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CULTURAL BROKERS AT
MEDITERRANEAN COURTS
IN THE MIDDLE AGES

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Courts, Brokers and Brokerage in the Medieval Mediterranean

People of different origins, religions and assignments gathered at Muslim and Christian courts of the Mediterranean region: diplomatic envoys and scholars, artists and merchants encountered administrative officials, royal confidants, and interpreters as well as religious and legal experts. By centring on these go-betweens – persons here referred to as “cultural brokers” – we are directing the focus of research on cultural transfer and interreligious contact toward the agents, places and ways of exchange, cross-fertilisation and communication. Such brokers were active at courts of diverse religious and confessional affiliation throughout the Mediterranean region. Whether we look at Muslim-Christian-Jewish relations in the “monotheistic world zone” on a general level (Borgolte) or in more detail at the courts of the Hospitallers at Rhodes (Sarnowsky), the Cyprian court during the Lusignan period (Coureas), the courts of the Abbasids in Baghdad (Drews) and the Fatimids in Cairo (Oesterle), the Ilkhanid Court (Amitai), the late medieval Byzantine Court at Constantinople (Kolditz), the court of the Doge in Venice (von der Höh), different Iberian courts (Jaspert, Schlieben, Echevarria) or the Papal Curia (Märtl), we find a tableau of complex historical conditions, of multilayered forms of brokerage and of actors from varying social, religious and cultural backgrounds.

But what exactly is meant by the term “cultural broker”? The concept evades simple classification or a single definition. On closer inspection however, three levels of meaning might be discerned. The first of these is rather broad, because it comprises all individuals who live in a cultural environment that is in some aspect different from their own. By communicating with these culturally alien surroundings, such individuals necessarily and often involuntarily perform cross-cultural brokerage. Examples of this group or of this understanding of cultural brokers include slaves, merchants or generally speaking experts who moved to a different cultural sphere. A second, narrower definition reduces cultural brokers to those who actively or deliberately transfer cultural messages or contents to a different environment. Examples would be missionaries, in some cases diplomats, authors of travel accounts, and participants in religious dialogues. The third and most exclusive understanding of the term is reserved for those go-betweens who mediate between two (or more) cultural spheres without being fully accepted members of either (or any) of

them. Examples would be the many Jewish brokers active at Christian or Muslim courts who are analyzed in this volume. While our first definition is a broad and general one, the last is particularly close to the stricter meaning of brokerage, a term derived from the economic sphere that designates a person involved in a commercial transaction as an intermediary or a facilitator between seller and purchaser. The papers in this volume do not all follow any one of these three definitions of cultural brokers or brokerage exclusively, although most of them work with a relatively broad understanding of the term. At first glance, this lack of terminological coherence might appear to be problematic; but in fact it is one of the strong points of this project: By struggling with the adequacy of the term and by searching for modes of operationalizing it, this collection of essays contributes to the analysis of inter- and trans-cultural agency.

The following introduction does not attempt to lay out a comprehensive and sophisticated panorama of cross-cultural brokerage in the Mediterranean. Rather, in what follows we would prefer to focus on four aspects. First of all, on social space: Which specific role did Mediterranean courts play as places of brokerage and what distinguished them from other locations of intercultural encounter? Can one really attribute the activities of cultural brokers to the specific functions that courts fulfilled as social and cultural phenomena? A second part deals with the more general problem of connections between cultures and religions and more particularly with the bearing that brokerage had on the dynamics of religious transfer. In doing so, we would also like to propose a terminological framework for analysing such phenomena. Third, we will touch upon actors and actants: What spectrum of “cultural brokers” can be discerned, what were their backgrounds, did they stay temporarily or permanently at court, what were their roles and functions? And finally, the very act of brokerage: What did brokerage between religions at medieval Mediterranean courts entail? What were its requirements, aims and achievements, what were its risks and challenges? Neither the introduction nor the essays in this volume can provide final answers to these questions. But we can attempt to draw a first sketch of the analytical field of brokerage between religions at Mediterranean courts in the Middle Ages.

1. The place of the intercultural brokerage: Court structures

This volume comprises the proceedings of an international conference held in October 2010 in Bochum. It was organised by the Centre for Mediterranean Studies together with the Käte Hamburger Kolleg “Dynamics in the History of Religion between Asia and Europe”. Its starting point was the observation that cultural brokers can be traced particularly often at medieval Mediterranean courts. It therefore seems appropriate to assume a direct relationship between

the specific social structure of courts and their position within political, cultural and personal networks that enabled cross-cultural communication.

In a pre-modern, largely itinerant world, courts were not necessarily a physically stable phenomenon. Rather, they should be seen as temporary groupings of people, not as a places in the physical sense of the word. Courts are better not understood as “containers” in which events or interactions take place, but rather as socially constructed spaces, that is, “embodied spaces” in which human beings create centres precisely due to their physical presence and their activities. Though the pre-modern Mediterranean saw the construction of many large palace complexes, such residences should analytically be separated from the court.¹ Dematerialising the latter in this way is entirely in line with a general trend in recent research: As a result of the so-called “spatial turn”, spatial metaphors are not only used in order to describe physical space, but also to analyse intellectual and semantic space.² Understood in this more general sense, nodal points of communication such as courts become detached from concrete places, though they form networks with other nodes. Such networks existed both between courts of different realms and within any given territory. Long-distance communication between courts is a focal point of several articles in this collection (Kolditz, von der Höh, Coureas, Märkl). Others concentrate on courts as nodal points within geographically more restricted areas such as individual realms (Amitai, Drews, Jaspert, Schlieben). For even within any given polity, one can sometimes discern courtly networks. In some instances a queen, a prince or a nobleman or especially in the Islamic context a *wesir* could hold a subsidiary court to that of the ruler (Echevarría). Historians can therefore attempt to differentiate courtly networks hierarchically, discerning between super-nodes (major courts) and nodes (subsidiary courts).³ But irrespective of whether we are analysing networks within one territory, within a particular court, between several courts or between different religions: the specific structure of the respective node (here the court) must be taken into ac-

¹ Cf. *Fürstliche Residenzen im Spätmittelalterlichen Europa*, ed. Hans PATZE / Werner PARAVICINI, Sigmaringen, 1991; Robert HILLENBRAND, *Islamic Architecture. Form, Function and Meaning*, Edinburgh, 1994; Gülru NECİPOĞLU, An Outline of Shifting Paradigms in the Palatial Architecture of the Pre-Modern Islamic World, in: *Ars Orientalis* 23 (1993), pp. 3-26.

² Markus SCHROER, *Räume, Orte, Grenzen. Auf dem Weg zu einer Soziologie des Raums*, Frankfurt am Main, 2006; *Raum: ein interdisziplinäres Handbuch*, ed. Stephan GÜNZEL / Franziska KÜMMERLING, Stuttgart, 2010, pp. 90-99, 234-249.

³ *Palais royaux et princiers au moyen âge*, ed. Annie RENOUX, Le Mans, 1996; Philippe ARAGUAS, Un roi soucieux de son confort: Pierre IV d'Aragon et III de Catalogne, dit Le Cérémonieux, et ses palais, in: *Du projet au chantier: maîtres d'ouvrage et maîtres d'œuvre aux XIVe-XVIe siècles*, ed. Odette CHAPELOT, (Civilisations et sociétés 106) Paris, 2001, pp. 279-296; Claire PONSICH, L'espace d'une reine dans le palais. L'exemple de la Confédération catalano-aragonaise (fin XIVe - début XVe siècles), in: *Palais et pouvoir: de Constantinople à Versailles*, ed. Marie-France AUZÉPY / Joël CORNETTE, Paris, 2003, pp. 183-227.

count. Applying such an approach necessarily implies identifying and categorising the social groups attracted to such “places of power”.⁴

When speaking of the court in pre-modern times we are in fact referring to several social, cultural and institutional phenomena.⁵ A perspective that focuses on the function that courts fulfilled has proven to be particularly instructive in order to analytically categorise this social space. Courts can be understood as a series of concentric circles, hierarchies or subsystems. Each of these has its specific function or role, but they are all centred on the ruler as their focal point and *raison d’être*.⁶ Furthermore, one should distinguish between primary and secondary functions of courts. Picking up on research on medieval and early modern courts over the last 20 years in Germany (“Hofforschung”),⁷ the primary function of courts can again be subdivided: First of all they aimed at the maintenance of the ruler and his family and second at enabling governance.⁸ The court is first and foremost the ruler’s household, its offices being responsible for the distribution of food, the preservation of the residence (the palace), and for ensuring the ruler’s safety by restricting access to him – to name just a few of the court’s many concrete functions. But given the personal character of pre-modern governance, the court is also the centre of power and administration, the place of concrete political and administrative decisions taken on a day-by-day basis, as well as the place of discussions about the guidelines of policies on a larger scale.

