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ISITA

INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF
ISLAMIC THOUGHT IN AFRICA

CENTRE
FOR THE STUDY OF
MANUSCRIPT CULTURES



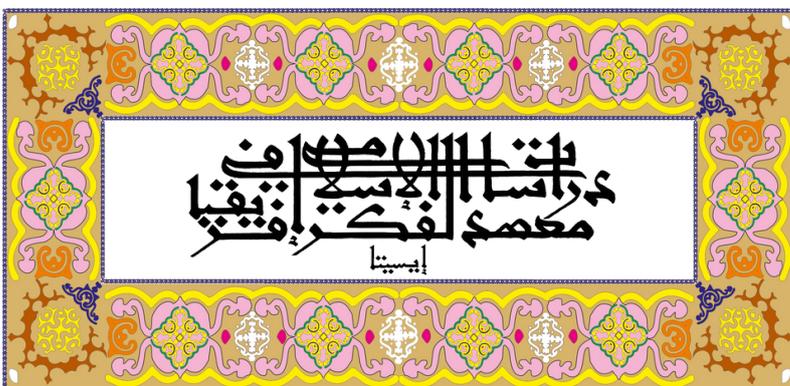
MELVILLE J
HERSKOVITS
LIBRARY
OF AFRICAN STUDIES

TEACHING WITH WEST AFRICAN MANUSCRIPT COLLECTIONS

Setting Up Joint ISITA-CSMC
Education & Research

MAY 23-24, 2022

A hybrid workshop organized by the Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures at the University of Hamburg and the Institute for the Study of Islamic Thought in Africa and Melville J. Herskovits Library of African Studies at Northwestern University.



Funded by the Federal Government and the Länder
in the Universities of Excellence funding line.

ABOUT THE WORKSHOP

This two-day hybrid workshop focuses on the collection of [Arabic Manuscripts from West Africa](#) housed in the Northwestern University Library. The workshop is part of a broader collaboration between Northwestern University's [Institute for the Study of Islamic Thought in Africa \(ISITA\)](#), its [Melville J. Herskovits Library of African Studies](#), and the [Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures \(CSMC\)](#) at the University of Hamburg.

The West African manuscripts housed at the Northwestern University Library constitute the largest and richest collection in North America of Arabic and 'Ajamī manuscripts from Africa, with over 5,000 items in four sub-collections. For over five decades, scholars have used these materials in their research and publications, travelling to consult items in person or requesting scans from the library. Yet, the meanings and significance of the manuscripts generally have not been accessible to those without the requisite language skills and knowledge of the contexts in which the manuscripts were produced.

The workshop brings together participants who have worked with the manuscripts in various capacities—along with those who can bring new insights and expertise—to consider how we might open engagement with the manuscripts to broader audiences. It considers several inter-locking questions:

1. How can we render these manuscripts more accessible as teaching and education resources for non-specialists?
2. What are some promising collaborative research projects that could be developed based upon this collection?
3. How can the existing partnership between the CSMC, ISITA, and the Herskovits Library of African Studies support these initiatives, allowing the collection to realize its full potential as a research and teaching resource, accessible to a variety of stakeholders.

ABOUT THE PARTNERSHIP

CSMC and ISITA possess complementary strengths and resources in the study of African Islamic manuscripts and their cultures. Both are embedded in overlapping, but distinct, global networks of scholars and institutions. The CSMC-ISITA-Herskovits Library partnership has developed gradually since 2015 through a series of visits, meetings, and co-organized events. The present workshop is intended to launch a phase of more structured and sustained collaboration between our centers, libraries, and universities, beginning with a focus on the West African manuscripts in the Herskovits Library.

ABOUT THE FORMAT

Scholars and librarians from a variety of disciplines, most of whom have worked with the manuscripts in the NU collection in some capacity, have been invited to participate. A small group of them will gather in person on Northwestern University's campus ([Location: University Library Forum Room](#)); another group will meet at the CSMC, Hamburg; and still more individuals will join by Zoom from various locations. The "Participants" list at the end of this document indicates how each person is participating.

The workshop is funded by the Institute for the Study of Islamic Thought in Africa, Northwestern University and by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) and the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg under the Excellence Strategy of the Federal Government and the Länder.

SCHEDULE

The schedule has been arranged to accommodate participants in multiple time zones in so far as possible.

