Obstacles to Oral Communication in the Mission of Friar William of Rubruck among the Mongols[1]

Michael Brauer

It is difficult enough to preach about matters of faith to people of one's own culture and language. It becomes even more difficult if a travelling missionary in a foreign country has to rely on an interpreter. This paper is a case study on inter-cultural translation problems, starting with the translation of languages and then concentrating on the cultural contexts that form the basis of all communication, be it verbal or non-verbal.

My main witness is the Franciscan William of Rubruck. He travelled to the Mongols from 1253–1255. Friar William was attracted by the rumour that Sartaq, a Mongol prince, intended to become Christian, but although his mission was sponsored by King Louis IX of France, William stated publically that he was not the king's special envoy. His report, the *Itinerarium*, is a vivid mixture of geographical account, description of customs, and anecdotes, which are interwoven with the story of the journey, including his personal reactions to the situations he encountered. Concerning source criticism, one has to keep in mind that William's mission, which led him all the way to Khan Batu and Great Khan Möngke, was basically a failure. His report to Saint Louis is in part a justification of why the Franciscan did not succeed in winning many Mongol converts.[2]

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[1] This paper examines aspects of the 'spoken word' which were omitted from my study "Missionaries and the Written Word: The Missions of Boniface and of William of Ruhruck among the Mongols in Comparison" (MA thesis, Central European University, Budapest, 2000). References are restricted to the most important works.

[2] William of Rubruck, *Itinerarium*, in *Sinica Franciscana*, vol. 1, *Itinera et relationes Fratrum Minorum saeculi XIII et XIV*, ed. Anastasius van den Wyngaert (Quarracchi: College of St. Bonaventure, 1929), pp. 164-332. The translations in the text are taken from Peter Jackson and David Morgan, *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck: His Journey to the Court of the Great Khan Möngke. 1253-1255* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1990). For scholarship on William of Rubruck see Peter Jackson, "William of Rubruck: A Review Article," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1987), pp. 92-97; more related to my topic is the discussion of William in Felicitas Schmieder, *Europa und die Fremden: Die Mongolen im Urteil des Abendlandes vom 13. bis in das 15. Jahrhundert* (Sigmaringen: Jan Thorbecke, 1994); Marina Münkler, *Erfahrung des Fremden: Die Beschreibung Ostasiens in den Augenzeugenberichten des 13. und 14. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2000); on the Mongols in general see Peter Jackson, "The State of Research: The Mongol Empire, 1986-1999," *Journal of Medieval History*, 26 (2000), 189-210.

It is out of the question that anyone travelling into Inner Asia at that time was in need of a good interpreter.[3] On his way he would pass through areas with – among others – Persian, Cuman, and Mongol languages. In his *Pratica della Mercatura* from the first half of the fourteenth century, Pegolotti therefore advises the tradesman: "Do not try to save money on the interpreters by taking a bad one instead of a good one. The additional money you spend on the good one will be less than what you save by having him."[4] William engaged an interpreter (*turgemanus*) called *Homo Dei*, who was apparently a bad one.

On the first encounter with a Mongol official, the limits of the interpreter are reached when William tries to expound to him the creed of the Faith as best he could through the interpreter "who was neither intelligent nor articulate."[5] The interpreter *Homo* sometimes even interrupts William in the course of preaching – or the attempt to preach – because he is tired (*fatigatus*) and not able to find the right words.[6]

A greater problem is another habit of *Homo Dei* that William mentions. "Later, when I acquired some little knowledge of the language, I noticed that when I said one thing he would say something totally different, depending on what came into his head. After that I realized the danger of speaking through him, and chose rather to say nothing."[7]

An almost tragicomical stage of the narrative is reached on occasion of the first audition at Great Khan Möngke's court. Following the usual Mongol custom, the visitors are offered drinks when entering. William himself sipped for a short time to show the khan respect, but "[u]nfortunately for us, our interpreter was

