

# CONFERENCE

## Pre-modern Literary

# Transnationalism from a Historical-Comparative Perspective

*19 and 20 June 2025, Rubenszaal, Palace of the Academies, Brussels*

While there have been some studies on the transnational functioning of literatures over the past decade, their historical, geographical and material scope is usually fairly limited. The very few frameworks that are available have mostly been developed to function for post-nineteenth-century literatures and, as such, are often difficult to reconcile with pre-modern situations; the very concept of 'transnationalism,' with its implicit idea of a nation, is even anachronistic from a long-term historical point of view. The great exception is Sheldon Pollock's book on Sanskrit cosmopolitanism, *The language of the gods in the world of men : Sanskrit, culture, and power in premodern India*, that already dates from 2006 and has inspired much discussion but did not have as much consequences.

This conference wants to respond to these knowledge gaps by exploring the following topics:

(1) Transnational awareness: To what extent do premodern literatures exhibit an awareness of their own transnational functioning? For instance, how do they present and negotiate the relationship between transnational functioning on the one hand and more local/regional



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contexts on the other? How do texts reflect on other traditions? What does this say about the specific ways in which transnationalism was shaped and conceptualised in individual traditions?

(2) Transnational actors: Which cultural actors determined the transnational functioning of the four literary traditions? The organisation of literary systems in the pre-modern period strongly differed from the way this is done today. After all, actors that we now take for granted and that often appear in explanatory models about modern transnationalism, such as the commercial book market, internationalized translation or digitalized authorship, did not yet exist before the nineteenth century. Which cultural actors shaped the transnationalist nature of a given tradition?

(3) Transnational aesthetics: In what ways is the transnational functioning of premodern literatures reflected within and shaped by aesthetic and narrative tendencies? Can we denote specific approaches to characterisation, storylines, styles and genres, linguistic register, etc.? What does the literary style in a given tradition tell us about its transnational functioning and connection with other literatures?

(4) Conceptual framework: What could be the central pillars for an explanatory model of pre-modern literary transnationalism? Can we develop an overarching model that still leaves enough room for the respective particularities of different traditions and also critically rethinks the already extant yet deficient models based on modern literatures (with related concepts such as cosmopolitanism, world literature, global literature, etc.)?

## Programme

### THURSDAY 19 JUNE

9.00-9.15 Welcome

9.15-10.30 Keynote by **Karla Mallette** (University of Michigan), *Languages of space, languages of place, and language actors: Trans theory and transnational language*

10.45-12.15 Panel 1

**Paul Johnston** (Stanford University), *Latin around the turn of the second century C.E.: on the emergence of “transnational” Latin*



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**Luise Frenkel** (Universidade de São Paulo), *Syriac between ancient empires and early modern nations: a transnational language without a nation*

**12.15-13.30** Lunch

**13.30-15.00** Panel 2

**John Aspinwall** (Historisches Seminar, Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg), *Jerusalem as a Distant Homeland: Ideas of Heimat in the Historiography of the Religious Orders of Palestine*

**Mathijs Clement** (University of Cambridge), *Ausonius of Bordeaux, or how to write a cosmos of the self*

**15.15-16.45** Panel 3

**Erika Dell'Aquila** (University of Jyväskylä), *Tracing the Travels of Amicus and Amelius: Transmission and Reception of the Old French and Late Old Swedish Versions of the Vita Amici et Amelii carissimorum*

**Mohamed Zaki Lhasnaoui** (Laboratoire LARLANCO FLSH UIZ-Agadir), *Entre Orient et Occident : La circulation des savoirs médicaux à travers les manuscrits arabes du Maroc médiéval*

**18.00** Conference dinner

## FRIDAY 20 JUNE

**9.00-10.30** Panel 4

**Gowaart Van den Bossche** (University of Zürich), *The Epistles of the Sincere Brethren (Rasā'il ikhwān al-ṣafā') as a Transnational Literary Tradition in the Islamicate World and Beyond*

**Alessandro De Blasi** (University of Padova), *Reassessing the Anonymous of Malta and Eugenius of Palermo: Multilingual Poetics and Transcultural Identity at the Norman Court*

**10.45-12.15** Panel 5



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**Simon Leese** (University of Amsterdam), *Territorial bounds of Arabic in India: in search of linguistic purity, compound civilizations, and “native speakers”*

**Yanick Maes** (Ghent University), *Latin Cosmopolitanism at the Crossroads: Confucius, World Literature, and the Provincialisation of Europe*

**12.15-13.30** Lunch

**13.30-15.00** Panel 6

**Irene Gómez Valverde** (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona) - *Paraphrasing the Bible in the Sixteenth Century: Circulation and Editorial Production Centers in Europe (1530–1600)*

**Mark Vessey** (University of British Columbia), *De-centring the New Latin Book Scene: Jerome as Transnational Literary Actor between Rome and Bethlehem, 385–395 CE*



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