

Motions of Knowledge – Knowledge in Motion. Conceptualizing Knowledge Circulation for Historical Research

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This year's annual GRACEH (Graduate Conference in European History), generously supported by the Doctoral School of Historical and Cultural Studies, as well as the Austrian Academy of Sciences, took place online. Besides students from other partner universities of GRACEH (European University Institute, Florence; Central European University, Budapest/Vienna; University of Oxford), there was a considerable number of participants from other institutions. The relevance of this conference on „knowledge in motion“ was made abundantly clear by the current situation in which knowledge, especially expert and political knowledge, is increasingly questioned to the extent that many thinkers overtly identify a „crisis of expertise“. This conference aimed to broaden our understanding of how knowledge is produced, co-produced, negotiated, disseminated and circulated; by whom, where, when, and how. Its objective was to bring together state-of-the-art historical research that analyzed how knowledge evolved and transformed, why certain types of knowledge appear and disappear, and what the effects of these processes were in various contexts. In short, it offered a digital space for early career researchers to bring together various historical perspectives on the ever-changing, mobile and transformative nature of knowledge, in the broadest sense.

These questions were eagerly taken up by all the participants. In particular, the presentations were generally centered around three core themes: 1) power relations and hierarchies in knowledge production and circulation, 2) actors of knowledge, and 3) specialty and travelling knowledge. The latter theme

concerned questions of how knowledge travelled transnationally, through different local spaces (media, laboratory, prison, urban space etc.) and in time. The second topic revolved around the way expert and lay carriers of knowledge came together and the entanglements between human and non-human actors. The first theme was used to address questions about the way power relations determined what kind of knowledge was produced – i.e. what the object of study was and how this was framed –, and which actors were acknowledged as carriers of knowledge.

To engage with such questions, a critical perspective of the historian is indispensable. This was emphasized in the first keynote lecture by KAPIL RAJ (Paris) who offered a brief conceptual history of the concepts of „diffusion“ and „circulation“ in the history of science and knowledge production, as well as an overview of historiographical tendencies to have their meanings overlapped. Raj made a plea to historians to move away from the „diffusionist“ perspective that knowledge originates in a certain, often Western, context and thereafter spreads to other areas and epistemic communities. This was problematic as it implied that knowledge is a stable category, unaffected by intercultural encounters, and denied the agency and knowledge traditions of those who „receive“ it. Through examples from early modern botanical knowledge in India, Raj demonstrated the potential pitfalls of such approaches and the conceptualization of such narratives by using „circulation“ as a key concept. Through highlighting the power relations and underlying arguments based on civilizational hierarchies between the „West“ and „the rest“, he proposed focusing on the role of other actors, such as local physicians, in the knowledge production, and not regarding them as mere passive receivers of what historians used to conceptualize as „modern Western science“.

This perspective was the basis of various papers that touched upon the question of how power relations influenced the way knowledge was framed and produced. Imperial knowledge transfers were one of the most prominent empirical examples for theorizing on the nature of „knowledge in motion“ throughout the various panels, including both

maritime and continental empires. For instance, SVEN MÖRSDORF (Florence) gave an overview of the exchange of colonial knowledge between the British Empire and Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, as did VOJTĚCH POJAR (Budapest/Vienna) who presented an interesting study on various epistemic communities within the multiple urban centers of Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, and how they bred eugenic thought. In her presentation on Jesuit ethnographic knowledge production about Japan, FRIEDERIKE PHILIPPE (Berlin) demonstrated that Jesuit missionaries believed they could „diffuse“ Christianity throughout Japan. Her analysis illustrated that in their collection and compilation of ethnographic knowledge of the Japanese, the Jesuits were influenced by racial Othering practices and projected contemporary European denominational conflicts onto their „object“ of study, which resulted in stereotypical accounts.

