

University of Groningen

Introduction

Hoogvliet, Margriet; Fernández Chaves, Manuel F.; Pérez García, Rafael M.

Published in:

Networking Europe and New Communities of Interpretation (1400-1600)

DOI:

[10.1484/M.NCI-EB.5.134307](https://doi.org/10.1484/M.NCI-EB.5.134307)

IMPORTANT NOTE: You are advised to consult the publisher's version (publisher's PDF) if you wish to cite from it. Please check the document version below.

Document Version

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Publication date:

2023

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Hoogvliet, M., Fernández Chaves, M. F., & Pérez García, R. M. (2023). Introduction: Networking Europe and New Communities of Interpretation. In M. Hoogvliet, M. F. Fernández Chaves, & R. M. Pérez García (Eds.), *Networking Europe and New Communities of Interpretation (1400-1600)* (pp. 9-17). (New Communities of Interpretation; Vol. 4). Brepols Publishers. <https://doi.org/10.1484/M.NCI-EB.5.134307>

Copyright

Other than for strictly personal use, it is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

The publication may also be distributed here under the terms of Article 25fa of the Dutch Copyright Act, indicated by the "Taverne" license. More information can be found on the University of Groningen website: <https://www.rug.nl/library/open-access/self-archiving-pure/taverne-amendment>.

Take-down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

Downloaded from the University of Groningen/UMCG research database (Pure): <http://www.rug.nl/research/portal>. For technical reasons the number of authors shown on this cover page is limited to 10 maximum.

MARGRIET HOOGLIET, MANUEL F.
FERNÁNDEZ CHAVES, AND RAFAEL M.
PÉREZ GARCÍA

Introduction

*Networking Europe and New Communities of Interpretation**

Hoc tibi nunc quoque affirmare ausim, si huc uenias,
fore, ut, quicquid propter hanc rem opere sumpseris,
magnis te premiis uberrimaque mercede redemisse
dicas.

(I have no hesitation in assuring you that if you come
here, whatever effort you had to make to do so, you
will say that it has well been worth the expense and
it has brought you valuable rewards.)¹

These words were hastily penned in Pavia in the summer or autumn of 1472 by the Dutch humanist Rudolph Agricola, born in the small hamlet of Baflo near Groningen, in a letter to his friend Johannes Vredewold, who was at that point still living in the city of Groningen. Agricola was studying

* The editors would like to express their gratitude to Susanne de Jong and Marco Mostert for their invaluable corrections and assistance in preparing this book for publication.

¹ Agricola, *Letters*, 66–67.

Margriet Hoogvliet • is a specialist in the field of biblical and religious reading cultures of lay people living and working in the towns of late medieval France.

Manuel F. Fernández Chaves • is Associate Professor in the Early Modern History Department at the Universidad de Sevilla.

Rafael M. Pérez García • is currently Associate Professor at the Department of Early Modern History at the Universidad de Sevilla.

Networking Europe and New Communities of Interpretation (1400–1600), ed. by Margriet Hoogvliet, Manuel F. Fernández Chaves, and Rafael M. Pérez García, *New Communities of Interpretation*, 4 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2023), pp. 9–18

BREPOLS PUBLISHERS

10.1484/M.NCI-EB.5.134307

classical Latin and Greek in Italy, and in this letter he tried to persuade his friend through phrases written in elegant humanist Latin to come to Italy as well, in order to absorb its culture and learning.

Nearly a century later, Juan de Ovando, president of the *Consejo de Indias* in Madrid, wrote to the Spanish humanist Benito Arias Montano, resident in Antwerp, informing him that he had received the Flemish books and objects that Montano had sent:

He recibido el astrolabio que ... es la mejor pieza que e visto en my vida ... Y ansí mismo e recibido el breviario y la Biblia que vuestra merced me enbió con don Pedro de Luna, y la Biblia me a contentado ynfinito, y no la dexo de las manos. Vuestra merced diga al Plantino que le soy aficionadíssimo ... Recibí el ánulo astronómico que vuestra merced me enbió ... y ansí mesmo recibí el báculo astronómico ... estímolo en mucho, porque cierto está eçelentemente labrado. También recibí del dicho Francisco de Palma dos catálogos ynpresos de los libros que an venido del nuevo ynpresor que an venido a las dos últimas ferias de Francaforte.²

(I have received the astrolabe ... which is the best piece I have seen in my life ... and I have also received the breviary and the Bible which your Grace sent me with don Pedro de Luna, and the Bible has pleased me so much, and I never put it down. Tell Plantin that I am very fond of his person ... I received also the astronomical *annulus* that your Grace sent me ... and the astronomical rod [Jacob's Staff]... I esteem it very much, because it is extremely well carved. I also received from Francisco de Palma two printed catalogues of the books of the new printer that came from the last two Frankfurt fairs.)

