

March 29th, 2011

Dear fellows,

A warm welcome to Bochum and to the Käte-Hamburger Kolleg to all those who have already arrived as well as to those who will do so shortly or in the course of the coming months. This text is designed as an input for future discussions about the activities you might be able to conduct during your stay in Germany. Probably, your prime activity will be bringing forward the research project you have announced. Another line of action we hope you will be able to follow is participation in the activities of the consortium. Our administration-centre has already provided you with relevant information in this respect, and more will be added at a later date by Volkhard Krech. You are quite free either to distribute your activities evenly among the four thematic fields or rather to concentrate on (a) single field(s) closer to your own line of research.

In these short deliberations, we would like to concentrate on research field 2 (RF 2), that is the group dedicated to studying “religious contacts during the period of institutionalization and expansion of the major religious traditions”. We – Reinhold Gleis (Chair for Latin Philology) and Nikolas Jaspert (Chair for Medieval History) are coordinating activities in RF 2. A general outline of the issues and transversal questions which have marked our work so far has already been provided separately for a brochure designed to inform you about our state of affairs. Here, we would rather like to present some thoughts for the months to come.

Each of our academic years is focused on one particular research field: 2009/2010 was above all dedicated to RF 1, 2010/2011 to RF 3. This year we will focus on RF 2. Many of this year’s fellows have carried out research related to topics that are very much in the foreground of this research field’s work. We would be most grateful if we could draw on your expertise and commitment in order to develop an attractive academic programme for this year.

As you probably already know, the consortium conducts four types of academic events in which fellows participate:

- First, fellow presentations – that is papers given by our fellows in which they expound in which way the consortium’s questions and methods (or certain questions and methods) apply to their own field of research.
- Second, workshops organized by members of the consortium in which fellows might take on papers; most of these workshops have already been applied for and approved before your arrival.
- Third, workshops organized by the fellows themselves during their stay; the idea behind this format is that one cannot foresee the dynamics that the fellows can create once they get to know each other. Therefore space and resources have been provided for organizing workshops on short notice.
- And finally, towards the end of the academic year (probably on February 9th/10th 2012) we will host a larger conference focused on RF 2 which will strongly count on contributions by this year's fellows.

After some deliberation with former and current fellows, we have formulated two propositions concerning thematic fields which might mark our work during the coming year.

1) The first suggestion is “Space and Religion”. The spatial dimension of religious transfer processes is already inherent in the title of our research field “religious contacts during the period of institutionalization and expansion of the major religious traditions” and has hitherto not been put centre stage amongst the consortium's activities. As already laid out in our welcoming brochure, geographical areas can be understood as transit zones of encounter and transfer, thus conveying particular importance to interface territories such as borderlands. As recent historical research into medieval frontiers has shown, these were by no means barriers alone, but also functioned as areas of intensified exchange. In fact, areas deemed peripheral from a political perspective were often very central from the viewpoint of religious transfer processes. In addition to frontier zones, we would also like to analyse the functioning and the effects of inter-religious networks. The network concept effectively complements the frontier paradigm as it does not concentrate on extended surface areas of contact but rather considers focal points and their position within larger communication systems.

Despite the undeniable heuristic value of frontier and network studies for the analysis of religious expansion, any study of spaces of religious transfer cannot limit its attention to the investigation of physical or natural space alone. One of the effects of the so-called “spatial turn” had been to highlight to which degree space has been and still is a socially and discursively constructed notion. The degree to which physical space could and can be symbolically charged deserves particular attention, for shifts and changes such “places of identification” underwent due to processes of expansion could trigger wide societal reactions in the religious field. To give an example: the notion of the Holy Land or the Holy City played a major role for Judaism, Islam and Christianity alike, and the fall of such symbolically charged places could have an enormous impact in theology and philosophy, liturgy and ritual, literature and the arts. We too would like to consider the cognitive and semantic dimension that religious concepts of space can possess and therefore understand “religious space” in a wider sense of the word: The term not only applies to the physical container of processes and events, but also describes a multifaceted relational area which can take on the form of a mental map, a repository of social meaning or a spatial metaphor. Independently of their respective fortune over time, highly charged religious places such as Jerusalem must be primarily understood as imagined and metaphorical spaces that were re- interpreted and mentally reconstructed time and again.

