

SUMMER  
NEWSLETTER  
2020

# ILLUMINATIONS



HILL MUSEUM & MANUSCRIPT LIBRARY





**ABOVE:**

Pictured left to right: Archivist Garba Yaro, HMML Project Director Sophie Sarin, and calligraphers Alassane Kanentao and Alpha Drame discuss manuscripts, calligraphy, and historical inks at HMML's new field site at the Djenné Manuscript Library, Djenné, Mali.

**ON THE COVER:**

Y. Brahmanath, of the Yogi Naraharinath Memorial Library and Museum, repairing a manuscript during a February 2020 workshop held at the Asha Archives (Āśā Saphūkuthi) in Kathmandu. The workshop was part of a series of training sessions organized by the Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures at the University of Hamburg (CSMC, University of Hamburg) in partnership with the Asha Archives and HMML, that will allow Nepalese manuscripts to be preserved, digitized, and made accessible. Photo credit: Bidur Bhattarai

## *Hill Museum & Manuscript Library*

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 from around the world. HMML places a special priority on manuscripts from regions endangered by war, political instability, or other threats.

HMML is currently preserving manuscript collections at sites in Croatia, Egypt, India, Iraq, Gaza, Lebanon, Libya, Mali, Malta, Nepal, Pakistan, Ukraine, and Yemen. With approximately 300,000 manuscripts from more than 540 partner libraries worldwide, HMML holds the world's largest collection of resources for the study of manuscript cultures both east and west. Explore the manuscripts in vHMML Reading Room at [vhmml.org](http://vhmml.org).

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[www.hmml.org](http://www.hmml.org)  
Start your research at: [www.vhmml.org](http://www.vhmml.org)

# *Illuminations*

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*Illuminations* is a publication of the Hill Museum & Manuscript Library and is published for scholars and friends of HMML twice a year.

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# Dear Friends,

What did we talk about before Covid-19? What did we do with all of that time we now find in our days? Even though HMML is as busy as ever, the context in which we work seems utterly changed. Our staff in the USA began remote working on March 17. I was meant to be on my way to Washington, DC that day for a round of lectures. Those, like everything else, were canceled. Our calendars may be free of travel for the foreseeable future, but deadlines haven't gone away and our days have filled up with meetings using the technologies now so familiar to us all. I am very proud of the ways our HMML teams here and abroad have adapted to the situation. We hope that our colleagues in places where it has been impossible to work because of lockdowns will be returning to their studios as you read these words.

With so much changing so quickly, the imperative to preserve the voices of the past becomes even more urgent. Our forebears survived plagues, wars, and famines, finding strength in their beliefs and joy in their human capacity to create beauty through words and images placed on a page. I've been thinking a lot about my ancestors, such as my grandparents who kept their families fed through the Great Depression, having already experienced World War I and the flu pandemic of 1918-19. They were strong, resolute people brimming with humanity and delight in simple things. All of us have known such people: may we become like them in our own time of challenge. Your confidence in HMML helps us to be our best selves: thank you for that greatest of gifts.

Sincerely,

*Columba Stewart, OSB*

Columba Stewart, OSB  
Executive Director



*In 2019 I had a chance to meet up with HMML's Director for Nepal Projects, Dr. Bidur Bhattarai, in Kathmandu during HMML's Millennium Club & Legacy Society trip to India and Nepal. I was on my way to Nepal this February when the world began to shut down.*



# New Traditions, New Communities

By Melissa Moreton

HMML's cultural and geographic focus has expanded considerably since it began microfilming Christian manuscripts in the 1960s. That expansion continues as HMML seeks new global partnerships in manuscript preservation. HMML's field work now extends to four continents and dozens of countries and now includes Islamic, Hindu, and Buddhist traditions across the Middle East, Africa, and South Asia. One message continues to connect across traditions—the preservation of cultural heritage has a powerful impact on communities. Training and employment opportunities sustain local technicians, and the shared mission of safeguarding endangered cultural heritage unites and strengthens the broader global community.