In the sixteenth century Montano used an extensive network of Spanish and Flemish merchants and travellers between Flanders and the Iberian Peninsula to send astronomical artefacts, books, Bibles, and also printed catalogues of books presented at the Frankfurt book fair. This information shows us how the cultural influence of the northern European printing press, together with the arts and crafts related to the fabrication of scientific objects, was channelled through mercantile and official networks with Spain, from north to south, paralleling the journey from Groningen to Pavia proposed by Agricola at the end of the fifteenth century.

A network of more than 120 researchers from twenty-five countries in the European Union and from associated countries had similarly enriching

² Macías Rosendo, *La correspondencia de Benito Arias Montano con el presidente de Indias Juan de Ovando*, 206. Letter of Juan de Ovando to Benito Arias Montano, Madrid, 31 March 1570.

experiences during their Europe-wide travels in order to participate in the meetings and other activities of COST Action IS-1304, 'New Communities of Interpretation: Contexts, Strategies and Processes of Religious Transformation in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe', that was active between 2013 and 2017. Just like Agricola, Bredewoldt, and Montano, modern researchers and students, all of them scholars and historians specializing in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, travelled from their institutions to a great variety of European countries participating in the COST Action for meetings, where they found 'valuable rewards' in the exchange of ideas and research results.

This book is the outcome of the meetings of the Action's Working Group 3: 'European Networks of Knowledge Exchange'. The COST Action in itself already being an important opportunity for scholarly exchange and networking, one of the approaches uniting the participants' research activities is 'Networking Europe', with which we refer to the long-distance social ties connecting Europeans from all geographical corners of the continent during the long fifteenth century and allowing the sharing of religious texts, books, iconography, ideas, and practices. In the theoretical Introduction to this volume, Suzan Folkerts and Margriet Hoogvliet will provide further details about our approach to 'connectivity' and 'social networks', as well as a further development of our understanding of this terminology.

As set out in the official Memorandum of Understanding of the Action, the goal of our Working Group is to study late medieval and early modern processes of religious transformation by means of:

reconstructing European networks of knowledge exchange, exploring how religious ideas and strategies of transformation 'travelled' and were shared in European cultural space (e.g. mobility of 'readers', printers, authors and groups of believers; dialogues and discussions within literary associations and institutions; organisation of and participation in Church Councils). As a matter of fact, a better-calibrated reconstruction of intellectual and mercantile networks, clusters of literary associations and institutions, networks of collaboration with religious communities and religious orders, mobility of people, texts and ideas is essential for the reconstruction of the circulation, the appropriation and the transformation of religious knowledge and the essential challenging of national paradigms.

In order to come to a better understanding of Europe-wide processes of religious culture and religious change in the late medieval and early modern periods, we intend to focus on the agency of the laity instead of that of the intellectual elites, the aristocracy, and religious institutions. This focus on the laity and their active involvement in religious life has also resulted in a renewed interest in texts in the European vernaculars instead

of in Latin, or the vernacular texts that existed alongside those in Latin. In reality, and as often observed before, the traditional coupling of the terminology professional religious–Latin and layperson–vernacular became more fluid during this period, with some laypeople reading and writing in Latin and some professional religious reading and writing in their mother tongue. Nevertheless, the agency of religious literature in the European vernaculars in processes of religious purification, reform, and innovation during the long fifteenth century is still largely underestimated. In our view, the development of new religious and cultural identities can be best studied from the perspective of ‘new communities of interpretation.’ To quote again the Memorandum of Understanding:

These new ‘communities of interpretation’ were often formed by an urban laity active in politics, finance and commerce. Over time, this *respublica laicorum* took a growing interest in the organisation of cultural and religious activities and in the production of literary, religious and scientific texts — and most interestingly recognised the opportunities offered by reading and writing in the vernacular to further their interests.

In addition to studying ‘new communities of interpretation’ through the lenses of the laity with special attention paid to the European vernacular languages, the contributions to this volume also aim to step away from studying ‘national’ textual production and consumption, by approaching these topics instead from a European and interconnected perspective. Just as Latin functioned as a supranational language in the European later Middle Ages, most vernacular languages were not tied to a specific political or geographical area, because a) several linguistic communities were larger than political territories — the ‘cosmopolitan vernacular’ Middle French being a case in point; b) medieval vernacular languages usually consisted of a patchwork of variants (dialects is not the correct term here); c) many people were multilingual and could communicate in several vernacular languages, even if in only a very basic form; and d) during the later Middle Ages people were mobile and they spent often time ‘abroad’ for reasons of commerce, education, pilgrimage, or exile.

