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

Translation Choices in Multilingual Written Artefacts: Navigating Visual and Cultural Layers

Friday, 24 October 2025, 9:00 am – 5:15 pm CEST
Saturday, 25 October 2025, 9:30 am – 3:00 pm CEST

Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek,
Von-Melle-Park 3, 20146 Hamburg

Organised by Silpsupa Jaengsawang (Ca' Foscari University of
Venice), Jannis Kostelnik (University of Hamburg),
and Szilvia Sövegjártó (University of Hamburg)

Registration:
https://www.csmc.uni-hamburg.de/register/workshop75

Translation practices leave traces that are often as intricate as they are elusive. In many cases, the only surviving witnesses to these practices are the artefacts themselves – written objects marked by their visual organisation, material features, or paratextual additions. Sometimes, translators' strategies are explicitly recorded in metatextual commentary or cultural traditions, such as the famous account of how the Septuagint was translated. However, these narratives do not always align with the preserved artefacts, prompting questions about whether they reflect authentic translation strategies, later interpretations, or idealised traditions. This workshop seeks to bridge this gap by bringing together the materiality of written artefacts and the cultural narratives surrounding translation practices. By exploring the interplay between visual and material features and the cultural frameworks of translation, we aim to uncover the choices translators make and how these choices manifest in the artefacts.

Programme

Friday, 24 October 2025, 9:00 am – 5:15 pm

9:00 – 9:15   Registration and Coffee

9:15 – 9:30   Welcome

Section 1: Visualising Translation on the Page

Chair: Szilvia Sövegjártó

9:30 – 10:15   Laura-Maxine Kalbow (University of Hamburg)
Translation Choices in Early Canadian Music Manuscripts

10:15 – 11:00   Direk Hongthong (Kasetsart University of Bangkok)
*Translation Choices in Ethnic Khmer in Thailand's Multilingual Written
 Artefacts*

11:00 – 11:30   Coffee Break

11:30 – 12:15   Sam Mirelman (University of Geneva)
The Interlinear-Translation Format in Ancient Mesopotamia

12:15 – 1:00   Ronit Ricci (Hebrew University of Jerusalem)
Translation as a Beard

1:00 – 2:30   Lunch Break

Section 2: Scholarly and Educational Translations

Chair: Jannis Kostelnik

2:30 – 3:15   Ciro Giacomelli (University of Padova) and José Makszimczuk (University
of Hamburg)
*Translating Greek into Latin and Latin into Greek in 15th-C. Lesbos, Chios,
and New Phokaia*

3:15 – 4:00   Philip Bockholt (University of Münster)
*Material Evidence Revisited: Translation Processes in Ottoman Istanbul in
the 1720s*

4:00 – 4:30	Coffee Break

4:30 – 5:15	Dmitry Bondarev (University of Hamburg) and Lina Sabbah (University of Hamburg)
	Grammar Visualised: Hybrid Grammatical Concepts in Borno Qur'anic Manuscripts

6:30	Conference Dinner for invited speakers

Saturday, 25 October 2025, 9:30 am – 3:00 pm

Section 3: Translation as Cultural Negotiation

Chair: Sara Chiarini

9:30 – 10:15	Erene Rafik Morcos (University of Cologne)
	Wrinkles in Scriptural Symmetry

10:15 – 11:00	Paolo Poccetti (Tor Vergara University of Rome)
	Translating Proper Names in Ancient Epigraphy

11:00 – 11:30	Coffee Break

11:30 – 12:15	Neela Bhaskar (University of Hamburg)
	How is a Translation Choice Informed? An Account of Tamil Histories from South India and their English Translations

12:15 – 1:00	Christoph Weyer (University of Hamburg)
	Translating Sound: Felix Fabri's Notation of Islamic Chant in the Late Middle Ages

1:00 – 2:30	Lunch Break

2:30 – 3:00	Final discussion and concluding remarks

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MANUSCRIPT
CULTURES

Abstracts and Contributors

Neela Bhaskar (University of Hamburg)

How is a Translation Choice Informed? An Account of Tamil Histories from South India and their English Translations

