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Space, Scale, Anachronism, and the History of Medieval Philosophy Today

Catherine König-Pralong

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PROBLEMI E ORIENTAMENTI ATTUALI
NELLA STORIA DELLA FILOSOFIA MEDIEVALE

SPACE, SCALE, ANACHRONISM, AND THE HISTORY OF MEDIEVAL PHILOSOPHY TODAY

1. *A state of the art. The XVth international congress of the SIEPM, Paris 2022*

Although not representative of all the work done in the field of the history of medieval philosophy, the *Société Internationale pour l'Étude de la Philosophie Médiévale* (SIEPM), founded in 1958, provides a good vantage point for observing current research trends¹. Its last international congress – an event organized every five years – was held in Paris in August 2022 and was attended by 348 scholars. Alongside five plenary lectures, 109 sessions were organized, each featuring three papers. The theme of the congress – «Radical Thinking in the Middle Ages» – obviously determined the content of the presentations and discussions, but if one does not take the particular issues of the papers into consideration, it is possible to draw some general methodological conclusions.

Three approaches largely dominated: a) sessions on individual figures; b) specific topics (for example, «free will», «the nature of evil», «melancholy», «infidelity»); and c) disciplinary gazes that reflect a broad conception of medieval philosophy: «radical thinking» was addressed in ethics, the theory of knowledge, theology, political philosophy, astrology, alchemy, logic, poetics, metaphysics, natural philosophy, cosmology, mathematics, and anthropology.

a) The first category, to which 37 sessions belonged, included 21

¹ Fifteen years ago, Loris Sturlese presented a similar (and much more accurate) state of the art at the opening of the Palermo congress (September 16-22, 2007): L. STURLESE, *Universalità della ragione e pluralità delle filosofie nel Medioevo. Geografia del pubblico e isògrafe di diffusione dei testi prima dell'invenzione della stampa*, «Giornale critico della filosofia italiana», LXXXVII, 2008, pp. 5-29.

figures, among whom, with 17 intellectual actors, the Latin world was by far the best represented. Thomas Aquinas (4 sessions), Roger Bacon (4 sessions), Albert the Great (4 sessions), William of Ockham (3 sessions), and John Duns Scotus (3 sessions) remained the most studied authors. Only Maimonides, with three sessions dedicated to him, rivaled the Latin stars of medieval philosophy. More generally, 11 sessions out of 109 addressed Islamic and Jewish thoughts, while only one was dedicated to Byzantine philosophy, the forgotten continent of medieval philosophy as it has been written in Western Europe from the nineteenth century onwards². The proportion of non-Latin philosophy (11%) may seem small provided the importance of Jewish and Islamic traditions – in themselves and for Latin philosophy from the eighth to the fifteenth century. However, compared to the history of modern philosophy, in which the Eurocentric turn taken by European philosophy in the nineteenth century³ has not been challenged before the last few decades⁴, the history of medieval philosophy is not doing so badly⁵. Moreover, in addition to isolated figures, it is interesting to point out sessions dedicated to groups – the secular masters, the Parisian masters, the Mendicants –, or to conflicts between groups. This approach, which stresses the effects of socialization, confirms the profession's growing interest in the social history of philosophy. Sociological tools are increasingly used in the intellectual history of the Mid-

² For a historiographical approach that starts from Basile Tatakis (*La philosophie byzantine* first published in 1949) and does not essentialize Byzantine philosophy, see M. TRIZIO, *Byzantine philosophy as a contemporary historiographical project*, «Recherches de Théologie et Philosophie médiévales», LXXIV, 2007, pp. 247-294. On the specificity and identity of Byzantine philosophy, as well as its contested «philosophical» nature, see K. IERODIAKONOY, *Byzantine Philosophy Revisited (a decade after)*, in *The Many Faces of Byzantine Philosophy*, ed. by B. Bydén - K. Ierodiakonou, Athens, The Norwegian Institute at Athens 2012, pp. 1-21. Since then, a history of medieval Byzantine philosophy has been published in the «New Ueberweg»: *Die Philosophie des Mittelalters. Band 1: Byzanz. Judentum*, hrsg. v. A. Brungs - G. Kapriev - V. Mudroch, Basel, Schwabe 2019.

³ See D.N. HASSE, *Was ist europäisch? Zur Überwindung kolonialer und romantischer Denkformen*, Stuttgart, Reclam 2021; C. KÖNIG-PRALONG, *La colonie philosophique. Écrire l'histoire de la philosophie aux XVIII^e-XIX^e siècles*, Paris, Éditions de l'EHESS 2019; S. WOOLF, *The Construction of a European World-View in the Revolutionary-Napoleonic Years, «Past & Present»*, CXXXVII, 1992, pp. 72-101.

⁴ See, for example, the research conducted by Rolf Elberfeld and his team within the project *Histories of Philosophy in a Global Perspective* in Hildesheim, as well as the recent volumes of the *Ueberweg. Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie* on Islamic Philosophy in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, which were edited by Anke von Kügelgen.

⁵ The last conference of the Renaissance Society of America (2023) presented the same tendencies: <https://rsa.confex.com/rsa/2023/meetingapp.cgi/ModuleProgramBook/0>. However, the Society is not principally defined as philosophical.

dle Ages⁶. Julie Brumberg-Chaumont is leading a project on the social history of logic⁷. By studying the various social institutions of philosophical production – schools, universities, courts⁸, centers of translation, or convents – medievalists identified philosophical practices outside the Faculty of Arts or Philosophy, notably lay philosophy⁹.

b) Most of the topics addressed during the congress are classic in the history of medieval philosophy, like the question of necessity and contingency, or that of hylomorphism; others are more atypical and reflect new interests. While the two sessions devoted to heresy and heterodoxy stemmed from the general theme of the congress, it is not insignificant that at least three sessions were dedicated to modern and contemporary historiography, adopting a reflexive point of view on disciplinary practices. Moreover, the rise of gender studies in medievalism, attested by the work of Caroline Walker Bynum in the field of religious studies¹⁰, was reflected in two sessions, which linked feminine philosophy with laity or mysticism. Finally, a tendency to extend the Middle Ages in time, even beyond the Reformation, can be observed. Three sessions dealt with fifteenth-century debates¹¹, one placed its subject in the context of the Reformation¹², and four focused on second (or modern) scholasticism and «*scholastica colonialis*»¹³. The idea

⁶ An approach advocated by Frank Rexroth (see, recently, *Fröhliche Scholastik. Die Wissenschaftsrevolution im Mittelalter*, München, Beck 2018).

