

**Hybridisation in Natural History?
Materials and Texts Between Asia and
Europe, 17th and 18th Centuries**

Veranstalter: Institute of Dutch Language and Literature

Datum, Ort: 21.02.2018–24.02.2018, Köln

Bericht von: Katrin Blombach, Institut für Niederlandistik, Universität zu Köln

The interdisciplinary workshop took place to discuss the production and reception of knowledge about natural history in cultural contact between Asian and European actors with speakers from all over the world, including senior scholars as well as PhD candidates, among them historians, art historians and literary scholars. The four themed panels of the workshop each focussed on a different aspect: 'texts', 'materials', 'on the move' and 'animals'.

The international workshop was designed to conclude the DFG-funded research project 'Circulation in Spaces of Knowledge Between Asia and Europe' about the works of G.E. Rumphius (1627-1702) at the Institute of Dutch Language and Literature at the University of Cologne. Main aims of the workshop were not only to give the organizers the opportunity to discuss the final phase and results of their research but also to provide insights into other disciplinary fields of study. After welcoming the guests and speakers to the library of the Morphomata Center for Advanced Studies in the Humanities at the University of Cologne, project leader and organizer MARIA-THERESIA LEUKER (Cologne) gave a short introduction to the research project, which she has been working on in collaboration with Esther Helena Arens and Charlotte Kießling. This project focuses on works of natural history, connecting the Moluccas and the Netherlands during the process of European colonisation during the 17th and 18th centuries. The theoretical starting point of the workshop was the idea of hybridity as double function or combination of elements. Its aim was to discuss evidence for hybridisation as a process from which something new and different originates in the production of knowledge (Homi K. Bhabha). For both of

Rumphius's books, the 'Ambonese Curiosity Cabinet' (*D'Amboinsche Rariteitkamer*, Amsterdam 1705) and the 'Ambonese Herbal' (*Het Amboinsche Kruid-boek*, Amsterdam 1741-1755), Leuker stated hybridisation originating from the polyphony of the author on Ambon and an Amsterdam editor, who added annotations to Rumphius's text. As a literary scholar, she argued that the hybrid character of Rumphius's works especially unfolds when it comes to the aesthetics of the rare and wonderful.

The theme of literary hybridity was continued as CHARLOTTE KIESSLING (Cologne) talked about auctoritas, empiricism and local knowledge in Rumphius's 'Curiosity Cabinet'. Based on Bakhtin's definition of the hybrid as the intermingling of different social languages in an utterance, she asked if the intermingling of the voices of European authors, eyewitnesses as well as local informants, in Rumphius's 'Curiosity Cabinet' lead to the disruption of the authoritative colonial discourse. She argued that this is not the case, because the voices are mediated by the voice of Rumphius and he, for example, devaluates local knowledge as superstition. Rumphius dictates how the voices included in the text should be understood and how the knowledge should be interpreted. Kießling concluded that the 'Curiosity Cabinet' is not a text of a monolithic, mono-voiced colonial discourse and that the reader can choose not to listen to Rumphius's assessments and to listen to the 'other' – the locals' – voices.

Empirical knowledge also played an important role in the talk of art historian BERT VAN DE ROEMER (Amsterdam), who tried to challenge the image of Rumphius as a 'hero of science', whose nomenclature paved the way for Linnaean taxonomy, by illustrating how Rumphius combines detailed systematic empiricism with explanations based on astrological views of nature. Van de Roemer argued that the description of the thunderstones for instance, according to Rumphius, formed by the powerful forces during a thunderstorm, shows Rumphius's belief in the astrological influence on the natural world as well as in the purposefulness of natural processes when it comes to the use of the thunderstones as weaponry. For van de Roemer, the combi-

nation of systematic nomenclature and taxonomy with the Neoplatonic tradition challenges the image of Rumphius's 'modernity'.

Similarly, KATHLEEN BURKE (Toronto) in her talk about cloves and the politics of bodies shed light on the use of cosmological knowledge and humoral theory alongside empirical knowledge and the Protestant worldview in Rumphius's work exemplified in the description of the clove tree in the 'Ambonese Herbal'. She pointed out that the application of the temperamental differences between Europeans, who use cloves and the locals who don't, as well as the emphasis on the role of God, serve to justify not only the exploitation of cloves but also the superiority of European over Asian bodies. In this way, Burke suggested, Rumphius uses a hybrid approach to justify the Dutch monopoly in the Asian colonies.

In the second panel, historian ESTHER HELENA ARENS (Cologne) in her talk about the 'Ambonese Herbal' shifted the focus to the materiality of collecting objects and information on the natural history of Ambon. Using the state of hybridity and the process of hybridisation as analytical categories, she presented her research results on the production process of Rumphius's book. She drew attention to the spatial mobilisation of the objects and information from the Indies to the Netherlands for which the infrastructure of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) plays a major role. Arens showcased the hybridisation of Asian and Latin nomenclature, as well as the hybridisation between the manuscript and the printed books.

The topic of mobility echoed through into the third panel that was opened by SUSANNE FRIEDRICH (Munich) who talked about the transfer of knowledge and the 'space of flows' created by the VOC. She drew attention to the specially organised network of transportation and communication of the VOC and emphasised the status of the merchants as well as of knowledge and information as commodities. Friedrich introduced the merchants of the VOC as agents gaining all information that might be useful for trade, considering (pieces of) knowledge as actual belongings of the trading company. According to Rumphius and his work as parts of this trade network

(with close, not always legal or safe connections between Europe and Asia), she raised the issue of his personal hybridity as a naturalist and a merchant at the same time.

