

Research Training Group (RTG) 2945: Knowing – Believing – Asserting: Production and Enforcement of Truth in the Premodern Period

Information for Applicants

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1. Job Advertisements and Timeline

a. 12 Doctoral Positions (<https://uni.ruhr-uni-bochum.de/de/stellenangebote>)

The Research Training Group 2945: ‚Knowing – Believing – Asserting: Production and Enforcement of Truth in the Premodern Period‘ at Ruhr University Bochum is looking for **12 PhD students (m,f,x) for 4 years (TV-L E13, 65%)**.

The Ruhr-Universität Bochum is one of Germany’s leading research universities, addressing the whole range of academic disciplines. A highly dynamic setting enables researchers and students to work across the traditional boundaries of academic subjects and faculties. To create knowledge networks within and beyond the university is RUB’s declared aim.

The Research Training Group (RTG) 2945 investigates the production and enforcement of truth between the 13th and 17th centuries. We seek to attract doctoral projects that either investigate how truth is claimed, asserted, enforced, and made acceptable to guide speech, thought, action and decision-making, or that explore how processes of 'making truth' are observed and reflected in images, plays, and texts. Europe and its early colonial contact zones as well as China and Korea - which are particularly suitable for a comparative investigation due to their highly developed written cultures and the specific dynamics of the latter - will be analyzed.

The Ruhr-Universität Bochum stands for diversity and equal opportunities. For this reason, we favour a working environment composed of heterogeneous teams, and seek to promote the careers of individuals who are underrepresented in our respective professional areas. The Ruhr-Universität Bochum expressly requests job applications from women. In areas in which they are underrepresented they will be given preference in the case of equivalent qualifications with male candidates. Applications from individuals with disabilities are most welcome.

Please send your application (German or English) with the required documents (letter of motivation, CV, certificates, list of publications and presentations if applicable) and an outline of your dissertation project (maximum of 20,000 characters, including spaces) **by 22 July 2024** exclusively in electronic form and in a single PDF document **with the reference number ANR 3401** to: Sabrina Pähler (sabrina.paehler@ruhr-uni-bochum.de). Ms Pähler is also available to answer any questions concerning the application process.

Your tasks:

- completion of a PhD thesis and of the doctoral examination within 4 years
- active participation in the activities and programme lines of the GRK 2945

We expect:

- an excellent degree (M.A., M.Ed., first legal examination, or equivalent international degrees) in one of the subjects participating in the RTG (i.e. English Literature, German Literature, History, Comparative Literature, Korean Studies, Art History, Legal History, Romance Studies, Chinese Studies, History of Knowledge) or in a related subject area with a strong focus on the premodern period
- the ability to conduct independent academic work
- a strong interest in interdisciplinary, theoretical work
- a high degree of personal initiative

Interviews will take place via Zoom on 5/6 August 2024. We will inform you of a possible invitation on 29 July 2024.

b. Scientific Coordinator

The Research Training Group 2945: ‚Knowing – Believing – Asserting: Production and Enforcement of Truth in the Premodern Period‘ at Ruhr University Bochum is looking for a **Scientific Coordinator (m,f,x) for (at least) 5 years (TV-L E13, 100%)**.

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Please send your application (German or English) with the required documents (letter of motivation, CV, certificates, list of publications and presentations if applicable) and a short letter of motivation, max. 1.5 pages) **by 22 July 2024** exclusively in electronic form and in a single PDF document **with the reference number ANR 3402** to: Sabrina Pähler (sabrina.paehler@ruhr-uni-bochum.de). Ms Pähler is also available to answer any questions concerning the application process.

Unfortunately, travel expenses for the interviews cannot be refunded.

