

The Cluster of Excellence  
**Understanding Written Artefacts**  
and the Academy Projects **Etymologika**, **INEL**, and **Tamilex**  
cordially invite you to the workshop

## Collecting Words and Putting Them in Place: Lexicographical Traditions and Their Agendas

Thursday, 15 May 2025, 9:00 am – 7:00 pm CEST  
Friday, 16 February 2025, 9:30 am – 5:30 pm CEST

Warburgstraße 26, 20354 Hamburg

Organised by Nicole Brisch, Christian Brockmann,  
José Maksimczuk, Beáta Wagner-Nagy, and Eva Wilden  
(University of Hamburg)

Registration:

<https://www.csmc.uni-hamburg.de/register/workshop70>

The workshop aims at discovering the hidden universals that inform lexicographical writings beyond one specific language or period of time. To achieve this, we will adopt a comparative, multidisciplinary approach. The workshop will gather scholars from different disciplines to discuss lexicographical writings produced in a wide range of cultures and settings. We aim at covering Arabic, Greek, Sumerian, Akkadian, Siberian, Tamil, spanning from the fourth millennium BCE to the second millennium CE.

## Programme

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### Thursday, 15 May 2025, 9:00 am – 7:00 pm

- 9:00 – 9:30 Registration  
9:30 – 9:45 Welcome by Konrad Hirschler (University of Hamburg)

#### Session 1

Chair: José Maksimczuk

- 9:45 – 10:15 Eva Wilden (University of Hamburg)  
*What Will Tamil Poets Do with Thesauri and What Will Thesauri Do to Poets?*
- 10:15 – 10:45 Paola La Barbera (Università Degli Studi Di Verona)  
*From Cyril to the Synagoge: How to Create (or Transform) a Byzantine Lexicon*
- 10:45 – 11:15 Coffee Break

#### Session 2

Chair: Nicole Brisch

- 11:15 – 11:45 Eva Cancik-Kirschbaum (FU Berlin)  
*Lists and Epistemic Things*
- 11:45 – 12:15 Tilman Seidensticker (University of Hamburg)  
*The Pre-Modern Arabic Lexicography: An Overview*
- 12:15 – 1:45 Lunch Break

#### Session 3

Chair: Luigi Orlandi

- 1:45 – 2:15 Sören Krömer (University of Hamburg)  
*For Common Scribes or Erudites? The Legal Phrasebook Kiulutinbeše*
- 2:15 – 2:45 Simone Fiori (Università degli Studi di Genova)  
*(Loan)words from Other Contemporary Languages in Ancient Greek Lexicography: Some Remarks on the Byzantine Etymologica*

2:45 – 3:15 Coffee Break

#### Session 4

Chair: Christian Brockmann

3:15 – 3:45 Olga Tribulato (Università Ca' Foscari Venezia)  
*Greek Lexicography as Puristic Lexicography: The Case of Atticist Lexica*

3:45 – 4:15 Margherita Trento (CNRS) and Jean-Luc Chevillard (CNRS)  
*Learning Tamil across the Centuries*

4:15 – 5:00 Coffee Break

#### Keynote

Chair: Eva Wilden

5:00 – 6:00 John Considine (University of Alberta)  
*What Is Like Lexicography?*

7:00 Conference Dinner

### Friday, 16 May 2025, 9:30 am – 5:30 pm

#### Session 5

Chair: Eva Wilden

9:30 – 10:00 Lata Deokar (Poone)  
*Lost in the World of Words*

10:00 – 10:30 Alessandro Musino (University of Hamburg)  
*How a Greek Byzantine Lexicographer (Could) Work: The Case of the Etymologicum Gudianum*

10:30 – 11:00 Coffee Break

## Session 6

Chair: Beáta Wagner-Nagy

- 11:00 – 11:30            Márton Vér (University of Hamburg)  
*The Emergence of Multilingual Vocabularies in Eurasia: The Spread of a Silk Road Tradition?*
- 11:30 – 12:00            Timofey Arkhangelskiy (University of Hamburg)  
*Russian Lexicography Tradition and the Minority Uralic Languages*
- 12:00 – 1:30            Lunch Break

