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Story Street is a One-Way Street. Concluding Thoughts on Cultural Entanglement and Historical Narration

Abstract: The following article provides some concluding considerations on the conference, its papers and discussions and, furthermore, approaches the issue of historical narratives and narration. The contributions to this volume give an insight into the wide range of topics transcultural studies are concerned with – what they have in common is a global perspective and an emphasis on dynamics in a multi-centric world. Thus, research on entanglement in medieval times dissociates itself from overarching grand narratives such as a Euro-centric modernization theory or the 'Rise of the West'. Although these narratives are much criticised, it is hard or even impossible to falsify or erase them. As a consequence, the danger of interference remains. This contribution touches upon the general nature, inherent benefits and downsides of meta-narratives and stresses the necessity to either modify existing large-scale frameworks or to create alternatives without only reiterating or rewriting older ones. Moreover, it reflects on the merits of historical narration as such, which, as an indispensable tool of historical meaning-making and with heterogeneous audiences in mind, deserves greater attention. The complexity of long-term historical processes of transformation requires forms of historical story-telling which avoid linear, teleological old-to-new structures but instead emphasize the episodic nature of changes and constellations of diversity and ambiguity. Promising ways which are used effectively in this volume are, for example, three-part narrative patterns and a focus on single, material objects.

Introduction: Cultural Entanglement and Narration

As the papers and discussion of the 2013 Münster conference 'Processes of Cultural Entanglement' illustrated, the rich textures of medieval and early modern European and Mediterranean cultures were made of many and colourful interwoven threads.[1] The conference traced entanglements spanning the distance from Byzantium to Scandinavia, from German cities to the Levant and Sicily, and from India and Persia all the way to the French and English courts. The materials analyzed to study them encom-

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[1] The following thoughts are based on an ad-hoc presentation and discussion during the Münster conference. The text therefore does not contain full bibliographical references for the many topics it touches. I would like to thank Antje FLÜCHTER and Theo RICHES for helpful comments.

passed texts and manuscript illuminations, textiles, tombstones and buildings, ceremonies and semantics. Frequently, contributors reflected not only on medieval phenomena, but also on the ways they have been studied, categorized and organized in modern research. Even though the international and interdisciplinary conference assembled scholars of many different specializations, discussion arose naturally and was surprisingly intense.

The impression of cultural complexity and connectivity found a very apt metaphor in Margit MERSCH's evening lecture on theories of entanglement and hybridity.[2] Among other things, she presented Gilles DELEUZE's und Félix GUATTARI's concept of the rhizoma, an asymmetrical and a-hierarchical web of botanical growth, typically producing far-flung shoots from an interconnected underground root system. This does indeed seem to be a singularly fitting image for the pre-modern Euro-Mediterranean area, in which far-distant cultural phenomena could be closely attuned to each other.

Faced with the task of offering a concluding summary to the conference, however, I found myself in some difficulties. The almost boundless connectivity conveyed by the image of the rhizoma may be fascinating, but it also has its downsides. The Münster conference was, in itself, rather rhizomatic – in the best sense, as it clarified how processes of cultural growth worked, and often illustrated 'underground' transcultural connections between far-flung areas. But how to summarize a rhizoma?

Considering the problem quickly led to another observation: it is not only the contributions of the Münster conference, but in fact most research results within the growing fields of transcultural, comparative and entangled histories of the Euro-Mediterranean area which are hard to summarize and recapitulate. One of several reasons for this, I would argue, is the problem of historical narratives and narration. It is this topic I would like to focus on exclusively in some concluding thoughts.

Some context needs to be established to describe why narrative should be a focus of attention again. Clearly, the contributions assembled in this volume are representative of an emerging research field attempting to widen the horizon from a Euro-centric perspective to a global one. Though historians of the medieval and early modern centuries necessarily remain bound to a local point of view and to a world still rather firmly divided into several interconnected areas, they are beginning to link their outlook on specific regions, in our case Europe, to a global perspective. Already, there is marked shift of regional and conceptual interests in European medieval studies, which has established a 'transcultural' perspective, caused the addition of the Medi-

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2 See the contribution by Margit MERSCH, Transkulturalität, Verflechtung, Hybridisierung – 'neue' epistemologische Modelle in der Mittelalterforschung, above.

terranean area to our imaginations of medieval Europe, and encouraged research on globalization and entanglement in the pre-modern period.[3]

Most researchers engaged in these fields underline that the history of the Euro-Mediterranean area in the pre-modern period was neither unified, nor static, nor based on intrinsic or 'essential' inner qualities. On the contrary, we are attempting to describe processes of cultural integration and disintegration in a multi-centric area. We assume that centres and peripheries shifted, while shared cultural spaces, for example a hybrid Mediterranean court culture or an Aristotelian knowledge tradition, emerged and changed over time.

But this endeavour can only have a lasting impact if current efforts manage to displace or at least transform several existing conceptual frameworks for historical study – most importantly, histories tied to national or Western European perspectives, and based on modernization theories of the 1950s to 70s, which have come under heavy scrutiny by now.[4] As it turns out, it is not so easy to tackle this opponent. Such older perspectives are still present and even dominant in both specialist research and popular versions, mainly in the form of historical grand narratives and underlying meta-narratives[5] – sweeping stories of the 'Rise of the West', based on a theory of universal modernization.

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3 For the developments traced here, see e. g. Wolfram DREWS and Jenny Rahel OESTERLE (eds.), Transkulturelle Komparatistik. Beiträge zu einer Globalgeschichte der Vormoderne, = Comparativ 18/3–4, 2008; Klaus HERBERS and Nikolas JASPERT (eds.), Grenzräume und Grenzüberschreitungen im Vergleich. Der Osten und der Westen des mittelalterlichen Lateineuropa (Europa im Mittelalter 7), Munich 2007; Michael BORGOLTE and Bernd SCHNEIDMÜLLER (eds.), Hybride Kulturen im mittelalterlichen Europa. Vorträge und Workshops einer internationalen Frühlingsschule (Europa im Mittelalter 16), Berlin 2010; Rania ABDELLATIF et al. (eds.), Construire la Méditerranée, penser les transferts culturels. Approches historiographiques et perspectives de recherche (Ateliers des DHI Paris 8), Munich 2012; Michael BORGOLTE and Matthias M. TISCHLER (eds.), Transkulturelle Verflechtungen im mittelalterlichen Jahrtausend. Europa, Ostasien, Afrika, Darmstadt 2012. Further literature is discussed in the introduction by Wolfram DREWS and Christian SCHOLL above.
4 There is no good overview of the relationship between sociological and historical modernization theories, but see Wolfgang KNÖBL, Aufstieg und Fall der Modernisierungstheorie und des säkularen Bildes moderner Gesellschaften, in: Ulrich WILLEMS et al. (eds.), Moderne und Religion. Kontroversen um Modernität und Säkularisierung, Bielefeld 2012, pp. 75–116 and my own rough sketch, Sita STECKEL, Differenzierung jenseits der Moderne. Eine Debatte zu mittelalterlicher Religion und moderner Differenzierungstheorie, in: Frühmittelalterliche Studien 47 (2013), pp. 35–80, at pp. 42–51.
5 The term meta-narrative is used here to denote a long-term perspective on history grounded in some theoretical framework, such as sociological or philosophical theories; the terms 'grand narratives', 'master narratives' etc. are used in a less specific sense to refer to historical narrations covering long periods and providing foundational stories for specific identities, cf. Franziska METZGER, Geschichtsschreibung und Geschichtsdenken im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert, Bern, Stuttgart, Vienna 2011, esp. pp. 91–93. On historical narrative in general, see Alun MUNSLOW, Narrative and History (Theory and History), New York 2007; Chris LORENZ, Konstruktion der Vergangenheit. Eine Einführung in die Geschichtstheorie, Cologne, Weimar, Vienna 1997, ch. VIII; on 'master narratives' dealing with the

For the European Middle Ages in particular, we often encounter master narratives framed in a mixture of macro-history and modernization theory, crediting Europe – and specifically, Western Europe of the high Middle Ages – with laying the foundations of global, secular modernity, and exporting it outwards. Modernization was seen to arrive with 'delay' in the Holy Roman Empire and the Central and Eastern areas of Europe after the high Middle Ages, then (largely after the Middle Ages) to spread further into the world. In such a perspective, cultural connections are mainly seen as uni-directional, and historical change is seen to start at a European core – all of which relegated the study of cultural entanglements firmly to the peripheries of historical enquiry.