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[3] See Berthold Altaner, "Sprachkenntnisse und Dolmetscherwesen im missionarischen und diplomatischen Verkehr zwischen Abendland (Päpstliche Kurie) und Orient im 13. und 14. Jahrhundert," *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte*, 55 (1936), pp. 83-126; Denis Sinor, "Interpreters in Medieval Inner Asia," *Asian and African Studies*, 16 (1982), pp. 293-320; Felicitas Schmieder, "*Tartarus valde sapiens et eruditus in philosophia:* La langue des missionaires en Asie," in *L'étranger au Moyen Âge: XXXe Congrès de la S.H.M.E.S.* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2000), pp. 271-281; for further references see Marc-Aeilko Aris, "Übersetzung, allgemeine Voraussetzungen und theoretische Grundlagen," in *Lexikon des Mittelalters* (Studienausgabe, Stuttgart and Weimar: Metzler, 1999), VIII (1999), cols. 1163-1166.

[4] Francesco Balducci Pegolotti, *La Pratica della Mercatura*, ed. Allan Evans (Cambridge, Mass.: The Medieval Academy of America, 1936), p. 21; the translation is following Sinor, "Interpreters," p. 320.

[5] *qui nullius erat ingenii nec alicuius eloquentie* (William of Rubruck, *Itinerarium*, X, 5, p. 191; Jackson, *The Mission*, p. 101).

[6] On the way to Prince Sartaq: *Super omnia autem gravabat me quod, quando volebam eis dicere aliquod verbum edificationis, interpres meus dicebat: 'Non faciatis me predicare, quia nescio talia verba dicere'* (William of Rubruck, *Itinerarium*, XIII, 6, p. 196). In the course of a disputation with Buddhist monks: *Tunc cum vellem plura ratiocinari cum illis, interpres meus fatigatus, non valens verba exprimere, fecit me tacere* (XXV, 8, p. 232).

[7] *Ego enim percipi postea, quando incepi aliquantulum intelligere idioma, quod quando dicebam unum, ipse totum aliud dicebat secundum quod ei occurrebat. Tunc videns periculum loquendi per ipsum, elegi magis tacere* (William of Rubruck, *Itinerarium*, XIII, 6, p. 196; Jackson, *The Mission*, p. 108).

standing next to the stewards, who gave him a good deal to drink, and in no time he grew tipsy."[8] In the course of the communication William has to acknowledge: "Up to this point I understood my interpreter, but beyond this I was unable to grasp any single complete sentence, which brought it home to me that he was drunk. And Mangu [i.e. Möngke] Chan too struck me as tipsy."[9]

When William complains about the general inadequacy, the arbitrary translations, and the drinking habits of his interpreter, he might have overemphasised the shortcomings of *Homo Dei*, since a bad interpreter is an ideal scapegoat for the failure of a mission. On the other hand, William's account does reflect general problems of missionaries in foreign countries. To a greater extent than a merchant, and even a political envoy, a missionary who wanted to spread the Word of God depended on an exact translation of his speech. Whether in a text such as the Creed, where each single word had been subject of a long debate, or in a sermon: each term would need a careful treatment.[10] Ricold of Montecroce was aware of that when he gave the following admonition around 1300 in his *Libellus . . . ad nationes orientales*: "The first rule is to know that it is no use preaching or disputing the faith with foreigners through an interpreter, however much and sufficient the ordinary interpreters know languages for trading (selling and buying) and for the daily life, nevertheless they are unable to express the faith and its content in proper and convenient words."[11]

Actions in place of words

The Franciscans tried to overcome translation problems by means of non-verbal communication when they first encountered the Mongol prince Sartaq in

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[8] *Et ad infortunium nostrum, interpres noster stabat iuxta pincernas qui dederunt ei multum bibere, et statim fuit ebrius* (William of Rubruck, *Itinerarium*, XXVIII, 15, p. 249; Jackson, *The Mission*, p. 179).