Your tasks:

- Coordination and development of the GRK study programme (incl. management of the interdisciplinary tutorials)
- Supporting the steering committee (incl. documentation and evaluation)
- Supervision of work plans and support of the fellows
- Organization of retreats, summer school and GRK conference
- Attending to visiting researchers
- Organizing cooperation with regional partner institutions
- Editorial support for the RTG website and RTG blog

We expect:

- an excellent degree (M.A., M.Ed., first legal examination, or equivalent international degrees) and an outstanding doctorate in one of the subjects participating in the RTG (i.e. English Literature, German Literature, History, Comparative Literature, Korean Studies, Art History, Legal History, Romance Studies, Chinese Studies, History of Knowledge) with a significant focus on the premodern period
- the ability to work independently as well as in a team
- flexibility and a high level of commitment

- a strong interest in interdisciplinary, theoretical work
- a strong interest in and preferably first professional experience in the field of science management and/or science communication
- excellent command of English

2. The Research Program and the Qualification Program of the RTG 2945

In current debates, truth is controversial. Buzzwords like *fake news* or *alternative facts* reflect significant differences among various social groups regarding what is accepted as truth. This issue of divergent truth claims is not confined to the present; consequently, the topic of truth has increasingly garnered attention in historical research (e.g. Bubert 2021; Frick 2020; Oschema 2022; Poor 2021; Waltenberger 2014). Nonetheless, attempts to analyse and address the problem of *fake news* by focusing on the false claims themselves only address the symptoms: current empirical and theoretical research has shown that measures such as *debunking*, *fact-checking* or the demonstration of counterarguments often have little effect at the level of ‘emotional response’, even when the counterarguments are reasonable (cf. Horner et al. 2021). These methods convey the truth but fail to enforce it. In contrast, strategies that emphasize the importance of understanding the mechanisms of truth production and enhancing media literacy have shown greater promise (e.g. McDougall et al. 2019).

Building on this premise, our research on historical forms of truth production and truth enforcement addresses strategies and practices, media and processes of ‘making’ truth. Investigating the 13th to 17th centuries, the RTG will focus on a time characterized by a complex interplay of media, religion, law, and knowledge. In this period, a network of different, competing, complementary or intersecting practices of truth production can be observed. By scrutinizing these practices, we aim to provide insights from historical analysis to enrich and enhance contemporary debates with additional analytical tools for critical reflection.

2.1 Issues, Areas of Investigation, Methods

The RTG 2945 investigates the production and enforcement of truth between the 13th and 17th centuries – a period characterized by media change, by political and social dynamics, by religious conflicts and the emergence of competing concepts of law, by differing knowledge communities and religious cultures. During this time, traditional knowledge coexisted with new sites of experience and learning, well-established and novel institutions, and both conventional and innovative forms of observation and representation. A multiplicity of practices for asserting and enforcing truth existed simultaneously, often ignoring, supporting, negating, or imitating each other.

We are seeking doctoral projects that address this period and either focus on Latin Europe and/or its early colonial contact zones or on China and/or Korea, which are particularly suitable for comparison due to their highly developed written cultures and their specific dynamics—such as the rise of book printing and the book market in the Ming period (1368-1644) or the expansion of written communication in the early Chosŏn period in Korea.

The RTG addresses various subject areas, inviting prospective PhD students specializing in European Philologies and Literary Studies—especially English, German and Romance Studies (including Ibero-Romance, Latin American, French and Italian Studies)—and those from Comparative Literature Studies, Korean Studies and Chinese Studies, or from the fields of Art History, Legal History, History of Knowledge and of Science, Gender and Body History and/or Cultural History. Applications from related fields are encouraged, provided they emphasize the period under study by the RTG.

We wish to attract doctoral projects that either investigate how truth is claimed, asserted, enforced, made to be a foundation guiding speech, thought, action and decision-making, or that explore how processes of 'making truth' are observed and reflected in images, plays, and texts. In recent years, broader questions concerning the dynamics of knowledge and different knowledge communities and cultures have been discussed with increasing intensity (e.g. Füssel 2021; Mulsow/Rexroth 2014). By focusing on practices of truth assertion and processes of truth enforcement, the RTG aims at structuring this broad field of research and hopes to sharpen the debate by asking how truth (as well as knowledge and belief) is made acceptable.

