

## Disciples and Masters

### Schüler und Meister – Disciples et Maîtres

"All teaching and all intellectual learning come about from already existing knowledge" – this famous introductory sentence of Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics* does not only apply to sciences specifically, but also to any activity based on experience and expertise, which is not the result of nature, but of "techne", i.e., human craftsmanship in the broadest sense. Any proficiency, whether it results in an object, a created artifact, or consists in a certain practical or theoretical ability itself, has to be learned. This is a fact which is independent from age and life experience. In this respect, being a disciple is essential to being human. A master, on the other hand, is someone who does not only have experience, expertise and knowledge, but is also able to convey it to others. He is not only acquainted with the facts and circumstances in question, but also has the methodological knowledge that is required to impart one's own expertise to others. Hence, the disciple-master relation is a fundamental part of any higher culture and a key to understanding all culturally transmitted skills and encoded knowledge.

However, the basis of this central relation of cultural conveyance of competences and knowledge is the individual experience of the involved carriers: primarily of the disciple and the master themselves, then as well of the particular institutions. To study the manifestation of this experience in its various facets within Latin and Greek Byzantine, within Arabic and Hebrew tradition, in the worlds of laity and scholars, but also within everyday culture, the focus lies on a subject which has often been dealt with only incidentally and instrumentally, for instance in the context of biographical or doctrinal questions, or the history of institutions of education.

Thus, the point of departure of the 39<sup>th</sup> Kölner Mediaevistentagung will be the disciple-master relation. Beyond language and cultural spheres the discursive practices and epistemological implications will be discussed, as well as the institutional requirements and the social understanding of these roles. Where can we find continuity, where common points of reference – perhaps in starting with models and traditions of late antiquity? Where do they sustain, where do new forms and new kinds of understanding of the relation of disciple and master emerge as a result of the clash of ancient traditions with the thenceforth culturally dominating religions based on revelation, namely Judaism, Christianity and Islam? – In the following, some generic issues and subjects will be presented, without the intention of being exhaustive.

**1)** The typology of the disciple-master relation has to be inquired: from the practice of craftsmen to theoretical and scientific expertise to spiritual mastership. An important point of departure is the terminology. On the one hand there is the disciple, novice, apprentice, student, talmid ḥakam, ṭālib, etc. On the other hand, however, there is the

even more multifaceted term "master": as the *magister operis* in the workshops, as well as the magister and teacher in schools and universities, as the *Lese- und Lebemeister*, as a rabbi and moreh, 'ustād, mu'allim, 'ālim, etc. How and by whom are those technical terms coined? How are they translated from one language to another? Does this also imply a change of the understanding of the role and self-conception?

**2)** Central to the disciple-master discussion are the various forms of discourse. Firstly, there are the different school types, such as *universitas*, *madrassa*, *yešivah*, and the corresponding ways of teaching, such as *lectio*, *disputatio*, *pilpul*, etc. Moreover, there is private tuition, which is especially important in philosophy. Special attention should be paid to the literary form of the disciple-master dialogue, in which the disciple is often the initiator of the conversation. What is the subject of such conversations and what is their literary concept?

**3)** Disciples and masters act as mutual, but not always like-minded partners of a science or art. This issue is often reduced to the disciple's dependence (as regards contents) on its master, to aspects of its further development with respect to the master and to questions of continuity, or emancipation and independence from the knowledge and thinking of the master. But how is it the other way round? To what extent do scholars nurture their knowledge and the corresponding theories in discussions with their disciples? We know about more than a few works, which masters wrote explicitly at their disciple's request. What happens to the scientific legacy of a master? Usually, his students – if it did not happen before - circulate his works and, if necessary, redact "unfinished" texts, frequently adding something to them and thus making them accessible. The *reportationes*, which raise question concerning authorship, can also be placed in this context. To what extent is it possible to distinguish between the contributions of students and those of masters? On the other hand there is the rebellious disciple or dissident, who develops his own theory as a reaction to and emancipation from his master.

**4)** But how can the master impart knowledge to the students anyway? The master-disciple relation also raises epistemological questions, which are discussed in philosophy since Plato's dialogues. Does the teacher have a stimulating or recollecting function, or does he rather master a technique of creating knowledge? What, in general, does teaching impart, and what is the status of learned knowledge in contrast to self-developed knowledge? Which qualities must disciples and masters have? – This is a classical question in all introductory writings.

