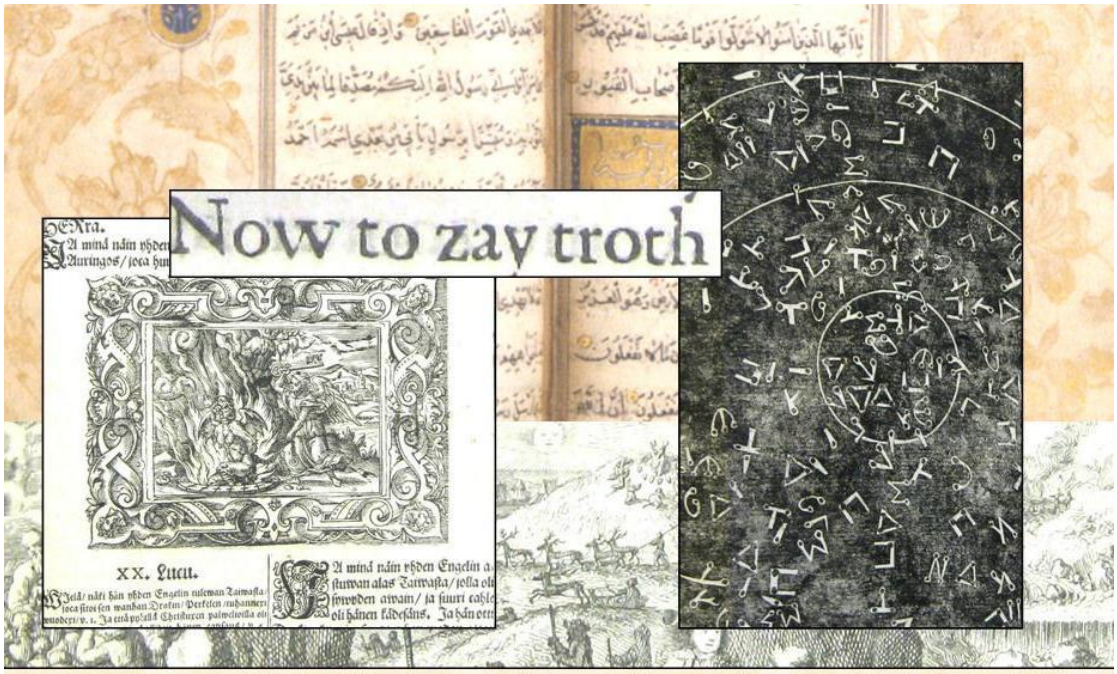

ST JOHN'S COLLEGE LIBRARY EXHIBITION

CATCHING BREATH: LANGUAGE, SPEECH & WRITING

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Catching language: manuscript to print

The Divine Word

Fly-leaf from the oldest book in Library showing St John the Evangelist writing. ***Gospels.*** 10th-13th c. additions to MS produced in Brittany in the 9th c.

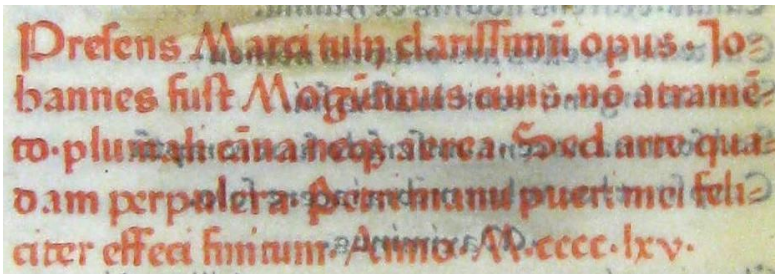
At over 1,100 years old, this set of Gospels, produced in Brittany, is probably the oldest book in the Library, and it opens with a scene of writing. St John begins his gospel with a hymn to Jesus as the divine Word, a concept adapted from the Jewish philosopher Philo, whilst an angel oversees his endeavours, or provides divine inspiration. Actually the illustration is in fact later than the main body of the volume (shown here on the right at the opening of John's Gospel), dating to around 100 years later, and was copied from a depiction of St Matthew in a Gospel book presented to the first English King, Aethelstan, by the first Holy Roman Emperor, Otto I. *MS 194*

A Demonic Process

The Library's oldest printed book, an edition of Cicero's *De Officiis*. Mainz : Johannes Fust & Peter Schoeffer, 1465.

