

The Cluster of Excellence  
**Understanding Written Artefacts**  
at the Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures (CSMC)  
cordially invites you to the workshop

## **Multilingualism in the Ancient Mediterranean after Alexander the Great**

Thursday, 1 February 2024, 2:00 pm – 5:45 pm CET

Friday, 2 February 2024, 9:30 am – 1:30 pm CET

Warburgstraße 26, 20354 Hamburg

Hybrid Event

Organisers: Leah Mascia (Universität Hamburg)  
and Szilvia Jaka-Sövegjártó (Universität Hamburg)

Registration:

<https://www.csmc.uni-hamburg.de/register/workshop48>

The empire created by Alexander the Great was hardly comparable to any other seen before in terms of extension and of variety of cultures embraced in his domain. Encompassing Libya, Egypt, Greece, Armenia, Mesopotamia, Persia, and Bactria, reaching even the Hindu Kush mountains and the faraway lands of the reign of Gandhara. Plutarch's *Life of Alexander the Great* offers a view of Alexander's political actions, which explains his imperial ambitions with his love of honour (i.e. *philotimia*) and the cultural indeterminacy of his native Macedonia. According to Plutarch these were the main reasons for Alexander's ideal of promotion of Hellenic ideals within a large multicultural empire. Whatever the reasons behind the creation of Alexander's domain were, the impact of his conquests reverberated in the centuries following the death of the Macedonian conqueror. The long interaction and intertwining between Greek and various indigenous customs led to the creation of a kaleidoscope of cultural phenomena, which find the most tangible echoes in the written sources known thus far. Greek was introduced as the main administrative language of the kingdom and influenced, according to different degrees, the textual production in different settings.

This conference aims to explore the variety of cultural and linguistic phenomena that originated from the interaction between Greek and indigenous traditions in the different regions of the Macedonian empire. The introduction of a new language influenced the production of official written testimonies (i.e. monumental inscriptions) and other types of written artefacts (i.e. ritual objects, coinage). The main goal of this workshop is to examine the multilingual phenomena of the Macedonian lands in their complexity. Therefore, the idea is not only to explore the different degrees of linguistic intermingling between ethnic communities but also how this cultural interaction shaped and transformed the materiality of the written production peculiar to the different domains of this immense empire, for instance, leading to phenomena of hybridisation or, on the contrary, strong conservatism.

## Programme

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### Thursday, 1 February 2024, 2:00 pm – 5:45 pm

2:00 – 2:15 Welcome

#### Session 1

Chair: tba (Universität Hamburg)

2:15 – 3:00 Johannes Hackl (Friedrich-Schiller-University, Jena) and Sven Tost  
(Austrian National Library, Vienna)

*Notaries and Their Language Dynamics in Hellenistic Babylonia*

3:00 – 3:45 Luigi Prada (Uppsala University)

*Egyptian Obelisks in Rome: Translating Roman Imperial Ideology into  
Hieroglyphs, and Vice Versa*

3:45 – 4:15 Coffee Break

#### Session 2

Chair: tba (Universität Hamburg)

4:15 – 5:00 Leonardo Gregoratti (Durham University)

*The Interaction Between Greek and Other Languages in the Parthian  
Commonwealth*

5:00 – 5:45 Rostyslav Oreshko (CNRS)

*The Veiled Diversity: Peoples and Languages of Anatolia after Alexander*

7:00 Conference Dinner

## Friday, 2 February 2024, 9:30 – 1:30

### Session 3

Chair: tba (Universität Hamburg)

9:30 – 10:15 Omar Coloru (CNRS / Università di Bari)  
*Greek in Bactria and India*

10:15 – 11:00 Chandima Wickramasinghe (University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka)  
*Multilingualism in India After the Invasion of Alexander (327 BC – AD 170)*

11:00 – 11:30 Coffee Break

### Session 4

Chair: tba (Universität Hamburg)

11:30 – 12:15 Jan Tavernier (University of Louvain)  
*Multilingualism in the Sasanian Empire (224–651 CE)*

12:15 – 1:30 Jost Gippert (Universität Hamburg)  
*Time Reckoning in the Pre-Islamic Caucasus – Between Christian and Zoroastrian Traditions)*

7:00 Conference Dinner

## Abstracts and Contributors

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### **Omar Coloru (CNRS / Università di Bari)**

