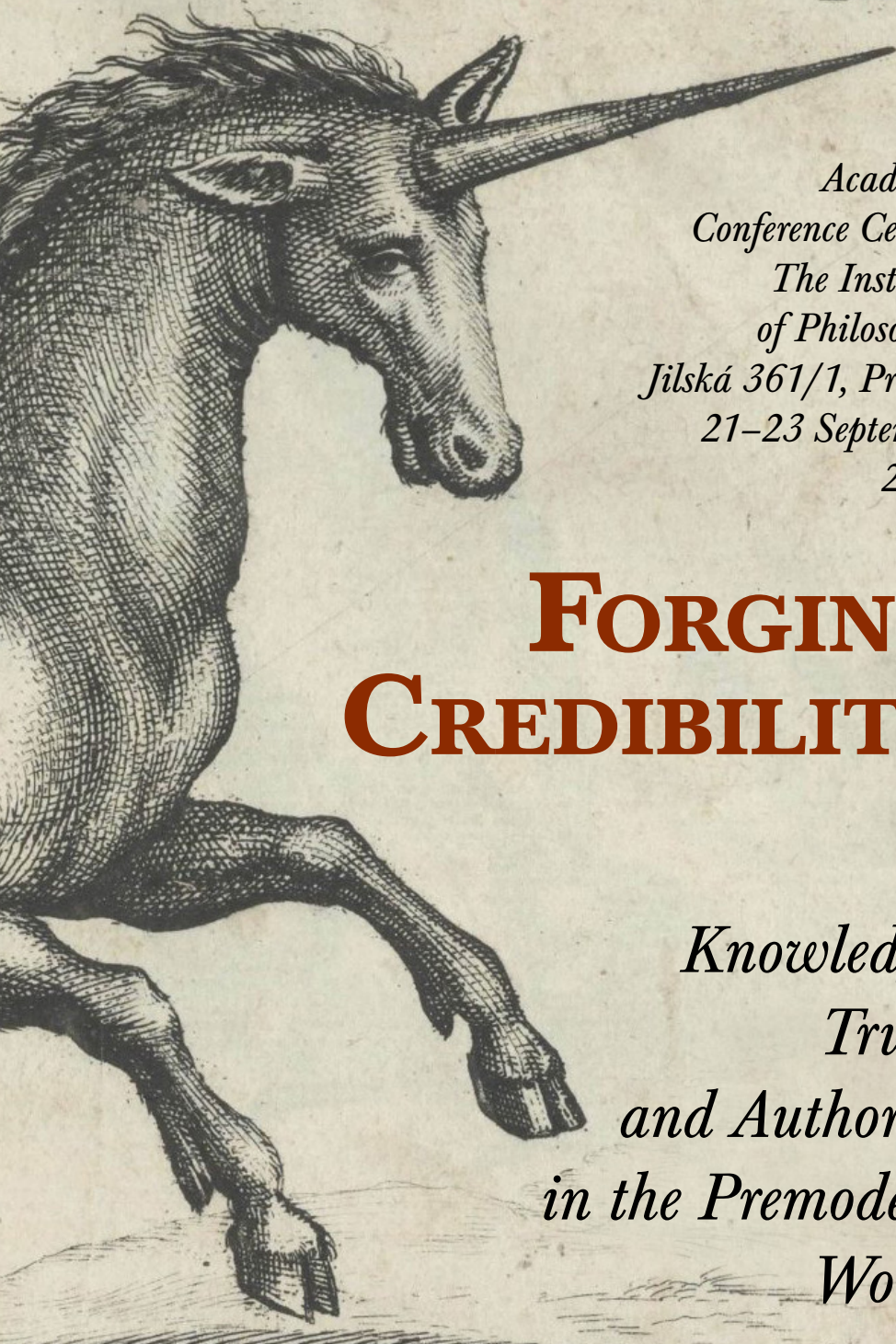




*Academic
Conference Centre,
The Institute
of Philosophy,
Jilská 361/1, Prague
21–23 September
2026*

FORGING CREDIBILITY

*Knowledge,
Trust,
and Authority
in the Premodern
World*



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Ministry of Education,
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Czech Academy
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Filosofický ústav AV ČR
Institute of Philosophy

Monday 21 September

10:00–10:30 Welcome and Introduction

Session I: Political, Confessional and Frontier Credibility

10:30-12:00

Chair: Václav Žůrek

- 10:30 Ludovica Sasso (Dresden University of Technology)
Claiming Authority at Europe's Eastern Frontiers: Neo-Latin Political Poetry and the Politics of Credible Knowledge
- 11:00 Márton Szentpéteri (MOME, Budapest)
From Agrippa to Kolosi Török: Vernacularising Learned Dissent in Unitarian Transylvania
- 11:30 Paweł Cholewicki (Palacký University, Olomouc)
Between Union and Uniformity: Jan of Oświęcim and the Legacy of Florence

12:00–14:00 Lunch break

Session II: Humanist Scholarship and the Struggle for Authority

14:00–15:30

Chair: Lucie Storchová

- 14:00 Simona Iaria (University of Turin)
Literary Models, Humanitas, and Friendship in Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini's Authority in Central and Eastern Europe
- 14:30 Justin P. Meyer (Washington University in St. Louis)
Source Authority and Humanist Intellectual Values: Tacitus and Strabo between Aegidius Tschudi and Beatus Rhenanus (on-line)
- 15:00 Hanna Szabelska (Jagiellonian University, Cracow)
The Virtue of Impartiality in Andrzej Frycz Modrzewski (1503–1572)

15:30–16:00 Coffee break

Session III: Institutional Authority and the Governance of Truth

16:00–17:00

Chair: Vojtěch Bažant

16:00 Luciano Micali (Université de Fribourg)

Jean Gerson on Academic Knowledge and Magisterial Authority

16:30 Roberto Peressin (University of Warsaw)

Construction and Performance of Authority at School: Sources and Symbols of Legitimation at the Danzig Academic Gymnasium in the Second Half of the Sixteenth Century

17:00–17:30 Coffee break

17:30 Evening keynote lecture

Stefano Gulizia (Ca' Foscari University of Venice)