The colophon, or terminal printing statement, of this book, boasts that it was produced not by a feather pen, but by "a certain wonderful art" and finished "by the hand of my boy Peter". The director of proceedings was Johannes Fust of Mainz, and the boy Peter was Peter Schoeffer. Both were involved in the production of the very first printed books, Fust being Gutenberg's financial backer, and Schoeffer his principal assistant. Fust withdrew his financial backing from Gutenberg after a legal case which left him with Gutenberg's presses and the services of Schoeffer. The printing business they set up together was far more financially successful than had been the venture with Gutenberg, and was involved in numerous projects which explored the new technology and helped develop markets for its products. The

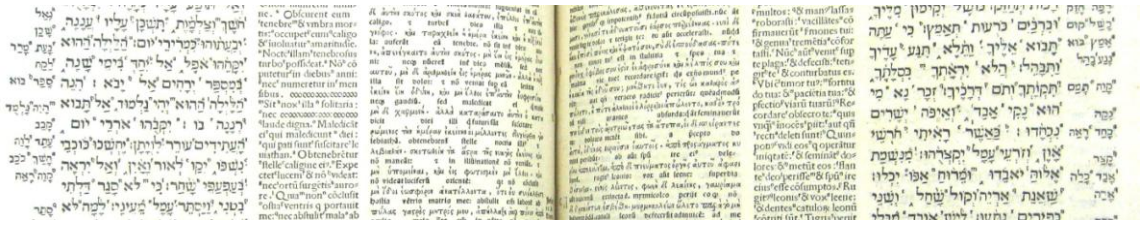
volume on display is exemplary here, being the first classical text to be printed. It also contained the first attempt at producing a Greek alphabet. Fust's coyness about the process of reproduction used may have added fuel to apocryphal tales in which he is confounded with Faust, and accused of witchcraft to produce in one day as much as several men in one year. *Cpbd.b.2.upper shelf.11*



Flowering of Typefaces

The first Polyglot Bible, Alcala de Henares : Arnaldo Guillen de Broacar, 1514-17

Only fifty years later typefaces for numerous alphabets had been developed. They were even in use in the newly unified Spain, still a relative cultural backwater. This achievement, however, took the determination and wealth of one man, Cardinal Ximenes de Cisneros - primate of Spain, confessor to Queen Isabella, and Grand Inquisitor. In order "to revive the hitherto dormant study of the Scriptures" and allow scholars to compare different versions in parallel, he produced this, the first polyglot Bible. It involved the importation, at huge expense, of the typefaces, and a period of costly trial and error amongst artisans unfamiliar with them. 600 copies were printed, many more copies of an expensive work of scholarship than the underdeveloped Spanish market could absorb, and the edition never sold out. Subsequently Spanish printers tailored their output to local needs, and even cut overheads by employing slaves. *Cpbd.b.1.lower shelf.6*



The Spreading Word: Language & Religion in the 17th century

The Word in the Vernacular

The Apocalypse in Finnish. ***Biblia.*** Stockholm : Heinrich Keisarild, 1642

A woodcut from the Book of Revelation showing Satan's imprisonment in the bottomless pit, from the first complete translation of the Bible into Finnish, known as

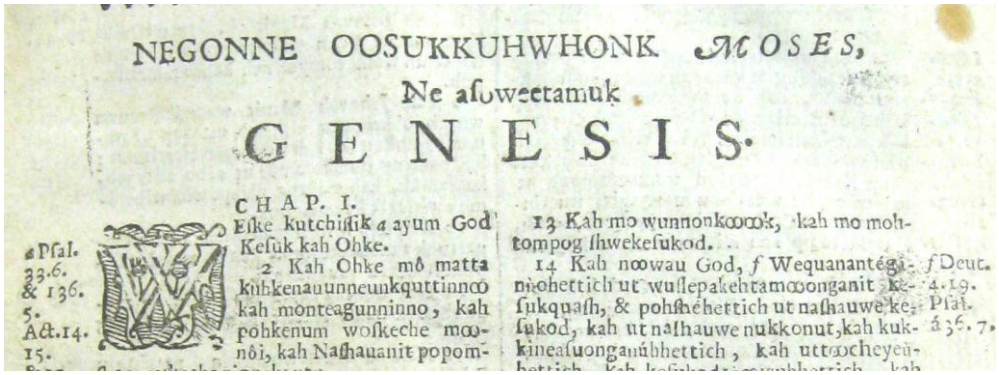
the *Vanha kirkkoraamattu* (Old Church Bible). A Finnish New Testament had been published in 1548 by the Finnish scholar Mikael Agricola as part of the general Lutheran imperative to spread the Word of God in vernacular tongues. Agricola had no model for his Finnish orthography, making it up as he went along, but pioneering Finnish as a literary language. A full translation had to wait, however, until the following century when this was published. It was fully funded by the Swedish state, Finland having been claimed by the Swedes since the 13th century, and printed in Stockholm, because no press in Finland could cope with such a project. The work was undertaken by a committee headed by Eskil Petraeus, who later produced the first Finnish grammar. As with several other European languages, biblical translation paved the way in terms of print production, ensuring the standardization and establishment of the language. *C.2.14*