## Session 7

Chair: Dmitry Bondarev

- 1:30 – 2:00            Klaus Wagensonner (Yale University)  
*Two Sides of the Same Coin – On Hermeneutics and Translation in Cuneiform Word Lists and Narrative Texts*
- 2:00 – 2:30            Charles Li (University of Hamburg)  
*One Thousand Years of the Immortal Treasury*
- 2:30 – 3:00            Coffee Break

## Session 8

Chair: Jean-Luc Chevillard

- 3:00 – 3:30            Elizaveta Kotorova (University of Zielona Góra)  
*Endangered Language Lexicography- Traditions and Obstacles*
- 3:30 – 4:00            Elena Lazarenko (University of Hamburg)  
*Endangered Language Lexicography: A Digital Follow-up*
- 4:00 – 4:30            Coffee Break
- 4:30 – 5:30            Final Roundtable

## Abstracts and Contributors

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### **Timofey Arkhangelsiy (University of Hamburg)**

*Russian Lexicographic Tradition and the Minority Uralic Languages*

Friday, 16 May 2025, 11:30 am – 12:00 pm

Starting from the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, comprehensive bilingual dictionaries have been published for the languages of Russia. My talk focuses on implicit assumptions their authors had and practices they followed. When one analyzes dictionaries of minority Uralic languages of the Volga-Kama area, it becomes clear that their authors transfer (sometimes unwittingly) conventions and approaches that are considered standard in dictionaries of the Russian language, thus following a Russian lexicographic tradition. However, some of these approaches turn out to be less suitable for these languages than they are for Russian. Particular potentially problematic features of Uralic/Russian dictionaries that I will discuss are the following:

- Infinitive as verbal lemma;
- Treating all derivations, including regular and absolutely productive, as separate headwords;
- Determining part of speech based on Russian translation rather than on language-internal grounds.

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### **Eva Cancik-Kirschbaum (FU Berlin)**

*Lists and Epistemic Things*

Thursday, 15 May 2025, 11:15 am – 11:45 am

In Mesopotamia, very different forms of epistemological practice were in use. Lists, with their particular format, played a prominent role here. In the lecture, some of these methods are discussed regarding problems in semantics and graphemics.

**John Considine (University of Alberta)**

*What Is Like Lexicography?*

Thursday, 15 May 2025, 5:00 pm – 6:00 pm

The conference ‘Collecting words and putting them into place’ has been designed to ask some profound questions about lexicography, with reference to a wide range of lexicographical traditions. So, a keynote talk which seeks to contribute to this conference must ask questions too.

One of the most fundamental questions with which we shall all be engaging in one way or another in the course of the conference is, I think, ‘What is *like* lexicography?’ On the one hand, considering the activities which are not lexicography, but are like it, may help us to reflect on how we are to define the activity of lexicography itself, a notoriously difficult undertaking. On the other hand, some of the activities which are like lexicography have, in the course of their history, turned into lexicography, or have at least supported it.

I would like to reflect on six activities which I think are like lexicography. They are, in some cases, like each other as well, but I think that they can be distinguished from each other. They are, as I see them at present, as follows:

1. The memorization and recitation of bodies of knowledge.
2. The education of poets or bards.
3. The education of scribes or of a clerisy.
4. The making of lists of important things.
5. The study of written characters.
6. The study of canonical texts.

All of these activities have been pursued in cultures without dictionaries. But all of them have also been associated with lexicography. Perhaps reflecting on them, in a questioning spirit, will help us to ask questions about what different lexicographical traditions might have in common, in their origins and development — and about the possibility that there may be irreducible differences between them.

## Lata Deokar (Poone)

*Lost in the World of Words*

Friday, 16 May 2025, 9:30 am – 10:00 am

How do poets choose words? From where do lexicographers build up their corpus? And how do poet-lexicographers proceed with their activity of writing a lexicon? What is the role of a lexicographical commentator? Is regional vocabulary represented in lexicons written in classical languages? These are some of the questions answers to which I will try to answer based on the rich Sanskrit lexicographical tradition with special focus on the two texts I am working at present – Mañkha's homonymous lexicon, its (auto?-)commentary, and Subhūcandra's Kavikāmadhenu.