The Forensics of Credibility in Early Modern Universities: A Global Perspective

Conference dinner

Tuesday 22 September

Session IV: Contesting Authority in Natural Knowledge

9:00–10:30

Chair: Lenka Řezníková

9:00 Ovanes Akopyan (Institute of Philosophy, Zagreb)

Forging and Contesting Authority: Giovanni Pico della Mirandola's Attack on Astrology and Its Aftermath

9:30 Martyna Osuch (University of Warsaw)

Challenging Zoological Authority: Early Modern Readers' Responses to Errors and Gaps in Conrad Gessner's Historia animalium

10:00 Jan Čížek (University of Ostrava)

Mosaic Physics between Factuality and Construction: The Case of Theatrum divinum by Matouš Konečný (1616)

10:30–11:00 Coffee break

Session V: Self-Fashioning and the Forging of Expert Authority

11:00–12:00

Chair: Stefano Gulizia

11:00 Vladimír Urbánek (Czech Academy of Sciences, Prague)

*“My Manner of Working is Not Imaginary but Real
& Experimental”: Mechanical Knowledge and the Construction
of Expert Authority in the Case of Johann Christoph Berger*

11:30 Oded Rabinovitch (Tel Aviv University)

*Mathematical Publishing in the Scientific Projects of Blaise-François,
Comte de Pagan (1603–1665)*

12:00–14:00 Lunch break

Session VI: Jesuit Negotiations of Knowledge and Trust

14:00–15:30

Chair: Iva Kovaříčková

14:00 Svorad Zavarský (Slovak Academy of Sciences, Bratislava)

Whom Did Szent-Ivany trust?

14:30 Maciej Jasiński (Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw)

*Astronomy and Authorities in the Works by Polish Jesuit Wojciech
Tylkowski (1624–1695)*

15:00 Kateřina Šolcová (Charles University, Prague)

*Rodrigo de Arriaga (1592–1667) and the Challenges to Natural
Philosophy in Post-White Mountain Prague*

15:30–16:00 Coffee break

Session VII: Experience and Epistemic Legitimacy 16:00–17:00

Chair: Márton Szentpéteri

16:00 Claudia Marsulli (Sapienza University, Rome)

*Forging Authority Through (Supernatural) Experience: Mysticism,
Knowledge, and Epistemic Legitimacy in Early Modern Italy*

16:30 Karl Johann Scharpf (Humboldt University, Berlin)

*Forging Matters of Fact? Lay Testimony and Situational Expertise in
Johann Weichard von Valvasor's Die Ehre des Herzogthums Crain*

Wednesday 23 September

Session VIII: Limits and the Destruction of Credibility

9:00–10:00

Chair: Vladimír Urbánek

- 9:00 Zoltán Tomkó (University of Szeged)
Who Can Write Whose History? An Early Modern Discussion of Historiography by Giovanni Michele Bruto
- 9:30 Jakub Wolak (Polish Academy of Sciences)
The Quincunx in Sir Thomas Browne and Stanisław Orzechowski, or the Limits of Geometrical Paradigm and the Breakdown of the Universal Analogy
- 10:00 Marie-Isabelle Schwarzburger, Michaela Clark (University of Düsseldorf)
Werewolf in Lemgo: The Curious Case of David Welman (1590–1669)

10:30–11:00 Coffee break

Session IX: Reconfiguration of Epistemic Authority around 1700

11:00–12:00

Chair: Petr Pavlas

- 11:00 Daniel Špelda (University of West Bohemia, Pilsen)
Authority, Time, and Method: Fontenelle's Reconfiguration of Epistemic Authority in the Wake of the Quarrel of the Ancients and Moderns
- 11:30 Dagmar Pichová (Masaryk University, Brno)
Arguments from Epistemic Authority: The Correspondence of Émilie Du Châtelet

12:00 Final Discussion, Closing Remarks

Book of Abstracts

Akopyan, Ovanes (Institute of Philosophy, Zagreb)

Forging and Contesting Authority: Giovanni Pico della Mirandola's Attack on Astrology and Its Aftermath

Giovanni Pico della Mirandola's *Disputationes adversus astrologos* (1496) has long been regarded as the most extensive early critique of astrology. Yet the authority from which Pico launched this attack was neither self-evident nor uncontested. This paper examines how Pico constructed his credibility as an arbiter of astrological knowledge, how contemporaries disputed that authority, and how these conflicts shaped the early modern development of astrological science. I argue that Pico's authority rested less on technical astrological expertise than on a carefully staged epistemic performance that combined humanist erudition, philosophical critique, and strategic appeals to intellectual networks, notably through figures such as Marsilio Ficino and Angelo Poliziano. These gestures, however, provoked immediate resistance. Astrologers and scholars, including Lucio Bellanti and Giovanni Pontano, challenged Pico's competence and questioned the authenticity of the *Disputationes*, accusing Savonarolan circles of appropriating and distorting his ideas. Such disputes transformed Pico's critique from a multifaceted philosophical intervention into a polemical, religiously motivated rejection of astrology. By tracing these controversies and their reception in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the paper shows how struggles over scholarly authority decisively influenced which forms of astrological knowledge were deemed credible. Pico's case thus illuminates broader processes through which trust in expertise was negotiated, destabilised, and reconfigured at the threshold of early modern science.

Čížek, Jan (University of Ostrava)

Mosaic Physics between Factuality and Construction: The Case of Theatrum divinum by Matouš Konečný (1616)

Early modern Mosaic physics has usually been associated, at least since Alsted and Comenius, with a distinct group of authors and

a relatively well-defined intellectual programme. This understanding appears in later Enlightenment historiography (Morhof, Buddeus, Brucker) and in much modern scholarship (for example, Jaromír Červenka and Ann Blair). In my paper, the relatively well-known Czech encyclopaedic work *Theatrum divinum* (1616), written by the Bishop of the Unity of the Brethren, Matouš Konečný, is presented from a new perspective. Drawing on a philosophical analysis, the paper argues that *Theatrum divinum* not only meets, in many respects, the criteria usually applied to works of Mosaic natural philosophy, but also, in some respects, surpasses the writings of several traditionally cited representatives of this current (Francisco Vallés, Levinus Lemnius, Thomas Lydiat). This finding highlights the difficulty of providing a clear theoretical and, especially, personal definition of this specific natural-philosophical endeavour. It also raises the question of the extent to which the very thematisation of Mosaic physics, together with its personal and content-related delimitation, functioned as a legitimising strategy for establishing credibility and negotiating epistemic authority in seventeenth-century debates on natural philosophy and knowledge as such.

