

Conference Report by Kristina Müller-Bongard and Jörg Rogge

In the course of the conference it was intended to come closer to the following, central questions: The institutionalisation of cultural history at universities, research institutes and other institutions, the specific research topics and questions as well as the perspectives and the relationship to other concepts of historical science and to cultural studies.

Anne Eriksen (Oslo) presented the shared tradition of cultural history in the Scandinavian countries Denmark, Sweden and Norway, the common roots of which go back to the 19th century. Eriksen emphasised that the development of European ethnology and folklore studies in these countries was closely connected with the process of modernisation and nation building in Scandinavia. In the countries looked at by her, cultural history developed out of the disciplines European ethnology and folklore which, according to Eriksen, can be described as a “Sonderweg” in European comparison. She illustrated this by the example of the University of Oslo where, in 2003, both disciplines were combined into the subject “Cultural History”. She described the relationship to cultural studies as being relaxed and productive. There is no strict differentiation between cultural history and cultural studies, as they emanated from the same disciplines and thus have a common history. Eriksen explained that, after initial difficulties, cultural history had developed very successfully.

Hannu Salmi (Turku) sketched out the development of cultural history in Finland since the end of the 19th century. First of all an Institute for Cultural History was founded at the Swedish-language Åbo Akademi in Turku in 1953. The research conducted there was for the most part ignored by Finnish-speaking cultural historians. It took until 1972 before cultural history became institutionalised as a discipline at the Finnish-language University in Turku. However, since the 1990s, cultural history has developed very well at the University in Turku. Salmi then emphasised that in the course of the development of cultural history in Finland it had received its most important theoretical influences from semiotics, structuralism and British cultural studies.

Ludmilla Jordanova (London) emphasised first and foremost the institutionally problematical situation of cultural history in England. Although there are certainly historians working on cultural history in England, cultural history as a subject is not very present. This is because, on the one hand, cultural history is hardly institutionalised and organised there in separate departments of its own and, on the other hand, because of the up to now less marked institutional co-operation with other European countries. Jordanova pointed out in addition that, until the 1970s, in research practice social and cultural history were dealt with together, enjoying in principle equal rights. Under the influence of historical anthropology, as well as cultural sociology and increasingly also the Warburg Institute, a newly conceived cultural history then diverged from social history of the classical kind. According to Jordanova, this new cultural history differs from older social history through its interdisciplinarity and from cultural studies through its more pronouncedly theoretical, polymorphous, flexible and open approach.

Things were different in Aberdeen. Nick Fisher (Aberdeen) reported on his personal experiences with the institutionalisation of the subject at the University there. Since the introduction of the subject in 1986, Aberdeen recorded a continuous rise in the numbers of students. But then the successful programme of studies fell victim to the restructuring in the University in 2002. The until then independent subject was linked more closely again to the Department of History, losing as a result not only its autonomy, but also staff posts. After the course of studies had in this way been made unattractive, the numbers of students fell dramatically, leading ultimately to the cessation of the course after the last graduate in 2011.

In Latvia, cultural history has only been able to develop very slowly and is hardly institutionalised. Martins Mintauris (Riga) attributed this to Russian rule under which Latvian historiography was ideologically controlled and to a great extent isolated from external influences. Although these restrictions no longer applied after 1991 and there has been access to new methods and approaches since then, political history continues to dominate Latvian historiography. Mintauris emphasised that the reorganisation of research and teaching in Latvia has not yet been completed and exchange programmes are of great importance for the import of the latest methods and theories of cultural history.

Igor Kąkolewski (Warsaw) examined first and foremost the Institute for the History of Material Culture of the Polish Academy of Sciences (IHMC PAN) founded in 1953/54

because different varieties of cultural history were institutionalised there. After the establishment of Communist rule, the methodological reconstruction and centralisation of academic life took place. With regard to the methodological foundation, the French *Annales* school had great influence, being in addition the “window on the world” for Polish historiography until the end of the 1960s. In the 1970s and 1980s, a general opening towards international approaches to cultural history took place in Poland, above all outside of the IHMC. In 1992, the IHMC was renamed the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology. At present, both theoretical-methodological topics are dealt with and empirical research is conducted on concrete questions.

