Hybridisation in Natural History?
Materials and Texts Between Asia and Europe, 17th and 18th Centuries
February 21–24, 2018, University of Cologne
Institute of Dutch Language and Literature

Call for Papers

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DFG-Project Circulation in Spaces of Knowledge Between Asia and Europe: G.E. Rumphius and his Texts, circa 1670–1755

Workshop Topic and Questions

Within the project Circulation in Spaces of Knowledge Between Asia and Europe, our focus lies on works of natural history connecting the Moluccas and the Netherlands during the process of European colonisation in the 17th and 18th centuries. We are especially interested in the different “ways of knowing and working” (Pickstone) that contributed to G. E. Rumphius’ books on the Ambonese flora and fauna.

On the surface, the objects and texts of Rumphius’s natural history can easily be localised in a specific geographical place or a specific collective practice. When taking a closer look, a shell from the coast of Papua was purchased from a trader coming through the market in Kota Ambon, incorporating different ways of transporting, assembling, and ordering material in the process. A plant was cultivated only in gardens or plantations in Java, but formed part of the larger knowledge economy within the Dutch East India Company. Also, the plant could take on a double function as food and as medicine and consequently go through different cycles of commodification. The shell might have been transformed from animal into artefact on one of the Indonesian islands and subsequently into a curiosity in a Dutch cabinet.

European and Moluccan knowledge interact in a hybrid natural history. A description of shells found while walking along the beach of Ambon was illustrated with copperplate prints depicting specimens from Dutch collections. For the textual representation of a shell, analogies and metaphors as well as the poetics of the rare, wonderful and marvellous were used. A narrative could be part of the depiction of a plant, thus combining local objects and local narratives with strategies of representation that originated in Europe.

The production and reception of knowledge about natural history is situated in cultural contact between Asian and European actors and framed as a process of circulation with dynamics that constituted new spaces of knowledge between Europe and Asia. Invited speakers at this point include Susanne Friedrich (LMU), Siegfried Huigen (Wroclaw), Eric Jorink (Huygens Institute, Amsterdam/Leiden), Sri Margana (Yogyakarta), Dániel Margóscy (Cambridge), Bert van de Roemer (UvA), and Claudia Swan (Northwestern).

During this workshop our aim is to look at the idea of hybridity as double function or combination of elements, and to discuss evidence for hybridisation as a process from
which something new and different originates in the production of knowledge (Bhabha). Therefore we invite contributions from fields such as the history of knowledge, the history of science, poetics of knowledge, art history, and adjoining disciplines. Themes to be addressed include, but are not limited to:

- Observation and illustration of objects between individual cases and general models
- Packaging, transport, and shipment as influence on object categories
- Practices of collecting and exchanges of material between collectors
- Additions and arrangements of material by editors and printers
- The role of analogies and metaphors in describing and naming objects
- The poetics of the rare, wonderful and marvellous
- The role and interaction of auctoritas, empiricism and local knowledge
- The form and function of narratives in natural history writing

Presentations will be 20 minutes followed by another 20 minutes of discussion. For PhD-students at the beginning of their research, there will be a moderated poster session on the third day of the workshop, including a 5 min presentation of each poster and the opportunity to answer questions.

**Organisation**

During the workshop, lunches will be provided and on the second night there will be a conference dinner. Additionally, we plan excursions to the Southeast Asia collection of the Rautenstrauch-Joest-Museum and to an exhibition of Japanese woodcut prints at the Museum of East Asian Art in Cologne. We are applying for funds to reimburse hotel and travel costs for speakers/presenters.

**Contact**

Please address your abstract of 400 words (presentation) or your project outline (poster) with a short CV by October 23 to Prof. Maria Leuker at leuker(at)uni-koeln.de.

Presenters will be informed about our decision by the end of November.

Find more information about our project on our homepage: http://niederlandistik.uni-koeln.de/dfgprojektliteraturwissenschaft.html and our blog http://rumphius.hypotheses.org.