Gulizia, Stefano (Ca' Foscari University, Venice)

The Forensics of Credibility in Early Modern Universities: A Global Perspective

Since roughly 2010, various studies have examined the vices of learning, the importance of scholarly personae, and the memory and identity of pre-modern institutions, which were rooted in self-fashioning, marriage strategies and household economy, biography, student dissertations, and miscellanist programmes. While most attention has gone to patronage, there has also been a significant legal development accompanying these formations. This paper aims to contribute to this field of study by adopting a comparative framework; I call the resulting picture “the forensics of credibility”. The case studies juxtapose factionalism and normative behaviour. They run as follows and respond to these questions: (i) What is the relationship between state-building, Thomasius’s advocacy of a new “galant” ethic, and the University of Leipzig? What were the legal ramifications

surrounding this period? The centrepiece of this section is the lecture-entertainment by Johann Burkhard Mencke, *De charlataneria eruditorum* (1713–1715), which can be seen as a parodic critique of sinology and orientalism, what Martin Mulsow calls “lost knowledge”. (ii) How were looted books classified once brought from Central Europe to Sweden during the period of military expansionism? What can we learn from this example of forced mobility? The documents analysed in this section provide a brief window into how the state was just one of many actors, alongside theological collections and the rector of the newly formed Uppsala University. (iii) How did the Jesuit China Mission make sense of the circumstances in the 1660s that led to exile and drove them out of the Astronomical Bureau? Was this a personal vendetta from a courtly circle of Neo-Confucian astronomers or the manifestation of a pedagogical division of labour? By moving from Germany to Sweden and China, in a period that remains largely the same, this paper seeks to give a global answer to disciplinary regimes and their punishment, which was sometimes metaphorical and other times quite real.

Paweł Cholewicki (Palacký University, Olomouc)

Between Union and Uniformity: Jan of Oświęcim and the Legacy of Florence

From the moment Jogaila, the Grand Duke of Lithuania, ascended to the Polish throne, the union of the Eastern and Western Churches became an important element of the Jagiellonian religious agenda. In 1476, sections of the Ruthenian clergy proclaimed their obedience to the Pope and recognised the Council of Florence as the “Eighth Ecumenical Council”. Within the Jagiellonian domains, the Observant Franciscans became the principal advocates of a uniate policy. Recognising the validity of Orthodox baptism, they focused their efforts on securing Ruthenian acceptance of papal jurisdiction by establishing ties with major noble houses and promoting miracles performed by saints of their order among Orthodox believers. However, their practice encountered strong opposition from the Polish clergy and intellectual circles, particularly from the long-standing rector of the University of Cracow, Jan of Oświęcim. In his polemical

treatise *Elucidarius errorum ritus Ruthenici* (1500 or 1501), he argued that the Orthodox should only be received in the Church after being given conditional baptism administered in the Catholic rite. The treatise accused the Orthodox of having lost the proper rite of the sacraments as well as their understanding, and it is marked by a pronounced hostility. The position presented in the *Elucidarius* was clearly shared by the Polish Church hierarchy, which ultimately favoured the Latinisation of the Orthodox rather than any uniate settlement. My paper will evaluate this controversy by taking a closer look at the arguments and recommendations set out in the *Elucidarius* against the practice established by the Observant Franciscans within the framework defined by the Council of Florence. It will also examine the efforts of both parties to gain legitimacy for their approach at the Roman Curia. Whom should be trusted when crafting the Church unity in Ruthenia?

Iaria, Simona (University of Turin)

Literary Models, Humanitas, and Friendship in Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini's Authority in Central and Eastern Europe

The interest of Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini (1405–1464), later Pope Pius II (1458–1464), in Central and Eastern Europe is well documented. He cultivated this interest from around 1450 onwards, and it intensified with the Ottoman advance and the growing tensions with the Hussites. Piccolomini came to be regarded as an authority on the region through the works he wrote, which drew together information and reports gathered during his service in the imperial chancellery. This paper examines his correspondents, particularly those in Bohemia, and the role they played in establishing his authority on Central and Eastern Europe. It focuses on the formative period of these contacts, when Piccolomini was serving the emperor and was crowned poet laureate (1442). His prestige, reflected both in his correspondence and in manuscripts preserved in Central European libraries, formed the basis of an intellectual network that he built and maintained through letters. This network included figures such as Prokop von Rabstein, Jan Tuschek, Johannes

Schindel, and Wenzel von Bochow, as well as members of the clergy and university masters associated with the imperial court and the Prague city administration. These exchanges continued even after Piccolomini became a priest and later a bishop. An examination of this correspondence sheds light on the topics they discussed, and, above all, on the mechanisms through which Piccolomini established and sustained his scholarly authority. The letters also reveal his correspondents' efforts to supply him with books, as well as their collecting of his own letters and literary works (including the comedy *Chrysis*, the *Historia de duobus amantibus*, and *De miseriis curialium*), which they regarded as models worthy of imitation.