⁷ *Logical Skills. Social-Historical Perspectives*, ed. by J. Brumberg-Chaumont and C. Rosental, Cham, Birkhäuser-Springer 2021; J. BRUMBERG-CHAUMONT, *A l'école de la logique* (forthcoming); J. MARENBO, *Towards a Social History of Medieval Logic*, «*Studia graeco-arabica*», XI, 2021, pp. 183-194.

⁸ See, very recently, *Philosophy, Sciences and Arts at the Court of Robert of Anjou*, «*Micrologus*», XXXI, 2023.

⁹ See R. IMBACH - C. KÖNIG-PRALONG, *Le défi laïque. Existe-t-il une philosophie de laïcs au moyen âge?*, Paris, Vrin 2013. For the twelfth century: I. CAIAZZO, *Rex illiteratus est quasi asinus coronatus. I laici e la filosofia nel secolo XII*, «*Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie*», LXIII, 2016, pp. 347-380.

¹⁰ C. WALKER BYNUM, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion*, New York, Zone Books 1991.

¹¹ Since the early 2000s, historians of philosophy shifted the center of gravity of scholasticism towards the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, blurring the boundary between humanism, mysticism and scholasticism. Among other works, see the collective volume: «*Herbst des Mittelalters?*» *Fragen zur Bewertung des 14. und 15. Jahrhunderts*, hrsg. v. J.A. Aertsen - M. Pickavé, Berlin-New York, De Gruyter 2004.

¹² On Protestant scholasticism see, recently, the project led by Ueli Zahnd at the University of Geneva since 2020: *A Disregarded Past-Medieval Scholasticism and Reformed Thought*.

¹³ Among other studies and volumes written or edited by R. Hofmeister Pich and A.S. Culleton, see «*Scholastica colonialis*». *Reception and Development of Baroque Scholasticism in Latin America. 16th-18th Centuries*, Barcelona-Roma, FIDEM-Brepols 2017.

of a long Middle Ages, once championed by Jacques Le Goff, seems to seduce historians of philosophy¹⁴. Furthermore, the adoption of *longue durée* perspectives can also be seen as a reaction to the fact that periodization is by nature uncomfortable, because it is quintessentially anachronistic (imposed *a posteriori*). Similar phenomena can be observed for the Renaissance that has been elongated under the name of «early modernity».

c) Third, as I have said, the approaches by fields of knowledge or disciplines reflect a very broad conception of medieval philosophy, including, among others, mathematics and alchemy¹⁵. From the perspective of the history of knowledge, alongside the discipline, the literary genre constituted an angle of approach during the congress. 24 sessions focused on a disciplinary field and 10 on a discursive form or literary genre (commentaries, *disputationes*, debates, *principia*¹⁶, and *quodlibeta*). Moreover, a session entitled «A Radical Poetics of Experience in Late Medieval England? Literature, Vernacularity, and Intellectual history (c. 1360-1425)» testifies to a broadening of the field of investigation beyond scholasticism¹⁷. Finally, some sessions dedicated to intellectual practices and techniques, such as note-taking and visualization processes (diagrams, images, maps)¹⁸, contributed to enrich intellectual history with material history. They highlighted the partic-

¹⁴ See the writings collected in J. LE GOFF, *Un long Moyen Âge*, Paris, Taillandier 2004.

¹⁵ Such a broad definition of medieval philosophy has been proposed by the editors of the new *Ueberweg*. See, for example, P. SCHULTHESS, *Vorwort*, in *Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie. Die Philosophie des Mittelalters, Band 4: 13. Jahrhundert*, hrsg. v. A. Brungs - V. Mudroch - P. Schulthess, Basel, Schwabe 2017, pp. XXI-XXVI, here p. XXI: «Themenbereiche und Inhalte sowie nicht zuletzt die Gesamtanlage dieses Bandes sind am vorherrschenden philosophischen Selbstverständnis des vorgestellten Zeitraums orientiert, wobei generell ein weiter Philosophiebegriff zugrunde gelegt ist. Neben auch gemäß heutigem Verständnis in engerem Sinne philosophischen Gebieten wie Logik, Metaphysik oder Ethik werden ebenfalls Disziplinen des seinerzeit üblichen Unterrichts von Trivium und Quadrivium vorgestellt, die nicht unbedingt zum Kern der Philosophie gezählt wurden und werden, doch Voraussetzung für jedwedes weitere Studium waren und für alle höheren Fächer als Motiv- und Argumentationsreservoir dienten». See also, § 1 on the notion of philosophy, pp. 5-35.

¹⁶ See the ongoing ERC-project DEBATE led by Monica Brn̄zei: <https://debate-erc.com/>

¹⁷ In the same vein, Christophe Grellard, who works on issues relative to faith and belief in medieval philosophy, studied the status of religion in the *Chanson de Roland*: Ch. GRELLARD, *Vraie foi, fausse loi. Les mutations de la religiosité dans la Chanson de Roland*, «Médiévales», LXXXI, 2022, pp. 35-54.

¹⁸ The project «From Data to Wisdom. Philosophizing Data Visualizations in the Middle Ages and Early Modernity (13th-17th Century)», conducted at the University of Porto, was notably presented in this session. On diagrammatic thought, see A. EVEN-EZRA, *Lines of Thought: Branching Diagrams and the Medieval Mind*, Chicago. The University of Chicago Press 2021.

ularly strong involvement of medievalism in the study of material culture, around the emblematic object of the manuscript¹⁹.

