



# Introduction: *lieux de savoir* and *archéologie du savoir*

SABRINA CORBELLINI 

MARGRIET HOOGVLIET 

\*Author affiliations can be found in the back matter of this article

## EDITORIAL



Open Library of Humanities



Part of the Ubiquity  
Partner Network

## ABSTRACT

The introduction to this special collection addresses a fundamental issue: the link between *savoir*/knowledge and the spatial turn in the humanities. This point, which will be the connecting thread of the articles to be published in the collection, is addressed and discussed through an analysis of two books that have significantly influenced theoretical reflection in the mentioned field: Michel Foucault's *L'Archéologie du savoir* (1969) and Christian Jacob's *Qu'est-ce qu'un lieu de savoir?* (2014). Keeping in mind the theoretical developments of the past half century, the introduction will look back on Foucault's concepts in order to see how they can be re-read in the light of recent developments in the spatial humanities and in particular in connection with the concept of *lieux de savoir* and the history of (religious) reading and knowledge transfer in medieval and early modern culture.

## CORRESPONDING AUTHOR:

**Margriet Hoogvliet**

University of Groningen, NL

[M.Hoogvliet@rug.nl](mailto:M.Hoogvliet@rug.nl)

---

## KEYWORDS:

spatial turn; knowledge; *lieux de savoir*; history of reading; medieval and early modern culture

## TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Corbellini, Sabrina and Margriet Hoogvliet. "Introduction: *lieux de savoir* and *archéologie du savoir*." *Le foucaldien* 7, no. 1 (2021): 3, 1–10. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16995/lefou.94>

The spatial turn in the humanities, and more recently even more so in the Digital Humanities, raises fundamental questions about the places and spaces where culture and knowledge are/were produced, interpreted, performed, and disseminated. The contributions to this special collection will approach these questions from different perspectives.<sup>1</sup> "Place" and "space" have received various epistemological dimensions in theoretical and philosophical approaches, from the material outcomes of the activity "place making," to purely conceptual "social spaces." As we will see, "savoir" (which is not entirely synonymous with the English term "knowledge") has been subject to different interpretations as well. In Michel Foucault's philosophy, for example, "savoir" is often coupled with "science" and with "pouvoir." For Christian Jacob, however, "savoir" is mostly advanced knowledge in all fields of humanity's intellectual endeavors.

As many other historians working with cultural theory, our thinking has been shaped profoundly by Michel Foucault's ideas, most notably (but not uniquely) the works in which he addresses knowledge as a product of culture, time, and power relations, for instance in *L'Archéologie du savoir* (1969) and *Les mots et les choses* (1966). Another French scholar to whom we are much indebted is Christian Jacob, who has introduced the term *lieux de savoir* in 2007. In both concepts, knowledge/*savoir* is not only linked to the material, and thus three-dimensional and localizable, but also to the discursive and to social relations. Since both works are concerned with *savoir* in relation to spaces, either material, mental or conceptual, we will outline their basic ideas and confront them with the results of our own lines of thought.

Michel Foucault's book *L'Archéologie du savoir* was first published more than fifty years ago, in 1969. This was a few years after he published two books with inquiries into the history of medical sciences and conceptualisations of the human mind and body: *Folie et déraison: Histoire de la folie à l'âge Classique* (1961), and *Naissance de la clinique: une archéologie du regard médical* (1963). A few years later Foucault published a critical philosophical reflection on the methods and concepts of the human sciences in *Les mots et les choses* (1966). These three are the works to which Foucault looks back in the *Archéologie* in order to elaborate their philosophical and methodological foundations.

As historians of the late medieval period, specialising in the history of reading, we have re-read the *Archéologie* in order to evaluate the relevance of this work for our field, more than fifty years after it was originally written.<sup>2</sup> Keeping in mind the theoretical developments during the past half century since its publication and the specificities of our own discipline, i.e. medieval and early modern history, we are looking back on this work to see how it can be helpful to advance our own thinking about our approaches and methods in the history of reading and the *lieux de savoir*. In the *Archéologie*, Foucault explores a philosophy and methodology of historical research, most notably the history of ideas, but he claims that his archaeology can also be used for the study of sexuality, political knowledge, or the visual arts in past societies.