HMML continues its work in Mali, where it has partnered with international funders and local libraries since 2013, digitizing Islamic manuscripts from the historic city of Timbuktu. In addition to ongoing projects in Bamako and Timbuktu, HMML now works with archivists and technicians in Djenné (Timbuktu's "sister city"), to preserve Quranic material, texts on religion, grammar, history, literature, Sufi mysticism, and magic. This new project, supported by Arcadia Fund, follows extensive work carried out under the EAP, the British Library's Endangered Archives Programme.

As the Timbuktu collections illustrate, the Djenné manuscripts speak across boundaries, highlighting the extensive connections between West African centers for learning and other parts of Africa and the Middle East in the medieval and early modern periods. The Malian library tradition is family-based; texts are collected, studied, and safeguarded for the next generation. Similar to HMML's main partner SAVAMA-DCI in Bamako, the Djenné Manuscript Library brings together manuscripts from over 150 local families for preservation, digitization, and renewed study, promoting a sense of social cohesion and civic pride. Archivist Garba Yaro notes, "the manuscripts are our

memory and our history. [They] teach us and advise us and above all they serve to create reconciliation between different communities through political and social crises." He stresses the critical importance of this cultural preservation work for maintaining historical continuity between the past, present, and future.



*(Right to left) Youssef Traore from the Timbuktu project, training Djenné team members Ibrabim Nalion and Ousmane Yaro at the Djenné Manuscript Library. The library holds thousands of important Islamic manuscripts from local family collections.*

*“The manuscripts are our memory and our history. The manuscripts teach us and advise us and above all they serve to create reconciliation between different communities through political and social crises.”*

These sentiments are echoed in Gaza, where HMML recently partnered with the EAP to digitize approximately 250 Islamic manuscripts at the Great Omari Mosque, a 14th-century collection in Gaza City and one of the most important national library and archives centers in Palestine. The collection, whose manuscripts on jurisprudence provide critical links to other historic centers of Islamic learning, is at risk due to ongoing armed conflict and the lack of proper treatment and preservation. Library staff have gained skills in the digitization, proper handling, and storage of manuscripts. Gaza technician Hani Abu Sharkh notes that the project has inspired community members to engage more deeply with their cultural heritage—in some cases for the first time. As a result, he says there is “a strengthened sense of cohesion within conflict-affected communities. This includes young people of school age who have been given the opportunity to visit the archive, understand its value, and what is being undertaken to preserve it, as well as what remains to be done.”



*Technician T.M. Maharjan cleaning a potbi-style paper manuscript during a training workshop at the Asha Archives, Kathmandu, one of the largest public archives run by a non-profit community-based organization in Nepal. The important collection contains 9,000 Buddhist and Hindu palm-leaf and paper manuscripts.*



*Local technician Said Jalal at the Great Omari Mosque in Gaza cleaning a manuscript in preparation for digitization. Much of the historic collection dates to the Ottoman era, and contains Qur’ans and Quranic texts, works of philosophy, theology, poetry, Sufism, Islamic jurisprudence, Arabic language, education, medicine, astronomy, history, and geography.*

In Kathmandu, Nepal, HMML recently began a project at the Asha Archives (Āśā Saphūkuthi) in partnership with the Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures (CSMC) at the University of Hamburg. The project, funded through CSMC, will digitize and make accessible approximately 9,000 Buddhist and Hindu manuscripts. The works contain a variety of texts on poetics, astronomy, astrology, medicine, and rituals, written in Sanskrit, Newari, Maithili, Nepali, and date between the 15th to 20th centuries. The archival stabilization, cataloging, and digitization that the CSMC partnership provides allows these historic and significant materials to be preserved and shared beyond Nepal. Project director Bidur Bhattarai notes that the project also “creates awareness for the need of preservation of manuscripts and artifacts in Nepal.”