I have recently pleaded for indiscipline in the history of philosophy and proposed immersing it in the history of knowledge²⁰. I have thereby considered the history of medieval philosophy and its recent developments as a paradigmatic example of the benefits produced by a broadening of perspective which moves away from the definition of philosophy to study past intellectual practices that can be conceived as philosophical by analogy with current philosophical practices. Starting from the partial state of the art established on the basis of the last SIEPM congress, I would like to pursue this reflection from a historiographical point of view. Therefore, I will focus on three epistemological issues that resulted from debates or propositions elaborated in the history of philosophy as well as related disciplines of the social sciences and humanities. They concern space, scales of description, and the use of anachronism. The studies and undertakings I will mention serve as illustrations. Subjective and suggestive, my choices are not intended to be representative of the field. They are overdetermined by my position in a French university, and by the groups and networks to which I belong.

2. *Space*

Since the 1990s, practitioners of the social sciences and humanities have talked of and pleaded for a spatial turn²¹. In the history of science and knowledge, attention to space and the spatialization of objects resulted, in part, from an anthropological approach that neutralizes the hermeneutical circularity of historicism²². On the side of the

¹⁹ On medievalism and modern appraisals of medieval material (and intellectual) culture, see: É. ANHEIM - C. KÖNIG-PRALONG, *Introduction. Le Moyen Âge des sciences sociales: médiévalisme, médiévisme et modernités*, «Revue d'Histoire des Sciences Humaines», XLIII, 2023, pp. 7-48 (<https://journals.openedition.org/rhsh/8619>).

²⁰ C. KÖNIG-PRALONG, *Indiscipline in the Intellectual History. Immersing the History of Philosophy in the History of Knowledge*, «Intersezioni», XLI, 2021, pp. 295-309.

²¹ For a critical appraisal, see A. TORRE, *A 'Spatial Turn' in History? Landscapes, Visions, Resources*, «Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales», LXIII, 2008, pp. 1127-1144.

²² B. LATOUR, *Nous n'avons jamais été modernes. Essai d'anthropologie symétrique*, Paris, La Découverte 1997 [1991], p. 102: «[...] une temporalité n'a rien de temporel. C'est un mode de rangement pour lier des éléments». See also p. 103: «Nous n'avons jamais ni avancé ni reculé. Nous avons toujours activement trié des éléments appartenant à des temps différents [...]. C'est le tri qui fait le temps et non pas le temps qui fait le tri».

historian, time possesses no phenomenological priority: the historian is no more the product of a historical tradition than of the places in which she lived. On the side of her objects, space and time form coordinate systems devoid of specific ontological consistency. Like space, time is a constructed referential in which the historian places her objects. Historical objects are situated in time and space in analogous manners. Thus, the historian escapes the tyranny of temporality. Chronology or the logic of time, which often introduces an unintended causality into the historical narrative, loses its pre-eminence.

However, space and places have been conceived in very different and more or less metaphorical ways in the historical sciences. Borrowing a practice from geographers, historians of medieval philosophy draw maps to represent the dissemination of manuscripts and incunabula. In this approach, which Loris Sturlese dubbed «philosophical geography», writing the history of texts and ideas consists first in locating codices on a map. Since medieval writings were materialized in manuscripts, that is, in objects with a high degree of unicity, this method seems particularly effective in the intellectual history of the Middle Ages:

Lo storico del pensiero medievale si trova qui addirittura in una situazione privilegiata, a causa delle modalità materiali della diffusione delle opere filosofiche nel medioevo, che sino all'invenzione della stampa circolarono in manoscritti. Il manoscritto ha, rispetto all'opera a stampa, un elevato grado di «personalizzazione» nella fattura, nell'acquisto e nella detenzione, in quanto è appositamente commissionato oppure appositamente realizzato, e soprattutto richiede per la realizzazione un investimento di tempo e quindi un impegno economico molto maggiore a quello relativo all'acquisizione di un libro a stampa²³.

Due to its high degree of «personalization», a medieval manuscript constitutes a suitable object for a «biographical» approach. The reconstruction of its «life» is part of the social history of medieval ideas²⁴.

²³ L. STURLESE, *Universalità della ragione e pluralità delle filosofie nel Medioevo*, cit., here p. 11.

²⁴ On the biography of objects or things in ethnography and archeology, see notably: J. HOSKINS, *Biographical Objects: How Things Tell the Stories of People's Lives*, London, Routledge 1998; Ch. GOSDEN - Y. MARSHALL, *The Cultural Biography of Objects*, «World Archeology», XXXI, 1999, pp. 169-178; A. HARDING, *Introduction: Biographies of Things*, «Continuities and Changes of Meaning», I, 2016, pp. 5-10. On things as objects of the history of knowledge: *Things that Talk. Object Lessons from Art and Science*, ed. by L. Daston, New York, Zone Books 2007.

In a symmetrical but more metaphorical approach, which observes the transformation of places into texts, Frank Rexroth emphasized spatialization of symbolic contents in medieval social memory. In the footsteps of Richard W. Southern and with the vocabulary forged by Jan Assmann, he described certain cities, especially Paris and Bologna, as topographical texts of cultural memory²⁵. John of Salisbury and Peter of Blois acted as their respective historical witnesses. In the time of Abaelard and his pupil John of Salisbury, the Parisian space represented a microcosm in which many groups competed. In the social history of philosophical practices written by Rexroth, the density of the schools made Paris the scholastic city par excellence; scholastic Latin was called the *lingua Parisiensis*. Science established itself in the city, among other guilds, corporations, and associations. As for Bologna, it embodied a competing discourse and knowledge, that of law and a specific «humanism» (I will come back to this in the conclusion).