*L'Archéologie du savoir* is a sharp and profound critique of historical research and history writing of the 1960s, which privileged a linear *longue durée* approach by seeking to retrace (through the succession of centuries) the ultimate source or the original of an object, a phenomenon, a practice, or an idea. Foucault strongly rejects historical cause-and-effect narratives that seek to explain the emergence of phenomena by identifying what preceded and what followed.<sup>3</sup> In his view, the objects with which history writing is concerned are not an ahistorical given that can be followed through the ages, but they are produced by societies and their discourses.<sup>4</sup> As a consequence, Foucault states, the practice of history should be concerned with the construction of discourses about a given historical object in a given society. These discursive practices are:

---

1 A reflection on the two key concepts of "savoir" and "lieu" is extremely important when using the "lieux de savoir" as a methodological framework. This reflection is, for example, absent from the recent volume Fokko Dijksterhuis, Andreas Weber, and H.J. Zuidervaart eds., *Locations of Knowledge in Dutch Contexts* (Leiden: Brill, 2019).

2 For a similar approach, see Catherine M. Soussloff ed., *Foucault on the Arts and Letters: Perspectives for the 21st Century* (London/New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2016).

3 Michel Foucault, *L'Archéologie du savoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969), 180–182, 214, 217.

4 Foucault, *L'Archéologie du savoir*, 60–67. All translations are ours.

*un ensemble de règles anonymes, historiques, toujours déterminées dans le temps et l'espace qui ont défini une époque donnée, et pour une aire sociale, économique, géographique ou linguistique donnée, les conditions d'exercice de la fonction énonciative.*<sup>5</sup>

a constellation of anonymous and historical rules, always determined in the time and the space that have defined in a given epoch, and for a given social, economic, geographical or linguistic area, the preconditions regulating the practice of making statements.

Foucault uses the term "l'archive" for this general system of formation and transformation of "statements." The regulating information contained in the archive is mostly implicit, while statements can take the form of events and of material discursive acts.<sup>6</sup> Historians rarely have complete and unbiased access to the statements of the past, and this is especially true for us as historians of the late medieval period. Here, too, Foucault stresses the importance of the factors that have determined their conservation or oblivion:

*Dire que les énoncés sont rémanents, ce n'est pas dire qu'ils restent dans le champ de la mémoire ou qu'on peut retrouver ce qu'ils voulaient dire; mais cela veut dire qu'ils sont conservés grâce à un certain nombre de supports et techniques matériels (dont le livre n'est, bien entendu, qu'un exemple), selon certains types d'institutions (parmi bien d'autres, la bibliothèque), et avec certaines modalités statutaires (qui ne sont pas les mêmes quand il s'agit d'un texte religieux, d'un règlement de droit, ou d'une vérité scientifique).<sup>7</sup>*

To state that statements are persistent, that does not mean that they remain in the realm of memory, or that one can retrieve what they were intending to say; but it does mean that they have been preserved thanks to a certain amount of material supports and techniques (of which the book is obviously only one example), according to certain types of institutions (among many others, the library), and with certain statutory terms (which are not the same when it concerns a religious text, a legal regulation, or a scientific truth).

Ideas such as these about the importance of the materiality of the surviving textual witnesses and the societal processes that have determined their preservation over more than five centuries are very insightful for our research into religious reading by the laity, in part based on material books and material contexts. Not unlike Michel Foucault in the late 1960s, we are interested in the different ways past societies experienced, transmitted and used knowledge: religious ideas expressed in the vernacular languages of Europe during the long fifteenth century, and the ways in which past societies constructed, preserved and disseminated knowledge (*savoirs*) and epistemologies.

A central point in Foucault's understanding of history, as expressed in the *Archéologie*, is the importance of human and societal practices:

*L'archéologie fait aussi apparaître des rapports entre les formations discursives et des domaines non discursifs (institutions, événements politiques, pratiques et processus économiques).<sup>8</sup>*

Archaeology also makes visible relations between discursive formations and non-discursive fields (institutions, political events, practices, and economic processes).

Practices are important in Foucault's archaeology and they are central to our thinking about the history of religious reading in the late Middle Ages as well: we are not only interested in texts and material books, but also in the historical practices relating to these objects, the ways in which people handled and used them, reproduced and read them—alone and in communities.