A critical focus on power relations also inspired participants to shift the focus from experts and scientists and bring into focus actors who had, either in history or in historiography, been overlooked as knowledge makers and carriers. In his analysis of artisan passports and secrete police files on journeymen associations, SEBASTIAN DRAGAN MAJSTOROVIC (Florence) showed how the extensive travelling culture of these craftsmen, their network and their skills (as bookbinders and typesetters for example) allowed them to produce and carry activist and radical knowledge throughout 19th century Central Europe. Moreover, in his research on the plantations of Barbados, JOSEPH BIGGERSTAFF (Berlin) argued that the agricultural innovations of this region were not simply introduced by the slaveholders but were, at least in part, the result of the embodied knowledge of the enslaved. The relevance of such a focus on embodied knowledge of marginalized groups was further emphasized in another paper, discussing another spatial and temporal context; the force-feeding of suffragette prisoners in early 20th century Britain. HEIDRUN MÜHLBRADT (Göttingen) discussed how the women’s movement shared the painful bodily experiences of force-feeding with the public as evidence of the

violent repression of women in England by the government. However, as physicians did not recognize and interpret these symptoms as evidence of governmental violence but as proof of the hysterical nature of the prisoners, their message was not received.

This focus on the relationship of expert-laymen knowledge exchange and the hierarchies thereby implied proved a fruitful perspective. This was also demonstrated by JANA HUNTER (Oxford) and SIGA MAGUIRAGA (Florence) who focused on actors such as travellers, pilgrims and colonial explorers, and used their output such as travelogues as primary sources for tracing the process of knowledge production, circulation and negotiation.

The rethinking of who knowledge-makers were was also a central theme in the second keynote address by KATHARINA KREUDER-SONNEN (Vienna). Shifting the focus to Central European scientists, a group that has been largely ignored as producers of this knowledge, she analyzed the travels of a Polish physician and bacteriologist. Kreuder-Sonnen presented this case study to illustrate the various methodologies historians could use to „grasp a world where everything is in motion [and] there are no clear boundaries.“ One of the instruments from her toolkit was Actor-Network Theory (ANT) as developed by Bruno Latour. Applying his notion of flat ontology and standpoint that non-human actors have agency (i.e. that they act in a way to enable or disable connections to be formed), she analyzed what role non-human actors played in the circulation of knowledge on rabies vaccination. For example, she showed the role that laboratory rabbits and statistics played, and how a top hat, worn by the Polish physician, almost prevented his access to the laboratory of the Parisian inventor of the vaccine. In this way, the keynote showed how the application of this ANT perspective can enable historians to carefully consider all actors involved in knowledge circulating processes, not favoring one over the other or dismissing and overlooking contributors.

Several papers followed this line of thought and illustrated the role that objects, particularly books, play in knowledge transfer. LISA LUDWIG (Göttingen) suggested that

the shape and size of the space in which knowledge is created, for example, a museum hall, also plays a role. Further research could further conceptualize the role that such physical spaces play in knowledge circulation. Other tools that were introduced during the keynote address were the concepts of *histoire croisée* by Werner and Zimmermann and micro-history. Kreuder-Sonnen combined a focus on how concrete actors travel with an emphasis on local practices. She aimed to show how local places and actors were connected and how they successfully maintained these relations. By combining both perspectives in her case study, Kreuder-Sonnen illustrated how a seemingly local practice of laboratory research in Paris was part of a large international network that facilitated the spread of the rabies vaccine. To facilitate research on such networks and to trace what they looked like, other participants pointed out that digital humanities and mapping tools could prove useful, as was illustrated in by ANNA REGENER (Bamberg) and ZRINKO NOVOSEL (Zagreb). However, during the debate there was a common understanding that choosing a micro- or macro level of analysis is not solely the decision of the historian. It was determined in the first place by the source material and, as Kreuder-Sonnen pointed out, by the historical actors and the way they defined themselves.

The keynote ended with a reflection on the concept of diffusionism that was introduced by Raj. The presenter asked, whether looking at knowledge objects that appear as „immutable mobiles,“ such as the laboratory rabbits, would not suggest a diffusionist perspective and whether it would be more fruitful to look at „mutable mobiles,“ actors that do not remain stable during their travels. We think that the object of the case study, the Polish physician, was a perfect example of such a shape-shifting actor, as he was not only altered by the knowledge he gathered but even transformed his own body in the process by receiving the vaccine. Other examples of mutable mobiles were discussed, such as the exhibition objects that were central in Panel XI. In addition, the paper of THOMAS SCHIRA (Trier) on the adaptations of John Jewitt's captivity narrative illustrated the importance

of extending our view beyond transnational knowledge circulation towards the mutable mobiles through time.

