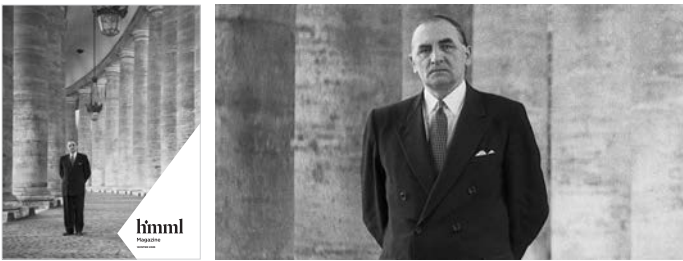


# himml

Magazine

WINTER 2023



## On the Cover

Dr. Arthur Vööbus' intensive, patient research on Syriac manuscripts in the Middle East began at the Monastery of Saint Mark in Jerusalem and carried him to Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Turkey, and beyond. He was allowed to view and photograph manuscripts previously unseen by Western scholars. His archive of images—the Vööbus Syriac Manuscript Collection—is preserved by HMML and is now available online. Learn more: pages 4–5. (Pictured: Vööbus, Photographs, PHO\_Large\_cropped\_Page\_04\_002)

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## HMML Magazine

Is published twice a year in support of HMML's mission: to preserve and share the world's handwritten past to inspire a deeper understanding of our present and future.

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Dr. Matthew Z. Heintzelman—Contributing Writer

Dr. Josh Mugler—Contributing Writer

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Dr. James Walters—Contributing Writer

## The Hill Museum & Manuscript Library (HMML)

is a global organization that advances manuscript research and scholarly inquiry by digitally preserving, providing access to, and interpreting manuscript collections around the world. HMML places a special priority on manuscripts in regions endangered by war, political instability, or other threats. HMML is currently preserving manuscript collections at sites in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Egypt, Gaza, Great Britain, India, Iraq, Italy, Lebanon, Mali, Malta, Mauritania, Montenegro, Nepal, Pakistan, and Yemen. With approximately 450,000 manuscripts photographed in partnership with more than 800 libraries worldwide, HMML offers the world's largest collection of resources for the study of manuscript cultures. View the manuscripts in Reading Room ([vhmml.org](http://vhmml.org)).

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# Dear Friends,

In the last few months I've been in Lebanon, Iraq, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Albania, visiting current field sites and exploring new partnerships. HMML's cataloging team has several new members, and they are steadily working their way through a backlog of images to get more manuscript collections online. We're as busy as ever.

But as I write this letter, the eyes of the world are turned once more to the Middle East and particularly to Gaza. In the previous issue of *HMML Magazine*, we shared a story about our ongoing partnership with the local Muslim community and the British Library's Endangered Archives Programme to digitize manuscript collections associated with the Great Omari Mosque and Eyes on Heritage, both in Gaza City.

Gaza is not the only place in HMML's community that is experiencing conflict. The security situation in Mali continues to worsen as we complete a decade-long series of projects. Millions of pages of West African manuscripts have been safely digitized, representing the manuscript collections of 37 libraries. HMML catalogers have years of work ahead of them to describe the contents, but the preservation images are ready.

As work in Mali winds down, we're launching a major new initiative in Mauritania, Mali's northern neighbor. After a year of planning, we've shipped HMML's studio equipment and launched the first project in Nouakchott, the capital, at the end of November. (You can read about the process of preparing and shipping a digitization studio in this issue of *HMML Magazine*.) The training in Nouakchott will include representatives from the historic desert cities of the Mauritanian Sahara to prepare for an expansion of the project in 2024.

In recent years we've been steadily building a presence in South Asia with a series of digitization projects in India and Pakistan. You can read about one of these projects—with the Mahmudabad Library in Lucknow, India—in "Where We're Working" (pages 6–7). You'll be hearing about others in the future. The lead story is about a remarkable scholar of Syriac manuscripts and the amazing archive of photographs that he created during years of research in the Middle East. I think you'll enjoy learning more about Arthur Vööbus and how HMML is making that archive accessible to the world.