ELENA LISITSYNA (Moscow/Cologne) then presented her historical postgraduate research on the production of knowledge about Caspian petroleum in the works of Prussian physician J.J. Lerche (1708-1780). Having the educational background of a physician and a Doctor of Medicine, Lerche accompanied military troops and was able to make observations about landscapes as well as collect minerals and other naturalia. Owing to this as well as his opportunity to communicate both with Russian and European scientific institutions to create the knowledge about the 'other', Lisitsyna considered him a hybrid figure. Lisitsyna showed how especially the use of petroleum for both medical and fuel purposes was of great interest to Lerche, who through his texts made the transfer of information about this material possible.

In the following presentation, JUDYTA KUZNIK (Wroclaw) talked about the description of Japan in the 19th century by members of the Dutch trade mission. By the example of the works of Philipp Franz von Siebold, she introduced the artificial island of Dejima, a Dutch trading post in Japan, as a space of circulation of knowledge according to Kapil Raj. The trade of information and knowledge between the Europeans and the Asians went both ways, as the Japanese kept an interest in learning European technology while, simultaneously the Dutch were able to collect knowledge about Japan. Emphasising that the island and the movements of the Dutch were strictly regulated and controlled by the Japanese, she argued that the locals' perspectives evidently shaped the Dutch view of Japan.

In the fourth panel, DIDI VAN TRIJP (Leiden) presented her research on observation and authority in the 'Historia Piscium' (1686), a path-breaking book on the natural history of fish. The volume features a variety of sources and materials, incorporating a large network of correspondence, various sources of drawings, as well as observations by the authors John Ray and Francis Willughby who went to fish markets and travelled Europe to col-

lect information about marine fauna and flora. Similar to the book knowledge they relied on in creating the volume, Van Trijp argued that for Ray and Willughby the fish market became a space where knowledge was created. Furthermore, she pointed out that the authors had to rely on their informants who were either characterised as 'normal' or 'wise' while the naturalist authors themselves were portrayed as the experts.

In his presentation on the description of nature in 'Oud en Nieuw-Oost Indiën' (1724–1726) by Francois Valentyn, SIEGFRIED HUIGEN (Wrocław/Stellenbosch) looked at the production and networks of knowledge in Valentyn's monumental work, in which he also incorporated parts of Rumphius's texts. Huigen analysed Valentyn as a virtuoso or amateur ('liefhebber') and questioned how this affected his work as a naturalist. He argued that for 'liefhebbers' detail was burdensome and a reduction in material and rhetoric was favoured as opposed to naturalists who welcomed detail. Huigen emphasized that unlike Rumphius, Valentyn did not make use of astrological modes of interpretation to describe the objects. Also, no traces of physico-theology can be found in 'Oud en Nieuw-Oost Indiën', although Valentyn was a minister.

In the last talk, DÁNIEL MARGÓCSY (Cambridge) presented his research on the circulation of knowledge between East Asia and Europe and the relation between myth and knowledge. Although myths were also seen as a corruption of knowledge, they served as guidance for research. Naturalists therefore had to be able to distinguish between information that was reliable and that which was not. Based on a case study about the representation of the satyr, he argued that the identification of this Greek mythological creature with orang-utans and prehistoric humans could be explained by the role of myths in guiding the development of science.

In the final discussion the scholars challenged the analytic concept of hybridity as Van de Roemer pointed out that it always involves the assumption of two entities that merge into something new, which could lead to a forced historical picture. The terms 'plu-

ralism' and 'bricolage' were discussed as substitute concepts for 'hybridisation'. While the term 'bricolage' suggests less of a stabilisation and centralization, just as 'pluralism', it has no colonial marking and suggests a contact on eye level. With regard to Rumphius's works that were produced within a colonial situation, 'hybridisation' still proves to be a fruitful and productive concept.

Conference Overview:

Maria-Theresia Leuker (Cologne): Welcome and Introduction

Panel 1 – Texts

Chair: Maria-Theresia Leuker (Cologne)

Charlotte Kießling (Cologne): Auctoritas, Empiricism and Local Knowledge. Rumphius as Mediator of Knowledge

Bert van der Roemer (Amsterdam): Shifting Between Classification and Explanation: Divergent Approaches of Nature in Rumphius' 'D'Amboinsche Rariteitkamer'.

Kathleen Burke (Toronto): Rumphius, the Clove Tree, and the Politics of Knowledge

Panel 2 – Materials

Chair: Stefan Grohé (Cologne)

Esther Helena Arens (Cologne): Hybrid Leaves, Hybrid Pages? The Ambonese Herbal between Ambon and Amsterdam.

Panel 3 – On the Move

Chair: Stefanie Gänger (Cologne)

Susanne Friedrich (Munich): Modelling the 'Space of Flows'. VOC and Knowledge Transfer around 1700.

Elena Lisitsyna (Moscow/Cologne): The Production of Knowledge about Caspian Petroleum by J.J. Lerche (1708–1780).

Judyta Kuznik (Wrocław): Nineteenth-Century Dejima as Space of Circulation.

Panel 4 – Animals

Chair: Esther Helena Arens (Cologne)

Didi van Trijp (Leiden): Fresh Fish. Observation and Authority in the *Historia piscium* (1686).

Siegfried Huigen (Wrocław/Stellenbosch): Describing Nature in *Oud en Nieuw Oost-*

Indiën (1724–1726) by François Valentyn.

Dániel Margócsy (Cambridge): A Natural History of the Satyr. Orangutans, Devils and the Circulation of Knowledge between East Asia and Europe.

Tagungsbericht *Hybridisation in Natural History? Materials and Texts Between Asia and Europe, 17th and 18th Centuries*. 21.02.2018–24.02.2018, Köln, in: H-Soz-Kult 14.05.2018.