Jasiński, Maciej (Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw)

Astronomy and authorities in the works by Polish Jesuit Wojciech Tytkowski (1624–1695)

Wojciech Tytkowski (1624–1695) was a Polish Jesuit, teacher at Jesuit colleges, and polymath. He authored works on a wide range of subjects, from logic to agronomy. His achievements in theology and philosophy were highly regarded by his contemporaries. Although later scholars acknowledged the soundness of some of his observations in scientific and practical matters, his name eventually became almost synonymous with obscurantism and intellectual backwardness. In fact, most of his oeuvre has received only limited or superficial scholarly attention. Previous scholarship has noted the remarkable range of authorities he cites, but this aspect of his work has never been examined systematically. This paper focuses on the authorities Tytkowski invokes in passages devoted to astronomy. It analyses which authors and opinions he cites and how he incorporates them into his argument. It also considers his position within the confessional constraints that shaped Jesuit astronomy and compares his approach with that of other Jesuit authors of the period. By doing so, the paper contributes both to the study of Jesuit polymathic writing and to a broader understanding of how Jesuit teachers employed scholarly authority in discussions of astronomy. The main source analysed here is Tytkowski's multidisciplinary work *Philosophia*

curiosa, often regarded as his principal publication. The first edition, published in 1669, appeared in a single volume, while the expanded second edition was issued in ten volumes between 1680 and 1690. In 1692, Tytkowski published an abridged Polish version under the title *Uczone rozmowy* (*Erudite Conversations*). Although the work follows the traditional Aristotelian disposition, it also engages with a number of contemporary questions. The author often simplifies topics by posing them as seemingly bizarre questions.

Marsulli, Claudia (Sapienza University, Rome)

Forging Authority Through (Supernatural) Experience: Mysticism, Knowledge, and Epistemic Legitimacy in Early Modern Italy

In 1654, Lorenza Tedeschi, a Carmelite tertiary nun, appeared before the Holy Office in Naples to testify about her long-standing experience of divinely inspired illuminations. This resulted in a substantial manuscript containing visions, descriptions of mystical phenomena and revelations. Rather than merely fulfilling her confessor's request, Lorenza's writing foregrounds a form of authority rooted in her own, first-hand experience of supernatural phenomena – whose features she seeks to identify through a multilayered framework of self-discernment. In doing so, despite lacking formal education, Lorenza articulates a coherent and self-legitimising body of knowledge rooted primarily in the mystical intellectual tradition while also engaging with natural philosophy and experimental science (particularly alchemy), which function as epistemic resources for grounding, interpreting, and communicating experiential knowledge. This study examines Lorenza's manuscript as a case study of experience-based mystical authority in order to open a broader discussion of early modern convergences between forms of knowledge derived from mystical epistemologies and emerging models of epistemic legitimacy based on experience, observation and experimentation. Reconsidering the pivotal yet often overshadowed role of mysticism in the production of knowledge, this study argues that mystical environments could serve as significant sites for negotiating epistemic authority, revealing shared experiential logics across religious and scientific cultures in seventeenth-century Italy.

Justin P. Meyer (Washington University in St. Louis)

Source Authority and Humanist Intellectual Values: Tacitus and Strabo between Aegidius Tschudi and Beatus Rhenanus

Renaissance humanists transformed European scholarship and developed powerful, critical mechanisms for discussing and expressing credibility and authority. The challenge for scholars is to situate these transformations within European intellectual history. The predominant model for understanding humanist authority-building is a teleological claim that the humanists created modern scholarship. By studying a 1536 debate among the German-speaking humanists Beatus Rhenanus and Aegidius Tschudi about the credibility of two ancient authors, I will show that these arguments rely on superficial comparisons between modern and humanist scholarship and misunderstand humanist source criticism.

I demonstrate that the humanists' criticism expressed context-specific concerns about identifying, creating, defending, and attacking credibility. Rhenanus' and Tschudi's debate was bound to contemporary issues about what they could learn about the German past and, therefore, how the Germans fit into the mental and political map of Central Europe. A significant, but thorny, question was the origin of the name "German." Answering this could identify who had claims to the name "German" and what this claim meant. Unfortunately, there were two irreconcilable answers: based on Tacitus, Rhenanus declared that it was a native invention exclusive to the Germans, while Tschudi used Strabo to claim it was a Roman imposition to show that the Gauls and Germans were related. My research shows that both humanists drew on established intellectual values about eyewitness knowledge, scholarly diligence, and perceived national identity to make arguments that served contemporary patriotic and political concerns. Rhenanus was committed to a German patriotic history based on Tacitus; Tschudi was devoted to a Swiss political history to separate the Swiss from the Germans. Placing their arguments in the context of the Renaissance reveals that their forms of credibility-building reflected ways of conceptualising

sources that expressed contemporary values and major debates about the nature of national and political belonging in Central Europe.

Osuch, Martyna (University of Warsaw)

Challenging Zoological Authority: Early Modern Readers' Responses to Errors and Gaps in Conrad Gessner's Historia animalium

In his pioneering work, *Historia Animalium* (1551), Conrad Gessner sought to compile all available knowledge about animals. He drew on printed sources, correspondence, and oral testimonies, sometimes expressing doubts about certain information or critiquing other authors. However, Gessner's primary aim was to create a comprehensive encyclopaedic compendium rather than to verify every claim about animals. As a result, many of his descriptions, particularly of lesser-known species such as those from Eastern Europe, were incomplete, imprecise, or based solely on hearsay or fragmentary information. Early modern readers rarely accepted printed authority passively. Through marginalia, corrections, vernacular notes, and additions, they engaged critically with the text, thereby entering into a dialogue with the author. *Historia Animalium*, which presents a wide range of zoological knowledge, was read by diverse audiences – physicians, preachers, and townspeople. Different reader groups sought different types of information and possessed varying levels of expertise. This can be seen in ownership marks and readers' annotations preserved in surviving copies of the book. This paper presents examples of reader interventions in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century copies of *Historia Animalium*. By examining these traces, the study demonstrates how readers actively negotiated Gessner's zoological authority, revealing the strategies they employed when confronted with errors, omissions, or uncertain information.

