

Second ENIUGH-Congress: Session „Premodern History“

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Bericht von: Debora Gerstenberger, Research Training Group „Critical Junctures of Globalisation“, Research Academy Leipzig, University of Leipzig

In the following you find a report on the session „Premodern History“ of the Second European Congress on World and Global History. The general aim and structure of the congress are described at: <<http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/tagungsberichte/id=2309>>

Session: „Premodern History“

Report by Debora Gerstenberger, Research Training Group „Critical Junctures of Globalisation“, Research Academy Leipzig, University of Leipzig

Globalisation and globality are phenomena usually ascribed to the modern period (i.e., to the 19th to 21st centuries) rather than to Ancient, Medieval or Early Modern Times. This notion was certainly not challenged by the Second European Congress of World and Global History held in Dresden where relatively few presentations dealt with periods previous to the so called Age of Globalisation. Yet, there were some papers „ahead of schedule“ here and there, and one of the ten conference sections was entirely designated to cover „Premodern History“. This section explicitly sought to draw attention to structures of world orders, processes of cross-cultural transfer and exchange of different types as well as over long distances from the Middle Ages to the early 19th century. That the section here discussed was the only one not named by its topics but labelled with a „time stamp“ instead does tell us something about the academic structures within the field of (Global) History, though. Additionally, one could spot a clear chronological setup within this division: Consisting of two panels, the first one meant to treat the Early Modern era while the second one, divided into two sub-panels, was to a large extent dedicated to the Middle Ages.

Directly referring to the overarching theme of the congress was panel no. 1 of the „Premodern History Section“ chaired by PEER VRIES (Vienna) dealt with „World Orders in Early Modern Time“. Obviously, the title already entails the assumption that there have been world orders previous to the French Revolution. At least to some 20 interested people in the audience the panelists were able to demonstrate that this motto was more than a lip service. Differing widely in regard to temporal and spatial scope, the topics of the presentations ranged from the harsh critique and opposition against the Societas Jesu with its so-perceived strive for world domination (16th to 18th centuries), which KAREL DAVIDS (Amsterdam) called an early „anti-globalisation“-movement, to the Philippines as „world region“ and theatre of the struggle for economic benefits – and predominance – between Japan, China and Spain in the 16th and 17th century (BIRGIT TREMML, Vienna). Two further papers dealt with the transfer of knowledge and techniques from Asia to Europe and vice versa, more precisely, ASHLEY E. MILLAR (London) analysed the transfer of economic knowledge from China to Great Britain in the 18th century and especially the effects this know-how had on the British society whereas SALVATORE CIRIACONO (Padua) reflected upon the transmittal of „superior“ German and Dutch medical knowledge to Japan in the 16th to 18th centuries as a matter of sensitive politics.

If it is opportune to state some general trends, the speakers dedicated themselves rather to Europe and Asia than to Latin America and Africa, more extensively to economy and politics than to culture. Furthermore, there was more reflection on processes than on entities and rather on struggles over different (perceived) orders than on the configuration of one single, however transitory, world order. Developments discussed such as the global entanglement in certain „world regions“ and the transfer of knowledge from and to Europe as well as the techniques used by Early Modern historians, that is, the particular interest for relevant actors (be they private or governmental) and the use of popular sources such as pamphlets and common journals bear witness to a truly global trend in (Ear-

ly) Global History. It is manifest in the avoidance of simplistic depictions of world order and the particular attention to power relations as a result of interactions on a large/global scale, notabene, first and foremost produced and challenged on a sub-governmental level. In the final discussion, all panelists and the chair argued with good reason that the Early Modern period offered great opportunities for the understanding of changing world orders and the mechanisms of global and trans-cultural interactions in general.

Whereas in panel no. 1 key terms like „cross-cultural interaction“ and „transfer“ had prevailed, the second panel entitled „Sacred Rulership as a Paradigm for a Pre-Modern World Order?“ chaired by WOLFGANG DREWS (Bonn) was entirely consigned to „trans-cultural comparison“. With only one exception the seven panelists were members of the academic network „Vormoderne monarchische Herrschaftsformen im transkulturellen Vergleich“ („Pre-modern monarchic rulership, trans-culturally compared“) funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG) and also directed by Wolfgang Drews.