These human and societal practices in relation to the *lieux de savoir* and the possibility of extending the connotation of *lieu de savoir* to specific artefacts, such as manuscripts, are somewhat less central in Christian Jacob's approach. In fact, these artefacts are not only the result of practices

---

5 Foucault, *L'Archéologie du savoir*, 153.

6 Foucault, *L'Archéologie du savoir*, 169–171.

7 Foucault, *L'Archéologie du savoir*, 162.

8 Foucault, *L'Archéologie du savoir*, 212.

influencing their morphology and semiotic frame, but could also be approached as "sites of knowledge" themselves and serve as starting point for the reconstruction of practices leading to the production and the transformation of knowledge. This line of thought, which moves away from a stricter definition of space and place to a broader understanding of the concept, is tested in our forthcoming article for this special collection, in which we will hone in on the practice of writing, copying texts, and on specific artefacts, medieval manuscripts with religious texts as *lieux de savoir*.

Although only Foucault's lecture *Des espaces autres* (1967) is explicitly cited in Christian Jacob's volume *Qu'est-ce qu'un lieu de savoir?*, the key issues we have indicated in Foucault's work are also at the very centre of Jacob's methodology.<sup>9</sup> Central to his approach is of course the definition of *savoir/savoirs*, which he describes as "a set of mental tools, discourses, practices, models, and shared representations allowing a society or smaller groups in this society to provide the world they live in with meaning and to act upon it."<sup>10</sup> This definition, which in its broadness also allows "comparison on a large scale, between societies and historical periods, but also within societies themselves," is further emphasised by a fundamental point of view:

Knowledge does not exist by itself. It is also embedded in artifacts or embodied in individuals, communities, or institutions [...] Moreover, knowledge does not exist without the practices that construct it, fix it, and make its circulation and transmission possible. Knowledge does not exist without the artifacts conveying it. These artifacts could be material objects, such as handwritten or printed books, notebooks, tablets, oral discourses, instruments, hand-made objects: they could also be gestures and savoir-faire, practices; they could be oral or written statements.<sup>11</sup>

This approach to knowledge as a process is strongly influenced, as Jacob shows, by the sociology of science and the "ethnography of laboratory life" inspired by the works of Bruno Latour and Steve Woolgar.<sup>12</sup> Jacob re-elaborates this "anthropological approach" by convincingly arguing that direct observations, which would make the application impossible to past societies and practices, could be substituted by historical textual, visual and material sources, as "insights into a culturally and socially determined perception of the activity."<sup>13</sup>

By implementing this "practical turn" and shifting the focus from the "traditional" philological textual analysis to practices, interactions, instruments, and production techniques, Jacob paves the way for a large-scale comparative approach—both chronological and geographical. He stresses, moreover, the collective value of these practices, performed by individuals but often determined by professional, intellectual, and cultural milieus, which define their normativity and syntax as well as their dissemination and assimilation through several processes of learning and education.<sup>14</sup>

This *habitus*, using the term coined by Pierre Bourdieu, is also "shared knowledge," which contributes to the creation of a group or a community. An essential point in this anthropology of knowledge is the focus on the materiality of the investigated knowledge, which is necessary for understanding how knowledge is produced, disseminated and performed. Writing a text is, for example, also a matter of study rooms, writing desks, availability and quality of paper and parchment, and techniques for the productions of ink and quills. Following these lines of thought, Jacob distinguishes four types of *lieux de savoir*. In the first instance, this includes

---

<sup>9</sup> Christian Jacob, *Qu'est-ce qu'un lieu de savoir?* (Marseille: Open Edition Press, 2014), <https://books.openedition.org/oeep/423?lang=en>. The book theorises the approach applied in the volumes. For an English summary of the main points and approaches, see Christian Jacob, "Lieux de savoir: Places and Spaces in the History of Knowledge," *KNOW: A Journal on the Formation of Knowledge* 1, no. 1 (Spring 2017): 85–102. See also Bertrand Müller, "Les lieux de savoir: un entretien avec Christian Jacob," *Genèses* 76, no. 3 (2009): 116–136.

<sup>10</sup> Jacob, "Lieux de savoir: Places and Spaces," 86.

<sup>11</sup> Jacob, "Lieux de savoir: Places and Spaces," 86–87. This theme is at the focus of a new research project, lead by Christian Jacob, launched in September 2020: *Savoirs, Le fil des idées* (<https://lieuxdesavoir.hypotheses.org/1843>). On this topic, see also Roger Chartier, "Science and Knowledge," *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 71, no 2 (2016): 451–64.