*Continued on page 8*



# Where We're Working

## *Dayr al-Za'faran*

By Columba Stewart, OSB, and David Calabro



*ZFRN 86 is a Syriac Šḫīmō, a service book of prayers for the weekday or “ferial” office, dated 1839. As a book that features prominently in the liturgy of the church, the manuscript is carefully decorated, with intricately painted geometric borders and birds typical of the tradition. At the end of the manuscript are three paintings in a simple style, depicting the fathers of the three Syriac poetic meters: Ephrem of Nisibis, Jacob of Serugh, and Balai. Saints Ephrem and Jacob of Serugh appear here on fol. 148v, Ephrem (left) holding a book, and Jacob (right) holding a censer and staff.*

Dayr al-Za'faran (“the Saffron Monastery”) outside of the city of Mardin in southeast Turkey is now a small community of a few monks and students. A visit to the crypt reveals its historic significance as the home of patriarchs and scholars of the Syriac Orthodox Church for almost 800 years, and the many hermit cells carved into the mountain face above the monastery show how large the community once was. Founded at the end of the 5th century on the site of a Roman fortress, the monastery’s golden age was from the 12th to early 20th centuries, brought to an abrupt end by

the *Sayfo*, the mass slaughter of Syriac-tradition Christians in Turkey and neighboring parts of Persia contemporaneous with the Armenian Genocide. In 1932 the patriarchate was moved to Syria, where it has remained since.

HMML began its work at Dayr al-Za'faran in 2009 as part of its comprehensive effort to digitize all of the Syriac manuscripts in the Tur ‘Abdin, the “mountain of the servants [of God].” Historically this has been one of the main centers of Syriac Christianity, though now there is only a vestigial

Christian population. An important center for manuscript production, the Dayr al-Za‘faran monks and scholars produced manuscripts for their use and for use at other monasteries and centers for learning throughout the region (some of these are in the DIYR collection). The Dayr al-Za‘faran library also includes manuscripts produced elsewhere, such as at the Monastery of Mar Aha (ZFRN 126) and Diyarbakir (ZFRN 18), demonstrating the historic networks of monastic book exchange in the Tur ‘Abdin. The majority of the manuscripts originally at Dayr al-Za‘faran were moved to the Church of the Forty Martyrs in Mardin some time after 1928, and were digitized in a HMML project from 2005-2009 in partnership with the Syriac Orthodox Diocese of Mardin and the local priest, Fr. Gabriel Akyüz. With both collections digitized and cataloged, the full corpus of manuscripts is now viewable in the vHMML Reading Room (project codes ZFRN and CFMM).

The ZFRN collection comprises over 260 manuscripts in Syriac, Arabic, and Arabic Garshuni (Arabic written in Syriac script). The manuscripts

cover a diversity of genres, including liturgical books (which represent almost half the collection), collections of homilies, and hagiographies. There are also several miscellanies containing apocryphal texts and other stories. The manuscripts range in date from about the 13th century to the 1990s.

The ZFRN collection is a rich example of a well-used library and its digital reunion with CFMM allows modern scholars an opportunity to understand the collection as it once existed in the historic monastic complex of Dayr al-Za‘faran.

View the collections in the vHMML Reading Room at [vHMML.org](http://vHMML.org)

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHORS:**

*Columba Stewart, OSB is the Executive Director of HMML*

*Dr. David Calabro is HMML’s Curator of Eastern Christian and Islamic Manuscripts*



*The ancient monastic complex of Dayr al-Za‘faran—the Saffron Monastery—near Mardin, Turkey, with surrounding hills that once sheltered some of the community’s many monks.*