In Hungary a cultural history was written from a national perspective. According to Andrea Pető (Budapest) the tendency before the Second World War is best described with Cooper’s comment “empires produced a strong empire-centred imagination”. It was essentially a matter of harnessing Hungarian national culture as a stabiliser for the realm. In the 1970s, the integration of the *Annales* school was tolerated until finally, in the mid-1980s, a general opening for other historical scientific concepts took place. Pető stated that after 1989 a conceptional and methodological modernisation of Hungarian historical science failed to materialise for the most part. Interestingly enough, historians of the new generation have also hardly concerned themselves with cultural history. In addition, the institutionalisation of cultural history in Hungary has been greatly hindered by financial bottlenecks at the state universities and the Bologna process, because the classical fields, such as political, economic and social history dominate studies. Therefore in Hungary, the privately financed Central European University in Budapest with its decidedly cultural historical orientation is the great exception.

Christof Dejung (Constance) emphasised the importance of the “Swiss cliché” and multilingualism for cultural history in Switzerland. The main fields of focus in Swiss cultural history are currently national identity, the history of mentality, economy and knowledge. One characteristic of cultural history there is its relatively close co-operation also with Swiss academics at foreign research institutions. Cultural history in Switzerland is also promoted outside of the universities by numerous private foundations. Dejung is of the opinion that the work on and with cultural history has only just begun and that in particular works on the history of the body and national identity are to be expected from Swiss cultural history in the next few years.

Christina Lutter (Vienna) began her paper with a theoretical-methodological situation analysis, starting out from Lynn Hunt's and Roger Chartier's reflections, of what characterised "New Cultural History" since the 1980s. Afterwards she presented cultural historical and, in a wider sense, research activities and opportunities in cultural studies in Austria, taking the University of Vienna in particular into consideration. Lutter observed that cultural historical research in Austria, in comparison with other European countries, with the exception of Germany, has a strong presence at universities, but particularly also at non-university research institutions and networks. One important reason for this was the "younger generation's" increased interest in international, theoretically informed and interdisciplinary cultural studies research, politically with reference to the political cultural concept of British cultural studies. The abundance of existing research activities and results, particularly at the "micro level", of individual institutes and research networks corresponds only in part with the research objectives of the large universities and institutions for the promotion of research. This incongruence becomes especially clear through the fact that there are still hardly any institutionalised programmes of study for cultural studies or cultural history at Austrian universities.

Achim Landwehr (Düsseldorf/Mainz) pointed out that cultural history in Germany is, on the one hand, already well established institutionally. Cultural historical research programmes are conducted in research centres, research groups, projects and excellence clusters (e.g. Heidelberg, Münster, Berlin, Constance and Mainz). However, this situation should not obscure the fact that cultural history is being conducted, up to now, first and foremost in projects and institutions for limited periods of time.

With regard to the establishment of New Cultural History, Landwehr recalled that in the 1980s it was felt by the representatives of social and political history to be a provocation, if not indeed a threat to the history established at the universities. In the meantime, however, cultural history in Germany is regarded as a recognised method of approaching the past. According to Landwehr, the New Cultural History sees itself more as a method or a specific perspective and is less fixed on certain topics or fields of research. Despite these comparatively good institutional conditions, he pointed out emphatically that in fact this just marks the beginning of intensive work in cultural history.

In Spain, too, cultural history is in great demand at present. As in Germany, there, too, cultural history was at first conducted by historians specialising in the middle ages and early modern period. Carolina Rodríguez-López (Madrid) explained this by Spain's imperial position in the Early Modern Period, on the one hand, and the instrumentalisation of this "brilliant epoch" in Spanish history under Franco on the other. However, the conception and implementation of a modern cultural history using the international discussion only became possible in the post-Franco era. Since 1989 there have been research groups, institutions and academic programmes dealing in particular with Spanish cultural history. The link for cultural history in Spain was above all the social history of the labour and trade union movement. A second important influence for the conception of modern Spanish cultural history was the history of ideas and researches into Spanish intellectuals, in particular their importance in the struggle against Franco and the authoritarian regime.

According to Alessandro Arcangeli (Verona), cultural history cannot be described as being established at Italian universities. As, on the one hand, cultural historical approaches appear first and foremost as "imports" from France and Britain in Italy and, on the other, cultural history is quite seldom studied as a main subject at universities, it is difficult to develop and carry through one's own approaches. The fact that approaches relating to intellectual history were already embodied in traditional Italian historical science and special research work, e.g. on the history of the book, food, or even of the genders, can hardly be regarded as being in a greater correlation, hinders the establishment of a theoretically and methodologically sound, independent cultural history; it is sometimes conducted without being designated or reflected as such. The main focus of cultural historically oriented research in Italy is to be found at present in Pisa, Bologna and Venice, with emphasis on the Modern Period and early Modern Period as epochs.

