

**Making Truth – Administrating Truth.
Establishing Credibility in Early Modern
History**

Veranstalter: Andreea Badea, German Historical Institute Rom; Bruno Boute / Marco Cavarzere, Goethe-University Frankfurt am Main; Steven Vanden Broecke, Ghent University

Datum, Ort: 15.11.2017–17.11.2017, Rom

Bericht von: Frédérique Renno, Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg

This international and interdisciplinary conference was a spinoff to the well-received panel („Wahrheit schaffen – Wahrheit verwalten“) by the conveners at the Hamburg Deutscher Historikertag 2016. Taking up new orientations and concerns in the history of knowledge, the conference focused first and foremost on the credibility of knowledge, its practitioners, and the practices involved in the production of meaning in the Early Modern Period. The notion of credibility as a promising approach for students of humanities to a more general history of ‘Truth’ was central to this conference’s program, aiming, as it did, at avoiding the pitfalls of both Whig history („Science explains Truth, Society explains Error“) and various strands of historical materialism („Society explains both Truth and Error“). True to this mission, ANDREEA BADEA paid tribute in her introductory remarks to the assertion, that the contradictions in early modern knowledge cultures provide historians with challenging questions. These can be summarized in the paradox that enhanced claims to absolute Truth in the context of confessional competition emerged in combination with an increased sense of cognitive uncertainty and a pluralization of disciplines which, to various degrees, tangled with and disentangled from dominant religious and ecclesial narratives. Faced with the fragility of early modern knowledge cultures, historians should pay attention to the evolving modes of knowledge production within their respective interpreted communities as much as with the material practices underpinning – among others – the administration of knowledge systems and the omnipresent strategies of equivoca-

tion, dissimulation and appropriation in order to reconstruct the credibility of early modern ‘Truth’ and its practitioners. This program was pursued in four sessions that, taken together, covered a rather classical range of learned disciplines such as theology, historiography, medicine and the natural sciences; at the same time it included a pivotal session on administrative and legal practice as constitutive elements of early modern cognitive cultures.

Recent scholarship is increasingly turning to doctrinal uncertainty and the practical means to overcome it. The first session on the ‘Pitfalls of Doctrine’, chaired by PAOLO BROGGIO (Rome), opened with RUDOLF SCHÜßLER’s (Bayreuth) overview of scholarly debates in the 16th and 17th centuries related to reasonable disagreement and probability. While these debates were deeply rooted in medieval scholastic thought and method, Schüssler forcibly argued they should be put in their early modern context as a search for a general framework to deal with reasonable disagreement between competent evaluators of truth claims, who were scholars, well-versed in Aristotelian logic and the academic disputation, as opposed to the „illiterate“ who (just as much as 21st century scholars) were not. In her paper on the 17th century controversy over atomism and cartesianism, MARIA PIA DONATO (Cagliari/Paris) investigated the continuous negotiations regarding the limits of disagreement, disciplinary boundaries, and the relations between truth, evidence and authority. These negotiations, which triggered a wave of censoring activity, need to be related to important shifts in moral theology and the corresponding power struggles at the Roman Curia. LEEN SPRUIT (Nijmegen) discussed the fallout of new approaches on human psychology against the background of the Aristotelian knowledge culture nurtured in the Roman Congregations of the Inquisition and the Index. The quest for an orthodox psychology can be traced back to late antiquity, yet gained momentum from the Renaissance onwards when philosophers turned to non-Aristotelian schemes to investigate the origin and functioning of the human soul. As similar approaches were considered heterodox by default by Roman censors,

they sought to align them with early Christian and medieval heresies in order to determine their deviance from Catholic tradition. BRUNO BOUTE (Frankfurt am Main) highlighted the fragility and controversial nature of this traditional body of knowledge in his paper on the ban of the „Seven Points“ by the Roman Holy Office in 1683, a summary of Catholic doctrine that was propagated by the parish clergy in the Habsburg Netherlands as indispensable for salvation. The Roman ban did not only target factitious explanations of central mysteries of the faith but also the integration of similar didactic methods of an emerging rigorist method in the administration of the sacrament of penance, highlighting thus the complex relationship between orthodoxy and orthopraxy in plural early modern Catholicisms.

The keynote paper by RIVKA FELDHAY (Tel Aviv) on disciplining sciences in conflict zones situated knowledge production in the early modern period in a trilateral relationship between state, church and arts, specifying the tensions between authority and the role of truth making within European political bodies. By looking at the multiple ways in which arts, sciences, and religion cooperated in the strengthening of modern sovereign states, Feldhay emphasized the importance of conflicts as driving forces for establishing a common ground of epistemological and political truths. The key example for this complex, coexistence of regulation and conflict potential, is offered by the Jesuit order. Jesuits showed best how arts and sciences might be subject to strict discipline as well as to be mobilized across potential conflict zones between religion, state and arts. Through the analysis of Paolo Casati's fictive conversation *Terra Machinis Mota* between Paulus Guldin, Galileo Galilei and Marin Mersenne (1658), Feldhay clearly demonstrated that physical knowledge was commonly used to answer philosophical claims and to combine practical and theoretical knowledge at the service of state and religion.