Sincerely,

*Columba Stewart, OSB*

Father Columba Stewart, OSB  
Executive Director



**ABOVE:** Erbil, Iraq, August 2023. Fr. Columba Stewart (right) visits Fr. Najeeb Michael (left), the Archbishop of Mosul and founder of the Centre Numérique des Manuscrits Orientaux, a HMML partner since 2009.

# Arthur Vööbus: Preserving a Legacy

By James Walters

**D**r. Arthur Vööbus was many things—a husband, father, scholar, pastor, teacher, and refugee in exile—but perhaps the best way to describe Vööbus is that he was a man on a mission, driven by his passion for knowledge and his compassion for his fellow humans.

Born in Estonia in 1909, Vööbus studied theology at Estonia's University of Tartu in the early 1930s while also serving as a Lutheran pastor. The country would soon see three successive occupations by warring nations. In 1940, following the Soviet annexation of Estonia, Vööbus fled to Germany. He returned to Estonia (then occupied by Germany) in 1942, completed his doctoral degree, and began teaching at his alma mater. In 1944, Vööbus was again forced to flee from Soviet invasion. He lived in Hamburg, Germany, teaching at the Baltic University for displaced persons and serving as a minister in refugee camps. Vööbus relocated to Chicago, Illinois, in 1948, where he began a long career as a professor of New Testament and Early Church History at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago (LSTC). He died in 1988, having never returned to his beloved Estonia.

## Syriac Manuscripts of the Middle East

Early in his career, Vööbus conducted research on manuscripts held in European collections and was introduced to Syriac literature. This serendipitous confluence created a lifelong curiosity about manuscripts that remained in the Middle East. In pursuit of Syriac manuscripts unknown to Western scholars, Vööbus made dozens of trips to Jerusalem, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and Turkey. Some destinations were based on common knowledge of manuscript repositories, while others were based on speculation. He was introduced to one important library—at the Church of the Forty Martyrs in Mardin, Turkey—by wandering around villages and asking strangers about manuscripts.