This is the proposed general backdrop for this year's activities; but more concrete themes for common research need to be found. A number of issues related to the notion of “religious space” have already sprung to mind. Please allow us to list some of them as a cautionary proposal for possible common work over the next few months. Perhaps a group of fellow might even agree to organize a workshop on one or more of them. Evidently, this is only the product of a first brainstorming, and we trust that this list will be extended by conversations held in Bochum. But it may serve as food for thought during the beginning of your fellowship:

- Religious universality and regionalism. The notion of universal applicability upheld by certain religions stands next to the regional radius of other religious concepts. In many

cases, universal claims are the result of historical developments, for example of processes of expansion. Growing knowledge of the world through travel, conquest and “discovery” had their effect on spatial self-reflection within the religious traditions.

- Verticality within religious traditions. Spatial stratification of heaven and earth (and hell) are common denominators of many religions. Social groups were and are often ordered vertically, and a similar relational hierarchy is often established between this world and other-worldly spheres. The possible positioning of the religious other within such spatial stratifications merits attention.
- Grounded religion. Many religious traditions are intimately tied to specific places or regions, Judaism is only a particularly prominent case in point. Comparative research into the relationship between religion and land, its shifts over time and its interdependence with processes of political expansion and conflicting claims might be a promising field of research.
- Bilocality and Dwelling. Diasporic communities are most prominently distinguished by their “dwelling” (T. Tweed) on certain, often far off places, thus forming “bilocal” groups positioned mid-way between their actual living space and those places and spaces they yearn for or reflect on. Such phenomena can also be observed within non-diasporic or non-migrant communities. Closely related is the phenomenon of imaginary and mythical geographies such as expressed in the medieval “Mappae mundi”, which form an intrinsic part of many religious traditions.
- Mission, religious expatriation and indigenisation. The role of “pull-factors” for the consolidation of religious traditions is dealt with in RF 1 and in the focus-group “attraction”. But “push-factors” such as mission and religious expatriation also influenced the expansion of religious traditions. As is well known, mission is a much debated issue, claims being that it has historically led to acculturation, westernization, cultural destruction etc., but without a doubt, attempts to proselytize individuals or entire peoples was one – and historically not the least important – way of expanding religious traditions. Modern missiology has underlined that processes of conversion and indigenisation are both active and passive: the mindsets of those missionized were situated in a wide spectrum ranging from acceptance, adaptation and modification to repulsion.

Apart from these proposals, one need not forget the transversal issues we have dealt with over the past two years and intend to continue working on:

- Translocation of Sacred Space. From a comparative, historical perspective, the basic condition for expanding religions does not seem to be local stability, but spatial dynamics. Apparently religions have the inherent tendency not only to transcend local borders while maintaining a cultic epicentre, but also to dis- and translocate the very centre itself. Examples of this phenomenon are multiple. Changes of sacred place may in

retrospect thus often be understood as a trigger for internal leaps within the history of religious traditions.

- Nodes and Hubs of Religious Transfer. The notion of gradual diffusion of religions via point to point contact has recently been put into question. Rather, expansion of religions seems to have resulted from more complex processes of transmission and transformation based on nodes of interaction that were interconnected by capillary routes. Such nodes or hubs fulfilled three functions: they attracted and condensed several religious inputs, they invigorated or “dynamised” them, and finally they transmitted them. Understood in such a functional sense, hubs could and can take differing forms: places, institutions, individuals and groups, but also intellectual currents or literary genres.

