

Online Workshop

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

6-8 Nov 2023

Central European Time / Berlin



ToRoll:  
Materialized Holiness

This workshop wants to discuss the phenomenon of Tagin and Otiyyot Meshunnot for writing the STaM and will open up space for paleographic, rabbinic, mystical, philosophical, and educational conceptions regarding these special letters in order to elucidate their role on a metaphysical level.

A paleographical particularity of Jewish scribal tradition is that some letters of the strongly standardized square script in scrolls are adorned with crownlets (Tagin) or written in an unusual way (Otiyyot Meshunnot). The Talmud specifies seven letters - gimel, zayin, tet, nun, ayin, tsade, and shin - to be decorated in a special way. Yet, medieval testimonies from the 12th-15th centuries (and some later ones, especially in megillot) present numerous exceptions to this antique limit and show a remarkable wealth of ornaments. Legal scholars across the Diaspora saw the unusual curlicues, arcs, 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.) could not curb the enthusiasm for these letter ornamentations.

Parallel to this writing practice, an exegetical tradition began to develop: Tagin and Otiyyot Meshunnot as well as standardized letterforms were interpreted from rabbinic-ethical, mystical, and philosophical perspectives.

Our 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. As research has almost completely neglected the numerous exegetical approaches towards Tagin and Otiyyot Meshunnot, this workshop will open up space for rabbinic, mystical, philosophical, and educational conceptions of these special letters.



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

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

**Monday, 6 November 2023**

14.00–14.30 *Welcome and Introduction* - Annett Martini (FU Berlin)

14.30–15.00 *Adkarah: The Tetragrammaton in Early Tiberian Masoretic Imagination* - Robert Vanhoff (TorahResource Institute)

15.00–15.30 *Mosaic Mosaics? Laws of Jewish Scribal Art and Palaeography of Mosaics Found in Byzantine Synagogues in the Land of Israel* - Mark Farnadi Jerusálmi (EPHE Paris)

**Coffee break**

15.45–16.15 *The Consequence of the Masoretic Mix Tape and Faulty Transmission of Sefer Tagin* - Marc Michaels (University of Cambridge)

16.15–16.45 *The Meaning of the Otiyyot Meshunnot* - Mordechai Weintraub (HUJI)

**Coffee break**

17.00–17.30 *Medieval Scribes and Creative Editing of Tagin within Scrolls* - Jen Taylor Friedman (independent scholar)

17.30–18.00 *The Tagin: Their Origin, Use, and Oscillating Evolution between Embellishment and Mystical Signifier. New Light from the Ancient Bologna Sefer Torah* - Mauro Perani (University of Bologna)



ToRoll:  
Materialized Holiness



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

**Tuesday, 7 November 202**

14.00–14.30 *A History of the Design of the Inverted Nuns* - Sholom Eisenstat  
(independent scholar)

14.30–15.00 *Kitrei Otiyyot Tefilin of R. Jehuda Hasid in Ms. Parma 2486  
fols. 55r-56r* - Emese Kozma (Heidelberg University)

## Coffee break

15.15–15.45 *Observations on the Midrash Rabbi Aqiva al HaTagin - The  
Different Representations of the Letters with Tagin and Otiyyot  
Meshunnot in the Manuscripts* - Rebecca Ullrich (FU Berlin)

15.45–16.15 *Esoteric Levels of Interpretation of Tagin in the Sefer Tagin  
Attributed to Eleazar of Worms in Consideration of his  
Speculative Opus Magnum Sode Razayya-* Dana Eichhorst (FU  
Berlin)

## Coffee break

16.30–17.00 *An Orthographic Exploration of the Torah's Two Creation  
Accounts* - Gabriel Slamovits (NYU)

17.00–17.30 *The Otiyyot Meshunnot in Medieval Kabbalistic Literature* -  
Yosef Ginsberg (YU)

## Coffee break

17.45–18.15 *Tagin in Barukh she-amar* - Anne May Dallendörfer (FU Berlin)

18.15-18.45 *Otiyyot Meshunnot in Early Codices* (tbc) - Judith Olszowy-  
Schlanger (University of Oxford)



ToRoll:  
Materialized Holiness

Freie Universität  Berlin

# Origin, History, & Interpretation of Tagin and Otiyyot Meshunot for Writing the STaM

**Wednesday, 8 November 2023**

14.00–14.30 *Erasing Rays of Light: Correcting Modified Letters in a 13th century Ashkenazi Torah Scroll* - Jesse Abelman (Museum of the Bible)

14.30–15.00 *Rabbinic Mandates and Tolerated Variance: Jewish Legal Codes and Artistic License in Torah Scrolls* - Abraham Marmorstein (Hackensack University Medical Center)

## Coffee break

15.15–15.45 *Hanging with Vaizatha: One Vav, Many Meanings in the Megillah* - Jonathan Homrighausen (Duke University)

15.45–16.15 *Unusual Letters and Crownlets in Decorated Esther Scrolls* - Dagmara Budzioch (independent scholar)

16.15-16.45 *The “Code of Esther”: A Connection Between the Small Letters in Esther 9 and the Nuremberg Trials?* - Emmanuel Bloch (University of Pennsylvania)

## Coffee break

17.00-17.30 *Tiferet she’beTiferet: Otiyyot Meshunot in Tefillin Scrolls and their Connection to Hasidism* - Deborah B. Thompson Shalsholet (University of Harvard)

17.30-18.00 *Reflections on the Workshop and Discussion about Further Research Questions, Networking and Future Collaboration*, led by Annett Martini (FU Berlin)



Akademie  
der Wissenschaften  
und der Literatur  
Mainz



Bundesministerium  
für Bildung  
und Forschung



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