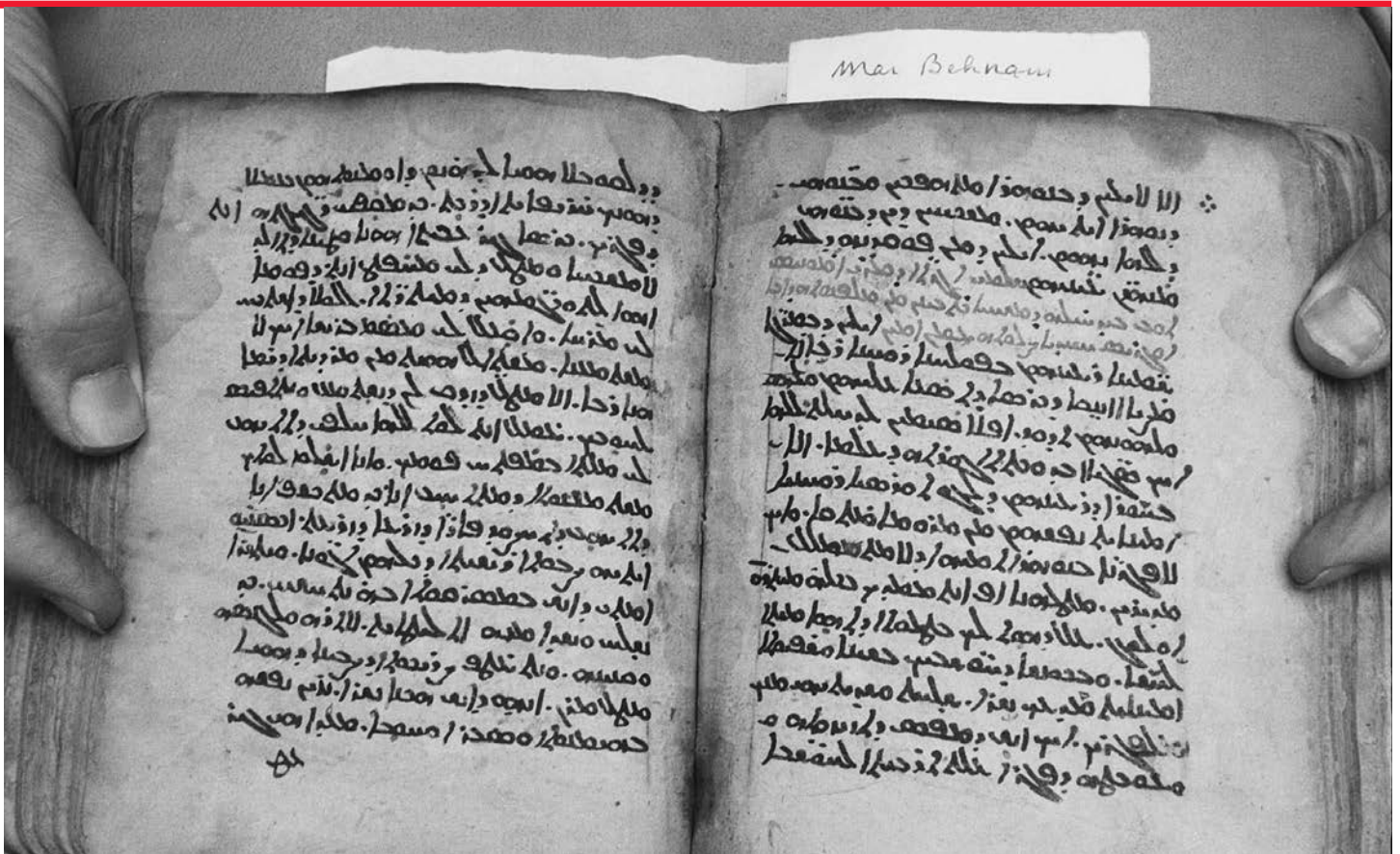
Vööbus' motivation was deeply humanistic, rooted in his own education at Tartu and his conviction about education in public life. As Vööbus himself wrote, "The role of a learned man in a free society must lead to a deeper sense of the responsibility towards the society and the world."

During his visits, Vööbus used a standard 35mm film camera to photograph his most significant finds. His collection of images grew to more than 65,000 photographs, many of which contain two pages of a manuscript. In the images, one can often see hands—either of Vööbus or a local assistant—holding the manuscript open. The lighting in the photographs is often inconsistent, suggesting that Vööbus was working with whatever daylight was available.

With these photographs, Vööbus created the largest collection of Syriac manuscript images before the advent of digital imaging. In some cases, Vööbus' photographs might provide the only surviving vestiges of manuscripts that have been lost or destroyed. In other cases, these images provide access to texts from manuscripts that have been badly damaged.



**ABOVE:** Dr. Arthur Vööbus examining a Syriac manuscript at a monastery in Mardin, Turkey. (Vööbus, Photographs, PHO\_MARD\_Page\_08\_002)



**ABOVE:** This 13th-century monastic miscellany contains several rare Syriac translations of Greek works. Photographed here by Dr. Arthur Vööbus, the manuscript was later digitized by HMML as MBM 00364. Collection of Mar Behnam Monastery in Mosul, Iraq. (Vööbus, Mar Behnam, 000–413)

In October 1979, Vööbus and his colleagues established the Institute of Syriac Manuscript Studies at LSTC, which became the new home for his collection of manuscript images. In 2005, LSTC entered into an agreement with the Oriental Institute at the University of Chicago, where Vööbus' collection was partially digitized and cataloged. LSTC transferred full ownership of Vööbus' collection to HMML in 2016, and the film was moved to HMML's climate-controlled microfilm storage facility in Collegeville, Minnesota, for long-term preservation and access.

