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Topographies of Nature: Nature of Topographies—Settlements, Territories, and Environment in Early Modern Historical-topographical Literature

Human perceptions of nature, and of the interactions between society and nature, determine the way in which societies organize these interactions. Thus, for a culturally informed environmental history, it is crucial to study representations of these perceptions in different types of historical sources. The historical-topographical literature of the early modern era (sixteenth to eighteenth centuries) is a source type of particular relevance in this respect. Topographical literature describes places, settlements, regions, and countries, recognizing their geographical as well as their legal, socio-economic and cultural situation. Works of topographical literature organize and document geographical information in three ways: cartography, graphical representation and description (text). In terms of dissemination and reception, topographical literature was a very successful medium by which geographical knowledge was popularized during the period in question (note the 5000 to 10,000 copies per volume of the topographies released by the publishing house of Matthaeus Merian the Elder [1593-1650]). Finally, topographical literature adopts a scheme for defining relevant topics that had already been developed by geographical authors of antiquity, and which later was reinvented and incorporated by European humanists. Geo- and hydromorphology, forms of land use, land coverage with woodland, availability of natural resources, etc. are part of the scheme.

My project analyzes the source type described above based on the hypothesis that the way nature and environmental aspects are represented (or ignored) in topographical literature can be studied in two ways: firstly, as an indicator of how a society conceptualizes its interactions with nature; and secondly, it shows how nature is used as a rhetorical device to frame social order, political power, regional or territorial identities.

In my project, a synchronic investigation analyzes the representation of nature and environmental aspects in different volumes of Merian's 'Topographia Germaniae' dedicated to the Upper Danube region (Swabia, Bavaria, Austria). A diachronic investigation compares different works of topographical description from different moments in time (i.e., descriptions of Bavaria from the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries: Ph. Apian [1568], M. Merian/M. Zeiller [1644], A. W. Ertl [1687-1690], M. Wening [1701-1726], J. Hazzi [1801-1808]). Last but not least, a study of editorial processes is intended to identify different stages and gaps in the processing of perceptions and motives.

This project's culturalized environmental history perspective will benefit from a broad range of research on the cultural history of perceptions of nature taken from different disciplines, such as art history and the history of cartography. Meanwhile, my project should serve to enrich the debate about space in cultural studies, *Kulturwissenschaften* (for the distinction between cultural studies and *Kulturwissenschaften* see Weigel [2002]), cultural geography, and sociology by its additional perspective of nature.

In terms of methodology, along with authors like B. Latour and T. Schatzki, I do not consider it useful to employ epistemological concepts that depict a dichotomy

nature/environment vs. culture/society. Both realms are taken to be completely overlapping. Thus, the human perception of nature is a kind of self-reflection