Embodied Dependencies

In Research Area B, we approach the phenomenon of slavery and other types of strong asymmetrical dependencies by taking into consideration a pre-colonial perspective. We aim at establishing archaeology, art history, and object-based anthropology on an equal level with other disciplines of the humanities that focus on written sources.

The second step towards a 'provincialization' of the Western/modern interpretational matrix takes objects as its starting point and aims to capture human and non-human 'bodies of dependency'. '. So in analogy to the first research area we will establish an inventory of material evidence of asymmetrical dependencies and their range of expression and information as a site of asymmetrical dependencies equalling the written word in importance. Relying on insights generated by the "material turn" (Appadurai 1986; Miller 1998) as well as recent debates on environmental history and biohistory, this research area aims to relativize the modern/Western focus on written culture from a pre-colonial perspective. Many societies that were not affected by Western colonization were oral societies, where a verbal agreement could weigh heavier than a written contract, and where the normative or guiding effect an object or image would be just as strong as that of a legal text elsewhere (Boivin 2008). The fact that many scholars tend to consider a lack of written traditions (e.g. for conquered peoples like the Etruscans or other peoples of ancient Italy, or empires of the past such as that of the Mongols or the Incas) to be indicative of an inherently deficient source situation reflects a modern Western habit of seeing things as well as an "inherited learning disability" in terms of reading artefacts (Weismantel 2011: 305).

Goals

Therefore, one aim of this research area is to correct the widespread asymmetry in the academic evaluation of written and non-written traditions by taking into consideration a pre-colonial perspective and to establish archaeology, art history, and object-based anthropology on an equal level with other disciplines of the humanities that focus on written sources. The deficit in terms of material evidence seems all the more crucial because (ever since E.P. Thompson and Eric Hobsbawm) social history has advocated giving back their voices to the "silent" actors of history, and examining the experiences of oppression and the scope of action within human communities. However, the resulting (hi)stories that have been written about agency have remained strangely incorporeal due to the focus on human actors as intentionally acting and speaking subjects (Schiel/Schürch/Steinbrecher 2017).

This research area will not concentrate on the "silent voices" but on the – supposedly – "silent bodies", both human and non-human, which encompass written descriptions of bodies and objects of social dependency as well as purely material traditions. We will correct the asymmetrical attention characteristic of modern/Western approaches with regard to the conceptual pairs of written vs. nonwritten, human vs. non-human, culture vs. nature (Descola 2013) by examining "embodied dependencies" from archaeological, art-historical and anthropological perspectives (Hegewald/Mitra 2012; Kraus/Noack 2015) as well as from the viewpoint of a praxeologically and body-historically oriented history and social science (Haasis

2015; Elias 2014; Reckwitz 2003; Zeuske 2012, 2015). Our goal here is expressly not an analytical separation of the object language from the lexical semantics explored in research area A, which would amount to an implicit continuation of modern/Western dichotomies. Instead, the dialogue between object- and text-based disciplines within this research area is fostered and institutionally mirrored by the distribution of PIs. The overarching aim is to render embodied dependencies 'legible' (again) as multi-dimensional research objects (Weismantel 2011: 316). We therefore explicitly seek to examine dependent bodies not just as discursive constructs, but also as material, resilient and autonomous, not just as objects of imagination and representation, but also as sites of social practices (Gell 1998; Ott/Sauer/Meier 2015). We understand dependent bodies as "agents", "mediators", and "intermediaries" (e.g. Latour 1993 and 2005; Thielmann/Schüttpelz 2013) and analyze even dependencies between human and non-human actors as "agencements" and forms of "interagency" (Despret 2013).

Parallel to research area A, the first step here will be to collect bodies of dependency in their historical breadth and variety and to place them within the respective predominant object languages. The evaluation of material evidence of enslavement and other forms of asymmetrical dependencies, depictions of enslaved and dependent people in images or buildings or descriptions of their bodies must be linked to the object semantics of the respective society or culture. This means that we will also concentrate on the ways architectural and material remains can express power and sovereignty, or migration and displacement. Apart from the reconstruction of historical buildings or of the spatial arrangement of settlements through excavations and the analysis of written descriptions, a particularly suitable method here is the comparative study of gravesites and burial objects, inscriptions and name formulas of rulers and ruled, oppressors and oppressed in a broad sense. Mural and vase paintings, gems, reliefs, and iconographic depictions can be examined for their statements of social difference. The guiding question thus is that of the object language used to express social distinctions between rulers and ruled, between the majority of society and minorities, between the local population and strangers, rich and poor, healthy and sick people, clerics and laypersons, teachers and students, men and women, gender-conforming and -nonconforming individuals, parents and children, etc.

The second step will be to relate the reconstruction of these material contexts to abstract object semantics, which can then be included in the collaboratively developed handbook on "Semantics of Asymmetrical Dependency" (cf. collaborative results in research area A) and serve to establish an image and object language on equal terms with the written language. For example, the image language of extreme violence and oppression in the religious art of South Asia has to be seen in relation to the semantics of violence in religious and philosophical writings originating in the same region. In a similar vein, the object language of the material remains that testify to hard physical (slave) labor (tools, instruments of discipline or control such as whips, bonds, etc.) must be placed next to the semantics of exploitation in written reflections on the maximization of the human labor force and in descriptions of disciplinary and control practices.

Thirdly, the dialogue between researchers working with objects and those working with texts and the interdisciplinary exchange between archaeology, ethnohistory, art history, museology, historical praxeology and body history in this research area aims to stimulate methodological

reflection on and an increased awareness of the relations between the material and the social spheres as a whole. Since the ontological turn has made us aware of the historicity of nature, animals, technology, machines and objects (in short, of everything non-human), prompting some scholars even to speak of a "decentering" of the role of human beings in history (Kaufmann 2005; Krüger/Steinbrecher/Wischermann 2014; Holbraad/Pedersen 2017), social history must also redefine its position (Schiel/Schürch/Steinbrecher 2017). The collaborative study of human and non-human bodies as multi-dimensional sites of asymmetrical dependency and the combination of object- and body-based approaches and methods in an interdisciplinary cluster group on asymmetrical dependencies promises important in sights and new findings for a very topical debate in the context of the anthropocene (Latour 2014; Rohr/Westermann 2015).