HERra.

XX. Luc.

The Word in the New World

The First American Bible. Cambridge [Mass.], Samuel Green & Marmaduke Johnson, 1663.


NEGONNE OOSUKKUHWHONK MOSES,

Ne aſoweetamuk.

GENESIS.

CHAP. I.

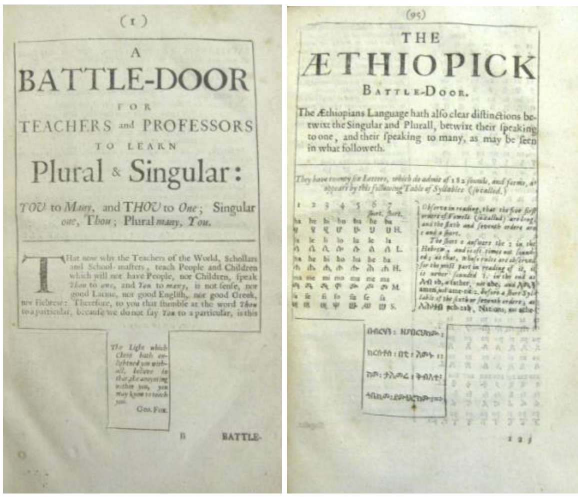
A copy of the first Bible of any kind published in North America, printed in the native Massachusetts language. This was a result of the missionary work of John Eliot, "The Indian Apostle", and one of the few large productions from a North American press in the 17th century. In general it was far cheaper to import substantial books from England and Europe than to produce them locally. Consequently American printers tended to concentrate on pamphlets and broadsheets. The printer of this volume, Samuel Green, had to rely on other sources of income to support his nineteen

children. An experienced English printer, Marmaduke Johnson, had to be called over to help manage a project of such size, and the only reason that the Bible was printed in America at all was the need for native proof-readers.

John Eliot's missionary work and publications were enabled by the Pequot War of 1636-37. After being left leaderless, several native communities came under the protection of the English administration. Closer interaction with these Massachusetts speakers meant that missionaries began to learn their language. Eliot preached in the Massachusetts tongue and produced, from 1654, twenty titles in it. Reading and understanding scripture was a major part of Eliot's project. Unfortunately this was derailed by King Philip's War (1675-76), when the Native Americans rose up against further encroachments by European settlers. Although around a thousand copies of this volume were printed, the disruption of Eliot's "Praying Towns", enclaves of native converts, during this war caused the abandonment and destruction of many, making this quite a rare survival.

Equality & the second person singular

George Fox, et al. *A battle-door for teachers & professors to learn singular & plural*. London : Robert Wilson, 1660.


A BATTLE-DOOR FOR TEACHERS and PROFESSORS TO LEARN Plural & Singular:

YOU to Many, and THOU to One; Singular one, Thou; Plural many, You.

THE ÆTHIOPICK BATTLE-DOOR.

The Æthiopians Language hath also clear distinctions betwixt the Singular and Plurall, betwixt their speaking to one, and their speaking to many, as may be seen in what followeth.