In this context, truth is not conceived narrowly as an absolute, singular entity ("the truth") but rather as asserted truth that exists only in the mode of its mediation. Its form or *Gestalt* and validity are shaped by various forms of truth production. Hence, aspects of the staging and presentation of knowledge that invest propositions with validity come into focus. This often involves the inclusion of metafigures which turn a statement such as "The sun revolves around the earth" into propositions such as "It can be observed from the movements of the heavens that the sun revolves around the earth" or "The learned books say that the sun revolves around the earth", or articulate a truth claim on moral grounds: "A pious Christian must believe that the earth is the center of the cosmos and that all the stars revolve around the earth." Such metafigures that claim the validity of an assertion are not restricted to language and rhetoric but can be found on the material level of media as well. They can be supported or substituted by human bodies, things or spatiotemporal arrangements in which truth is not only inscribed but also embodied. For example, paratexts of the early printing period and their manuscript predecessors—such as *accessus ad auctores*, dedications, prefaces, prologues, and epic proemias—can be read as meta-figures that negotiate and materialize truth claims, incorporating them into personal networks consisting of multiple recipients. Additionally, the external form of a text, the choice of writing material, the colour of the ink, the form of the scripture or font type, the *mise-en-page*, the use of seals, images, diagrams, registers, glossaries and/or commentaries also communicate truth claims in their own way. Similarly, instruments, tools, maps, natural objects, artefacts, human bodies, attitudes, emotions, gestures, architecture, or spatial arrangements can become metafigures of validity explaining and showing why a certain truth claim should be accepted, demanding or commanding its acceptance, or evoking emotions to make something 'felt' as true. Rules of procedure or performative gestures enact what is to be understood as law; dramatic and performative representations of truth are dependent on the material and performance conditions of public and theatre stages; the use of special types of material or spolia in artistic objects articulates validity claims; the various forms of graphic notation, diagrams, and tables not only produce forms of knowledge but also assert truth to make the produced knowledge plausible and acceptable. By focussing on truth enforcement as a practice and by investigating its materiality and embodiment, we transcend the investigation of the various historical semantics of truth. Additionally, we take the praxeological perspective of 'making' truth to the history of the sciences, the history of the institutionalisation of knowledge or the role of the expert (cf. e.g. Brendecke 2015, Freist 2015a/b, Reckwitz 2014). We aim to analyse truth production and enforcement as events and processes situated in space and time, where heterogeneous elements such as bodies, movements, words, materials, objects, and affects are connected and interact as social and material 'arrangements' (Schatzki 2010). This perspective allows for a more precise analysis of the dynamics between different practices of knowledge, religion, law, society, or rule and their heterogenous 'arrangements'. For instance, one might describe how bodies, instruments, tools, or media that produce knowledge are presented as witnesses in the context of truth practices and thus gain a new form of agency. Alternatively, one could

examine how places, attitudes, and objects support the validity of an assertion, how they are introduced into truth-making processes, create evidence, and interact to maintain the visibility and connectivity of truth in the long term. Additionally, the embodiment of different truth claims and concepts in literary forms, artistic artifacts, and theatrical or representational stagings of truth could be observed, as they gain an aesthetic reality of their own.

With the help of documents and monuments, historical processes of truth enforcement can be analysed. At the same time, literary forms, sculptures, paintings, and early modern theatre performances reflected upon and problematized truth production. By bringing together historians specializing in the history of knowledge, legal history, gender and/or body history, and researchers in the fields of literary studies, cultural history, and art history, the RTG can pursue both dimensions of truth production. In summary, the methodological surplus and innovative potential of our project resides firstly in the dual perspective that examines both truth production and its historical reflection in art and literature, secondly in the focus on truth production as a central aspect of the broad field of the history of knowledge, and thirdly in the emphasis on practices and arrangements that encompass linguistic and rhetorical strategies, tangible objects, images, actions, attitudes, emotions, and physical performances.

In line with this research program, potential doctoral projects can address different genres, forms, and modes of truth production and processes. The spectrum ranges from descriptive or instructive texts to texts that discuss and explain, to narrative, epideictic, or lyrical texts. In addition to fictional and factual narratives (e.g. of history, law or knowledge), didactic poems, dialogues, treatises, essays, specialist texts or *artes* literature and their popularising adaptations could be explored. Furthermore, practices of writing or print, such as quotations, glosses and commentaries, or 'brush-notes' from pre-modern China and Korea (biji 筆記, bitan/p'iltam 筆談, suibi/sup'il 隨筆), which served as sketchy recordings of knowledge, as well as juxtapositions and exhibitions of different or conflicting truth claims, such as the negotiation of different theories of authority, claims to power, and self-practices in early modern theatre, could be investigated.