*Greek in Bactria and India*

Friday, 2 February, 9:30 am – 11:50 am

During the Hellenistic period, Central Asia and North-western India experienced a phase of linguistic contact between the local populations and the Hellenophone communities that had settled permanently in this vast geographical area. The eastern campaign of Alexander the Great, the integration of Bactria within the Seleucid empire, the emergence of the Graeco-Bactrian kingdom, and finally the constitution of the so-called Indo-Greek kingdoms south of the Hindu Kush represented important historical stages in this linguistic process. This contribution aims to show the variety as well as the complexity of the cultural interactions that took place in these regions of the Hellenistic Far East which were numerically dominated by speakers of Eastern Iranian and Indian languages. The written record in Greek represents a limited corpus of documents at present. Still, if we combine what we have with the data that can be inferred from archaeological and numismatic sources as well as documentation in local languages, then it is possible to draw a picture - no doubt a preliminary one, but certainly a clearer one - of this subject matter. The present contribution will examine the social and cultural contexts in which the use of the Greek language emerges, focusing on the administrative and religious spheres, and the phenomena of bilingualism. Data emerging from the archaeological excavations in the Swat region (Pakistan) and the surrounding areas are adding new perspectives to this field. Finally, part of this presentation will be devoted to the analysis of cases of linguistic conservatism and reciprocal influences between Greek and local languages in the form of loans or calques.

**Jost Gippert (Universität Hamburg)**

*Time Reckoning in the Pre-Islamic Caucasus - Between Christian and Zoroastrian Traditions*

Friday, 2 February, 12:15 pm – 1:30 pm

Autochthonous literacy in the major languages of the Southern Caucasus (Armenian and Georgian) began with the Christianisation of the region in about the fourth century of our era, under the influence of Greek and Syriac as well as, less prominently, Latin and Hebrew. At the same time, Iranian (Zoroastrian) influences prevailed until the end of the Sasanid Empire. All these influences manifested themselves in the time reckoning systems that Armenians and Georgians developed, both for calculating years and for determining and denoting months. On the basis of relevant sources, the presentation will outline the divergent systems and show how the Caucasians coped with them in the given multilingual setting.

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**Leonardo Gregoratti (Durham University)**

*The Interaction Between Greek and Other Languages in the Parthian Commonwealth*

Thursday, 1 February, 4:15 pm – 5:00 pm

This paper is the first attempt to analyse all cases of bilingualism involving Greek documented within the Parthian Empire, including its vassal kingdoms. It is widely known that the Greek language was among the official languages of the Arsacid court. It was largely employed as a lingua franca like before by the Seleucids, of whom the Parthian rulers considered themselves the successors. The Greek language was not only fundamental in the relationship between the leadership and the Greek communities, but the sources indicate it was known and used all over the Empire. This paper will try to collect together all documents where Greek was used along with other languages (Aramaic or Parthian), translating the same texts (or parts of it), but also analyse all cases, as the Awroman papyri where the two languages coexisted side by side.

**Johannes Hackl (Friedrich-Schiller-University, Jena) and Sven Tost (Austrian National Library, Vienna)**

*Notaries and Their Language Dynamics in Hellenistic Babylonia*

Thursday, 1 February, 2:15 pm – 3:00 pm

The practice of recording legal documents in public registers, be it in the context of taxation or just for safe keeping, is a common feature of legal systems in which the written word is considered of fundamental importance. Examples include the Achaemenid royal tax office (*karamaru*), the Ptolemaic notary's office (*agoranomeion*) and the medieval cartularies (*cartularium*). From first mill. BCE Babylonia, there is also direct and indirect evidence pertaining to the practice of keeping registers and the activities of the individuals operating in this field. Besides a large and diverse group of professional scribes, there was a much smaller group of scribes specialized in drafting property documents. While the scribes of the first group were at best private notaries, like the *symbolaiographoi* or *nomikoi* in Byzantine and Early Arab Egypt and the early medieval *tabeliones*, those of the second group qualify as notaries proper. Under Seleucid rule, the procedure of registering and taxing sales seems to have been largely placed in the hands of Greek officials (*chreophylakes*), as is implied by tax stamps from Uruk. Such procedures may have been modelled on administrative practices in urban communities and city states (*poleis*) in Greece and Asia minor. In Hellenistic Babylonia, another official, apart from the *chreophylax*, registered legal documents. The holders of this office who have received little attention so far, bore the Babylonian title *mukīn šarri*, literally 'royal witness.'

It follows that languages coexisted in the realm of administration, giving rise to the question of how they relate to each other, primarily from the perspective of 'superstratum-substratum relationships'—to loosely borrow the like-named concept from sociolinguists. It appears that multilingualism does not necessarily serve a bridging function but can also reflect a hierarchical function implying a stronger element of control. In the context of Babylonia and the Babylonian language, a case in point is the long-established recourse to Aramaic as a lingua franca, with the more recent introduction of Greek as the new 'language of power.' It is the aim of this paper to examine the available evidence concerning (1) the administrative role of these officials during the Seleucid period and, building on that, (2) the implications of their language use against the backdrop of these 'superstratum-substratum relationships.'