Parallely, contemporary intellectual history identified urban centers as the main sites of philosophical production in the Middle Ages, from Cordoba to Prague, and from Baghdad to Oxford. Moreover, these urban spaces were often connected to each other, notably by trade, diplomacy, and war. From a cultural point of view, cities formed large intercultural networks, whose constitutive relationships were exchanges and circulations of texts and scholars across languages and places. Some of them are seen as frontiers or sites of interactions between «civilizations»: for example, Salerno, a gateway for knowledge and goods from the Near East, or Venice, which was connected with Byzantium. Thus, Charles Burnett studied the circulation of Arabic texts – from Antioch to Toledo or from Baghdad to Salerno – and their translation into Latin²⁶. In such approaches, the Mediterranean basin

²⁵ F. REXROTH, *Fröhliche Scholastik*, cit., pp. 233-235. On the notions of «medium of cultural memory», «topographical text» or «mnemotopia» developed by Egyptologist Jan Assmann and based on Maurice Halbwachs' «legendary topography»: J. ASSMANN, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis, Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen*, München, Beck 1997; D. IOGNA-PRAT, *Maurice Halbwachs ou la mnémotopie: 'Textes topographiques' et inscription spatiale de la mémoire*, «Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales», LXVI, 2011, pp. 821-837.

²⁶ See, for example, Ch. BURNETT, *Arabic into Latin in the Middle Ages: The Translators and their Intellectual and Social Context*, London, Routledge 2009 (on the city of Antioch, see chapter 4: «Antioch as a Link between Arabic and Latin Culture in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries»; on Toledo and Bologna, chapters 7-8; and on the court of Frederick II, chapter 8-9). Similar work is being done on Jewish traditions by Yossef Schwartz, who is the editor of the volumes on Jewish thought that will be published in the «New Ueberweg». See Y. SCHWARTZ, *Methodengeschichtlicher Aufriss zur Historiographie der Philosophie im Judentum*, in *Die Philosophie des Mittelalters. Band 1: Byzanz. Judentum*, cit., pp. 301-351.

was often described as a hub through which scholars and texts passed in the Middle Ages. At least since the twentieth century, the geo-cultural notion of the Mediterranean, a space extendable and retractable almost at will, has served as the canvas of continuous and anachronistic stories of Europe from the Roman Empire to modernity, for example in Henri Pirenne's *Mahomet et Charlemagne* (1937), which was devoted to the genesis of the European area from the rise of Islam, or in *La Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II* by Fernand Braudel (1949)²⁷. Since then, the Mediterranean centers of gravity shifted and pluralized. The Mediterranean no longer has to be oriented towards Europe. Shelomo Dov Goitein, for example, reconstructed this social-geographical space, from the tenth to the thirteenth century, by studying the archives of the Cairo Geniza²⁸.

A smaller area, that of the Holy Roman Empire, was also considered the center of gravity of the Middle Ages in a tradition initiated by Herder's *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* (1784-1791) and revitalized by the book that the young Kantorowicz dedicated to *Kaiser Friedrich der Zweite* in 1927²⁹. From the second volume of the series *Micrologus* dedicated to the sciences at the court of Frederick II³⁰ to the studies edited by Pieter De Leemans around the translations produced by Bartholomew of Messina at the court of Manfred³¹, the Kingdom of Sicily came to constitute a philosophical center par excellence of this specific European cultural area, which was largely purged of the ideological connotations imprinted to it in the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.

In addition, and in a more cultural approach, debates arose on linguistic, proto-national or regional identities of philosophical productions, for example around the notion of «English experimental science» defended by Lynn Thorndike and then Alistair Crombie³², or,

²⁷ Today, the notion continues to function as the designation of a geo-cultural space. See, for example, the ongoing project directed by Houari Touati «Encyclopedia of Mediterranean Humanism» (<https://encyclopedie-humanisme.com/?Towards-a-Mediterranean-humanism>).

²⁸ S.D. GOITEIN, *A Mediterranean Society*, Chicago, University of California Press 2000, 6 vols.

²⁹ A. GRACEFFA, *Compte-rendu de Robert E. Lerner, Ernst Kantorowicz: A Life*, «Revue d'histoire des sciences humaines», XXXV, 2019, pp. 259-263.

³⁰ *Le scienze alla corte di Federico II / Sciences at the Court of Frederick II*, «Micrologus», II, 1994.

³¹ *Translating at the Court. Bartholomew of Messina and Cultural Life at the Court of Manfred of Sicily*, ed. by P. De Leemans, Leuven, University Press 2014.

³² L. THORNDIKE, *Roger Bacon and Experimental Method in the Middle Ages*, «Philo-

more recently, the concept of «German Dominican school» proposed by Loris Sturlese³³. Last but not least, there have been efforts to shift the center of gravity of medieval philosophy. In particular, Marxist historiographies aimed at decentering it towards the East, from the Marxist-Leninist historiography of Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union and the Middle East³⁴, to Dimitri Gutas today³⁵.

3. Scale

The constitution of a thick historical space involves not only defining an area but also choosing a scale or varying scales of description. Yet, in the history of medieval philosophy, particularly within doctrinal history or the history of problems, the question of scale was often not asked, as if philosophical thoughts were non-localized items: pure truths³⁶ or utopias. In such undertakings, medieval philosophy was mostly reconstructed on the basis of texts produced in an area that covers today's Western Europe, in particular England, France, Italy and Germany, without these texts being observed, on a local scale, in their places of production and circulation. However, social and cultural history had already partially transformed the history of medieval philosophy, when the wave of *microstoria* reached it and led to draw large-

sophical Review», XXIII, 1914, pp. 271-298; A.C. CROMBIE, *Robert Grosseteste and the Origins of Experimental Science, 1100-1700*, Oxford, Clarendon Press 1953.

³³ L. STURLESE, *Albert der Grosse und die deutsche philosophische Kultur des Mittelalters*, «Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie», XXVIII, 1981, pp. 133-147; ID., *Die deutsche Philosophie im Mittelalter. Von Bonifatius bis zu Albert dem Grossen (748-1280)*, München, Beck 1993. For a critical discussion of the notion, see N. LARGIER, *Die ‚deutsche Dominikanerschule‘. Zur Problematik eines historiographischen Konzepts*, in *Geistesleben im 13. Jahrhundert*, hrsg. v. J.A. Aertsen - A. Speer, Berlin-New York, De Gruyter 2000, pp. 202-213.

