S-112 – Circulation of knowledge and scientific institutions: the Americas, Western Europe, South Asia (1750s-1914)

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Abstract:
While historians should take into account the movements in space that constantly transform sciences, they should not lose sight of the specific locations dedicated to the daily work of scientists. In scientific facilities (museums, laboratories, hospitals, etc.), modern scientists use their research instruments, meet with members of their networks, teach, and interact with various actors from outside their scientific community. Participants in this symposium will seek ways to write the history of this dynamic between circulation and institutions of science.

In the last decades, scholars have invested efforts to decentralize the history of science. They shifted the focus to spaces in between the European knowledge centers and alternative geographies. In so doing, not only have they integrated other locations to the picture of modern science, but they also challenged the notion of “diffusion” from center to peripheries. Some have looked towards the East to study negotiations and scientific circulation between Europe and societies on the Asian continent, whereas others have looked towards the West and mapped the transatlantic networks linking actors in Europe and in the Americas. This symposium may bridge this divide by bringing together scholars working on transnational scientific interactions from both standpoints.

We welcome contributions covering periods between the 1750s and 1914. Imperialism underwent dramatic changes at that time. In the Americas, several colonies declared independence. It was also a time when European imperialist powers intensified their colonizing efforts towards Asia and Africa, notably in South Asia. New transnational scientific networks thus emerged and transformed the ways in which knowledge and institutions were elaborated in those territories. In postcolonial Americas, science and autonomous scientific institutions became an important feature of the quest for modernization. In colonized Asian territories, scientific endeavors were part of imperial projects and/or of the local elites’ agenda.

Participants to this symposium should insist along those lines on the spatial characteristics that shape scientific circulation and institutions. Concrete circulatory aspects of scientific activity should be emphasized. For instance, in which conditions do actors travel and ship material from one scientific site to another? Also, taking into account asymmetrical relations, how do characteristics of societies (demography, religion, race relations, etc.) and territories (climate, topography, hydrography, etc.) affect their work and the circulation that it involves? How do institutions as sites of science anchor that circulation? This multifaceted approach may give tools to articulate original interrogations in the history of science.
Keywords: Circulation of knowledge – Scientific institutions – Interactions – European empires – Transnational history.

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