

# Beyond Comparison

## Towards a Connected Philology

*Abstracts*

### Wednesday, 13.45–14.30

Carine van Rhijn (Utrecht, Netherlands, Medieval History)

*Repeated Re-Invention: The Many Histories of the Tabula Salomonis*

In a Latin manuscript dating to around the year 1000, there is a prognostic table which helps its user to gain insights into aspects of the future. By observing sudden incidents (such as the spontaneous combustion of clothes, involuntary bodily movements, or animals making sudden sounds) under the current sign of the zodiac, the table offers – usually rather modest – bits of knowledge about the near future. It may, for instance, inform its user that guests will arrive, that money will be found or lost, that there will be travel, marriage, disease, or war. This is a unique method of prognostication within the rich corpus of Latin prognostic texts, but more interesting for this conference is the long and remarkable history of the *Tabula*. The contents of the table, which were turned into a prose text not long after the year 1500, are remarkably stable over a period of nearly a full millennium, whereas the way in which various societies interpreted it changed radically over time.

In this paper, my focus will be on such re-interpretation and I will highlight a few ‘episodes’ in the long life of this text. As the *Tabula Salomonis*, it fitted easily into the context of early medieval interest in the highly respected art of time reckoning as one table-shaped calculation tool among others. Several centuries later, however, we see the very same table rewritten as a prose text, now interpreted as a piece of Arabic esoteric writing ascribed to a mysterious, ‘very wise king Zebel’. Some centuries later even, the text made it (now anonymously) to the court of the Elector of Brandenburg as a very expensive and prestigious gift – but not long after, a German compendium of superstitions has no good word for its utter stupidity. And this is only a part of the western European side of things: there is a parallel Arabic learned tradition of which we know very little, a Russian tradition in which only the list of incidents survives (framed and utterly forbidden as the ‘Volhovnik’, ‘the book of the magician’), whereas an anthropologist who worked in early 20<sup>th</sup> century Iraq discovered a set of the same incidents in a holy Mandaean book.

This long history shows how, first of all, textual interpretation is always the product of specific times and places: one text can mean many things to as many different people. It also opens a discussion about texts which are, in a sense, ‘culturally neutral’ and therefore travel easily through time and place and can be re-invented over and over again.

### Wednesday, 14.30–15.15

Chia-Wei Lin (Jena, Germany, Indoeuropean, Arabic and South Asian Studies)

Scriptio buddhica, interpretatio islamica – *Buddhist Sūtras Translated in Rašīd al-Dīn's Ġāmi' al-Tawārīḥ*

Rašīd al-Dīn's (1247-1318) *Ġāmi' al-tawārīḥ* (‘Compendium of Chronicles’), often regarded as “the first world history” by historians, contains one of few precious systematic accounts introducing Indian religions to the Islamic world. The Indian history in the *Ġāmi' al-tawārīḥ* is composed of three parts: (I.1) a chronological and geographical description of India based on al-Bīrūnī's *Kitāb al-Hind*, (I.2) a history of the rulers of Delhi, (II) the life and teaching of Śākyamuni according to a Buddhist monk from Kashmir named “Kamālaśrī Bahṣī” (a loaned title from Chin. 博士 via Old Uyghur *bahṣī*). Buddhist parallels of Śākyamuni's biography reported in the *Ġāmi' al-tawārīḥ* have been identified in Chinese, Sanskrit, Pali and Tibetan Buddhist canons by Schopen (1965), Sakaki (2000), Elverskog (2008) and Lin (2021).