³⁴ On East-Germany and some Syrian ramifications, see C. KÖNIG-PRALONG, *La science arabe en Allemagne de l'Est. Une histoire du matérialisme athée*, «Communications», CXIII, 2023, pp. 149-159. On the Soviet Union: I. MANOVA, *From Aristotle, Through Ibn Sīnā and Ibn Rusūd to Dialectical Materialism: Soviet Approaches Towards the History of Medieval Philosophy in the 1950s and 1960s*, «Rivista di storia della filosofia», LXXIII, 2018, pp. 295-310.

³⁵ Among other studies: D. GUTAS, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture. The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early 'abbāsīd Society (2nd-4th/8th-10th Centuries)*, London-New York, Routledge 1998; ID., *The Study of Arabic Philosophy in the Twentieth Century*, «British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies», XXIX, 2002, pp. 5-25.

³⁶ On this notion of purity in the history of science: S. SHAPIN, *Never Pure. Historical Studies of Science as if It Was Produced by People with Bodies, Situated in Time, Space, and Society, and Struggling for Credibility and Authority*, Baltimore, The John Hopkins University Press 2010.

scale maps³⁷ in order to observe local particularities affecting philosophical production³⁸. The pioneering work of Richard W. Southern³⁹, which placed Anselm in a landscape, renewed the intellectual and social history of medieval philosophy. A recent example is provided by the book that Aurélien Robert dedicated to Marco Trevisano, a nobleman who wrote a philosophical treatise *De macrocosmo* and was representative of a certain Venetian intellectual sociability in the first half of the fourteenth century⁴⁰.

Furthermore, the trend of global history – entangled, connected, or comparative – gave rise to debates about the interactions between the local and the global in multiscalar approaches. Since the last decades, these discussions have been very lively in medievalism and the idea of a global Middle Ages hotly debated⁴¹. In 2017, Jérôme Baschet proposed to globalize medieval history⁴². At the University of Oxford, Catherine Holmes, a specialist in Byzantine studies, coordinated a project entitled «Defining the Global Middle Ages». In a paper written together with Naomi Standen, she rejected the theory that equates globalization with modernization, to assert that «people living» in the Middle Ages «had global histories». Stressing that «the kinds of phenomena often associated with global history often happened outside Europe before 1500»⁴³, Holmes and Standen defined «globality» as follows:

[...] diversity and connectivity are not modern phenomena alone; nor are many other characteristics widely associated with the global, including empires, long-distance commercial activity, diasporas, migrations and religious missions⁴⁴.

However, as the degree of connectivity between societies was low-

³⁷ In cartography, a large-scale map (1:10,000 or 1:25,000) shows a smaller amount of area with a greater amount of detail.

³⁸ C. KÖNIG-PRALONG, *L'histoire de la philosophie médiévale depuis 1950: méthodes, textes, débats*, «Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales», LXIV, 2009, pp. 143-169.

³⁹ On Southern's micro-historical approach, see A. BOUREAU, *Richard Southern. A Landscape for a Portrait*, «Past & Present», CLXV, 1999, pp. 218-229.

⁴⁰ A. ROBERT, *Le monde mathématique. Marco Trevisano et la philosophie dans la Venise du Trecento*, Paris, Cerf 2023.

⁴¹ For a synthesis, see: Th. ERTL - K. OSCEMA, *Les études médiévales après le tournant global*, «Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales», LXXVI, 2021, pp. 787-801.

⁴² J. BASCHET, *Faut-il mondialiser l'histoire médiévale?*, in *Histoire monde, jeux d'échelles et espaces connectés*, Paris, Éditions de la Sorbonne 2017, pp. 13-36.

⁴³ C. HOLMES - N. STANDEN, *Introduction: Towards a Global Middle Ages*, «Past & Present», CCXXXVIII, 2018, pp. 1-44, here p. 6.

⁴⁴ *Ivi*, p. 1.

er in the Middle Ages than after 1500, the global history of the Middle Ages, as exemplified by the imposing book published by Michael Borgolte in 2022⁴⁵, tends to assert a plurality of «worlds» on a global scale, in order to describe their respective relationships and isolation.

In the specific field of the history of philosophy, the study of interconnections between religious and scientific cultures in the Middle Ages developed since 1950. A textbook originally published in 1989 by Alain de Libera placed considerable emphasis on the philosophies of the Near and Middle East, as well as their effects and reconfigurations in Europe⁴⁶. As has been said, the study of translations was often the driving force behind such research, for example in the work of Alexander Fidora on cultural contacts between Judaism, Christianity and Islam, or that of Dag Nikolaus Hasse on the reception of Arabic philosophical texts in Europe during the Middle Ages and Renaissance. Multilingualism and diglossia, which result from interactions between societies, are hallmarks of medieval cultures. As for «European» philosophy in particular, it was based on corpora translated from Greek, Hebrew and Arabic, and was mostly expressed in an artificial language, a «textualized» idiom learned at school: Latin⁴⁷.

However, as it is practiced in Western universities, the history of medieval philosophy remains a history of contacts, exchanges and interactions, with Europe at its center and the other societies that inherited ancient Greek philosophy at its periphery. A comparative history, which would draw a map of the world philosophies between 500 and 1500⁴⁸, include thoughts that developed outside the Greek philosophical tradition, and study their stronger or weaker connections, remains to be written⁴⁹ and faces the problem of the use of the word «philosophy»⁵⁰.

⁴⁵ M. BORGOLTE, *Die Welten des Mittelalters. Globalgeschichte eines Jahrtausends*, München, Beck 2022.

⁴⁶ A. DE LIBERA, *La philosophie médiévale*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France 1989.

⁴⁷ W.J. ONG, *Orality, Literacy, and Medieval Textualization*, «New Literary History», XVI, 1984, pp. 1-12.

⁴⁸ On the problems posed by Western periodization, see: C. KÖNIG-PRALONG, *Indiscipline in the Intellectual History*, cit.