Strictly linked to these primary functions – in fact a direct consequence of the court being the ruler’s household and the centre of government – is the court’s secondary function: It is a point of social, cultural and economic agglomeration and attraction within the respective realm. Courts act as economic and cultural centres because of the respective ruler’s and court’s “conspicuous consumption” (Veblen).⁹ Clothing and sophisticated foods, music, dance, artisan workmanship and art, literature and theological or – later on – humanistic erudition: all these elements of court culture can be conceived as forms of consumption, they were currency in the contest for prestige, appreciation and

⁴ *Places of power*, ed. Caspar EHLERS, (Veröffentlichungen des Max-Planck-Instituts für Geschichte 11,8) Göttingen, 2007.

⁵ Cf. Werner PARAVICINI, *Die Ritterlich-höfische Kultur des Mittelalters*, (Enzyklopädie Deutscher Geschichte 32) München, 2011, pp. 65-71.

⁶ Cf. Jan HIRSCHBIEGEL, Hof als soziales System. Der Beitrag der Systemtheorie nach Niklas Luhmann für eine Theorie des Hofes, in: *Hof und Theorie. Annäherung an ein historisches Phänomen*, ed. IDEM / Reinhardt BUTZ / Dietmar WILLOWEIT, Köln/Weimar/Wien, 2004, pp. 43-54.

⁷ Cf. *Höfe und Residenzen im spätmittelalterlichen Reich. Bilder und Begriffe*, ed. Werner PARAVICINI / Jan HIRSCHBIEGEL / Jörg WETTLAUER, (Residenzenforschung 15.II) Ostfildern, 2005.

⁸ PARAVICINI, *Ritterlich-Höfische Kultur*, (as n. 5), pp. 66-67.

⁹ Thorstein VEBLEN, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, New York, 1899; *Showing Status. Representation of Social Positions in the Middle Ages*, ed. Wim BLOCKMANS / Antheun JANSE, Turnhout, 1999; *The World of Goods. Towards a History of Consumption*, ed. Mary DOUGLAS / Baron ISHERWOOD, London, 1996.

hierarchies, a competition that marked the society of the courts¹⁰ but also the relationship between the court and its non-courtly environment¹¹ or even between different courts.¹²

Apart from their economic function, courts also acted as social centres because of their appeal to local and foreign elites that tried to improve their respective positions in the contest for social, symbolic and, not least, economic capital. For one way of achieving that aim was by gaining access or at least proximity to the ruler. This meant that medieval courts were important meeting points and even points of orientation for the nobility of the respective realms. Members of the elites hoped to gain access to powerful and profitable positions in court and state administration, to establish advantageous marital ties or simply to win the favour of the ruler. The attraction that courts exerted at any given period was not uniform. Of course, it could grow or diminish over time depending on political and cultural developments. But even on a day-to-day basis, such centres of power irradiated to a greater or lesser degree. Only on certain occasions, particularly when a representative court convened, did an exceptionally high number of elite agents gather. The ruler's household on the contrary was a more stable factor, as it comprised the officials and other employees constantly charged with his well-being. Therefore, in addition to the regular personnel – which German research has termed the “narrow court” (“enger Hof”) – courts were always filled with people of different origin that constituted the “wider court” (“weiter Hof”).¹³

Courts thus attracted privileged and influential individuals – noblemen and other members of the political, administrative and military elite, learned and artistic members of the cultural sphere, merchants and other economic leaders, and not to forget religious experts.¹⁴ It is necessary to distinguish such varying

¹⁰ Cf. Ulf Christian EWERT, Sozialer Tausch bei Hofe. Eine Skizze des Erklärungspotentials der Neuen Institutionenökonomik, in: HIRSCHBIEGEL / BUTZ / WILLOWEIT, Hof und Theorie, (as n. 6), pp. 55-75.

¹¹ *Städtisches Bürgertum und Hofgesellschaft: Kulturen integrativer und konkurrierender Beziehungen in Residenz- und Hauptstädten vom 14. bis ins 19. Jahrhundert*, ed. Jan HIRSCHBIEGEL, (Residenzenforschung 25) Ostfildern, 2011.

¹² *Vorbild, Austausch, Konkurrenz. Höfe und Residenzen in der gegenseitigen Wahrnehmung*, ed. Anna Paulina ORLOWSKA / Werner PARAVICINI / Jörg WETTLAUER, (Mitteilungen der Residenzen-Kommission, Sonderheft 12) Kiel, 2009.

¹³ PARAVICINI, Ritterlich-Höfische Kultur, (as n. 5), p. 67 following Konrad von Megenberg's *Ökonomik*, cf. Werner RÖSENER, Hofämter an mittelalterlichen Fürstenhöfen, in: *Deutsches Archiv* 45 (1989), pp. 485-550, 514.

¹⁴ *La corte e il "Cortegiano"*, 2 vols., ed. Carlo OSSOLA / Adriano PROSPERI, (Biblioteca del Cinquecento 8) Roma, 1980; *Curialitas: Studien zu Grundfragen der höfisch-ritterlichen Kultur*, ed. Josef FLECKENSTEIN, (Veröffentlichungen des Max-Planck-Instituts für Geschichte 100) Göttingen, 1990; Peter MORAW, Über den Hof Johans von Luxemburg und Böhmen, in: *Johann der Blinde: Graf von Luxemburg, König von Böhmen, 1296 - 1346*, ed. Michel PAULY, (Publications de la Section Historique de l'Institut Grand-Ducal de Luxembourg 14) Luxembourg, 1997, pp. 93-121; *Powerbrokers in the late Middle Ages: the Burgundian Low Countries in a European context = Les courtiers du pouvoir au Bas Moyen-Âge*, ed. Robert STEIN, (Burgundica 4) Turnhout, 2001; *Hofgesellschaft und Höflinge an europäischen Fürs-*

and sometimes intermingling sets of agents, because they all contributed to the court's function as a centre of communication and also accounted for its complexity. Within the respective realm, each of these social groups arguably formed networks of their own with particular nodal points. Communication between scholarly, artistic, political, and economic agents created very particular dynamics. For all of these networks however, the court was a major nodal point and – on a functional level – a centre of professionalism and competence.¹⁵ This is precisely where courts unfold their considerable heuristic potential: They allow for amplifying traditional social network analysis, because they enable us to juxtapose and correlate different networks in order to determine points of intensified contact. Only by laying one such network over the other and thus forming overlapping clusters can one discern that courts were indeed disproportionally well-connected nodes, true super-nodes¹⁶, in the pre-modern world.

Courts were therefore undoubtedly hotspots of communication, power, culture etc. Arguably, individuals from these social groups more often than not intermingled at courts, which therefore must also be understood as important nodes of communication and transfer between elite communities. But not only were privileged groups attracted to them: Other strata of society, too, flocked to the courts. Given that hospitality and munificence were esteemed religious and ethical virtues of rulers both in the *dār al-Islām* and in Christian ruled territories, courts were also centres of charity:¹⁷ the needy and concerned came

tenhöfen in der Frühen Neuzeit (15.-18. Jh.) = Société de cour et courtisans dans l'Europe de l'époque moderne (XVe-XVIIIe siècle), ed. Klaus MALETTKE, (Marburger Beiträge 1) Münster, 2001; Monique ORNATO, *Répertoire prosopographique de personnages apparentés à la couronne de France aux XIVe et XVe siècles*, (Histoire ancienne et médiévale 65) Paris, 2001; *Poder y movilidad social: cortesanos, religiosos y oligarquías en la península Ibérica (siglos XV-XIX)*, ed. Francisco CHACÓN JIMÉNEZ, (Biblioteca de historia 64) Madrid, 2006; András KUBINYI, Courtiers and Court Life in the Time of Matthias Corvinus, in: *Matthias Corvinus, the King: tradition and renewal in the Hungarian Royal Court*, ed. Péter FARBAKY, Budapest, 2008, pp. 21-34; *I saperi nelle corti = Knowledge at the courts*, ed. Clelia ARCELLI, (Micrologus 16) Firenze, 2008.