Based on the manuscripts British Library MS Add 7628 (in Persian) and Khalili Collection MS 727 (in Arabic), this paper examines how Buddhist terminology and formulaic phrases are transcribed, translated, or paraphrased from Indic into Arabic and Persian in Rašīd al-Dīn's rendition of Śākyamuni's biography. A particular focus will be (1) on Ch. 8 in Persian or the \**Ārya-vaśiṣṭha-sūtra*, identified to be the parallel of the Pali *Vāseṭṭhasutta* (*Āṅguttara-nikāya*) and the Tibetan *'Phags pa gnas 'jog gi mdo* (Derge Kanjur 333); (2) Ch. 16 in Persian or Ch. 17 in Arabic, identified to be the parallel of the Sanskrit *Devatāsūtra*, of which manuscript has been newly discovered and identified in Gilgit (Mette 1981), the Chinese 天請問經 *Tian qǐng wèn jīng* (Taishō 592), the Tibetan *Lha'i mdo* (Derge Kanjur 329), and some Old Turkic fragments from Turfan (Zieme 2002). With the help of parallel Buddhist sources as well as Rašīd al-Dīn's Quranic and Sufi references, this paper will re-evaluate Buddhist translations as a transcultural phenomenon that spans from East Asia all the way to the Mediterranean world.

### Wednesday, 15.45–16.30

Christian Høgel (Lund, Sweden, Ancient and Byzantine Greek Philology)

*Euthymios the Athonite – A Georgian Translator Updating Greek metaphrasis*

Euthymios the Athonite (ca. 955-1028) was a most productive translator between Greek and Georgian, producing numerous Georgian translations of Greek patristics and hagiography, but also conveying new texts from Georgian into Greek. Most importantly he was the person to translate into Greek the *Barlaam and Ioasaph* story (in the west known as *Barlaam and Josafat*). As is clear from the new edition of the Greek text by Robert Volk, Euthymios at some point even updated his own translation, so that we have two slightly differing versions from his hand. But Euthymios's manner of translating deserves special attention, for he seems to have employed quite inventive procedures. When translating from Greek into Georgian, he would accommodate, rephrase, sometimes abbreviate, all measures that would aim at including introductory tools for readers unfamiliar with Byzantine text culture. The same vein of thought went into Euthymios's (and other subsequent Georgian translators') colophon texts, which sometimes extended into to becoming full prologues to the new translated text. When translating from Georgian into Greek, however, Euthymios would apply a different method. Whereas much of the narrative backbone of the new text was fairly direct translations of the important events and dialogues, as found in the Georgian original, Euthymios's Greek *Barlaam and Ioasaph* became a much longer text by the inclusion of much new material. For in order to secure Byzantine wording and style for the text, Euthymios copied long passages from other texts more or less directly into the story. Set scenes describing e.g. questioning, conversion, or pagan rituals were taken from Greek hagiography, whereas he fleshed out all passages alluding to faith with quotations from the Bible or Greek church fathers. The most well-known example of this is the long quotation of the so-called *Apology of Aristides*, which Barlaam now becomes the mouthpiece of. But the quotations are numerous and ubiquitous in the text, and since much of the hagiographical material is taken from the contemporary Metaphrastic (rewritten) hagiographical texts, it is fair to ask whether Euthymios was thereby renewing the Greek praxis of *metaphrasis*, the rewriting of hagiography that became so popular from the ninth-tenth centuries. An indication that Greek writers (and rewriters) may have learnt from Euthymios's style of translation may be found in the twelfth-century *Life of Kyrillos Phileotes*. This saint's Life, written by Nikolaos Kataskapenos, demonstrates a similar mosaic nature, with numerous quotations enveloping a simple narrative, with an openness to new narrative modes in a manner very similar to the one Euthymios introduced to the Greek world with his translation of the *Barlaam and Ioasaph*.

### Wednesday, 16.30–17.15

Natalie Köhle (Sydney, Australia, History and Philosophy of Science)

*Toward a Connected History Approach to Chinese Medicine: The Case of Phlegm*

Phlegm (*tan* 痰) figures as a major cause and consequence of disease in late imperial Chinese medicine. Curiously, however, when we go back to the classics, the very notion of phlegm is entirely absent. The rise of phlegm represents one of the fundamental transformations in the history of Chinese medicine. In this presentation, I argue that a little-known chapter on phlegm in Wang Gui's 王珪 (1264–1354) *On the Art of Nourishing Life* (1338), notable for discussing a host of unprecedented practices and concepts in Chinese phlegm theory, was pivotal for this transformation. I draw attention to a strong resemblance with Galenic medical theories and this resemblance was the result of a hitherto overlooked knowledge transmission, that is the transmission of Galenic medical ideas to pre-modern China.