The problem with this type of history is not that it has not been criticized, but that it is typically organized in grand narratives, and as such, immune to many forms of criticism. This fact is not new, but it needs to be emphasized: the debate on postmodernism has made the problem of historical narration a well-known issue, and extant historical master narratives (typically based either on Marxism or modernization theory) have been extensively criticized.[6] From the 1980s onwards, the turn towards cultural history pushed the older, heavily charged *grand récits* into the background. In fields strongly influenced by cultural history, their prime assumptions were largely replaced. But they continued – and still continue – to provide the only extant frame of reference for long-term processes in several areas of study; not only in some sub-fields within the history of the pre-modern period, but also within the political and social sciences and global history.

If medievalists and early modernists hope to show the importance of cultural entanglement and of a transcultural perspective, it is these narratives of the Rise of the West and of a Euro-centric modernization that must be transformed. In fact, they need to be adapted somehow if we hope to achieve a more dynamic historical framework for long-term processes within a multi-centric world – in which Europe has been 'provincialized' (CHAKRABARTY) – at all. But as I would caution, this may not be easy to achieve through specialized research and theoretical models.

As we have come to realize, the problem with narratives – highly efficient vehicles of historical meaning and identity – is that they cannot be falsified.[7] Unlike a scien-

Middle Ages, see Frank REXROTH (Hg.), Meistererzählungen vom Mittelalter. Epochenimaginationen und Verlaufsmuster in der Praxis mediävistischer Disziplinen (Historische Zeitschrift. Beiheft 46), Munich 2007.

6 On these developments, see the instructive recent overview by Lynn HUNT, Writing History in the Global Era, New York, London 2014, esp. ch. 1–2, pp. 13–78; she enumerates four great paradigms, Marxism, modernization, the Annales school and identity history, though I can only deal with the first two in this chapter.

7 In addition to work on historical narratives, which is summarized for example in LORENZ (note 5), see also Albrecht KOSCHORKE, Zur Logik kultureller Gründungserzählungen, in: Zeitschrift für Ideengeschichte 1 (2007), pp. 5–12.

tific hypothesis, a historical narrative cannot be disproven by convincing criticisms of its individual constituents. A sweeping story like that of Europe's growing dominance over the world draws its strength and structure from sociological and political macro-theory rather than historical micro-analyses, and can take quite a bit of small-scale criticism by historians without incurring visible damage. The only way to get rid of large-scale narratives, it appears, is to re-write them – or to replace them with other narratives.

And in fact, several voices have recently re-asserted that we need narration as a tool of historical meaning-making anyway.[8] To work with theoretical models or to attack grand narratives through visual metaphors like the intriguing but complicated rhizoma may be productive and interesting for specialized debate. But most of us are still under high pressure to produce scholarly publications in the traditional formats of books and articles. There is no denying that a linear mode of presentation – in short, a story, with a beginning and an end – helps to organize this kind of text, and that expectations, conventions and its proven high effectivity favor it.

More importantly, we will need convincing historical narration of varying types to reach the different audiences we rely on. These do not only include specialized colleagues – who are, if they also work on cultural entanglement, hardly in need of further persuasion. Rather, we must be able to speak to colleagues who are sceptical of the importance of a transcultural perspective, and to colleagues from other academic disciplines, who are becoming more and more influential in allotting research funding. Moreover, there are students and finally non-academic audiences. The latter, who are understably keen on the larger picture and seem to enjoy non-specialized books on themes like global history, would be a particularly important audience for studies of cultural entanglement. But they are at the moment mostly targeted by a new generation of macro-historians, some of whom are simply re-hashing the old 'Rise of the West' paradigm without much reference to current research.[9] Though specialists have made efforts to produce new handbooks and overviews, this process seems to be in the beginning stages. While there is no reason to be overly dramatic, it does seem worrisome that the broader public knows little to nothing about the the elaborate, expensive and often highly useful research done in specialized academic communities, which is increasingly conducted for dwindling audiences of a few students and colleagues.[10]

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8 Cf. HUNT (note 6), p. 40; Jürgen OSTERHAMMEL, Die Verwandlung der Welt. Eine Geschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts, Munich 2009, pp. 13–16.

9 I am particularly alarmed by some examples of heavy-handed identity history such as Niall FERGUSON, Civilization. The West and the Rest, London 2011, which to me mostly seems to aim to assert Western cultural hegemony which it perceives as threatened. But there is, of course, also more nuanced and thought-provoking work on global history for a popular market.

10 For a related but slightly different angle of criticism of current historical introversion, see Jo GULDI and David ARMITAGE, The History Manifesto, Cambridge 2014, http://historymanifesto.cambridge.org

As I would moreover argue, certain forms of story-telling seem fundamentally necessary to generate a form of scholarship which has enough coherence and clout to reach all these relevant groups. The rhizoma may thus be a great framework to experiment with, and cultural entanglement may be multi-directional, but to put it very bluntly: story street is a one-way street (see fig. 1). Besides theoretical models, transcultural and entangled histories need modes of linear narration.

But this does not mean that we need to return to older forms of large-scale teleological historiography, or that we should base our research solely on old-fashioned narrative accounts – quite to the contrary. What I would hope for is an interdisciplinary debate on the ways in which the study of medieval and early modern history, art history, literature and other disciplines can and should be communicated to various audiences, and how we can solve the dilemma of wishing to replace older master narratives without falling into the trap of new teleologies.

Put in this context, the papers presented and discussed at the Münster conference proved highly intriguing not only on the thematic, but also on the narrative level. Most contributors did not only position themselves critically towards older large-scale narratives implicitly or explicitly. They also told different kinds of stories, organized in more or less linear, comparative or episodic forms – but all of them managed to break down the theoretical ideas inherent in a transcultural perspective to a manageable level. Taken together, the contributions thus document that we can, indeed, tell innovative kinds of stories about entanglement and disentanglement. *In lieu* of a conclusion, I would like to summarize some patterns emerging from the chosen forms of narration, rather than their content. To point out the larger – and as I think, quite pressing – issues inherent in this task, I present some further preliminary discussion, both on difficulties and possibilites inherent in new forms of narration.

Pitfalls for New Narratives: Theorizing Transformation in Multi-Centric Constellations

Even if we acknowledge the need to construct new overarching narratives and overviews, it seems highly advisable to reflect on the possible scope and nature of such frameworks first. How 'grand' could and should new narratives become? Could the study of the pre-modern period, and in particular of the medieval centuries, profit from orienting itself more firmly towards large-scale frameworks of global history, often tested already for the modern period? Or should we attempt to construct new convincing narratives and models of long-term change ourselves – possibly by turning to more recent macro-historical models debated in sociology and other fields?