<sup>12</sup> Jacob, "Lieux de savoir: Places and Spaces," 88.

<sup>13</sup> Jacob, "Lieux de savoir: Places and Spaces," 89. This approach has been extensively rehearsed in the two collective volumes resulting for the *Lieux de savoir* project: Christian Jacob, ed., *Lieux de savoir. Espaces et communautés* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2007), and Christian Jacob, ed., *Lieux de savoir. Les mains de l'intellect* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2011).

<sup>14</sup> See "practical turn," in Jacob, *Qu'est-ce qu'un lieu de savoir?*, 9.

"real" places, such as schools, universities, libraries, laboratories and workshops; and in the second case working spaces (desks, tools, shelves). A third category is defined as "inscriptions," such as drawing, schemas and texts which are organised "in a system of hierarchic and articulated places."<sup>15</sup> The fourth category, the most complex and the least developed in Jacob's publications, is the one which includes agents and actors and their position in space in the moment of knowledge production.<sup>16</sup> This last category somehow includes and combines all the others and asks for a dynamic application of the concept of "practice," but is although more difficult to grasp and up to now less problematised by Jacob. It is, however, probably the most challenging and useful approach for opening new research avenues, especially in the strongly interdisciplinary research field of the performative transmission of knowledge through preaching, reading, and writing.

Essential in this new approach, which reconstructs knowledge within the frame of the *lieux de savoir*, is the inclusion of the concept of space and the methodological innovations summarised as a spatial turn. Space is intended in its topographic and geographic features, but also, and foremost, in its immaterial sense, ranging from the concept of identity and genre to thought and the unconscious. In his overview of the influence of spatial approaches to his own work, Jacob refers to Foucault and his "espaces autres," focusing in particular on the

*Rôle opératoire de la notion de l'espace, son histoire et ses mutations, à travers la dualité de l'utopie et de l'hétérotopie.*<sup>17</sup>

The instrumental role of the notion of space, its history and transformations, through the duality of utopia and heterotopia.

In fact, Foucault's thinking, together with that of Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, Pierre Bourdieu, Bruno Latour and Michel de Certeau significantly contributed to the inclusion of space into the study of *savoir/savoirs*—both in the scrutiny of the influence of space on the production and dissemination of knowledge and in the enquiry of the spaces created by the very same *savoir/savoirs*.<sup>18</sup>

## 2. NEW APPROACHES TO *LIEUX DE SAVOIR* AND THE HISTORY OF RELIGIOUS READING

Even though Michel Foucault's *Archéologie* has certainly not lost its relevance and its innovative potential, there are some aspects that now seem somewhat less useful, due to the methodological developments of the past decades. For instance, Foucault's work is much concerned with regulation and the functioning of power while our own work into the history of religious reading cultures has led to highlight the importance of ideals, ethics and aspirations as co-shaping forces behind human practices in relation to material texts and knowledge transfer.

Another example of "how we would do history differently now" is Foucault's treatment of historical periods: short periods, clearly delimited in time and cultural space by processes of change and transformations, such as the French Classical period. As a consequence of his treatment of historical fault lines (explicitly not the same as the traditional historical periodisation), Foucault represents historical societies—at least in his archaeological works—as distant and entirely disconnected from the present day. In our approach (inspired by globalisation and the information society surrounding us), we are interested in connections, exchanges and sharing. This can, for example, result in modern information technologies informing our understanding of historical reading practices, such as hypertexts and open access that have helped us to see the importance of paratexts in medieval books and chained "common profit" books.<sup>19</sup> Our study of connections, exchanges and sharing differs from the

---

15 Jacob, "Lieux de savoir: Places and Spaces," 97.

16 Jacob, "Lieux de savoir: Places and Spaces," 96–98.

17 See "spatial turn," in Jacob, *Qu'est-ce qu'un lieu de savoir?*, 4.

18 Following this line of thought, it is worth mentioning that in the second volume of the series *Lieux de savoir* a chapter has been dedicated to Foucault's atelier. See Philippe Artières, Jean-François Bert, Pascal Michon, Mathieu Potte-Bonneville and Judith Revel, "Dans l'atelier de Michel Foucault," in *Lieux de savoir. Les mains de l'intellect*, 944–962.