Saturday, 25 October 2025, 11:30 am – 12:15 pm

During the beginning of the 19th century, south India bore witness to a unique collaborative effort between Colin Mackenzie, a British colonial military officer stationed in India, and several South Indian scholars of literature and history such as the Kavali brothers. Their collaboration resulted in one of the largest manuscript collections on India till date, called the Mackenzie Collection, which is now divided between the Government Oriental Manuscripts Library in Chennai (India) and the British Library in London. While the collection remains a treasure trove for scholars of literary history and adjacent fields, it is seldom recognised for its contribution to translation studies. Mackenzie, whose goal was to collect Indian historical information, inadvertently became the catalyst for the Indian scholars with whom he worked to translate for the first time regional histories in a variety of languages. This talk will focus on the manuscripts in the Tamil language, highlighting a few documents which speak of the history of the Pāṇṭiya dynasty that ruled the far south from in ancient times. The British in India were arguably most interested by this lineage of rulers for their literary and political contributions to the Tamil region, and these manuscripts thus became the first translated histories from Tamil to English, paving the way for East-West linguistic studies to flourish ever since.

Philip Bockholt (University of Münster)

Material Evidence Revisited: Translation Processes in Ottoman Istanbul in the 1720s

Friday, 24 October 2025, 3:15 pm – 4:00 pm

In the early eighteenth century, the Ottoman Empire witnessed a marked expansion of translation activity, particularly in historiography, under the patronage of Grand Vizier Dāmād İbrāhīm Paşa (in office 1718–1730). This lecture analyzes the material evidence of the translations to examine the aims, methods, and cultural implications of rendering major historiographical works from Arabic and Persian into Ottoman Turkish, including Badr al-Dīn al-ʿAynʾīs (d. 855/1451) ʿIqd al-Jumān ("The Pearl Necklace"), Ghiyāṣ al-Dīn Muḥammad Khvāndamīr's (d. 942/1535–36) Ḥabīb al-Siyar ("Beloved of Careers"), and Iskandar Beg Munshʾīs Tārīkh-i ʿĀlam-ārā-yi ʿAbbāsī ("The World-Adorning History of ʿAbbās"). Although contemporary sources and the translations'

prefaces present these projects as efforts to broaden access to historical knowledge, the involvement of numerous actors and substantial resources indicates broader cultural and political stakes. Drawing on surviving manuscripts, the lecture investigates who translated what and how the texts were adapted for their intended readership. It argues that these undertakings were not isolated initiatives but part of a wider cultural movement characterized by bibliophilic pursuits and the establishment of libraries. They were also shaped by contemporary geopolitics – above all, Ottoman expansion into the Safavid Caucasus and northwestern Iran – which heightened interest in Safavid history and encouraged the translation of Persian works. Particular attention is given to the material features of translation visible in the manuscripts, including minhu notes, newly added illustrations, and the translator's voice.

Dmitry Bondarev (University of Hamburg) and Lina Sabbah (University of Hamburg)
Grammar visualised: Hybrid grammatical concepts in Borno Qur'anic manuscripts
Friday, 24 October 2025, 4:30 pm – 5:15 pm

Annotated Qur'anic manuscripts from Borno Sultanate (15th to early 19th centuries) witness linguistic creativity of Borno Islamic scholars who applied Arabic grammatical concepts to linguistic structures of Old Kanembu, a language closely related to Saharan languages Kanuri and Kanembu. The practice of annotation in Old Kanembu was built on a grammatical apparatus borrowed from Arabic linguistic tradition and mixed with authentic grammatical material. Thus, Arabic grammatical terms (e.g. fāʿil 'agent/subject') were used in combination with the original Kanembu syntactic markers (e.g. the agent/subject clitic -ye) to tag both the Arabic and Old Kanembu morphosyntax at the first step of translation. Literal and interpretative translations were added at subsequent steps.

Comparison of different manuscripts reveal a certain school of grammatical thought in Borno. Different scribes from a variety of local centres of learning consistently employed a range of mixed Arabic/Old Kanembu terms. Such categorial mixing is manifestly seen in hybrid forms that start with an Arabic word or particle and continue with an Old Kanembu particle. Many of these items are puzzling and at the current state of research we cannot plausibly identify either their precise morphological composition or their intended grammatical meaning. However, some hybrid glosses have already been deciphered and in this presentation we will be looking into hybrid forms made up of the Arabic independent possessive pronoun dhū (roughly corresponding to English prepositions 'with' or 'of'). By investigating different manuscripts and scribal hands we will demonstrate that these hybrid forms derive from a conceptual fusion of the Arabic possessive pronoun and Old Kanembu associative/comitative postposition.

