

Zukunftsphilologie: Revisiting the Canons of Textual Practice

Lecture cum Seminar

Thursday, May 26, 2011, 16.00 – 19.00

Freie Universität Berlin, Raum JK 24/122d, Habelschwerdter Allee 45

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Communicative Choices in Early Arabic-Islamic Book Culture

Chair: Islam Dayeh (Freie Universität Berlin)

The emerging Arabic-Islamic book culture of the ninth century A.D. affected many disciplines of knowledge. This trend was invigorated by the introduction, at the end of the eighth century, of a cheap and abundant writing material, namely paper, as well as by the growth of linguistic treatises, secretarial handbooks, and poetic manuals on the new state language ('arabiyya), which placed the knowhow of written composition at the disposal of a growing public, largely constituted by the urban elite. With that came a sea change among those groups who produced, used, and transmitted scholarship. The question is not so much the newness of the written format, as other supports of writing (papyrus and parchment) had existed, and the paper codex, notebook, and letter were adopted almost immediately after their introduction to Iraq. Of interest is rather the (re)distribution of speaking vs. writing or consulting books vs. memory in the various old and new communicative situations. Related questions regard the purpose these modes served (short or long term storage, limited or wide dissemination), the way in which this altered methods of scholarship, and the society's attitudes to the old and new media.

The new data format that surreptitiously engulfed educated Baghdad spurred different reactions. The famous philologists and favorite foes al-Aṣma'ī (d. 828) and Abū 'Ubayda (d. c. 822-28) epitomized the clash between two types of scholar, the oral performer and the writer of books. Others meanwhile, like al-Farrā' (d. 822), sat on the fence. With its potential not yet fully realized (which would take two further generations), the book format already enabled a new kind of independent career, both in terms of the material treated and the income drawn from it, as proven by Abū 'Ubayd (d. 838). But it also presented pitfalls by making a merchandise out of what had before been freely shared among one's current and future colleagues. More fundamentally, the book broke down barriers and opened avenues of communication by addressing readers of different disciplines and social classes at the same time. It freed information from the control of those groups who produced it, and by its irreverent mix and unlimited reach of readers led to a new *Wissenschaftlichkeit* that would articulate itself in the explosive development of thought in all areas of scholarship during the ninth and tenth centuries.

Beatrice Gründler (D.E.U.G. Strasbourg, 1985; B.A. Tübingen, 1987; M.A. 1989; Ph.D. Harvard, 1995) is active in four areas of research: the development of Arabic script, classical Arabic poetry and its social context, the integration of modern literary theory into the study of Near Eastern literatures, and early Islamic book-culture (3rd/9th century C.E.) viewed within the history of communication.

Her publications include *The Development of the Arabic Scripts: From the Nabatean Era to the First Islamic Century*. Harvard Semitic Studies 43, Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993. Arabic translation by Sultân Ma`ânî: *Ta'rîkh al-Khutût wa-l-kitâba al-`arabiyya min al-anbât ilâ bidâyat al-islâm*. Petra: Bayt al-Anbat, Jordan, 2004. And *Medieval Arabic Praise Poetry: Ibn al-Rûmî and the Patron's Redemption*. London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003.

Her current work comprises a study of the communicative choices of literati in the ninth century and a media history of early Arabic-Islamic book culture, to be written during her residency as a fellow of the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin in the academic year 2010-11.

Lecture-cum-Seminar

The Lecture-cum-Seminar series is a central element of the scholarly program of the Zukunftsphilologie project. It is conceived as a working seminar of 3 to 5 hours. The lecture (ca. 45-60 minutes) is meant to introduce the audience to the research problem and provide the general analytical and theoretical framework for the topic. This is followed by a practical seminar, wherein the speaker demonstrates his or her case by reference to texts in the original language and in English translation. It is hoped that this Lecture-cum-Seminar series, a combination of theory and a direct engagement with texts, will enable scholars to examine the comparative aspect of the problematic without neglect of the local and singular nature of the texts examined.

Zukunftsphilologie: Revisiting the Canons of Textual Scholarship

The project Zukunftsphilologie endeavours to promote and emphasize primary textual scholarship beyond the classical humanistic canon. In an age of advanced communication, intellectual specialization, and unprecedented migration of knowledge and people, the discipline of philology assumes new relevance. Zukunftsphilologie aspires to support research in neglected varieties of philology with the explicit aim to integrate texts and scholarly traditions from Asia, Africa, the Middle East as well as from Europe itself.

Zukunftsphilologie refers to the polemic between the classicist Ulrich von Wilamowitz and Friedrich Nietzsche around the method and meaning of classical studies. As a project it sees itself as part of a growing trend towards a more global intellectual history. It is inspired in particular by the work of Edward Said and Sheldon Pollock.

In order to promote historically-conscious philology, Zukunftsphilologie will foster research in the following areas: genealogies and transformations of philological practice, philology's place in the system of knowledge (e.g. its relation to science, theology and jurisprudence), and philology and the university. Furthermore, Zukunftsphilologie aims to support critical reviews of historical and philological practice. In revisiting important „philological wars“, the goal is not to merely evaluate the argumentative worth of these debates, but to reflect on the wider cultural and political context in which these „philological wars“ emerged and how they have shaped our knowledge of the past.

The project Zukunftsphilologie is co-directed by Angelika Neuwirth, Manan Ahmed and Islam Dayeh (all Freie Universität Berlin) and is associated with and located at the Friedrich Schlegel Graduate School for Literary Studies at Freie Universität Berlin. Zukunftsphilologie is a project at the Forum Transregionale Studien.

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For more information please see:

www.forum-transregionale-studien.de

<http://www.geisteswissenschaften.fu-berlin.de/friedrichschlegel/promotionsprogramm/kooperationen/Zukunftsphilologie/index.html>