¹⁵ Rainer Christoph SCHWINGES, Zur Professionalisierung gelehrter Tätigkeit im deutschen Spätmittelalter, in: *Recht und Verfassung im Übergang vom Mittelalter zur Neuzeit. Bericht über Kolloquien der Kommission zur Erforschung der Kultur des Spätmittelalters 1996 bis 1997*, vol. 2, ed. Hartmut BOOCKMANN / Ludger GRENZMANN, (Abhandlungen der Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen. Philologisch-Historische Klasse Folge 3, 239) Göttingen, 2001, pp. 473-493; *Sozialer Aufstieg: Funktionseliten im Spätmittelalter und in der frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Günther SCHULZ, (Deutsche Führungsschichten in der Neuzeit 2000/2001) München, 2002; *Spezialisierung und Professionalisierung: Träger und Foren Städtischer Außenpolitik während des späten Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Christian JÖRG / Michael JUCKER, (Trierer Beiträge zu den historischen Kulturwissenschaften 1) Wiesbaden 2010.

¹⁶ Some scholars refer to such super-nodes as “hubs”, cf. Anna COLLAR, Network Theory and Religious Innovation, in: *Mediterranean Historical Review* 22.1 (2007), pp. 149-162, 152.

¹⁷ *The search for a patron in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, ed. David G. WILKINS / Rebecca L. WILKINS, (Medieval and Renaissance studies 12) Lewiston/NY, 1996; Jutta M. HUESMANN, *Hospitality at the Court of Philip the Good, Duke of Burgundy (c. 1435 - 1467)*,

before the ruler or more often before his officials as petitioners in search of aid or justice. Thus different societal spheres were attracted to this social space, which itself mirrored the spectrum of these visitors, because the officials and other agents active therein belonged to a certain extent to the very same (more privileged) groupings that were attracted to it.

When analysing cultural brokers at Mediterranean courts, one therefore needs to consider in which functional sphere or subsystem of the court these go-betweens were active. A traditional focus on political history sometimes tends to overestimate the impact or even the role of the rulers: Our short insight into the various functional subsystems of the court draws attention to the fact that although the ruler may be the centre of the court, brokerage was not necessarily concentrated (in spatial and communicative terms) on him. Courts were and still are social universes comprising a multitude of individuals each of whom is a potential partner or recipient for cultural brokers. Did the ruler effectively take part in the exchange processes mediated or initiated by the brokers? Were such acts of cultural brokerage addressed to him as the centre of the court? Or did they take place in marginal spheres of the court, unnoticed by the ruler? The role of courtly society, especially of the wider court, in intercultural communications is worth considering. And in addition, the impact of the brokers did not stop at the fringes of the court: Their relation to the non-courtly environment is also a factor that has to be borne in mind.

2. Spatial settings and networks

For apart from the economic, political and social dimension to our subject, there is also a spatial one that is not limited to the physical places in which courts resided or congregated – be it palaces, tents or open spaces such as the Mongol *ordo* as described in Reuven Amitai's paper:¹⁸ Courts were often intimately related to urban centres, even if they were not necessarily identical with them, a subject discussed intensely over many years in Germany.¹⁹ In

Oxford, 2001; *Stiftungen in Christentum, Judentum und Islam vor der Moderne: auf der Suche nach ihren Gemeinsamkeiten und Unterschieden in religiösen Grundlagen, praktischen Zwecken und historischen Transformationen*, ed. Michael BORGOLTE, (Stiftungsgeschichten 4) Berlin, 2005.

¹⁸ *Höfe und Residenzen im spätmittelalterlichen Reich*, 4 vols., ed. Werner PARAVICINI, (Residenzenforschung 15) Ostfildern, 2003-2012, particularly vol. 1 (2003); Philippe ARAGUAS, Châteaux, palais, hôtels et tentes de campagne: notes sur les "itinérances" de Pierre IV le Cérémonieux, in: *e-Spania* 8 (2009): <http://e-spania.revues.org/18677#text>. Cf. Margaret MULLET, Tented ceremony, in: *Court Ceremonies and Rituals of Power in the Medieval Mediterranean*, ed. Alexander BEIHAMMER (in press).

¹⁹ *Der Hof und die Stadt: Konfrontation, Koexistenz und Integration in Spätmittelalter und Früher Neuzeit*, ed. Werner PARAVICINI / Jörg WETTLAUER, (Residenzenforschung 20) Ostfildern, 2006; Thomas ZOTZ, Informelle Zusammenhänge zwischen Hof und Stadt, in: *Informelle Strukturen bei Hof: Dresdener Gespräche III zur Theorie des Hofes*, ed. Reinhardt BUTZ / Jan HIRSCHBIEGEL, (Vita curialis 2) Berlin, 2009, pp. 157-168; Jan HIRSCHBIEGEL / Gabriel

most case studies analysed in this volume, one can observe such a concurrence of town and court: Cairo, Barcelona, Granada, Baghdad, Rome, Venice, and Constantinople, to name a few. In these cases, urban centres – the paradigmatic nodes of knowledge and profit par excellence²⁰ – formed a dynamic relation with a second such cluster: the court. The intermingling of urban and courtly space – be it in the form of symbolic, social or public space – is only now beginning to be adequately analysed. Several papers in this volume deal with this very special relationship (Drews, von der Höh, Jaspert). In these and similar cases, one might ask whether it was really the court that attracted the cultural brokers or whether they were not rather drawn to it by its urban environment. This is especially worth considering when analysing the activities of merchants, craftsmen or artists: surely they were working for the court (though probably not exclusively), but did they really belong to it? Did their acts of brokerage concern the court in particular?

By understanding Mediterranean courts in the pre-modern era as communicative nodes which relate to others via brokers, comparative historical research is picking up impulses provided in recent years by network theory. Indeed, such nodal points could form part of far-flung networks of varying intensity.²¹ One might, therefore, ask if methods developed in order to analyse social networks might be applied to courts and more specifically to Mediterranean courts as nodes of religious transfer in order to better understand the dynamics of intercultural agency.²² Reconstructing courtly networks using social network analysis (graphs included) appears to be promising, as long as the quan-

ZEILINGER, Urban Space Divided? The Encounter of Civic and Courtly Spheres in Late-Medieval Towns, in: *Urban Space in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Age*, ed. Albrecht CLASSEN, (Fundamentals of medieval and early modern culture 4) Berlin, 2009, pp. 481-504; *Städtisches Bürgertum und Hofgesellschaft: Kulturen integrativer und konkurrierender Beziehungen in Residenz- und Hauptstädten vom 14. bis ins 19. Jahrhundert*, ed. Jan HIRSCHBIEGEL / Werner PARAVICINI / Jörg WETTLAUER, (Residenzenforschung 25) Ostfildern, 2012.

²⁰ *Kommunikation in mittelalterlichen Städten*, ed. Jörg OBERSTE, (Studien / Forum Mittelalter 3) Regensburg, 2007; *Cities and cultural exchange in Europe, 1400 - 1700*, ed. Donatella CALABI / Stephen Turk CHRISTENSEN, (Cultural exchange in early modern Europe 2) Cambridge, 2007, particularly Alex COWAN, Nodes, Networks and Hinterlands, *ibidem*, pp. 28-41; *Towns and Communication; Communication between Towns*, ed. Neven BUDAK / Hubert HOUBEN, Zagreb, 2011; Paula SANDERS, *Ritual, Politics and the City in Fatimid Cairo*, Princeton, 1994.

²¹ Dorothea JANSEN, *Einführung in die Netzwerkanalyse: Grundlagen, Methoden, Anwendungen*, Opladen, 1999; Steffen ALBRECHT, Netzwerke und Kommunikation. Zum Verhältnis zweier sozialwissenschaftlicher Paradigmen, in: *Netzwerkanalyse und Netzwerktheorie: ein neues Paradigma in den Sozialwissenschaften*, ed. Christian STEGBAUER, (Netzwerkforschung 1) 2nd ed., Wiesbaden, 2010, pp. 165-178; *Akteure der Außenbeziehungen: Netzwerke und Interkulturalität im historischen Wandel*, ed. Hillard VON THIESSEN / Christian WINDLER, (Externa 1) Köln, 2010.