### Advancing Research

Vööbus' collection arrived at HMML in the form of hundreds of small film boxes containing loose film strips and reels. The boxes bore very little descriptive information about their contents—sometimes just the name of a city. In 2018, Mary Hoppe, digital projects assistant at HMML, began the laborious process of transferring the film strips to binder sleeves, entering the known data into a spreadsheet, and scanning each frame of film to produce digital copies. The work was slow and intermittent—

balanced with other projects at HMML—until 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic provided Hoppe with an opportunity to work on the project in earnest. Nearly all of Vööbus' original film strips have now been digitized.

Digital images of the Vööbus Syriac Manuscript Collection can be viewed on a new website developed specifically for the project: [HMMLVoobus.org](http://HMMLVoobus.org). HMML's usual method of cataloging individual manuscripts does not match the unique format of the collection, because Vööbus rarely photographed every page of a manuscript. Instead, [HMMLVoobus.org](http://HMMLVoobus.org) presents the images as Vööbus made them, allowing his work to be viewed as a collection of historical film.

Vööbus' original film strips, as well as microfilm images that he purchased, will continue to be stored at HMML. Coupled with digital access, this will ensure the preservation of a significant archive of manuscript photographs for generations to come.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Dr. James Walters is lead cataloger of Eastern Christian collections at HMML.

# Lucknow

By Josh Mugler

HMML's preservation work in India began in 2008 with the manuscript collections of numerous Christian libraries in the southern state of Kerala. In 2018, HMML moved about 1,500 miles north, working in Uttar Pradesh with the Raja of Mahmudabad Palace Library in Lucknow.

Dr. Ali Khan Mahmudabad had long been interested in preserving and sharing his family's diverse collection of manuscripts. As often happens, it took a fortuitous networking chain to connect him through Arthur Dudley of Arcadia Fund to Assistant Professor Matthew Miller of the University of Maryland (UMD) and eventually to HMML.

The Mahmudabad family can trace their ancestry back to the companions of the Prophet Muḥammad in Mecca and have resided in the Lucknow area since approximately the 14th century. Under Mughal and later British rule, they were one of the more prominent landowning families in the historic region of Awadh, their home to this day. Mohammad Amir Mohammad Khan, Ali Khan's father and the latest holder of the Raja of Mahmudabad title, died in October 2023 at the age of 80.

In recent years, the family has faced the sufferings of the Partition and the challenges of life in independent India, including a lengthy legal struggle to retain their family's property. With the current nationalist turn of Indian politics, Muslims in India are subject to an increasingly restrictive environment, and the preservation of their cultural heritage grows more and more precarious.

To date, HMML has digitized more than 400 manuscripts in the Mahmudabad library, 175 of which are cataloged and can be viewed in HMML Reading Room under the project code MBAD. Work is ongoing, as the library contains about 2,000 manuscripts in total. The most common language in the collection is Persian, which long served as the literary and courtly language of South Asian Muslims. There are also numerous texts in the Islamic sacred language of Arabic and a significant number in Urdu, the vernacular of many Muslims across northern India and Pakistan.

The collection is especially valuable for the history of Awadh around the 19th century, addressing a variety

of topics including controversies between Sunni and Shi'i Muslims. The Mahmudabad family themselves have a Sunni history, but they converted to Shi'ism and maintain connections across sectarian and religious boundaries. Many sides of these theological conversations appear in the manuscripts alongside resources on local and global history, literary works, and a variety of other genres. Local authors of Lucknow are well represented, including many texts that would be difficult to locate beyond this library.



**ABOVE:** An apologetic work in Persian by Muḥammad ibn Dildār 'Alī Naqvi Naṣīr'ābādī (b. 1784–d. 1867 CE), son of the scholar who introduced Usuli Shi'ism to Lucknow. The rich decoration in gold leaf shows the manuscript's connection to the wealthy Lucknow court of Ghāzī al-Dīn Ḥaydar (d. 1827 CE), king of Awadh. (MBAD 00117)



**ABOVE:** Dr. Ali Khan Mahmudabad, assistant professor at Ashoka University and son of the late Raja of Mahmudabad, with his family's library in Lucknow.