An “X” indicates that the session is taking place either too early or too late for the audience in that time zone to participate. The session will be recorded for viewing at a different time.

The sessions highlighted in blue are for participants in all time zones (“Joint Sessions”).

EVANSTON TIME (CDT)	HAMBURG TIME (CEST)	DAY ONE MONDAY, MAY 23, 2022
X	1:00-1:30 pm	Session 1. Dmitry Bondarev (CSMC): “An Update on ‘Ajamī Projects at the CSMC.” <i>Recorded for audience in US time zones.</i>
X	1:30-2:00 pm	Session 2. Walid Mourad (HMML): “Manuscript Ownership & Access in the Context of the HMML’s Digitization Projects.” <i>Recorded for audience in US time zones.</i>
8:30-9:00 am	3:30-4:00 pm	Session 3. Welcome and Introductions
9:00-10:00 am	4:00-5:00 pm	Session 4. Teaching with the Collection I: Manuscript Studies
10:00-10:15 am	5:00-5:15 pm	Break
10:15-11:45 am	5:15-6:45 pm	Session 5. Teaching with the Collection II: Translation & Engaging with Contents (including a presentation introducing the <i>Maktaba</i> project).
12:00-1:00 pm	X	Break for Evanston group / Day ends for Hamburg group
1:00-1:30 pm	X	Session 6. Ragy Mikhaeel (NU): “ A Pilot Project for Teaching Advanced Arabic Language Using Manuscripts .” <i>Recorded for audience in Europe.</i>
1:30-2:00 pm	X	Evanston group watches recording of Session 1 (Bondarev)
2:00-2:30 pm	X	Evanston group watches recording of Session 2 (Mourad)
EVANSTON TIME (CDT)	HAMBURG TIME (CEST)	DAY TWO TUESDAY, MAY 24, 2022
X	1:00-1:30 pm	Hamburg group watches recording of Session 6 (Mikhaeel).
8:30-9:00 am	3:30-4:00 pm	Session 7. Q&A on Bondarev, Mourad, and Mikhaeel’s presentations
9:00-10:00 am	4:00-5:00 pm	Session 8. Outreach & Connecting with Stakeholders
10:00-11:15 am	5:00-6:15 pm	Session 9. Promising Research Trajectories (Pitch Your Idea)
11:15 am-12:30 pm	6:15-7:30 pm	Session 10. Avenues of Collaboration between ISITA, the CSMC, & the Herskovits Library
12:30-1:00 pm	7:30-8:00 pm	Break
1:00-2:00 pm	8:00-9:00 pm	Concluding Session. Lecture by Charles Stewart, “Literary Authority in West African Islam” (open to the public; separate Zoom registration required).

ABBREVIATIONS

ISITA – Institute for the Study of Islamic Thought in Africa NU – Northwestern University

CSMC – Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures, University of Hamburg

HMML – Hill Museum and Manuscript Library, Saint John’s University, Minnesota

JOINT SESSION DESCRIPTIONS

Most of the workshop sessions have been scheduled at times when participants in all time zones can participate. These “Joint Sessions” are described below, along with some questions for participants to consider in advance. The remaining workshop sessions consist of either a brief presentation by one person, viewing of a presentation recorded at an earlier time, or a Q&A about the recorded sessions.

We are using the terms “NU collection” or “NU manuscript collection” as shorthand to refer to the collection of Arabic and ‘Ajamī manuscripts from West African housed in the Melville J. Herskovits Library of African Studies at Northwestern University. See <https://libguides.northwestern.edu/arabic-manuscripts> for more information about these materials.

Session 4: Teaching with the Collection I: Manuscript Studies

Monday, May 23

CDT (Evanston): 9:00-10:00 am

CEST (Hamburg): 4:00-5:00 pm

The NU manuscript collection has potential as a teaching collection for courses in manuscript studies, codicology, and the so called “book disciplines.” ISITA, the Herskovits Library of African Studies, CSMC, and the Center for African Studies at UIUC already organized one such practical training workshop in August 2017, titled “Working with African Arabic Script Manuscripts.” Read more about the workshop here: <https://africanstudies.northwestern.edu/docs/publications-research/newsletters/pasnewswinter20181.pdf#page=2>).

The focus on manuscripts from sub-Saharan Africa (and within that, attention to texts in ‘Ajamī), the inclusion of curators of African manuscript collections, and a holistic approach that went beyond codicology, were features that set this workshop apart from the Islamic manuscript codicology courses offered periodically through The Islamic Manuscript Association (TIMA), the Hill Museum and Manuscript Library (HMML), the El Escorial Collection (Spain), and other entities.