Ciro Giacomelli (University of Padova) and José Makszimczuk (University of Hamburg)
Translating Greek into Latin and Latin into Greek in 15th-C. Lesbos, Chios, and New Phokaia. The Case of Vat. gr. 870: settings of production and circulation
Friday, 24 October 2025, 2:30 pm – 3:15 pm

The manuscript Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. gr. 870 is an unassuming composite codex containing a series of Greek-Latin and Latin-Greek lexica. Despite its understudied status, Vat. gr. 870 has traditionally been identified as the autograph of the scribe and printer Bartolomeo de Colunnis (d. ca. 1487), thought to have compiled it for his personal use. A detailed palaeographic analysis, however, enables us to reattribute the production of this written artefact to the historian and teacher Ioannes Kanaboutzes (d. ca. 1453?), active mainly during the second third of the fifteenth century in the Genoese colonies of the northern Aegean. Vat. gr. 870 thus offers a rare opportunity to explore the scholarly practices of translation between Greek and Latin on Lesbos in the mid-fifteenth century.

Direk Hongthong (Kasetsart University of Bangkok)
Translation Choices in Ethnic Khmer in Thailand's Multilingual Written Artefacts: Exploring Visual and Politico-Cultural Aspects
Friday, 24 October 2025, 10:15 am – 11:00 am

Ethnic Khmer in Thailand, or Northern Khmers, are approximately 2.8% of the whole population in Thailand. Most of them live in the southern part of Northeastern Thailand bordering Cambodia to the south. Their ancestors had lived there since 7th-8th centuries CE and related to Khmer written culture since 10th-11th centuries CE, according to archeological sites and inscriptions, respectively. Later, Northern Khmers had been governed by Thai state and officially become Thai citizens since the reign of King Rama V (1868-1910). Consequently, they had been educated in Thai public schools by learning Thai language since 1900 along with learning in their Khmer traditional education in Buddhist monasteries. However, their traditional education and Khmer documents had been later considerably affected and decreased their importance due to major international conflicts such as the conflicts in 1940 between Thailand and France in Indochina and in 1962 between Thailand and Cambodia on Preah Vihear temple. These conflicts significantly led to Khmer document destruction and the prohibition of preaching in Khmer. Nevertheless, Khmer culture in Thailand was later reconsidered in the better light from the late 1970s onwards due to localism. Thus, it could exist as local culture in Thai society. These factors inevitably impacted on many aspects of Northern Khmers' lives including the cultural aspect in (re)production of their written artefacts.

Northern Khmers' written artefacts are found in various forms: palm leaves, mulberry papers, notebook papers, and printed documents. They contain several languages: Khmer, Northern Khmer, Thai, and/or Pali and are written by using 2 main sets of script: Khmer and Thai. Given these multilingual written artefacts in term of translation choices, there are 3 types of translation: (1) interlingual translation from either Khmer language with Khmer script or Northern Khmer dialect with Thai script into Thai language with Thai script; (2) intralingual translation from Khmer language into Northern Khmer dialect; and (3) the combination of intralingual and interlingual translations from Khmer and Northern Khmer into Thai. These different translation types are presented for different groups of readers with different backgrounds and knowledge. The intralingual translation focuses on Northern Khmers' in-group members whereas the remaining types focus mainly on Thai readers and Northern Khmer younger generations who have difficulty understanding the source languages. Moreover, these translation types are visually organized in simple but various patterns by merely focusing on the presentation of source and target languages. For the interlingual translation, source and target languages are systematically arranged in 4 different patterns: (a) Khmer/ Northern Khmer on the left column and Thai translation on the right in the same page with/without a line drawn for separation. (b) Khmer/ Northern Khmer on the left page and Thai translation on the right or vice versa (c) Northern Khmer on the front and Thai translation on the back of each paper sheet and (d) Khmer on the above line/stanza and Thai translation below in each page. For the intralingual translation, some Northern Khmer words with Thai script are added later above or below the normal lines of Khmer script for Northern Khmers' more convenience in pronunciation due to the marked differences between Khmer and Northern Khmer accents. For the combination of intralingual and interlingual translations, it is systematically organized in 3 parallel columns in each page: Pali and Khmer on the left, Northern Khmer in the middle, and Thai translation on the right.