HMML's partnership with the Mahmudabad library has provided a broader opening to preservation projects across South Asia. HMML Reading Room already has some images from the collection of Anjuman-i Taraqqī-yi Urdū (Organization for the Progress of Urdu) in Karachi, Pakistan, and numerous other projects in India and Pakistan are in

their initial stages. Two HMML field representatives—Rohan Chauhan in India and Ahmad Atta in Pakistan—are helping find and facilitate contacts with repositories throughout the two countries.

For Matthew Miller and his colleagues at UMD's Roshan Institute for Persian Studies, the Mahmudabad manuscript images represent an important opportunity to develop software tools that can help researchers better understand the manuscript heritage of the Islamic world. Their Open Islamicate Texts Initiative (OpenITI) uses manuscript images from various sources, including many from HMML, to improve the quality of software designed to read handwritten text in Arabic script. This type of work has many potential benefits for researchers and catalogers in manuscript studies and beyond.

The manuscripts in Lucknow and other Islamic libraries in South Asia are separated from HMML's earlier India projects by distance, by religion, and by language, but all are part of the endlessly rich mosaic of South Asian history and culture. HMML's work enables these collections to be viewed side by side, facilitating a deeper understanding of the region's diverse past and present.



**ABOVE:** (Left to right) The late Mohammad Amir Mohammad Khan, Raja of Mahmudabad (b. 1943–d. 2023), with Fr. Columba Stewart, executive director of HMML.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Dr. Josh Mugler is curator of Eastern Christian and Islamic manuscripts at HMML.

# News in Brief

## Highlights from HMML's cultural preservation initiatives and activities

### Outbound Digitization Studios

To photograph manuscripts in a wide range of environments and circumstances, it is essential that digitization workflows and equipment are simple, efficient, and practical. In the past six months, HMML has shipped three digitization studios to India, six studios to Pakistan, three studios to Mauritania, and one to London.

A typical studio setup is packed in a box measuring 48" x 16" x 16" and contains everything needed for digital photography except for the computer, which is purchased locally. The studios are equipped and prepared by Wayne Torborg, the director of digital collections and imaging at HMML since 2004.



### Award Honors Founder of the Malta Study Center

In November 2023, Joseph S. Micallef, KMOB UOM, received the Colman J. Barry Award from Saint John's University (SJU) in Collegeville, Minnesota, in celebration of Micallef's longstanding dedication to service and philanthropy. Micallef is a member of HMML's Board of Directors and founder of the Malta Study Center at HMML. His commitment to service is extraordinary, chairing the Friends of the Malta Study Center for 50 years before stepping down in 2022.

The Colman J. Barry Award was established by SJU in memory of Father Colman Barry, OSB, a professor of history and the university's eighth president (1964–71). Among Fr. Colman's many contributions were the founding of HMML, the Collegeville Institute, and Minnesota Public Radio. Micallef received the award during HMML's annual Millennium Club and Legacy Society event in Minneapolis, Minnesota, during the 50th anniversary year of the Malta Study Center.

Pictured: Joseph S. Micallef (left) and Monsignor Ġwann Azzopardi (right) at the inauguration of the conservation laboratory at the Cathedral Museum, Mdina, Malta, 1982. (*Times of Malta*)





## HMML Welcomes New Catalogers

HMML's focus on sharing the handwritten heritage of diverse cultures depends on the talents of the people who make this work possible through their dedication and knowledge. In 2023, HMML was fortunate to welcome new catalogers to our team, broadening the linguistic and cultural expertise we can offer to the world.

- Dr. Jennifer Carnell will finish cataloging Latin and German manuscripts from Germany and Austria, enabling online searching of collections microfilmed in those countries between 1968 and 2000.
- Dr. Jeremy R. Brown will provide access to Ethiopic manuscripts, working on the remaining 6,000 records in the Ethiopian Manuscript Microfilm Library (EMML). Microfilming began in 1973 and ended in 1994.
- Dr. Ani Shahinian will bring her expertise on Armenian culture and language to collections in Turkey, Lebanon, and Italy, focusing on 2,500 manuscripts digitized between 2004 and 2018.
- Dr. Constanța Burlacu will delve into Slavonic collections, completing the cataloging of 800 manuscripts digitized in Ukraine, Montenegro, and Croatia between 2008 and the present.