[9] *Usque huc intellexi interpretem meum, sed ulterius nullam integram sentenciam potui comprehendere, unde percepi bene quod ebrius erat. Et etiam ipse Manguchan videbatur michi temulentus* (William of Rubruck, *Itinerarium*, XXVIII, 18, p. 251; Jackson, *The Mission*, p. 180).

[10] Already John of Pian di Carpini found his interpreter unable to translate a papal letter: *Sed quia noster interpres, quem de Kiovia dato pretio duxeramus, non erat sufficiens ut per eum littere possent interpretari, nec ad hoc aliquis alius idoneus habebatur, iccirco* [sic!] *non / potuerunt interpretari. Historia Mongalorum*, IX, 11 = Giovanni di Pian di Carpine: *Storia dei Mongoli*, ed. Enrico Menestò, transl. Maria Cristiana Lungarotti (Spoleto: Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo, 1989), pp. 225-333 (pp. 308-309).

[11] *Libellus fratris Ricoldi ad nationes orientales*, ed. A. Dondaine, in id., "Ricoldiana: Notes sur les œuvres de Ricoldo da Montecroce," *Archivum Fratrum Praedicatorum*, 37 (1967), pp. 119-179 (pp. 168-169). *Prima regula est quia scire oportet quod nullo modo expedit predicare vel disputare cum extraneis de fide per interpretem, nam interpretes communes quantumcumque bene sciant linguas et sufficienter quantum ad vendendum et emendum et ad communiter convivendum, nesciunt tamen fidem / et ea que sunt intima fidei exprimere per verba propria et convenientia.* Also they are not able to translate scholastic terms such as *natura, ypostasis, persona, forma, materia* etc.

South Russia, who was believed to be Christian. Before the audition, the friars are asked to put on their vestments and chant a blessing for Sartaq. They use the opportunity for a presentation which, I argue, is meant to appeal to the senses of the audience – to the sense of sight, hearing, smell, and touch – and attract peoples' attention to the Christian faith. Namely, William and his *confrater* put on ornamented vestments, and display mass requisites;[12] they enter Sartaq's dwelling chanting *Salve regina*. At first it seems to work, the prince takes the requisites in his hands, scrutinises the Psalter together with his wife, and asks if the Bible in his hand contained the Gospel. But then Sartaq turns to normal business, and on the following day, travelling to Sartaq's father Batu, the friars have to leave the vestments and requisites behind and can only rescue part of them on their way home.

What went wrong? Practices and objects, that appeal to the senses are polysemic. Their exact meaning has yet to be defined, be it by an explanation or pre-existing cultural knowledge. In this particular scene, different implicit contexts intermingled. From the Franciscans' point of view, the presentation before the prince can be seen in the European context of diphany, where the sensual perception of the lay churchgoer was supposed to be transformed into a "spiritual vision of the Divine," with very complex meanings being ascribed to the sensual elements.[13] For the transformation on this occasion, however, the interpretation by means of the spoken word was missing.

To discover the Mongol perspective, later observations made by William also have to be considered. First, Christians were not unknown to the Mongols; Nestorian Christians, who often acted as court officials, surrounded them.[14] Therefore, one can assume that the Franciscan presentation was understood in relation to the rites practised by the Nestorians. This leads to the second point, namely the function of religious groups at the Mongol court. Möngke gathered around him representatives of various religious groups; this poly-religious circle was comprised of Buddhists, Muslims, Christians, and Shamans, the members of which pronounced certain days holy, prayed for the ruler, blessed his cup and were

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[12] Such as the Bible and a richly illuminated Psalter, presents of Saint Louis and the Queen, respectively, the missal, and the cross, while the clerk is carrying the thurible (William of Rubruck, *Itinerarium*, XV, 6-7).

