



Review

***Wissenstransfer und Auctoritas in der frühneuzeitlichen niederländischsprachigen Literatur*, ed. by Bettina Noak (Göttingen, V&R unipress, 2014).**

Julia Wagner, University of Duisburg-Essen

In the year 1664 Filip von Zesen, a later member of the *Fruchtbringende Gesellschaft*, published a sumptuous book about the town of Amsterdam. It is considered to be one of the first guidebooks in history. The book *Beschreibung der Stadt Amsterdam* was written as a sign of gratitude for the Amsterdam citizenship that was granted to him, and in the foreword Zesen praised the cities authorities for being awarded with ‘such honours’. 17th-century Amsterdam was the home of the *Verenigte Oost-Indische Compagnie* (VOC), one of the most prominent places of early modern cross-cultural urbanity and a dominant centre for global trade. The frontispiece of Zesen’s book represents the celebrated status of the town in a striking scene: it shows – in allegorical manner – a personification of the town as a queen. To both sides figures of indigenous tribes stand or kneel, with each of the natives presenting gifts to the women in the middle. The picture illustrates the status of the noblest cities of the *Republiek der Zeven Verenigde Nederlanden* in a time when the Dutch Republic was the dominant economic and naval authority of the world. Zesen’s book gives record of ‘the rich tapestry of economic, cultural and religious factors which made this leading metropolis of Europe a creative hub for activities’.¹

Zesen is a good example of an agent of knowledge transfer in the 17th century. German by birth, he travelled all over Europe during and after the Thirty Year’s War, not only finding shelter in Amsterdam, but also a place of broad cultural life, where he could indulge in its customs and traditions. Zesen modified an earlier book on Amsterdam by Olfert Dapper (1636-1689) and – back in Germany – founded his *Deutschgesinnte Genossenschaft* after the model of the *Rederijkskamer* of Amsterdam. His adaption of the Dutch culture brought the Dutch language in a distinctive way back to his homeland. The adjustment-proposals for a German standard language (versus Latin as the lingua franca of the Academia) lead to the linguistic levelling of German words and phrases that are still in use today. Zesen could have been chosen as a good patron for the here discussed volume *Wissenstransfer und Auctoritas in der frühneuzeitlichen niederländischsprachigen Literatur*.

¹ Christian Gellinek, ‘Foreword’, in *Europas Erster Baedeker: Filip von Zesens Amsterdam 1664* (New York / Bern / Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1988), p. vii.

In the last decade much research has been done on the phenomena of the global history of knowledge transfer and the entanglement of knowledge and literature. The volume deals with different aspects of knowledge transfer and the handling of *auctoritas* in Dutch literature during the early modern period, which can be called – under the caveat that Johan Huizinga expressed – *de Gouden Eeuw* [The Golden Century]. How varying traditions are accumulated and hence shape the epistemic fields of politics, humanities and natural science is the underlying question that ties this volume together.

The editor of the volume, Bettina Noak, stresses in her introduction the exemplary status of the different articles on the field of knowledge transfer in Dutch literature during early modern times. As main sources of inspiration for the conception Noak points to the DFG-Research Group *Topik und Tradition*. The volume itself is based on contributions from a conference that took place in November 2010. It is subdivided into four chapters, each highlighting a different aspect of knowledge transfer. Wisely arranged, the contributions are not restricted by a regional and timely emphasis; they rather expand the focus under the premises of ‘niederländischsprachige Literatur’. This elegant move depicts the objects of research themselves as products of knowledge transfer. Neither do the texts have to be written in the Republic of the Netherlands nor by Dutch authors.

The first chapter deals with questions of translatability and re-writing processes that undermine, or better: deny the concept of an original. Especially post-colonial studies have put an emphasis on an epistemic Third Space that emerged from intercultural contacts and that is widely discussed in poetic works. Maria Theresia-Leuker describes the German-Dutch natural scientist Georg Everhard Rumphuis as a prototype of a Third-Space-inhabitant. His *Ambonische Kruid-boek* was written under the conditions of tacit local knowledge on the island of Ambon.

In the case of Gotthart Arthus’s *Orientalischen Indien* the translation gained the status of a creation, because Pieter de Marees Dutch template *Beschryvinge ende Historische verhael vant Gout koninckrijck van Gunea* was long time forgotten and literally over-written by the authority of the German author. In her article about the vanishing of the eyewitness, Christina Brauner describes the changes of the text in the hands of two authors. Siegfried Huigen reflects on how knowledge is produced in the strange case of François Valentyn’s description of mermaids. In a crude mix of anthropological tradition, botanical knowledge and literary techniques a new creature emerges: the sea-human, integrated in a zoological system. It is the reader who is put in the place of the eyewitness, in order to abolish any doubts about the existence of human sea-creatures. Authority is handed over from the author to the reader, who now is in the position to stand up for Valentyn’s assumptions. Classification is a fundamental tool and at the same time a problem for an early model project of natural and cultural history that still relies on similarities rather than differences. This section is contrasted by the last part of the book, which sheds light on the construction of political authorities (Rita Schlusemann, Mike Keirsbilck).

The second section puts emphasis on local networks and knowledge circulation in different Dutch-speaking communities. Questions of ceremony and baroque spectacle (Arjan van Dixhoorn), conversion and ethics (Julie Rogiest) and the historical tradition of hermetic writings (Esteban Law) are touched upon in this chapter. The entanglement between translation, transformation and poetics is the key concern of the third section (Marco Prandoni, Francesca Terrenato, Jeroen Jansen, Christian Sinn).

It would be useful to the reader if the different aspects that the broad volume touched upon had been summed up – the book is lacking this kind of synopsis under key-questions like: What meaning is carried by the circulation of news and goods, in which groups do certain ideas circulate, which settings are dominant forces when new epistemic structures evolve? But this is a minor default compared to the quality of the articles. In the tradition of Foucault's *Archaeology* the contributions reflect on the multiple entanglements between discursive and non-discursive areas (institutions, events, economic practices). The volume gives an excellent survey on different fields of the history of science, thought and literature. Rather than dealing with analysis that merely recaptures the *Querelle* of the old versus new, true versus false, origin and copy, the volume illuminates scenes of transfer processes. By doing so, it not only tells fascinating stories about change, but also about the variously shaped metamorphosis of authors, knowledge and thought.