

## Knowledge in Motion

**October 16 | 6.30pm Panel Discussion**

**October 17 | 10am Workshop**

Venue: Deutsches Haus at NYU, 42 Washington Mews (at University Place), New York, NY 10003

This event is presented in collaboration with the *German University Alliance*, the New York Liaison Office of Freie Universität Berlin.

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### October 16 | 6.30pm Panel Discussion

*Knowledge is always in motion, even – and especially – where it appears to remain stable and tradition-bound.*

Premodern institutions and communities were regularly engaged in vibrant transcultural relations while their systems of knowledge were subject to constant change. Because the forms of exchange involved frequently challenge modern notions both of period boundaries and cultural spaces, they can be investigated in their full complexity only in an effort that is both collective and transdisciplinary.

The Berlin-based Collaborative Research Centre “Episteme in Motion” meets this challenge and analyses the economies of knowledge transfer in selected premodern cultures from Europe and beyond. It draws on a unique reservoir of academic disciplines, including Arabic Studies, Jewish Studies, Classics, Medieval and Early Modern Literatures. The Centre’s individual projects examine knowledge transfer in a variety of cultural contexts ranging from medicine to visual art, from philosophy to literature and from linguistics to theology.

Panelists:

**Gyburg Uhlmann** is Professor of Classical Greek Studies at the Freie Universität Berlin and Head of the Collaborative Research Centre “Episteme in Motion. Transfer of Knowledge from the Ancient World to the Early Modern Period”. Her project – titled “Processes of Creating Tradition in Late Antique Commentaries of *De interpretatione*” – is concerned with the late antique and early medieval Greek and Latin commentaries on Plato’s and Aristotle’s writings on language theory. For a long time, these commentaries were believed to be the prototype of an entirely static tradition of knowledge, hostile towards all creative impulses. The project seeks, however, to examine the diverse and innovative ways in which the commentators structured their arguments when dealing with doctrinal authorities.

**Anita Traninger** is Professor of Romance Philology at the Freie Universität Berlin and a member of the Collaborative Research Centre's board of directors. Her project "*Erotema. The Question as an Epistemic Genre in the Learned Societies of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*" focuses on the forms and media of scholarly debates in learned societies in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, within an institutional context demarcated by the poles of the university, on the one hand, and the academy, on the other. The project examines how, in the early academies, debates about knowledge were framed as prize questions and what kind of truth-function was attributed to the answers. The period's characteristic shifts between orality and literacy provide the overarching framework for the project.

**Lennart Lehmhaus** is a post-doctoral research associate within the Collaborative Research Centre. In a project on encyclopedic medical episteme in Late Antiquity, he looks at talmudic representations of medical discourses, their particular (i.e. "Jewish") epistemologies and encyclopedic dimensions. This inquiry into transfers and transformations of such knowledge combines comparative perspectives on Graeco-Roman, (Ancient) Near Eastern and early Christian traditions with a theoretical approach grounded both in rabbinic studies and in the history and anthropology of science and knowledge. The project studies epistemic productivity and creativity of the seemingly conserving and conservative genre of commentaries and encyclopedias as they took place concurrently in the late antique Talmudic traditions from Palestine and Babylonia as well as in early Byzantine medical compilations in Greek.

**Monika Pietrzak-Franger** (moderator) is Visiting Professor at the University of Hamburg, Germany, and currently DAAD visiting scholar at Deutsches Haus at NYU, having previously taught at the universities of Mainz, Siegen, Braunschweig and St. Louis. She received a Volkswagen Foundation scholarship for her postdoctoral project on *Syphilis in Victorian Literature and Culture*, for which she was also awarded the BritCult Award by the German Association for the Study of British Cultures. She has published widely on Victorian and neo-Victorian studies, gender, medicine, visual culture and adaptation. She is the author of *The Male Body and Masculinity* (2007), editor of *Women, Beauty, and Fashion* (2014) and co-editor of *Neo-Victorianism and Globalisation* (2015), *Disease, Communication and the Ethics of (In)Visibility* (2014), *Reflecting on Darwin* (2014) and *Adaptations – Performing across Media and Genres* (2008).

## **October 17 | 10am Workshop** (ends 1.30 pm)

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Introduction: Knowledge in Motion – Introduction to perspectives and terms of the Collaborative Research Centre

Four exemplary Case Studies illuminating the increment value of the interdisciplinary research association (max. 10 min. + 20 min. discussion each)

### **Gyburg Uhlmann: Practices of Knowledge Transfer in the Late Antique Commentators on Aristotle**

The philosophical Greek commentators on Aristotle in the 5th and 6th century AD do not appear to be a very good example for dynamics in the history of knowledge. For their exegetical instruments and basic assumptions seem to be fixed and more or less unchanging since the works of Alexander of Aphrodisias who lived around 200 AD. However, this impression is based on a narrow understanding of change and epistemic movement, which identifies change with rupture or explicit rejection of the forerunners. With reference to short text passages and their institutional contexts the paper presents analyses in the gradual and sometimes subcutaneous changes that are introduced by the commentators by contextualizing the knowledge, which is handed down to them, anew and that do not require radical opposition to former or contemporary exegetes.

### **Lennart Lehmhaus: Medical Episteme and Encyclopaedisms in Late Antiquity – theories and methodologies in motion**

In contrast to other transfers (e.g., from Greek to Latin, Syriac and Arabic), is the transmission of medical epistemes in and between early Byzantine Greek and Hebrew-Aramaic Talmudic texts not straightforward and may even comprise forms of a negative transfer of knowledge. The talk will address some approaches developed within our research group to cope with these challenges and to inquire into similarities and differences that range from philology and concepts to discursive strategies and questions of authentication.

*11.40-12.00 Coffee break*

### **Nora Katharina Schmid: Performing the divine alphabet – the “mysterious letters” in the Qur’an**

Numerous surahs of the Qur’an are preceded by disconnected letters and combinations of letters. Scholars, puzzled by their existence, have proposed different explanations for their occurrence. The small case study will approach them as instantiations of the smallest elements of a heavenly scripture. Their oral performance in recitation serves to invest the Prophetic message with claims to validity, simultaneously disclosing knowledge formation from a heavenly source, across an ontological gap.

**Anita Traninger: Against Universities: Rhetoric of Innovation and Practices of Continuity in the Early Modern Period**

Many of the groundbreaking intellectual movements of the early modern period, including humanism, empiricism, and the rise of academies and learned societies, defined themselves in opposition to the university. Yet while their rhetoric framed the relationship in terms of a radical break, their story is better told as a history of entanglement, shared concerns, and mutual dependence. Two brief case studies from the Renaissance and the seventeenth century will highlight some core aspects of this relationship.

Concluding discussion (30 min.)

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**Nora Katharina Schmid** is an Arabist and member of the project “From *Logos* to *Kalām*: Figurations and Transformations of Knowledge in Near Eastern Late Antiquity”. The Islamic culture of knowledge is increasingly being recognized as a continuation of the intellectual traditions of Late Antiquity. In order to show that the transfer of knowledge from late antiquity was by no means limited to philosophy and the sciences, this project examines core elements of what has been seen as the ‘genuinely Arabic’ canon of knowledge, namely the Qur’an and Islamic Qur’an studies and Qur’an linguistics. Nora K. Schmid examines the actualization of God’s word in speech and cult as well as the role this process played in knowledge formation in early Arabic Islamic culture, particularly in ascetic contexts.