[13] The smell of incense, for example, was often interpreted as the presence of the Divine. Horst Wenzel, *Hören und Sehen. Schrift und Bild: Kultur und Gedächtnis im Mittelalter* (München: Beck, 1995), ch. 3, 'Einschulung des Adels im Kirchenraum: Partizipation und Repräsentation,' pp. 95-127 (pp. 115), "Überführung der sinnlichen Wahrnehmung in eine spirituelle Schau des Göttlichen."

[14] On William of Rubruck and the Nestorian Christians see Jean Dauvillier, "Guillaume de Rubrouck et les communautés chaldéennes d'Asie centrale au Moyen-Age," *L'Orient Syrien*, 2 (1957), pp. 223-242; Anna-Dorothee von den Brincken, "Eine christliche Weltchronik von Qara Qorum: Wilhelm von Rubruck O. F. M. und der Nestorianismus," *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte*, 53 (1971), pp. 1-19.

rewarded with gifts, one group after the other.[15] Now one can see more clearly that the request made to the friars to put on the vestments and chant a blessing was intended as an additional spiritual aid for prince Sartaq, to be performed by a visiting religious group. Not less, but by no means more, there was no intention to *become* Christian, i.e. to rely on the help of only one of the religions at hand.[16]

A better interpreter

When Möngke assembled the Buddhists, Muslims, and Christians at his court in Karakorum for a theological dispute about the true religion, the conditions for the Franciscan were better. This time, his interpreter was the adopted son of a Parisian goldsmith at court, for whom both Mongol and French were native languages. He might also have had some knowledge of religious terms.[17]

I will summarise only the main points of the debate:[18] according to the *Itinerarium*, William allies with the Nestorians and convinces them to let him be their speaker. His opponent is a Chinese wise man speaking on behalf of Lamaistic Buddhists. The Franciscan can next persuade the Mongol arbiters to begin with talking about God. Here the friar with his university training[19] is on safe grounds and he can easily produce a contradiction in the Buddhist's argument. He makes

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[15] A particularly concise description is given by William, when he elaborates on which days Möngke holds court: *[M]os eius est quod talibus diebus, quibus divini sui dicunt ei festos vel sacerdotes nestorini aliquando sacros, quod ipse tunc tenet curiam. Et talibus diebus primo veniunt sacerdotes christiani cum suo apparatu et orant pro eo et benedicunt cifum suum; istis recedentibus, veniunt sacerdotes sarraceni et faciunt similiter; post hos veniunt sacerdotes ydolatre* [i.e., the Buddhists] *idem facientes* (William of Rubruck, *Itinerarium*, XXIX, 15, p. 256).

[16] A similar story is found in the *Itinerarium* of Odoricus of Portu Naonis. In the last chapter, the Franciscan friars are waiting for the Mogol great khan on his way to Khanbaliq, present-day Beijing. The friars display a cross on a board, sing, and light incense, whereupon the great khan lifts his hat in reverence of the cross. In return he is blessed. Odoricus of Portu Naonis, *Itinerarium de mirabilibus orientalium Tartarorum*, in *Sinica Franciscana*, I, pp. 381-495, ch. XXXVIII. This episode was added later by Marchesimus de Bassano, a Franciscan from Padua.

[17] William states about the father, the goldsmith: *Novit enim parum de litteris, et gessit se ut clericus* (William of Rubruck, *Itinerarium*, XXX, 13, p. 281).

[18] The debate has been treated in R. W. Southern, *Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1961; 2nd ed. 1978), pp. 47-51; Johannes Fried, "Auf der Suche nach der Wirklichkeit: Die Mongolen und die europäische Erfahrungswissenschaft im 13. Jahrhundert," *Historische Zeitschrift*, 243 (1986), pp. 287-332 (pp. 308-12); Samuel N. C. Lieu, "Some Themes in Later Roman Anti-Manichaean Polemics: II," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 69 (1986-87), pp. 235-275 (pp. 248-250).