Part of the radical appeal of the Quaker movement when it first appeared in the 1640s was its insistence on the equality of all before God. This egalitarianism extended even into grammar, and a retention of the distinctive form of the second person singular, 'thou'. Historically English speakers had used this form when talking to individuals, as opposed to 'ye' or 'you' in addressing a number of people. During the Middle Ages another social dimension was added as 'thou' became a familiar and informal from, whilst 'you' was reserved for social superiors and strangers. The Quakers disliked the implication of division and hierarchy implicit in this form and developed what they called 'plain-speaking' which retained 'thou' in address to individuals to demonstrate their equality. This volume, a survey of the second person singular and plural in languages as diverse as Italian, Ethiopic, Welsh and Persian, was co-authored by their founder, George Fox to justify the practice. The

title battle-door perhaps refers to the term ‘battledore’, from the game of battledore and shuttlecock, a forerunner of badminton. This might explain the strange typographical layout (above) at the beginning of some sections as an attempt to replicate the shape of a bat, with a handle to the bottom. *Phi.3.18*

Wandering Tongues

Engraved title page of Olaf Rudbeck the Younger’s *Nora Samolad sive Laponia illustrata*. Upsalla, 1701.

Biblical scenes and Hebrew quotations mingle with images of shamanistic Sami ritual in the allegorical frontispiece to what was intended as a prospectus to a massive 12 volume work on the geography of Lapland. This was to have been based on the expedition the author, botanist Olaf Rudbeck the Younger, undertook to the region in 1695. Rudbeck not only discovered 50 new species of plants, but also speculated on the relationship between the native Sami language and ancient Hebrew. This volume contains a comparison of words in the two languages. Unfortunately the manuscript notes for the other volumes were destroyed a year later in the Great Fire of Uppsala. Although Rudbeck was a respected botanist, his linguistic work was highly speculative and seems part of a more general desire amongst European scholars to find familiar, biblical resonances in exotic regions. *HB4/3.c.6.11*

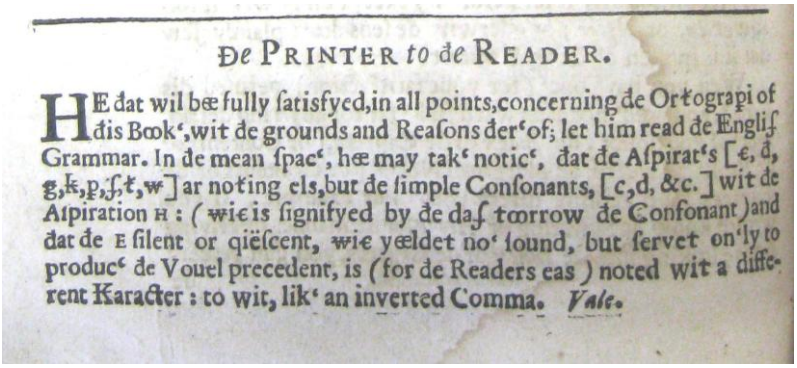
Real Characters: New Notations

Catching speech: phonetic alphabets

Example of a 17th c. phonetic alphabet from the 3rd edition of *The feminin’ monarchi’, or, The histori of bee’s*. London, William Turner for the Author, 1634**.**

Obviously a man of distinctive passions, Charles Butler had previously published two editions of this, the seminal English work in English beekeeping until the 19th century. For this third edition Butler used his own standardized phonetic alphabet. He was perhaps leading by example, following the argument put forward a year

earlier in his *The English grammar, or, The institution of letters, syllables, and words in the English tongue.* In this he railed against the inconsistency between written and spoken speech, and inconsistent spellings. As a curative he proposed that all should 'write altogether according to the sound now generally received.' In an era when it was not uncommon to find a word spelled three different ways on a single page this system might be thought to have some appeal. Some anxiety regarding its accessibility is apparent from this explanatory note from the printer. *Psi.4.36*

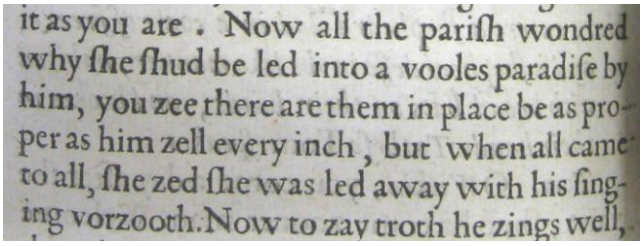


Đe PRINTER *to* đe READER.