Translation choices in Northern Khmers' multilingual written artefacts are presented through various language choices and spatial organizations. Therefore, they reveal these artefacts as hybrid spaces where many languages, particularly Khmer and Thai, exist together in several visual organizations. Their existences communicate Northern Khmers' hybrid identities in 3 noteworthy aspects: (1) as local Khmers/ Khmers in Thailand, through the intralingual translation; (2) as Khmer-Thai, through the interlingual translation and the combination of intralingual and interlingual translations; and (3) as local Thais who open themselves to Thai society, through Thai translation for Thai readers. Besides, these artefacts indicate Northern Khmers' political and cultural negotiation with Thai state's assimilation so that, as minority or marginal people, they could preserve their own culture and are able to simultaneously express themselves as both Khmers and Thais.

Laura-Maxine Kalbow (University of Hamburg)
Translation Choices in Early Canadian Music Manuscripts
Friday, 24 October 2025, 9:30 am – 10:15 am

With the French colonization of North America/Canada in the 17th century, music became a central tool of political and cultural power. Sacred repertoire from France circulated in Ursuline convents in Québec and Montréal and in Jesuit missions, where it served the dual aim of Christianization and cultural domination. Manuscripts – likely copied in France and redistributed in Québec – document these practices and illuminate Canada's "paradoxical colonial history" (Dubois). While the Ursulines' use of music for conversion met with resistance and violent conflict, the Jesuit missions reveal more complex dynamics of cultural transfer. Manuscripts constitute the primary evidence of this musical-cultural transmission, offering insights into the exchange between French musical traditions and Indigenous languages, as well as into the translation practices that mediated this encounter and are somehow the only surviving witnesses to practices of musical exchange, but also cultural assimilation. In my paper, I will examine different examples of compositions/manuscripts of French music repertoire, that were circulated in the North American Jesuit mission to illustrate how translation strategies were deliberately employed to further missionary objectives. I will pay particular attention to how these translation choices shaped the "layout" of musical language, highlighting the intersection of linguistic mediation and musical adaptation. This case study demonstrates not only the instrumental use of translation in colonial contexts but also the nuanced ways in which music itself was modified to accommodate intercultural communication.
This paper highlights the instrumental use of translation in colonial contexts and demonstrates how music, as a written artefact, materializes the entanglements of language, culture, and power. By focusing on the material and visual features of these manuscripts, the study aligns with broader questions about how translation strategies are inscribed in artefacts and how cultural frameworks shape both the process and product of multilingual mediation.

Sam Mirelman (University of Geneva)
The Interlinear-Translation Format in Ancient Mesopotamia: Its Implications and Significance
Friday, 24 October 2025, 11:30 am – 12:15 pm

The interlinear translation format, with Sumerian first, followed in the next line by the Akkadian translation, is by far the most widespread format for bilingual Sumerian-Akkadian literary tablets. The significance of this choice of format is never explained in Mesopotamian literature. But it has a long history in later periods, especially in Bible translations. Theoretical statements on

the topic include those of the philosopher Walter Benjamin, who considered it as the ideal form of translation for sacred texts. Several possible motivations may be suggested for the choice of an interlinear translation format in ancient Mesopotamia. Most clearly, it reflects the pedagogical, literal and lexical approach to literary translation which pervaded Mesopotamian scholarship. Furthermore, it may also encourage specific techniques of translation, including the conception of literary lines as a reflection of physical lines on tablets.

Erene Rafik Morcos (University of Cologne)
Wrinkles in Scriptural Symmetry: Material & Textual Negotiations of a Pauline Interpolation
Saturday, 25 October 2025, 9:30 am – 10:15 am

This paper examines the expanded form of Psalm 13:3 in the Latin Vulgate, beginning:

> Sepulchrum patens est guttur eorum; linguis suis dolose agebant. Venenum aspidum sub labiis eorum,…

> Their throat is an open sepulchre: with their tongues they acted deceitfully; the poison of asps is upon their lips…

Its source is a Pauline quotation in Romans 3:13–18, which conflates several scriptural references into a single catena.

Because Paul's first-century citation endowed the passage with apostolic authority, the interpolation gained canonical weight, particularly in Latin traditions. This extended passage, however, is absent from the Masoretic Hebrew tradition and thus from the Septuagint Greek Psalms. It entered the Vulgate and was later acknowledged—bracketed or annotated—in the critical apparatus of some Septuagint editions, largely due to its presence in several multilingual Psalters. The interpolation seems to have forced scribes and editors to confront a scriptural anomaly generated by divergent translation lineages and competing conceptions of textual authority.