HMML has photographed collections around the world for decades. Over the next three years, the new catalogers will enable online access to much of this legacy material for the first time. With their varying backgrounds, the catalogers will provide access to a wide range of materials, increasing the possibilities for scholarship within these traditions and supporting cross-cultural conversations.

## Notable

### HMML STAFF AND ASSOCIATES PRESENT AT GLOBAL CONFERENCES

#### NOVEMBER 2–5, 2023

Middle East Studies Association  
Annual Meeting

(Montreal, Quebec, Canada)

*Speaker*—Dr. Josh Mugler

*Topic*—Manuscript Collection and Digitization in Post-ISIS Mosul

#### NOVEMBER 16–18, 2023

Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures,  
Universität Hamburg

(Hamburg, Germany)

*Speaker*—Dr. Ali Diakite

*Topic*—How HMML Catalogs West African Manuscripts, and What We Found Inside

#### NOVEMBER 18–21, 2023

American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting  
(San Antonio, Texas, USA)

*Speaker*—Dr. Josh Mugler

*Topic*—Non-Zaydī Texts in the Zaydī Manuscript Collections of Yemen

#### NOVEMBER 30–DECEMBER 2, 2023

African Studies Association,  
66th Annual Meeting

(San Francisco, California, USA)

*Speaker*—Dr. Paul Naylor

*Topic*—Governance in Gwandu: A Fulani Hegemony in Sokoto's Western Territories, Captured in Sa'd ibn 'Abd al-Raḥmān's *Tartīb al-aṣḥāb*

#### DECEMBER 12, 2023

Islamic Art in Italy: From the Artefacts to Their Reception

(Bologna, Italy)


*Speaker*—Dr. Celeste Gianni

*Topic*—Islamic Metalworks in the Duchy of Urbino: From the Artefacts to Their Reception

**ABOUT THE AUTHORS:** Wayne Torborg is director of digital collections and imaging at HMML. Katrina P. Schlude is director of advancement at HMML. Dr. Catherine Walsh is director of cataloging at HMML.

# Advancing Scholarship

Meet Six Scholars Completing Fellowships at HMML



**Dr. Ian Mills**  
**Heckman Stipend**

Hamilton College, Clinton,  
New York, USA  
Project Title: "A History of Syriac  
Gospel Titles"  
At HMML: June 26–July 7, 2023



**Dr. Jennifer Griggs**  
**Nicky B. Carpenter Fellowship**

Fondazione per le scienze religiose,  
Palermo, Sicily  
Project Title: "A Christian Intellectual  
at the Centre of the Mongol Il-Khānate:  
Bar Hebraeus' Encounter with Naṣīr  
al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī"  
At HMML: July 1–7; August 5–11, 2023



**George Summers**  
**Heckman Stipend**

Saint Louis University, St. Louis,  
Missouri, USA  
Project Title: "The Knights Hospitaller  
in Venice and the Veneto, 1306–1480"  
At HMML: July 8–27, 2023



**Rachel Abdoler**  
**Swenson Family Fellowship**

University of Chicago Divinity School,  
Chicago, Illinois, USA  
Project Title: "From Baghdad to Egypt:  
The Interconfessional Context of 13th-  
Century Coptic Thought"  
At HMML: August 4–19, 2023



**Prof. Emanuel Buttigieg**  
**Heckman Stipend**

University of Malta, Msida, Malta  
Project Title: "Noble Offspring  
of Mars: A Military History of the  
Knights of Malta During the  
17th Century"  
At HMML: September 14–25, 2023



**Dr. Valentina Burgassi**  
**Heckman Stipend**

École Pratique des Hautes Études, Paris,  
France; Politecnico di Torino, Torino, Italy  
Project Title: "Torino as a Crossroads of  
Professional Figures and Architectural  
Models in the Mid-17th Century"  
At HMML: September 19–27, 2023

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Julie Dietman is assistant for advancement and library services at HMML.

