

Order into Action. How Large-Scale Concepts of World-Order determine Practices in the Premodern World

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The perception of the world and the categories used to order it vary considerably between different cultures. While the pre-modern systems of world order have been intensively scrutinized, the question regarding how these systems influenced individual or collective behaviours and actions remains rather underexplored. Based on this observation, the conference „Order into Action - How large-scale concepts of world-order determine practices in the premodern world“ (Heidelberg, 10–12. November 2016), organized by Christoph Mauntel (Tübingen), Klaus Oschema (Heidelberg/ Princeton) and Bernd Schneidmüller (Heidelberg) aimed to explore the impact of ideas of order on social realities in the late medieval and early modern periods. Marking the final event of Project A27 „World Orders in Transcultural Perspective“ within the Cluster of Excellence „Asia and Europe in a Global Context“, the conference focused on religious, political, and geographical large-scale models of world order. It concentrated primarily on Latin Europe, the Islamic World, and East Asia, but included Sub-Saharan Africa, Australia, and Mesoamerica as well, with a particular focus on examples that demonstrate, if and how such concepts were put into action.

After a general introduction by CHRISTOPH MAUNTEL (Tübingen) and KLAUS OSHEMA (Heidelberg/ Princeton), the first panel was dedicated to phenomena that might be described as „religious con-

cepts“. In the opening presentation, DAVID MAX MOERMAN (New York) presented evidence from Japanese cartography between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries, underscoring its transcultural character. Japanese Buddhists conceived the earth as a single world continent that contained three realms—Japan, China, and India—as shown by a detailed *mappa mundi* created by Japanese monks in 1364. The arrival of Iberian merchants and Western missionaries from the mid-sixteenth century onwards, introduced European concepts of world order. This represented a major challenge to the established perception: European (Christian) concepts of continents and empires competed with the corresponding Japanese Buddhist ideas. The resulting processes of both approximation and demarcation offer important insights into transcultural exchanges that led, as Moerman argued, to the prolonged parallel existence (and sometimes blending) of the theoretically mutually exclusive systems. While the underlying mechanisms still warrant further exploration, it seems clear that the specific needs of a Buddhist discourse resulted in the continuance of practices that did not come up to the criteria of „Western scientific discourse“.

With a focus on the delimitation between Christian and „pagan“ spheres in the Early and High Middle Ages, NORA BEREND (Cambridge) analyzed the use of the term *christianitas* in political and religious discourse and its relation to corresponding actions. She demonstrated that the notion appeared predominantly in critical situations and served as a call to action, inviting Christian rulers to fight against „foreign“ heterodox threats. The term was, for example, used in ninth-century Italy to call for aid against the „Arabic menace“, as well as in the thirteenth century, when the Mongols threatened Christendom from the East. While the use of the notion *christianitas* could result from a variety of motivations, including the call for financial or military help, Berend demonstrated that the word itself was mainly characterized by its ability to motivate and invite tangible action, and not an abstract term that referred to a well-defined content.

In a complementary perspective, DANIEL

KÖNIG (Heidelberg) compared the Arabic term *dār al-harb* and the Latin term *terra paganorum*. Both notions served to describe the space beyond the influence of Islam and Christianity respectively. Through investigating the emergence, documentation, and contexts of use of the Arabic term *dār al-harb*, König demonstrated that it was implemented in the eighth century, mostly in juridical texts. In this context, the term referred to a sphere that was to be conquered by Islam, but that could at once be entangled with Muslim realms. Due to its use for juridical purposes, the notion had a stronger practical implication than its Latin counterpart *terra paganorum*: the latter mainly emerged only in the ninth century, in a period of expansion, and was thus characterised by its missionary origins. Although it has been used as an implicit part of the conceptual framework of the Christian world, König concluded that it had never become conceptualized to the same degree as its Islamic equivalent.

The second panel of the conference was dedicated to political concepts of world order in Asia, the Middle East, and Europe. MICHAL BIRAN (Jerusalem) examined the ideas of world order and their impact on Mongol politics, during both the period of the united Mongol empire and its dissolution. Based on the better-documented cases of the Yuan Dynasty in China and the Ilkhanate in Iran, Biran demonstrated that Mongol policies had to balance the Chinggisid universalistic aspirations with political realities on the one hand, and with local imperial concepts in China and Iran, but also Tibetan Buddhism and Islam on the other. In the long run, Mongol rulers tended to partly put aside explicit universalistic claims in favour of softer, „globalized“ policies that tolerated various coexisting spatial and imperial concepts. However, the overarching idea of a ‘brotherhood’ of Mongol empires was never abandoned.