## New Traditions, New Communities

*Continued from page 5*

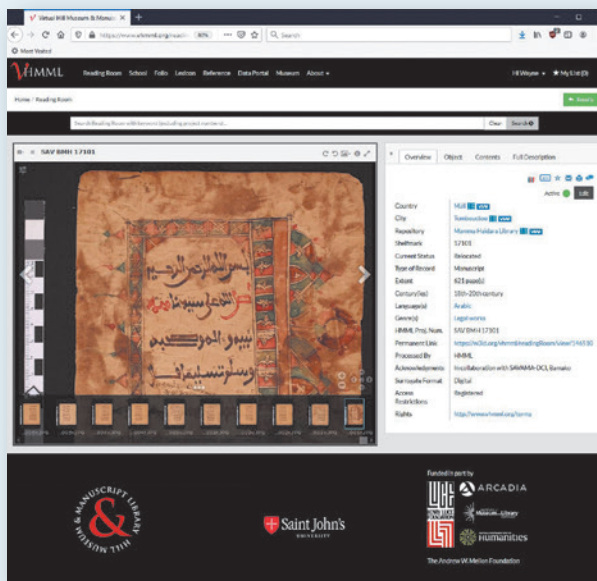
A new project in Pakistan, supported by Arcadia Fund in partnership with the Roshan Institute for Persian Studies at the University of Maryland College Park, brings hope of reuniting a divided manuscript collection. The Anjuman-e-Taraqqi-e-Urdu Pakistan is a literary collection, established in Delhi in 1903 to promote Urdu literature and language. The collection was divided in 1948, shortly after the partition of India, with half remaining in Delhi and the rest sent to Pakistan. The Pakistan collection contains approximately 2,000 manuscripts in Urdu, Persian, and Arabic, some dating to the 15th century. With the completion of this project, HMML and its partners may reach the goal of someday bringing these digitized manuscripts together with their counterparts in Delhi. This reunion would allow new studies of this material—Qur’ans, epic poetry, Sufi treatises, historiographical works, autobiographies, and dictionaries—and would have great significance to a divided community and a larger global public who have not had access to the unified collection for over 50 years.

As new projects in Africa, the Middle East, and Asia further expand the range and depth of HMML’s collections, its commitment to partnering with the communities deepens. The projects offer financial support and unique training experiences to local community members who are directly engaged in



*Digitization technician wearing a protective mask at the Anjuman-e-Taraqqi-e-Urdu Pakistan in Karachi. This field work will make accessible a historic collection of Urdu, Persian, and Arabic manuscripts separated from its original library in Delhi.*

the preservation of their own cultural heritage. As Djenné cataloger Ousmane Yaro notes, “the manuscripts constitute one of the most faithful sources of our history,” therefore to share these manuscripts “is to let Africa tell its own story.” HMML’s partnerships help preserve and share this history, allowing new scholarly connections to be made, and enriching broader communities across cultures by highlighting how we are all connected.



## Explore Recent Projects at vHMML.org

HMML partnerships with local communities allow endangered manuscript heritage to be preserved and shared.

Explore recent projects, such as the West African Islamic collections, in the Reading Room at vHMML.org (Search the **Country** field for “Mali”).



## HMML Responds to Global Pandemic

The challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic have affected HMML—its staff and work—in a variety of ways. HMML is in constant contact with its global partners and doing everything it can to ensure the safety and continued employment of digitization technicians and staff. HMML currently has field operations in thirteen countries. All are dealing with the pandemic according to their local circumstances. In every location the situation is changing rapidly from day to day. In some locations work has been suspended. In others, work continues—especially at sites where digitization is carried out by a single technician, allowing for the required social distancing.

For the spring and summer, HMML's in-person programming and educational and research offerings have been canceled or postponed. HMML is working with recipients of our stipends and fellowships, as well as other scholars who planned research visits, with the hope of rescheduling their visits in the future.

At HMML's headquarters in Minnesota, staff have adapted to the new reality and have been working from home since late March, staying in touch and collaborating using a variety of virtual communication platforms. In order to stay connected to its global audience, HMML has launched its HMML@Home series. This social media campaign highlights HMML's digital offerings, providing new programming featuring conversations with curators discussing manuscripts and objects from HMML collections. These are archived and viewable on HMML's YouTube channel ([www.youtube.com/HMMLPreservation](http://www.youtube.com/HMMLPreservation)) and shared worldwide via Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram.

HMML's digital services are robust and remain fully accessible and free of charge. With many people retooling for online teaching and learning, HMML offers new and existing users the tools they need to explore new collections, conduct research, and teach:

- **READING ROOM:** this digital library offers 70,000 manuscript records with advanced search and image viewing capabilities (<https://www.vhmml.org/readingRoom/>)

- **SCHOOL:** paleography instruction in Latin, Syriac, Arabic—with Armenian, Ge'ez, and Persian to come (<https://www.vhmmlschool.org/>)
- **FOLIO:** annotated gallery of manuscript images to illustrate how writing changes over time and depicting the handwriting styles described in SCHOOL (<https://www.vhmml.org/folio>)
- **vHMML DH (Digital Humanities):** tools and guides for creating digital projects using metadata downloaded from vHMML (<https://www.vhmml.org/dh>)
- **vHMML MUSEUM:** digital library collection of HMML prints, art objects, artifacts, and photographs (<https://www.vhmml.org/museum>)

During these unprecedented times, HMML continues the work of preserving and sharing the world's handwritten heritage to the greatest extent possible and looks forward to safely resuming its full array of programming and activities.

