EARLY MODERN SCHOLARS' PATRONAGE NETWORKS AND THEIR REPRESENTATION BY AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL WRITERS (16th CENTURY)*

by Gabriele Jancke (Berlin)

Networks and patronage[1] were an important part of premodern societies. Theories of modernization, relying on the concepts of Karl Marx, Jacob Burckhardt, and Max Weber, stress institutions and bureaucratic structures to the exclusion of patronage networks. Consequently, modernization narratives tend to situate patronage on the margins of the story they have to tell: either in the beginning, which was changed and improved afterwards, or, in strongly moral terms, as a corruption of personally-disinterested practices. A third way of marginalizing patronage is by representing it just as a singular relationship concerning a patron and his client, situated predominantly in special milieus like courts and the Catholic church and concerning special fields like art, literature, and politics.

The Renaissance and Reformation are crucial points for the beginning of modernization, so the narrative runs, and therefore also for the breakdown of patronage networks. Protestantism, humanism and early modern scholarship are most prominent factors in the modernization process, which resulted, among other things, in the development of the Western autonomous individual, liberated from traditions and personal relationships with all their social obligations. In this story, autobiographical writings are used as privileged sources, seemingly representing the autonomous individual and its development in the West. Needless to say, the individual of modernization theory is white, Christian, urban, male and educated. It is produced by way of implicit generalization, and it strongly influences our views of the autobiographical genres.[2]

In fact, autobiographical writings of the early modern period do not confirm this modernization narrative. On the contrary, they fit the model drawn, e.g., by Ronald Weissman. This reveals the enormous role of patronage networks in Renaissance society.[3] Autobiographical texts, written mostly by scholars, provide many insights into scholars' worlds and values – worlds largely shaped by patronage activities and patronage networks. The sources used here are 234 autobiographical writings written by 179 authors in the 15th and 16th centuries up to the beginning of the Thirty-Years' war. Most of these texts are from the 16th century; all of them are from the German-speaking areas.

According to these sources, getting access to patronage networks in most cases meant becoming somebody's student and, moreover, developing a special relationship with that teacher or professor. It was the teacher's or professor's part to decide *if* he wanted to support one of the young men studying with him, and *if* he wanted to enter into a relationship that would involve more than just teaching. Teaching itself might have a public and a private side. When Conrad Gesner (1516-1565) went to Montpellier to complete his studies in medicine he desperately tried to be admitted to one of the professors' households in order to attain access to the teaching that took place there. Unsuccessful in this endeavour, he left Montpellier because, as he wrote afterwards, the public lectures taught what he already knew.[4]

Getting a teacher's personal interest and support could be a first step to getting access not only to the teacher's instruction and guidance but also to his contacts and networks. Many autobiographers tell the story of one of those teaching relationships: For example, Daniel Greiser (1504-1591) met his future patron Erhard Schnepf when he was a student. Before Schnepf procured a job for him there was a personal relationship that grew more intense over years. Greiser became godparent of Schnepf's daughter, and he accompanied Schnepf's mother-in-law on her voyage from her home in southern Germany to her daughter and her son-in-law in the north. He invited Schnepf to his first marriage, continued his studies, and became a guest at Schnepf's table. Finding Greiser a job came after both patron and client had invested years in their relationship.

Whereas Greiser was able to approach Schnepf directly from the beginning, Sebastian Leonhart (1544-1610) had to gain initial access to the Leipzig humanist Joachim Camerarius indirectly. Leonhart went to school with one of Camerarius' sons, and the boys became friends. This way, writes Leonhart, he gained access to the father and began bringing him his Greek exercises. Joachim Camerarius took a liking to his son's friend, and he started to supervise him as a teacher and to support him as a patron, even when Leonhart did not follow his advice in his own choice of profession.

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NET CULTURE SCIENCE
NETZ KULTUR WISSENSCHAFT

EARLY MODERN SCHOLARS' PATRONAGE NETWORKS AND THEIR REPRESENTATION BY AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL WRITERS (16th CENTURY) by Gabriele Jancke (Berlin)

5 For some network studies relevant here cf. Reinhard, Wolfgang: Freunde und Kreaturen. »Verflechtung« als Konzept zur Erforschung historischer Führungsgruppen. Römische Oligarchie um 1600. München: Vögel 1979 (Schriften der Philosophischen Fachbereiche der Univ. Augsburg 14); Sieh-Burens, Katarina: Oligarchie, Konfession und Politik im 16. Jahrhundert. Zur sozialen Verflechtung der Augsburger Bürgermeister und der Stadtpfleger 1518-1618. München: Vögel 1986 (Schriften der Philosophischen Fakultäten der Univ. Augsburg 29); Teuscher, Simon: Bekannte – Klienten – Verwandte. Soziabilität und Politik in der Stadt Bern um 1500. Köln, Weimar, Wien: Böhlau 1998 (Norm u. Struktur 9). For recommendations cf. Jancke 2002 (*Autobiographie als soziale Praxis*), pp. 135-141.