The following section, chaired by STEFANO ZEN (Naples), offered further evidence of such a dynamic of recomposition in the domain of historical research. ANDREA BADEA (Rome) used the example of

the hagiographer Jean de Launoy in order to follow the different attributions on 'true' and 'untrue' within post-Tridentine Catholicism in 17th-century France. The case study showed how it was possible to conciliate (or even fight) deviant opinions and doctrines without endangering the constantly projected idea of Catholic universality. Launoy used the historical-critical method in particular to investigate Church history, contributing to create a completely new ground for the discussion of matters of faith. MARKUS FRIEDRICH (Hamburg) shifted focus from the religious field to the role of historical research in the domain of state administration and public opinion. By surveying the genealogical work by Jakob Wilhelm Imhoff, Friedrich illustrated the different ways in which early modern scholars could collect and assert genealogical knowledge for political reasons and emphasized the impact of new media in changing the frame in which genealogical research was perceived.

The following two lectures showed how the processes of canonization, newly organized by the Roman Curia during the 17th century, unveiled an intimate relationship between historical truth and theological and political ones. BIRGIT EMICH (Frankfurt am Main) individuated two different mechanisms that predominated the declaration of sanctity: a bureaucratic mode and a spiritual one. The former mechanism relied on historical research and on gatherings of trustworthy information, the latter on the ceremonial recognition of sainthood and on the transformation of bureaucratic procedures into theological truths. Emich's systematical view was supplemented by JAN MACHIELSEN (Cardiff), added the importance of popular culture. The paper focused on the case of the Martyrs of Gorcum, nineteen men, among whom eleven Franciscan friars, who were executed in 1572 by radical Protestants during the Dutch revolts. By that approach, Machielsen intended to show the intersection of formal investigations with popular beliefs in the construction of truth.

The third section of the conference, led by IRENE FOSI (Chieti), introduced new actors and new topics. PAOLO QUATTRONE (Edinburgh) showed the connection between re-

ligious and accounting practices in the Jesuit Order. During the 16th and 17th centuries, the Jesuits used the latter not in order to represent the truth of economic value, but as an instrument for expressing wisdom. There was in fact a close relationship between the meditative and religious practices of the spiritual exercises and the accounting methods of Jesuit accountants, who relied on the same rhetorical and mnemotechnical devices. VITTORIA FIORELLI (Napoli) placed the focus of her paper on the case of Giacinto de Cristofaro and on the inquisitorial trials against Neapolitan atheists during the years 1688–1697. Through this example she was able to show the changes that early modern tensions between knowledge and orthodoxy were undergoing, while coming into contacts with different scientific and political events in the Neapolitan context.

The following two lectures dealt with the problem of religious pluralism in early modern societies. MARCO CAVARZERE (Frankfurt am Main) considered the case of contractual oaths used in cross-cultural trade. Oaths were theological acts, which implied the use of God's name, and therefore entailed forms of religious recognition. Discussing the case of oaths in inter-religious and cross-cultural contexts, casuistry became a tool for combining confessional knowledge with the social practices of a globalized world. CECILIA CRISTELLON (Frankfurt am Main) similarly examined religious pluralism, but with a particular focus on the construction of normativity within the Catholic church. By analyzing the case of interconfessional marriage, Cristellon showed how specific norms of the papacy managed to domesticate and include pluralism and polycentricism as a key for the sustainability of the system itself.

Under the chair of UGO BALDINI (Rome), the fourth section focused on the truth of natural sciences and their relationship to dogma. KOEN VERMEIR (Paris) analyzed scientific metaphors in religious contexts by inquiring the differences between intra- and extra-confessional attitudes towards truth and rationality. He specifically explored the travel book by Johann Christian Wagner (1688), showing how its frontispiece covertly expressed specific opinions about

truth, grace and rationality in a metaphorical way. STEVEN VANDEN BROECKE (Ghent) surveyed Catholic Copernicanism in the Low Countries after 1616. He took into account two anti-Copernican treatises (1631 and 1634) by the Louvain theologian Libert Froidmont and the figure of the Copernican astronomer-priest Govaert Wendelen, whom Froidmont repeatedly portrayed as an example of a legitimate Catholic Copernican.