Throughout the conference, participants referred to knowledge as a performance. This concept took the center stage in BASTIAN SPANGENBERG's (Paris) argument that we live in a post-truth society in which the notion of true knowledge is no longer important. He illustrated this by explaining that instances in which politicians deliberately tell lies or even absurdities are not even attempts at truth claims but instead demonstrations of power. This provoked an interesting debate concerning the question of how such information was received. Did the audience believe these absurdities were the truth and did they care about this? Such questions about the recipients of knowledge, or non-knowledge claims, can offer a starting point for further research, as it was an underdeveloped issue in the program, despite issues like non-circulation of knowledge being thoroughly addressed throughout the conference.

Moreover, as the closing remarks by Claudia Kraft (Vienna) indicated, future research should also be more mindful of our typical analytical reflex to compare histories of knowledge in motion. While such a tendency to compare was natural at a conference like this, she emphasized that we needed to reflect on the question of whether our tendency to compare different contexts in which knowledge circulates could be considered a form of diffusionism. Do we wrongfully assume that insights from one context are comparable to, or can even be applied to another? Perhaps, this question could be answered by returning to the debate on the historian's toolkit.

Opportunities for addressing these issues will arise in a potential common publication relating to the overall topic of the conference, most probably a special issue of the „European Review of History / Revue européenne d'histoire“. Participants of this year's GRACEH were encouraged to indicate their interest in contributing to it, based on the research they presented. The next GRACEH is set to take place at the University of Oxford in April 2022.

Conference overview:

Claudia Kraft and GRACEH 2021 Organisation Committee (Vienna): Opening address

Keynote Lecture I

Kapil Raj (EHSSS Paris): Why Circulation? Motion in Knowledge under a Historian's Lens

Panel I: Appraising, Negotiating and Contesting the Status of Knowledge

Joseph Biggerstaff (Humboldt University / Free University Berlin): Ecology, Knowledge, and Power in the Plantation Complex: 1624-1700

Anna Grutza (Central European University, Budapest/Vienna): Intimate Epistemic Economies of Strictly Limited Distribution: Following the Spies and Informants of Radio Free Europe from the U.N. to Polish TV Shows

Bastian Spangenberg (Sorbonne University, Paris): Absurd Politics and the Impossibility of Positivist Knowledge Transfer

Panel II: Cross-Regional Encounters and their Implications for Knowledge Production

Siga Maguiraga (European University Institute, Florence): Knowledge of Africa: The Encounter between West African Pilgrims and Scholars and European Explorers in 19th Century Cairo

Jana Hunter (University of Oxford): The British Traveller and the Czech Native: Circulating Knowledge of 19th Century Prague

Balázs Balatoni (University of Szeged): „A country almost as wild as Afghanistan” – Representation and Knowledge of Southeastern Europe in the Work of the Balkan Committee

Panel III: The Role of Spatiality for Knowledge Production

Anna-Maria Hünnes (University of Erfurt): Scientific Knowledge Moving through Town. Interwoven Spaces of Knowledge Production in 19th Century Gotha

Morgan Breene (University of Oxford): To Cross a Surf Both Alarming and Dangerous: The Exclusionary Knowledge of Motion in the 19th Century Madras Littoral

Elisa Chazal (European University Institute, Florence): The „Old cities“: Place of Adaptation for Knowledge in Motion

Panel IV: Political Activism and the Movement of Radical Ideas

Sebastian Dragan Majstorovic (European University Institute, Florence): Radical Agitation on the Road: Journeymen Activism in Central Europe, c. 1834-1848

Anna Regener (University of Bamberg): The Geography of Books: National Libraries, Anarchism, and the Nodes of Global Radical Knowledge

Heidrun Mühlbradt (University of Göttingen): Epistemic Resistance against Forcible Feeding in Prison

Keynote Lecture II

Katharina Kreuder-Sonnen (University of Vienna): History in Motion: How to Disentangle an Entangled World

Panel V: Knowledge Circulation through Transmission and Translation

Nicola Carotenuto (University of Oxford): Merchant Manuals and the Transmission of Knowledge in the 14th Century

Krisztina Péter (Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest): The Circulation of the Spanish Armada

Panel VI: Non-Humans as Actors of Knowledge

Jens Amborg (Uppsala University): Buffon's Dogs, Wolves and Readers: Circulation of Knowledge and Animals in 18th Century Natural History

Nikolaus Thoman (University of Vienna): A Circulating Tool: Clinical, Judicial, and Administrative Uses of Intelligence Testing in Interwar Vienna