By means of a thorough philological examination of *On the Art of Nourishing Life*, I show that, although at first sight, the work seems to be composed entirely within the framework of traditional Chinese medicine, it is actually a translation: Its author, Wang Gui, has rearranged existing emic notions and concepts and put them to work to 'translate' some of the core theories of Galenic medicine into a Chinese medical framework.

I then go on to situate *On the Art of Nourishing Life* in the context of the corpus of earlier and later works in Chinese medicine and discuss the ways in which it promoted the rise of phlegm in Chinese medical theory, and how this rise, in turn, spurred major transformations in the understanding of sickness—in terms of both etiology and therapy. I also demonstrate that the very term 'phlegm' (*tan* 痰) ceased to mean 'phlegm' in the narrow sense of the word but began to be used to render and translate the full range of the pathogenic Galenic humours: phlegm, bile, and black bile.

Based on these findings, I argue that (1) in contrast to the current scholarly consensus, Chinese medicine did *not* develop in isolation before encountering Western medicine in the 19th century, it was inextricably entwined with the history of Eurasian medical traditions since at least the Yuan period (1271–1368). (2) Galenic theories of the humours were not alien to Chinese medicine; they were an important vehicle for the Eurasian transfer of medical ideas.

My argument is not only important for the historiography of Chinese medicine, but for the historiography of global medicine at large. It also invites contemplation on the current state of the field: Current scholars of the history of Chinese medicine agree that many of the *materia medica* used and traded in medieval Chinese were of West Asian origin, and that this shows that China had strong links to the rest of the world. How is it that, at the same time, they maintain that the medical theories of Chinese medicine remained entirely disconnected from foreign traditions?

### Wednesday, 17.30–19.00

Glenn Most (Chicago, USA, Classical Philology)

*From Athens to China and Back: A Western Student of Ancient Greece Looks at the Chinese Classical Tradition*

Until recently, modern Europe and the cultures that derive from it accorded an unquestioned privilege to the Classical traditions they knew best, those of ancient Greece and Rome. Comparative studies tended to be few and were often rejected as being superficial. Now a variety of economic, political, and ideological factors have made not only the West become much more open to considering the value of other cultures than its own, but also have made those other cultures much more interested than previously in exchanges of all sorts with the West. I myself am by profession a Western student of ancient Greece; but I have always believed that one can only understand one Classical tradition well if one sees it in comparison with other Classical traditions. Among the dozen or score of Classical traditions scattered throughout the world, the Greek and the Chinese are two of the ones that have flourished the most. It is worth studying them comparatively, because not only their similarities, but also their differences, and the relative independence and lack of contact between them for most of their history, can tell us much about what makes a Classical tradition. This can only be done seriously by

groups of researchers with different competences but shared questions and mutual respect. But someone has to make a start; and this lecture is intended as one such start.

### **Thursday, 9.00–9.45**

Andrea Acri (Paris, France, South Asian Studies)

*The Sanskrit-Old Javanese tutur literature in the light of transregional connections between South and Southeast Asia*

An extensive body of religious literature, known as tutur and tattva, was composed in Java and Bali in the period from c. the ninth to the sixteenth century, and has been preserved up to the present on palm-leaf manuscripts. It is mainly concerned with the reconfiguration of Indic metaphysics, philosophy, soteriology, and ritual along localized lines, and often built in the form of Sanskrit verses provided with an Old Javanese prose exegesis—each unit forming a “translation dyad”. The Old Javanese prose parts document cases of linguistic and cultural localization that could be regarded as broadly corresponding to the Western categories of translation, paraphrase, and commentary, but which often do not fit neatly into any one category. These “cultural translations” document a “creative reuse” of Indic material, and reflect the ways in which local agents (re-)interpreted, synthesized, fractured, and restated the messages conveyed by the Sanskrit verses in the light of their contingent contexts, agendas, and prevalent exegetical practices.