The last two lectures under the chair of FERNANDA ALFIERI (Trento) dealt with the relationship between religion and medicine. JETZE TOUBER (Utrecht) was engaged in the still neglected field of sacred medicine. In the early modern period, the human body and its disorders were an obvious object of confessional authority. Corruptible human flesh was in fact a product of the Fall. Toubert presented the role of medicine in exceptional circumstances, such as the examination of candidates for sanctity, the evaluation of medical miracles and the role of physicians in the entourage of popes and cardinals. BRENDAN RÖDER (München) spoke about the types of knowledge and notions of truth used in discussions on so-called 'bodily defects' of clergymen. By analyzing over 500 petitions of individual (prospective) clergymen sent to the Roman Curia around 1700 to clarify their physical and legal-religious status, Röder discussed how clergymen, their families, local and Roman church authorities and experts like healers, physicians and surgeons spoke about medical and theological truth.

In his concluding remarks, Steven Vanden Broecke pointed out that the search for truth lent a particular *urgency* to experiences of uncertainty and challenges of credibility. Accordingly, issues of credibility and authorizing were profoundly bottom-up. Vanden Broecke underlined that the conference approached an enormous variety of themes related to the changing socio-economic and political conditions of early modern life and keenly concluded showing that this tremendous multiplication of tensions represented the dialectical twin of the early modern desire to extend and refine discipline and normativity, a kind of inherent worm in the apple of early modern truth regimes and strategies of control.

Conference Overview:

Martin Baumeister (Roma): Welcome

Andreea Badea (Roma): Introduction

I – The Pitfalls of Doctrine (1)

Chair: Paolo Broggio (Roma)

Rudolf Schüßler (Bayreuth): Conflicting Truth Claims – Scholastic Approaches to Reasonable Disagreement

Maria Pia Donato (Paris / Cagliari): Truth and Evidence, Truth and Authority: Who Speaks of What and Why in the late 17th-Century Debate on Atoms vs Matter and Form and Other Aristotelian Relics

II – The Pitfalls of Doctrine (2)

Chair: Paolo Broggio (Roma)

Leen Spruit (Nijmegen): Modern Philosophy and Ancient Heresies: New Wine in Old Bottles?

Bruno Boute (Frankfurt am Main): The Uncertainties of Salvation. Roman Censorship and the Sacrament of Penance

Keynote

Rivka Feldhay (Tel Aviv): Disciplining the Sciences in Conflict Zones

III – Wandering into Distant Realms: Fact-Finding in History and Geography

Chair: Stefano Zen (Napoli)

Andreea Badea (Roma): Defining Past and Present – Hagiographical Debates and Historical Criticism in 17th-Century Rome

Markus Friedrich (Hamburg): Genealogical Truth between Archives and Administration

IV – The Assurances of Legal and Administrative Practice (1)

Chair: Stefano Zen (Napoli)

Birgit Emich (Frankfurt am Main): Making Truth, Making Saints: Procedures, Credibility and Patronage in Early Modern Canonization

Jan Machielsen (Cardiff): Putting Martyrs on Trial Again: The Congregation of Rites, the Scrutiny of Evidence and the Martyrs of Gorcum, 1572 – 1675

V – The Assurances of Legal and Administrative Practice (2)

Chair: Irene Fosi (Chieti)

Paolo Quattrone (Edinburgh): In Search of Value: Mystery and Accounting Practices in the Jesuit Order

Vittoria Fiorelli (Napoli): „L’esperienze non sono fedeli scorte a portarci alla cognizione della verità“. Giacinto De Cristofaro and the Trial against Atheists

VI – The Assurances of Legal and Administrative Practice (3)

Chair: Irene Fosi (Chieti)

Marco Cavarzere (Frankfurt am Main): Plural Truths: Casuistry and the Interpretation of Moral Law

Cecilia Cristellon (Frankfurt am Main): Choosing Information, Selecting Truth. The Roman Inquisition and the Construction of Normativity of Religious Pluralism

VII – The Senses Deluded. Exploring the Nature of Things

Chair: Ugo Baldini (Roma)

Koen Vermeir (Paris): Translating Truth: Tracing Scientific Metaphors in Religious Contexts

Steven Vanden Broecke (Ghent): How (not) to be a Catholic Copernican after 1616: Evidence from the Low Countries

VIII – Healing the Soul, Healing the Body: Religion and Medicine

Chair: Fernanda Alfieri (Trento)

Jetze Touber (Utrecht): Medicina Sacra in Post-Tridentine Catholicism

Brendan Röder (München): Judging by Appearance. ‘True’ Knowledge of Clerical Bodies in the Catholic Church (ca. 1700)

Steven Vanden Broecke (Ghent): Conclusions and Discussion

Tagungsbericht *Making Truth – Administering Truth. Establishing Credibility in Early Modern History*. 15.11.2017–17.11.2017, Rom, in: H-Soz-Kult 11.04.2018.