2) The second issue proposed here is “interreligious dialogue”. The communication between networks of religious traditions via dialogue not only marks an important form of religious contact, its study is also well qualified to achieve the consortium’s goals, i.e. establishing a theory of religious transfer to the effect of a hermeneutics that is oriented towards communication, since dialogic forms of communication presuppose the generally accepted significance of both interlocutors. Therefore, this focus should especially be emphasised in RF2. Since the consortium’s start in 2008, we have tried to build up a “Repertory of Sources concerning Interreligious Dialogue” (in German: “Quellenrepertorium zum interreligiösen Dialog”, with the acronym QUID), which you all are invited to join by writing articles on relevant texts. In the current term, we should intensify the discussion both by working out the theoretical framework of (especially interreligious) dialogue and by presenting some results from different areas of research, i.e. a series of QUID entries on ‘typical’ and ‘non-typical’ sources.

To define “interreligious dialogue” (a discussion that has not ended yet):

- a. Object of study. Object of “interreligious dialogue” is the conversation between religions in its broadest sense. “Religion” thereby not only refers to “high religions”, but can also be understood narrowly (“heresy”, “confession”) as well as broadly (“ideology”, e.g. atheism); however, there must be a dominant reference to religion or religious views respectively.
- b. Form. “Dialogue” is not understood as a specific literary form, but as the representation of a specific communicative situation (cf. c below). This representation can be realised in different literary forms, such as a philosophical dialogue in the ancient sense, as an interpolation in a narrative text or as a historical report. The basic dialogic intention of the text should be identifiable and manifest itself in a primarily argumentative structure.
- c. Situation. A necessary prerequisite to identify a “dialogue” in the sense laid out here is the existence of at least two individuals, who are clearly observable and distinguishable interlocutors and who are individualised or allegorised to a higher or lower degree. Treatises, although they are oriented towards certain addressees and sometimes contain fictional dialogue partners, are not dialogues, since they are not based on a concrete

situation of communication. Dialogue is only existent whenever opinions are put forward by characters who are at least to some extent integrated in time and space, so that the text shows a level of representation.

- d. Rationability. An essential criterion is the basic consensus on the rationability of the arguments, i.e. the general possibility for all interlocutors to understand the other's arguments on the notion that all human beings share reason. This does not strictly rule out the reference to sources of revelation, but it presupposes that the participants accept the authenticity of the revelation in question.
- e. Representativity. As distinguished from didactic dialogues, the interlocutors are to be regarded as representative of their respective religion/ religious view. This does not necessarily imply "equality", yet a basic significance of the opinions put forward, which are taken seriously and are subject to a rational discussion.
- f. Time. As a temporal limitation (which is sensible because of practical and systematic reasons) the term "pre-modern era" has been suggested. This term allows for a flexible, if need be also a culturally specific handling of a temporal limit that may vary, depending on the historical, intellectual and/ or sources-related considerations, between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries (this is especially important for the interreligious dialogue with East Asian religions).

Further information (a list of authors and works, guidelines for the practical arrangement of the repertorium etc.) is available on the blackboard and may be given also in our first session on April 11th. We hope the project fits very well with your interest.

The idea to concentrate on "Space and Religion" and/or "interreligious dialogue" is only a suggestion. Other proposals on your part would be most welcome. Some further projects have already been initiated prior to the fellows' arrivals: Hans-Martin Krämer and Jason Josephson plan to organize a workshop on "heresy in cross-cultural interaction", in which the usage of the concept of heresy in processes of intercultural contact is examined. Here, too, the subject might have a spatial dimension to it, for this sort of functionalization was often applied in processes of expansion (f.e. Christian expansion to Northern Africa and Central-America). Michael Willis has drafted a workshop on "Interactions between Buddhists, Hinduists and Jainists in late Antiquity and early Middle Ages".

We are looking forward to your suggestions and comments – and most of all, we are looking forward to meeting you all in Bochum!

Best greetings,

Reinhold Gleis and Nikolas Jaspert