My paper will investigate the connections—in terms of networks of texts, practices, and historical persons—that shaped this India-inspired, culturally and linguistically hybrid Sanskrit-Old Javanese literature. It will frame these connections in terms of intra-Asian (maritime) circulatory dynamics involving the transfer of Indic languages (i.e., Sanskrit), textbuilding and hermeneutical techniques, social norms, and religious systems from the Indian subcontinent to insular Southeast Asia, and the local responses that led to their adaptation and “vernacularization” in the literary traditions of Java and Bali. First, it will present and discuss cases of quotation and borrowing of portions of Sanskrit prototypical scriptures, as well as rare references to the actual titles of Sanskrit scriptures, in Old Javanese texts. Second, it will focus on human connections, namely the documented travels of Buddhist masters to the Indonesian archipelago in the medieval period, and their influence on textual practices and canons, as well as the possible allusions to premodern Indian authors in Old Javanese Śaiva texts. Third, it will problematize the asymmetrical way in which the “story” of the cultural transfers from India to Southeast Asia has been narrated thus far, advocating a multi-centric and multi-directional approach—for instance, by highlighting the creative role of Southeast Asian agents, and the Southeast Asian cultural features and religious paradigms appropriated by travelling Buddhist agents who transmitted texts and practices to other areas of Asia, including Tibet, China, and Japan.

### **Thursday, 9.45–10.30**

Mert Moralı (Izmir, Turkey, Translation Studies)

*Transformation through Translation: The Introduction of Epic Theatre into the Turkish Theatrical System through Brecht Translations*

This paper investigates how epic theatre was introduced to the Turkish theatrical system in the late 1950s and mid-1960s through the translation of Bertolt Brecht’s plays. It claims that these translations and subsequent productions in different forms eventually played a role in the gradual transformation of the cultural life of Turkey. The early Brecht translations into Turkish initiated the import of epic theatre as a genre to the Turkish theatrical system. These translations were followed by paratextual materials such as extended prefaces accompanying the in-print translations of Brecht plays, opinions in local newspapers, play reviews, and theoretical writings on epic theatre. The introduction of this brand-new genre was further encouraged by the first Brecht performances on the Turkish stage by amateur theatre groups. Afterwards, Istanbul City Theatres and private theatre groups started to stage Brecht plays and heavily publicized their new repertoire through the means of various publications. The Turkish staging

of Brecht sparked hectic debates and led to intense divisions not only among the theatre professionals, but also in the whole cultural life and the public arena. That is, the theatre house staging Brecht's *Der gute Mensch von Sezuan* was plundered by fanatical right-wing groups in 1964. This incident deeply polarized the secular and conservative sides as reflected in the discourse of the opposing newspapers. However, the Turkish translations of Brecht plays did not only challenge the political and intellectual life of Turkey during the 1960s. The innovatory aesthetical and ideological nature of Brecht's works in Turkish translation also paved the way for the production of the first Turkish epic plays such as *Keşanlı Ali Destanı* [The Ballad of Ali of Keshan] by the Turkish playwright Haldun Taner. These indigenous epic plays had a transformative effect on the Turkish theatre since they combined the epic elements of Brecht theatre with the traditional Turkish theatre. This transformation gave way to the formation of a new Turkish epic theatre and the creation of a new repertoire of political plays, which contributed to the re-shaping of the cultural life of Turkey.

#### **Thursday, 11.00–11.45**

Max Deeg (Cardiff, UK, Buddhist Studies)

*Making Sense of the Other: Reading and Contextualizing Xuanzang's Representation of India*

This paper will, as a kind of scholarly self-reflection, focus on the reading of the interpretation of Indian culture and society by the Chinese monk and traveller Xuanzang (600 or 602-664) in his "Record of the Western Regions of the Great Tang" (*Datang Xiyu ji*). He was not only a prolific translator of Indian Buddhist texts into Chinese but also a skilful "translator" of India for his Chinese audience or readership. The paper will address the hermeneutical "double bottom" which philologists and historians have to take into account when reading and analysing historical sources which represent other cultures than the ones from which they – both the texts and modern scholars – originate. It will be argued that a meaningful approach to such texts is only viable when the interpretative agenda of the "Urtext" (or the "author") when "describing" the "other" is reconstructed through means of a careful philological reading not only of this text but also of its double context which, in the case of Xuanzang, is a Chinese as well as an Indian one. After reflecting on some of the methodological and philological issues when translating and contextualizing the text, some selected examples from the second chapter of the "Record" will be discussed. It will be argued that a careful reading – applying both traditional philology and a cultural studies approach – will lead to a deeper understanding of the text, its complex structure of meaning, its intentionality, and possible impact and reception beyond the usually assumed "descriptive" or documentary dimension.