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## Simone Fiori (Università degli Studi di Genova)

*(Loan)words from Other Contemporary Languages in Ancient Greek Lexicography: Some Remarks on the Byzantine Etymologica*

Thursday, 15 February 2025, 2:15 pm – 2:45 pm

Several ancient Greek lexica deal with words that do not have Greek origin. The inclusion of non-Greek words in glossaries and lexica is already attested in scholars of the Hellenistic/early imperial age and continued in various forms even in later times. Given this background, this paper aims to examine the presence of non-Greek words within the four major Byzantine etymological lexica (that is to say, the *Etymologicum Genuinum*, the *Etymologicum Gudianum*, the *Etymologicum Symeonianum*, and the *Etymologicum Magnum*). More specifically, this survey will focus on (loan)words from languages that were still spoken and/or written at the time the first Byzantine etymologica were produced. Particular attention will be paid to words from languages spoken within the Empire and/or on its borders such as Latin, Hebrew, Arabic and Slavic languages. It will be shown how the individual etymologica show different approaches and a different level of interest in such words. Significant differences emerge above all between the two oldest etymologica, the *Genuinum* and the *Gudianum*. On the one hand, the *Genuinum* can be said to virtually include only very few biblical Semitisms and a limited number of Latin words, which moreover are mostly already attested at an early stage: many of these Latinisms come from the scholarly works of the grammarian Philoxenus of Alexandria (Augustan age). On the other hand, unlike all other etymologica, the *Gudianum* is comparatively generous in including (both as lemmata and as interpretamenta) vocabulary deriving from other contemporary languages (above all, from Latin): such words are often attested in Greek only at later stages and sometimes show phonetical features unknown to classical Greek, such as the digraph -τζ- (as in the case of the Medieval Latinism φουκάτζα). These contrasting approaches are likely to depend on the different cultural background in which the individual etymologica were produced.

**Elizaveta Kotorova (University of Zielona Góra)**

*Endangered Language Lexicography: Traditions and Obstacles*

Friday, 16 May 2025, 3:00 pm – 3:30 pm

This presentation explores how the unique structural and functional characteristics of a language, as well as its current sociolinguistic situation, may influence the processes involved in dictionary compilation. Using Ket, a highly endangered language in Central Siberia, as a case study (Kotorova & Nefedov 2015), the discussion addresses key challenges in creating dictionaries for minority languages.

**1. Target Audience**

A comprehensive sociolinguistic analysis of the Ket community revealed that scholars are the primary intended users of the Ket dictionary. This insight significantly shaped various practical aspects of dictionary development, ensuring that the final result meets the specific needs of academic researchers.

**2. Basic Vocabulary**

A notable challenge in assembling the Ket dictionary's wordlist stemmed from its origins as a handwritten card file dictionary, which was initially compiled from field notes. This foundational approach influenced the selection and organization of basic vocabulary, requiring meticulous verification and expansion to ensure comprehensiveness and accuracy.

**3. Dictionary Entry**

**3.1. Lemma**

Given the scholarly focus of the dictionary, entries utilize the IPA for notation. The diverse orthographic conventions present in field notes and other sources necessitated the standardization of Ket data representations. Consequently, Ket lemmas are presented in a strict phonological transcription, while illustrative contexts employ a unified phonetic transcription that accounts for dialectal variations. The presentation also addresses two significant issues in lemma representation: the depiction of four suprasegmental tonemes and the selection of the initial form for Ket verbs.

**3.2. Commentary**

An important and mandatory element of the commentary section is the hierarchical organization of word meanings. Each meaning is substantiated with relevant contexts drawn from both published and unpublished sources. The dictionary's corpus of examples is enriched with encyclopedic information where necessary, aiding in the comprehension of ethnospecific concepts and enhancing the overall utility of the dictionary.