19 Sabrina Corbellini and Margriet Hoogvliet, "Late Medieval Urban Libraries as Social Practice: Miscellanies, Common Profit Books and Libraries (France, Italy, the Low Countries)," in *Die Bibliothek—The Library—La Bibliothèque. Denkräume und Wissensordnungen*, ed. Andreas Speer and Lars Reuke (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2020), 379–398.

*longue durée* history writing in the middle of the twentieth century as criticised by Foucault, because it does not take into account changes and transformations in different cultural contexts (but without losing sight of that what is shared and mixed).

Furthermore, Foucault's objects of research are somewhat immobile to our taste and he does not seem to address transfers, mobilities, exchanges and shared practices over geographical distances and between different cultures. Strongly informed by microhistory, our approach aims to reconstruct how small-scale events reflect macrohistorical developments and investigates how they are related to them. Microhistory is also the study of the local in its connection to the global.<sup>20</sup> Likewise, our research into the history of religious reading is not only concerned with exchanges and connections between the Low Countries, France and Italy, but also as an expression of a broader pan-European history, Mediterranean history and, ideally, also global history. The history of cultures of religious reading in western Europe can also be described in terms of connected history, with the two other religions of the Book, Judaism and Islam, and with other text-based religions such as Buddhism.<sup>21</sup>

Above we have already touched upon Foucault's initial ideas about the importance of materiality in the study of discursive acts, which led him later to include materiality more explicitly in his thinking, such as manifestations of power in objects and their arrangements.<sup>22</sup> The study of material texts and the material contexts of books and reading is one of the central points in our approach. This is not a return to naive and positivistic empiricism in history, but rather due to the influence of New Materialism, to which Donna Haraway's work has made great contributions.<sup>23</sup> For example, recent historical research has investigated the interplay between the human body and material objects (books for instance), or between the body and material environments, such as landscapes or human-made architectural settings (such as libraries).

An important point, which is underestimated in Jacob's programmatic description, but which relates our approach to the *lieux de savoir* and the *Archéologie du savoir*, is Foucault's interest in the trivial and the everyday, instead of a privileged focus on the intellectual "great men" of the past:

*Histoire non de la littérature mais de cette rumeur latérale, de cette écriture quotidienne et si vite effacée qui n'acquiert jamais le statut de l'oeuvre ou s'en trouve aussitôt déçue.*<sup>24</sup>

Not the history of literature, but of that rumour alongside it, of that everyday writing, so quickly erased, which never obtains the status of the work of art or which is immediately divested of this honour.

This resonates strongly with our own approach that is also inspired by "history from below," focusing on the lives, ideas and experiences of ordinary people living in an urban context, such as artisans and servants. In spite of historical commonplaces, these people have left their traces in the historical documentation, even that of the Middle Ages; many of them were literate and they co-shaped the religious reading cultures and textual cultures of the long fifteenth century. In fact, we are convinced that the *lieux de savoir* framework could be extremely useful to give these "outliers" in historical research (but in reality the most common) a voice as they are all too often neglected in traditional scholarship focusing on the "great minds" of the past. Moreover, it is also extremely important to approach areas of knowledge production and transmission that are seldomly addressed in "traditional" scholarship on *savoir/savoirs*: medieval religious

---

<sup>20</sup> See for example: Carlo Ginzburg, "Microhistory, Two or Three Things That I Know about It," *Critical Inquiry* 20, no. 1 (1993): 10–35; Thomas V. Cohen, "The Macrohistory of Microhistory," *Journal for Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 47, no. 1 (2017): 53–73.

<sup>21</sup> Jeroen Duindam's recent work on the history court societies in Europe, Moghul India and China is a good example of this approach: Jeroen Duindam, *Dynasties. A Global History of Power 1300–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015). See also Konrad Hirschler, *Medieval Damascus: Plurality and Diversity in an Arabic Library – The Ashrafiya Library Catalogue* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016) and *The Written Word in the Medieval Arabic Lands: A Social and Cultural History of Reading Practices* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012).

<sup>22</sup> Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et punir: naissance de la prison* (Paris: Gallimard, 1981), 189.

<sup>23</sup> Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (1988): 575–599; Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

<sup>24</sup> Foucault, *L'Archéologie du savoir*, 179.

knowledge, often relegated to the field of religious and theological studies, as a consequence of the alleged monopoly and control of the medieval church on contents, practices, textualities and performances, allegedly resulting in the obstruction of knowledge transfer.