#### **Thursday, 11.45–12.30**

Federica Venturi (Paris, France, Central Eurasian Studies)

*Himalayan Encounters: Philological Practices in Reading Orazio Della Penna's (1680–1745) Tibetan-Italian-Tibetan Dictionary*

The proposed paper examines the methodological practices employed in the compilation of the first ever written dictionary of the Tibetan language into a modern western language. Compiled in the first half of the 18th century by Orazio Della Penna (1680–1745), an Italian Capuchin friar sent on an apostolic mission to Tibet, it comprises three manuscripts: a Tibetan-Italian dictionary with 386 pages; an Italian-Tibetan version with 436 pages—both autographs of Della Penna—, and a late 18th century copy of the latter, with 960 pages. Long considered lost, these manuscripts have recently been recovered and are held in a private collection in Italy.

This paper will focus on Della Penna's encounter with the Tibetan language as it can be deduced from an examination of the dictionary entries, which reveals the author's work practices in facing, deciphering, and translating into Italian new cultural concepts that were often wholly alien to him. This

investigation of the dictionary entries will be supplemented by information found in other missionary documents (letters, accounts, etc.) that provide glimpses into the process of writing the dictionary, including the input received from locals of different social extraction and on Della Penna's study of classical Tibetan Buddhist literature under a Tibetan lama. Moreover, this paper will also take in consideration the curriculum that typically formed the scholarly background of Capuchin missionaries and reflect on its possible influences on Della Penna's methodological approach.

Through a comprehensive interweaving of the aforementioned evidence, this paper will propose that through a careful reading of the dictionary it is possible to hypothesize a possible reconstruction of how the dictionary was made, thus shedding new light on the encounter between two very different literate cultures and the strategies employed to facilitate communication between them.

### **Thursday, 16.30–17.15**

Natalia Kamovnikova (Banská Bystrica, Slovakia, Translation Studies)

*Ukrainian Language and Images in Russian New Anti-War Literature*

The ongoing Russian-Ukrainian war has given rise to a new wave of anti-war literature and journalism on both sides of the front. Works written in Ukraine, both in Ukrainian and Russian, are widely available to the international readership unlike anti-war literature and journalism in Russia: aimed at the perpetrators of the tragedy, the sanctions ricocheted off ordinary Russian citizens, involuntarily making the Russian anti-war protest almost invisible to the outside world. Despite the difference in circulation and accessibility as well as significant differences in the language pictures of the warring states, it is striking that the anti-war literature demonstrates the tendency towards bilingualism on both sides of the frontline. The new literary trend taking shape before our eyes unwittingly confirms the statement Monica Juneja made nine years before the war regarding the ability of warfare to create the paradox of bringing together people and identities often fighting across these lines (Juneja and Kravagna 32). For anti-war texts originated in Russia, the employment of Ukrainian language and cultural images manifests redemption and acknowledgement of tragedy. From the first days of war, Russo-Ukrainian bilingualism has become an instrument of expressing protest in Russia: with the open resistance movement crashed by government forces, learning the Ukrainian language, the Ukrainian national anthem, and poems by Taras Shevchenko became the means of personal resistance (Meduza 2022). The employment of the Ukrainian language in the Russian protest literature and journalism and their transculturality therefore confirm the rightful call for philology to move out of the classic paradigm of direct comparison. Indeed, studies in the selection of literary means as a tool for expressing recognition and respect to the language and culture of the officially prescribed political adversary at the risk of losing individual freedom require complex tracing of sociolinguistic, historical, cultural, and personal factors.

