

Reporting Christian Missions. Communication, Culture of Knowledge and Regular Publication in a Cross-Confessional Perspective (Eighteenth Century)

Workshop an der J. W. Goethe Universität in Frankfurt am Main,
mit Unterstützung des Cluster of Excellence
„Herausbildung normativer Ordnungen – Formation of Normative Orders“
Frankfurt am Main, 12. bis 13. Dezember 2008

Through the publication of periodicals, missionary organizations of the eighteenth century forged international networks, provided ethnographic information about non-Europeans to a European audience, and raised much-needed funds to continue their missionary work. Despite the richness of these sources, and the wealth of ways in which the periodicals and their contextual frameworks may be analyzed, there has hitherto been a paucity of academic consideration of the ways in which Christian missionary periodicals of the eighteenth century contributed to the changing world view of Europe and Europeans in that century. It was therefore fitting that, on the 12th and 13th of December, 2008, a workshop entitled „Reporting Christian Missions: Communication, Culture of Knowledge and Regular Publication in a Cross-confessional perspective (eighteenth century)“ was held at the J. W. Goethe Universität in Frankfurt am Main, with the support of the Cluster of Excellence: „Herausbildung normativer Ordnungen – Formation of Normative Orders“. The workshop encompassed the regular periodicals of both Catholic and Protestant Churches over broad geographical areas, with the aim of finding points of similarity and divergence, not only in the subject matter of such periodicals, but also the technologies and procedures employed within them to further the aim of disseminating information about the extra-European world.

The focus on the eighteenth century was deemed important for the workshop as this century was a time of renewed Catholic missionary endeavor and the beginnings of large-scale Protestant missions. Thus, it is the first century for which the publications from both groups can be read in a similar light. Added to this is the fact that the eighteenth century also saw an increase in the regularity of such missionary publications. As it was on the verge of modernity, contemplation of the eighteenth century raises important questions relating to societal structures, economic innovation, cultural autonomy, global colonialism, and the authority of science. Furthermore, the analysis of regular periodical missionary texts sheds light on how both Catholic and Protestant missions responded to, and were influenced by, these aspects of modernity.

The conveners, *Markus Friedrich* (Frankfurt/Boston) and *Alexander Schunka* (Stuttgart), opened the proceedings with an overview of the rationale behind the workshop. The assumption underlying the conference was that the transforming communication patterns of the eighteenth century were shaped both in general by new ways of dealing with increasing amounts of knowledge and information in the early Enlightenment, and in particular by the development of Christian missionary organizations in this century. Therefore, the means and modes of communication within regular missionary periodicals were privileged in this workshop above the actual material disseminated, for, according to the organizers, the ultimate aim of the workshop was to „establish a broader framework for understanding the organized and institutionalized transfer of knowledge from the missions to Europe“ in order to foster a cross-confessional, multi-disciplinary comparative analysis of these periodicals.

Catholicism provided the thematic nucleus of Friday's sessions, with missionary publications produced by the Protestant world discussed on Saturday. The key-note address, delivered by *Iris Gareis* (Frankfurt), and entitled „Missionary Reports and their Relevance as Ethnographic Sources“, provided an insightful analysis of how eighteenth-century missionary reports, specifically those of the Spanish and Portuguese Catholics, have been used by twenty-first century ethnographers to reconstruct ethno-histories of colonized peoples. Gareis argued that the hierarchical and central structure of the Society of Jesus in the eighteenth century did not allow for much individualism within the annual reports to Europe, but were extremely structured. Despite this limitation, the annual reports are embedded with much ethnographic material and reference to indigenous spirituality. As the Jesuits were often the only missionary order in much of South America at this time, these reports provide unique insights into contemporary cross-cultural relations, and also contain material that has proved invaluable for reconstructing indigenous cultural practices, names, and heritage. Discussion arising from the key-note address considered notions of censorship and reliability of the material on behalf of both the missionaries and also the local informants, who themselves were often societal elites. These points, in turn, fed into a broader discourse on how knowledge is ordered, which was an abiding theme of many of the subsequent papers.