Pichová, Dagmar (Masaryk University, Brno)

Arguments from Epistemic Authority: The Correspondence of Émilie Du Châtelet

This paper examines the construction of epistemic authority in the correspondence of the French philosopher and scientist Émilie Du

Châtelet. Du Châtelet's significance in the history of philosophy and science has been increasingly recognised in recent scholarship devoted to her writings (e.g., Hagengruber, 2022; Le Ru, 2019). However, her correspondence with contemporary scholars has received only partial scholarly attention (e.g., Passeron, 2001; Bonnel, 2000). In her letters, Du Châtelet discussed a wide range of philosophical and scientific questions, tested her ideas, and developed original theories through epistolary exchange. Her "scientific" correspondence reveals an extensive network of intellectual interactions with contemporary scholars and offers valuable insights into their approaches to scientific inquiry. The paper analyses how Du Châtelet and her correspondents, such as Mairan, Clairaut, and Algarotti, constructed and negotiated epistemic authority in their scientific discussions, and how they positioned themselves in relation to contemporary intellectual authorities such as Leibniz and Newton. Methodologically, the paper approaches Du Châtelet's correspondence through the lens of modern argumentation theory, with particular attention to arguments from authority (Walton 1997). The paper examines how references to epistemic authorities function in scientific debates conducted through correspondence, and how such appeals are justified or challenged. Although the analysed correspondence does not directly pertain to a Central European context, the proposed conceptual framework is applicable to a broader corpus of early modern scientific discussions. In this way, the paper contributes to a better understanding of epistemic authority and argumentative practices in early modern European philosophy and science.

Rabinovitch, Oded (Tel Aviv University)

Mathematical Publishing in the Scientific Projects of Blaise-François, Comte de Pagan (1603–1665)

Blaise-François, Comte de Pagan, was a high-ranking military engineer who exemplified the ideals of the French "nobility of the sword." However, he also published texts on fortifications, geometry, astrology, and planetary orbits, as well as a conduct manual for the aristocracy – all works that are thoroughly neglected in modern scholarship, in

spite of Pagan's prominence in the seventeenth century. He therefore provides an especially apt case study for understanding the impact of noble military culture on seventeenth-century science: instead of avoiding the putative "stigma" of print, Pagan relished opportunities for scientific authorship. This paper focuses on Pagan's *Ten Books on Geometrical Theorems* (1651, revised 1654). The book appears to bring together a disparate range of subjects, from the geometry of parallel lines to ellipses and fortifications, without regard for Euclidean conventions for presenting such material. This paper argues, however, that the book in fact anchors Pagan's future publications by adapting the practice of a military engineer to the broad interests of its author, especially in astrology, and draws on the culture of the French aristocracy to legitimate such a venture.

Micali, Luciano (Fribourg University)

Jean Gerson on Academic Knowledge and Magisterial Authority

As an influential professor of theology and chancellor of the University of Paris, Jean Gerson enjoyed immense authority in the intellectual landscape of the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. His works became major reference points in ecclesiology, systematic theology, and mysticism, and were already circulating in an exceptionally large number of manuscripts during his lifetime. A central aspect of Gerson's thought is his reflection on the proper pursuit of knowledge, particularly in theology. He conceives of the university as the *communis schola theologicae veritatis* (common school of theological truth), where Scripture is interpreted and the foundations of theology are discussed and expounded in order to safeguard Christian doctrine against dangerous interpretations that may lead to heresy and schism. Within this framework, Gerson frequently outlines the moral and intellectual qualities of the ideal university master, whose magisterial authority is essential not only within the academic community but also in establishing theological truth in doctrinal controversies and in combating heresy beyond the university. This paper aims to reconstruct the key elements of Gerson's account of magisterial authority within the broader framework of his conception

of the production of reliable and beneficial academic knowledge. It will also examine the strategies and practical means by which academic credibility is established according to Gerson, including his emphasis on Latin as the language of learned tradition, in contrast to the vernacular, which he regards as a disruptive element in mystical and systematic theology.

Peressin, Roberto (University of Warsaw)

Construction and Performance of Authority at School: Sources and Symbols of Legitimation at the Danzig Academic Gymnasium in the Second Half of the Sixteenth Century

This paper investigates the foundations and strategies through which the concept of scholarly authority was constructed in a Protestant educational institution founded in the second half of the sixteenth century. The focus will be on the Academic Gymnasium of Danzig, a major centre of Reformed education in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, where several generations of students received an education in theology, classical languages, rhetoric, law and medicine. The paper examines a selection of sources that reveal which personalities, works, doctrines, and symbolic references were mobilised in the institution's early decades to establish credibility and authority. While the intellectual models that inspired this type of school, including Luther, Melanchthon, Johannes Sturm, Ramus, and Erasmus, are well known, less attention has been paid to how authority was actively staged in everyday school life. In particular, the paper will analyse the role of rituals, taught subjects and textbooks, and rhetorical practices (such as *prolusiones* and *disputationes*) in shaping and performing authority. Finally, the paper will consider how this process interacted with civic power, upon which the institution depended and from which it derived its legitimacy, in order to assess how scholarly authority was achieved within a broader urban and confessional framework.

Sasso, Ludovica (Dresden University of Technology)

Claiming Authority at Europe's Eastern Frontiers: Neo-Latin Political Poetry and the Politics of Credible Knowledge

This paper examines the construction of scholarly authority in Neo-Latin political poetry linked to East-Central Europe between the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. Through selected case studies – Georgius Sissoreus in Dalmatia, Ugolino Verino in relation to the Hungarian court of Matthias Corvinus, and Girolamo Balbi in Habsburg-imperial contexts – it explores how credibility was forged at Europe's eastern frontiers amid Ottoman pressure and political fragmentation. The three authors represent distinct configurations of authority. Verino addressed the Hungarian court without holding a stable diplomatic mandate, intervening in debates on rulership and Imperial responsibility from a position of institutional exteriority. Sissoreus, writing from the Dalmatian frontier zone, articulated a collective identity in the face of Ottoman threat and positioned himself as an authoritative interpreter of frontier experience. Educated in Italian humanist milieus, he transformed anti-Ottoman poetry into a vehicle for intellectual self-legitimation within emerging Croatian humanism. Balbi, by contrast, operated within Habsburg and imperial structures and held recognised institutional roles. His case demonstrates that even formally integrated intellectuals relied on poetic production as a complementary mode of legitimation. Literary performance did not replace the office but enhanced and publicised it. The paper interprets these texts as performances of political knowledge through which authors constructed competence, negotiated credibility, and positioned themselves within shifting hierarchies of power. In a multi-confessional frontier space characterised by hybrid political structures and a sustained military threat, authority could not rely solely on institutional mandate or literary prestige. It had to be performed and made credible across transregional networks of communication. The comparison highlights authority as a relational and context-sensitive form of political knowledge emerging from interconnected humanist milieus spanning Italy and East-Central Europe.