²² Manuel A. VÁSQUEZ, Studying Religion in Motion: A Networks Approach, in: *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 20 (2008), pp. 151-184; Anna COLLAR, Network Theory and Religious Innovation, in: *Mediterranean Historical Review* 22 (2007), pp. 149-162.

tity of sources allows for such an approach. This methodology has hitherto proven particularly useful for the analyses of networks consisting of individual actors or groups. Cultural brokers such as diplomatic envoys or mercenaries might indeed have formed such networks between political centres, as Ana Echevarría shows.²³ The missionaries mentioned by Jenny Oesterle, the secretaries and scribes that connected the eastern Mediterranean courts via their correspondence (Coureas) or the Vice-Chancellors in Jürgen Sarnowsky's paper seem to be further cases in point. Also, a wider understanding of agency that includes non-human actors opens up new insights. Following a wording developed by adherents of the actor network theory, one might speak of "actants" in order to encompass a wide range of agents, i.e. one that conveys agency both to human, material and non-material factors.²⁴ In this collection, such actants are also discussed, for example artistic products (Coureas) or influential literary works (Schlieben and Drews). However, the dearth of extant sources from the mediaeval era often prevents us from fully identifying such patterns of relationships with the density required in order to successfully apply social network analysis.

But even if such intricate patterns of relations can rarely be reconstructed, there is no doubt that courts formed nodal points within large territorial networks that spanned the entire Mediterranean in pre-modern times. They effectively contributed to what modern research in the wake of Nicholas Purcell and Peregrine Horden has termed "connectivity":²⁵ the ability to link smaller territorial and self-sufficient units across the sea. Indeed, centres of power on the coasts of the Mediterranean and on islands within it could be joined by multiple ties: diplomatic and marital connections (*connubium* in the Latin world of the Northern Mediterranean) as well as commercial or cultural links.²⁶ These relations need not have been amicable, for political and econom-

²³ Nicolas DROCOURT, *Peut-on parler d'un réseau d'ambassadeurs dans la Méditerranée médiévale? Le cas des ambassadeurs étrangers envoyés dans l'Empire byzantine du VIII^e au XII^e siècle*, in: *Espaces et réseaux en Méditerranée. VI^e-XVI^e siècle 1, La configuration des réseaux*, ed. Damien COULON / Christophe PICARD / Dominique VALERIAN, Paris, 2007, pp. 147-176.

²⁴ Bruno LATOUR, *On Actor Network Theory. A few Clarifications*, in: *Soziale Welt* 47 (1996), pp. 369-382; Cassandra S. CRAWFORD, *Actor Network Theory*, in: *Encyclopedia of Social Theory* 1: [A - M], ed. George RITZER, Thousand Oaks, Calif., 2005, pp. 1-3.

²⁵ Peregrine HORDEN / Nicholas PURCELL, *The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History*, Oxford, 2000, pp. 123-172.

²⁶ Karl-Heinz SPIEB, *Europa heiratet. Kommunikation und Kulturtransfer im Kontext europäischer Königsheiraten des Spätmittelalters*, in: *Europa im späten Mittelalter: Politik - Gesellschaft - Kultur*, ed. Rainer Christoph SCHWINGES / Christian HESSE / Peter MORAW, (Historische Zeitschrift. Beiheft N.F., 40) München, 2006, pp. 435-464; *Gens de passage en Méditerranée de l'Antiquité à l'époque moderne: procédures de contrôle et d'identification*, ed. Claude MOATTI / Wolfgang KAISER, Paris, 2007; *Les relations diplomatiques entre le monde musulman et l'Occident latin: (XII^e - XVI^e siècle)*, ed. Denise AIGLE / Pascal BURESI, (Orient moderne N.S., 88) Roma, 2008; *Le monde de l'itinérance en Méditerranée de l'antiquité à l'époque moderne: procédures de contrôle et d'identification*, ed. Claude MOATTI / Wolfgang KAISER / Christophe PEBARTHE, (Études 72) Pessac, 2009; *La correspondance entre souverains, princes et cités-États. Approches croisées entre l'Orient musul-*

ic relations were also upheld between adversaries, and even war is ultimately a particular form of contact. In order to differentiate and compare degrees of connectedness, one could again attempt to apply methods developed within network theory, for example, by defining the intensity of ties between courts and illustrating them in graphs or by measuring how intricately such centres were related, thus determining the density of the courtly network of the Medieval Mediterranean.²⁷ This is still an open assignment, but the following papers are a step toward this as yet distant objective.

3. Religious transfer and courts

The court's setting is also a relevant point for the question of interreligious transfer. At court, the religious other took on different hues. It could either be encountered on site in the form of individuals of differing creed: Visitors from foreign countries, officials employed specifically because of their cultural, most often linguistic skills or in certain cases also subjects (plaintiffs, petitioners etc.) belonging to a religious minority. Or it took the form of material or immaterial commodities at court such as texts, ideas, artefacts, cultural modes, etc.²⁸ Finally, the religious other could also be the objective of courtly activities far afield: Envoys could be sent to foreign courts, distant areas could be targeted as areas of mission etc. All three areas of interreligious contact play a role within this volume, although overall, special emphasis is laid on the first field – that is, on individuals as cultural brokers.

The papers in this collection focus on a particular trait of pre-modern courts: their character as intercultural centres or, more precisely, as centres of

man, *l'Occident latin et Byzance (XIIIe-début XVIe siècle)*, ed. Denise AIGLE / Stéphane PÉQUIGNOT, Turnhout, (in press); Nikolas JASPERT / Sebastian KOLDITZ, *Christlich-muslimische Außenbeziehungen im Mittelmeerraum: Zur räumlichen und religiösen Dimension mittelalterlicher Diplomatie*, (in press).

²⁷ John SCOTT, *Social network analysis: a handbook*, London, 2000; Albert-László BARABÁSI, *Linked: The New Science of Networks*, Cambridge, Mass., 2002; *Models and Methods in Social Network Analysis*, ed. Peter J. CARRINGTON, (Structural Analysis in the Social Sciences 27 [i.e. 28]) Cambridge, 2005; Mike BURKHARDT, *Der hansische Bergenhandel im Spätmittelalter: Handel, Kaufleute, Netzwerke*, (Quellen und Darstellungen zur Hansischen Geschichte N.F., 60) Köln, 2009; Christian STEGBAUER, *Netzwerkanalyse und Netzwerktheorie: ein neues Paradigma in den Sozialwissenschaften*, (Netzwerkforschung 1) 2nd ed., Wiesbaden, 2010.

²⁸ *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. Arjun APPADURAI, Cambridge, 1986; Karl-Heinz SPIEB, Asian Objects and Western European Court Culture in the Middle Ages, in: *Artistic and Cultural Exchanges between Europe and Asia, 1400-1900*, ed. Michael NORTH, Farnham, 2010, pp. 10-28; *Islamic Artefacts in the Mediterranean World: Trade, Gift Exchange and Artistic Transfer*, ed. Catarina SCHMIDT ARCANGELI / Gerhard WOLF, (Collana del Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz, Max-Planck-Institut 15) Venezia, 2010; *Lateinisch-griechisch-arabische Begegnungen: Kulturelle Diversität im Mittelmeerraum des Spätmittelalters*, ed. Margit MERSCH / Ulrike RITZERFELD, (Europa im Mittelalter 15) München, 2010.

religious encounters. An underlying assumption is that courts played an important role both for religious transfer and for the spread of religions. In order to comprehend this relationship between expansion and cross-fertilisation of religious ideas one needs to understand how and through which channels religions could be disseminated. At first sight, intercultural relations were particularly prone to occur in frontier societies, where societal groups or individuals of different religious affiliation encountered each other on a regular basis or even shared common spaces. In areas far from the religious border zones on the contrary, the opportunities for interreligious relations naturally diminished. But the picture of gradual diffusion based on the assumption that religious ideas expanded via point-to-point contact has recently been criticized, among others by Erik Zürcher and Jason Neelis.²⁹ According to these scholars, the expansion of religions resulted from a more complex process of transmission and transformation based on nodes (or nodal points) of interaction that were interconnected by capillary routes. Such dynamic points of confluence where religious traditions interact and mutually influence each other deserve special attention. They can, but need not necessarily, be situated in border zones between territories inhabited by people of one religious affiliation.³⁰ It is within this context that the court, a nodal point generally situated within the hinterland of the respective realm, acquires particular relevance for the study of religious transfer processes. Because here too, adherents of different belief systems could, albeit only temporarily or partially, inhabit shared space. Pre-modern Mediterranean courts often belong to this group of nodes situated in the hinterland and not on the frontier but which nevertheless had an impact on the dissemination of religious ideas.