Following the mobility of people and objects during the long fifteenth century, religious texts and material books should also be studied from a supranational or transnational perspective: many religious texts were translated into several vernacular languages, thus becoming ‘international bestsellers’, and this justifies the necessity of studying religious texts from a Europe-wide or even global perspective. In addition, books were transportable commodities, and these were exported via commercial networks in order to be sold and read in all corners of the European area, and sometimes even across the seas in the new territories of the European monarchies. As a consequence of human and textual mobility, not only

were religious texts shared within communities, but they also contributed to the creation of international and multilingual communities of interpretation.

The contributions to this book explore late medieval and early modern networks connecting people and transporting texts, in some cases including the transatlantic New World, following three main axes of investigation. Firstly, the chapters in the section, 'European connections', focus on religious texts that were connecting local and European communities of readers; the following section, 'Exiles, diasporas, and migrants', will address textual networks created by early modern people living far away from their homelands; and, thirdly, the section, 'Mobility and dissemination', will ask how late medieval and early modern mobility and travel networks enabled the transportation of texts, books, and ideas.

European Connections

In the chapter discussing 'Francisco de Osuna's 'Tercer Abecedario Espiritual' and the Medieval Mystical Tradition in Western Europe', Rafael M. Pérez García proposes to move beyond national and nationalistic approaches to spiritual literature from the sixteenth century and to investigate this textual culture instead as the expression of a shared European and Christian culture. Starting from the *Third Spiritual Alphabet* (1527), written in the Spanish vernacular by the Franciscan Friar Francisco de Osuna, the chapter retraces the medieval and European textual network of sources that converged in his text. Even if most of these works were originally intended exclusively for monastic and clerical practices of mysticism, Francisco de Osuna, by means of a new elaboration of Pseudo-Dionysian exegesis of the *Song of Songs*, opened up to lay readers the search for a mystical union with the divine.

European textual connections are also addressed in Mirosława Hanusiewicz-Lavallee's chapter 'The Sixteenth-Century Polish Protestant Martyrology and Its Latin Sources'. The Polish vernacular compendium collecting stories of the sufferings of European proto-Reformation and Reformation martyrs, *History of Harsh Persecution of God's Church*, was printed in 1567 in Brest, then situated in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, and translated and adapted by Cyprian Bazylik. Hanusiewicz-Lavallee retraces Bazylik's European sources, most notably Latin treatises of Protestant martyrs, such as John Foxe's *Rerum in Ecclesia gestarum [...] commentarii* (1559), Jean Crespin's Latin martyrology (1560), Jan van Utenhove's *Simplex et fidelis narratio* (1560), and Heinrich Pantaleon's *Martyrum historia* (1563). Through Bazylik's Polish martyrology, historical, textual, and religious connections were created between the Polish Protestants and

the Reformed communities elsewhere in Europe, thus establishing ‘textual communities’ and connected histories of Protestant martyrs.

A geographically smaller, but socially more diverse community reading biblical and religious texts in Middle Dutch, often translated from Latin and other European vernaculars, is studied by Marcin Polkowski in his chapter ‘(Re-)Constructing a Community of Readers: The Image of the Laity in Books Printed in Delft (1477–1500)’. Polkowski addresses the conceptualization of laypeople (*laici*) as ‘virtual’ textual actors (after Bruno Latour’s ‘Actor–Network’ model) and their representation as ‘ideal readers’ by authors and printers from the Dutch city of Delft during the ‘long sixteenth century’. In Delft, the output of authors and printers was received in an urban society which was characterized by the existence of a myriad of social networks, often connecting laity and clergy, which were all supportive of religious textual culture. The vernacular textual output of the Delft printing presses suggests that these contributed to specific religious reading practices including to the creation of a religious identity for the laity, but one which could also include clerical readers.

Exiles, Diasporas, and Migrants

In the chapter ‘Spanish Merchants and Dissidents outside Spain in the Sixteenth Century’, Ignacio García Pinilla shows the important role of merchant colonies of businessmen from Burgos, Seville, and Valencia that were established in the Low Countries in the sixteenth century (especially in Bruges and Antwerp) in the circulation of ideas and the dissemination of Protestantism within the mercantile networks that connected the main economic centres in Western Europe (from London and the Low Countries to Burgos, Seville, Florence, and Rome). This article shows how, besides the economic functions of these networks, we can approach the processes of cultural change that those networks made possible, shaking the same familiar and mercantile structures over which they were built. Among others, the case of the Valencian humanist Luis Vives and the well-known cases of the families San Román and Encinas from Burgos are studied.

