

Language as a Specimen

Conveners:

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Language was never studied by linguists (or philologists) alone. The greater part of the languages of the world were first known in the West through the reports of missionaries, explorers, and colonial administrators, and what they documented reflected their specific interests. With missionaries, this meant that word lists and grammars were accompanied by Lord's Prayers, catechisms, and Bible translations; for explorers and administrators, language was one aspect among many to cover in their accounts of faraway regions. Word lists were used to identify peoples and tribes; toponyms served for geographic description; names of plants and animals were gathered together with specimens and images of plants and animals.

Especially the role of naturalist explorers deserves closer attention in this regard. Prominent examples include Peter Simon Pallas, the editor of Catherine the Great's comparative vocabulary (1786-89); Alexander von Humboldt gathering missionary grammars and other language materials for his brother in South America (1799-1804); and the later South American expeditions by Carl Friedrich von Martius (1817-20) and Alcide d'Orbigny (1826-33). Wilhelm Bleek first analysed the prefix system of Bantu languages on the basis of word lists compiled by naturalist Wilhelm Peters in Mozambique; the languages of the Pacific were documented by the U.S. Exploring Expedition, whose collections laid the basis for the Smithsonian Institution. Much earlier, even Hendrik van Reede's *Hortus Malabaricus* (1678), with its names of plants in four languages, was also a linguistic source; one of the first catalogues of languages (*Mithridates*, 1555) was by Swiss naturalist Conrad Gessner.

This workshop aims to investigate the different ways in which linguistic material has been gathered and used in geographic, botanic, medical, ethnographic etc. researches, from the 16th to the early 20th century. One goal of this is to promote a cross-disciplinary perspective on the history of the language sciences; at the same time, we hope to show how such fieldwork *avant la lettre* contributed to shaping linguistics as a discipline.

Contributions could include case studies on individual figures and collections as well as on the circulation of knowledge through specimens and language materials, theoretical reflections on different local/colonial/expert 'ways of knowing', comparisons between different regions and periods, or other perspectives relevant to the subject. We welcome contributions in English and French; please send abstracts for presentations to floris.solleveld@kuleuven.be