⁴⁹ Although a growing number of works and publications focus on non-European philosophies, such as the «new Ueberweg» (with volumes planned on African philosophies) or the *Routledge History of World Philosophies* series. As for monographs, recent examples include: *Y a-t-il une philosophie chinoise? Un état de la question*, éd. par A. Cheng, «Extrême-Orient/Extrême-Occident», XXVII, 2005; V. ELTSCHINGER - I. RATIÉ, *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie indienne?*, Paris, Gallimard 2023.

⁵⁰ I will briefly address it in the last part of this paper.

On the other hand, the history of medieval Europe inherited the issues raised by postcolonial studies, although it is, of course, a history of pre-colonial societies⁵¹. In 1993, Robert Bartlett asserted that the «'expansion of Europe' in the High Middle Ages clearly shared many characteristics with the overseas expansion of post-medieval times» and concluded as follows:

It has been shown, reasonably conclusively, how the mental habits and institutions of European racism and colonialism were born in the medieval world: the conquerors of Mexico knew the problem of the Mudejars; the planters of Virginia had already been planters of Ireland⁵².

Thus, representations of «racialized»⁵³, dominated and oppressed groups have been studied in intellectual history and the history of medieval philosophy, for example, in the work of Elsa Marmursztejn on scholastic discourses about the Jews and their social-political effects⁵⁴. In a more metaphorical vein, some medievalists called for decolonizing the Middle Ages envisioned as the «dark continent of history», a subaltern world which had been created and imagined by the humanists⁵⁵.

Finally, postcolonial studies have been associated with the so-called «ontological turn» which replaced philosophy at the epistemological core of the social sciences, renaming it «cosmology» in order to include conceptions and practices that do not belong to the tradition of the *philosophia/falsafa*. In a study entitled «Globalizing Cosmologies», Caroline Dodds Pennock, a historian of Aztec worlds, and Amanda Power, a specialist in Franciscan thought and Roger Bacon, drew parallels between two «pre-modern» worlds: pre-Columbian so-

⁵¹ As reaffirmed by É. ANHEIM - N. BEREND, *Introduction*, «Medieval Encounters», XXIX, 2023, pp. 145-151.

⁵² R. BARTLETT, *The Making of Europe. Conquest, Colonization and Cultural Change 950-1350*, London, Pinguin 1993, pp. 306 and 313.

⁵³ On the anachronistic use of this notion, I refer to the conclusion of Jean-Frédéric Schaub, in J.-F. SCHAUB - S. SEBASTIANI, *Race et histoire dans les sociétés occidentales (XV^e-XVIII^e siècle)*, Paris, Albin Michel 2021, p. 101: «il s'agit [...] de déterminer si la lutte contre la persistance du fait juif a mobilisé des arguments de type naturaliste».

⁵⁴ E. MARMURSZTEJN, *Le baptême forcé des enfants juifs. Question scolastique, enjeu politique, échos contemporains*, Paris, Les Belles Lettres 2016.

⁵⁵ J. DAGENAIS, M.R. GREER, *Decolonizing the Middle Ages: Introduction*, «Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies», XXX, 2000, pp. 431-448, here p. 431: «Is it possible to colonize a region of history, as it is to colonize a region of geography? There are many reasons to believe so. The history of 'the Middle Ages' begins at the precise moment when European imperial and colonial expansion begins. The Middle Ages is Europe's Dark Continent of History, even as Africa is its Dark Ages of Geography».

ciety and the Latin thirteenth century. Thus, they challenged the equation between modernity and «globalization», two phenomena which were often located in Europe and conceived from the West. The aim of the inquiry is to show that

[...] many communities and societies – whether conceived as pre-modern, indigenous, non-western or otherwise subaltern to western modernity – possessed their own complex, sophisticated and dynamic ways of understanding the ‘global’ and envisaging themselves as ‘globalizing’ actors within it⁵⁶.

In a comparative approach, Dodds Pennock and Power describe Aztec and medieval Latin cosmologies as means of pluralizing the notion of globality. They thus distinguish the processes of globalization produced by trade in the modern era, from thoughts with a global outlook that should neither be confined to modernity, nor be sought exclusively in Europe. More precisely, they demonstrate that two societies considered «subaltern», Aztec and medieval, elaborated representations that were no less relevant or interesting than our modern conceptions of the global. These societies envisioned their environment on a cosmic scale and conceived both their social-political agency within it, and the necessary limitation of their own views. More encompassing in terms of agency, these cosmologies included a variety of actors – human beings, spirits, deities, non-human animals, plants, and geological elements. In a symmetrical anthropological approach, their reconstruction contributes to put modern worldviews into perspective and to relativize the position of modernity: «there is no reason to assume homogeneity or a unidirectional process of the kind usually envisaged as ‘globalization’»⁵⁷. Within this parallel constructed between Meso-american and medieval thoughts and practices, the Middle Ages constitute a field of experimentation which, from within the European tradition, allows to elaborate a critical view of it.

4. *Anachronism*

Thus, in the margin of the history of «problems» catalogued by philosophical historiography since the nineteenth century, medieval studies

⁵⁶ C. DODDS PENNOCK - A. POWER, *Globalizing Cosmologies*, «Past & Present», CCXXXVIII, 2018, pp. 88-115, p. 90.

⁵⁷ *Ivi*, p. 94.

have opened up new avenues and faced historiographical challenges arising from the particularity of their object: the Middle Ages were produced by «modern» scholars as an otherness that allowed them to place themselves in a new world. Medieval sciences were regarded as pre-scientific, because they were pre-modern. They constituted an anachronism.

Moreover, as shown in the preceding pages, medieval philosophy was discovered by its historians outside the institutions explicitly dedicated to it, and even in undertakings and practices that were not defined as philosophy, but which made use of philosophy or which, by analogy, can be associated with what we call philosophy today. From the nineteenth century onwards, the history of medieval philosophy has been concerned with texts produced by intellectual actors who did not think of themselves as philosophers. Thomas Aquinas, Peter of John Olivi and John Duns Scotus were theologians. They wrote theology. They sometimes defended this practice by specifically distinguishing it from philosophy. What right do we have to speak of medieval philosophy in such cases? Furthermore, is it legitimate to find philosophy in writings in which the word «*philosophia*» does not appear?