Panel VII: Media(lity) of Knowledge: Transformation and Adaptation

Thomas Schira (University of Trier): The Circulating Other: Analysing Knowledge in John Jewitt's Captivity Narrative (1807-2015)

Roland Wolfgang Peball (Alpen-Adria University of Klagenfurt): Knowledge Circula-

tion in Discourse – A Cultural Analytical and Knowledge Anthropological Perspective on Knowledge Production

Panel VIII: Expert Knowledge and the Construction of National Identities

Zoe Lauri (European University Institute, Florence): Mobility Networks and the Circulation of Practical Knowledge in 19th Century Europe: The Italian Mining Corps Apprentices at the École des Mines in Paris

Ivana Mihaela Žimbek (Central European University, Budapest/Vienna): Expert Knowledge Production and Modern Retail in Socialist Yugoslavia, 1950s-1960s

Panel IX: Educational Networks and their Political Dimension

Maria Florutau (University of Oxford): The Circulation of Knowledge and the Habsburg Culture Wars: Studying Abroad in 18th Century Transylvania and the Politics of „Civilization“

Alexandria Dugal (University of Oxford): Knowledge Production and Formation within the Canadian Eiwa Mission Girls' Schools in 1930s Japan: Transnational Communication, International Mobility, and Christian Women's Organizational Networking

Florence Klauda (University of Vienna): What Knowledge do Cultural Institutes Circulate? The Case of the Institut Français de Barcelone (1921-1950)

Immanuel R. Harisch (University of Vienna): The Creation and Circulation of Knowledge on African Trade Unions between „South“, „East“ and „West“ during the Cold War 1960s
Keynote Lecture III

Linda Andersson Burnett (Uppsala University): Circulating Scientific Knowledge: Linnaean Natural History in the 18th Century (cancelled)

Panel X: Knowledge Travelling on Imperial Roads

Maeva Le Roy (European University Institute, Florence): Investigating *l'esprit public* in Napoleonic Europe: The Transnational Circulation of an Administrative Category and its

Limits

Sven Mörsdorf (European University Institute, Florence): Empires Exchanging Colonial Know-How: An Austro-Hungarian Consul's Mission to British Cyprus (1880)

Vojtěch Pojar (Central European University, Budapest/Vienna): Empire and its Discontents: Epistemic Communities and the Emergence of Eugenics in the Late Habsburg Empire

Panel XI: Implicit and Absent Knowledge in Exhibitions and how it can be researched – an Interdisciplinary Approach

Farina Asche / Ramona Bechauf (Georg August University Göttingen): Exhibiting Knowledge/Knowledge in Exhibitions – A Short Introduction into Concepts, Actors and Methods

Johanna Lessing / Klara Wagner (Georg August University Göttingen): The „Inner Circle“: Knowledge Circulation within Institutions

Franziska Lichtenstein / Lisa Ludwig (Georg August University Göttingen): Exploring the Blank Spaces. On Knowledge and Absent Knowledge in Museum Exhibitions

Panel XII: Science on the Move: Circulation within Academic Disciplines

Friederike Philippe (Free University, Berlin): Jesuit Ethnographic Knowledge Production about Japan between Mission Strategies and post-Tridentine Ideals of Catholicism (1549-1583)

Janka Kovács (Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest): From Nervous Distempers to Therapeutic Measures. Teaching „Psychology“ at the Medical Faculties of the Habsburg Monarchy (1786–1830)

Zrinko Novosel (Croatian Institute of History, Zagreb): Knowledge Circulation among the Habsburg Legal Intellectuals in the Early 19th Century. The Case of the Law Textbook „The Basics of General Financial Science“ by Antun Ferdinand Albely

Panel XIII: Looking at Historiography through the Lens of Knowledge Circulation

Ela Bozok / Klaudia Kuchno (European University Institute, Florence): Botero Revisited. The Representations of Poland-Lithuania and Ottoman Empire in „Relazioni Universali“ and Knowledge Production in the 16th Century

Tanja Zakrzewski (University of Potsdam): Dangerous Books – Dangerous Minds. How two New Christians turned Early Modern Spanish Historiography on its Head

Lokesh Durga (Delhi University, New Delhi): European Historical Interest and Regional Historical Narratives: State, Society and Culture in Premodern South Asia (Eastern India)

Closing Remarks

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