HE đat wil bœ fully ſatisfyed, in all points, concerning đe Ortograpi of đis Bœk', wit đe grounds and Reaſons đer'of; let him read đe Engliſ Grammar. In đe mean ſpac', hœ may tak' notic', đat đe Aſpirat's [ϵ, đ, g, k, p, ſ, t, w] ar noting els, but đe ſimple Conſonants, [c, d, &c.] wit đe Aſpiration H: (wiϵ is ſignifyed by đe daſ tœrrow đe Conſonant) and đat đe E ſilent or qiëſcent, wiϵ yœldet no' ſound, but ſervet on'ly to produc' đe Vouel precedent, is (for đe Readers eas) noted wit a differ-rent Karacter: to wit, lik' an inverted Comma. *Vale.*

Catching speech: representing dialect

17th c. Wiltshire dialect represented in *The King and Queenes entertainement at Richmond, after their departure from Oxford, in a masque, presented by the most illustrious prince, Prince Charles Sept. 1. 1636.* Oxford : Leonard Lichfield, 1636.



it as you are. Now all the pariſh wondred why ſhe ſhud be led into a vooles paradiſe by him, you zee there are them in place be as proper as him zell every inch, but when all came to all, ſhe zed ſhe was led away with his ſinging vorzooth. Now to zay troth he zings well,

Comic yokels appear spouting inanities in speech overburdened with zeds, some three hundred and fifty years before Adge Cutler and the Wurzels had hits with *Drink up thee zyder* and *Blackbird, I'll 'ave 'ee*. It is possible to conceive such characterisations as a by-product of the development of printing in England. The pioneering printers of the late fifteenth century such as William Caxton, and particularly Richard Pynson, adopted the recently emergent Chancery Standard, based on the speech of London and the East Midlands, establishing it widely as a prestige. Consequently other speech variants began to suffer a certain social stigma and by the seventeenth century rustics and clowns speaking in non-standard ways appear. Even in an age when spelling was far from standardized, such speech patterns could still be highlighted by an orthography based on a stylized depiction of their phonetics. Masques were ornate, and often participatory, dramatic entertainments provided for the court. This particular example juxtaposes its Wiltshire rustics and their country capers with more refined language and dancing,

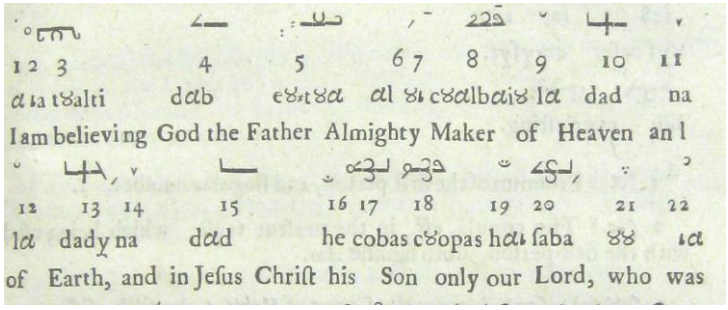
designed to highlight the talents of the six year old Prince Charles (later Charles II). *HB4/6.a.2.15*

Catching concepts

Sound formation from John Wilkins's *An Essay towards a Real Character, and a Philosophical Language*. London, Samual Gellibrand & John Martyn, 1668.

As vernacular languages flourished, and Latin began to decline as a lingua franca for the scholarly communities of Europe, various systems were proposed to replace it. One notable example was devised by the theologian and founder member of the Royal Society, John Wilkins. Wilkins's 'real character' was an attempt to formulate a notation based on logically ordered concepts, and therefore independent of any spoken language, an approach based on accounts of Chinese writing.

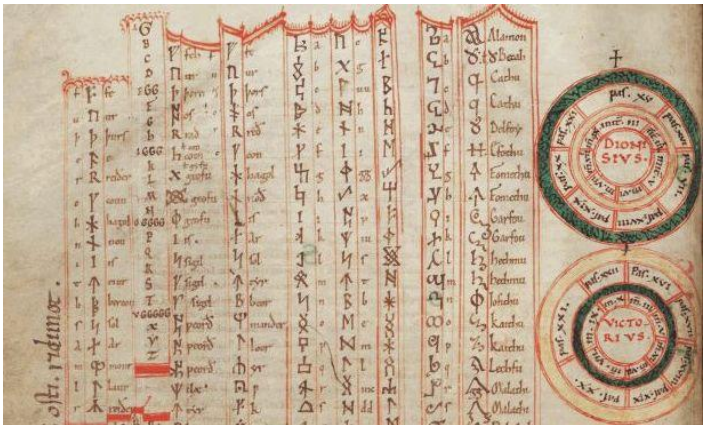
In the transliteration below the 'real character' is contained in those symbols that look vaguely Arabic. To complement this notational system he also devised a means of articulating it phonetically so that people could, if so desired, speak a 'philosophical language'. In the example the 'philosophical language' is the text that looks like a jumble of Roman and Greek alphabets.