Another aspect of materiality and spaces in our historical research in which we differ from Foucault's and Jacob's ideas is that these can serve, for us, as a "gateway to experiences in the past." This may be the result of the sensation of "timeless time" and the annihilation of geographical distances created by the information society of the early twenty-first century,<sup>25</sup> which co-shapes our perception of history. Seeing and touching an object from the past, standing on the site where books were copied and read five centuries ago, can result in a better understanding of (reading) experiences from the past and a greater awareness of the historic layering of sites. In this, we follow Edward Soja's concept of "thirdspaces," which addresses the interconnections between the social, the historical and the spatial: "The three terms and the complex interactions between them should be studied together as fundamental and intertwined knowledge sources, for this is what being-in-the-world is all about."<sup>26</sup>

An example how historical *lieux de savoir* and information flows can be studied and experienced in present day urban spaces is the multi-media app "Hidden Cities" that we are currently co-developing in collaboration with the HERA project "Public Renaissance." It is a GPS-based walk along historical urban sites of communication and exchange, guided by voices from the past.<sup>27</sup> This use of material spaces (streets, architecture, landscape) in combination with information technology for the study of historical spaces could possibly be defined as a combination of Foucault's *archéologie du savoir* and Jacob's *lieux de savoir*: it approaches urban spaces as archives, in which records are formed by textual, visual and material (architectural) objects—both historical and present-day—in a dynamic exchange of dialogue and oppositions. The challenge is to unravel the "hidden rules" of their production, conservation, dissemination and, at times, destruction.

The "Hidden Cities" apps, created for several European towns, allow to toggle between a modern digital map and a georectified historical map to see, by means of GPS, one's position both in the modern and the historical city. The use of historical maps for studying the urban network of *lieux de savoir* and the historical urban context is an additional source informing our modern understanding of historical spatial experiences and conceptualisations. As Keith Lilley writes, these allow to "explore how mapping the city mediates lived experiences."<sup>28</sup>

The idea of approaching the urban spaces as archives, in which several *lieux de savoir* can be detected, inventoried and analysed, is also closely connected to the idea of "mapping," in the sense of reconstructing and visualising connections between agents, places, practices, social interactions and objects in, for example, cityscapes. The map is in essence the framing of interconnectivity and intersectionality, of a relational web in continuous movement and transformation which can be studied only through a continuous shifting between the micro and the macro.<sup>29</sup> In a sense, we are seeking to create historical "deep maps" as described by David Bodenhamer:

A deep map is a finely detailed, multimedia depiction of a place and the people, animals, and objects that exist within it and are thus inseparable from the contours and rhythms of everyday life. Deep maps are not confined to the tangible or material, but include the discursive and ideological dimensions of place, the dreams, hopes, and fears of residents—they are, in short, positioned between matter and meaning.<sup>30</sup>

---

25 Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society* (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1996).

26 Edward Soja, "Thirdspace: Expanding the Scope of the Geographical Imagination," in *Human Geography Today*, ed. Doreen Massey, John Allen, Philip Sarre (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999), 262.

27 "Public Renaissance: Urban Cultures of Public Space between Early Modern Europe and the Present," funded by the Humanities in European Research Area (HERA) (2019–2022); PI Fabrizio Nevola, University of Exeter, UK, involving researchers from universities in Italy, Germany, the Netherlands, Spain and the UK, see <http://www.hiddencities.eu>.

28 Keith D. Lilley, "Materialising the City: Mapping in the Imaging and Imagining of Medieval Urban Spaces," in *Kommunale Selbstinszenierung: Städtische Konstellationen zwischen Mittelalter und Neuzeit*, ed. Martina Stercken and Christian Hesse (Zürich: Chronos Verlag, 2018), 242.

29 The importance of the connection between the urban and the spatial has been recently restated by Richard Rodger and Susanne Rau, "Thinking Spatially: New Horizons for Urban History," *Urban History* 47 (2020): 372–383.

30 David J. Bodenhamer, John Corrigan, Trevor M. Harris, eds., *Deep Maps and Spatial Narratives* (Bloomington/Minneapolis: Indiana University Press, 2015), 3.