**5)** Special emphasis shall be put on the academic milieu: cathedral schools, universities, *madāris* (madrassas), etc. How does a master find his students and vice versa? Of great importance are the specific stages of an academic career, such as the final exam, the permission to teach, the permission to practice, ordination. Who has access to academic education and which possibilities are there besides the established courses of education? How are competing demands of teachers, schools or religious and secular authorities handled?

**6)** Apart from the academic milieu there are numerous institutions of organized knowledge transfer: guilds, monasteries, convents, and workshops. What kind of relation

do the novices have to their masters? The primary questions concern the self-conception of student and master, as well as the type of education. Does the transfer take place merely orally and by means of passing on practical skills? Which relevance do written sources (collections of recipes, instructions, sample books) have? Concerning religious orders, the relation of active, intellectual and spiritual education is of importance, too.

**7)** The disciple-master relation has an effect on different kinds of experiential, artistic and scientific mastery and on their potential connection. Hence, interesting epistemological questions arise, which concern the relation of *experientia*, *ars* and *scientia* as well as of practice and poesis, of theoretical and practical knowledge. Does the "ordo addiscendi" correspond to the "ordo artium et scientiarum", or are teaching and learning autonomous?

**8)** Some marginal questions should also come up for discussion. Is it, for instance, possible for a human being to teach himself? The prototype of this concept is the autodidact. Which role do "masters" play that are seemingly not directly involved in the teaching process: Aristotle, for example, as the "first teacher" (*al-mu'allim al-'awwal*) or Christ as the "inner master"?

**9)** From the prosopographic perspective, famous and less famous disciple-master relations shall be discussed. The topos "great masters" / "minor masters" hints at a growing awareness for individual mastery. The prestige of schools and other educational institutions is dependent on their teachers. However, the relationship between students – especially distinguished ones – and their masters is quite often rather tense, even when they refer to them respectfully. For the formation of schools those affirmative or rejecting references to a master are constitutive.

**10)** If teaching and learning is regarded as a process of transmission, the disciple-master relation is a particularly complex form of the *translatio* of experience, expertise and knowledge, which goes beyond time periods and cultural spheres. How about the communication of competences beyond cultural borders though? Are there disciple-master relationships across linguistic, cultural and religious boundaries? Which conditions have to be fulfilled to allow such intercultural teaching-learning relationships to be successful, what is imparted and where are their limits?

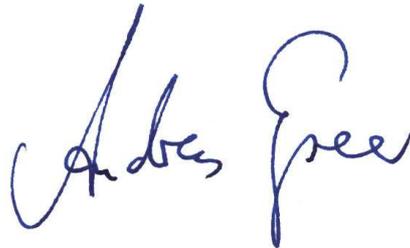
The focus lies on the diverging transmission of late antique knowledge within different cultural spheres, as well as on its reception and transformation during a millennium which was only retrospectively qualified as the Middle Ages. But does the therein implied difference really exist, or do we have to assume a continuity that still has an effect on the Modern Age, i.e., existing longer than until the posited end of the Middle Ages? As always, the Kölner Mediaevistentagung aims at a broad, interdisciplinary spectrum. Therefore, we invite philosophers, theologians, historians and philologists, literary scholars and cultural scientists, art and science historians and more, to participate in the 39<sup>th</sup> Kölner Mediaevistentagung with an interdisciplinary question or an issue from their field of study. It is our goal to open up new perspectives, to challenge and reconsider old ways of thinking. In doing so, the wider context as well as the micrologic detail, the continuity as well as the divergences within the discourse are of importance. Also, it is necessary to

widen one's view and go beyond the narrow, hermeneutic apprehension of a text to the realm of material, medial and symbolic forms of communication, as they find their expression in rituals, iconographies or in specific objects.

I would like to finish with the request for your proposals, which you may send until August 15<sup>th</sup>, 2013 preferably (thomas-institut@uni-koeln.de), and be glad to welcome you to the 39<sup>th</sup> Kölner Mediaevistentagung next year. Please feel free to forward this invitation to colleagues who are not yet in our mailing list or send us the addresses of anyone interested. Thank you!

I am looking forward to receiving your proposals and remain with best regards,

Cologne, March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2013

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Andreas Frey". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'A' and a long, sweeping underline.