**Sören Krömer (University of Hamburg)**

*For Common Scribes or Erudites? The Legal Phrasebook Kiulutinbeše*

Thursday, 15 May 2025, 1:45 am – 2:15 pm

At the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BCE, most scribes in Southern Mesopotamia (present-day Iraq) were native speakers of Akkadian. Surprisingly, the scribal education relied almost exclusively on Sumerian texts. Once spoken across the entire region, Sumerian was at the verge of extinction, but remained in use as main written language: Legal documents, for example, were almost exclusively drafted in Sumerian. From this period, excerpt tablets of a Sumerian legal phrasebook were discovered in Nippur, the cultural centre of Mesopotamia. The phrasebook, known by its incipit as *ki-ulutin-be<sub>2</sub>-še<sub>3</sub>* “in due time”, words and phrases covering legal topics such as purchase, adoption, exchange, interest, bail, construction, loan, lease, rent, witnesses, trial proceedings and marriage. Within the educational curriculum, *Kiulutinbeše* can be placed towards the end of a basic phase not yet preoccupied with longer Sumerian narrative texts. Manuscripts of *Kiulutinbeše* from late 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BCE Assyria (Northern Mesopotamia) paint a different picture. They are well organized, carefully written, and add an Akkadian column to the Sumerian text. Although *Kiulutinbeše*'s legal terminology had been outdated for many centuries, the now bilingual compendium of legal terminology and phraseology *ki-ulutin-be<sub>2</sub>-še<sub>3</sub> | ana ittišu* remained to be copied in Assyria. Clay tablets found in the famous library of king Ashurbanipal in 7<sup>th</sup> century BCE Nineveh attest to a canonical series of 7 tablets with almost 1,500 comparatively well-preserved entries in Sumerian and Akkadian. Contemporary sources indicate that erudite scribes at the royal courts of Assyria showed a strong interest in bilinguals, especially those from the culturally prominent town of Nippur. Throughout *Kiulutinbeše*'s textual history, multilingualism remained a driving force and an important reason the legal phrasebook was copied for over 1,000 years: Originally, the monolingual *Kiulutinbeše* was part of the scribal education, while the later bilingual series reflects a shift towards an elaborate scholarly interest in preserving, systematizing and building on transmitted knowledge.

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**Elena Lazarenko (University of Hamburg)**

*Endangered Language Lexicography: A Digital Follow-up*

Friday, 16 May 2025, 3:30 pm – 4:00 pm

This presentation aims to step out from the general scope of the workshop. It does not explore the lexicographical traditions per se but rather the modern-day electronic dictionaries and challenges of digitalizing of existing resources. The structural characteristics and principles of data modelling in various lexicographical resources in the digital era as well as their differences from the printed ones will be discussed.

This talk's focal point will be the use case of transforming the Comprehensive Dictionary of Ket (Kotorova & Nefedov 2015) into a minimal static web interface. A workflow that shapes the step-wise processing of the original textual data will be presented.

The graphical interface in question is comprised of a simple HTML page with the dictionary data served in a table form. The table is populated with the entries from the printed source organized as JSON files and processed directly in browser by the DataTables Javascript library. This enables a quick setup bypassing the need of a complex lexical database.

Various options of how a digital dictionary can be organized exist, yet they all heavily depend on the individual use contexts (cf. Klosa-Kückelhaus & Michaelis 2024; Müller-Spitzer 2014). The tabular form of the presented interface is dictated by the goals, structure, and the target audience—researchers—of the source book. Such a design provides a direct overview of all the entries and lexical examples and simplifies the lookup within all the parts of the data model. Moreover, the obtained JSON files with the lexical data can be easily repurposed and adapted to be used with other data presentation forms.

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### Charles Li (University of Hamburg)

*One Thousand Years of the Immortal Treasury*

Friday, 16 May 2025, 2:00 pm – 2:30 pm

The *Amarakoṣa*, sometimes translated as the \*Immortal Treasury\*, is one of the most successful and influential dictionaries ever produced. Although it is a Sanskrit lexicon, it became the model for lexicographical practices in many other other languages as well. And not only did it circulate widely, but it was also translated or commented upon, not only in Sanskrit, but also in Persian, Latin, Tibetan, and more. Moreso than the copious number of copies of the *Amarakoṣa* in circulation, it is these commentaries, spanning from the 10th to the 21st centuries, that attest to its extraordinarily long-lived and continuous usage. As part of an ongoing study of these commentaries, garnered from more than two hundred and fifty print and manuscript sources in fourteen different languages, including marginal annotations, we can now study the cultural, religious, and institutional vectors by which lexicographical knowledge was transmitted across space and time.

