

constellations

**44th Cologne**

**Mediaevistentagung**

**9–13 September 2024**

KON  
STEL  
LATIO  
NEN



# KON STEL LATIO NEN

constellations

## 44th Cologne Mediaevistentagung 9–13 September 2024

Originally, the term ‘constellation’ was used to describe a group of neighbouring fixed stars and their spatial relationship to each other or also a certain position of planets (*synastry*, *constellatio*). Star constellations thus become signs of a cosmological whole. They not only disclose the intention of a divine creator, but also the favourable moment for a wedding day, as in the wedding between Mercury and Philology in the didactic poem of Martianus Capella. Already in the astrological context, however, the meaning of ‘constellation’ changes from referring to the totality of the stars to friendship. Thus, there is a transfer from the astronomical-astrological sphere to political, social and historical conditions. And finally, a constellation is understood as the overall situation that results from the coincidence of special circumstances and conditions. This can be an arrangement of people: for example, in the arts, politics and science, such as artists’ circles, political parties and scientific communities. In this context, one can think of Charlemagne’s court school, of the Cologne school of painting of the 14th and 15th centuries or of 13th-century Paris with its particular constellation of institutions: the newly founded university, the **studia** and monasteries, and the individuals involved, including Bonaventure and Thomas Aquinas, who taught together at least twice in Paris and whose commemorative year on the occasion of the 750th anniversary of their death we celebrate in 2024. The two **syllabi** of the Parisian bishop Étienne Tempier, dated 10 December 1270 and 7 March 1277, can also be considered reference documents for intellectual debates and frontlines that can be attributed to historical sources as well as contemporary authors through extensive source studies. In this way, a dynamic and dense network of relationships between persons, ideas, theories, problems and documents becomes visible, “in such a way that only the analysis of this context, and not its isolated components, makes it possible to understand the philosophical achievement and development of the persons, ideas and theories”; this is how Martin Mulsow determines what a philosophical constellation is.

But does what is said about philosophical constellation here also apply to other areas? What characterises a constellation in general and how can it be determined? Christian Kiening sees the proprium of constellations in the mediation between historically complex individual phenomena and structures of a developmental history, between an unavailable totality and an unclear diversity. They thus appear as possibilities to reveal an overarching, though not fully comprehensible context that does not exhaust itself in causal analyses of historical dependencies and psychological motivations.

Constellations are about the interplay of event, circumstance and situation. Therefore, a constellation presupposes a sufficient context density, an adequate number of documents that prove this context and make it accessible: Manuscripts and books with glosses and marginalia, notes and letters, deeds, but also lists of errors, trial records, etc. The reconstruction of philosophical, literary or political constellations is carried out with a systematic intention. This also includes unrealised possibilities. It is about “options within the theoretical horizon surrounding a constellation” and thus about the dynamics of ideas in a space of thought that contains a multitude of “moves of reasoning on a given basis” (Mulsow).

This is linked to a research programme that has become prominent under the name of “Konstellationsforschung“ (constellation research) through Dieter Henrich’s works on the development of classical German philosophy after Kant, applying especially to the Tübingen constellation of early idealism. But what applies to the Tübingen Stift can also be made fruitful for that long millennium we usually call Middle Ages. This is the thesis that shall be tested in the course of the 44th Cologne **Mediaevistentagung**. It is undisputed that we need new historiographical models to retell the entangled history (*histoire croisée*) of cultural interactions and philosophical (but also artistic, political, cultural) exchange relations across languages and borders. Can constellation research help us in this matter? Can the model be further developed and adapted to the requirements of medieval studies? We invite you to take up these questions from a wide range of professional and interdisciplinary perspectives and to develop them further together.

1. What exactly do we mean by constellation? This is a matter of terminological and conceptual sharpening, especially with a view to neighbouring concepts such as biography, discourse and network analysis, with which overlaps are possible. Thus, a clear definition of concept, method and object is all the more important.

2. Constellations are dynamic. They reflect the complexity of the situations of the people involved and the different horizons of the actors: for example, their reading horizons, their horizons of values and expectations, their considerations for career or censorship, their sometimes changing sympathies for each other. Yet, the actors are united by the same or at least similar problems. How can these constellations be reconstructed and presented?

3. What are the prerequisites for researching constellations? The prerequisites for the Middle Ages are not as bad as is sometimes suggested. An interdisciplinary approach, the sources and methods of indexing are important in this regard. For example, the new possibilities of digitisation have not only enabled simultaneous access to a multitude of sources, they have also introduced new methodological approaches that allow us to take a look at the desks of scholars, readers and writers and provide precisely the information that constellation research needs.