Focusing on religious expansion from a historical and comparative perspective, the wide range of such centres of religious transfer might be divided into four groups. Basically, one can discern “nodes of learning and knowledge” such as universities, madrasas etc., “nodes of economy”, such as trading em-

²⁹ Erik ZÜRCHER, *Buddhism Across Boundaries: The Foreign Input*, in: *Buddhism Across Boundaries - Chinese Buddhism and the Western Regions: Collection of Essays 1993*, ed. John MCRAE / Jan NATTIER, Taipei, 1999, pp. 1-59; Erik ZÜRCHER, *The Buddhist Conquest of China: The Spread and Adaptation of Buddhism in Early Medieval China*, 3rd. ed. (Sinica Leidensia 11) Leiden, 2007, cf. Jason Emmanuel NEELIS, *Early Buddhist Transmission and Trade Networks: Mobility and Exchange within and beyond the Northwestern Borderlands of South Asia*, (Dynamics in the History of Religion 2) Leiden, 2011.

³⁰ *Frontiers in Question: Eurasian Borderlands, 700 - 1700*, ed. Daniel POWER / Naomi STANDEN, Houndmills, 1999; *Medieval Frontiers: Concepts and Practices*, ed. David ABULAFIA / Nora BEREND, Aldershot, 2002; *Grenzüberschreitungen im Vergleich: der Osten und der Westen des mittelalterlichen Lateineuropas*, ed. Klaus HERBERS / Nikolas JASPERT, (Europa im Mittelalter 7) Berlin, 2007; *Grenze und Grenzüberschreitung im Mittelalter*, ed. Ulrich KNEFELKAMP, Berlin, 2007; *Grenzen und Grenzüberschreitungen: Bilanz und Perspektiven der Frühneuzeitforschung*, ed. Christine ROLL, (Frühnezeit-Impulse 1) Köln, 2010; *Faktum und Konstrukt: politische Grenzziehungen im Mittelalter: Verdichtung - Symbolisierung - Reflexion*, ed. Nils BOCK, (Symbolische Kommunikation und Gesellschaftliche Wertesysteme 35) Münster, 2011.

poria, major trading towns etc., “nodes of worship” such as centres of pilgrimage, cemeteries, monasteries etc. and finally “nodes of power” such as fortresses, palaces – and courts. What all these dynamic centres of interaction have in common is that they could at a certain moment in time function as places of religious transfer. A decisive element for such processes was the activities of individual agents as go-betweens, *gens de passage* or cultural brokers.³¹ Certainly, some nodal points evade exclusive allocation and belong to different types at the same time. Courts in particular are certainly not only centres of power, but also nodes of knowledge, economy and often also worship.³² But then again, such an attempt at a general classification might prove useful as an analytical device.

When studying the history of pre-modern courts, interdisciplinary German research (“Hof- und Residenzenforschung”) has emphasized three fields or perspectives of enquiry:³³ First of all, courts as structural elements or frame-

³¹ Leyla ROUHI, *Mediation and Love: A Study of the Medieval Go-between in Key Romance and Near-Eastern Texts*, (Brill’s Studies in Intellectual History 93) Leiden, 1999; Mercedes GARCÍA-ARENAL / Gerard Albert WIEGERS, *A Man of Three Worlds: Samuel Pallache, a Moroccan Jew in Catholic and Protestant Europe*, Baltimore, 2003 (Span. Orig. 1999); *Gens de passage en Méditerranée de l’Antiquité à l’époque moderne: procédures de contrôle et d’identification*, ed. Claude MOATTI / Wolfgang KAISER, Paris, 2007; *Le commerce des captifs: les intermédiaires dans l’échange et le rachat des prisonniers en Méditerranée, XVe - XVIIIe siècle*, ed. Wolfgang KAISER, (Collection de l’École Française de Rome 406) Rome, 2010; *Double agents: Cultural and Political Brokerage in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Marika KEBLUSEK / Badeloch NOLDUS, (Studies in Medieval and Reformation Traditions 154) Boston, 2011; Ella Natalie ROTHMAN, *Brokering Empire: Trans-imperial Subjects between Venice and Istanbul*, Ithaca, 2011; *Les Musulmans dans l’histoire de l’Europe II: Passages et contacts en Méditerranée*, ed. Jocelyne DAKHLIA / Wolfgang KAISER, Paris, 2012.

³² *Hof und Theorie: Annäherungen an ein historisches Phänomen*, ed. Reinhardt BUTZ / Jan HIRSCHBIEGEL / Dietmar WILLOWEIT, (Norm und Struktur 22) Köln, 2004; *Kulturtransfer und Hofgesellschaft im Mittelalter: Wissenskultur am sizilianischen und kastilischen Hof im 13. Jahrhundert*, ed. Gundula GREBNER, (Wissenskultur und gesellschaftlicher Wandel 15) Berlin, 2008; *Informelle Strukturen bei Hof: Dresdener Gespräche III zur Theorie des Hofes*, ed. Reinhardt BUTZ / Jan Hirschbiegel, (Vita curialis 2) Berlin, 2009; *The politics of Space: European Courts, ca. 1500 - 1750*, ed. Marcello FANTONI / George GORSE / Malcolm SMUTS, (Biblioteca del Cinquecento 142) Roma, 2009; *Hofkultur der Jagiellonendynastie und verwandter Fürstenhäuser*, ed. Urszula BORKOWSKA / Markus HÖRSCH, (Studia Jagellonica Lipsiensia 6) Ostfildern, 2010; *Luxus und Integration: materielle Hofkultur Westeuropas vom 12. bis zum 18. Jahrhundert*, ed. Werner PARAVICINI, München, 2010; *Court Cultures in the Muslim World: Seventh to Nineteenth Centuries*, ed. Albrecht FUESS, (SOAS Routledge Studies on the Middle East 13) London, 2011; *La cour du prince: cour de France, cours d’Europe, XIIe - XVe siècle*, ed. Murielle GAUDE-FERRAGU, (Études d’histoire médiévale 13) Paris, 2011; *Cultures courtoises en mouvement*, ed. Isabelle ARSENEAU, Montréal, 2011; *Royal Courts in Dynastic States and Empires: A Global Perspective*, ed. Jeroen Frans Jozef DUINDAM, (Comparative Studies in Governance 1) Leiden, 2011. Cf. the volumes of the series ‘Residenzenforschung’.

³³ Cf. Andreas Bihrer, *Curia non sufficit. Vergangene, aktuelle und zukünftige Wege der Erforschung von Höfen im Mittelalter und in der Frühen Neuzeit*, in: *Zeitschrift für historische Forschung* 35 (2008), pp. 235-237. These focuses of the German research are also mirrored in the structure of the articles in the compendium *Höfe und Residenzen im spätmittelalterlichen Reich, Teil 1: Dynastisch-topographisches Handbuch*, ed. Werner Paravicini / Jan Hirschbie-

works of pre-modern government; second, the social history of the courts and particularly prosopographical research, and finally courts as places of a specific secular chivalric culture (“ritterlich-höfische Kultur”). Religious functions of courts or even religion at court in contrast have rarely attracted scholarly attention in Germany.³⁴ This is true for studies on medieval Christian as well as on Islamic courts. The recently published important volume on court cultures by Fuess/Hartung dedicates sections to “politics”, “court cultures”, “sciences”, “literature”, “art and architecture” not however to religion.³⁵ Telling examples in this respect are also the monographs dedicated to the courts of ecclesiastical princes and published in the series “Residenzenforschungen”: They could well have included detailed discussions of the religious field but nevertheless only briefly touch on the subject.³⁶ To a certain extent, this omission might be explained by the specific situation of late-medieval German courts, but it is by no means compelling on a general level. Research on medieval Latin and Arabic courts is asymmetric in as much as there is no comprehensive “Residenzenforschung” for the Islamic middle ages. Studies on the court culture of the Umayyads, Abbasids, Fatimids, Mamluks etc. concentrate on a variety of aspects of courtly life such as, for example, architecture, ceremonial or art and literature.³⁷ As the examples of the Fatimids, the Papacy, the Iberian Peninsula

gel / Jörg Wettlaufer, (Residenzenforschung 15.I) Ostfildern, 2003, in which there is not much space for church and religion between the chapters “Chronologische[m] Abriß der Entwicklung des Hofes”, “Organisation/Aufbau”, “Wirtschaft”, “Prosopographische[m]” und “Feste, Vergnügungen, Repräsentation”.

³⁴ Cf. BIHRER, *Curia non sufficit*, (as n. 33), pp. 263-264.