### **Alessandro Musino (University of Hamburg)**

*How a Greek Byzantine Lexicographer (Could) Work: The Case of the Etymologicum Gudianum*

Friday, 16 May 2025, 10:00 am – 10:30 am

From the Antiquity onwards, Greek and Byzantine scholars have produced, used and disseminated a wide range of instruments that could help them in understanding ancient texts. A relevant role within this field, the so-called auxiliary literature, is played by lexicography. The composition and transmission of lexica and similar scholarly works followed fundamentally different principles than the ones of 'normal' literary texts. On the one hand, lexica were derivative texts, as they were usually produced using pre-existing works as sources; on the other hand, the scribes did not feel compelled to copy lexica as faithfully as possible, but they could heavily rework the text of their models in order to produce scholarly tools that were more suited to their needs. In the field of lexicography, then, it is particularly evident that every manuscript is worth to be studied as a cultural artefact, testifying to the interests and capacities of its milieu of production. Several lexica, dealing with single authors or genres as well as more general ones, have been preserved in manuscripts up to the present day. While we can try to reconstruct the genesis of such works only on the basis of the hints provided by the 'end products' in most cases, in few fortunate instances it is possible to observe how lexicographers composed their texts. One of these is represented by the so-called *Etymologicum Gudianum*, a lexicon of mainly etymological and grammatical content compiled in the 11<sup>th</sup> century in Southern Italy, since the original manuscript, the working copy of the authors of this lexicon, is still preserved in the codex *Vaticanus Barberinianus graecus 70*, a complex and multilayered written artefact. The aim of this paper is to provide further insights on how the authors of the *Etymologicum Gudianum* worked to realise a new lexicon, on the basis of an investigation of the peculiarities and different layers of *Vat. Barb. gr. 70*. In particular, the example offered by this manuscript allows us to directly observe how the lexicon was compiled, corrected and supplemented in different stages, how the authors worked with their sources, and how they arranged or planned to arrange the material.

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### **Tilman Seidensticker (University of Hamburg)**

*The Pre-modern Arabic Lexicography: An Overview*

Thursday, 15 May 2025, 11:45 am – 12:15 pm

The lecture gives an overview of the main features of Arabic-Islamic lexicography in the period between c. 800 and 1800 AD. The linguistic and cultural preconditions, the selection of the listed vocabulary, the collection of the material, the methods of word explanation and finally the different types of lexicons, including the arrangement of the lemmas, will be presented. The overall picture of an extremely productive, long-lived and differentiated branch of literature can provide a framework for comparative analyses.

## Magherita Trento (CNRS) and Jean-Luc Chevillard (CNRS)

### *Learning Tamil across the Centuries*

Thursday, 15 May 2025, 3:45 pm – 4:15 pm

This presentation will focus on six prefaces to five dictionaries composed by three Jesuit missionaries who worked in South India in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. They are the Portuguese Antão de Proença (1625-1666), the French Louis Noël de Bourzès (1673-1735), and the Italian Costanzo Giuseppe Beschi (1680-1747), who was initially mentored by Bourzès. These three missionaries, from the point of view that is our main concern here, were engaged in the task of learning Tamil. However, they explained their goal differently in the prefaces to their works, which were written primarily for an audience of fellow missionaries.

In our presentation, we will pay particular attention to these prefaces, gleaning important insights on their respective intellectual and didactic projects. In chronological order, the prefaces are:

(P<sub>1</sub>) The Portuguese preface to Proença's *Vocabulario* (1679), a Tamil-Portuguese dictionary printed posthumously, where the existence of Poetical Tamil is mentioned but presented as useless for practical purposes.

