



DEPARTMENT OF ARABIC AND SEMITIC STUDIES
AND THE CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF RELIGIONS
SOFIA UNIVERSITY ST. KLIMENT OHRIDSKI



YOU ARE CORDIALLY INVITED TO A LECTURE BY

PROFESSOR MARKHAM J. GELLER

University College London

From Cuneiform to Karshuni: Ancient Babylonian Medicine in Aramaic and Syriac

The lecture will take place on 5 January 2026 at 5:00 p.m. in Hall 111,
Center for Oriental Languages and Cultures, Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski
79 Todor Alexandrov Blvd., 1303 Sofia

Languages die hard, and not without a struggle. The demise of Akkadian on cuneiform tablets has been greatly overestimated, judging by the evidence of ancient medicine. The records of medical diagnoses, drugs, and treatments from Mesopotamia in Late Antiquity (1st–6th centuries CE), preserved in Aramaic and Syriac, show extensive influence from Babylonian cuneiform medicine. This has been almost entirely overlooked by historians of ancient medicine.

MARK GELLER holds a degree in Classics from Princeton and a PhD in Mediterranean Studies from Brandeis, where he wrote his dissertation on Aramaic magic bowls in relation to Rabbinic texts. A leading and big-hearted scholar, he is highly accomplished in the Semitic languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, Ugaritic, Syriac, and Arabic). He is also a gifted epigraphist with a particular passion for cuneiform, especially Sumerian–Akkadian medical and magical texts.

Jewish Chronicle Professor in the Department of Hebrew and Jewish Studies at University College London since 1976, he served as Head of Department (1984–93) and has directed the Institute of Jewish Studies since 1982.

The author of over 200 publications, Mark has received numerous grants and awards, as well as honorary doctorates from New Bulgarian University and Sofia University. In 2016 he completed his *magnum opus* on bilingual Sumerian–Akkadian incantations against “evil demons,” while serving as Principal Investigator on an ERC Advanced Grant on Babylonian medicine at the Freie Universität Berlin (2013–2018), which reshaped cuneiform medicine. This work was complemented by a Wellcome Trust grant, led by him and colleagues at the British Museum (2020–2023). In 2024, he published his edition of the third part of the *Syriac Book of Medicines*, where he harvested hundreds of Akkadian loanwords and calques, a discovery that further illuminates the final phases of the Akkadian language.