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Transmitting and Preserving Languages in the Medieval and Early Modern Mediterranean

International Workshop

5 June 2025
Balliol College, Oxford and online

An event sponsored by
Balliol Interdisciplinary Institute and OCBR

Image Credit: Ioannis Altamouras, *Θαλασσογραφία* (1875) ©National Gallery of Greece

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This one-day workshop brings together international scholars from a range of disciplines to explore how and why languages were taught, learned, and sustained across the diverse and shifting socio-cultural landscapes of the late medieval and early modern Mediterranean. By weaving together these perspectives, the workshop seeks to uncover patterns and connections that are often overlooked when studied within the confines of a single field.

Integrating history with historical sociolinguistics, the workshop aims to identify shared trends, comparable elements, and distinctive features in language learning and transmission. This approach offers a renewed perspective on the interconnected Mediterranean world—a region where multilingualism, mobility, and intercultural exchange were and are central to daily life. The impact of these dynamics on language teaching, preservation, and use has often been underestimated.

The workshop offers a comparative examination of the strategies employed by polities and communities, élites and subaltern groups alike. It investigates the relationship between literacy and spoken language, the emergence of new teaching methods, and their long-term influence on writing practices, diplomacy, translation, and the role of lingua franca. Particular attention is given to less visible actors—students, scribes, teachers, and migrants—whose linguistic practices shaped cultural and social life, even when their voices are largely absent from the historical record.

Rather than simply comparing different regions, the workshop seeks to chorally rethink how language functioned as a social and cultural force in a deeply interconnected Mediterranean. It highlights how linguistic creativity crossed boundaries and contributed to the formation of shared and shifting identities.

The event will include dedicated time for discussion and reflection, allowing participants to engage in a broader conversation about language and cultural transmission. At its core, the workshop presents the medieval and early modern Mediterranean as a space of teaching, learning, and multilingual exchange.

Date: 5th June 2025
Venue: Balliol College, Gillis Lecture Theatre and Massey Room (Oxford OX1 3BJ) & online

Convenors: Daniel Gallaher and Ugo Mondini

For registration and link for online attendance (Teams): ugo.mondini@mod-langs.ox.ac.uk

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Thursday, 5th June 2025

8:45 a.m.	**Registration**
9:00 a.m.	**Welcoming address**
	Introduction Daniel Gallaher (Balliol College – Faculty of History) Ugo Mondini (Exeter College – Faculty of Medieval and Modern Languages)
9:15 a.m.	**First Session** Chair: John-Paul Ghobrial (Balliol College – Faculty of History)
	Syriac reactions to political changes and the 7th-c. translation "movement" Giorgia Nicosia (Ghent University)
	The revival of Syriac in the sixteenth century Lucy Parker (University of Nottingham)
10:45 a.m.	Coffee break
11:00 a.m.	**Second Session** Chair: Theo Maarten van Lint (Pembroke College – Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies)
	Centrifugal Forces v. Recentering Ideology: Linguistic Tensions in the Armenian Oikoumene (1050–1787) S. Peter Cowe (University of California, Los Angeles)
	Kurdish Medrese Learning and Vernacularization in the Ottoman Empire: Towards an Interconnected History Michiel Leezenberg (University of Amsterdam)
12:30 p.m.	Lunch
1:30 p.m.	**Third Session** Chair: Marc D. Lauxtermann (Exeter College – Faculty of Medieval and Modern Languages)
	Which Arabic, Which Quechua?: Spanish Debates on Registers for Catechization from the Mediterranean to the Andes Erica Feild-Marchello (Exeter College)
	Liturgical Diglossia/Bilingualism in Ottoman Asia Minor Mark Janse (University of Cambridge)
	Universal Claims, Multilingual Strategies: Language Ideology and Knowledge Production at the Court of Mehmed II Samet Budak (ANAMED Koç University)
4:30 p.m.	Pause
4:45 p.m.	**Roundtable** with refreshments
5:45 p.m.	**Concluding remarks and discussion** followed by drinks
	Dinner for invited guests