## 'Foreign Knowledge' – Medieval Attitudes Towards the Unknown

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**Datum, Ort:** 14.06.2018–16.06.2018, Bochum
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How do we deal with what we don't know? During the Graduate Workshop, 24 international researchers looked for medieval answers to this question. Two of Bochum's institutions supported the event: while the university's Research School was responsible for funding, the Centre for Religious Studies (CERES) provided the venue. Prior to the workshop every participant was asked to send a source or source extracts concerning 'foreign' or 'unknown' knowledge to the organisers. These texts were circulated amongst the participants beforehand—the workshop itself was devoted to intensive discussions about various aspects of the 'foreign' or 'unknown' on the basis of the medieval sources.

The first session explored how knowledge about foreign enemies was gathered, assessed, and used. STEPHEN POW (Budapest) presented several extracts from thirteenth- and fourteenth-century sources, one of them the *Secret History of the Mongols*, written by an anonymous author between the 1250s and the 1260s. By contrasting the *Secret History* with Arab and Chinese sources, Pow revealed traces of the Mongolian efforts to gather knowledge about one of their foreign enemies – the Franks. Ways of organising such an acquisition of information were exemplified by extracts from the *Riformagioni* and *Provvigioni* of the Bolognese Council Acts, composed between 1287 and 1331, contributed to the workshop by EDWARD LOSS (Bologna). In these texts the actions of the *Officio Spiarum*, the „Office of the Spies", were outlined, which played a vital part in decision-making processes of the Bolognese councils. A specific way of using knowledge about foreign enemies was demonstrated by Guillelmus Adae's *Tractatus Quomodo Sarraceni Sunt Expugnandi* (fourteenth century),

introduced by GION WALLMEYER (Duisburg–Essen). The author of the text promoted a plan to construct a naval blockade near the Gulf of Aden with the aim of ruining the Egyptian Sultan's economy by interrupting its trade with India. The discussions in this session revolved around questions of the character and usefulness of the gathered knowledge as well as the techniques for and circumstances of collecting this information.

The second session was titled „Dealing with Authoritative Knowledge" and analysed different ways of approaching and assessing texts concerning famous figures – in these cases King Arthur and Aristotle. MARY BATEMAN (Bristol) introduced William Caxton's preface to his 1485 edition of Thomas Malory's *Morthe D'Arthur*. The text focusses on the reception of King Arthur's myth in regard to its 'foreignness' in a period which was shaped by scepticism towards Arthur and the legends surrounding him. Bateman was accompanied by RICCARDO CORADESCHI (Berlin), who presented John Lydgate's *Secrees of Old Philosoffres*, written around 1452. This text is an adaptation of the pseudo-Aristotelian *Secretum Secretorum* and plays with the reader's interest by hinting at a secret of arcane knowledge allegedly hidden between its lines without ever revealing what this secret is. The participants debated, amongst other things, how different uses of authoritative knowledge could help to create the image of authenticity.

The second day started with the third session, „Imagining Unknown Places". The discussion revolved around two sources which explored different kinds of unknown places: The so-called *Pilgrimage to the Holy Land* (The Hague Koninklijke Bibliotheek MS 73 F 23) was presented by LYDIA SHAHAN (Leuven). The travelogue was written in the second half of the fifteenth century by an unknown author who never visited the described places himself, but sent the reader on an imaginary journey to the Holy Land. It was produced for the Convent of St. Agnes in Maaseik, a group of canonesses regular. The second source, submitted by STEPHEN BULL (Bristol), was *The Romance and Prophecies of Thomas of Erceldoune* (early fifteenth century). The author sent the reader on an imag-

inary journey as well, but to a fictional place: the fairy land. The texts show two different cases of fictional journeys to unknown places: The *Pilgrimage* enabled the canonesses regular to spiritually retrace and to mentally imitate the pilgrimage in pursuit of a closer relationship with God, which they couldn't undertake in reality. The journey of Thomas Erceldoune, however, primarily functioned as an explanation for the prophetic gifts the traveller obtained during his stay in fairy land. Although the texts are completely diverse regarding their content and purpose, their comparison proved fruitful in order to explore how medieval authors depicted the 'foreign' and 'unknown' in imaginary travelogues of such distinct genres.

„Confronting the Unknown" was the theme of the fourth session. It focused on different attitudes towards foreign people – on a personal and on a legal level. The first source was Afanasy Nikitin's „Voyage Along Three Seas" (*Khozheniye za tri moray*), which was presented by ROMAN TYMOSHEVSKYI (Budapest). Afanasy Nikitin, a Russian traveller, visited India in the middle of the fifteenth century and describes his encounters with the indigenous people in much personal detail. SUSANNA MARKERT (Oxford) contributed a collection of extracts from several thirteenth-century English Common Law statutes and the court rolls. The texts' main goal was to protect the native economy against strangers. One aspect of the discussion was the wide scope of perception of the unknown, ranging from 'exotic' places like India, at least from the medieval European point of view, to simply the next village in English counties. The discussion furthermore dealt with questions about vocabulary and meaning: what were 'foreigners' or 'strangers' called and what did this entail?

The fifth session „Reception of Foreign Knowledge" addressed the question to what extent the origin of knowledge played a role in its assessment. The session included extracts from Adelard of Bath's *Questiones naturales*, submitted by ALEXANDER PEPLOW (Oxford), from Roger Bacon's *Opus Majus*, presented by FRIEDERIKE PFISTER (Bochum), and from Hildegard of Bingen's *Causae et curae*, introduced by LAUREN COLE (Bristol). All sources show different attitudes towards knowledge and its reception. While Roger Bacon stresses the need for 'foreign' knowledge as a Christian weapon, Adelard is more cautious in his promotion of the 'study of the Arabs', and Hildegard completely refrains from naming her sources. The discussions about the origin, the usage, and the legitimacy of foreign knowledge led to the question of whether knowledge belongs to specific individuals, nations or just to everyone who is able to receive it.

