manuscripts produced in Iran. It will address palaeographical and formatting issues, drawing examples from well-known manuscripts (e.g., the Paris and Berlin manuscripts utilized by Osman Turan in his seminal work on Anatolian inshā'; the Fatih manuscript with the work of Ḥusām al-Dīn Khū'ī) and from lesser-known, yet equally significant, ones (MS Mar'ashī 11136, likely the oldest collection of Anatolian inshā' dating to the 1240s; MS Majles containing the only copy of Majdī's Misbāḥ al-rasā'il).

**Benoît GRÉVIN (CRH-UMR 8558, Paris)**

*Collections of Letters Related to Ars Dictaminis in Latin Europe (1080-c. 1450): Typology, Structure, Evolution*

Tuesday, 9 April 2024, 9:00 am – 9:45 am

In recent decades, great progress has been made in the study of collections of letters related to ars dictaminis (the art of ornate epistolary writing, which flourished in the Latin West from 1080 until the fifteenth century), but the profusion of forms does not facilitate a global vision of this field. The ars dictaminis produced over 150 theoretical treatises, and thousands of practical or theoretical-practical letter collections. The aim of this paper is to present a few remarks on the main factors structuring these collections, with particular emphasis on their materiality.

The evolution of these letter collections has depended on complex factors. Their coalescence is the result of a double movement. Some of them were created in places where rhetoric was taught (studia, universities). Their letters are often fictitious, and the organization of the most famous corpora corresponds to a desire to create canonical collections associating various treatises. Another part was created as a result of chancery activity. In these cases, letter collections are organized typologically, and the letters they contain are “reprocessed” from documents created in a specific historical context. The form taken by the manuscripts also suggests the diversity of solutions adopted in different environments. Collections of letters created for princely, royal or episcopal chancelleries differ markedly in their materiality from those intended for the literate public of Italian or German cities.

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**Jürgen PAUL (CSMC, Hamburg)**

*Well-Formatted Letters, Sayings, and Phrases. The Manuscript Chester Beatty Ar 3968*

Tuesday, 9 April 2024, 9:45 am – 10:30 am

At first, to understand what happens in the manuscript under study, a glance at the development of literary inshāʾ writings in the first centuries of Islam is needed. This genre started to be widely practiced only in the tenth century, with a handful of important compilations being created in two generations where no such works were known before. These compilations all go under the name of one author, most of the time a high-

ranking official, they all have official correspondence mostly, and at least some of them have been used as an important source for political and social history.

The case study of CBL Ar-3968 refers to the very short description in the library catalogue (compiled by A.J. Arberry) and gives codicological precisions and also takes a closer look at the content. In this respect, Arberry's description is misleading for the second (and largest) part of the manuscript: it does not present "a collection of letters written by famous persons", and above all nothing that looks like the compilations just mentioned, but a collection of fragments of letters, but also short sayings and phrases taken from oral communication. It is called a "selection" from another work which Arberry could not identify beyond doubt – I do not have a solution for that question either and see many reasons to reject Arberry's thesis.

The paper also addresses the question of formatting, even if it is clear that the manuscript cannot show us anything about the formatting of letters and not about the formatting of compilations of letters, either. However, it is an interesting case of a compilation of short items, and makes one think about how such items are marked off in such compilations, for instance in contrast to personal notebooks.

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### Alexander RIEHLE (Harvard University)

*Collections of Sample Letters in Byzantium: Types, Manuscripts, Uses*

Monday, 8 April 2024, 1:45 pm – 2:30 pm

Despite the great importance of epistolography for communication and self-representation in Byzantine elite culture, there is very little direct evidence for the teaching of letter-writing in the school curriculum. While the late antique manual attributed to Libanios or Proklos enjoyed popularity in Byzantium—and it is possible that some instruction was provided in the context of the progymnasmata, or preliminary rhetorical exercises—there exists no Byzantine equivalent of the Western European dictamen. Letter-writing was likely learned more informally by studying and imitating canonical writers of the past. This is suggested by the large number of Byzantine epistolary manuscripts, which come in the form of either comprehensive single-author corpora or miscellanies offering samples from different authors, most often combined with texts belonging to other genres.

This paper will provide a survey of the various different types of such collections of sample letters with a focused discussion of a few manuscripts, asking what the con-



tents (including paratextual elements such as headings and marginal notes) and palaeographical-codicological evidence can tell us about the original objectives, intended audiences and later uses of these collections.

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**Markus RÜTTERMANN (Hemmoor / Kyoto)**

*Manuscripts with Sample Letters. Reflections on Japanese Developments between the Eighth and the Eighteenth Centuries*

Monday, 8 April 2024, 3:45 pm – 4:30 pm

Since the transmission of correspondence rules from China to Japan in the seventh and eighth centuries, rules and paragons were copied and passed down by handwriting. Due to specific social interactions in Japan and also the unique aspects of the Japanese language, common Japanese letters diverged from Chinese conventions. The main graphical change in these letters is the spectrum of cursive writing (to show one's respect), and the use of phonetic syllabaries alongside Chinese or pseudo-Chinese ideograms.

These changes can be observed in originals, copies (using a variety of techniques), or handscroll-preserved originals, which also served as samples. They, among other things, express artful calligraphy or hierarchical and gender-related status relationships.

From the twelfth-thirteenth centuries onwards, Japanese rules and paragons were edited according to a set of established standards, mirroring parts of the adapted average practice. A high number of early letter samples have only survived in printed books, while others have been passed down through handwritten copies as the outcome of teaching and training texts. In many cases, however, it is not easy to attribute paragons to specific letter-style calligraphy. Besides a few greeting phrases, the graduation of respect is rarely observed in sample texts. However, within the didactic sections, there is more emphasis on the use of calligraphy to denote grades of formality in epistolary communication. A number of common practices, whether adhering to or deviating from established rules, were even dropped from the collections of sample letters. Conversely, since the 17th century, when popular handbooks were printed in Kyoto and other cities, some lithographic and woodblock-printed collection of letter samples began to include more common and concrete codes for handwriting in paragons (printed "manugraphy").

**Emad SHEIKH AL-HOKAMAEE (University of Tehran)**

*Emphasizing Sacred Names (momtāz-nevisi): The Adoption of a Chinese Practice in Iranian Epistolary Tradition (13th-16th Centuries)*

Tuesday, 9 April 2024, 11:00 am – 11:45 am

In several Iranian manuscripts containing sample letters (a.k.a. enshā), sacred terms are visually set apart from the main text. These terms, including the word “God” or the name of the ruler mentioned within the letter, are written in the margins, directly adjacent to the sentence they pertain to.

While prior scholars have noted this practice in archival documents or chronicles, its principles and origins have remained obscure. This paper aims to trace its origins back to China, examining its adoption in Iran chancery practice following the Mongol invasion in the thirteenth century and the subsequent arrival of Uyghur scribes. We will analyse several instances of this practice and compare them with the didactic explanations found in writing manuals, particularly Nasafī’s *Laṭā’if al-inshā’* (early fourteenth century). Persisting well beyond the Mongol era, this practice serves as a compelling and rare instance of how letter formatting traditions were exchanged between manuscript cultures.