Building upon our successful experience with the 2017 workshop, we are ready to make the NU collection the home base for a regular series of hands-on courses based upon materials in the collection, leveraging the expertise and resources of ISITA and CSMC and our networks.

In this session we will brainstorm about the contents of, and potential audiences for, these courses and how to establish a sustainable infrastructure for them.

Note: A list of past and current Islamic/Arabic manuscript short courses offered at other institutions is available on the [workshop webpage](#), under “Resources.”

Questions to consider include:

- What themes and topics should be included in a general introductory course for working with African Arabic script manuscripts?
- What ideas do you have for more specialized courses on specific topics?
- What are the various audiences and constituencies we wish to serve?
- What are the prospects for integrating manuscript courses within the curriculum at either NU or CSMC/U. Hamburg? What would be needed to make these courses credit-bearing?
- Should we offer the courses through an established entity like the [Rare Books School](#) (which has already expressed interest) or create an independent structure through which we would offer the courses?
- What is a sustainable financial and administrative model to ensure that any courses we devise are not one-off efforts? The August 2017 workshop charged participants a modest fee to keep it accessible, especially to graduate students, and subsidized the actual cost from grant and institutional (NU and CSMC) support. From where would we seek grant support?

Session 5: Teaching with the Collection II: Translation & Engaging with Contents

Monday, May 23

CDT (Evanston): 10:15-11:45 am

CEST (Hamburg): 5:15-6:45 pm

While the manuscripts in the NU collection have been used by scholars in a variety of disciplines for their own research agendas, the meanings and significance of the manuscripts are generally not *accessible* to those without the requisite language skills and knowledge of the contexts in which the manuscripts were produced.

This session considers strategies for presenting manuscripts in the NU collection in ways that encourage non-specialists to engage with the *contents* of the texts.

Questions to consider include:

- How can we transform manuscripts in the NU collection—through translation, contextualization, curation, and other methods—into resources suitable for undergraduate or graduate teaching across the humanities disciplines?

- We invite those of you who have incorporated West African manuscripts (from any collection) into your teaching to share your experience. What manuscripts did you use? For which courses? What worked? What didn't?
- Are there specific manuscripts, or sub-sets of manuscripts, from the NU collection that it would be particularly beneficial to have translated and contextualized for teaching purposes?

This session will also include a brief presentation by Mauro Nobili (UIUC) about *Maktaba: A Digital Collection of African Arabic Manuscripts in Translation*--a new initiative coordinated jointly by Nobili at UIUC, ISITA, and NU Library. *Maktaba* will be an open access digital collection that makes selected Arabic manuscripts from the NU and UIUC collections available in English translation. UIUC and ISITA recently received a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities to build a pilot version of the *Maktaba* site over the next two years.

Session 8: Outreach and Connecting with Stakeholders

Tuesday, May 24

CDT (Evanston): 9:00-10:00 am

CEST (Hamburg): 4:00-5:00 pm

This session considers how we enable use and exploration of this collection by diverse audiences worldwide and especially constituencies interested in this material for religious or heritage reasons including West African Muslims (in Africa and the diaspora) and American Muslims.

Session 9: Promising Research Trajectories (Pitch Your Idea)

Tuesday, May 24

CDT (Evanston): 10:00-11:15 am

CEST (Hamburg): 5:00-6:15 pm

If you could design a collaborative research project using the materials in the NU manuscript collection, what would it be? All participants are invited to take 5 minutes to pitch an idea for a collaborative research project with a sustained focus involving the NU manuscript collection (on its own or in conjunction with other collections) that could be supported through the ISITA-CSMC partnership. Who would be involved? How long would it take? What would the outputs be?

Session 10: Avenues of Collaboration between ISITA, CSMC, and the
Herskovits Library

Tuesday, May 24

CDT (Evanston): 11:15 am-12:30 pm

CEST (Hamburg): 6:15-7:30 pm

CSMC and ISITA possess complementary strengths and resources in the study of African Islamic manuscripts and their cultures. Both are embedded in overlapping, but distinct, global networks of scholars and institutions. The CSMC-ISITA-Herskovits Library partnership has developed gradually since 2015 through a series of visits, meetings, and co-organized events. The present workshop is intended to launch a phase of more structured and sustained collaboration between our centers, libraries, and universities, beginning with a focus on the West African manuscripts in the Herskovits Library.