To structure this very broad field of possible topics, the RTG focusses on those areas of truth production and enforcement characterized by a particular lack of evidence and by precarious perceptibility, recognizability, and representability. This approach is informed by the idea that practices of truth production and enforcement are primarily required and reflected upon in those moments when certainty about what is to be considered true is not yet (or not anymore) established, lacking, or in doubt. Truth that is easily perceived, is readily accepted; it is obvious and (self-)evident (Müller 2007). We want to group the doctoral projects around areas that, to varying degrees and for different reasons, resist visibility and thus challenge truth practices. We use umbrella terms to describe these areas, which address different forms of lack of evidence and accordingly require different practices and material arrangements: (1) the withdrawn; (2) the hidden; (3) the new. These umbrella terms do not define sharply delineated areas. Rather, we assume very permeable borders and that doctoral projects cannot be assigned to only one area, with some aspects of a project extending into at least one of the other two areas.

The Withdrawn

This umbrella term addresses those areas of truth production in which truth claims refer to entities fundamentally withdrawn from direct perception. This encompasses the transcendental and the otherworldly, the past that has been withdrawn in time, as well as the

intentions and motivations of individuals. That which is withdrawn cannot be directly perceived and only reveals itself in highly uncertain conditions and mediated modes of perception (dream, vision, apparition, revelation, memory). This area relates to evaluations and re-evaluations of historical events and claims, stories of origin, narratives about (as yet) non-canonized 'saints', feast days, relics or places of pilgrimage. It also includes the sphere of supernatural forces and beings, spirits, ancestors and ghosts, evoked in the context of religious communication and cultic practices, but also frequently thematized in fictional literature. Truth practices that relate to that which is withdrawn depend on trustworthy sources, credible statements and reliable reports. Witnesses play an important role in these processes, and we aim to investigate which practices are used to validate human or written witnesses and how credibility and authenticity are safeguarded against doubt. This applies just as much to reports of visions or journeys to the next world as to searches for the Holy Grail or to statements about past and secret events. Furthermore, it applies to 'inner facts' in the legal sense, i.e. motivations and intentions, which are withdrawn from direct perception by others. Documents, witness reports, procedural practices and institutional or innovative procedural safeguards seem to be woven into a network of mutual authorization and protection characterized by a multiplicity of reciprocal relationships and 'feedback effects' (Cuntz et al. 2006: 20). These networks always also include objects and material witnesses that acquire validity as traces and evidence, that produce truth as part of legal practice or that are used as insignia to secure e.g. legal authority.

The Hidden

This umbrella term addresses those areas of truth production which are not fundamentally withdrawn, but only partially accessible to perception, difficult to access, or which can only be verified by means of mediation. These include hidden processes, concealed principles of action, inner structures and invisible qualities, such as phenomena and events situated below the surface of the earth or inside the body, interrelations of invisible influences, abstract ideas such as mathematical axioms, or the intangible norms of law, unreachable areas such as the planetary spheres, or secrets (arcana) as, for example, in the field of alchemy. 'The Hidden' encompasses structures and dimensions that need to be visualized and that cannot be experienced by the senses or are unmanageable due to their seize, such as national borders or populations. The same can be said of standards and values which are transmitted orally, or customs and habits which are not codified.

Claims that refer to such areas can draw on the reports of lay people and experts, and they can present specific objects or materials as results of presumed processes (such as the ore or mineral found, the plant, animal or even human being brought from afar, the newborn child, the illness cured, the observable reaction). However, complete certainty as to their geneses and beginnings, their exact nature or formation processes cannot be attained. Truth practices in this area seek to reveal the concealed nature of existing things, they try to make them conceivable, and/or to outline them by means of models, diagrams, images and metaphors.

As a consequence of the changes in manuscript culture between the 13th and 17th centuries, techniques of image printing, graphic elements, pictures, and diagrams gained significant importance, in Europe as well as in China and Korea. Concurrently, tools and instruments played an increasingly important role in the production of knowledge. Together with cards, drafts, and models they serve to precisely record, test, measure, and calculate, or to make proportionalities and structures tangible. These texts, images, and objects, initially used to

produce knowledge, sometimes were repurposed to gain new agency as means of validation. Natural things and artefacts, fabrics, materials or bodies could form material arrangements and networks of reciprocal authorization to provide evidence for and illustrate the asserted, hidden connections—and this applies as much to the objects, actors, and materials on the early modern theatre stages as it does to the practices in early modern workshops and ‘laboratories’.