[last accessed: 15.02.2015]. For a recent handbook, see e. g. Thomas ERTL and Michael LIMBERGER, Die Welt 1250–1500 (Globalgeschichte 2), Vienna 2009.

If we contemplate possible frameworks built on global history models for a moment, they seem rather intriguing, especially for the study of pre-modern cultural entanglements. Not only is this a topic of interest to broader as well as specialist audiences. It could also be argued that most recent approaches to long-term historical transformations have stressed the role of cultural encounter, which was clearly underrepresented in older modernization theory. After all, cultural contact, conflict, competition and interaction do not only explain much about identities. Many new overarching social, political and economic structures of the medieval and early modern period emerged where new cultural contacts and conjunctions created a need or opportunity for them. Historical models explaining structural transformations by recourse to cultural contact (instead of understanding them as internal 'developments' of essentialized cultural units in the Hegelian sense) might thus enable us to give better answers to the questions purportedly answered by older theories and especially by modernization theory. For example, modernization-oriented medieval history has already argued that the more densely settled, economically potent areas of Europe (more or less the 'Europe of cities') were engines of transformation – and this could be tied to their role as cultural hubs and their high connectivity just as well as to economic factors alone.

As I would argue, however, there is one significant problem inherent in such a 'revised modernization' approach. Even if Europe and the Euro-Mediterranean continuum remain the focus of attention for many historians of the pre-modern periods, we do not perceive them as unified areas anymore. Rather, we attempt to write the history of a world region with many centers and zones today. As traditional narratives tend to construct a unified identity, any attempt to build an overarching story for this type of multi-centric area must lead into difficulties. Often, the main outcome will simply be a renewed bout of the old disease of 'precursorism', in which experts for the pre-modern periods attempt to claim early origins for certain modern phenomena. Typically, this is resoundingly ignored by modernists, and instead leads to quarrels between medievalists and early modernists about the respective importance of their various precursors of modernity.

The problem can be exemplified rather drastically by the fate of the 'Renaissance' narrative within Europe and the Mediterranean area. As is well known, the charged concept of re-birth became a convenient label for a nuanced narrative of cultural renewal during the nineteenth century. The narrative of the Italian Renaissance was in fact so successful that it was, as it were, copied into the Middle Ages in the early twentieth century.[11] At first, this only led to the postulates of a 'Twelfth-Century

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11 See Warren T. TREADGOLD, Renaissances Before the Renaissance. Cultural Revivals of Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, Stanford 1984; Robert L. BENSON, Giles CONSTABLE and Carol D. LANHAM (eds.), Renaissance and Renewal in the Twelfth Century, Cambridge (Mass.) 1982, esp. the introduction.

Renaissance' (1927) and a 'Carolingian Renaissance' (1924). But these were copied yet again, so that renaissances soon multiplied. This generated some critical debate, but individual narratives such as the ones about the 'Northumbrian' or 'Ottonian Renaissance' still flourished. With hindsight, attaching the label of 'renaissance' to various periods of Northern European history mostly served the purpose of providing a tested and approved narrative structure – and probably relevance and glamour – to studies into less appreciated political, intellectual or religious reforms of the medieval period. As most renaissances were postulated within limited fields anyway, debate focused much more on the meaning of the term for specific renaissances than on its curious multiplication.

If the perspective is widened beyond the traditional focus of Latin Europe, however, the multiplicatory effects become so obvious as to verge on the comical. If we add only one other, smallish, regional entity within the Mediterranean continuum, the Byzantine Empire, we are faced with a staggering series of the Northumbrian, Carolingian, Macedonian, Ottonian, Twelfth-Century, Palaiologan and Italian Renaissances, to leave out various 'humanisms' in Greek and Latin culture. Juxtaposing interrelated historical narratives in this way must of course undermine the idea that any one of the renewals in question could have been a genuine historical turning point. Rather, we appear to be observing renewed, multiple and multi-focal cultural re-negotiations making use of the ancient heritage – as is being asserted in recent research.[12]

If we add the fact that ancient intellectual culture also underwent several re-births in the Islamic Near and Middle East and Africa, the idea that this huge area could have been historically defined by one particular transformation, and that this should have been the Twelfth-Century or Italian Renaissance in particular, becomes even more problematic. Such a claim can only be upheld (and has been upheld historically) by insisting upon older grand narratives of the 'Rise of the West' and a complementary narrative of a 'Golden Age' of Islamic science followed by decline, which have recently come under criticism.[13] As I would guess, almost any individual scholar's opinion on the relative importance of various renaissances and renewals in this huge area would be defined by their own regional and cultural standpoints and their specific area of research.

The few extant attempts to connect the European Middle Ages to recent large-scale frameworks seem to be burdened with similar problems. A good example are studies

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12 See e. g. the research agenda of the SFB 644 "Transformationen der Antike" at HU Berlin, http://www.sfb-antike.de/startseite/ [last accessed: 15.02.2015] and cf. Hartmut Böhme et al. (eds.), Transformation. Ein Konzept zur Erforschung kulturellen Wandels, Munich 2011.

13 See e. g. Frank Griffel, "… and the killing of someone who upholds these convictions is obligatory!" Religious Law and the Assumed Disappearance of Philosophy in Islam, in: Andreas Speer and Guy Guldentops, Das Gesetz – La Loi – The Law (Miscellanea Mediaevalia 39), Berlin, Boston 2014, pp. 213–226.

using paradigms described as 'top-down globalization' by American historian Lynn HUNT – as she cautions, large-scale globalization narratives may simply re-import older modernization theories.[14] As she argues, 'top-down' history of globalization is organized by the idea of a single, uni-directional process of increasing globalization running towards the present, typically marking economic history out as the dominant thread. There are currently two camps within this research field[15] – adherents of the traditional 'Rise of the West' narrative which dates the origins of Western hegemony to the Middle Ages, and adherents of a late 'Great divergence' between Europe and Asia in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

If medievalists choose the first camp, they invariably run into political and identity-driven issues, as this is very clearly a Euro-centric narrative, whose comparative basis is so far inadequate. Michael MITTERAUER's "Why Europe", which offers a comparative discussion of European and Asian societies, for example, has been widely acclaimed for its incisive analysis. But it seems to fall into the category of asymmetrical comparison, as it does not offer comparable analyses for Europe and Asia – which we may, in fact, be unable to produce at the moment, as too much still has to be done and a shared vocabulary of research is still under construction.[16]

But the latter camp does not fare much better. Recent considerations formulated by British historian Robert I. MOORE highlight problematic issues of narrative and of the theoretical structuring of historical writing even more sharply. In several articles dedicated to the task of locating medieval Europe in Eurasian and global history, MOORE very carefully distanced himself from older linear stories of the 'Rise of the West', and joined the 'Great Divergence' side instead.[17] He cautions that history can

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14 Cf. HUNT (note 6), pp. 13–14 (definition of 'paradigm'), pp. 59–65 (top-down globalization).

15 For an overview, see Patrick O'BRIEN, Ten Years of Debate on the Origins of the Great Divergence (Reviews in History 1008), http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews/review/1008 [last accessed: 15.02.2015] and the contributions in Jürgen OSTERHAMMEL (ed.), Weltgeschichte (Basistexte Geschichte 4), Stuttgart 2008.