In this session we will take stock of the ideas that have been put on the table over the past two days and identify the most promising avenues of collaboration between ISITA and CSMC.

CSMC's website: <https://www.csmc.uni-hamburg.de/>

ISITA's website: <https://isita.northwestern.edu/index.html>

Concluding Session:

“Literary Authority in West African Islam,”

A talk by Charles Stewart

Tuesday, May 24

CDT (Evanston): 1:00-2:00 pm

CEST (Hamburg): 8:00-9:00 pm

The talk is open to the public, in-person and on Zoom. The in-person talk will take place in the Forum Room, Northwestern University Library. [Find the full details here.](#)

To attend via Zoom, register here: https://northwestern.zoom.us/meeting/register/tJYrf-iurDIsG92TzM_qHjpZhRr-nIVhn0XJ

Note: This is a separate Zoom meeting link than the one used for the rest of the workshop. You will need to register in advance for the talk.

ABOUT THE TALK

Ten years ago, Charles Stewart and Bruce Hall published a paper* outlining a “Core Curriculum” they argued was common to teaching and learning across Muslim communities in West Africa. This talk revisits that article using a sample of manuscripts from West African manuscript libraries that is nearly three times larger (43,000 manuscripts) than the original one. Its findings: (1) nearly all the works and authors originally cited as the core of teaching in West Africa are confirmed, and (2) the larger sample expands that core of most-commonly found texts to 204 authors and 323 works. These texts make up about thirty percent of all authored manuscripts accessible through the West African Arabic Manuscript Database, and, arguably, across West Africa’s Arabic manuscript culture. Twenty percent of those works were written by West African scholars. In addition to providing a template for writing an intellectual history, this compilation of literary authority documents the emergence of an autonomous Arabic culture in nineteenth century in West Africa.

*Bruce S. Hall and Charles C. Stewart, "The historic 'Core Curriculum' and the book market in Islamic West Africa," in Graziano Kratli and Ghislaine Lydon (eds.), *The Trans-Saharan Book Trade* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), pp. 107-174.

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Charles Stewart is professor emeritus of history at the University of Illinois and served as ISITA's director of programming from 2014-16. An expert on the history of Islam in Mauritania and Arabic written traditions in Arabic in the broader West African region, Stewart compiled volume V in the "Arabic Literature of Africa Series," titled *The Writings of Mauritania and the Western Sahara* (Brill, 2015). This two-volume annotated bibliography contains entries on 10,000 manuscripts written during the past 350 years by 1,900 authors. Stewart is the creator of the first computer-based cataloging system for Arabic manuscripts in West Africa accessible online as the [West African Arabic Manuscript Database](#).

PARTICIPANTS

ORGANIZING COMMITTEE

ZEKERIA AHMED SALEM, Northwestern University

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GRADUATE ASSISTANT

XENA AMRO is ISITA's graduate assistant and a PhD student in the Middle East and North African Studies and Comparative Literary Studies Programs at Northwestern University. [More information.](#)

ATTENDING THE IN-PERSON MEETING AT NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY

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REBECCA SHEREIKIS is the Associate Director of ISITA, Northwestern University. [More information.](#)

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ATTENDING THE IN-PERSON MEETING AT CSMC, UNIVERSITY OF HAMBURG

DMITRY BONDAREV is a Researcher and the Head of West Africa Projects, CSMC, University of Hamburg. [More information.](#)

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JOINING BY ZOOM

MICHAELLE BIDDLE is the former Head Conservator at Wesleyan University Library and currently a Permanent Fellow-Conservator, CSMC, University of Hamburg. [More information.](#)

SAID BOUSBINA is a historian and independent researcher based in Marseille.

ANDREA BRIGAGLIA is a Researcher in the Department of Studies on Asia, Africa, and the Mediterranean, Università di Napoli "L'Orientale". [More information.](#)

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CHARLES RILEY is the Catalog Librarian for African Languages, Yale University Library. [More information.](#)

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ZACHARY WRIGHT is an Associate Professor in Residence, Northwestern University in Qatar. [More information.](#)

STEPHANIE ZEHNLE is a Faculty Member in the History Department, Christian-Albrecht-University of Kiel. [More information.](#)