This "cartographical" research line restates, moreover, the fundamental correlation between social interactions and spatial practices and perceptions, which is the cornerstone of modern approaches to space and place.<sup>31</sup> The study of *lieux de savoir* not as separate and unrelated case studies, but as points or localities on a map also allows to perform a spatial analysis at least at two different but strictly connected levels: at the level of the specific *lieu* as well as at a second level, the map, which allows to apply other analytical spatial concepts to the analysis, such as "near-far" and "centre-periphery," and spatial figures, such as copresence of spaces (confluence of multiple spaces or social realities at one place or in close proximity), co-spatiality (overlapping or intermeshing of spaces), networks as well as borders and markings.<sup>32</sup>

### 3. CONTRIBUTIONS TO THIS COLLECTION

Spatial research is a powerful and innovative direction of the humanities and maybe even more so in research in premodern history. This approach includes locating history, but even more importantly spatialising history, i.e. to inquire into the creation of material and conceptual spaces by societies, as well as the agency of man-made and natural spaces on societies and human behaviour. Moving away from older initiatives that sought above all to confirm ideas about national exceptionalism and cultural borders, recent directions in spatial research are strongly informed by modern cultural theory, based directly on Foucault's works or by approaches inspired by his thought. The further development of spatial approaches for the humanities, as well as research into the history of spatial thinking in the humanities are a first centre of interest of this collection.

For the contributions to this collection we are furthermore interested in *lieux de savoir*, the study of places and spaces connected to the creation of knowledge and its dissemination. While the materiality of these places and spaces is certainly of importance, in our opinion the study of social practices related to objects and architecture should be the actual objective of inquiry. These practices can be activities as thinking, reading, writing, preaching, discussing, sharing, memorising, handling objects, and many other social activities. Practices of knowledge were spatially determined, but they also created social and discursive spaces as such, through the dialogical relationship between the participants, in which *savoir* was created, transmitted and transformed. Micro-historical studies of technologies and practices connected to *lieux de savoir* can also serve for the investigation of larger geographical areas while transgressing perceived cultural, religious, and linguistic borders.<sup>33</sup>

In addition, even if some medieval and early modern *lieux de savoir* were located in "the desert", we are first and foremost interested in a study of the interplay between urban contexts and *lieux de savoir*. This is for the period in consideration above all dictated by the survival of historical documentation, but most importantly urban life constituted certainly a high-density hub of historical information networks. Moreover, being in part dictated by the geomorphological setting and by man-made architecture and roads, medieval and early modern cities provide the opportunity to study their reciprocal interaction with specificities of *lieux de savoir*. At the same time, in urban contexts different social classes and various types of religious life lived close to each other and with each other, thus creating overlapping and intersecting places and spaces of knowledge. In order to better grasp the implications of medieval and early modern urban spaces in relation to *lieux de savoir*, we are also keen to include research into early modern urban cartography as representations of actual physical spaces and their affordances, but also as representations of conceptual spaces.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The contributions of this collection are based in part on the stimulating discussions during the international workshop at the NIAS/Lorentz Center @Snellius in Leiden, the Netherlands: "Spaces and Places of Religious Knowledge Transfer in Early Modern Cities," 30 January 2017 – 2 February 2017.

---

<sup>31</sup> Susanne Rau, *History, Space, and Place* (London/New York: Routledge: 2019).

<sup>32</sup> For these concepts and figures, see Rau, *History, Space, and Place*, 93–96.

<sup>33</sup> See the methodology of layers (substrates, nodes, and networks) for doing global history of the Middle Ages as proposed in Naomi Standen, "Colouring Outside the Lines: Methods for a Global History of Eastern Eurasia 600–1350," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 29 (2019): 27–63.

Sabrina Corbellini  [orcid.org/0000-0003-4178-3622](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4178-3622)

University of Groningen, NL

Margriet Hoogvliet  [orcid.org/0000-0001-7113-5162](https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7113-5162)