Scharpf, Karl Johann (Humboldt University of Berlin)

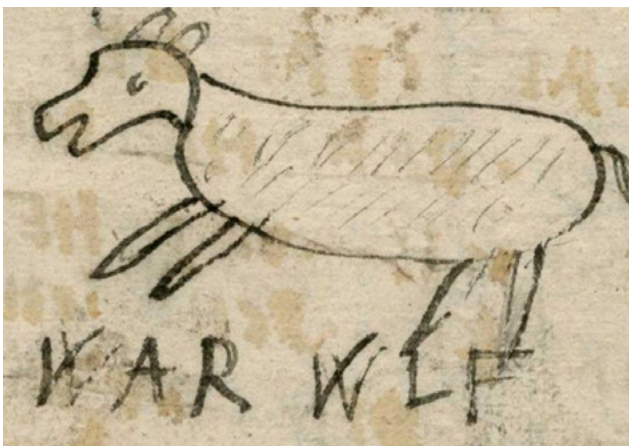
Forging Matters of Fact? Lay Testimony and Situational Expertise in Johann Weichard von Valvasor's Die Ehre des Herzogthums Crain

This paper examines Johann Weichard von Valvasor's monumental topography *Die Ehre des Herzogthums Crain* (1689). It focuses on the epistemic role of lay testimony and explores how Valvasor systematically recorded, curated, and transformed local accounts of epistemic instability into credible knowledge about natural phenomena. Drawing on a praxeological perspective, the paper analyses Valvasor's use of questionnaires, correspondence networks, and collaborative information-gathering practices to establish matters of fact. Rather than treating testimony as a theoretically fragile substitute for direct observation, the paper argues that Valvasor utilised testimony as a socially embedded epistemic practice. Particular attention is paid to how credibility was forged through what may be termed situational expertise. For example, hunters might testify about demonic interference during hunts, miners might recount encounters with subterranean dragons, and peasants might describe the magical phenomena they occasionally experienced. Here, authority did not primarily derive from learned status but from proximity and contextual competence. By highlighting these practices, the paper challenges modern scholarly narratives that describe a linear shift from confirmatory to merely informative uses of testimony in the early modern world. Although limited, the contributions of women, peasants, and other non-elite individuals to the stabilisation of knowledge claims through their testimonies were significant. By examining these practices, the paper shifts the focus from the supposed epistemic weakness of testimony to its undeniable importance in everyday use. In doing so, it reveals early modern constructions of credibility, authority, and belonging within collaborative knowledge-making practices, which have largely gone unnoticed thus far.

Schwarzburger, Marie-Isabelle – Clark, Michaela (University of Düsseldorf)

Werewolf in Lemgo: The Curious Case of David Welman (1590–1669)

This paper outlines the case of David Welman, the werewolf-pharmacist of Lemgo (Germany), as it relates to the authority of public opinion in the early modern period. The owner of two apothecaries, Welman made a successful living despite the repeated plundering of his businesses. But this was not to last. In early 1642, he accused his assistant and conspiring villagers of theft, and many were punished by the local court. What followed was an anonymous smear campaign against the pharmacist, aimed at undermining his social credibility. Over the following eight months, 35 libellous letters about Welman were posted in popular public spaces across Lemgo. These accuse and mark the pharmacist, both in word and in image, as a wizarding werewolf. While written and drawn by different hands, the imagery is nearly identical: Welman, wolflike, on all fours, sometimes situated upon the roof of his apothecary. As such, the documents are memetic in that, to paraphrase Limor Schiffman's (2013) definition of a meme, they share common content, form, and stance. They were created with awareness of one another and were circulated, imitated, and transformed by various authors. In the case of Welman, these letters provided sufficient evidence to see the pharmacist accused and judged in a Lemgo witch trial fifteen years later. The case of Welman



demonstrates that consistent and repetitive imagery held tremendous authority in the early modern period, especially in the authentication of rumour. No amount of professional success could withstand

the court of public opinion once trust had been lost and discredit amplified by the public libel letters. Not unlike memes today, these illustrated diatribes gained enough traction to produce consequential, material results. At almost eighty years of age, David Welman, the werewolf of Lemgo, was sentenced to death based on fake news made true through a seventeenth-century meme.

Šolcová, Kateřina (Charles University, Prague)

Rodrigo de Arriaga (1592–1667) and the Challenges to Natural Philosophy in Post-White Mountain Prague

Aristotle's authority in the field of natural philosophy remained largely unrivalled until the late Middle Ages, when rapid intellectual developments at the beginning of the modern period brought about significant change. While early modern thought remained deeply rooted in Aristotelianism, here was an increasing desire to challenge traditional doctrine, particularly in its scholastic form, and to move beyond it. Among the issues debated in natural philosophy, the problem of quantity – one of the ten Aristotelian categories – was of particular importance. This paper examines the doctrine of continuous quantity in the teachings of Rodrigo de Arriaga (1592–1667), a Jesuit professor at the University of Prague and the most influential philosopher in post-White Mountain Bohemia. His unconventional approach to the continuum conflicted with Peripatetic orthodoxy, arousing serious concern among his superiors. For the Society of Jesus, Aristotle had been a binding authority in philosophy since the time of its founder, St Ignatius of Loyola. Drawing on letters sent to Arriaga from Rome by Superior General Mutio Vitelleschi around the time of the publication of Arriaga's major work, *Cursus philosophicus*, this paper will demonstrate the innovative features of Arriaga's natural philosophy and assess its reception within the order.