6 Ibid., p. 137f.

7 Ibid., pp. 100-102.

8 Ibid., pp. 123-129.

9 Ibid., pp. 153-158.

Teachers and professors could serve as mediators to other scholars, thus constituting a scholars' network that recruited younger scholars as new members of a transregional scholars' community. Usually they did so by way of recommendation, mostly writing a recommendation letter to one of their contacts.[5] Thus, the student or fellow scholar was able to move on to another place and make his way in his new surroundings more easily, as if he were already known there personally. When, for example, Simon Lemnius (1511-1550) came to Wittenberg to continue his studies he brought letters of recommendation from his former teachers. With these he went to Philipp Melanchthon, one of the most important 16th-century brokers for scholars seeking jobs, funding, or accommodation. Melanchthon made the reading of Lemnius' letters of recommendation part of a public situation, sitting among other scholars and thus creating a ritual of scholars' sociability.[6]

Scholars could act as mediators to powerful men in the world of politics and business as well, thus helping the young men to get funding or employment. With the job might come integration into the employer's network: Lucas Geizkofler (1550-1620), for example, was helped by his elder brother Michael to get access to his brother's employers and patrons, the Fugger family. They supported Lucas' studies as a lawyer, gave him smaller jobs, and took care of his full professional training. After this, they gave him permanent employment. However, Geizkofler's success story with his patrons did not stop at this point. As he writes in his autobiography, his final point of success was when he married the daughter of one of the Fugger's foremost associates, the Hörmanns – a marriage, moreover, which came to pass through the Fuggers' initiative, a fact he was especially proud of. As a result, he was now firmly integrated into the Fuggers' networks, with employment and marriage as the final and decisive elements.[7]

In most cases, gaining access to patronage networks and the support they offered was the main issue. Access to networks was not in all cases deemed an aim in itself, even if it guaranteed support. In some cases it might be a question of how to avoid becoming involved or how to leave a network. This is described most vividly by Stephan Isaac (1542-1597) who was born Jewish, then converted together with his father and his brothers to Lutheranism as a small boy, and later converted again, this time to Catholicism. He studied in Douay, where he had already established himself as a physician and a professor of Hebrew and Chaldaic, when the magistrates of Cologne summoned him to receive a prebend. He had no desire to become a priest, which was contrary to his and his father's wishes for his professional life, but he had to go, evidently because his father and brothers were living in Cologne and because his father as a professor of Hebrew at Cologne university was subject to the magistrates' will. The Isaac family's dependency on the magistrate was aggravated by the fact that they had been received into the city's support system years ago and, after their conversion, had not had many alternatives to find new support networks. In this case, being a powerful patron's client was no individual but a family matter. Stephan Isaac's family solidarity was used by his patrons for their own politics: They wanted a loyal client in their own struggle for church prebends and religious policy. Consequently, Isaac became involved in competion among networks, and he received lucrative offers to change sides. He eventually left Cologne some years later to become a reformed minister near Heidelberg, judging the material resources he got in Cologne much less important than the religious and social pressures to which he was exposed. His case shows the longterm obligations and opportunities involved in patronage networks, spanning more than one generation and covering more than just one individual person.[8]

Martin Luther (1483-1546) shows another possibility in his famous preface to his Latin *Opera omnia* (1545). Changing patrons and networks could also signify the deep changes of belief systems and church structures we know as the Lutheran Reformation. To describe his transformation from Catholic priest to church reformer he uses the language of patronage networks: realizing that he did not get due support from his patron, the pope (*patronus papa*), and from the papal church's networks, he simply accepted the offer of his new patron, the Saxon Elector Friedrich the Wise. Consequently he became part of a quite different network, predominantly politically and territorially structured, with the church having become a matter of territorial and imperial politics. Only after he set up this framework of patronage does Martin Luther describe the development of his theology.[9]

Some points stand out from all these stories and fragments of information: Foremost, patrons made their own decisions, and *they* determined what mattered most to them. They had a range of possibilities to choose from, and they could do so arbitrarily.