[19] See Schmieder, "*Tartarus*," p. 275, on the question of whether William studied in Paris under Alexander of Hales. In any case, William had with him on the journey the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard, the basic textbook of university training (William of Rubruck, *Itinerarium*, XVI, 3). On the use of the *Sentences* see Marcia L. Colish, *Peter Lombard*, 2 vols. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994), I, pp. 77-90.

the Buddhist confess that no God is all-powerful, and can conclude: "Therefore none of your Gods can rescue you in all danger, for there can be found a case in which he does not have the power."[20] In a European context at university, William would be the clear winner of the dispute, but here, the Nestorians take over as if nothing had happened, enumerating stories from the Bible, convincing nobody. William describes the end of the debate as follows: "When it was all over, the Nestorians and Saracens alike sang in loud voices, while the *tuins* [i.e., the Buddhists][21] remained silent; and after that everyone drank heavily."[22]

Of course one should not follow the account to the letter; the exact line of William's argument is probably a later composition, following a scholastic ideal type. But the dispute as such in all probability took place in 1254, perfectly fitting into a series of official debates among Buddhists and Taoists in 1255 and 1256 after William's departure.[23] Also, certain Buddhist characteristics are too specific to be fictitious – after all, William was the first European to give a detailed description of Buddhism in his report.[24]

Again the question: What went wrong? The background of the debate is a clash of two incommensurable ways of treating the Divine. William of Rubruck conducts himself in a scholastic manner: matters of faith are accessible to 'natural' reason, they can be treated with dialectic methods of argumentation. It is supposed that non-Christians can be convinced of the truth of Christianity by means of rational arguments. For the Buddhists at court, on the other hand, it seems unusual to debate in that manner. According to William, they "began to murmur against Mangu Chan, since no Chan had ever attempted to probe their secrets."[25] These Lamaistic Buddhists can only reveal the secrets of their religion in a narrative, not in a dialectic way. They recite genealogies of gods and myths. I hesitate to call this way of argument 'traditional,' but it is much more built on transmitted wisdom than on abstract reasoning. This is not the time to enter a detailed discussion of Buddhism, but one simply has to acknowledge that in this particular cultural setting logic in its European shape was not seen as relevant and did not have the power to convince. William's argumentative victory was in fact a defeat, for he did not appreciate the intellectual horizon of his audience.

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[20] *Ergo nullus Deorum tuorum potest te salvare in omni periculo, quia potest inveniri casus in quo non habet potestatem* (William of Rubruck, *Itinerarium*, XXXIII, 20, pp. 296-97; translation mine).

[21] Following the expression *toyin* for Uighur monks.

[22] *Hiis peractis nestorini pariter et sarraceni cantaverunt alte, tuinis tacentibus, et postea biberunt omnes copiose* (William of Rubruck, *Itinerarium*, XXXIII, 23, p. 297; Jackson, *The Mission*, p. 235).

[23] Larry William Moses, *The Political Role of Mongol Buddhism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977), pp. 59-63.

[24] Jackson, *The Mission*, p. 49.

[25] ... *inceperunt murmurare contra Manguchan, quia nunquam aliquis Chan hoc attemptaverat ut scrutaretur de secretis eorum* (William of Rubruck, *Itinerarium*, XXXIII, 13, p. 294; Jackson, *The Misssion*, p. 232).

The further events in the *Itinerarium* support this claim: William and his Buddhist opponent were summoned to Möngke on the following day. The great khan, who had been informed about the course of the debate by his arbiters, gave his verdict in form of an image: "But just as God has given the hand several fingers, so he has given mankind several paths. To you God has given the Scriptures and you Christians do not observe them ...; whereas to us he has given soothsayers, and we do as they tell us and live in peace."[26] After that William is told that his stay at court was over and he had to return home.

One should not overlook the political dimension of this episode. According to Buddhism scholar Moses, Möngke held the series of debates from 1254–1256 to find a suitable religion that could provide unity for the diverse peoples of the empire. Moses argues that Christianity with its "assumption of superiority over all other doctrines and Gods" could not provide that and was therefore rejected as state religion by Möngke. The great khan later opted for Buddhism.[27]

An important consequence of the numerous translation problems had already been perceived in the Middle Ages: namely that it was not enough to hope for better interpreters, but one had to learn foreign languages.[28] However, my intention was to make clear that there was not only a problem of translation, but of perception. A mere translation of words is not sufficient if the various contexts, which secure the meaning of words, are not taken into account.