16 See Michael MITTERAUER, Warum Europa? Mittelalterliche Grundlagen eines Sonderwegs, Munich 2004, with the reviews by William CAFERRO, Review: Michael MITTERAUER, Why Europe? The Medieval Origins of its Special Path, Chicago 2010, in: The Medieval Review 11.07.18, http://hdl.handle.net/2022/13388 [last accessed: 15.02.2015]; Ludolf KUCHENBUCH, Kontrastierter Okzident. Bemerkungen zu Michael Mitterauers Buch ,Warum Europa? Mittelalterliche Grundlagen eines Sonderwegs', in: OSTERHAMMEL (note 15), pp. 121–140. On the concept of asymmetrical comparison, see Jürgen KOCKA, Asymmetrical Historical Comparison. The Case of the German Sonderweg, in: History and Theory 38 (1999), pp. 40–50. On the state and issues of comparative research on Europe and Asia, see e. g. Antje FLÜCHTER, Structures on the Move. Appropriating Technologies of Governance in a Transcultural Encounter, in: EAD. and Susann RICHTER (eds.), Structures on the Move (Transcultural Research – Heidelberg Studies on Asia and Europe in a Global Context), Berlin, Heidelberg, 2012, pp. 1–27.

17 See Robert I. MOORE, Medieval Europe in World History, in: Carol LANSING and Edward D. ENGLISH (eds.), A Companion to the Medieval World (Blackwell Companions to History 16), London 2012, pp. 563–580, at pp. 563–564; see also ID., The Transformation of Europe as a Eurasian Phenomenon, in: Johann P. ARNASON and Björn WITTROCK (eds.), Eurasian Transformations. Tenth to Thirteenth

no longer be written as a unified story of essentialized civilizations, adding a warning about constructing asymmetrical comparisons highlighting Europe's special path rather than traits shared worldwide:

> Whatever Europe was, and whatever part it has played in the making of the modern world, it has to be assessed in the light of the differences between the many histories of Europe's variously defined sets of inhabitants, and equally of the similarities that so many of them turn out to have possessed to counterparts in other parts of the world.[18]

Yet at the end of his text – which happens to be a handbook chapter and thus geared to a broader audience of students – MOORE concludes with a summary which is as pithy as it is problematic. He arrives at the conclusion that medieval European transformations were so important that we must postulate two Great Divergences – not only the one in the nineteenth, but also another one in the long twelfth century, a "First Great Divergence".[19]

This assertion cannot be accused of being unfounded: MOORE has conducted in-depth studies of the large-scale economic, political, social and religious transformations taking place in Europe in the tenth to twelfth centuries. He refers to medieval Asian developments, though they do not feature very prominently in his text. But one is tempted to speculate where this type of adaptation of a large-scale, uni-directional narrative will lead: I strongly suspect that other scholars may feel motivated to discover other 'Great Divergences' and copy this narrative structure, as happened with the 'renaissance' motif.

If we look at MOORE's narrative rather than his specific argument, it turns out that his own research on the European transformations of the central Middle Ages represents an (albeit much improved and enlarged) version of the narrative of the 'Twelfth-Century Renaissance', at least insofar as it represents a narrative of modernization linking modern European identities to the central Middle Ages as a point of origin.[20] In this respect, MOORE of course is part of a very respectable tradition of historians, which includes scholars such as Charles Homer HASKINS, Joseph STRAYER, Richard W. SOUTHERN, Walter ULLMANN or Gerd TELLENBACH.[21] Yet on the level of narrative construction, MOORE's argumentation rather encourages speculation: if the 'Twelfth-Century Renaissance' narrative can morph into a 'First Great Divergence', what about the other medieval renaissances? We may not quite end up with a series

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Centuries. Crystallizations, Divergences, Renaissances, Leiden, Boston 2011, pp. 77–98. On the role of the European Middle Ages in global history, see also Thomas ERTL (ed.), Europas Aufstieg. Eine Spurensuche im späten Mittelalter (Globalhistorische Skizzen), Vienna 2013.

18 MOORE, Medieval Europe (note 17), p. 568.

19 Ibid., p. 577.

20 See especially Robert I. MOORE, The First European Revolution, c. 970–1215, London 2000.

21 See the references in STECKEL (note 4), pp. 45–51.

of the Northumbrian, Macedonian, Carolingian, Ottonian, Twelfth-Century, Palaiologan and Italian First Great Divergences. But just a bit of input from ancient historians and early modernists – who have experimented with ideas of a First Great Divergence between Ancient Rome and China before 500CE[22] and an Early Modern Great Divergence happening towards 1500 rather than 1800[23] – would be enough to change the nature of the game. Rather than a number of 'great' divergences, we would be left with many small divergences, or simply divergences.

Once the door to a description of divergences in general is opened, however, there would be no further reason to exclude a host of small-scale developments. In fact, even a large-scale transformation such as the one re-shaping Europe in the long twelfth century – whose importance and relevance I can only underline – could be broken up into many smaller regional shifts, which do not always run parallel to each other. This has, in fact, already been observed, if not in any systematic way.[24] Once the hypothetical multiplication process of divergences encompasses enough different regional and cultural units, however, the relative importance of various historical divergences would once again be up to personal, cultural and disciplinary standpoints.

This type of problem seems more or less inevitable in adaptations of narratives originally meant as foundational stories for single, unified identities, and hinging on one transformation – from medieval to modern, from regional to global, or from religious to secular, to name just the most popular ones. These stories simply cannot accommodate recurring and episodic change, or multi-centric areas in which several identities are in flux. How to solve this dilemma?

One possibility may be to turn to rather more abstract frameworks, i. e. to theoretical models and metaphors imported from other disciplines, such as the rhizoma – but to combine and complement them with narrations focused on the mid and short term, whose task it is to 'translate' the theoretical models and make them tangible. Such narrations would have to be complex enough to express our changed views of transcultural processes, but simple enough to reach our different audiences. If we

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22 Admittedly, this concept has only been put forward tentatively and has not made it far, for understandable reasons; but see Walter Scheidel, From the 'Great Convergence' to the 'First Great Divergence'. Roman and Qin-Han State Formation and its Aftermath (10/2007). Available at http://ssrn.com/abstract=1096433 or http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1096433 [last accessed: 15.02.2015].

23 See e. g. Stephen Broadberry and Bishnupriya Gupta, The Early Modern Great Divergence. Wages, Prices and Economic Development in Europe and Asia 1500–1800, in: The Economic History Review 59 (2006), pp. 2–31. Countless histories seeing the Reformation period and the beginning of European Expansion as a caesura also come to mind.

24 The different regional developments of the long twelfth century are emphasized (if rather implicitly) in the contributions to Thomas F. X. Noble and John H. van Engen (eds.), European Transformations. The Long Twelfth Century (Notre Dame Conferences in Medieval Studies), Notre Dame (IN) 2012; see esp. John Van Engen, The Twelfth Century. Reading, Reason, and Revolt in a World of Custom, ibid., pp. 17–45.

look around, speculation about both levels of such a double strategy is already going on in various fields.