The final discussion concentrated on three main aspects: The state of the institutionalisation of cultural history in the different countries and future perspectives, the question of the relevance as regards content of cultural history as well as of future research prospects. According to Jörg Rogge's (Mainz) impression, cultural history was well institutionalised in Germany and Austria by comparison, for instance, with Italy and Spain. Silvia Serena Tschopp (Augsburg) observed that first and foremost there were especially cultural historically oriented institutions in existence in Germany, but there were also certainly cultural historical influences on established historical institutions. A mixture of purely cultural historically oriented

institutions and at the same time a further opening of established research institutions for cultural historical approaches would be sensible for the future and for the spread of cultural history. Cultural history needed a firm place in universities as the prerequisite for a longer-term existence as a separate line of research. Anu Korhonen (Helsinki) also emphasised the importance of institutionalisation for successful cultural historical work and stressed the importance of teaching, because only then could cultural history also have an influence on the necessary training of the rising generation of scholars. In addition, she emphasised that the importance of cultural history could be underlined through international co-operation and network building. Jordanova observed that flexible concepts for cultural studies which stand out through their openness, thus reducing the risk of ending up in academic dead ends, were also the prerequisite for research. Salmi noted that research work without institutions was inconceivable; the question was solely what concrete form they should take. He noted in addition that cultural history could be a means of defending positions in the humanities in the ever fiercer competition for financial resources. With regard to the relevance of cultural history, Jordanova observed that there would be discussions on the fundamental importance and standing of cultural history until it had become everyday practice. For Germany Tschopp also included the experience with academic history that new perspectives and approaches to research always lead to intense discussions. Successful new lines of research were a threat for established scholarship, as they – apart from financial and staff aspects – could potentially determine what the subject matter of historical science was. In Spain there was no consensus about what cultural history is. But there was also no intensive discussion of methods; rather there would be a pragmatic return to cultural historical approaches for certain topics. In Italy, too, there were no great discussions because no specific difference to traditional research is seen; cultural history is conducted simply free of any theoretical discussion. Finally the question of the relevance of cultural artefacts on the one hand and their link with concepts of endowment with meaning was discussed. In Britain and Scandinavia, the material culture had a special significance, above all in the field of gender and body research. Tschopp pointed out that in cultural history in Germany there was no strong tradition of research into material cultures, rather intellectual influences and questions derived from them predominated. The participants at the conference were agreed that future cultural historical research would have to take account of the significance of cultural artefacts for the production of human worlds of life and meaning across the epochs.

The papers will appear in a volume in the series “*Mainzer Historische Kulturwissenschaften*” published by the Research Group Historical Cultural Studies.

List of the papers given

Anne Eriksen (Oslo)

From European ethnology and folklore studies to cultural history in Scandinavia

Hannu Salmi (Turku)

Finnish Traditions of Cultural History

Ludmilla Jordanova (London)

The Practice of Cultural History in Britain

Nicolas Fisher (Aberdeen)

Reflections on the Cultural History MA at the University of Aberdeen, 1986-2011

Martins Mintauris (Riga)

Perspectives of Cultural History in Latvia: The 20th century and beyond

Igor Kąkolewski (Warschau)

Cultural history in Poland before and after the breakthrough of 1989

Andrea Petö (Budapest)

History of Culture or Culture of History. Writing cultural history in Hungary

Christoph Dejung (Constance)

The current status of Cultural History in Switzerland: Institutions and research topics

Christina Lutter (Vienna)

What’s new about the ‘New Cultural History’? An exemplary survey of the Austrian scientific community

Achim Landwehr (Düsseldorf/Mainz)

We've only just begun: A young scholar's guide to Cultural history in Germany

Carolina Rodriguez-López (Madrid)

Cultural History in Spain

Alessandro Arcangeli (Verona)

Cultural History in/and Italy

Chairs: Anu Korhonen (Helsinki), Silvia Serena Tschopp (Augsburg), Rainer Brömer (Istanbul)