In the introduction to the two volumes of the «New Ueberweg» dedicated to the thirteenth century and published in 2017, Peter Schulthess tries to answer these questions by outlining a program that is nothing less than a linking of the history of philosophy to the history of knowledge. To avoid reducing, in a presentist way, medieval philosophy to the small part that the contemporary analytical philosopher can appropriate, and to avoid constraining it, in a historicist way, to the scholastic institution where it was taught – the Faculty of Arts or Philosophy –, he attempts to redeploy the map of knowledge. In the Middle Ages, *philosophia* could designate all the disciplines except law and theology, but the latter was full of philosophy and law used logic⁵⁸. Peter Schulthess defines medieval philosophy not as a system or a doctrinal corpus; he describes it as a «rhizome»⁵⁹. Its institutions, producers, literary genres and addressees were varied; they belonged to various social groups. Thus, for the Middle Ages, the *Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie*, which assumes its artificial division of history into centuries, proceeds by spatializing historical materials: it dis-

⁵⁸ P. SCHULTHESS, *Vorwort*, cit., p. XXI.

⁵⁹ P. SCHULTHESS, *Der Philosophiebegriff*, in *Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie. Die Philosophie des Mittelalters, Band 4: 13. Jahrhundert*, cit., pp. 5-40, here p. 9.

tinguishes geographical regions and observes the uses of philosophy circulating between medieval disciplines, outside the Faculty of Arts.

Moreover, since the turn of the twentieth century, attempts have been made to rehabilitate a «controlled» and «productive» anachronism in history⁶⁰. To conclude, I will present a weaker hypothesis, which I will illustrate by means of three discussions. According to it, anachronism is first and foremost a way of naming the irreducible part of the historian's subjectivity, without turning it into a historicist drama. Frank Rexroth developed a perspectivist approach that does not reduce past practices to what present normativities can accommodate, but confronts and compares discourses of various natures, produced in different times, on issues or in contexts conceived as analogous by the historian. The historian takes leave of linear historical narrative. Thus, he avoids the hermeneutic circle of historicism, in which he was defined as the product of unescapable historical traditions, while the past was considered foreign, definitively abolished. «No affirmation of continuity» and «no position of otherness»: such are the two watchwords of a method that organizes the discursive simultaneity of historical discontinuities⁶¹. Secondly and consequently, anachronism can be defined as a process of analogical translation, from the present to the past, but also from one language to another⁶², or from one duration to another⁶³. In a nutshell, anachronism is a translation between worlds.

The first illustration I would like to give is that proposed by Cecilia Muratori on the subject of vegetarianism. In a book dedicated to the reception of Porphyry's treatise *De abstinentia* and Renaissance vegetarianism, Muratori begins by acknowledging that the term «vegetarianism» was not coined before the mid-nineteenth century. «But while the word did not exist in the Renaissance, the philosophical foundation of the diet that excludes meat had been passionately discussed by Renaissance philosophers»⁶⁴. Renaissance philosophers

⁶⁰ See, in particular, N. LORAUX, *Éloge de l'anachronisme en histoire*, «Espaces Temps», LXXXVII-LXXXVIII, 2005, pp. 127-139.

⁶¹ F. REXROTH, *Fröhliche Scholastik*, cit., p. 17.

⁶² At least if we adopt Quine's pragmatic conception of translation (W.V.O. QUINE, *Ontological Relativity*, «The Journal of Philosophy», LXV, 1968, pp. 185-212).

⁶³ Alain de Libera emphasized the non-simultaneity or asynchronicity of medieval durations or temporalities: «[...] une durée latine, une durée grecque, une durée arabo-musulmane, une durée juive. Comment inscrire dans 'Le Moyen Âge' le premier siècle de l'Hégire?» (LIBERA, *La philosophie*, cit., p. XIII).

⁶⁴ C. MURATORI, *Renaissance Vegetarianism. The Philosophical Afterlives of Porphyry's On Abstinence*, Cambridge, Legenda 2020, p. 1.

spoke of «abstinence», and this term also embraced practices and renunciations other than those implied by the vegetarian diet. On the one hand, the use of the word «vegetarianism» allows the historian to focus on her special issue and produce understanding by bringing together various discourses scattered in different sorts of writings and produced in different times, around a practice: that of renouncing eating meat. On the other hand, replaced in the context of abstinence and the series of behaviors it designated, Renaissance vegetarianism can be apprehended in relation to today's vegetarianism, in its similarities and dissimilarities. In the world of the historian and her readers, the basic translation of the term used by Renaissance speakers – «abstinence» – would have blurred the meaning of the diet it designated in the Renaissance, for example by unduly associating it with sexual abstinence or alcoholic sobriety as they are conceived today. The historian of vegetarianism actually needs both words: the Latin *abstinentia* and the imperfect and anachronistic translation which is related to the issue she studies, that is, «vegetarianism».

The second example concerns the notions of intellectuals and public space. As is well known, the term «intellectual» came to the fore with the Dreyfus Affair to designate actors who stepped outside their field of competence and ventured into areas where they had no legitimacy; for the first time, thought would explicitly be defined as a type of social action⁶⁵. More broadly, since the 1960s «intellectuals» have been associated with public space (*Öffentlichkeit*) as defined by Jürgen Habermas in opposition to the private sphere⁶⁶. Yet, according to Habermas, medieval feudalism had abolished the distinction between private and public, a social structure that was gradually re-imposed from the seventeenth century onwards. As for Lewis A. Coser, he also situated these «men» who live for, rather than of, ideas, in the modern public sphere (French salons, English coffee houses, etc.), in order to describe their progressive professionalization and bureaucratization⁶⁷.