Focusing on the Mamluk rulers, ALBRECHT FUESS (Marburg) explored how the motif of the „just ruler“ represented an integral part of the concepts of governance in the Muslim World. This became particularly relevant in the late medieval and early modern Mamluk state, when former military slaves reigned. In order to legitimize their position,

Mamluk rulers had to live up to recognized ideals. Therefore, descriptions of ideal moral behaviour, which could be found in „Mirrors for Princes“ by religious scholars, exerted a crucial influence on the rulers’ actions. According to Fuess, historical writings of the period clearly expressed the idea that no Muslim society could thrive without the cooperation of scholars and rulers. Due to the existence of competing principalities that rivalled their claims to authority, the figure of Alexander the Great became a widespread role model for Muslim rulers. Fuess argued that some aspects of Alexander’s depiction merged with the image of the prophet.

In their combined contribution, CHRISTOPH MAUNTEL (Tübingen) and KLAUS OSCEMA (Heidelberg/Princeton) argued that large-scale shifts in theoretical political concepts in late medieval Europe shaped political practices, thereby reinforcing the role of diplomatic relations, political cooperation, and the idea of political alliances. Even though the idea of the (Holy Roman) Empire’s universal claim remained, a pluralised world-view acquired growing importance from the thirteenth century onwards. As a side effect of this development, which reinforced diplomatic practices and exchange, the use of the notion of ‘empire’ became more flexible. Eventually, the term became a central element in the representation of the entire world as being structured by a number of coexisting empires and kingdoms. In an interdependent development, this change in political thinking and concrete political practices resulted towards the end of the Middle Ages in the prevalence of „collaborative“ models of political cooperation.

The following section focused on geographic concepts of ordering the world, starting with CHRISTINE GADRAT-OUERFELLI (Marseille) who presented her research on reports from medieval travellers to Asia in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Gadrat-Ouerfelli particularly underlined that late medieval travellers passed through spaces that exceeded the geographical ideas and dimensions to which they had previously been used. Furthermore, as the vast territories were also largely unknown to their fellow countrymen,

they had to develop new techniques in order to convey knowledge of this space. These approaches relied primarily on the application of existing (European) concepts of world-order, which were more familiar and thus easier to comprehend for their contemporaries.

MICHAEL WINTLE (Amsterdam) investigated the advent of the Black Magus in contemporary depictions of the „Adoration of the Magi“. In the early fifteenth century, illustrations of the youngest king start to depict him with stereotypically „sub-Saharan African“ features, while the other two Magi could be interpreted as representatives of Europe and Asia. In his analysis of this development, Wintle argued that these visual representations of world order in allegorical form both reflected and advanced the evolving relations between politics and culture in the late medieval and early modern periods. The example of the Three Magi thus allows paradigmatic insights into processes which finally led to the creation of a continental hierarchy that relied on notions of cultural value and that dominated the self-perception of early modern Europe.

The influence of geographic concepts on concrete action in Ming and Qing China was analysed by DONATELLA GUIDA (Naples). In the Chinese world order, the Emperor, or rather „Son of Heaven“, was considered to be the ruler of the whole world. Based on sources from South-East Asia, Guida demonstrated how this order and the interactions between foreign rulers and the Chinese emperor were based on privileges and a tributary system. The Chinese concepts of order did not only apply to their own society, but also equally included foreign peoples, to whom it assigned specific places (and obligations) according to categories that included their geographical location or their political proximity to the empire. This perception of order, however, was not necessarily shared by the subjected peoples.

Approaches to a „global history“ of the premodern period often focus on Europe and Asia, thereby neglecting Africa or listing it just as a part of European and Asian politics. Based on the example of the Sultanate of Kilwa, located on the Indian Ocean in present day Tanzania, MARK HORTON's

(Bristol) contribution illustrated that sub-Saharan Africa participated in wide-ranging political and trade relations. While written sources such as indigenous documents, are rare, excavations prove the existence of contacts between Africa, Arabia, and Europe. Horton's case study about the king of Kilwa's involvement in trans-continental trade illustrated that African states were important actors in the gold and ivory trade that connected Africa with Europe and Asia. In addition, the case of Kilwa, with the creation of an autonomous „Sultanate“ by al-Hasan ibn Sulaiman in the early fourteenth century effectively demonstrates how theoretical concepts translated in concrete actions, as he deliberately tried to imitate early Islamic forms of rule and legitimization.