Within historical research, and especially research focused on political structures, models of comparative history and patterns of comparative narration are the most important field for experiments. In studies of comparative and entangled histories, the image of the rhizoma can be most easily appropriated and filled with concrete historical evidence. Comparisons typically dynamize linear narratives and meaning-making based on one identity, after all.[25] Several scholars have provided thought-provoking examples for narrative techniques recently, ranging from elaborate *histoire croisée* patterns to sweeping multi-focal regional comparisons such as Chris WICKHAM's "Framing the Early Middle Ages: Europe and the Mediterranean 400–800".[26]

More generally, this research field has also given birth to approaches which HUNT characterizes as 'bottom-up globalization'.[27] In contrast to uni-directional 'top-down' globalization narratives, they trace the supra-regional entanglement of specific areas over time, and do not necessarily stay within a modernization paradigm. As their starting point is not the globalized present but a largely regionalized, multi-centric past, they typically arrive at more complicated patterns, with multiple world regions forming shifting constellations which eventually lead to 'multiple modernities'.[28] This type of investigation is not only more manageable for historical scholars, who tend to work on one segment of such long-term entanglement processes. As HUNT emphasizes, relevant studies typically also do without a predetermined focus on economic factors, highlighting the connections and influences between economic, political and other transformations instead. By analyzing the social or political backgrounds of economic shifts locally, or vice versa, links and causalities between different phenomena can be established.[29]

Other models for long-term historical transformations have arisen in the study of religion. In this field, it is periodization rather than regionally based identity which has engendered problems, as certain religious transformations tend to recur

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25 Cf. Michael BORGOLTE and Ralf LUSIARDI (eds.), Das Europäische Mittelalter im Spannungsbogen des Vergleichs. Zwanzig internationale Beiträge zu Praxis, Problemen und Perspektiven der historischen Komparatistik (Europa im Mittelalter 1), Berlin 2001; Heinz-Gerhard HAUPT and Jürgen KOCKA, Comparative History. Methods, Aims, Problems, in: Deborah COHEN and Maura O'CONNOR (eds.), Comparison and History. Europe in Cross-National Perspective, London 2004, pp. 23–39, at p. 25.
26 Chris WICKHAM, Framing the Early Middle Ages. Europe and the Mediterranean 400–800, Oxford, New York 2005.
27 Cf. HUNT (note 6), pp. 65–77.
28 See Shmuel N. EISENSTADT, Multiple Modernities. Analyserahmen und Problemstellung, in: Thorsten BONACKER and Andreas RECKWITZ (eds.), Kulturen der Moderne. Soziologische Perspektiven der Gegenwart, Frankfurt a. M. 2007, pp. 19–45.
29 See HUNT (note 6), pp. 65–66.

in similar forms and thus also invite 'precursorism'.[30] Euro-centric modernization theory enabled many older master narratives of linear or outright teleological European secularization and rationalization, for example. As the idea was appropriated in various fields of historical research, the most important turning point has been dated variously to the twelfth, thirteenth, sixteenth, eighteenth or twentieth centuries. A variant form of the 'Rationalization of Europe' is the narrative of the 'Rise of Pluralism', which describes a breakthrough towards tolerance during the early modern and modern periods. Lately, some research has attempted to define Europe as an area which has always and from the beginnings been characterized by religious plurality[31] – only to run into renewed bouts of precursorism, as various researchers are still keen to emphasize that Europe may always have been pluralistic, but was much more pluralistic from 'their' period onwards.[32]

But recently, the debate has managed to wrench itself out of its precursorist rut with the observation that phases of secularization seem to be interspersed with religious renewals. We may thus see patterns of recurring sacralization and de-sacralization rather than uni-directional secularization.[33] This could very well be applied to the medieval centuries, too, as they have not only been credited with a 'Twelfth-Century Renaissance' with strong tendencies towards a secularization of law, politics and learning, but – at the same time and in the same regions – with a 'Twelfth-Century Reformation' and new 'religious movements', too.[34]

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30 See especially Alexandra WALSHAM, Migrations of the Holy. Explaining Religious Change in Medieval and Early Modern Europe, in: Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies 44 (2014), pp. 241–280; EAD., The Reformation and the 'Disenchantment of the World' Reassessed, in: The Historical Journal 51 (2008), pp. 497–528.

31 See especially Hans G. KIPPENBERG, Jörg RÜPKE and Kocku VON STUCKRAD (eds.), Europäische Religionsgeschichte. Ein mehrfacher Pluralismus, 2 vols., Göttingen 2009.

32 See e. g. (ironically, in the very volume insisting on plurality as a characteristic feature of Europe since antiquity) Burkhardt GLADIGOW, Europäische Religionsgeschichte der Neuzeit, in: KIPPENBERG, RÜPKE and VON STUCKRAD (note 31), vol. 1, pp. 15–39.

33 See N. Jay DEMERATH, Secularization and Sacralization Deconstructed and Reconstructed, in: James A. BECKFORD and N. Jay DEMERATH (eds.), The SAGE Handbook of the Sociology of Religion, London 2007, pp. 57–80.

34 See the references in Sita STECKEL, Säkularisierung, Desakralisierung und Resakralisierung. Transformationen hoch- und spätmittelalterlichen gelehrten Wissens als Ausdifferenzierung von Religion und Politik, in: Karl GABRIEL, Christel GÄRTNER and Detlef POLLACK (eds.), Umstrittene Säkularisierung. Soziologische und historische Analysen zur Differenzierung von Religion und Politik, Berlin ²2014, pp. 134–175, esp. pp. 155–175; for the mentioned research, see Giles CONSTABLE, The Reformation of the Twelfth Century, Cambridge, New York 1998; Herbert GRUNDMANN, Religiöse Bewegungen im Mittelalter. Untersuchungen über die geschichtlichen Zusammenhänge zwischen der Ketzerei, den Bettelorden und der religiösen Frauenbewegung im 12. und 13. Jahrhundert und über die geschichtlichen Grundlagen der Deutschen Mystik (Historische Studien 267), Berlin 1936, repr. Darmstadt 1977.

Speculating about non-teleological models for long-term change, several voices have expressed the opinion that we seem to witness recurring transformations or cultural re-negotiations, similar to 'waves', 'spirals' or even 'cyclical developments'.[35] Early Modern historian Alexandra WALSHAM, who offers the most trenchant analysis of this issue for the history of religion, points out the problems inherent in such concepts, especially in the term 'cycles': it easily leads to the assumption that historical change is rhythmical or that history repeats itself.[36] As she argues, it may be more helpful to think of a 'spiral' or waves of continuing transformations of religion, a notion conserving the modern understanding of history as an open process unfolding towards an unknown future.[37] Breaking the problem down to specific short- and mid-term approaches, WALSHAM discusses transformations based on generational change, a concept also important in the study of twentieth-century religion.[38] Another pattern she points out is the rise and institutionalization of new religious movements, an approach especially familiar in the study of medieval religious orders.[39]

In addition, more recent sociological models might be considered as frameworks for religious change. For example, adaptations of Pierre BOURDIEU's concept of a 'religious field' suggest interesting frames:[40] as Astrid REUTER has argued, we can dynamize this concept historically by assuming repeated "boundary work" re-defining the religious field[41] – an approach I have found quite helpful for the medieval period, too.[42] Volkhard KRECH's considerations on long-term and global change add the sug-

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35 See the summary in WALSHAM, The Reformation Reassessed (note 30), pp. 517–527; EAD., Migrations of the Holy (note 30), pp. 261–265.

36 See WALSHAM, Migrations of the Holy (note 30), p. 264; she also (ibid., p. 261) cites the warning formulated by John VAN ENGEN, The Future of Medieval Church History, in: Church History 71 (2002), pp. 492–522, p. 514 that "to treat 'reform' as cyclical, almost predictable, robs its history of drive and contingency – and allows us to get away with explanations or narratives that are ultimately unsatisfying."

37 WALSHAM, Migrations of the Holy (note 30), p. 264.

38 Cf. Hugh MCLEOD, The Religious Crisis of the 1960s, Oxford 2007; Christel GÄRTNER, Generationenabfolge – ein Faktor des Wandels in Modernisierungsprozessen. Shmuel N. Eisenstadts Beitrag zur Generationensoziologie, in: Österreichische Zeitschrift für Soziologie 38 (2013), pp. 425–436; Beate FIETZE, Historische Generationen. Über einen sozialen Mechanismus kulturellen Wandels und kollektiver Kreativität, Bielefeld 2009.