This paper will be equipped by examples to demonstrate different purposes for which the Ukrainian language is used in Russian anti-war literature. These purposes include redemption, express of compassion, manifestation of resistance to the Kremlin regime, social manifestation of distancing from the aggressor, and resolving individual and collective traumas.

### **Thursday, 17.15–18.00**

Tobias Weber (Munich, Germany, Finno-Ugric Studies)

*The Interdisciplinary Study of Linguistic Legacy Materials – A Philological Challenge*

Linguistic legacy materials are the result of past studies of the world's languages and oral traditions that survive in archives after the end of active research. Apart from the defining temporal dimension, these artefacts are imbued by various social interactions between researchers, consultants, and a general or academic audience. Consequently, any work using these materials must involve a careful interpretation and evaluation of their traces: Is the language authentic or a result of structured elicitation? Under which circumstances were consultants recruited and interviewed? Are the content and its representation in the materials influenced by stereotype or prejudice that distort our view of the communities and their

languages? Many of these questions cannot be answered by an exclusive expert for the language, culture or folklore contained in the materials, but only through the combination of specific background knowledge and reflective academic practice that addresses past and present research traditions. The task at hand is, thus, philological in its core, revolving around the connection between textual artefacts, language use, and social, cultural and historical contexts: a dual philology of working on the content of the artefact while simultaneously evaluating and curating the artefact as a historical text in its own right. Understanding not only the data contained in the legacy materials but also the contexts of their creation can support researchers and community members aiming to reuse and repurpose the data for their needs; the philological work allows to detect unethical research practice in the past, acknowledge the work of all involved parties, and connect current generations of speakers and researchers with previous ones. Thereby, curation adds value to the legacy materials beyond their preparation for research projects and ties philology to highly topical social and ethical issues.

This paper illustrates the overlapping social dimensions using examples from Estonian dialectology. With first folkloristic and philological collections arising from the work of learned societies and their 16 national romantic aspirations in the 19th century, the practice of data collection and description goes beyond a neutral scientific report. In many cases, scholars tried to present the breadth of their nation's cultural heritage to their compatriots while also trying to fit in with colonial narratives in international academic discourse. If present-day research adopts the descriptions from these legacy materials, it implicitly replicates the distorted views of national romanticism or colonialism. The philological alternative involves careful criticism and curation of the artefacts that aims to identify characteristics introduced by the researchers or their target audience, and separate them from a truthful description of language, culture and history of the Estonian communities in the 19th and early 20th century. In this view, philology is best equipped to handle the interdisciplinary challenges posed by philologists in the past, in the Estonian context and beyond.

### **Friday, 9.00–9.45**

Kevin Chang (Taipei, Taiwan, Cultural History and History of Science)

*A Connected Oriental Philology. A Meeting of National Traditions at the Discovery of Dunhuang*

The discovery of the historical documents, wall paintings and sculptures in the “Caves of Thousand Buddhas” in Dunhuang in northwestern China created an immense sensation in global academia in the early twentieth century. The discovery itself was a continuation of international expeditions into Central Asia and East Turkestan (today's Xinjiang), an even greater cross-national scholarly phenomenon. This paper analyses the motivations for these expeditions and its reactions in the participating countries—Britain, Germany, France, Russia, Japan, and the country that endured these foreign intrusions, China. It situates the oriental philosophy related to these expeditions, and Chinese studies in general, in each individual country. Oriental philology was becoming global, while each country had a very distinct academic and political structure that shaped its oriental study. This paper shows the connection of these different national traditions in the discovery of Dunhuang.

### **Friday, 9.45–10.30**

Avishek Ray (Silchar, India, Literature and Culture of South Asia)

*India as the Home(land) of the Romanies: Philological Comparison Reconsidered*

Since the eighteenth century, the Europeans have framed the Roma as a problem in many different ways. Ethnographers and linguists have seen a scholarly problem, seeking origins and mapping characteristics, while demographers have often sought to ostracize them. Meanwhile, a large number of Orientalist scholars have traced the Roma's origin to India. The premise of such claims rests on philology: structural analysis of the Romani language, which started as early as the eighteenth century, and philological comparison – sometimes rather flimsy – between the Romani and certain Indic languages.