Manuel Fernández Chaves, in the chapter entitled ‘The Library of the Pious House and Chapel of Saint Andrew of the Flemish Nation in Seville under Philip V’, studies the type of books that were part of the library that the Flemish Nation in Seville had in its confraternity and pious chapel. Working with an inventory from 1734, the author analyses the main topics and authors that were important to the Flemish community in the city, such as history, classical authors, theology, and religious controversies, among others. The library comprised books dating to between the sixteenth and the eighteenth centuries, with most from the seventeenth

century. Their study allows us to identify the religious and cultural profile that the Flemish community developed in the city, using books in Latin, Spanish, French, and Flemish. These were not only intended for the use of their chaplain but also for their members, which is a very telling fact about the self-representation of a community of readers during almost three centuries.

Mobility and Dissemination

In the chapter ‘Business is Business: Book Merchants, Printers, and the Spanish Inquisition during the Sixteenth Century’, Natalia Maillard-Alvarez studies the interrelations between mercantile interests, the printing press, and the boundaries of religious orthodoxy. She analyses the different strategies developed by book professionals to avoid the mechanisms of supervision and Inquisitorial control, focusing on the ways they used to adapt their business and activity as printers and book importers to the shifting situation concerning the religious and cultural changes in the sixteenth century. Maillard-Alvarez shows that we can find the printers in situations that vary from persecution to a certain tolerance from, and even cooperation with, the Holy Office — not only as *familiares* or informers on other printers suspected of being Protestants, but also as publishers or suppliers of paper and other materials. In other words, we can see how the Inquisition showed indulgence with regard to some crimes or complaints against printers, or preferred some booksellers and printers more than others, being pragmatic in many cases, mainly to avoid the suffocation of the printing press business. Moreover, some members of the Inquisition permitted the introduction of forbidden authors or titles into the peninsula in exchange for money. The article also discusses cases in Spain and Mexico, bringing out the connections between the main European centres of the printing press with those in New Spain.

In the chapter ‘The Colony of the Republic of Ragusa Merchants in Belgrade in the Sixteenth Century and their Printing Press’, Vladimir Abramović explores the activities of the Ragusan merchant community established in Belgrade during the sixteenth century, showing the merchants’ role as economic and cultural connectors between the Ottoman Empire and Western Europe. The activities of these merchants reveal a world where Serbian, Italian, and Latin coexisted in different oral and written registers. Among other businesses, they were very active in the book trade, importing to Belgrade Cyrillic liturgical books printed in Serbian in Venice or Ancona. In this mercantile network we can find the figure of Trojan Gundulić. He established the first printing press in Belgrade, which issued the first book printed in the Balkans. In this way, the Ragusan merchants

contributed to the expansion of the Republic of Letters in south eastern Europe.

The closing chapter of the book, written by Margriet Hoogvliet, addresses roads, means of transportation, and lodgings as the 'hardware' of European connections in the late Middle Ages and the early sixteenth century. In the chapter 'The Spiritual Road: European Networks and Pilgrim Travels from Northern France and the Low Countries to Rome, Venice, and Santiago (Late Fifteenth–early Sixteenth Century)', three pilgrims' accounts in Middle French are scrutinized for the information they contain concerning the daily practice of travel around the year 1500, including roads and other provisions for travellers. The accounts are very informative about the well-functioning infrastructure that was in place for long-distance travel and about social networks that connected people living huge distances apart from each other. The pilgrims' accounts also show how these networks were crucial in the transportation of information about religious and spiritual topics.

Taken together, the chapters in this book cover a huge geographical network that stretches from Poland to Spain and the New World, and from the Low Countries to the Balkan Peninsula. It is, of course, not possible to cover in detail in one collective book all the particularities of these European and transatlantic areas. It is our conviction, however, that the study of 'connections' and 'networks' will be a fruitful approach for future research, by re-connecting people and ideas that were actually connected in the late Middle Ages and early modern period. Ideally this will lead to more inclusive approaches and an opening up of historiographies of national exceptionalism.

Works Cited

Agricola, Rudolph, *Letters*, ed. and trans., with notes by Adrie van de Laan and Fokke Akkerman (Assen: Koninklijke Van Gorcum, 2002)

Macías Rosendo, Baldomero, *La correspondencia de Benito Arias Montano con el presidente de Indias Juan de Ovando* (Huelva: Universidad de Huelva, 2008)