Session 1 of the workshop dealt with the European dimension of Catholic Missionary Reports. In *Markus Friedrich's* (Frankfurt/Boston) paper, „Producing Catholic Missionary Reports: the Jesuits“, attention turned to the regularity of missionary publications in the eighteenth century. Friedrich's focus was on the annual reports stemming from French Jesuits in Canada and China. There was, he argued, a complex balance between a desire to produce regular publications and a need for material collected within a defined time-frame to be edifying for a readership, which often was the Society's administrative body. The paper thus investigated how publishing schedules influenced publications, and consequently how the presentation and editing of events affected their message. Shifting the attention back to Europe, *Adrien Paschoud* (Lausanne) focused on the literary aspect of one French Jesuit publication in his paper, „Lettres édifiantes“. Within the structures of this publication, Paschoud contended, the guiding aim was to promote both faith and knowledge, whilst reinforcing a unified Jesuit identity in the wake of public criticism of the order. The publication was often polemic and apologetic, and influenced broader French thinking of the age. Furthermore, as the authors adjusted their writing style to achieve a desired effect on their perceived readership, this journal, Paschoud concluded, serves as an example of the multiplicity of meanings evident in a singular missionary publication.

In the second session of the workshop, attention was specifically focused on the German dimension of Catholic Missionary Reports. *Galaxis Borja Gonzalez* (Kassel) reported on the 35-year history of the first German-language missionary publication in her paper, „The Missionary Journal ‚Neuer Welt-Bott‘ – Collective Identities and Social Hierarchies“. The standard geographical ordering of material was one strategy used to create meaning. Through the editor's pervasive interventions, the self-perception of the order was perpetuated throughout, with a collective identity formed through, for example, the editing of the missionaries' various dialectics into standardized German. Thus, the journal provided a representation of the foreign „other“ as well as the construction of self. These points were further argued in *Claudia von Collani's* (Würzburg) paper „Missions to China in the ‚Neuer Welt-Bott‘„. Through an analysis of French Jesuit writings printed in this German-language publication, she argued that such writings transcended cultural boundaries in shaping a unified Catholic identity. Furthermore, the writings reflected a mutual transfer of knowledge between China and Europe, with French Jesuits instigating cultural change in China, and Europe, in turn, benefiting from Chinese scientific advancements. Although the publication was propaganda undertaken for the benefit of the Jesuits, the diversity of information within these reports is informative in reconstructing the lives of both eighteenth-century Chinese and the missionaries who worked amongst them.

Saturday's first session was concerned with Protestant Missionary reports, and more specifically their cross-confessional aspects. In *Alexander Schunka's* (Stuttgart) paper, „Catholic and Protestant Missions in early eighteenth-century German Periodicals“, a rich nexus between multiple publications was detailed. Through the cross-publication of various articles from Christian missions in certain periodicals, a strong relationship was built up within German religious networks, including some cross-confessional networks. Reporting on Christian missions was especially important for those religious periodicals with long publication lives, and became more so over the course of the century. Yet from the hundreds of periodicals founded in the early eighteenth century, very few lasted more than 10 years, their life-span being extremely dependent on their editors. Within Schunka's broad-reaching analysis, attention was drawn to the self-serving, self-supporting, and self-referential nature of German missionary publications. *Jeremy Gregory* (Manchester) provided an English perspective on eighteenth-century missionary publication in his paper „The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in foreign Parts – Anniversary sermons and abstracts of proceedings“. From their inception in 1711, the sermons were a method of raising funds for the missions, and by the mid-eighteenth century they were a polished fundraising vehicle, designed to be transparent, engaging, and edifying. SPG missionaries were requested to write letters for inclusion in the sermons, and by doing so, Gregory noted, missionary tropes were perpetuated. Nonetheless, these letters themselves were seen as factual, and thus influenced the way in which missions were represented and understood within an English-Christian public.

