

Dissertation project by Dunja Bulinsky

Local Networks of Knowledge Production:

The scholarly household of Johann Jakob Scheuchzer (1672-1733)

Recent research on the history of early modern science has largely focused on the networks created between actors in all over Europe, often within the framework of a *Republic of Letters*. The long-distance transfer of ideas, publications and artefacts, and its significance for knowledge production could be clearly highlighted by this approach. Much less is known, however, about the local networks and day-to-day interactions that were of similar – or even greater – importance for the production of knowledge and symbolic goods. These networks were located in the households of single scholars with numerous relations to persons next door, next street or next quarter, be they family and kin, specialised artisans or merely neighbours. One can assume that the high productivity, observed in not a few early modern scholarly biographies, did not result from isolated individuals, but was often based to a considerable degree on such support-systems in the surrounding of the principal actors.

A good case in point is the biography of the well-known Swiss naturalist Johann Jakob Scheuchzer (1672-1733). Scheuchzer was a medical doctor and highschool teacher in Zurich, and a pioneer of many learned activities in the Swiss Confederation between the Baroque and Enlightenment. He corresponded with famous members of the *Republic of Letters* such as Isaac Newton and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, but also with hundreds of other contemporaries, some of them living in peripheral mountain villages. By his continuous correspondence and his learned and popular writings, which he produced year after year, he made research a systematic enterprise. When he died at the age of 61, one line on his gravestone read: „Died from work, not from age“. The sheer number and size of his writings strongly suggest that Scheuchzer was running an „open house-workshop“ allowing for high output. The present dissertation project will investigate this local knowledge producing-system from its beginning in the 1690s to the mid-eighteenth century, that is somewhat beyond the death of Scheuchzer. It takes up most key ideas of our overall project: the *practice* of early modern scholarship and its relationships to *housekeeping*, which includes aspects of *communication*, *public-private* interpenetration, *gender* issues and of other topics.

In recent times the personality of Johann Jakob Scheuchzer has obtained much attention from historical research, especially with respect to the history of scientific ideas, of academies, of correspondence networks, and of art history. But similar to much international research on scholarship, there is no study of the local, practical and social side of his career and scholarly output. Here the project has to start from close to scratch. In contrast to other approaches, it is question-driven, not source-driven. In fact, the massive source material that is available above all in the *Zentralbibliothek Zürich* has to be used in new and resourceful ways. In their main parts Scheuchzer's publications, for instance, do not tell us much about the conditions of their production; more hints and clues can be obtained in their para-texts (prefaces, introductions etc). Of course, also writings by third parties can be of great value. It is quite certain that Scheuchzer's wife Susanna Vogel and two of his brothers were important for his work; yet his local network included a series of other actors, from students living in his household to engravers and printers. Who were exactly the local contributors to Scheuchzer's work, and what did they contribute? How did the local system function in and beyond his household? Which changes in this social configuration can be observed during the period under study?