Špelda, Daniel (University of West Bohemia, Pilsen)

Authority, Time, and Method: Fontenelle's Reconfiguration of Epistemic Authority in the Wake of the Quarrel of the Ancients and Moderns

This paper reads Bernard de Fontenelle's *Histoire de l'Académie royale des sciences* (1699–1715) as a systematic intervention in early modern debates on epistemic authority. While the Quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns is often treated as a literary controversy, its scientific dimension revolved around a central question: where does authority in knowledge reside? The partisans of the Ancients conceded the expansion of modern empirical knowledge but denied that this implied intellectual superiority. Modern sciences, they argued, merely benefited from temporal accumulation, accidental discoveries, and the foundational genius of ancient masters. Scientific progress thus appeared additive rather than structural, derivative rather than original. In this framework, epistemic authority remained anchored in antiquity. Bernard de Fontenelle's volumes relocate epistemic authority from antiquity to method and institutional practice. First, Fontenelle rejects the mere passage of time as a sufficient cause of scientific advancement, emphasising instead experimental discipline, technical precision, and collective verification. Second, he undermines the additive conception of science by presenting modern inquiry as paradigmatically distinct from ancient natural philosophy: inductive procedure replaces speculative deduction, and provisional hypotheses replace closed systems. Third, he reframes contingent discoveries as epistemically insignificant unless integrated into a rational and reproducible framework. Central to this shift is Fontenelle's concept of the "history of the human spirit." Ancient science is treated as an early developmental stage rather than a normative authority. Epistemic legitimacy rests not on origin, tradition, or the authority of founding figures, but on methodological reflexivity and institutionalised critique. The paper thus proposes reading Fontenelle's texts as an important moment in the relocation of intellectual authority from antiquity to the evolving structures of modern scientific practice.

Szabelska, Hanna (Jagiellonian University, Cracow)

The Virtue of Impartiality in Andrzej Frycz Modrzewski (1503–1572)

This paper examines the concept of impartiality as both an epistemic and moral virtue in the thought of the Erasmian Andrzej Frycz Modrzewski, and situates it within the broader historiography of objectivity (Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison). First, it shows that impartiality, as a virtue of neutral arbiters, such as the king convoking a national synod and its deputies, was regarded as equally important as the force of the arguments advanced by both sides, for example, in debates over conflicting doctrines of the Holy Trinity. However, Modrzewski did not employ the term “impartialis”, in contrast to Sebastian Franck, who introduced “unparteiisch” into the German literary vocabulary. The argument is supported by textual evidence from *Liber de ecclesia* (excluded from the 1551 Kraków edition of *Commentariorum de Republica emendanda libri quinque* due to censorship and published only in 1554 in Basel) and *Sylvae quattuor*, which appeared posthumously in Raków in 1590. Secondly, the paper demonstrates that Modrzewski’s approach corroborates the hypothesis of Anita Traninger and Kathryn Murphy. Specifically, it lends weight to the claim that humanist writings lack a general concept of impartiality, making it a novelty in the eyes of John Wilkins and other members of the Royal Society. The analysis of Antoine Furetière’s *Dictionnaire universel*, together with Jean-Baptiste Brutel de la Rivière’s expanded 1727 entry on “impartial”, is further informed by Pierre Bayle’s entry on Modrevius as a religious mediator, whose mission was inherently doomed to failure. Furthermore, de la Rivière’s citation from Bayle’s *Réponse aux questions d’un provincial* regarding the rarity of impartiality reinforces the argument. Taken together, these sources suggest that the gap between Modrzewski and Bacon, who anticipated later natural philosophers concerned with impartiality, stemmed from a sceptical crisis. Lastly, the paper discusses how Stanisław Lubieniecki (1623–1675) integrated Modrzewski and Bacon into his account of religious toleration and free speech, framed within the context of Tacitean republicanism, in *Theatrum cometicum*. The arguments outlined here culminate in the conclusion that the

development of experimental philosophy gave rise to an ambiguous notion of impartiality, in contrast to post-Kantian objectivity.

Szentpéteri, Márton (MOME, Budapest)

From Agrippa to Kolosi Török: Vernacularising Learned Dissent in Unitarian Transylvania

This paper examines the vernacular afterlife of learned authority in seventeenth-century Transylvania through the oeuvre of the Unitarian minister and poet Kolosi Török István. It returns to a thesis first advanced by the author at the Institute for Literary Studies of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in 2001 and at an ISIH conference in Istanbul in 2003: that *Az asszonyi nemnek nemességéről, méltóságáról és ditséretéről való Rythmusok* (Rhythms on the Nobility, Dignity, and Praise of the Female Sex) is not an original work of “Renaissance feminism”, as it was long taken to be, but a substantial Hungarian poetic translation and adaptation of Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim’s *De nobilitate et praecellentia foeminei sexus*. Agrippa’s text is itself a learned declamation overturning entrenched scholarly commonplaces that present women as inferior, and precisely this polemical form made it especially meaningful in a Unitarian context. Read as a whole, Kolosi Török’s surviving corpus reveals remarkable thematic coherence. A *domi doctus* reader of Renaissance philosophy, he produced vernacular adaptations of Agrippa, Ficino, and Reuchlin, including *Az Szent János evangélista és apostol históriája* (The History of Saint John the Evangelist and Apostle) and *Az világi embereknek bolondságán és nyomorúságán való siralom* (Lament on the Folly and Misery of Worldly People). Yet these translations are markedly selective. Compared to their Latin sources, they are stripped of most of the Hermetic and Christian Cabalistic elements that gave them much of their intellectual force. This was a deliberate act of confessional mediation. Kolosi addressed a broader Hungarian-speaking public largely unaware of these traditions, while their deeper significance remained legible to the Unitarian elite, including figures such as his master Szentmártoni Bodó János. In this milieu, Agrippa could be valued as one of the *reclamatores*: not as a doctrinal

Antitrinitarian authority, but as a prestigious learned predecessor whose declamatory overthrow of false commonplaces made him usable within the genealogical logic already exemplified by Dávid Ferenc, namely the recovery of earlier witnesses against corrupted orthodoxy.