This Pauline interpolation thus introduces a subtle but revealing wrinkle in the visual and textual symmetry of multilingual Psalters. Far from being a marginal anomaly, this disruption offers a remarkably informative site for studying the practices of multilingual manuscript production. The transcriptional strategies applied to this verse vary widely across the Greco-Latin tradition. Through close attention to material features—marginal signs, layout tensions, and paratextual commentary— this paper traces how scribes and compilers from Late Antiquity to the medieval period navigated the disruption. These responses reveal not only differing views on authority and coherence but also a tacit linguistic sophistication in the management of parallel texts. The interpolation thus becomes a site of disclosure: a moment where translation, theology, and

manuscript design converge to illuminate the cultural and intellectual conditions of multilingual textual making.

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Paolo Poccetti (Tor Vergata University of Rome)
Translating Proper Names in Ancient Epigraphy: Contexts, Strategies, Purposes
Saturday, 25 October 2025, 10:15 am – 11:00 am

Proper names are often regarded as untranslatable, since they function both as 'rigid designators' of individual entities and as cultural expressions resistant to transfer. Yet ancient Mediterranean epigraphy reveals a variety of translation practices involving personal, local, and divine names, carried out through different strategies: morpho-phonological adaptation, substitution with a different name, or reordering in the case of multi-membered names.

In epigraphic artifacts designed for practical use, such as coins, or for long-lasting commemoration, such as honorary and funerary inscriptions, the translation of proper names served not primarily interlinguistic communication, but rather the negotiation of personal or collective identity, memory, and cultural (dis)continuity in the ancient Mediterranean world.

Translation could operate synchronically, within multilingual contexts where the dual identity of a human or non-human being was emphasized, or diachronically, reflecting broader socio-cultural transitions. A proper act of translation was often enabled by the real or perceived lexical transparency of a name and was shaped by individual choices, cultural narratives, or ideological purposes.

A particularly distinctive procedure is the combination of names and images, which could serve to clarify the synchronic meaning of a name within or beyond a linguistic community, to evoke a previous or alternative designation, and to highlight connections among persons, places, and deities across different linguistic and cultural settings.

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Ronit Ricci (Hebrew University of Jerusalem)
Translation as a Beard
Friday, 24 October 2025, 12:15 pm – 1:00 pm

Indonesian manuscripts containing interlinear translations from Arabic to Javanese and from Arabic to Malay are aplenty in the libraries of Islamic boarding schools across Indonesia as well as in Leiden, Kuala Lumpur, London and elsewhere. Although nowadays, at least when speaking or writing in English, we refer to them as "interlinear," they have had different and various des-

ignations in local languages, one of which is kitab jenggotan or 'bearded books.' The 'beard' refers to the Malay or Javanese translation appearing between the Arabic lines and at times also spreading beyond them and onto the page's margins. In the context of bilingual or multilingual Islamic translations from Indonesia, I will ask: what does it mean to imagine or consider translation as a beard?

This question, in line with the workshop's theme, will be explored both in terms of the translation's visual organization and its layout on the manuscript page, and in terms of the cultural narratives and tropes surrounding this translation practice, and even more so this particular translation terminology. What have been some of the cultural meanings of beards and what might these reveal about the significance ascribed to translation?

Christoph Weyer (University of Hamburg)
Translating Sound: Felix Fabri's Notation of Islamic Chant in the Late Middle Ages
Saturday, 25 October 2025, 12:15 pm – 1:00 pm

Felix Fabri's Evagatorium, written after his pilgrimage to the Holy Land (1483–85), combines factual description with theological narrative. Among its most striking passages is the earliest known Western notation of Islamic chant, recorded during a visit to a madrasa in Jerusalem. Fabri transcribed the boys' repetitive chanting of the shahāda into square notation, thus transforming foreign sound into a medium familiar to Latin Christendom.

This paper argues that Fabri's notation is not a neutral document but a translational act at the intersection of experience, theology, and cultural politics. By inscribing unfamiliar chant within monastic notation, Fabri both claimed authority as an "earwitness" and domesticated alterity into European categories of musical knowledge. His choice of notation rendered the sound comparable and archivable, while his pejorative rhetoric - describing the boys' voices as "howling" - situated the practice within broader late medieval discourses of the Turkengefahr.

Examining this episode highlights the tension between Fabri's descriptive accuracy and his theological agenda. It shows how translating sound into notation produced meaning beyond music, reinforcing Christian identity while constructing an image of the "other." Fabri's Evagatorium thus exemplifies how late medieval authors used translation - of places, rituals, and sounds - as a strategy of cultural framing and hierarchy.