JEAN-CLAUDE SCHMITT (Paris) concluded the second day with his keynote address „The Unknown in Medieval Culture", in which he opened up a wide panorama of different dimensions of the 'unknown' in the Middle Ages. Starting with vocabulary questions, he presented various medieval depictions of unknown spaces and unknown times, linking the sources that had been provided by the participants with material from his own research. By doing this, he summarised different approaches and paved new paths for the following discussions.

The last day started with the session „Preparation for the Unknown Future". The discussion was firstly based on the *Sermo in Concilio pro Negotio Tartarorum* written by Eudes of Chateauroux, which was presented by EMILIE LAVALLÉE (Oxford). The sermon was preached in 1241 after the death of pope Gregory IX and during an increasing concern about a possible invasion by the Mongols. Secondly, in order to show the alterity of a political concept MARIE-ASTRID HUGEL (Paris / Heidelberg) selected a conglomerate of texts addressing different aspects of the priest-king. During the discussions it became clear that while the sermon was aimed at pointing out the importance of councel as preparation for the future, the sources concerning the priest-king tried to mediate a specific knowledge about a future ruler.

The seventh and final session „Foreign Languages made languages themselves the subject of discussion. SAMUEL LANE (Oxford) presented John Fortescue's *De Laudibus Legum Angliae*, a mid-fifteenth-century treatise, in which the author criticised the use of the English language, particularly in legal operations. The source reveals the fact that all

three spoken languages of later medieval England (Latin, Anglo-Norman French, and English) could be declared as 'foreign' by specific parts of the population. The second source, the *Histoire ancienne jusqu'à César*, introduced by HENRY RAVENHALL (London), presented a quite different point of view. This popular thirteenth-century universal chronicle promoted the idea of using French as literary language throughout the European continent. The discussion evolved around questions of foreignness of languages in general, as the sources showed the importance of the author's point of view as well as his intentions by describing a language as 'foreign'.

Due to the format of the workshop with its focus on discussions instead of papers, the participants could associate freely and contribute their own specific knowledge extensively, coming from various research backgrounds. The openness of the general theme, the consequent variety of source texts, and the discussion-based sessions allowed participants to approach the particular topics from various angles. It opened up new accesses to other sources, showed connections between sources that haven't been compared before in this way, and created new possibilities for future cooperation between international researchers.

**Conference Overview:**

*Session 1: Knowledge about Foreign Enemies*

Chair: Jan Vandeburie (Leicester)

Stephen Pow (Budapest): *Secret History of the Mongols* / Al-Qazwini, *Athar al-Bilad Wa Akhbar al-Ibad* / Usama ibn Munqidh, *Kitab al-I'tibar* / Song Lian, *Yuan Shi*

Edward Loss (Bologna): Extracts from the *Riformagioni* and *Provvigioni* of the Bolognese Council Acts

Gion Wallmeyer (Duisburg-Essen): Guillelmus Adae, *Tractatus Quomodo Sarraceni Sunt Expugnandi*

*Session 2: Dealing with Authoritative Knowledge*

Chair: Benjamin Müsegades (Heidelberg)

Mary Bateman (Bristol): William Caxton's

Preface to his 1485 Edition of Thomas Malory's *Morthe D'Arthur*

Riccardo Coradeschi (Berlin): John Lydgate, *Secrees of Old Philosoffres*

*Session 3: Imagining Unknown Places*

Chair: Eleanor Janega (London)

Lydia Shahan (Leuven): *Pilgrimage to the Holy Land* (The Hague Koninklijke Bibliotheek MS 73 F 23)

Stephen Bull (Bristol): *The Romance and Prophecies of Thomas of Erceldoune*

*Session 4: Confronting the Unknown*

Chair: Philippa Byrne (Oxford)

Roman Tymoshevskyi (Budapest): Afanasy Nikitin, „Voyage Along Three Seas" (*Khozheniye za tri morya*)

Susanna Markert (Oxford): Extracts from Several English Common Law Statutes and from the Court Rolls

*Session 5: Reception of Foreign Knowledge*

Chair: Sara Öberg Strådal (London)

Alexander Peplow (Oxford): Adelard of Bath, *Questiones naturales*

Friederike Pfister (Bochum): Roger Bacon, *Opus Majus*

Lauren Cole (Bristol): Hildegard of Bingen, *Causae et curae*

*Keynote Address*

Jean-Claude Schmitt (Paris): „The Unknown in Medieval Culture"

*Session 6: Preparation for the Unknown Future*

Chair: Verena B. Krebs (Bochum)

Emilie Lavallée (Oxford): Eudes of Chateauroux, *Sermo in Concilio pro Negotio Tartarorum*

Marie-Astrid Hugel (Paris / Heidelberg): *Reformatio Sigismundi* / *Speculum Humanae Salvationis* / Hartmann Schedel, *Cronica Cronicarum* / Letter of Prester John / John of Hildesheim, *Historia Trium Regum*

*Session 7: Foreign Languages*

Chair: Manuel Kamenzin (Bochum)

Samuel Lane (Oxford): John Fortescue, *De Laudibus Legum Angliae*

Henry Ravenhall (London): *Histoire ancienne jusqu'à César*

*Concluding Remarks*

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Tagungsbericht *'Foreign Knowledge' – Medieval Attitudes Towards the Unknown*. 14.06.2018–16.06.2018, Bochum, in: H-Soz-Kult 28.09.2018.