Tomkó, Zoltán (University of Szeged)

Who Can Write Whose History? An Early Modern Discussion of Historiography by Giovanni Michele Bruto

In 1562, Giovanni Michele Bruto published his first major historical work, the anti-Medici History of Florence, in Lyon. The Medici dynasty attempted to suppress it immediately after publication. Less well known is that the work apparently caused controversy even before publication. In a letter at the end of the volume, Bruto complains to a friend that, unlike other authors who are attacked by envious readers only after their works are published, he finds himself attacked at a time when the critics cannot even know what they are criticising. In 1566, the preface to the Italian translation of Bruto's *History of Florence* was republished as an anti-Giovio pamphlet by the Italian Federico di Scipione degli Alberti. The volume also reprinted (in Italian only) the same letter that Bruto had published in 1562. This time, however, the end of the letter had been revised in response to critics who apparently argued that a foreigner, in this case, a Venetian, could not write the history of another people. The same issue arose in connection with one of Bruto's later works. In 1574, he began work on his monumental *History of Hungary* as court historian to Stephen Báthory. In 1583, he published a collection of writings in Cracow, including a treatise on historiography entitled *De historiae laudibus*. There, he once again defended himself against those who claimed that a foreigner could not write someone else's history. For this purpose, he used a revised version of his previous apology, which presents a highly elaborated concept that turns the entire critique on its head and argues that it is precisely foreigners who are in a position to write a reliable historical account. This paper examines the evolution of Bruto's historical thinking and the argumentative strategies through

which he sought to defend the legitimacy of his works and establish his authority.

Urbánek, Vladimír (Czech Academy of Sciences, Prague)

“My Manner of Working is Not Imaginary but Real & Experimental”: Mechanical Knowledge and the Construction of Expert Authority in the Case of Johann Christoph Berger

Building on the work of Eric H. Ash, this paper examines how expertise functioned in a period before stable institutional mechanisms certified knowledge. In the seventeenth century, experts often did not receive institutional confirmation of their knowledge from universities, state offices, and professional bodies, as in modern times. Instead, expertise emerged through negotiated relationships between practitioners and the audiences whose recognition they sought. Material results mattered, but so did performance: credibility depended on persuading patrons, scholars, and officials that one's knowledge was both reliable and useful. Focusing on the Moravian nobleman and exile Johann Christoph Berger (Jan Pergar of Perg), the paper reconstructs how mechanical knowledge was fashioned into public authority in mid-1630s England. Presenting himself as a technological inventor and specialist in mine drainage, Berger emphasised that his methods were “real & experimental,” contrasting embodied, practice-based knowledge with merely bookish learning. His self-fashioning responded to a competitive, expanding market for useful knowledge, shaped by economic pressures, mining ventures, and reformist projects. Berger mobilised multiple arenas of validation. He engaged the Hartlib circle around Samuel Hartlib, petitioned the English crown, addressed civic authorities in London, and sought endorsement from professors at Gresham College. By aligning himself with established scholars and representatives of secular power, he attempted to appropriate their authority and social prestige. His memoranda and requests reveal strategic self-presentation, calibrated to different audiences yet consistently foregrounding experiment, utility, and public benefit. Through this case study, the paper argues that early modern expertise was not merely a matter of technical

competence but of social negotiation. Mechanical knowledge became authoritative when successfully embedded in networks of patronage, communication, and institutional prestige. Berger's career thus illuminates the contingent processes through which "expert" identities were constructed, contested, and recognised in seventeenth-century England.

Wolak, Jakub (Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw)

The Quincunx in Sir Thomas Browne and Stanisław Orzechowski, or the Limits of Geometrical Paradigm and the Breakdown of the Universal Analogy

The quincunx figure is most commonly associated with Thomas Browne's *The Garden of Cyrus*, written in 1658 and identified as a work of natural philosophy or natural history. Browne seems to persuade his reader that the world is pervaded by the quincunx figure, which is perhaps most evident in seeds and in the phenomena of plant generation, discussed in the central part of the five chapters of his work. Almost a hundred years earlier, Stanisław Orzechowski published *Quincunx, To iest wzor Korony Polskiej na cynku wystawiony* (Quincunx or the Forme of the Polish Crowne Presented on a Cinque). In his 1564 dialogue, Orzechowski, a brilliant rhetorician and turbulent Catholic polemicist, uses the figure of the quincunx in a politico-theological context to persuade his reader of the natural, fundamental properties of the Crown of the Kingdom of Poland. Both Browne and Orzechowski write in the Neoplatonist tradition and invoke the authority of the "divine philosopher". They both emphasise that the quincunx, despite reportedly being a pre-existing form that determines the phenomena they consider, is also the form of knowledge, thereby determining human cognition and, in particular, the faculty of sight. It is widely accepted that Browne belongs to the hieroglyphical tradition, and this paper argues that Orzechowski does too, with all his quincunxial mnemonics and architectural symbolism centred on identifying his pyramidal three-dimensional quincunx with the Altar of Burnt Offering and the True Cross. Finally, the paper shows that both writers, albeit in different ways, acknowledge the limits of the geometric paradigm within which they develop their respective considerations. The belief

that temporal phenomena, such as the generation of plants or the constitution of a given polity, may mirror a geometrical form is tacitly recognised as unsustainable in both works. This recognition has significant consequences for the authority of both writers, who, unable to uphold the initial proposition of analogy, resort to irony and literary playfulness (Browne) or to fideism and propheticism (Orzechowski). However, by doing so, they ultimately demonstrate their dual fidelity: to Plato the philosopher and to Plato the artist.

Zavarský, Svorad (Slovak Academy of Sciences, Bratislava)

Whom Did Szent-Ivany Trust?

Martinus Szent-Ivany SJ, a polymathic scholar of the late seventeenth century based at the University of *Tyrnavia* (Trnava, Nagyszombat), authored numerous dissertations on natural philosophy, history, and (polemical) theology. His life was closely tied to books: he served as prefect of the Tyrnavian Jesuit library and of the university publishing house, and he was also appointed Imperial censor for the Kingdom of Hungary. The wide scope of his work suggests that he relied on a broad range of sources, primarily extracting information from books. However, identifying his sources is often a difficult philological task, since he rarely cited his authors. Nevertheless, some of his works contain explicit indications of the authorities on whom he relied. Of particular interest in this respect is his metascientific treatise *De scientiis in genere* (On Sciences in General). Szent-Ivany clearly sought to present himself as an authority while simultaneously leaning on others' authority. In this paper, I aim to interpret Szent-Ivany's choice of authorities, what he believed to be true and what he did not. I also seek to answer the question of what strategies he employed to establish credibility with his readers. In doing so, I hope to draw a portrait of a typical late seventeenth-century Jesuit scholar from the Central European periphery.

Monoceros Unicornu .

Einhorn .