## HMML Receives \$1.4 Million from the National Endowment for the Humanities

In January 2020, HMML received a \$1.4 million grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) that will fund a three-year project to catalog 53,000 digitized manuscripts and create an online database of authors and titles originating from underrepresented or little-known literary traditions. Over the course of the three years, HMML will raise an additional \$200,000 in matching funds to successfully complete the project.

Collections cataloged under this project come from the Middle East, Africa, and Europe, and include both Christian and Islamic texts. The NEH grant will be used to support the work of several catalogers and metadata experts to make tens of thousands of manuscripts available online—in the vHMML.org Reading Room—to scholars and educators worldwide.

The grant also funds HMML in the development of a new database of authors and titles related to

manuscript traditions not traditionally represented in standard reference tools such as the Library of Congress (LC) and Virtual International Authority File (VIAF) databases. The NEH grant has enabled HMML to become a Name Authority Cooperative Program (NACO) contributor, which allows it to submit authorities directly to the LC and VIAF. This means little-known authors and works will now be discovered, shared, and studied because they will be connected through massive, open-access, national and international databases.

Through the NEH project, scholars and historians will now be able to engage in innovative comparative methods of study, crossing boundaries of language, culture, and geography. Manuscript traditions around the world can be viewed in relation to each other and a fuller picture of our shared history can be developed. Following the movement of texts and of the manuscripts containing them will create a new intellectual map of the premodern world.

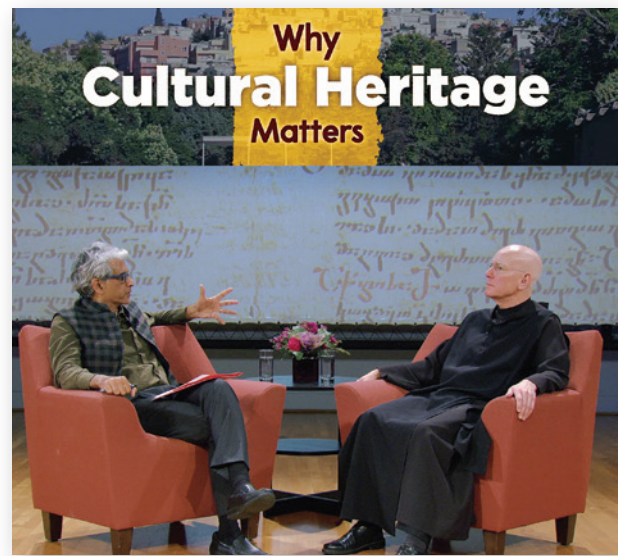
## HMML Program “Why Cultural Heritage Matters” Goes Global

A thirty-minute television program created by HMML and Twin Cities Public Television (TPT) was broadcast for the first time on April 19, viewed locally and streamed globally. The program, “Why Cultural Heritage Matters,” highlights the reasons why preserving the knowledge of the past is important for the understanding of our future.

The program is a dialogue between Fr. Columba Stewart and Fred de Sam Lazaro (PBS NewsHour and the Under-Told Stories Project), discussing HMML’s vital work digitizing important historical manuscripts in partnership with communities around the world. During their conversation, Fr. Columba emphasizes the importance of preserving the world’s handwritten heritage for the purpose of fostering conversation and respectful debate among different cultures and religions. Finally, Fr. Columba passionately defends the importance of listening to each other in our otherwise divided and polarized world.

*Why Cultural Heritage Matters* has already prompted engaging discussions locally and across the country. Virtual viewing dialogues have been

hosted by individuals, religious leaders, and cultural organizations. HMML plans to expand programming to encourage educators to use the program in their secondary and higher education curricula. Anyone can join the conversation by streaming the program ([bit.ly/why-cultural-heritage-matters](http://bit.ly/why-cultural-heritage-matters)) and hosting a discussion group using the conversation guide ([bit.ly/hmml-conversation-guide](http://bit.ly/hmml-conversation-guide)).



