

# Knowledge Hegemonies in the Early Modern World

## Sources and Interpretations

*A collaborative open access series*

### *Thematic overview*

This series is devoted to the social-cultural study of early modern knowledge cultures (ca.1450-1750). It promotes works that highlight the importance of science as a collective *praxis*, understood as a contested field informed by political, philosophical and confessional struggles for cultural hegemony, and in connection with social and economic interests. The emphasis on the political and ethical dimensions of agency should complement existing narratives on the materials, techniques, and meanings of learned and artistic practices. Moreover, since early modern knowledge was articulated and modified through its circulation within various realms of society, including artisanal circles and academic networks, it is crucial to investigate the institutional, political, and ideological settings of early-modern knowledge cultures. In how far did political antagonisms, ideological struggles, and religious tensions hinder scientific development or underpin it? How did the modern construction of identity along confessional, linguistic, and political lines affect the ethos and epistemic values of the sciences? What hegemonic values underpinned the early modern transformation of life and knowledge production?

To deal with struggles for knowledge hegemonies implies to value political subjectivity, initiative, and action in their capacity to redirect the structural elements that emerge from history. Among the many cultural forms of knowledge, science seems to have a tight connection with the production and reproduction of material life conditions of society, although it is closely linked to the immaterial and symbolic spheres of culture, as well. The concept of knowledge hegemony emphasizes the collective subjectivity as the driving force of political and epistemic transformations.

### *State of the art and desiderata*

Over the last four decades, taking inspiration from fields such as cultural anthropology and STS, historians of science have increasingly turned their lens to the exploration of situated knowledge practices. More recently, with the turn to global history, the field has further broadened to interrogate how knowledge is produced, transmitted and appropriated in specific times and places and the power structures shaping relationship between actors and ideas, skills, materials and techniques and between different locales. Grand modernist narratives of the past, which told a story of European 'progress' and scientific 'supremacy', have been successfully questioned and replaced by a more nuanced agenda. History of early modern science today understands scientific knowledge

and identities no longer as simply ‘neutral’ or ‘objective’ but as a product of complicated knowledge and power constellations, specific to time and place.

In spite of the widening of our field, the cultural-political dimension of science—that is to say, its place within hegemonic projects, ideological clashes, and struggles for meaning—still warrants further exploration. The attention to individual actors at the center of the cultural turn, although beneficial for specific case studies, has often obfuscated the collective dimension of intellectual endeavors and their particular objectives. Specific studies which draw upon this fundamental premise will form a comparative enquiry into the political *esprit* of knowledge and ultimately into the *ethos* which the community imparts onto knowledge and *vice versa*.

### *Prospects*

In light of this program, the investigation of scientific *practice* will be enlarged to include scientific *praxis*, that is, a consideration of political agendas. This implies an integration of the study of epistemic values by reassessing agency as expressly linked to the moral (individual), ethical (individual but collectivity oriented) and political (collective) spheres of life and human interaction and association. Our series calls for a closer investigation of the manner in which such *cognitive* virtues are connected with *practical* virtues, ethical and political in the strict sense. We especially invite scholars to consider the cultural-political embedment of scientific knowledge, with particular reference to the collective directedness of science as a contested field of cultural-hegemonic struggles.

### *Open access publication*

The goal of our series is to publish source-based studies that combine the online presentation of historical sources with accompanying critical monographs. We are open to new formats and digital experimentation, as we are to new ways of presenting the circulation and transformation of sources. All publications in this series will be peer reviewed and available in an open-access format. The peer reviewing will follow a best practice rather than a double blind model to provide more transparency. The benefits of openness and flexibility intrinsic to EOA have been demonstrated by the experience of the Max Planck Society over the past ten years (<http://edition-open-access.de/>). They range from the rapid circulation of ideas to high quality readability of documents, new citation forms, connection of publications to databases and to digital tools, and the possibility of multi-phase publications. Most importantly, a scholarly open access series allows for the publication of sources and studies that would not otherwise be printed by profit-oriented publishers due to “lack of market,” despite their great value for research, which in our case is historical and epistemological

inquiry. Scholarly works published in this series will be connected with databases and digital repositories such as the European Cultural Heritage Online (<http://echo.mpiwg-berlin.mpg.de>), which provides a model for the secure and lasting storage of documents, digitized books, and other sources in the history of science. Edizioni Ca' Foscari will support the project with the editorial expertise of an established academic publisher (<http://edizionicafoscari.unive.it>).

*Project partners*

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