39 See e. g. the various observations in Gert MELVILLE and Giancarlo ANDENNA (eds.), Charisma und religiöse Gemeinschaften im Mittelalter. Akten des 3. Internationalen Kongresses des italienisch-deutschen Zentrums für Vergleichende Ordensgeschichte (Vita Regularis. Ordnungen und Deutungen religiosen Lebens im Mittelalter 26), Münster 2005.

40 See the discussion in STECKEL (note 4), pp. 67–78.

41 See Astrid REUTER, Religion in der verrechtlichten Gesellschaft. Rechtskonflikte und öffentliche Kontroversen um Religion als Grenzarbeiten am religiösen Feld (Critical Studies in Religion 5), Göttingen 2014).

42 See STECKEL (note 4), esp. pp. 67–71, and EAD., Auslegungskrisen. Grenzarbeiten zwischen Wissenschaft, Recht und Religion im französischen Bettelordensstreit des 13. Jahrhunderts, in: Martin MULSOW and Frank REXROTH (eds.), Was als wissenschaftlich gelten darf. Praktiken der Grenzzie-

gestion that a global perspective should probably assume a gradual convergence of several different religious fields towards a fairly recent globalized one.[43]

Finally, another area of study in which similar considerations have been voiced is the study of pre-modern and modern knowledge cultures.[44] MERSCH discusses the palimpsest as a metaphor for cultural appropriation and re-writing,[45] an idea akin to FOUCAULT's concept of an archaeology of knowledge.[46] Within the field of the history of knowledge, roughly related models have been adapted to describe historical transformation processes, for example as 'revolutions of knowledge' and recently as 'episteme in motion'.[47] The latter concept aims to describe long-term processes of recurring transformations of knowledge. But it emphasizes that each adaptation of knowledge – including attempts to fix, conserve or codify traditions – invariably brings small-scale change, which can occasionally lead to large-scale shifts if several transformations co-incide. The emerging model is one of long-term change which is nevertheless imagined as episodic, non-linear and non-teleological.

It remains to be discussed how such models could be translated into concrete patterns of historical narration – and as I would underline, the contributions to this volume point to various possibilities and patterns. In the following, I highlight some of these before returning to more general issues in a conclusion.

Three is Better than Two: Narrating Time and Space beyond 'Old to New'

Several contributions to this volume manage to compress quite a lot of issues into rather brief, clearly laid out narrations. Both Christian SCHOLL's and Amy REMENSNY-

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hung in Gelehrtenmilieus der Vormoderne (Campus Historische Studien), Frankfurt a. M. 2014, pp. 39–89.

43 See Volkhard KRECH, Dynamics in the History of Religion. Preliminary Considerations on Aspects of a Research Programme, in: ID. and Marion STEINICKE (eds.), Dynamics in the History of Religions between Asia and Europe. Encounters, Notions, and Comparative Perspectives, Leiden, Boston 2011, pp. 15–70.

44 For the pre-modern period, see the overview in Sita STECKEL, Wissensgeschichten. Zugänge, Probleme und Potentiale in der Erforschung mittelalterlicher Wissenskulturen, in: Martin KINTZINGER and EAD. (eds.), Akademische Wissenskulturen. Praktiken des Lehrens und Forschens vom Mittelalter bis zur Moderne (Veröffentlichungen der Gesellschaft für Universitäts- und Wissenschaftsgeschichte 13), Bern 2015 (in print) and cf. Wolfgang DETEL and Claus ZITTEL (eds.), Ideals and Cultures of Knowledge in Early Modern Europe, Berlin 2002.

45 See MERSCH (note 2), at note 24.

46 Michel FOUCAULT, Archäologie des Wissens, Frankfurt a. M. 1986 (first publ. in French 1969).

47 See the SFB 980 "Episteme in Bewegung" at FU Berlin, http://www.sfb-episteme.de/konzept/index.html [last accessed: 15.02.2015] and cf. Johannes FRIED and Johannes SÜSSMANN (eds.), Revolutionen des Wissens. Von der Steinzeit bis zur Moderne, Munich 2001.

DER's contributions, for example, deal with religious entangling and disentangling. Both also engage older narratives of a rise of pluralism, which typically either constructed a linear development moving from separate religions to hybrid forms, or from harmonious co-existence to persecution.[48] But both contributions avoid this trap by juxtaposing several episodes of the re-negotiation of religious identities, establishing a pattern of 'three is better than two'.

This is especially instructive in REMENSNYDER's considerations: she begins with the eleventh- and twelfth-century Christian appropriation of Muslim places of worship in Iberia, but does not end her story with the fascinating hybrid forms of devotion engendered by this process of entanglement (which would lead her into a 'Rise of Pluralism' narrative). Following the co-existence of Christianity and Islam into the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, she makes clear instead that changed circumstances eventually led to a re-drawing of cultural boundaries, which altogether amounted to a process of disentanglement and de-hybridization. SCHOLL's contribution similarly sketches a long-term panorama of Jewish-Christian coexistence in German towns, discussing recurring instances of cultural entanglement as well as re-appropriations resulting in disentanglement.

These contributions emphasize the extreme importance and relevance of the concept of disentanglement: research on pre-modern and modern cultures has so far shown a strong tendency to view processes of entanglement and hybridization as increasing over time, especially if one scrutinizes historical narration. Even though the term 'hybridity' was not originally intended that way, there is a strong tendency to link it to processes resulting in ever-increasing cultural amalgamation and connectivity.[49] If we want to avoid a linear narrative of growing entanglement, or, on the other hand, an impression of constant, unmotivated transformation,[50] it seems essential to stress actor-driven disentanglement processes. Often, emphasizing the episodic nature of change helps to link the re-negotiation of identities to underlying shifts in economic, religious, social or political power, or, of course, to contacts and conflicts upsetting local or regional balances.

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48 Both narratives seem strongly influenced by narratives of modernization and usually date the origins of modernization/pluralization to the high Middle Ages, though the latter (present for example in Robert I. MOORE, The Formation of a Persecuting Society. Authority and Deviance in Western Europe 950–1250, Oxford ²2007) highlights the negative, persecutory aspects of modernity as well as the positive ones.

49 As MERSCH (note 2), at note 10, recapitulates, theories of cultural hybridity tend to assume constant processes of transformation of identities rather than a developmental narrative from less to more hybridity.

50 See the remarks by Benjamin SCHELLER, Migrationen und kulturelle Hybridisierungen im normannischen und staufischen Königreich Sizilien (12.–13. Jahrhundert), in: BORGOLTE and TISCHLER (note 3), pp. 167–186, at p. 169.

As the contributions of the volume moreover show, the episodic nature of transformation seems to be especially well conveyed in narrative patterns avoiding 'two-part' stories, as these typically run the danger of being rather easily reabsorbed into older linear meta-narratives. Roland SCHEEL's contribution is a very good example of a story framing shifting regional entanglements; though he does not emphasize disentanglement processes to the same degree as REMENSNYDER and others do, his story manages to convey a strong sense of the changing and episodic nature of regional entanglement by framing a three-part transformation. Rather than just describing a process of increasing entanglement between Scandinavia and Byzantium, SCHEEL proposes distinct phases: early cultural contacts could not yet build on an extant shared framework and thus appear disparate and fragmented. But contacts eventually intensified to produce a period of cultural synchronicity, which encouraged interrelation in various domains. When contacts ceased after the Latin conquest of Constantinople, former entanglement turned into mere reception and internal adaptation of Byzantine material within Scandinavia. Though it is of course mainly SCHEEL's nuanced presentation of his material which manages to convey the differentiated message, I would also argue that the three-part narration strengthens it considerably. Moreover, the three-part narration would be able to convey the sense of episodic change even if the contribution's findings were to be compressed for a shorter, textbook-style presentation.