With her description of the Aboriginal concepts of the universe, VERONICA STRANG (Durham) illustrated how the indigenous populations of Australia traditionally located themselves within a hydro-theological cycle, embodied by a Rainbow Serpent. As ancestors played an essential role in Aboriginal life and beliefs, their lifestyle was generally orientated according to the „law“ of the ancestors. This entailed a particular accent on the harmony with nature and the forefathers, not least connected to particular places. According to Strang, this fundamental belief and the related concept of an ordered universe dominated the Aboriginal way of life over large periods and lead to the creation of profoundly sustainable modes of social organisation.

The conference drew to an end with FRAUKE SACHSE's (Bonn) presentation on one of the most extensive bodies of doctrinal and missionary texts that has been preserved for the Mayan language K'iche', the *Theologia Indorum*. Focusing on the strategies of missionaries and their impact on the conversion of the Highland Maya, Sachse argued that the missionary authors communicated parts of the Christian worldview to the indigenous population, such as the concepts of „heaven“, „hell“, and „resurrection“, by using K'iche' notions and metaphors. The missionaries hoped to increase the probability of a successful adaption of Christian ideas and concepts by adjusting them to indigenous cosmologies. Sachse also emphasized

the intertextual relations between missionary and indigenous K'iche' texts, which make the corpus an exceptional resource for studying the encounter of two religious systems and worldviews.

The final discussion underlined the necessity to bear in mind that the heuristic distinction between religious, political, and geographic concepts of world order represents an artificial and imperfect classification. In most of the contributions, the thresholds between the three categories were fluid and the corresponding concepts have always been intimately linked. In addition, all contributions demonstrated (albeit to varying degrees) that the relationship between theoretical systems of order and individual or collective actions and practices is always reciprocal. In a constant and ongoing process, models of order, processes of perception and description, and actions, appear to be intricately linked. Approaching them from cross-cultural and transdisciplinary perspectives constitutes a helpful and seminal endeavor that not only allows for a better understanding of the complex and varying relations between models of order and ensuing practices, but also identifies the immense potential of further research into the practical relevance of seemingly „merely“ theoretical constructs. Future research might lead to a better comprehension of far-ranging developments in the context of modern globalisation. Although modern European expansionism and imperialism can certainly not be explained exclusively by differing systems of pre-modern world orders, its causes and developments can be better understood through a more thorough analysis of cosmological ideas and their influence on individual's or groups' actions.

Conference Overview:

Introduction

KLAUS OSCEMA (Princeton / Heidelberg)
/ CHRISTOPH MAUNTEL (Tübingen)

Panel 1: Religious concepts

Chair: BERND SCHNEIDMÜLLER (Heidelberg)

DAVID MAX MOERMAN (New York): The Buddhist World Continent and the European World Order: Transcultural Cartography in

Japan, 1300-1700

NORA BEREND (Cambridge): The Concept of Christianitas: a Guide to Action?

DANIEL KÖNIG (Heidelberg): dār al-harb and terra paganorum. On the Practical Implications of Circumscribing the Sphere of the 'Infidels'

Panel 2: Political concepts

Chair: ENNO GIELE (Heidelberg)

MICHAL BIRAN (Jerusalem): The Mongol World-Order: From Universalism to Globalization

ALBRECHT FUESS (Marburg): Global Historiography and Mirrors for Princes: Concepts of Political Rule in the Near East (15th–16th centuries)

KLAUS OSCEMA (Princeton / Heidelberg)
/ CHRISTOPH MAUNTEL (Tübingen): Between Universal Empire and the Plurality of Kingdoms – the Influence of Political Concepts in Late Medieval Latin Europe

Panel 3: Geographic concepts

Chair: JOACHIM KURTZ (Heidelberg)

CHRISTINE GADRAT-OUERFELLI (Marseille): Travelling through empires: how Medieval travellers conceived of Asia

MICHAEL WINTLE (Amsterdam): The Advent of the Black Magus: exoticism, court politics and the creation of a continental hierarchy

DONATELLA GUIDA (Naples): Bestowing Benevolence. The Chinese Imperial World Order and the Construction of its Margins.

Panel 4: Outlook: premodern societies in Africa, the Americas and Australia

Chair: GERRIT JASPER SCHENK (Darmstadt)

MARK HORTON (Bristol): Beyond Eurasia – the African contribution to the premodern world

VERONICA STRANG (Durham): Seeing Through the Rainbow: Aboriginal Australian concepts of an ordered universe

FRAUKE SACHSE (Bonn): Worlds in Words: The Encounter of Pre-Columbian and European Cosmologies in Colonial Missionary and Indigenous Texts from Highland Guatemala

Tagungsbericht *Order into Action. How*

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