4. The mere assignment to a supposed school does not yet constitute a constellation if, due to the lack of sufficient documents, there is no possibility to examine and prove the quality of the relationships between the actors. Which historiographical narratives that have constructed apparent constellations can be disproved on the basis of recent research?

5. Constellations are able to open up the cycle of scientific facts (Latour). In addition to the interest of the actors and protagonists, the interest of a circle of addressees is needed, without whose support the necessary resources would not be available. This circle of interested parties is often larger than it seems, and it is by no means accidental when it comes to the appropriate definition of the scientific object. Who, for example, is interested in translations of astronomical tables or of a physics commentary? A translation is known to be time-consuming and costly and thus requires corresponding resources.

6. Constellations reach across disciplinary boundaries. This holds true for the historical perspective with a view to the Middle Ages and for the disciplinary focal points of current research. To what extent do disciplinary constellations influence our perception of scientific debates and problems? And, in contrast, which constellations that transcend disciplinary boundaries have changed our scientific world view? What institutional preconditions were necessary and where were they provided?

7. Constellations are not limited to scientific collectives. We are also interested in groups of artists and poets, political and social communities as well as actors. Where were there constellations across professional and status boundaries? What were the conditions for such border crossings?

8. A constellation is usually associated with a local and temporal unit. But are constellations limited to local units? How far can they extend, spatially and temporally, to still be considered a constellation? One might think of commentary traditions, for example, on the **Sentences** or the Aristotelian **Physics**, but also of translation schools such as those in Baghdad, Toledo or Lunel.

9. What role do constellations play in competitive situations? And what significance does competition have for the genesis of constellations? Are there differences in different areas of society, politics, science and culture? What characterises the dynamics of such competitive constellations?

10. Constellations offer an opportunity to present the cultural, linguistic, religious and scientific diversity of the long millennium that we call Middle Ages in its interconnectedness. Where and how did these exchanges take place? Who were the most prominent actors? What were their preconditions and how did they differ with regard to varying institutional backgrounds? Where can we find exemplary constellations for such an entangled history?

These questions cannot and do not want to be more than initial suggestions, and they raise no claim to completeness. They are intended to stimulate further thinking. We hope that the topic offers many points of contact, and that it invites you to look at your own projects from the perspective of constellation research.

From the beginning, the Cologne **Mediaevistentagung** has strived for the broadest possible interdisciplinary range. Therefore, we invite scholars from philosophy, theology and the history of science, from philologies and literary studies, from history, cultural studies and art studies as well as digital humanities to participate in the 44th Cologne **Mediaevistentagung** with a question from their respective fields or with an interdisciplinary issue. Once again, we aim at looking beyond the Latin conceptual and cultural space and in this way question habits of perception and open up new perspectives.

Let me conclude with the request to send us your proposals together with an abstract (approx. 1 page), if possible, by 31 July 2023 (directly via upload or via email). I would be particularly pleased to personally welcome you to the 44th Cologne **Mediaevistentagung** next year. Please feel free to forward this invitation to your colleagues (as all of them are certainly not yet in our address file). Thank you very much!

Looking forward to your suggestions, I remain with best regards



Cologne, March 2023

Literature:

M. Mulsow, "Zum Methodenprofil der Konstellationsforschung", in: M. Mulsow/ M. Stamm (ed.), *Konstellationsforschung*, Frankfurt a.M. 2005 (stw 1736), 74–97.

D. Henrich, "Konstellationsforschung zur klassischen deutschen Philosophie", in: Mulsow/Stamm (ed.), *Konstellationsforschung*, 15–30.

C. Kiening, "Einleitung", in: C. Kiening/ M. Stercken, *Medialität: historische Konstellationen*, Zürich 2019 (Medienwandel – Medienwechsel – Medienwissen 42), 9–16.

B. Latour, "Der Blutkreislauf der Wissenschaft", in: ders., *Die Hoffnung der Pandora. Untersuchungen zur Wirklichkeit der Wissenschaft* (übers. aus dem Englischen von G. Roßler), Frankfurt a.M. 2002 (stw 1595), 96–136.

## Scientific Organization:

Prof. Dr. Andreas Speer (andreas.speer@uni-koeln.de)

Lars Reuke, M.A. (lars.reuke@uni-koeln.de)

Thomas-Institut der Universität zu Köln

Universitätsstraße 22

D-50923 KÖLN

Tel.: +49/(0)221/470-2309

Fax: +49/(0)221/470-5011

email: thomas-institut@uni-koeln.de

upload: kmt.uni-koeln.de/upload

www.kmt.uni-koeln.de | www.thomasinst.uni-koeln.de