



*The Reception of the Church Fathers and Early Church Historians, c. 1470–1650.* Andreas Ammann (Universität Bern), Sam Kennerley (Trinity College, Cambridge), Kirsten Mcfarlane (Lincoln College, Oxford), 23.09.2016.

**Reviewed by** Stefan Bauer

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On 23 September 2016, (lay) historians and literary scholars assembled at Trinity College, Cambridge, to reflect on “The Reception of the Church Fathers and Early Church Historians, c. 1470–1650”. One of their principal aims was to ponder what impact these earlier Christian sources had on the development of the early modern sense of the Christian past. Today’s scholarship investigating this reception comes in many forms.

ANDREW TAYLOR (Cambridge) paid very close philological attention to how Philo was read and edited in the 1550s. RICHARD SERJEANTSON (Cambridge) underlined (with reference to Arnaldo Momigliano) that scholars have only recently recognized that the foundations of historical scholarship were laid by church historians. He tracked the great controversy from the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries about the place and the time of Emperor Constantine’s baptism, discussing the views of Bartolomeo Platina (d. 1481), Johannes Löwenklau (d. 1594) and Jean Morin (d. 1659).

ANTHONY GRAFTON (Princeton) also quoted Momigliano as he had been “spot-on” in pointing out the importance of Eusebius for early modern scholars in the 1960s. In his talk, Grafton followed the “twists and turns” of the Eusebian revival in the Renaissance and Reformation. Eusebius’s inclusion of original documents in his *Church History* had paved the way for the documentary

method of sixteenth-century scholars. Grafton told the story of how Eusebius inspired such diverse figures such as Paul of Middelburg (d. 1534), Guillaume Budé (d. 1540), Thomas Cranmer (d. 1556) and John Foxe (d. 1587). Eusebius’s practice of working with assistants might have inspired the team-work project of the Magdeburg Centuries.

CRISTINA DONDI (Oxford) presented her data-based project “The Fifteenth-Century Book Trade”, which allows scholars to retrace the distribution of incunables across the world. Material evidence (bindings, signatures, marginalia etc.) is used to identify the movements of early printed books. MADELINE MCMAHON (Princeton) explained how Desiderius Erasmus (d. 1536) elevated the reception of a church father to a new level by fashioning an image of himself based on Jerome; this was, in turn, a Jerome based on his own image. Erasmus’s editing became a “form of theology”. In his *Defence of the Apology*, John Jewel (d. 1571), on the other hand, pointed out the weaknesses of church fathers. Many humanists had seen the fathers as both authoritative and fallible, so McMahon also offered insights into how fifteenth-century humanists studied the church fathers in discerning fashion. Poggio Bracciolini (d. 1459), for example, juxtaposed church fathers such as Augustine and Jerome, recognizing how

they had differed in their opinions on numerous points.

ALEX WRIGHT (Cambridge) concentrated on William Cave's *Primitive Christianity: or, the Religion of the Ancient Christians in the First Ages of the Gospel*. Cave (d. 1713) studied the genre of commendatory letters and was the first English scholar to write a literary history of the Church. SAM KENNERLEY (Cambridge) traced an aspect of a "change in direction" of early modern Catholicism by exploring how patristic studies were extended to the East. This outreach was supported by Marcello Cervini (Pope Marcellus II, d. 1555). SUNDAR HENNY (Bern) dealt with presentism in seventeenth-century patristics in Zurich, while CORNEL ZWIERLEIN (Bochum) investigated Non-juror patristic studies and the Levant. MARK VESSEY (Vancouver) reviewed aspects of Erasmus's method as found in his *Ratio seu compendium verae theologiae* (1518/19).

In a thought-provoking talk, NICHOLAS HARDY (Cambridge) examined how political circumstances, patronage as well as the disciplinary conventions of controversial theology conditioned the writings of Isaac Casaubon (d. 1614). Such influences made Casaubon, like other humanists, a flexible and inconstant figure, to whom even the term "scholar" in the strictest modern sense should perhaps not be applied.

JEAN-LOUIS QUANTIN (Paris) gave the keynote lecture to conclude the conference. His overview of the geography of patristic printing was a history of patristic studies in disguise. He recounted how Venetian publishing became increasingly disconnected from patristic scholarship and how Paris printers then ascended to market dominance. Was it beneficial for patristic studies, however, that only one order (the Maurists) came to monopolize this field so strongly? Or did this very monopoly contribute to a slowdown of patristic studies from the eighteenth century onwards? Quantin left this interesting question open.

In conclusion, one could not have wished for much more from this high-powered short conference, both in terms of variety and intellectual stimulation; perhaps only the participation of theologians might have added more viewpoints.

#### **Conference Overview:**

*Panel 1. Chair: Andreas Ammann (University of Bern)*

Andrew Taylor (Churchill College, Cambridge): Reading Philo in the 1550s

Richard Serjeantson (Trinity College, Cambridge): Reborn in Rome? The baptism of Constantine and the writing of church history, 1475–1650

Anthony Grafton (Princeton): The reception of Eusebius as a church historian

*Panel 2. Chair: Emily Michelson (University of St Andrews)*

Cristina Dondi (Lincoln College, Oxford): The circulation of the early editions of the fathers: an evidence-based approach

Madeline McMahon (Princeton): Feuding Fathers: John Jewel reads Jerome on the Origenist Controversy

Alex Wright (Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge): 'Letters and Learning'. William Cave's 'Primitive Christianity' (1673) and the early modern study of 'literae commendaticiae'

*Panel 3. Chair: John-Paul Ghobrial (Balliol College, Oxford)*

Sam Kennerley (Trinity College, Cambridge): The globalisation of patristics in the circle of Marcello Cervini

Sundar Henny (Universität Bern): Presentism in Seventeenth-Century Patristics

Cornel Zwierlein (Ruhr-Universität Bochum): Non-Juror Patristic studies and the Levant

*Panel 4. Chair: Joanna Weinberg (University of Oxford)*

Mark Vessey (University of British Columbia):  
The renaissance of late antiquity in Erasmus' 'Ratio seu compendium verae theologiae' (1518/19)

Nicholas Hardy (Trinity College, Cambridge):  
Isaac Casaubon, the fathers, and post-Reformation theological controversy

*Keynote lecture. Respondent: Scott Mandelbrote (Peterhouse, Cambridge)*

Jean-Louis Quantin (École Pratique des Hautes Études, Sorbonne, Paris): A European geography of patristic scholarship, sixteenth to the seventeenth-century

Book-launch of Scott Mandelbrote and Joanna Weinberg (eds.), *Jewish Books and their Readers* (Leiden, 2016), presented by Thomas Roebuck (University of East Anglia).

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at <http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/>

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