

# Call for Papers

## Online Workshop Origin, History, & Interpretation of Tagin and Otiyyot Meshunnot for Writing the STaM

6–8 Nov 2023

Central European Time / Berlin



Scan the code or  
visit our [website](#) for  
more information  
about the project.

Freie Universität



Berlin

A paleographical particularity of Jewish scribal tradition is that some letters of the strongly standardized square script featured within scrolls are adorned with crownlets (Tagin) or written in an unusual way (Otiyyot Meshunnot). The Talmud specifies seven letters – *gimel*, *zajin*, *tet*, *nun*, *ayin*, *tsade*, and *shin* – for this uncommon letter ornamentation. Yet, medieval written testimonies from the 12th to the 15th centuries (and some later testimonies of this phenomenon, especially in megillot) present numerous exceptions to this antique limit and show a remarkable wealth of forms for new ornaments. Legal scholars across the Diaspora saw the unusual curlicues, arcs, little flags, and dashes as a threat to the authentic gestalt of a Sefer Torah, and urged uniformity. However, even the standard work Sefer ha-tagin (10th/11th c.), widely received in scribal circles and providing copyists with a precise listing of words and letters for such modifications, could not curb the enthusiasm for these letter ornamentations.

Parallel to this uncommon writing practice, an exegetical tradition began to develop:

These crownlets and unusually written letters, and also the standardized letterforms, were interpreted from rabbinic-ethical, mystical, and philosophical perspectives.

This workshop wants to discuss the phenomenon of Tagin and Otiyyot Meshunnot for writing the STaM. Papers presented at the workshop may be published in a subsequent anthology on this topic. We are looking forward to contributions from two perspectives:

- Tagin and Otiyyot Meshunnot as a paleographic tradition

The paleographic tradition has developed different regional characteristics over time. Manuscript evidence of halakhic treatises on the correct visual appearance of these signs testify to a lively debate on the forms of Tagin and Otiyyot Meshunnot. The authors or copyists of these writings in different times and regions gave many examples revealing the enormous richness of shapes. Moreover, the artefacts themselves – scrolls and even codices, dating from the Middle Ages and modern times (here especially the Megillot) – surprise with many variants. The workshop aims to provide an opportunity to present material witnesses, new insights into the origin of tagin, and various sources for describing the shape of the unusual letters.

- Tagin and Otiyyot Meshunnot as a subject of exegesis

Research has almost completely neglected the numerous exegetical approaches towards the forms of Tagin and Otiyyot Meshunnot that flourished especially in the Middle Ages, although this literature provides deep insight into both the intellectual history and cultural memory of Diaspora Jewry. The workshop will open up space for rabbinic, mystical, philosophical, and educational conceptions regarding these special letters in order to elucidate their role on a metaphysical level.

Please send your abstract for a paper presentation (150–200 words) to  
PD Dr Annett Martini by **31 May 2023**:  
[amartini@zedat.fu-berlin.de](mailto:amartini@zedat.fu-berlin.de)