³⁵ Articles dealing explicitly with religion at court are integrated in the chapter on politics like the essays of Stefan HEIDEMANN, The representation of the Abbasid Empire and its religion on coin imagery and Michael Cook: Did the Prophet keep court?, in: *Court Cultures in the Muslim World 7th to 19th centuries*, ed. Albrecht FUESS / Jan-Peter HARTUNG, London/New York, 2010, pp. 30-53 and 23-29.

³⁶ Konrad AMANN, *Die landesherrliche Residenzstadt Passau im spätmittelalterlichen Deutschen Reich*, (Residenzenforschung 3) Sigmaringen, 1992, chap. “Erziehung und Bildung”, pp. 217-235; Dieter KERBER, *Herrschaftsmittelpunkte im Erzstift Trier. Hof und Residenz im späten Mittelalter*, (Residenzenforschung 4) Sigmaringen, 1995, “Die geistliche Verwaltung”, pp. 199-206; Michael SCHOLZ, *Residenz, Hof und Verwaltung der Erzbischöfe von Magdeburg in Halle in der ersten Hälfte des 16. Jahrhunderts*, (Residenzenforschung 7) Sigmaringen, 1998, “Die Hofgeistlichkeit”, pp. 98-99; Volker HIRSCH, *Der Hof des Basler Bischofs Johannes von Venningen (1458 - 1478): Verwaltung und Kommunikation, Wirtschaftsführung und Konsum*, (Residenzenforschung 16) Ostfildern, 2004, “Der geistliche Hof”, pp. 62-66; Andreas BIHRER, *Der Konstanzer Bischofssitz im 14. Jahrhundert. Herrschaftliche, soziale und kommunikative Aspekte*, (Residenzenforschung, 18) Ostfildern, 2005, “Geistliches Wirken”, pp. 100-104. Symptomatic in this respect is also the collected volume *Höfe und Residenzen geistlicher Fürsten. Strukturen, Regionen und Salzburgs Beispiel in Mittelalter und Neuzeit*, ed. Tobias Riedl / Jutta Baumgartner / Gerhard Ammerer / Ingonda Hanneschläger / Jan Paul Niederkorn / Wolfgang Wüst, (Residenzenforschung 24), Ostfildern, 2010.

³⁷ Rachel HASON, *Court Amusements: Games, Sport and Pleasure in Islamic art*, Jerusalem, 2006; Oleg GRABA, *Ceremonial and Art at the Umayyad Court*, Princeton, 1954; Janina M. SAFRAN, *The Second Umayyad Caliphate. The Articulation of Caliphal Legitimacy in al-Andalus*, (Harvard Middle Eastern Monographs 33) Cambridge, Mass., 2001; Robert HILLENBRAND, *La dolce vita in Early Islamic Syria: The evidence of Later Umayyad Palaces*, in: *Art*

and the Ilkhans demonstrate, religion and particularly inter-religious dialogue were fields closely linked to the courts, both in Christian and in Muslim ruled territories.

4. Mediterranean courts: Milieus of religious tolerance?

Were Medieval Mediterranean courts especially favourable to cultural brokerage, especially compared to the non-courtly environment? Were these places of power characterized by a specific climate of openness and tolerance? The results of various papers in this volume suggest such an interpretation. It is precisely here that an analytical differentiation between the specific (functional) subsystems of the respective courts and between Christian and Muslim courts is obligatory. One can easily discern varying degrees of religious diversity, for example, concerning different confessions within the ruler's family (Fatimids, Ilkhans), or concerning different religions amongst the court personnel and the wider court. Muslim courts in particular appear to be characterized by a relative openness towards members of other religions (of the Book); while the presence of Jewish or Christian councillors, experts or simply attendants – despite their often precarious positions – was often the rule at Muslim courts, the corresponding presence of Muslims and Jews at Christian courts is mostly a (significant) exception that can be explained by the lack of adequate Christian alternatives – as in the case of physicians or interpreters – or by specific pragmatic contexts, as in the case of the guards at the Castilian court.

Only some of the papers offer a glimpse beyond the limits of the courts, thus enabling us to determine whether the non-courtly environment was characterized by a quite different stance towards members of other cultures or confessions. In this sense, specific courtly situations may have momentarily brought about an apparently higher degree of tolerance towards people of different creeds, far more so than the court as a social and cultural space shaped by different norms. As an example one could refer to diplomatic receptions that were subjected to different rules than informal every-day contacts which tended to be much more antagonistic (von der Höh).

The mediating function of cultural brokers is complemented by their role as markers of cultural difference, as shown in the contributions by Ana Echevarría, Marc von der Höh, Barbara Schlieben and Nikolas Jaspert. The ostensive performance of Ottoman ambassadors at foreign courts or the notable refusal to engage in direct communication in the case of Venice are such forms of clarifying and marking cultural boundaries. For in the Medieval Mediterra-

History 5.1 (1982), pp. 1-35; Julie SCOTT-MEISAMI, The Palace Complex as Emblem. Some Samarran Qasidas, in: *A Medieval Islamic City Reconsidered: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Samarra*, ed. Chase ROBINSON, Oxford, 2001, pp. 69-79

nean, communication and dialogue were rarely aimed at the understanding or approval of cultural differences – no matter how desirable this might be nowadays. In most cases, cultural brokerage was rather the result of a pragmatic attitude that (often only momentarily) put aside differences in order to achieve concrete aims. In some cases this objective was in fact persuasion or to be more exact: religious conversion as in the case of the Fatimid missionaries analyzed by Jenny Oesterle or the Mendicant theologians presented by Nikolas Jaspert. These few examples suffice to show that brokerage at Mediterranean courts was by far not only harmonious mediation between religions but has to be perceived within a wide semantic spectrum that ranges from dialogue and mediation to translation, from interpretation to persuasion and oppression. Brokers were indeed “border-crossers”, but the transgression?overstepping of borders presupposes the existence of such boundaries. The article on Jewish and Muslim paramours in Castile emphasizes this simple and at the same time complex tension (Schlieben).

5. Types of brokers and brokerage

From Aragon to Baghdad we find a wide range of brokers: scholars, scribes, diplomats, religious experts, interpreters and translators. In many cases these go-betweens acted out multiple roles simultaneously: They could work as both religious experts and translators (Jaspert) or as both merchants and diplomats (von der Höh, Kolditz). The essays in this volume present a variety of brokers who were more or less permanently present at court – functionaries such as scribes in the royal administration and interpreters – but also individuals whose time at court was limited such as, for example, diplomats (like Wilhelm of Rubruk and John of Gorze, cf. Borgolte) or merchants (von der Höh). Given this wide spectrum, we cannot attempt at systematically covering all types of brokers at Mediterranean courts in one volume, but some general comments might be appropriate in order to delineate a tentative typology.

In order to categorize the wide field of brokerage, it might be helpful to distinguish between “manifest” and “latent” functions of cultural brokers: Is the inter or trans-cultural impact a result of an intentional, “manifest” act on the part of the brokers, or is it accidental and therefore “latent”, the by-product of an activity that has other aims? Some cases presented in the following papers may help to illustrate these two concepts. A representative of manifest (intentional) brokerage would be a theologian in an inter-religious dialogue (Amitai, Jaspert), a missionary (Oesterle, Jaspert), in certain cases also diplomats or envoys (Jaspert, Echevarria, von der Höh) and surely translators or interpreters (Echevarria, Drews, Coureas). All of these agents were deliberately active in intercultural communication, they tried to teach, convince or simply enable exchange by bridging cultural or religious borders. Latent (unintentional) brokers on the contrary would be merchants travelling to foreign countries, slaves

or prisoners, experts and servants, mercenaries, pilgrims, physicians and artists in the widest sense of the word. They all lived for a certain period of time or even permanently in foreign countries or unfamiliar cultures and in doing so to some degree spread information about their own cultural backgrounds; arguably they also provided knowledge about alien cultures on their return home. But conducting such exchange and transfer was not their objective; they unintentionally contributed to the bilateral flow of information and maybe understanding.

