CONFERENCE PROSPECTUS

BOOKS IN MOTION IN EARLY MODERN EUROPE. BEYOND PRODUCTION, CIRCULATION AND CONSUMPTION

International Conference
Gotha (Germany)
29-31 May 2014

This international conference is designed as a reflection on the history of the early modern book in Europe, and aims to open discussion between experts that are working in the interdisciplinary field of book history. Contributions from different scholarly perspectives are highly encouraged – ranging from (and by far not limited to) literary studies, history, art history, media studies, economic history, communication studies, history of science, and bibliography.

As the conference’s title assumes, Books in Motion in Early Modern Europe. Beyond Production, Circulation and Consumption is aimed to focus on all three main research fields of book history: production, circulation and consumption. While providing an opportunity and forum for reviewing current and past developments in these often separated fields, we also set out to highlight the connections between them. To achieve this aim, we will concentrate especially on the interplay between the three stages of early modern book culture, established by the actions and motives of its participants (sociality), the characteristics of the used and produced spaces (spatiality), and the variety of the publications (materiality). To put it differently: the focus lies on the human networks of producing, distributing and consuming; on the interconnectivity of geography, distance and space that shaped early modern production, circulation, and consumption; and on the wide range and function of contemporary published material (in manuscript and print) characterized by aspects of production, circulation and consumption.

The three themes of sociality, spatiality, and materiality will interconnect the conference’s different sections:

→ Section “Production”
We invite case studies that go beyond the traditional scheme of author-printer-publisher-reader, and include everyone involved in the material aspect of production – ranging from the creditors to the suppliers of material (paper, ink, type), to the printers and their apprentices, to the publishers, editors and binders, draughtsmen and engravers responsible for the illustrations, etc. Further, we welcome contributions on the spatial dimensions of this production universe: where were these people active and where did they connect, assemble, collaborate and trade? Next, the variety of the material text and image can be addressed, stressing the effects of production strategies, distribution conditions, and demands of the market. Potential perspectives might be on competition in the book production, strategies of popularizing specific prints, aspects of organizing a competitively inexpensive book for the market, adaptations to certain forms of distribution and responses to a changing reading audience, etc.

→ Section “Circulation”
This section seeks case studies on cooperating and competing mercantile networks which linked the production of prints and manuscripts with their (stationary and peddling) distributors –
including the social background of the distributors, the organization, activities, and strategies of distribution, the actual distribution systems and infrastructure the book people used and/or developed within Europe. Further, what can be said on the dissemination of ‘books’ across legal and state borders? As we know, regular and irregular markets for books were always fluidly interconnected (Geheimbuchhandel, livres sans frontières, illegal booktrade, piracy, books without borders). We invite case studies on the stopping places and ports used, and on the people involved in the actual book trade and transport such as commercial agents, shippers, peddlars, smugglers etc. In addition, we are looking for the range of tools that were used to promote and sell these cultural commodities. This may include the strategies of positioning the own products within competitive (regional, national and international) markets, as well as choices of authors (hack writers or the literary elite), content (e.g. pirate editions or popular adaptations), titles (who is addressed?) and material quality (such as costly paper, bindings and illustrations). In sum, we are interested in all the physical and material circumstances of the book trade itself.

→ Section “Consumption”
In this section we want to encourage contributions that focus on the connection between the materiality of print (format, typography, images, binding), reading instructions, habits and experiences. This last category also includes the written annotations of users and owners in the margins of printed books. Furthermore we are interested in research that is able to make connections between consumer behavior and reading habits on the one hand, and socio-geographical circumstances on the other (urban vs. rural consumption; catholic vs. protestant regions, etc.). This approach also opens up relevant questions about consumption/reading and cultural identity. More specifically focused on the eighteenth century, it would be interesting to unravel the connection between the alleged consumer revolution and the manifestation of this phenomenon in the buying and reading of printed material. Is the diversity of genres, titles and format a direct response to a changing market? Another field that can be explored more extensively is the relation between the infrastructure (printers, publishers, book shops, itinerant traders, means of transport, libraries, reading societies etc.), and the consumption of books.

Details and Deadline for Submission
The deadline for abstracts will be provided soon, and we would appreciate your assistance in spreading the word to researchers who may be interested in these topics and the proposed approach. Paper proposals of no more than 300 words should be accompanied with a short biography. All papers presented at the conference are expected to be based on current and new research, and are aimed for publication in an edited volume.

Please send your proposal and all further enquiries to the conference organizers:
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