# A Closer Look at a Single Manuscript

By Matthew Z. Heintzelman

One of the most common uses of manuscripts over the centuries is to train children in reading and writing. Sometimes, however, the children's writing is not quite what the teacher might have wanted.

Such is the case with a 15th-century Latin grammar manuscript in the collection of Saint John's University in Collegeville, Minnesota, viewable in HMML Reading Room. The book, by an unknown author, contains adaptations of excerpts from the *Institutiones grammaticae* of Priscian (active circa 500 CE), one of the most influential grammarians in pre-Modern Europe. Priscian's text is not copied verbatim; instead, it is reworked into notes or lessons for student use.

Written in a very neat, cursive hand, the book provides an overview of parts of speech, noun declensions, definitions of grammatical terms, and other elements in the art of writing. Guide words in the manuscript's margins identify important terms and names of cited authors and poets. All is written in Humanist script, developed by Petrarch and other humanists in 15th-century Florence as an attempt to copy ancient Roman formal scripts (Humanist Minuscule and Cursive influenced the so-called Roman typefaces used for printing in most Western European languages from the 16th century to today).

In addition to the author's planned marginal notes, a large amount of marginalia was added later in Latin and Italian. These notes are written in a very informal way—likely “scribbles” left by students who used the book at some point in the past five centuries. Such marginalia appear throughout the book, largely bearing the names of Marco di Fasana and Gioanne Giacobis Fasana (the latter perhaps a Latinized spelling of Giovanni Giacopo). These scribbles reach their zenith on the book's final leaves.

The penultimate leaf contains a variety of pen trials, ruminations, and an elaborate drawing of a man holding an oversized wine goblet in which a large heart with eyes is weeping, pierced with an arrow and a sword. Written on the heart is a phrase in Italian, “Per troppo amare asorai sei saetto zo [?]” (for loving you too much, as you are an arrow [?]). At the top of the leaf, after a failed first writing attempt, comes a couplet, also in Italian:

*“I withstand such pain in my heart  
that I am forced to love you whether I live or die.”*



**ABOVE:** Examples of prime marginalia in a Latin grammar book. “If you wish to know that I love you, look above at my wounded heart.” Collection of Saint John's University, Collegeville, Minnesota. (SJR0 00004, folio 129v)

Other scribbles abound on these leaves, such as “mater dei” (Mother of God) and “Per extrinseca cognoscuntur intrinseca” (Internal things are known through the external things).

Marco and Giovanni Giacobis Fasana appear to be two boys from the di Fasana family who were learning Latin, perhaps in the 15th or 16th centuries. That a certain rivalry may have existed emerges from the most memorable of the marginalia that open the book: “Marco di Fasana è un bestiale ignorante...” (is a beastly ignoramus).

The scribbles of youth, indeed.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Dr. Matthew Z. Heintzelman is curator of Western European manuscripts and Special Collections at HMML.

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## Preserve and Share

Working with communities around the world to preserve rare and endangered cultural heritage

“Some of the greatest theologians are poets! Go and read Syriac poetry—the beauty of it. Go and read Ephrem’s *Hymns on Paradise*—just that whole way of viewing the world. Go read Sebastian Brock’s *Luminous Eye*. It’s amazing.”

—Dr. Jack Tannous, speaking with Fr. Columba Stewart, OSB.

(To Listen: *A Global Journey*, March 31, 2022. View all three seasons at [hmml.org](http://hmml.org))



**ABOVE:** HMML hosted a four-week, intermediate-level course on Syriac language and paleography as part of the 2023 Dumbarton Oaks/HMML Summer School. Pictured (left to right): Jacob Henke, Leighton Smith, Maria Thomas, and Bailey Freeburn.

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