The New

This umbrella term addresses areas of truth production that are dedicated to things whose status, claim and validity are not yet secured, i.e. to emergent phenomena which are not yet fully accessible, categorized, conceptualized, or named. One could think, for example, of reports of first encounters with new countries, peoples, animals, or plants, which may employ the narrative mode of the adventurous to enrich that which is new with detailed descriptions, pictures and maps. Things never seen, people never heard of, or new places may be fundamentally accessible, but they are neither conceptually present nor is knowledge about them easily or equally available. From our perspective, such phenomena are accessible only in mediated forms—reports, descriptions, or pictorial representations—and have not yet been inspected. Therefore, truth productions concerning that which is new must first and foremost rely on sources and witnesses, but their validation eludes established forms of procedural evidence as, for example, in truth processes of the law. Other agents, media, things, and places of truth production are brought into position, and their own credibility must be secured. Hence, new arrangements of truth production are formed, which, in turn, bring forth their own instruments (of image production and/or numerical appropriation of the visible world). Simultaneously, an aesthetic interest in new objects and foreign bodies is articulated, which can be witnessed in the art chambers of the 16th and 17th centuries, in prints or on theatre stages.

Processes of truth production are also aimed at the 'legibility' of new things and foreign people, integrating them into conventional and valid systems of knowledge. In these cases, the investigation of 'the New' might focus on its symbolism, its interpretability, and/or its ambiguous reference to what is to come. Therefore, we would like to open the collective area of 'the new' to concepts of and claims about a future, which is not yet present, but which directly influences the actions of the present in the sense of anticipation, fear, foresight, and precaution. Thus, 'the New' becomes a relevant category in questions of risk assessment, the defence against imminent dangers (e.g. fire protection in growing cities) or the distribution of uncontrollable dangers in contract and tort law (e.g. for strict liability for animals).

2.2 Qualification Program

Our qualification concept aims to prepare the PhD students for a career in research and teaching through intensive subject-specific supervision. The interdisciplinary nature of the program provides the fellows with a significant advantage in advancing their academic career, particularly in disciplines and subjects that deal with the pre-modern period. The RTG's focus on truth production and enforcement addresses a subject area that is also highly relevant to various non-university work contexts. This includes, for example, educational work in museums and collections, adult education, public relations work and science management, as

well as the work of lecturers and advisory positions in the cultural and cultural heritage sector. Additionally, it encompasses knowledge transfer and non-formal learning in museums and collections, and public relations and science management. Equally important, it caters to fields where there is likely to be increased job market demand, such as content management, fact-checking, transfer, and science communication. It is to be expected that this is not a temporary trend, but that the examination of the effects and consequences of changing forms of truth production and enforcement will become even more relevant in years to come.

The GRK's study and qualification program answers to this situation by providing opportunities for skill acquisition and professional orientation, enabling the fellows to try out different forms of knowledge transfer in the Ruhr metropolitan region. To this end, we cooperate closely with regional partner institutions that support our fellows in their activities (e.g. in the organization of public discussions, lecture series, exhibitions, workshops, etc.): Buxus Foundation/Fritz Bauer Forum (Bochum); Deutsches Bergbau-Museum/Leibniz Research Museum for Georesources (Bochum); CORRECTIV (Essen); Institute for Advanced Study in the Humanities (KWI, Essen); Kultur- und Stadthistorisches Museum/Mercator-Gesellschaft (Mercator-Society, Duisburg); LWL-Museum für Archäologie und Kultur (Herne); Museum Schnütgen (Köln). Thus, we enable our PhD Students to gain experience outside the predominantly academic confines of the university.

The interdisciplinary cooperation within the RTG facilitates detailed research concerning the interaction of different literatures, arts and fields of knowledge in processes of truth production. Accordingly, a central focus of the RTG will be the discussion of the methodological challenges associated with a praxeological approach for historical disciplines. We will place emphasis on methodological courses and the development and discussion of dissertation projects, measures which are flanked by assigning two doctoral advisors for each PhD student from the group of participating professors. By involving as many international third-party experts as possible in the supervisory work, we also increase the transparency and objectivity of the examination procedures and enable our fellows to network internationally at an early stage.

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