University of Groningen, NL

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Artières, Philippe, Jean-François Bert, Pascal Michon, Mathieu Potte-Bonneville, and Judith Revel. "Dans l'atelier de Michel Foucault." In *Lieux de savoir. Les mains de l'intellect*, edited by Christian Jacob, 944–962. Paris: Albin Michel, 2011.
- Bodenhamer, David J., John Corrigan and Trevor M. Harris. (eds.). *Deep maps and spatial narratives*. Bloomington/Minneapolis: Indiana University Press, 2015. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1zxxzr2>
- Butler, Judith. *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*. New York: Routledge, 1993.
- Castells, Manuel. *The Rise of the Network Society*. Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1996.
- Chartier, Roger. "Science and Knowledge." *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 71, no. 2 (2016): 451–464. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/ahs.2016.0065>
- Cohen, Thomas V. "The Macrohistory of Microhistory." *Journal for Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 47, no. 1 (2017): 53–73. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1215/10829636-3716578>
- Corbellini, Sabrina and Margriet Hoogvliet. "Late Medieval Urban Libraries as Social Practice: Miscellanies, Common Profit Books and Libraries (France, Italy, the Low Countries)." In *Die Bibliothek – The Library – La Bibliothèque. Denkräume und Wissensordnungen*, eds. Andreas Speer and Lars Reuke, 379–398. Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2020. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110700503-020>
- Dijksterhuis, Fokko, Andreas Weber and H.J. Zuidervaart. (eds.). *Locations of Knowledge in Dutch contexts*. Leiden: Brill, 2019. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004264885>
- Duindam, Jeroen. *Dynasties. A Global History of Power 1300–1800*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781107447554>
- Foucault, Michel. *L'Archéologie du savoir*. Paris: Gallimard, 1969.
- Foucault, Michel. *Surveiller et punir: naissance de la prison*. Paris: Gallimard, 1981.
- Ginzburg, Carlo. "Microhistory, Two or Three Things That I Know about It." *Critical Inquiry* 20, no. 1 (1993): 10–35. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1086/448699>
- Haraway, Donna. "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective." *Feminist Studies*, 14, no. 3 (1988): 575–599. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2307/3178066>
- Hirschler, Konrad. *Medieval Damascus: Plurality and Diversity in an Arabic Library – The Ashrafiya Library Catalogue*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3366/edinburgh/9781474408776.001.0001>
- Hirschler, Konrad. *The Written Word in the Medieval Arabic Lands: A Social and Cultural History of Reading Practices*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012.
- Jacob, Christian. (ed.). *Lieux de savoir. Espaces et communautés*. Paris: Albin Michel, 2007.
- Jacob, Christian. (ed.). *Lieux de savoir. Les mains de l'intellect*. Paris: Albin Michel, 2011.
- Jacob, Christian. *Qu'est-ce qu'un lieu de savoir?* Marseille: Open Edition Press, 2014. <https://books.openedition.org/oepp/423?lang=en>. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/books.oepp.423>
- Jacob, Christian. "Lieux de savoir: Places and Spaces in the History of Knowledge." *KNOW: A Journal on the Formation of Knowledge* 1, no. 1 (Spring 2017): 85–102. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1086/692293>
- Latour, Bruno. *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Lilley, Keith D. "Materialising the City: Mapping in the Imaging and Imagining of Medieval Urban Spaces." In *Kommunale Selbstinszenierung: Städtische Konstellationen zwischen Mittelalter und Neuzeit*, edited by Martina Stercken and Christian Hesse, 241–252. Zürich: Chronos Verlag, 2018.
- Müller, Bertrand. "Les lieux de savoir: un entretien avec Christian Jacob." *Genèses* 76, no. 3 (2009): 116–136. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3917/gen.076.0116>
- Rodger, Richard and Susanne Rau. "Thinking Spatially: New Horizons for Urban History." *Urban History* 47 (2020): 372–383. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0963926820000218>
- Soja, Edward. "Thirdspace: Expanding the Scope of the Geographical Imagination." In *Human Geography Today*, edited by Doreen Massey, John Allen, and Philip Sarre, 260–278. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999.
- Soussloff, Catherine M. (ed.). *Foucault on the Arts and Letters: Perspectives for the 21st Century*. London/New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2016.
- Standen, Naomi. "Colouring Outside the Lines: Methods for a Global History of Eastern Eurasia 600–1350." *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 29 (2019): 27–63. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0080440119000021>

**TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:**

Corbellini, Sabrina and Margriet Hoogvliet. "Introduction: *lieux de savoir* and *archéologie du savoir*." *Le foualdien* 7, no. 1 (2021): 3, 1–10. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16995/lefou.94>

Submitted: 09 October 2020

Accepted: 06 February 2021

Published: 29 March 2021

**COPYRIGHT:**

© 2021 The Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited. See <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

*Le foualdien* is a peer-reviewed open access journal published by Open Library of Humanities.