My paper questions the structuralist premise that buttresses such claims and problematizes the methodological apparatuses deployed therein. It seeks to understand what structures of understanding inform the ‘scientific’ claims about the Roma’s Indian origin, and the epistemological implications thereof. It focuses on how scholars and savants have sought to understand Roma populations, particularly in relation to their purported Indian origin, and what their philological methodologies entail epistemologically. The recent findings from genetic mapping, in fact, strengthen the Indian origin theory. However, my argument is not based along the lines of veracity. What I am rather concerned with are the epistemic conditions under which the Roma, or more precisely the quest for their origin, was approached philologically, the ensuing originary theory then advanced and appropriated, and the stakes involved therein. Put differently, how have savants since the eighteenth century deployed philological comparison toward (re)discovering a ‘primordial’ connection between the Roma and India? What are the epistemological stakes in (re)construing a home(land) for the Romanies that few Romanies associate themselves with? Why did philological ‘evidence’, which was deemed sufficient and valid in the nineteenth century, require to be buttressed by genetic ‘evidence’ only within some two hundred years? What sense do we make of the constituency of ‘evidence’ across the two epistemes, and what do the shifting ‘standards’ of evidentiality reveal about the nature of philological comparison?

### **Friday, 11.00–12.30**

Kapil Raj (Paris, France, History of Sciences)

*Using Relational Approaches to Understand Philological Activities in History: The Emergence of Sir William Jones’s Theory of Indo-European Languages*

Although a complete outsider to the domain, having little to say about the historiography or current trends in the global turn in philology, but having discussed the preoccupations and frustrations that lay behind the organisation of this conference, I can only say that they resonate very strongly with what I have faced throughout my career as a historian of science working on the relationship between Europe and the rest of the world in the emergence and development of modern science. Indeed, the duality of methodical nationalism – the assumption that nations are the natural units for study, thus equating society with the nation-state and conflating national interests with the purposes of the social sciences – consistently coupled on a vaster scale with “civilisationalism” – the assumption that civilisations are the natural units for social scientific analysis – have characterized the historiography of the history of science since its rise as a discipline over a century ago. This has encouraged an exclusively comparativist approach when approaching questions that involve larger spaces than the national or the civilisational, as if the world were composed solely of hermetic silo-like social and cultural units of analysis – ethnic, national or civilisational – which develop purely through endogenous dynamics. However, several alternatives – collectively labelled “relational” histories and historiographies – have emerged over recent decades that offer new possibilities of focusing instead on the significant and historically apparent intercultural interactions that have fuelled material, cultural and intellectual change in any society. My own contribution has been in developing an approach that I have called “circulation” to study the construction of knowledge through processes of intercultural encounter and interaction between Europeans and South Asians over the past five hundred years.

This talk will start with a presentation of some of the most well-known relational approaches in addition to comparative history – *histoire carrefour*, *histoire croisée*, connected history and circulatory history... – before developing the last one through an example based on the one example that I have studied, that of Sir William Jones’s career, his sojourn in India and the wider historical and intellectual context of his celebrated philological epiphany. Contrary to his popular portrayal as a lone genius, the “father of scientific linguistics and comparative philology”, I shall focus on the interactions and negotiations with his indigenous interlocutors that conferred novelty to Jones’s various contributions. As we shall see, there were several lively philological traditions in South Asia at the time in contexts as varied as the mastery of classical languages, the concordance between Persian, Sanskrit and Arabic notably for juridical purposes, a search for religious syncretism between Islam and Hinduism through philological and mythographic analysis, and the settling of linguistic rivalries in the Persianate world. As a jurist and key architect of a new legal regime for colonial India, William Jones had to familiarise himself and



interact with these various traditions, leading to his own ethno-linguistic genealogical theory. The talk will conclude with some reflections on the potentials of post-comparative perspectives to fruitfully deal with interactions in a multilinguistic world.