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ERNST MAYR LECTURE 2022: HOPI HOEKSTRA

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Greeting

The Ernst Mayr Lecture is one of the definitive highlights of the year, dear Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger, dear Dieter Ebert, dear Axel Meyer, ladies and gentlemen. The Ernst Mayr Lecture is, of course, one of the definitive highlights of this year, because Hopi Hoekstra will be speaking, and I would like to welcome her very, very warmly here at the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities. But the Ernst Mayr Lecture is also one of the definitive highlights of the Academy's scientific life, not only because it was founded under the name of our honorary member Ernst Mayr, but also because Mayr gave the first lecture in this series twenty-five years ago. Personally, it became clear to me some time before I was admitted to the Academy that the Ernst Mayr Lecture was a highlight of the academic year – when I was a Fellow of the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin in Wallotstraße in 1998/1999. Back then, Jared Diamond from Los Angeles spoke here in the Academy building (in the Einstein-Hall, if I remember correctly) on the topic of „Rich and Poor“. We discussed the theses of this lecture, which was later published as a monograph under the title „Guns, Germs, and Steel“, again and again over breakfast or lunch in the Grunewald during the following days, and his decisive plea for environmental determinacy opened my eyes to the importance of nature as a factor in the historical sciences.

Although I have not only been elected to this academy and am now its president, and therefore have the honour of opening this year's lecture by Hopi Hoekstra, I am no more a specialist in the subject that has been the subject of these Ernst Mayr Lectures for five and twenty years than I was with Diamond in 1998. To be more precise: as a historian, philologist and theologian who deals with religions in antiquity, I am also miles away from the topics our lecturer this year is dealing with. The last President of the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy, who was really able to claim expertise on the subjects of the Mayr Lecture, was also the first President of the newly constituted Academy – it was the unforgotten biologist Hubert Markl from Constance, the last honorary member of our Academy to date, an honorary member just like Ernst Mayr, the first honorary member of the newly constituted Academy in 1994. As biologists, Markl and Mayr never shied away from placing their subject into a broader context and thus also talked about the humanities. Markl liked to be trenchant. I will never forget how he formulated his plea that excellent science today should be formulated in English, without regard for the protesting humanities scholars and their attachment to the German language. He used the Munich Romance scholar Karl Vosseler as a justification, presumably not without provocative intent. And the first Ernst Mayr Lecture, by Ernst Mayr himself, on 14 October 1997 here at the Academy, was also dedicated to a topic that transcended the strict boundaries between the natural sciences and the humanities. Mayr spoke on the topic: „What actually is the philosophy of biology?“, not only looking at anthropology, but also talking about ethics.

In view of my predecessor Markl and Ernst Mayr's first lecture, I dare to conclude this greeting with a few thoughts by a scientist from outside the field. Historical studies cannot exist without sources, and sources must be edited. And for each edition set up according to the classical method established here in Berlin in the nineteenth century by our member Karl Lachmann, the manuscripts that bear witness to

a text must be hierarchized and inserted into a stemma. It is the stemma, a family tree of the dependencies of the manuscripts on the very first original, that is important to me. For such a stemma (as expression of a family dependency) connects, if I see it correctly, at least the classical theory of evolution with the classical form of classical philology. And in both sciences – my own and yours, dear Mrs Hoekstra and the vast majority of our guests in the room – such a stemma as a graphic modelling of family dependence is of fundamental importance for the new form of the respective science that emerged in the nineteenth century and revolutionized the previous study of the subject.

At a conference on Lachmann and his philological editing method held at the Wissenschaftskolleg in 2018 and recently published, the Munich-based Greek scholar Oliver Primavesi showed that the first corresponding genealogical tree in philology appears in an edition of laws from Västergötland published by the legal historians Hans Samuel Collin and Carl Johan Schlyter in Stockholm in 1827. The two jurists place the stemma of the manuscripts directly below the facsimile of a handwritten tree-diagram from a medieval manuscript, which clearly shows medieval relationships of kinship. This neighbourhood makes it crystal clear to what extent the form of stemmatics of the philological editing technique were drawn from the family trees. If I had more time and if this were not the opening greeting, I would, on the one hand, use these observations to follow in the footsteps of the art historians Julia Voss and Horst Bredekamp and also take a look at the family trees of the earliest evolutionary biology and make comparisons. On the other hand, it would certainly also be interesting to trace how in philology as well as in evolutionary biology the stemmata have become problematic and new designs sometimes manage without them or at least think they can manage without them.

However, I can reassure you, dear Hopi Hoekstra, ladies and gentlemen – with my little digression on the relationship between philology and evolutionary biology, I did not want to presume to give an Ernst Mayr Lecture myself, but only to welcome you all to this year's Ernst Mayr Lecture, an anniversary lecture, a special highlight. It is a pleasure to work together with the Wissenschaftskolleg, dear Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger, and I thank those who have been preparing this lecture since the beginning, Rüdiger Wehner and Axel Meyer, but also Dieter Ebert, who has so kindly joined this group on the part of the Wissenschaftskolleg. And now, I greet you all once again very warmly, especially Hopi Hoekstra, and wish this anniversary lecture a good course and us all good insights into the matter. Thank you very much.