To avoid a linear 'old to new' pattern, the fairly simple narrative device of a three-part instead of two-part presentation may turn out to be one of the most helpful structures. It also has other advantages. As Jürgen OSTERHAMMEL points out, transformations can be more clearly explained and tied to different contexts and factors if they are framed by preceding and following developments[51] – whereas a sharp contrast of old and new tends to overstate dissimilarities, and a 'development' narrative focused on one change and its ramifications tends to obscure multi-causal processes. In both cases, changes are essentialized rather than explained.

Even where historians hope to trace a development from old to new, moreover, either the old or the new can be differentiated. To take up an example used by WALSHAM, the story of a successful religious reform can usually be incorporated into larger linear meta-narratives fairly easily. But slightly more complex studies contrasting not only the period before and after reforms, but going on to describe institutionalization – or, on the other hand, tracing reform, institutionalization and renewed reform – seem well able to transport a sense of recurring or episodic change.[52] Another way of dynamizing two-part narrations is, of course, to juxtapose two or more regions rather than two or more episodes.

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51 Cf. OSTERHAMMEL (note 8), p. 87.
52 For an example, see the nuanced overview of monastic reforms by Gert MELVILLE, Die Welt der mittelalterlichen Klöster. Geschichte und Lebensformen, Munich 2012.

Diversity and Materiality: Transcending Narrations
of Cultural Confrontation

Other contributions present rather different methodological and thematical approaches, but point out similar possibilities of subverting teleological narratives geared to the emergence of a unified identity. One way of undermining typical narrative frameworks of encounters or conflicts between cultural 'self' and 'other' is to focus on diversity in various situations. Again, the 'three is better than two' rule seems to hold: Antje FLÜCHTER's contribution, for example, describes the self-positioning of the British ambassador at the Mughal court. As it turns out, he did not only find himself confronting the Emperor Jahangir. He also measured his own status in relation to that of the Persian ambassador. This at the same time created a triangle between the English embassy, the Dutch embassy, and the Mughal Emperor. Such multi-sided encounters were mentioned frequently during the conference – in fact, even ostensible dual oppositions may hide them. The conflict constellations discussed by SCHOLL, for example, treated Christians and Jews. But as it turned out, Jews faced not only Christian city-dwellers, but also the bishop, whose view on Christian-Jewish relations could diverge markedly from the perspective of the citizens. SCHEEL's contribution describes how the connections to Byzantium and Jerusalem were instrumentalized in the competition between the Scandinavian kings Sverrir and Magnús.

Lutz RICKELT's contribution superficially focuses on the enmity between Byzantines and the Latin world – but the accusation of being Latin-minded (*latinophrōn*) was leveled by Byzantine opponents facing each other within a shared political sphere. In RICKELT's case, internal cultural diversification was, thus, achieved by the 'import' or re-entry of a boundary usually separating cultural self and other. Similar processes of diversification of identity can be observed across the high and late Middle Ages, for example when clerics were prompted by local competition to polemically compare mendicant brothers to heretics,[53] or when Christian preachers held devout Muslims up as examples to bad Christians.[54] Putting constellations of diversity at the center of a historical narration thus appears as another way to dynamize two-part narrations by inclusion of a third element – or, of course, even more. As most three-actor stories tend to give reasons for changes or divergences in the various parties' standpoints,

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[53] See Sita STECKEL, Ein brennendes Feuer in meiner Brust. Prophetische Autorschaft und polemische Autorisierungsstrategien Guillaumes de Saint-Amour im Pariser Bettelordensstreit (1256), in: Christel MEIER and Martina WAGNER-EGELHAAF (eds.), Prophetie und Autorschaft. Charisma, Heilsversprechen und Gefährdung, Berlin 2014, pp. 129–168.

[54] To choose a fairly random example out of many, see the many positive aspects of the description of the religiosity of Muslims in Ricoldus de Montecrucis, Pérégrination en Terre Sainte et au Proche Orient. Texte latin et traduction. Lettres sur la chute de Saint-Jean d'Acre. Traduction, trans. by René KAPPLER (Textes et traductions des classiques français du Moyen Age 4), Paris 1997.

they typically also add an explanatory dimension to stories of two-way conflict or co-existence.

Several other contributions make use of a slightly different, but currently very popular way of narrating complex shifts in identity: as the contributions by Almut HÖFERT, Christian SCHOLL and Amy REMENSNYDER show, the history of specific material objects can be reconstructed to recover their various cultural appropriations and interpretations, thus re-creating the 'archeological' layers of the object's past uses.[55] HÖFERT's discussion of the twelfth-century coronation mantle of Roger II and its many re-interpretations gives a good example of this narrative strategy, which also conveys a clear sense of episodic, recurring change. As the mantle's story shows, the radical reduction of focus to a single object opens up enough room to link a larger number of episodic re-interpretations into a single story. In SCHOLL's contribution, a similar narration is attached to grave-markers and their successive uses, whereas REMENSNYDER's discussion of mosque/church buildings also uses them as a fixed basis to mark the regional ebb and flow of religious identities, which can be seen to advance and retreat across Iberia. Kristin SKOTTKI's multi-layered contribution combines these types of narration in discussing some of the varying and manifold meanings and interpretations successively projected onto the Holy Land, both in medieval times and in modern historiography.

A final narrative pattern illustrated most easily on material objects and images can conclude the overview: as Sarit SHALEV-EYNI's contribution on images and everyday objects from Christian-Jewish contexts shows, we cannot always separate processes of cultural entanglement and disentanglement into neatly ordered episodes or units. Rather than telling a straightforward story of oppositions, SHALEV-EYNI's discussion circles around the images and things in question, and – emulating the art historian's own scrutiny of her objects – assesses them from different perspectives. The process of slow approximation shows that cultural artefacts can convey multiple and overlapping meanings and identities, and eventually dis-covers simultaneous layers of cultural convergence and boundary-drawing. An elaborate double cup decorated with the armorial device of a 'Judenhut', for example, may point to the labeling of Jews as 'others' through the forced wearing of discriminating symbols. But it might also testify to the close integration of Jewish merchants with their Christian neighbours, with whom they may have shared a taste for precious tableware and social drinking. In discussing diverging Jewish and Christian rituals, SHALEV-EYNI also shows that both groups may have engaged in diverging rituals which attempted to counter the other group's respective interpretation – yet both used a mutually understandable, indeed increasingly related language of images and performance.

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55 For this approach, see the literature discussed in the article by Almut HÖFERT in this volume; important impulses have recently come from exhibition projects, see mainly Neil MACGREGOR, A History of the World in 100 Objects, London 2010.

This points out an issue also tackled by SKOTTKI's contribution: while we can decipher many negotiations of cultural identity from the medieval and early modern period fairly clearly, others resist modern interpretation – either because they are too heterogeneous, as SKOTTKI argues for medieval crusaders' attitudes towards the conquered lands of the East, or because they remain ambiguous. As the various contributions dealing with materiality and images show, moreover, some media seem able to convey greater ambiguity than others, or can be more readily adapted to new identities.

While historians may often be be forced to tell simple stories to make themselves understood, it should not be forgotten that the more complex and enigmatic messages inherent in pre-modern texts, images, objects and performances exert their own kind of fascination. In its own fashion, the recent turn to the materiality of the past is an important pathway to making the complexities of a transcultural perspective understandable to non-specialist audiences: after all, the aura of images or objects like medieval Jewish gravestones and splendid ceremonial mantles derives from their accumulated history no less than from their material aesthetic,[56] and we can make this aura accessible again through historical narration or visualization.