Apart from distinguishing between latent and manifest brokers one might also categorize medieval brokers by applying the religious field as a tool. The broker's creed and more particularly the relationship between his beliefs and those of the courtly environment need to be taken into consideration. From this perspective, three types of brokerage can be distinguished: First of all, we can distinguish brokers who belonged to the "dominant" religion at court, that is, who possessed the same creed as the ruler and who was charged with studying other cultures and religions such as the Mendicants in Aragon (Jaspert) or the Chancellors of the Hospitallars at Rhodes (Sarnowsky). A second important group of "border-crossers" were converts – we find them at every Islamic court studied in this volume (Amitai, Drews, Oesterle) and also at many Christian courts (Jaspert, Märkl, von der Höh). Finally, brokers belonging to religious minorities at court need to be mentioned. This group is especially relevant at Mediterranean courts and thereby reflects the situation of interreligious coexistence in Mediterranean societies. We find religious minorities such as Muslims and Jews as brokers at Christian courts (Jaspert, Echevarría, Schlieben) but members of religious minorities were particularly prominent at Muslim Courts (Amitai, Drews, Oesterle), where Christians and Jews often held prominent functions. These go-betweens possessed a double qualification: On the one hand they were close to the centre of power and relatively well integrated into the courtly environment, and on the other hand they were versed in another religion and could act as mediators between the ruler and their fellow believers as well as between courts of different creed. First and foremost, Jews played an important role as brokers at Mediterranean courts (Borgolte, Jaspert, Echevarria) and also at central Asian courts like the Abbasid (Drews) and the Ilkhanid court (Amitai). At these courts Jews commonly held important administrative positions, but were also highly esteemed as scholars, scientists and advisors. The essay on the Ilkhanid Court traces prominent Jewish careers which at least in certain cases even had a major political impact (Amitai). However there are also exemptions: At the Hospitallars' court (Sarnowsky) or the Papal Curia (Märkl) adherents of other creeds, such as Jews and Muslims, did not occupy permanent positions. These courts upheld intensive diplomatic contacts (Sarnowsky) and studied the religion of "the other" (Märkl), but they generally did not integrate multi-religious functionaries permanently into their courtly environment. Claudia Märkl therefore describes the relationship between Christianity and Islam at the papal court as

“self-evidently asymmetrical”³⁸ because “any contact” was “intended to serve Christian interests”.³⁹ This asymmetry is mirrored by the fact that the Papal curia did not permit multi-religious coexistence in the immediate vicinity of the pope. Obviously the balance between religion and politics at court had a strong impact on the aims and intentions of brokerage in each historical constellation.

In terms of duration, too, brokerage might be differentiated. Sometimes it was temporarily limited, as for example during interreligious disputations, but mostly it should be understood as a more ongoing process. The results of such long-term developments are naturally difficult to grasp. The intensity of intercultural brokerage differed according to the interests, the aims and the inclination of each court to actively face other religions and cultures. The papers presented here convey the impression that, in general, religion was usually not explicitly the topic of such brokerage within courtly contexts. Sometimes brokers conducted brokerage due to their specific role at court, in other cases they did so simply by “living” their otherness (Schlieben). Sometimes they were committed to enabling communication because of their religious background, at other times because of their expertise.

A final word on the rulers: In some, albeit rare, cases they themselves acted as cultural brokers, but usually their importance for our subject lies in the fact that they related to the go-betweens and enabled or impeded their activities. The interests and intentions of rulers to gain knowledge of “the other” varied at the courts studied in this volume. Evidently, the intensity of brokerage was strongly affected if the ruler accepted or even encouraged it, particularly if he himself even acted as a broker between religions as in the Cyprian and Byzantine cases (Coureas, Kolditz). The ruler’s willingness to face other religions varied considerably depending on historical circumstances: Sometimes, a given political situation made it necessary to intensify diplomacy, with all the consequences this entailed in terms of acquiring knowledge about the religion and political culture of “the other”. But not only political, but also religious circumstances had an effect: The fragile balance between religion and politics influenced the role and function of religious elites at Christian courts (Jaspert), whereas the lack of such highly structured religious institutions as the Church or the Religious Orders in the *dār al-Islām* impeded the systematic training of religious experts as potential brokers at Islamic courts.

³⁸ Cf. p. 152.

³⁹ Cf. *ibidem*.

6. Broker ergo translator, translator ergo broker

One of the noteworthy focal points of this volume is that almost every case study presented deals with experts of language and writing such as interpreters (Echevaria, Borgolte, Jaspert, Sarnowsky, Märtil, Oesterle, Drews, Amitai, von der Höh, Coureas) or translators, as in the essays on the Abbasid court at Baghdad (Drews) and on the Iberian translation movement in the 12th century (highlighted by Borgolte). This dominance of translators is even more striking when viewed from a general perspective, because in a more abstract sense of the word every form of brokerage can in fact be conceptualized as a form of translation: If one considers cultures as systems of meanings or symbols⁴⁰, then phenomena of communication and even more so of transfer are necessarily connected to translation,⁴¹ because translators are always experts in intercultural transfer independent of their strictly linguistic activities.⁴² We would therefore suggest conceptualizing every broker – at least concerning his function as a mediator – as a *translator*: “Broker ergo translator”.

If we thus conceive brokers as mediators and translators, we must then ask what it was they communicated or translated. In many cases, such go-betweens simply transported texts – either from one language to another or geographically from one country or region to another. Examples would be the translation of the Koran but also of scientific books as touched upon in the papers by Wolfram Drews and Nikolas Jaspert. Parallel to such translations of texts one could analyse the transport of (artistic) artefacts, as in the case of the Egyptian brass basin in the paper by Nicolas Coureas. The example of material artefacts shows that processes of transport always occurred on several levels: On the one hand the material object was transported, but together with its materiality the form (the design) and finally the use or the knowledge of its use were also transferred. An example of the latter process would be the Christian artillery experts working for the Ottomans. But in most cases, not objects but knowledge as such was communicated: Knowledge about the other, but also the other’s knowledge: Medical know-how was transferred by Muslim or Jewish physicians to Iberian courts and theological knowledge to the court of the Ilkhans but also knowledge about Ottoman court culture was brought to Renaissance Venice. Regardless of the nature of the transferred object, be it knowledge, texts or artefacts: the process of translation and transfer

⁴⁰ Cf. Stephan MOEBIUS / Dirk QUADFLIEG, Kulturtheorien der Gegenwart – Heterotopien der Theorie, in: *Kultur. Theorien der Gegenwart*, ed. Stephan MOEBIUS / Dirk QUADFLIEG, Wiesbaden, 2011, pp. 12-18.

⁴¹ Cf. Thomas KELLER, Kulturtransferforschung. Grenzgänge zwischen den Kulturen, in: *Kultur. Theorien der Gegenwart*, ed. Stephan MOEBIUS / Dirk QUADFLIEG, Wiesbaden, 2011, pp. 106-119.

⁴² Susan BASSNETT, The Translation Turn in Cultural Studies, in: *Constructing Cultures. Essays on Literary Translation*, ed. Susan BASSNETT / André LEFEVERE, Clevedon u.a., 1998, pp. 123-140.

necessarily went hand-in-hand with a change in the meaning of that object. We might therefore ask how the channels and contexts of transfer affected such processes. Or to phrase it more succinctly: What effect did the courtly context and the medium of intercultural brokers have upon the act of cultural translation?

7. The effects of brokerage

The situation of cultural brokers within the courtly system not only has a social dimension to it, but also an important impact on the content of the brokerage conducted. If courts are to be considered as nodes in a network of communication channels, the question arises as to what extent those nodes affected the communicated content and its transfer. Courts were indeed both the end point of several flows and the places of confluence for several commodities. But that is not all: They were also often a site of distribution or dissemination. This aspect is worth stressing, because an underlying question in several papers in this volume is how courts actually functioned as centres of intercultural transfer. What appears particularly relevant in this context are not only the economic, political and intellectual commodities that courts attracted, but – perhaps even more so – the modifications this input or supply underwent, i.e. the changes in flow.

Measuring the intensity of flow and focusing the changes brought about in the process, implies exploring issues that the current network paradigm often fails to address. For the latter tends to concentrate on agents, places and quantities of interaction and not so much on the qualitative variations which the commodities underwent when they were exchanged. The editors would like to propose a term with which to describe this qualitative change: hubs. The concept of hubs which initially pertains to the field of logistics and communication technologies has recently been applied to network theory and could also prove fruitful for research on religious transfer. In logistics, a differentiation has been proposed between “passive hubs” that simply serve as a conduit for transfer, and “intelligent” or “manageable hubs” that monitor the traffic passing through them.⁴³ The latter type of hub is more relevant to this volume, though the term has not yet been applied to the humanities to any notable degree.