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[26] "*Sed sicut Deus dedit manui diversos digitos, ita dedit hominibus diversas vias. Vobis dedit Deus Scripturas, et vos christiani non custoditis eas . . . ; nobis autem dedit divinatores, et nos facimus quod ipsi dicunt nobis, et vivimus in pace*" (William of Rubruck, *Itinerarium*, XXXIV, 2, p. 298; Jackson, *The Mission*, pp. 236-237).

[27] Moses, *The Political Role*, p. 59.

[28] I only remind of John of Montecorvino, Archbishop of Khanbaliq, present-day Beijing, who apparently knew Mongol and also taught indigenous boys to read and write Latin texts (see the second letter of John of Monte Corvino, in *Sinica Franciscana*, I, pp. 345-351), not to mention the reforming ideas of Ramon Lull (See Eusebio Colomer, "Raimund Lulls Stellung zu den Andersgläubigen: Zwischen Zwie- und Streitgespräch," in *Religionsgespräche im Mittelalter*, ed. Bernard Lewis and Friedrich Niewöhner (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1992), pp. 217-236), and the institution of language schools (see Jean Richard, "L'enseignement des langues orientales en occident au moyen âge," *Revue des Études Islamiques*, 44 (1976), pp. 149-64).

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GEDRUCKT MIT UNTERSTÜTZUNG DER ABTEILUNG KULTUR UND WISSENSCHAFT DES AMTES DER NIEDERÖSTERREICHISCHEN LANDESREGIERUNG

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Cover illustration: The wife of Potiphar covets Joseph: "... erat autem Joseph pulchra facie et decorus apectu: post multos itaque dies iecit domina oculos suis in Ioseph et ait dormi mecum." ("... And Joseph was [a] goodly [person], and well favoured. And it came to pass after these things, that his master's wife cast her eyes upon Joseph; and she said, Lie with me."), Gen. 39: 6-7 (KJV). Concordantiae Caritatis, c. 1350. Cistercian abbey of Lilienfeld (Lower Austria), ms 151, fol. 244v (detail). Photo: Institut für Realienkunde des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit (Krems an der Donau).

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Preface

Oral culture played an instrumental role in medieval society.[1] Due to the lack of any direct source evidence, however, research into the functions and importance of oral communication in the Middle Ages must confront a number of significant problems. Only indrect traces offer the opportunity to analyze phenomena that were based on or connected with the spoken word. The 'oral history' of the Middle Ages requires the application of different approaches than dealing with the 20th or 21st century.

For some decades Medieval Studies have been interested in questions of orality and literacy, their relationship and the substitution of the spoken by the written word.[2] Oral and literate culture were not exclusive and certainly not opposed to each other.[3] The 'art of writing' was part of the 'ars rhetorica' and writing makes no sense without speech.[4] Any existing written statement should also be seen as a spoken one, although, clearly, not every oral statement as a written one. Authors regularly wrote with oral delivery in mind. 'Speaking' and 'writing' are not antonyms.

It is also obvious that "the use of oral communication in medieval society should not be evaluated . . . as a function of *culture populaire* vis-à-vis *culture savante* but, rather, of the communication habits and the tendency of medieval man

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[1] For the late Middle Ages and the early modern period, cf. Willem Frijhoff, "Communication et vie quotidienne à la fin du moyen âge et à l'epoque moderne: réflexions de théorie et de méthode," in *Kommuniation und Alltag in Spätmittelalter und früher Neuzeit*, ed. Helmut Hundsbichler (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1992), p. 24: "La plupart de gens vivait encore pour l'essentiel dans une culture orale et les procédés d'appropriation des idées passaient de préférence par la parole dite et écoutée, quand bien même on était capable d'une lecture visuelle plus ou moins rudimentaire."