Entanglement and its Audiences: An Open Agenda

As I hope to have shown, the contributions to this volume contain a very interesting mix of traditional and experimental historical storytelling. Explicitly or implicitly, the various approaches to cultural entanglement and disentanglement position themselves critically to older linear narratives and succeed in describing more complex patterns. As the contributions build on certain basic types of storytelling, they remain fairly straightforward even where they convey complexity. Typically, the contributions combine sequential and comparative narration – for example by juxtaposing two or more episodes of historical change and telling three-part stories, by contrasting not only two opposing cultures, but highlighting their internal diversity, or by tracing the episodes of cultural adaptation undergone by or inherent in certain objects. If we consciously attempted to build new mid-range narratives for a broader audience to complement abstract models, using such strategies consciously might turn out to be productive.

It would be interesting to debate in more detail how functional and how representative the strategies discussed above are – and whether we do need new large, small or mid-range narratives to convey the complex theories we work with. But there may be more urgent underlying issues: while experiments with a multi-centric history

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56 Cf. C. Stephen JAEGER, Aura and Charisma. Two Useful Concepts in Critical Theory, in: New German Critique 38 (2011), pp. 17–34, at p. 19.

of the entangled Euro-Mediterranean area may be popular at the moment, they are by no means based on a very broad consensus within the fields of pre-modern history and especially within Medieval Studies as yet. To make such a framework truly relevant, scholars from many fields would have to engage in further debate and reach a provisional consensus on core questions. Most importantly, periodizations and contours of regions and cultural spaces would have to be re-evaluated across rather disparate areas of study. After all, the histories of Europe, the Mediterranean, Africa and the Middle East are not only debated in different national and regional academic communities, but also across the sub-disciplines of specialized economic, political and religious histories, art history, archaeology, literatures and so on.

Even if the impetus to locate Europe within a broader global panorama continues, moreover, discussing theroretical and methodical frameworks will not be enough to truly establish transcultural perspectives as a core part of historical study. We also need to convey new theories to non-academic audiences – for example by publicly presenting complex models and metaphors such as the rhizoma, the palimpsest and the spiral. Ideally, such presentations could make use of newly developing tools for visualization. We should also renew our engagement with historical materiality, which can currently profit from intensified and digitally enhanced communication with museums, archives and libraries. We might also invest more time and thought into story-telling as a basic, but unexpectedly sharp tool of historians.

But there is another 'broader audience' which may be more important than we think – that of neighbouring fields within our own disciplines, not least medieval history. At the moment, research engaging in a transcultural perspective is a rather clearly demarcated sub-field of historical study. There is much debate and methodological discussion, but it is often turned inward. As the contributions to this volume show, 'cultural encounter' is rather narrowly defined – the term either denotes contact between religious cultures such as Judaism, Christianity and Islam, or long-distance encounter reaching beyond Latin Christianity.

While this approach is needed to make up for deficits, and remains quite legitimate, it does appear limited. Much research on cultural transfer during the modern period, for example, has looked at neighbouring 'cultures' such as the national educational systems and literatures of Germany and France.[57] As it happens, current research on medieval political culture is still debating the considerable differences developing within Latin Europe from the high Middle Ages onwards – for example, differences between Western European monarchies, the Holy Roman Empire and the political communities of Central and Eastern Europe, but also differences between

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57 See e. g. Michel Espagne, Jenseits der Komparatistik. Zur Methode der Erforschung von Kulturtransfers, in: Susanne Friede and Ulrich Mölk (eds.), Europäische Kulturzeitschriften um 1900 als Medien transnationaler und transdisziplinärer Wahrnehmung (Abhandlungen der Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen. Phil.-hist. Klasse. Dritte Folge 273), Göttingen 2006, pp. 13–32.

Mediterranean contact zones, continental Europe and Scandinavia. These studies engage with the same problem of large-scale narratives – in fact, with the same basis of out-dated modernization theory. To dynamize extant models, much could be made of cultural entanglement within Latin Europe for the long twelfth century alone.[58]

On a different front, it could be argued that across large areas of high and late medieval Europe, 'religious diversity' was experienced primarily as intra-Christian diversity – the medieval Latin church was, after all, constantly witnessing the emergence of new religious movements in the form of heretical groups, monastic and mendicant orders or lay practices of spirituality and religious reading.[59] In the fifteenth century at the latest, we can speak of a society of "multiple options" concerning Christian religiosity.[60] In this field, older narratives are also being discussed – particularly, variations of modernization theory filtered through various denominational or secular standpoints.

Yet all three areas of research – cultural entanglements across the Euro-Mediterranean continuum, the emergence of diverse political structures, and of a differentiated religious culture within Latin Europe – have remained fairly separate for a long time. While a shared emphasis on political culture is currently drawing the first two together, the study of religion within Latin Christianity is still rather separate from studies of inter-religious encounter, and undergoing further internal specialization. There are, for example, rather clear demarcations between research on heresy, monastic and mendicant orders, female religiosity, lay religiosity and the clergy, standing apart from research on Christian-Jewish, Christian-Muslim and other forms of encounter.[61]

While there are, yet again, good reasons for this pragmatic division of labour, the debate about long-term perspectives, theoretical frameworks and engagement of the public is one area where intensified exchange does not only seem desirable, but necessary – for all fields involved. As the areas mentioned are all rather firmly entrenched in traditional frameworks and large-scale narratives inherited from older national or confessional history and modernization theory, they stand to gain from an expansion of horizons. More importantly, the pooling of intellectual resources would undermine tendencies to pit 'traditional' European history against transcultural perspectives

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58 I again refer to the strong regional divergences treated, though not explicitly discussed, in Noble and Van Engen (note 24).

59 Cf. Nikolas Jaspert, Communicating Vessels. Ecclesiastic Centralisation, Religious Diversity and Knowledge in Medieval Latin Europe, in: The Medieval History Journal 16 (2013), pp. 389–424.

60 Cf. John van Engen, Multiple Options. The World of the Fifteenth-Century Church, in: Church History 77 (2008), pp. 257–284.

61 The fragmentation of this particular research field was the topic of a round-table on 'New Religious Histories' during the International Medieval Congress at Leeds 2014 co-organized by Melanie Brunner and Emilia Jamroziak (both Leeds), Amanda Power (Sheffield) and myself; a publication is planned.

and vice versa. This only weakens both sides in an increasingly competitive academic world, in which the study of pre-modern periods is fighting to keep its relevance at all.

It is not least this institutional and political framework of research which plays a role in theoretical debates: there is a very strong trend at the moment to focus on religious and cultural diversity, and the study of formerly marginal fields like cultural entanglements and inter-religious contact is highly rewarded. But if this boom does not generate a new way of thinking about history and its regional and chronological shape, and fails to communicate its results to a broader audience, the traditional historical narratives of modernization and the 'Rise of the West' will, in all probability, remain dominant, cementing the marginal role of pre-modern cultures. The old master narratives are, after all, rather firmly entrenched in policy-relevant disciplines such as political science, law and sociology. If current, highly sophisticated research fails to convince these audiences that the study of the medieval and early modern period can contribute to ongoing debates by providing new perspectives, we should not be surprised to find the relevance of our disciplines dwindling. If for this reason alone, the ways we organize and present our research should be more consciously debated, and we may want to engage in conversation about large-scale transformations with current theorists rather than outdated theories. As the approaches to cultural entanglement and disentanglement collected in this volume show, there is no lack of fascinating material, intellectual curiosity or willingness to engage in debate.

Fig. 1: Street sign in Cambridge, Massachusetts (Photo: © Sita Steckel).