

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The present volume is based on the international conference “Finding, Inheriting or Borrowing? Construction and Transfer of Knowledge about Man and Nature in Antiquity and the Middle Ages” held at the University of Mainz from 14 to 16 September 2016. The conference was part of the research programme of the Research Training Group (RTG) “Early Concepts of Humans and Nature. Universal, Specific, Interchanged”, which was started and funded by the German Research Foundation at the University of Mainz in 2013 (DFG-RTG 1876).

The overall aim of the RTG is to study early concepts of humans and nature based on texts, iconography, and material evidence. The time span of the RTG extends from the dawn of history (ca. 100,000 years BCE) to the Middle Ages (up to the 15th century). The group consists of graduate students and their supervisors from the disciplines of Egyptology, ancient Near Eastern studies, Near Eastern archaeology, Classical philology, pre- and proto-historic archaeology (Pleistocene Archaeology), Classical archaeology, medieval German studies, and Byzantine studies. It is interested in establishing where and when similar beliefs and concepts originated, whether this happened independently, whether such concepts were transmitted or exchanged between early cultures, and how they then changed over time.

The aim of the conference was to focus on the third part of the project’s subtitle, “interchanged”, in the sense of transfer, and on the processes of construction, invention, or discovery, and the legitimization of knowledge in a broader sense.

In order to systematically investigate the chosen topic, four sections were formed, with contributions from various fields, including anthropology, Egyptology, Jewish studies, Classical philology, Old Norse studies, and Byzantine studies. The first section aimed at working out the theoretical and

methodological foundations of the formation, transfer, and legitimation of knowledge. The three subsequent sections were case studies in which individual doctoral research projects associated with the Research Training Group were placed in a broader, interdisciplinary context. On the basis of these case studies, it was intended to show concretely how certain elements of knowledge were formed, adopted, and legitimized in different cultures and times. The first of these sections (organized by Victoria Altmann-Wendling and Tim Brandes) dealt with the knowledge and cultural meaning of the moon, the second (organized by Dominic Bärsch) with the idea of the end of the world in fire, and the third (organized by Tristan Schmidt) with the pejorative description and distinction based on human perceptions of animals.

In order to ensure coherence, the proceedings of the conference are being published in two volumes. The present volume contains the first three sections: the theoretical and methodological foundations, followed by a series of case studies on the moon and another series treating the end of the world in fire. The fourth section, with a slightly enlarged scope, will be edited in a separate volume by Johannes Pahlitzsch and Tristan Schmidt that is going to be published in 2019 with DeGruyter.

Many people contributed to the success of the conference and this volume containing its proceedings. First of all, we would like to express our gratitude to all of the scholars who presented a paper at the conference and later revised it for publication. Moreover, we would like to thank all the participants of the conference for their dedicated and fruitful discussions.

Furthermore, we want to thank the staff of the Research Training Group. The doctoral students contributed to this workshop in many ways, by proposing and organizing the thematic sections, presenting papers, moderating the discussions, etc. Silke Bechler did an excellent job as coordinator, organizing and supporting the conference before, during, and after the actual event. We are especially grateful to the whole team.

A heartfelt thank is extended to the German Research Foundation for their continued support of the Research Training Group with its conferences. We would also like to thank the coordinating committee of the Mainz-based research unit Historical Cultural Science for giving us the opportunity to publish within the *Mainzer Historische Kulturwissenschaften* series and for their generous funding of the publication costs.

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Jochen Althoff, Dominik Berrens, and Tanja Pommerening