(P<sub>2a</sub>) The Latin preface to the *Caturakarāti* (1732), a monolingual Tamil dictionary-cum-thesaurus by Beschi, which closely follows the model of traditional Tamil Poetical vocabularies. Here Beschi explains that no one can master the Arts and Sciences in Tamil Nadu without a command of Poetical Tamil.

(P<sub>2b</sub>) The Tamil preface of the *Caturakarāti*, where Beschi also stresses the importance of mastering Poetical Tamil.

(P<sub>3</sub>) The French preface to Bourzès's Tamil-French dictionary (1734), where he recognizes the importance of both types of Tamil, and acknowledges the eminence of Beschi's *Caturakarāti*.

(P<sub>4</sub>) The Latin preface to Beschi's Tamil-Latin dictionary (1742/1743). Here, Beschi argues that what Bourzès had done was the equivalent of compiling a dictionary in which Portuguese and Latin entries would be mixed, disregarding the fact that they belong to distinct languages. Beschi further explained that the target of his *Caturakarāti* had been *Cen-tami* (i.e. Poetical Tamil) but that the target of his new dictionary was *Koṭun-tami* (ordinary Tamil), although it would not contain substandard terms. He also complained that Bourzès 1734 dictionary contained too many "wrong" variant/dialectal forms, which should be deprecated, because only uneducated people used them.

(P<sub>5</sub>) The French preface to a Tamil-French dictionary attributed to Beschi, which seems to be in fact a French translation of his Tamil-Latin dictionary, as appears when comparing the two prefaces and some individual entries.

In our presentation, we will reflect on the themes emerging from these prefaces, mainly the co-existence and relationship between different types of Tamil, and the interaction between Tamil and European views on lexicography. This will help us to draw a picture of the intellectual context of Beschi's *Caturakārati*, of which we are currently preparing an edition based on the earliest manuscript, while closely comparing it with the Traditional Tamil *kōṣa*-s such as the *Tivākaram*, etc. The other project underway is an electronic edition of Proença's 1679's *Vocabulario*. This study will also help us to understand these five dictionaries more largely, in the perspective of integrating their entries in the TAMILEX database.

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**Olga Tribulato (Università Ca' Foscari Venezia)**

*Greek Lexicography as Puristic Lexicography: The Case of Atticist Lexica*

Thursday, 15 May 2025, 3:15 pm – 3:45 pm

Ancient Greek culture produced a vast number of lexicographical works. The first examples were collections of rare and obsolete words (*glōssai*) assembled in the Hellenistic age, but soon lexica were produced to describe all kinds of linguistic varieties: from that of literary authors (such as Homer and Hippocrates) to that of individual dialects, in an attempt to capture the great diversity of the Greek language in dictionaries. In the Imperial age, a special type of lexica started appearing: those devoted to teaching the correct way of reusing the classical Attic dialect in prose works and orations. These lexica had a lasting impact on Greek linguistic history and much of their material was reused in the Middle Ages for the compilation of Byzantine lexica. As the aim of Atticist lexicographers was to resuscitate a defunct linguistic variety and impose it as a prestigious standard for literary communication, their works qualify as a kind of puristic lexicography.

In my paper, I shall first discuss which characters allow the classification of Atticist lexica under the sociolinguistic category of purism. I will focus on features such as prescriptive terminology, aesthetic and moral metaphors, and metalinguistic comments which all underlie an ideological view of language. I will then discuss some comparanda in the lexicographical traditions of other cultures: I will compare structuring features, ideological agendas, the approach to literary canons, and the way bi- or multilingualism may be reflected (or not) in these traditions, in order to better define the exact type of purism embodied by Atticism and its lexica.