[2] See Marco Mostert, "New Approaches to Medieval Communication?" in *New Approaches to Medieval Communication*, ed. Marco Mostert (Turnhout: Brepols, 1999), pp. 15-37; Michael Richter, "Die Entdeckung der 'Oralität' der mittelalterlichen Gesellschaft durch die neuere Mediävistik," in *Die Aktualität des Mittelalters*, ed. Hans-Werner Goetz (Bochum: D. Winkler, 2000), pp. 273-287.

[3] Peter Burke calls the construct of "oral versus literate" useful but at the same time dangerous: idem, "Mündliche Kultur und >Druckkultur< im spätmittelalterlichen Italien," in *Volkskultur des europäischen Spätmittelalters*, eds. Peter Dinzelbacher and Hans-Dieter Mück (Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner Verlag, 1987), p. 60.

[4] Michael Clanchy, "Introduction," in *New Approaches to Medieval Communication*, ed. Marco Mostert (Turnhout: Brepols, 1999), p. 6.

to share his intellectual experiences in the corporate framework."[5] Oral delivery was not "the sole prerogative of any socioeconomic class."[6]

For all these reasons, it is important to analyze the extent of and context, in which 'speech acts,' auditive effects, and oral tradition occur in medieval sources .[7] Research into the use of the spoken word or references to it in texts and images provides new insight into various, mainly social, rules and patterns of the communication system. It opens up additional approaches to the organization and complexity of different, but indispensably related, media in medieval society, and their comparative analysis.[8]

The spoken word is connected with the physical presence of its 'sender.' Speech may represent the authenticity of the given message in a more obvious way than written texts or images. Therefore, the use of 'speech acts' in written or visual evidence also has to be seen in context with the attempt to create, construct, or prove authenticity. Moreover, spoken messages contribute to and increase the lifelikeness of their contents, which may influence their perception by the receiver, their efficacy and success. Being aware of such a situation will have led to the explicit and intended use and application of the spoken word in written texts and images – to increase their authenticity and importance, too.

If one operates with a model of 'closeness' and 'distance' of communication with regard to the level of relation of 'senders' and 'receivers,' then the 'speech acts' or their representation have to be seen as contributors to a 'closer' connection among the participants of the communication process.[9] At the same time, however, speech might be evaluated as less official. One regularly comes across 'oral space'

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[5] Sophia Menache, *The Vox Dei. Communication in the Middle Ages* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 19.

[6] Ibidem, p. 21. Cf. also Jan-Dirk Müller, "Zwischen mündlicher Anweisung und schriftlicher Sicherung von Tradition. Zur Kommunikationsstruktur spätmittelalterlicher Fechtbücher," in *Kommunikation und Alltag in Spätmittelalter und früher Neuzeit*, ed. Helmut Hundsbichler (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1992), p. 400: "Offensichtlich sind schriftliche und nichtschriftliche Tradierung von Wissen weiterhin relativ unabhängig voneinander, nachdem die Schrift längst dazu angesetzt hat, Inseln der Mündlichkeit oder praktisch-enaktiver Wissensvermittlung zu erobern. Die Gedächtnisstütze kann die Erfahrung nicht ersetzen, sondern allenfalls reaktivieren. Sie ist sogar nur verständlich, wo sie auf anderweitig vermittelte Vorkenntnisse stößt."

[7] Cf. W.F.H. Nicolaisen, ed., *Oral Tradition in the Middle Ages* (Binghamton: Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 1995).

[8] See, esp., Horst Wenzel, *Hören und Sehen, Schrift und Bild. Kultur und Gedächtnis im Mittelalter* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1995), passim.