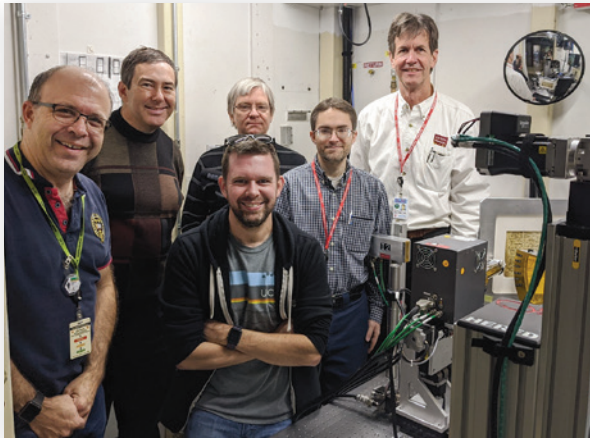
*A conversation about “Why Cultural Heritage Matters” with Fred de Sam Lazaro and HMML’s Fr. Columba Stewart.*

## HMML Palimpsest Undergoes Analysis at Stanford

In January 2020, HMML’s Georgian–Syriac palimpsest (MS Frag 32) was sent to Stanford’s SLAC National Accelerator Laboratory for X-ray Fluorescence (XRF) processing, the most powerful imaging technology available. The fragment, which contains a visible, 10th-century upper text in Georgian, has two Syriac undertexts, the earliest of which may date to the 5th or 6th century. Previous analysis with multispectral imaging (MSI) suggested the presence of underwriting, but it is not sufficiently legible to identify the texts. David Calabro, Curator of Eastern Christian and Islamic Manuscripts, and Wayne Torborg, Director of Digital Collections and Imaging at HMML, were part of the team at Stanford who conducted the analysis. Instrumental in overseeing this and the MSI project was Michael B. Toth, whose work on the Syriac Galen and Archimedes palimpsests is known worldwide.



This exciting process yielded a tremendous amount of data which now must be carefully analyzed by scholars. The natural light and several processed MSI and XRF images of the HMML Palimpsest are in vHMML Reading Room. Downloadable images and open access data are also hosted on the University of Pennsylvania's OPenn site, where they are in the company of the Syriac Galen and Archimedes palimpsests.



*HMML palimpsest at SLAC (visible in lower right) in position for XRF imaging, accompanied by team members (left to right) Sam Webb (SLAC/SSRL), Michael Penn (Stanford), Nicholas P. Edwards (SLAC/SSRL), Wayne Torborg (HMML), David Calabro (HMML), Mike Toth (RB Toth Associates). Image courtesy of SLAC.*

## New Cataloger Joins HMML's West African Manuscripts Team

Dr. Paul Naylor joined HMML as a cataloger of West African manuscripts in November 2019. He works closely with HMML's scholarly team that also includes Josh Mugler and Ali Diakite, who together will catalog the vast collection of manuscripts digitized by HMML's partners in Mali. Naylor has extensive experience



cataloging for the British Library's collection of Arabic script manuscripts and providing curatorial assistance with their major 2016 public exhibition "West Africa: Word, Symbol, Song." He holds degrees from the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) and Goldsmiths College, both part of the University of London. His PhD in African Studies is from the University of Birmingham.

## HMML Scholars

January 2020—June 2020

UTE POSSEKEL  
Lecturer on Syriac,  
Harvard Divinity School,  
Cambridge, Massachusetts  
*Project Title: A Forgotten  
Letter Against the Julianists*

Nicky B. Carpenter Fellowship  
in Manuscript Studies  
January 12–23



### Heckman Scholars

YANCHEN LIU  
Ph.D. Candidate, Columbia University,  
New York City, New York  
*Project Title: Investigating the Margins in the  
Decretales of Pope Gregory IX (1234): Bernard of  
Parma's Glossa ordinaria on Religious Marginality*  
January 2–18

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