**Márton Vér (University of Hamburg)**

*The Emergence of Multilingual Vocabularies in Eurasia: The Spread of a Silk Road tradition?*

Friday, 16 May 2025, 11:00 am – 11:30 am

Every major Eurasian literary culture developed its own lexicographical traditions from an early stage. These traditions primarily produced specialised vocabularies of their respective literary languages, typically monolingual. Multilingual vocabularies were largely compiled in the context of religious dissemination, yet they remained marginal for a long time, and their manuscripts have rarely survived. However, during the Mongol period (13<sup>th</sup>–14<sup>th</sup> centuries CE), thematically organised vocabularies emerged across the continent, from the Crimea through the Middle East to China, serving diverse purposes, including proselytization, trade, and chancery translation. The manuscripts preserved from this period, however, are not the earliest examples of such vocabularies. Due to the inherent multilingualism of Central Asian societies, navigating between languages was an integral part of daily life. Moreover, the extremely arid climate of the Eastern Silk Road has enabled the preservation of original multilingual vocabulary manuscripts, the earliest of which dates back to the 8<sup>th</sup> century CE. Yet, partly due to disciplinary boundaries and partly due to their fragmentary state, these manuscripts have thus far been studied in isolation and not recognised as part of a broader lexicographical tradition.

This paper surveys the available materials, identifies common elements in these manuscripts, and explores whether they constitute a distinct lexicographical tradition. If so, it seeks to determine its defining features and its relationship to the continent-wide emergence of thematically organised vocabularies during the Mongol period.

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**Klaus Wagensohn (Yale University)**

*Two Sides of the Same Coin — On Hermeneutics and Translation in Cuneiform Word Lists and Narrative Texts*

Friday, 16 May 2025, 1:30 pm – 2:00 pm

Cuneiform sources from Mesopotamia represent the earliest extensive corpus of lexical texts in human history, covering many aspects of the social, cultural, and intellectual lives of Sumerian and Akkadian societies. While the earliest lists, dating from the last third of the fourth millennium BCE, were monolingual Sumerian compositions, we begin to see the first attempts at translations into a Semitic language in the 24<sup>th</sup> century BCE, with extant texts from Ebla, Syria. Starting in the second millennium BCE, most of the earlier lists gradually faded into oblivion, but many more texts emerged, serving as crucial tools for scribal education. While these texts remained predominantly Sumerian, translations—whether in the form of glosses or full equivalents—became increasingly frequent. Furthermore, recorded bilingualism expanded beyond

word lists. Compositions from different text genres (royal, literary, liturgical) began to receive Akkadian versions, a process that started in the first half of the second millennium BCE and intensified in the following centuries. While bilingual lexical texts often provide one-to-one equivalents, translations of other text genres frequently involve idiomatic language that requires adaptations. This paper explores the varying degrees and qualities of lexical equivalents both in the primary corpus of bilingual or multilingual word lists and in translations within other text genres, where the context may influence translation choices. In doing so, the paper examines to what extent the largely decontextualized world of word lists may have influenced translations in other genres, and vice versa.

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### **Eva Wilden (University of Hamburg)**

*What Will Tamil Poets Do with Thesauri and What Will Thesauri Do to Poets?*

Thursday, 15 May 2025, 9:45 – 10:15 am

It has been observed, though not yet demonstrated on a statistically relevant basis, that commentators of Tamil poetry are users of the lexicographical works available in their period. Thus commentators of the Caṅkam anthologies, roughly in the first three centuries of the second millennium, made use of the three poetic thesauri composed in the first millennium, the *Uriyiyal* of the oldest grammar, the *Tolkāppiyam*, the *Tivākaram* and the *Piṅkalam*. Glosses, especially in the early commentaries are restricted to problematic words, problematic either because they are unusual or even rare, or because they have multiple meanings and need disambiguation. They do not explicitly refer to the lexicographical works, but very often their choice of word(s) can be traced back to a specific *sūtra*. Such a system of reference can only function if we precede from the assumption that lexicographers read poetry and incorporated the lexical repertoire they encountered in their works. Ultimately the problem boils down to a simple double question: how many rare/poetic/complicated words used in poetry are not found in the thesauri? How many words listed in the thesauri are not found in poetry? Quite obviously these questions are not likely to be answered in full without the help of digital humanities and a sophisticated data set. But this presentation will make a modest beginning by tracing words which occur less than three times in the Caṅkam corpus (my current idea of a rare word) to the three lexicographical works mentioned above.