[9] See also Stefan Sonderegger, ">Gesprochen oder nur geschrieben?< Mündlichkeit in mittelalterlichen Texten als direkter Zugang zum Menschen," in *Homo Medietas. Aufsätze zu Religiosität, Literatur und Denkformen des Menschen vom Mittelalter bis in die Neuzeit. Festschrift für Alois Maria Haas zum 65. Geburtstag,* eds. Claudia Brinker-von der Heyde and Niklaus Largier (Bern et al.: Peter Lang, 1999), p. 665: "Jedenfalls darf man sich bewußt bleiben, daß auch in den Texten des deutschen Mittelalters die Reflexe gesprochener Sprache eine bedeutende Schicht ausmachen, die besonders dann immer wieder hervortritt, wenn es um einen direkten Zugang zum Menschen geht, um einVerstehen aus unmittelbarer Partnerschaft heraus ..."

that has become institutionalized or more official by the application of 'written space.'[10] Simultanous employment of such different levels and qualities of messages must often have had considerable influence on their efficacy.[11]

The papers in this volume are the outcome of an international workshop that was held in February, 2001, at the Department of Medieval Studies, Central European University, Budapest. Participants concentrated on problems of the occurrence, usage, and patterns of the spoken word in written and visual sources of the Middle Ages. They dealt with the role and contents of direct and indirect speech in textual evidence or in relation to it, such as chronicles, travel descriptions, court and canonization protocols, sermons, testaments, law-books, literary sources, drama, etc. They also tried to analyze the function of oral expression in connection with late medieval images.

The audiovisuality of medieval communication processes[12] has proved to be evident and, thus, important for any kind of further comparative analysis of the various levels of the 'oral–visual–literate,' i.e. multimedia culture of the Middle Ages. Particular emphasis has to be put on methodological problems, such as the necessity of interdisciplinary approaches,[13] or the question of the extent to which we are, generally, able to comprehend and to decode the communication systems of the past.[14] Moreover, the medievalist does not come across any types of sources in which oral communication represents the main concern.[15] Instead, she or he is confronted, at first glance, with a great variety of 'casual' and 'marginal' evidence.

We would like to thank all the contributors to the workshop and to this volume. Their cooperation made it possible to publish the results of the meeting in the same year in which it took place. This can be seen as a rare exception, at least in the world of the historical disciplines. The head, faculty, staff, and students of the Department of Medieval Studies of Central European University offered various help and support. Special thanks go to Judith Rasson, the copy editor of

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[10] This, e.g., could be well shown in a case study on the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela: Friederike Hassauer, "Schriftlichkeit und Mündlichkeit im Alltag des Pilgers am Beispiel der Wallfahrt nach Santiago de Compostela," in *Wallfahrt und Alltag in Mittelalter und früher Neuzeit*, eds. Gerhard Jaritz and Barbara Schuh (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1992), pp. 277-316.

[11] Cf. Bob Scribner, "Mündliche Kommunikation und Strategien der Macht in Deutschland im 16. Jahrhundert," in *Kommunikation und Alltag in Spätmittelalter und früher Neuzeit*, ed. Helmut Hundsbichler (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1992), pp. 183-197.

[12] Wenzel, *Hören und Sehen*, p. 292.

[13] Cf. Ursula Schaefer, "Zum Problem der Mündlichkeit," in *Modernes Mittelalter. Neue Bilder einer populären Epoche*, ed. Joachim Heinzle (Frankfurt am Main and Leipzig: Insel Verlag, 1994), pp. 374 f.

[14] Frijhoff, "Communication et vie quotidienne," p. 25: "Sommes-nous encore en mesure de communiquer avec la communication de jadis?"

[15] Michael Richter, *Sprache und Gesellschaft im Mittelalter. Untersuchungen zur mündlichen Kommunikation in England von der Mitte des elften bis zu Beginn des vierzehnten Jahrhunderts* (Stuttgart: Anton Hiersemann, 1979), p. 22.

this volume, who took particluar care with the texts of the many non-native speakers fighting with the pitfalls of the English language.

Budapest, Krems, and Constance
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