The scheme was highly thought of amongst the Royal Society for a short while, particularly by Robert Hooke, probably because it worked like a classificatory system, moving from the general to the particular. Thus *Z* is used for the category of animals, *Zi* identifies the genus "beasts" (mammals), *Zit* denotes "rapacious beasts of the dog kind" and *Zitα* gives the species of dogs. As a language, though, this is not ideal, because words for fairly similar concepts look very similar (the word for monkey and cat are going to be four characters long and begin with *Zi* in the same way that dog does) leading to a vastly increased chance of verbal confusion. Wilkins made one such error in this book, using the notation for 'barley' instead of 'tulip'. *Omega 4.44*

Hiding Meaning: Cryptography & Occult Writing

Fun with letters: Medieval cryptography



A list of alphabets, and some cryptographic messages, from the 12th century. ***The Thorney Computus.*** English (Thorney, Cambridgeshire), ca. 1110.

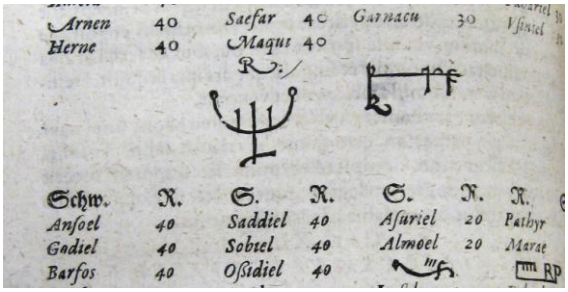
Produced at Thorney Abbey in Cambridgeshire, this volume belongs to a tradition of manuscripts produced to aid time-reckoning and the construction of calendars – particularly the calculation of important feast days like Easter. Such manuscripts, whilst retaining the central theme of time as their organizing principle, became increasingly encyclopaedic and eventually embraced a whole host of supporting or related subjects, such as astronomy, cosmology, geography, history, mathematics, rhetoric and meter. Often they were highly diagrammatic. Amongst the auxiliary tables alphabets often feature, partly because they can be used to represent numbers more succinctly than the cumbersome Roman system. This manuscript has thirteen different writing systems listed on this leaf. Although many are virtually the same – there are five runic alphabets of differing sorts, and several cryptographic systems - others look very strange. Mostly these are invented alphabets ascribed to exotic locations or antique lands such as the 'Nemnivian' and 'Scythian' alphabets. Although they fascinated later renaissance scholars, such alphabetic profusion seems to have been put to no serious purpose, and were probably included purely for aesthetic reasons. *MS 17*

Ghost writing: Renaissance cryptography

Johannes Trithemius, *Steganographia.* Darmstadt : Balthasar Hoffmann for Johann Berner, 1621

Written at the end of the fifteenth century this book was suppressed by its author, a German abbot and occultist, and only published over 100 years later in 1606. It was then banned by the Catholic Church in 1609, and placed on the Index of Prohibited Books for nearly 300 years, until 1900. This edition was published soon after this prohibition. Given the ostensible subject matter, a system of using spirits to

communicate over long distances, religious opprobrium seems unsurprising. In fact the entire text is an elaborately disguised treatise on sending hidden messages. Its title has given the name ‘steganography’ to the branch of cryptography concerned with sending concealed messages, so that only the sender and recipient are aware that a message is being sent, a practice which of which it is a major example. *HB 4/3.a.5.9*



Angelic writing

A celestial alphabet in the northern & southern skies, from Athanasius Kircher’s *Oedipus Aegyptiacus.* Rome : Vitale Mascardi, 1652-1655.