Precisely which traits characterise a hub? A tentative set of common features might be defined: First of all, hubs show the trait of attracting and agglutinating several elements or inputs at a time; they are highly connected. Second, these inputs are shared and processed: they are invigorated or reinforced

⁴³ Nathan J. MULLER, *Intelligent Hubs*, Boston, 1993; Arjan Marcel LEJOUR / Hugo ROJAS-ROMAGOSA / Paul J. J. VEENENDAAL, *Identifying hubs and spokes in global supply chains using redirected trade in value added*, (CPB discussion paper 227) Den Haag, 2012.

within such places of convergence, they gain momentum. And finally, hubs emit this united and strengthened input as a new and effective output of their own. Convergence – reinforcement – dissemination can therefore be tentatively defined as the three common attributes of hubs. They also apply to hubs of religious transfer. This concept not only helps discern where such processes occurred, but also draws our attention to the way transfer was brought about and highlights the individuals, groups, texts or ideas that played an important role therein. Its particular heuristic value lies in the level of abstraction which allows us to compare the activities of differing actants – both physical and non-physical, both socio-cultural and semantic – on a functional level. For according to this definition, not only places, but also institutions, individuals and other actants can function as a hub.

Turning to courts as hubs: Juridical impulses such as petitions or complaints were effectively transformed and invigorated in the form of legal rulings at court before this input was finally concretized either as laws or as regulations.⁴⁴ A similar case in point is the chancery, where submissions received and decided at court were converted into writing and thus formalised before being disseminated, as Nicholas Coureas's and Jürgen Sarnowsky's papers show.⁴⁵ Clearly then, it is not enough to measure the influx received at courts and their outflow in quantitative terms; one must also look at the qualitative change a commodity underwent as it passed through such a node of communication. As a centre of distribution, the court accelerated the transfer of information and advanced its diffusion because of its position in a given network of channels, e.g. the people circulating between the court and its environment or between different courts. Courts not only enhanced the distribution of given information by increasing the intensity of communication and also by changing the quality of information given in a specific way, because the court lent it a certain degree of prestige or even authority, thus adding a specific "courtly" connotation to the respective knowledge. The ruler and his court were often models for values, behaviour and consumption: They could therefore affect the interpretation and appreciation of knowledge about the cultural other, its toleration or rejection, and above all the reception of certain cultural forms.

⁴⁴ Ute RÖDEL, *Königliche Gerichtsbarkeit und Streitfälle der Fürsten und Grafen im Südwesten des Reiches 1250 - 1313*, (Quellen und Forschungen zur höchsten Gerichtsbarkeit im alten Reich 5) Köln, 1979; James A. Brundage, *The Medieval Origins of the Legal Profession: Canonists, Civilians, and Courts*, Chicago, 2008, pp. 283-343.

⁴⁵ *Cancellaria e cultura nel medio evo: comunicazioni presentate nelle giornate di studio della Commissione*, ed. Germano GUALDO, Città del Vaticano, 1990; Alfred FICKEL, *Korrektor und Korrekturen der Papstkanzlei in der ersten Hälfte des 13. Jahrhunderts: ein Beitrag zum Geschäftsgang der Papstkanzlei 1198 - 1241*, Landshut, 1993; *Écrit et pouvoir dans les chancelleries médiévales: espace français, espace anglais*, ed. Kouky FIANU, (Textes et études du moyen âge 6) Louvain-La-Neuve, 1997; Sebastian GLEIXNER, *Sprachrohr kaiserlichen Willens: die Kanzlei Kaiser Friedrichs II. (1226 - 1236)*, (Archiv für Diplomatik. Beiheft 11) Köln, 2006; *Kanzleisprachenforschung: ein internationales Handbuch*, ed. Albrecht GREULE, / Jörg MEIER / Arne ZIEGLER / Melanie GLANTSCHNIG, Berlin, 2012.

The court's impact was not only advantageous to intercultural dialogue. It could also regulate, standardise or even monopolize intercultural communication. Certain contents or fields of communication could be oppressed by the court. Here, it suffices to mention the avoidance of interreligious discussions or the attempts to limit intercultural dialogue to the court by prohibiting intercultural contacts outside it. Several papers in this volume illustrate such procedures (Echevarría, von der Höh) and also show the extent to which courts indeed displayed all three characteristics of a religious hub by converging, reinforcing and disseminating: Knowledge of missionary target areas flowed to the Fatimid court at Cairo, where it was processed, condensed and transmitted to clandestine missionaries who were sent out to further the cause of Shi'a Islam (Oesterle); similarly, Greek and Persian learning was treated at the Abbasid *bayt al-ḥikma*, from where it irradiated throughout the *dār al-Islām* (Drews). Manuscripts were collected by order of Mediterranean rulers in order to be translated, more often than not with the objective of using this new knowledge for polemical purposes (Märtl, Jaspert); Greek feasts were adapted to Latin traditions by Philippe de Mézières and distributed to several European courts via his *Repraesentatio Figurata* in honour of the Virgin Mary (Coureas), and other literary work cited in this collection such as Rashīd al Dīn's *Jamī al-tāwrikh* or the *Cantigas de Santa María* are similar products of convergence and adaptation (Drews, Echevarría). Only by a comparative analysis of the dynamic processes that turned nodes into hubs as attempted in this volume can one appreciate the role which Mediterranean courts and the cultural brokers active therein played for processes of religious transfer in the pre-modern era.

Just as knowledge and cultural artefacts are modified by their reception and communication at court, the various brokers themselves change the meaning of the "things" they transport (brokers as media). Obviously it is fundamental whether knowledge about Islam is conveyed by a Christian pilgrim to his brothers in faith, by an uninvolved Jew in a Christian milieu, or whether an Ismaelite missionary propagates his specific interpretation of Islam hoping for conversion. The specific social and cultural settings, the related modes of transmission and not least the claims of validity have to be considered when approaching cultural brokerage and the modifications effected on its respective contents in the process. This brings us back to the relation between the intentions of cultural brokers and the actions of communication or mediation carried out by them. We already drew the distinction between latent and manifest brokerage, that is, between intentional and accidental communications and mediations. Although this categorization accentuates an important aspect of our subject, it is rarely possible to make a clear decision to which of these ideal types of brokerage a given example fits. Concrete cases will often lie between the two extremes. Many of the studies show a constellation that is probably most frequent: Cultural exchange in these cases is neither the actual aim of the respective brokers nor does it occur completely by accident: Cultural

brokerage in these cases is actively sought as a means to achieve a certain purpose that however lies beyond the field of cultural exchange or understanding. This is especially true of various forms of diplomatic communication: The aims of these interactions can usually be established precisely, whether it be the initiation, facilitation or intensification of (commercial) contacts, conflict resolution or just maintenance of peaceful relations between realms or rulers. A precondition and result of these interactions is mutual knowledge about the counterpart, especially knowledge about the respective diplomatic customs, but also language skills, experience with mentalities, religiously motivated standards of conduct and so on.

8. Conclusion

The essays in this volume concentrate on courts in the medieval Mediterranean, an area which was characterized by intensive but “unstable” (Borgolte) contacts between religions. Studies in transcultural history have quite rightfully questioned the assumption of homogeneous “Christian” or “Muslim” cultures and rather depict the societies of the medieval Mediterranean as highly entangled, which means: in permanent contact with one another – with all the chances for integration, exchange, conflicts and demarcation that such relations entail. It is clear that courts were indeed nodal points of entangled societies in the Mediterranean world which they themselves mirrored. Courts were places of power where rulers and interacting religious and political elites created a society *sui generis* which promoted and favoured interreligious encounters in very specific ways, but also enhanced religious demarcation and the drawing of boundaries. Above all, courts were places which offered a broad spectrum of interreligious encounters, exchange and brokerage. Obviously at Mediterranean courts inter-religiosity was common: Though seldom consciously reflected, it was more often pragmatically lived, sometimes peacefully, sometimes antagonistically. A focus on brokerage at court sheds new light on such highly dynamic processes of interaction between religions during the Middle Ages. The diversity of agents, settings, intentions and forms of brokerage described in this volume is therefore telling in itself: It reflects the openness of Mediterranean courts to integrate and adapt different forms of interreligious mediation. If we consider this variety of brokers and forms of brokerage it seems that such processes were in fact integral to certain courts in the Mediterranean area during specific periods of time. Further studies will be needed in order to determine the duration, cycles and extension of this phenomenon within the Mediterranean. Presumably brokerage was an answer to the necessities, chances and risks of entangled societies because of its ability to simultaneously draw and transgress borders. Comparative research on cultural brokerage as conducted in this volume will hopefully help identify and analyse perceptions of the other in the Islamo-Jewish-Christian Mediterranean

and thereby contribute to a better understanding of the complex history and concrete circumstances of intercultural contacts, transfer processes and hybrid coexistence.