**Rostyslav Oreshko (CNRS)**

*The Veiled Diversity: Peoples and Languages of Anatolia after Alexander*

Thursday, 1 February, 5:00 pm – 5:45 pm

Abstract tba

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**Luigi Prada (Uppsala University)**

*Egyptian Obelisks in Rome: Translating Roman Imperial Ideology into Hieroglyphs, and Vice Versa*

Thursday, 1 February, 3:00 pm – 3:45 pm

Following the conquest of Egypt in 30 BCE and until the fourth century CE, several Egyptian obelisks were erected in Rome and other localities of the Roman empire. The majority were earlier—i.e., by then already ancient—obelisks, which had originally been erected in Egypt by pharaohs of the second and first millennium BCE, and which the Romans transferred to new locations across the Mediterranean. Others, instead, were expressly commissioned by Roman emperors, and contained Egyptian hieroglyphic inscriptions celebrating sovereigns such as Vespasian, Titus, Domitian, and Hadrian. Thus, hieroglyphic Egyptian became the third language and writing system officially used by the Roman imperial authority, alongside Latin and Greek.

This paper will look at these monuments from the specific angle of translation. How did these obelisks—and, specifically amongst them, the new commissions—express key concepts of Roman imperial ideology in as alien a language and script as Egyptian hieroglyphs, both linguistically and culturally? How did they include mention of personal names and toponyms alien to ancient Egypt's oikoumene? And how could the inscriptions of earlier pharaonic obelisks re-erected in Rome be made accessible to the Roman public, if they were at all? This talk will consider matters of translations not only from a textual perspective, but also from the material side of their epigraphy, looking into how and when this may differ between the “fully” Egyptian obelisks and the Roman commissions.

This Romano-Egyptian material will not be studied in isolation, but as the culmination of a longer process, in which ancient foreign cultures (amongst them, those of Achae-



menid Persia and Hellenistic Greece) equally experimented with the millennia-old language of power of pharaonic Egypt. In conclusion, the question will be asked whether these translations—and, overall, the experiment in multiculturalism represented by Romano-Egyptian obelisks—were ultimately successful.

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**Jan Tavernier (University of Louvain)**

*Multilingualism in the Sasanian Empire (224– 651 CE)*

Friday, 2 February, 11:30 am – 12:15 pm

This paper will discuss multilingualism in the Sasanian Empire (224-651 CE), in the large territory of which various languages were spoken and written. Special attention will be given to the use and the position of multiple languages, such as Middle Persian, Parthian and Greek, in the royal communication of the Sasanian kings (e.g. Shapur's I trilingual Ka'ba-ye Zardošt inscription). In addition, the presentation will also deal with local usage of various languages. The main sources for the study will accordingly be the Sasanian royal inscriptions, but also other textual sources will be considered.

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**Chandima Wickramasinghe (University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka)**

*Multilingualism in India After the Invasion of Alexander (327 BC – AD 170)*

Friday, 2 February, 10:15 am – 11:00 am

In ancient India, as in the other parts of the ancient world, war and colonization were the key agents of multilingualism. Aramaic and Greek, for instance, came to India through the invasion of the Persians and that of Alexander. Aramaic diminished over-time giving way to the dominating Greek language. Greek established firmly as a language due to the political and socio-cultural measures of Alexander and his successors facilitating its survival beyond the fall of the Greek rule in ancient India. Along with war and colonization, various other factors such as migration, religion, trade and commercial pursuits too contributed, at varying levels, to the sustenance and establishment of non-native languages, especially Greek, in ancient India. The reciprocity between cultural hybridization and multilingualism is clear, with the latter being considered as a gateway to understand, accept, respect, empathize, value and corporate with other cultures, civilizations and their mindsets.

The present study defines multilingualism as the ability to communicate in more than one language with more emphasis on the use of Greek script and language by non-Greeks, and the use of Indian scripts and languages by non-Indians in India. For convenience, though geographical extent is referred to broadly, loosely and, perhaps even incorrectly, as 'India,' it is much different to the present political bounds of the land. It mostly covers north western territories including Arachosia, Gandhara, Sagala, Taxila stretching up to Matura and even Pataliputra occupied by the Indo-Greeks, Indo-Parthians, Indo-Sakas and Kushanas.

The present study aims at examining the nature and extent of the circulation of Greek language in India within a multilingual context that resulted in cross cultural hybridization having stemmed from Alexander's Indian invasion. In the process, study observes diverse aspects of multilingualism prevalent in ancient India, and how it affected its contemporary communities, People and rulers facilitating inter and intra national relations via literary, epigraphic, numismatic and archaeological evidence. The time frame is broad, as noted in the title to enable to include evidence from Kushana era to show the prevalence of multilingualism in full swing where Greek and Indian scripts were used as political tools in India by the non-Greek and non-Indian rulers, centuries after the fall of the Hellenic and Indian dominions.