

Modes of Authentication in Early Modern Europe

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4-5 July 2019
Warburg Haus, Hamburg

Organisers: Richard Calis (Princeton University), Liesbeth Corens (Queen Mary, University of London), and Tom Tölle (University of Hamburg)



In a time of ‘alternative facts’ and ‘fake news’ we may long for an earlier, purportedly simpler world in which facts were simply facts. But were facts ever that simple? How did past generations separate fact from fiction; truth from falsehood; and proof from hearsay? Tradition has it that written proof once ruled supreme, whether it concerned early modern scholarship or litigation, the spiritual world of demons and the saints or the worldly realm of land rights and taxation. As historians in different fields have since realised, proof was an omnipresent, but nevertheless contested practice that bred fierce conflicts about degrees of trust, the nature of truth, the boundaries between scholarly disciplines, and the purview of official institutions.

The historiography on proof is varied, and scholars work in parallel traditions; historians of science are inspired by Bruno Latour; historians of religion look at wonders and miracles; historians of scholarship discuss authenticity and forgery; cultural historians are fascinated by the witness. Proof, in short, has enjoyed much critical press within today's scholarly disciplines. Rarely, however, have scholars integrated these individual observations to probe the shared European legacy of proof. This conference seeks to provide an international forum for an interdisciplinary exchange about the concept of proof in its different early modern guises. It invites scholars – from political to religious history, from law to the history of art and science – to think about the common intellectual problems that once underlay practices of proving in the early modern period.

With its focus on the period from roughly 1400 to 1800 it hones in on what we posit was a crucial phase in the history of proof. The early modern period is traditionally affiliated with the construction of precisely the disciplinary boundaries that continue to separate different strands of contemporary research on proving. Proof itself underwent a similar transformation: different ways of proving became specific to separate disciplines. To understand, then, why such a fundamental concept as proof is still too often studied within and hardly across separate scholarly disciplines we need to return to the very moment when different forms of proof were articulated for different spheres of life and thought. But instead of making the mute point that disciplines develop exclusive forms of proving, our conference seeks to understand the processes by which the disciplinization of proof could ultimately come about: for instance, to what extent did the articulation and definition of proof contribute to the development of disciplinary boundaries, and vice versa? Did its articulation in one discipline influence the development in others? Did certain traditions of proving influence this process in disproportionate ways? Did the early modern period develop a hierarchy of proof?

Attendance is free, but if you want to join, please register via email (toelle@gmail.com) before 25 June 2019. Lunch and refreshments are provided during the day, but dinner comes at an extra cost (about €60), should you chose to join us for dinner.

PROGRAMME:

Thursday 4 July 2019

- 9:00-9:30 REGISTRATION
- 9:30-10:00 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION: Richard Calis (Princeton University), Liesbeth Corens, (Queen Mary University of London), Tom Tölle (Hamburg University).
- 10:00-12:30 SESSION 1: TRUTH, FALSEHOOD, AND UNCERTAINTY
Chair: Liesbeth Corens
Virginia Reinburg (Boston College) “Fabled Truths: Crafting a Proof in a Religiously Fractured World”
Charlotta Forss (University of Oxford) “A Changeable Cartography: The Problems of Proof and Discovery in Early Modern World Maps”
Noah Millstone (University of Birmingham) “The Spirit of Contradiction in Early Modern News”
- 12:30-13:30 LUNCH
- 13:30-16:00 SESSION 2: FOUNDATIONS: TRANSITION AND COMPLEMENTARITY
Chair: Richard Calis
Richard Serjeantson (University of Cambridge) “The Logic of History in Confessional Europe”
Tom Tölle (Hamburg University) “The Noble Archive Goes to Court: How a Rhenish Minorite Authenticated His Proofs”
Hester Schadee (University of Exeter), *To be determined*
- 16:00-16:30 COFFEE AND TEA
- 16:30-18:30 SESSION 3: CARRIERS: MEDIA AND MATERIALITY
Chair: Tom Tölle
Kai Schwahn (Hamburg University) “How to Authenticate a Manuscript? Johann Schilter (1632-1705) and the Debates on ‘ius archivi’ and Diplomats”
Sara Barker (University of Leeds) “Reprinting Pamphlets during the French Wars of Religion”
- 18:30 CONFERENCE DINNER

Friday 5 July 2019

9:00-10:15 KEYNOTE ADDRESS:

Lorraine Daston (Max Planck Institute for the History of Science) “The Ethics and Epistemology of Belief in Early Modern Europe”

10:15-10:30 REFRESHMENTS

10:30-13:00 SESSION 4: ACTORS: EXPERTS, PUBLIC, AND AUDIENCES

Chair: Dominik Hünninger

Andrew Mendelsohn (Queen Mary, University of London) “Office to Öffentlichkeit in Early Modern Europe”

Kim Breitmoser (Hamburg University) “Proving and Disproving Witchcraft”

Renee Raphael (UC Irvine) “A Discipline in Formation: Proving Mathematical and Experimental Claims in Early Modern Mechanics”

13:00-14:00 LUNCH

14:00-14:30 FINAL COMMENT: MARKUS FRIEDRICH

14:30-15:00 FINAL Q&A/ROUNDTABLE

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