The first part of the panel (2a) dedicated to „Motivations and conceptualizations“ meant to clarify the conditions under which pre-modern rulers referred to religious arguments either in political discourse or by means of symbolic representations. Whereas all papers could certainly be classed with the New Cultural/Political History („Kulturgeschichte des Politischen“) for focussing on ways and techniques used to achieve and maintain political power as well as the intended (world) order, the time span here stretched from Antiquity to Early Modern Time (with one paper on each end of the line and the rest literally about the „Middle“ Ages). Likewise, the geographical scope was huge ranging from Europe across the Middle East to India. Due to the method used by all panelists, namely „Historical Comparison“, for the most part Europe or else Christianity served as reference point of analysis. Panel no. 2b called „Representation and religious performance“ then drew upon specific forms of representation and practice of power, focusing e.g. on the reference to Christian and Islamic rulers in

prayers (JENNY RAHEL OESTERLE, Braunschweig), on the depiction of monarchs in sacred images (GERALD SCHWENDLER, Zürich) and on the act of pilgrimage performed by rulers both of the occident and the orient in order to consolidate territorial order (SEBASTIAN KOLDITZ, Leipzig). The outcome was, however, that religion provided the single most important source of arguments conducive to the construction of political legitimacy from antiquity onwards until Early Modern Time (as exemplified in the case of India), not only in Europe but in all geographical regions under scrutiny.

True enough, whoever should have been looking, at this panel, for trans-cultural interactions on a worldwide scale so prevalent at the conference and in the field of Global History in general had to cope with the fact that Medieval History has its own ways of dealing with global contexts. Yet, the panelists answered the question about usefulness and realisation of comparison with the argument that the task of Medieval historians at present time is to raise awareness, in general terms, of other cultures and to put into perspective the so-called special European case. Thus, different kinds and levels of comparison as well as the creation of certain religious, cultural and political entities (for example along the lines of Max Weber and Pierre Bourdieu) were strongly defended by Wolfram Drews and other members of the DFG network. In the final plenary discussion of the conference, ALMUT HÖFERT (Basel), Medieval historian and member of the network, addressed the issue of only one single congress section having explicitly dealt with Premodern History. The unanimous answer given by the round table discussants was that there was absolutely no objection against Premodern topics on the part of the steering committee, but supposedly rather a reluctance on the part of historians dealing with Ancient, Medieval or Early Modern history themselves. As the conference showed some work has been going on, but certainly much more is left to really bring together Global Historians and those doing research in Premodern History.

Program of the Session:

World Orders in Early Modern Times, chair
Peer Vries, University of Vienna

Karel Davids: „Plotting against the world? Visions of Jesuit world domination, 16th-18th centuries“

Salvatore Ciriaco: „Engelbert Kaempfer, Philipp Franz von Siebold, Erwin Bälz and the origins of an European Japonism“

Ashley E. Millar: „Shifting civilisational hierarchies: popular British views of China's political economy in the eighteenth century“

Birgit Tremml: „The Philippines and the Pacific Ocean: Interfaces for Intercontinental Business Relations and Cultural Exchange in the Early Modern Era“

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Sacred Rulership as a Paradigm for a Pre - Modern World Order? A diachronic and transcultural perspective on political legitimation (2 parts), chair: Wolfram Drews, University of Bonn

2a: Motivations and conceptualizations

Wolfram Drews: „Towards a Cultural History of Politics in the Middle Ages. Dynastic Legitimation in Christianity and Islam“

Almut Höfert: „Provincializing Europe in the Middle Ages – Sacred Monarchy in Europe and the Middle East“

Antje Flüchter: „Herrschaft und religiöse Legitimation im frühneuzeitlichen Indien – Vorbild oder Gegenbild für ein konfessionalisiertes Europa“

Thorsten Beigel: „Religion und Königtum sind Geschwister – römische und sasanidische Herrschaftsauffassung im 3. und 4. Jahrhundert“

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2b: Representation and religious performance

Jenny Rahel Oesterle: „Islamische und christliche Herrscher im Gebet (10.-12. Jahrhundert)“

Sebastian Kolditz: „Der Herrscher als Pilger im abendländischen und östlichen Mittelalter“

Gerald Schwedler: „Macht braucht ein Gesicht. Sakralisierte Bilder von Königen im Vergleich“

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