

International Conference, 30 June-1 July 2014

“The Study of Knowledge in Eurasia and North Africa: Issues of Methodology and Future Perspectives”

Venue: Main conference room of the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science, Boltzmannstr. 22, 14195 Berlin

Convenors:

Sonja Brentjes(MPIWG); Dagmar Schäfer (MPIWG); Sabine Schmidtke (Freie Universität Berlin); Miri Shefer-Mossensohn (Tel Aviv University)

The workshop discusses issues of methodology and future perspectives of the study of knowledge cultures in Eurasia and North Africa. The group of discussants includes historians of science, medicine and technology, intellectual historians (philosophy, theology, or other forms of religious knowledge), cultural historians, and linguists.

The conveners’s drafted paper on major problems that currently challenge or impede academic research on intellectual activities in pre-modern Eurasia and North Africa serves as basis for the discussions. It will be sent to all participants of the Conference who register until June 26 with Sonja Brentjes: brentjes@mpiwg-berlin.de.

On Day 1, the key lecture discusses the opposing directions into which the humanities are pulled by diverse actors. Senior scholars will take a critical view on the research trends in their fields, reflect upon the changes that teaching about knowledge cultures needs to undergo in order to cope with the increasing challenges. They will comment on the public awareness of academic research on non-Western knowledge cultures and the various problems that have arisen over the last years. Graduate students and early career scholars will share their experiences concerning training, funding and career opportunities. A round table discussion will bring these different topics together. It will focus on possibilities for overcoming the problems and promoting positive change.

On Day 2, the talks focus on methodological approaches. The speakers will reflect on experiences with interdisciplinary applications of methodologies, developed in the humanities and social sciences for modern problems, to the study of pre-modern societies. They will discuss which methods and theoretical concepts have proven fruitful and which ones turned out to be untranslatable. They will exchange views about a broad range of possible approaches to intellectual activities that fit the specifics of particular pre-modern local as well as trans-local groups in their production of different types of knowledge. The final round table aims at discussing how to transform the fruitful discussions into a publication that reaches out into the various academic domains that are represented at this conference and to decide on the proposals discussed on Day 1.

The goals of this conference are to boost our fields from within, to improve their perception in other fields of academic research, and to discuss concrete activities for enhancing cross-disciplinary cooperation and new forms of teaching and career development.