However, five years before the publication of Habermas' first book (1962), *Les intellectuels au Moyen Âge* by Jacques le Goff⁶⁸ linked the

⁶⁵ Ch. CHARLE, *Naissance des intellectuels (1880-1900)*, Paris, Minit 1990.

⁶⁶ J. HABERMAS, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit: Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft*, Berlin, Luchterhand 1962.

⁶⁷ L.A. COSER, *Men of Ideas. A Sociologist's View*, New York-London, The Free Press 1965.

⁶⁸ J. LE GOFF, *Les intellectuels au Moyen Âge*, Paris, Seuil 1957.

emergence of this new class of men to urbanization in the twelfth century. Abelard was portrayed as the first Western intellectual in the modern sense of the word, an author of philosophy whose traits are those of the debater, the contradicter and the «critical» teacher. In 1991, Alain de Libera took up the question explicitly, in a book dedicated to the experience of thought in the Middle Ages⁶⁹. According to Libera, followed recently by Marcel Bubert in his inquiry on the Faculty of Arts⁷⁰, the masters of this guild (notably the «Averroists»), and then Dante and Master Eckhart, developed philosophical ethics to theorize the practice of philosophy, defend its legitimacy and autonomy, and thus assert their new status as intellectuals⁷¹. In a collective volume entitled *L'espace public au Moyen Âge*, Patrick Boucheron and Nicolas Offenstadt⁷² emphasized the need to criticize Habermas's vision of the Middle Ages, namely that elaborated by Otto Brunner. They thus advocated an «anachronistic» use of the notion of public space, to project it onto the Middle Ages. Thus, rather than Lucien Febvre's famous condemnation of anachronism in his *Rabelais*, they recalled the words of Marc Bloch:

[...] consciemment ou non, c'est toujours à nos expériences quotidiennes que, pour les nuancer, là où il se doit, de teintes nouvelles, nous empruntons, en dernière analyse, les éléments qui nous servent à reconstituer le passé⁷³.

Very recently, Frank Rexroth asserted the existence of medieval intellectuals. Distinguishing the word from the thing⁷⁴, he reconstruct-

⁶⁹ A. DE LIBERA, *Penser au Moyen Âge*, Paris, Seuil 1991, p. 350: «[...] nous voulions saisir l'intellectuel médiéval au moment où la question intellectuelle s'est imposée à lui».

⁷⁰ M. BUBERT, *Kreative Gegensätze. Der Streit um den Nutzen der Philosophie an der mittelalterlichen Pariser Universität*, Leiden, Brill 2019.

⁷¹ On this status according to Abelard, see also: L. VALENTE, *Philosophers and Other Kinds of Human Beings According to Peter Abelard and John of Salisbury*, in *Logic and Language in the Middle Ages. A Volume in Honour of Sten Ebbesen*, ed. by J.L. Fink - H. Hansen - A.M. Mora-Márquez, Leiden, Brill 2013, pp. 105-124; F. REXROTH, *Fröhliche Scholastik*, cit.

⁷² P. BOUCHERON - N. OFFENSTADT, *Introduction générale: une histoire de l'échange politique au Moyen Âge*, in *L'espace public au Moyen Âge. Débats autour de Jürgen Habermas*, dir. de P. Boucheron - N. Offenstadt, Paris, PUF 2011, pp. 1-21.

⁷³ M. BLOCH, *Apologie pour l'histoire ou Métier d'historien (1941-1942)*, Paris, Armand Colin 1993, p. 93.

⁷⁴ F. REXROTH, *Unerwünschte Experten. Der Intellektuellengestus in der gelehrten Praxis des 12. Jahrhunderts*, in *Intellektuelle. Karrieren und Krisen einer Figur vom Mittelalter bis zur Gegenwart*, hrsg. v. M. Kitzinger - W.E. Wagner, Basel, Schwabe 2023, pp. 11-33, here pp. 12-13.

ed the communicative conditions of their social agency and, by analogy with the Dreyfus Affair, described intellectual behaviors or an intellectual «gesture» in twelfth- and thirteenth-century humanism, from John of Salisbury to Peter of Blois.

This last undertaking allows me to briefly introduce a third illustration, that of «humanism», which Rexroth also associated with a medieval «scientific revolution»⁷⁵. The question of a medieval humanism as a real social phenomenon that appeared four centuries before self-proclaimed «humanists» (*humanista* or, in Italian, *umanista*) in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, can be traced back to Richard W. Southern, as can many of the issues addressed in this paper⁷⁶. Since then, it has been revived again and again. In 2009 Stephen Gersh described three phases of medieval philosophical humanism, after showing that all the conditions for this were present in the Middle Ages: an interest in ancient writings, a philological concern, the praise of rhetoric and the liberal arts, the practice of certain literary genres, such as letters, and a Platonic orientation. Thus, Gersh is not afraid to assert that «the humanistic branch of medieval philosophy even exhibits certain affinities with the Jacques Derrida's model of deconstructive reading and writing»⁷⁷.

To end this brief survey of some recent literature and propose a provisional conclusion, it may be noted that, from Jacques Le Goff's long Middle Ages to the controlled uses of anachronism, medievalism, which was born of nineteenth-century historicism, presents a vast and multifaceted movement away from historicism. It has been renewed by sociological and anthropological approaches, but also through the history of philosophy, which has never ceased to reconstruct medieval theories and practices comparable to and different from modern and contemporary «philosophical» elaborations⁷⁸.

CATHERINE KÖNIG-PRALONG

⁷⁵ F. REXROTH, *Fröhliche Scholastik*, cit.

⁷⁶ Among many other studies: R.W. SOUTHERN, *Peter of Blois: A Twelfth Century Humanist?*, in *Medieval Humanism and Other Studies*, Oxford, University Press 1970, pp. 105-132.

⁷⁷ St. GERSH, *Philosophy and Humanism*, in *A Companion to the Medieval World*, ed. by C. Lansing - E.D. English, Chichester, Wiley-Blackwell 2009, pp. 525-543, p. 535.

⁷⁸ My thanks go to Cecilia Muratori (Pavia) for her reading and comments.

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