In the final session of the workshop, Pietist publications were analyzed. *Heike Liebau* (Berlin) reported on 138 years of the content, form and style of a German-language Pietist publication from Halle in her paper „The ‚Hallesche Berichte‘: mechanisms of production, dissemination and reception“. Through her detailed analysis of this publication she demonstrated that the missionaries in Tranquebar, India, were involved in a complex process of knowledge transfer, in which the audience-aware missionaries reported Indian voices, yet remained the dominant voice themselves. Liebau raised important questions about the ways in which the reports were commonly read by contemporary audiences, for although these reports had the subaltern as the subject, they also spoke to an academic audience and had the potential to shape European views, not only about India, but also about the larger ethnological and natural world. Returning to the role of missionary publications in communal identity construction, *Gisela Mettele* (Leicester) focused on the handwritten community reports of a pietistic inspired group in her paper, „Moravian ‚Gemein-Nachrichten‘“. From 1747, these reports, including extracts from missionary fields, were produced for Moravian communities spread across the globe, and acted as a unifying agent, both within communities, where they were read aloud, and between communities, as they were passed from one to the next. A multiple editing process ensured that strict control was maintained over the message, with rules and regulations also applied to the mode of communication. Mettele's analysis highlighted the problems of distance in time and space, and how these were addressed through such publications.

The concluding discussion of the workshop provided avenues for further research possibilities. In surveying the material presented over the preceding days, it was noted that there was scope to focus more closely on the timeliness of material printed within such missionary periodicals. Some questions raised to be addressed in the future included: What role did the periodicals play in transmitting European knowledge to the extra-European world? What was the tension between generality and specificity within publications? What impact did self-censorship have on the missionaries' writings? What were common missionary tropes? And, How can these texts be contextualized within the broader history of knowledge?

To summarize, this diverse workshop provided an excellent opportunity for people from various academic backgrounds and specialties working within the general area to share insights gained from the study of particular periodicals, and moreover, to discuss how these particular insights could be extrapolated to more broadly inform the ways in which eighteenth-century missionary periodicals influenced and shaped global

perspectives. Strikingly, although there was an expansive spectrum both of material presented and methodologies used, there were many points of similarity. These similarities themselves provided further conceptual questions as to whether they were a product of the genre, or were informed by broader social and intellectual norms of the eighteenth century. The conjuncture of ideas and people at the workshop expanded the horizons of this area of research and has ensured that this new field has gained momentum through the ideas exchanged within this interdisciplinary and interconfessional forum.

Generally speaking, missionary history has been the realm of Church and confessional historians until recently. Through this workshop a very constructive step has been taken towards expanding the ways and means by which missionary periodicals can be analyzed. It was indeed an insightful decision on behalf of the workshop organizers to ensure that from the outset a multi-disciplinary dialogue was opened, which also included analyses of multiple religious organizations and creeds. This will ensure that a rich and vibrant scholarship will be generated from this workshop, and carried onto all further exchanges between researchers in this field. A publication of the proceedings is planned.

Felicity Jensz

Kontakt:

Felicity Jensz
 Exzellenzcluster: Religion und Politik,
 Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster,
 E-mail: felicity.jensz@uni-muenster.de

Programm:

Friday, Dec 12, 2008

Markus Friedrich / Alexander Schunka: Opening Remarks

Iris Gareis (Frankfurt): Missionary Reports and their Relevance as Ethnographic Sources

Markus Friedrich (Frankfurt/Boston): Producing Catholic Missionary Reports: The Jesuits

Adrien Paschoud (Lausanne): Lettres édifiantes

Galaxis Borja Gonzalez (Kassel): The Missionary Journal ‚Neuer Welt-Bott‘ – Collective Identities and Social Hierarchies.

Claudia von Collani (Würzburg): Missions to China in the ‚Neuer Welt-Bott‘

Saturday, Dec 13, 2008

Alexander Schunka (Stuttgart): Catholic and Protestant Missions in early eighteenth-century German Periodicals

Jeremy Gregory (Manchester): SPG – Anniversary Sermons

Heike Liebau (Berlin): The ‚Hallesche Berichte‘: mechanisms of production, dissemination and reception

Gisela Mettele (Leicester): Moravian ‚Gemein-Nachrichten‘

Comments/Closing Discussion

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AHF, Schellingstraße 9, 80799 München

Telefon: 089/13 47 29, Fax: 089/13 47 39

E-Mail: info@ahf-muenchen.de, Website: <http://www.ahf-muenchen.de>

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