NCS/NKW
NET CULTURE SCIENCE
NETZ KULTUR WISSENSCHAFT

EARLY MODERN SCHOLARS' PATRONAGE NETWORKS AND THEIR REPRESENTATION BY AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL WRITERS (16th CENTURY) by Gabriele Jancke (Berlin)

10 Ibid., pp. 144-148.

11 Ibid., p. 173f.; male bonding as part of scholars' education described by Ong, Walter J., S.J.: Latin Language Study as a Renaissance Puberty Rite. In: Studies in Philology 56/2 (April 1959), pp. 103-124, esp. p. 109, p. 113; Ong, W.J., S.J.: Agonistic Structures in Academia: Past to Present. In: Interchange 5/4 (1974), pp. 1-12. – On early modern artisans' male bonding culture cf. Wiesner, Merry E.: Guilds, Male Bonding, and Women's Work in Early Modern Germany. In: Gender & History 1/2 (Summer 1989), pp. 125-147.

12 Eisenstadt, Shmuel N. / Schluchter, Wolfgang / Wittrock, Björn (Eds.): Public Spheres and Collective Identities. New Brunswick, London: Transaction Publ. 2001; Eisenstadt, S.N. (Ed.): Multiple Modernities, New Brunswick, London: Transaction Publ. 2002.

Yet, a number of common values becomes apparent: As in the case of Lucas Geizkofler, the potential client's abilities constituted an asset that counted for much with potential patrons. So, patronage depended on the scholar's/client's merit. It was granted as a favour, but it was not just a personal whim. At least that is the way the scholarly autobiographers want to put it. Other advantages often also played a role, like personal association. Geizkofler's brother was already a member of the patron's network, Sebastian Leonhart was a schoolfellow and friend of his patron's son.

Sharing the same religious loyalties could be a precondition for gaining or retaining support in many cases. Consequently, changing one's religious orientations often meant losing not only certain patrons but also membership in kinship or other support networks, as, for example, Gerhard Oemeken (1485-1562) tells his readers. His family had sent him to study for the priesthood. When he turned Protestant during his studies he lost access to his native family permanently. He managed to win powerful patrons instead, and he presented them as his second family, a source of support as well as shared loyalties.[10] Thus, patronage could affect personal religious decisions, and religious decisions could affect patronage. Lastly, gender was an issue, at least implicitly. Nearly all of the autobiographical texts were written by male authors, and their depiction of patronage is focussed on male actors. The scholarly world they show in their autobiographical writings was largely one of patronage relationships and networks, and it was predominantly a world of males facing other males in their patronage and network activities – a form of male bonding[11]. On the other hand, it is clear that women also acted as patronesses of scholars. So, the question of gaining access to these networks is but partly answered by these male autobiographers. Their texts represent their success in becoming part of patronage networks. Much of their own failings, as well as the role gender really played in their networks, are left out. For early modern scholars, success and failure were certainly questions of patronage rather than of institutions, like church or university. The cultural representation they shaped for themselves in their autobiographical writings may privilege certain actors and their resources. Maybe these authors wanted to make a statement not so much about who really was part of their networks but about whom they were concerned with and about who should be visible for their audience.

Conclusion

Early modern scholars seem to have relied on patronage networks to forward their careers. The fields in which they were most active and influential, namely education, government, religion, were shaped by these networks and their activities within these networks. If we want to call the processes instigated in these areas »modernization«, then we have to take into account that Western modernization processes involved some of the same elements as in other premodern societies. We have to find out more exactly how this worked. Perhaps we should start also thinking in terms of multiple modernities, not just *one* path to just *one* modernity.[12] Changing focus from institutions to networks also brings more complicated issues of gender and religion, of inclusion and exclusion, to the fore. Scholars' networks certainly were not gender-exclusive, but they also were not gender-indifferent. We still have to discover the workings of a network society. But simple narratives of modernization via institutionalization will have to be changed. Autobiographical writings, written by authors who wanted to represent themselves not as autonomous individuals, but rather in relationships and in networks, might give us decisive clues for this.

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NCS/NKW
NET CULTURE SCIENCE
NETZ KULTUR WISSENSCHAFT

EARLY MODERN SCHOLARS' PATRONAGE NETWORKS AND THEIR REPRESENTATION BY AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL WRITERS (16th CENTURY) by Gabriele Jancke (Berlin)

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NCS/NKW
NET CULTURE SCIENCE
NETZ KULTUR WISSENSCHAFT

EARLY MODERN SCHOLARS' PATRONAGE NETWORKS AND THEIR REPRESENTATION BY AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL WRITERS (16th CENTURY) by Gabriele Jancke (Berlin)

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NET CULTURE SCIENCE
NETZ KULTUR WISSENSCHAFT

**EARLY MODERN SCHOLARS' PATRONAGE NETWORKS AND THEIR REPRESENTATION
BY AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL WRITERS (16th CENTURY)** by Gabriele Jancke (Berlin)

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