The shapes of letters are picked out amongst the stars in this 17th century diagram. The ‘Celestial Alphabet’ was created by the 16th century occult writer Cornelius Agrippa to enable communication with angels. It appears here in Athanasius Kircher’s huge work on the interpretation of hieroglyphs. Although notionally concerned with Egyptian hieroglyphs, this actually covers an eclectic range of esoteric symbolism, incorporating Hebrew Kabbalah, Greek mythology, and ancient astrology. The engraved title page, showing the Sphinx admitting that Kircher has solved her riddle, rather overstates his success. His interpretations are informed by a belief that heiroglyphs are occult symbols, leading to lengthy explications of very simple texts, such as "The treachery of Typhon ends at the throne of Isis; the moisture of nature is guarded by the vigilance of Anubis" instead of “Osiris says”. In spite of his mostly nonsensical interpretations, Kircher has been seen as a founding figure in Egyptology. As an influential Jesuit, he was able to channel resources to allow production of his numerous, encyclopaedic and beautifully illustrated books. The synthesis of text and illustration indicates that these were designed as much to engage and entertain as impart knowledge, and they did have a broad appeal. Kircher definitely worked at building up a prospective audience. His books included advertisements for forthcoming titles, many of which only arrived years later, if at all. He also relied heavily on grooming potential patrons. The first volume of the

Oedipus was dedicated to the Emperor Ferdinand III, but having a single patron was risky, so in later volumes Kircher started dedicating different sections to other possible patrons. *Psi.1.25*

A Tradition of Writing

Linguistic Sciences in Medieval Uzbekistan

Diagram from al-Sakkaki's *Miftah al-ulum [Key to the Sciences].* Khwarezm, 1332.

A diagram of a mouth, representing the throat, teeth and tongue, from a major work of medieval Arabic linguistic science. The *Miftah al-ulum* covered the morphology of words, grammar and rhetoric and begins by making sure that the reader can pronounce Arabic properly, hence this diagram of the major parts of the mouth used to produce speech. It was composed in the Central Asian region of Khwarezm (now mainly in Uzbekistan) by the lawyer and scholar known as al-Sakkaki, or 'The Die Cutter', owing to his early life as a lock maker. Al-Sakkaki apparently ended up dying in prison on the orders of Chaghatai, one of the sons of Genghis Khan who invaded the region. The manuscript version shown here was also produced in Khwarezm, 100 years later. It is annotated in several different hands, indicating heavy use. Most of these annotations appear to be extracts from a later commentary, although there is a note recording the death of a certain Shams al-Din al-Ashari on the 29th August 1371 (by which time Tamerlane's armies were ravaging the country). Eventually it was to end up in the library of the natural philosopher and courtier Sir Kenelm Digby (1603-1665) and from there came to Archbishop William Laud (1573-1645). *MS 122*

Flowering of Calligraphy

Three Qur'ans showing differing calligraphic styles. (Top) North African, 16-17th century. (Centre) Iran or India, 17th century. (Bottom) Iran, 16th century.

Owing to a suspicion of figurative illustration, which could be perceived as potentially idolatrous, calligraphic art developed to a high degree in Islamic culture. The top example shown here was probably produced in Morocco during the reign of the Sa'did dynasty, and although attractive was not the work of a professional. It

incorporates two types of script. The titles to the surahs are in gold in a Kufic script, an older style which was retained for decorative purposes. The main body of the text is in a Maghribi script, which developed locally in North Africa, and is distinguished by its straight horizontal strokes.

The central example dates to around 100 years later and was produced either in Safavid Iran or Mughal India. It is much less austere, with floral decoration of a quality indicating that it was professionally made. The script used is Naskh, a delicate cursive script with flowing curves, which developed in the 10th century. The bottom example also uses Naskh for the text but uses another cursive style, Thulth, for the heading panels of larger script. Thulth is so-called because one third of each letter slopes.

The cultural prestige of calligraphy in the Islamic world meant that printing was not initially received with great enthusiasm. It was felt it would put craftsmen out of work, was aesthetically inferior, and would introduce mistakes into the scriptures. Indeed printing in Arabic was banned in the Ottoman Empire from 1485 until the 18th century, although this didn't stop Venetian businessmen from attempting to fill the gap with a rather dodgy print version in the 1530s. Most printers in the Empire were Sephardic Jews who had fled the persecution of the Spanish Inquisition after 1492, but they were only allowed to print in non-Arabic scripts, so even English was printed in Istanbul before Arabic (at least as early as 1663). *MSS 107, 215 & 304*