

## Introduction

### *Decentering the History of Knowledge*

▼ **FORUM ARTICLE** in *Decentering the History of Knowledge*

▼ **ISSUE** Volume 5 (2024)

From its beginnings, the *Journal for the History of Knowledge* has adopted a global scope.<sup>1</sup> This choice is implied by its subject matter, as compared to, for instance, the history of science. The latter field has for a long time privileged Europe as the birthplace of its subject, and historians of science only started to turn their gaze to local knowledges constructed in the so-called peripheries by the end of the twentieth century. By contrast, the history of *knowledge* tries to be even-handed and inclusive of different forms of knowledge. It does not hint at any centers or peripheries.

But what exactly does such a global approach entail? Does it amount to a single perspective that universalizes knowledge? Does it suggest a multipolar world in which knowledge production is localized? Does a plurality of knowledges entail a multiplicity of histories from different parts of the world? Does it call for a diversity of perspectives on how to even understand the whereabouts of knowledge? Or does a decentered approach focus on circulation and exchange, or on interaction and travel, in which knowledge is produced by movements across the globe?

For this Forum, we have invited several experts to reflect on decentering the history of knowledge: what it means, how to approach it, what challenges it faces, and how to give shape to it in research and writing. In tackling these issues, the Forum itself takes a decentered set-up: it features historians with expertise in different geographical areas around the world. While each

---

<sup>1</sup> Marwa Elshakry, "Beyond a Singular History of Knowledge," *Journal for the History of Knowledge* 1, no. 1 (2020): 6. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5334/jhk.30>.

**Sven Dupré** • Utrecht University and University of Amsterdam, NL [s.g.m.dupre@uu.nl](mailto:s.g.m.dupre@uu.nl)

**Geert Somsen** • Maastricht University and VU Amsterdam, NL  
[g.somsen@maastrichtuniversity.nl](mailto:g.somsen@maastrichtuniversity.nl)

**Cite this article:** Sven Dupré and Geert Somsen, 'Introduction', *Journal for the History of Knowledge*, 5 (2024), 177–178

<<https://dx.doi.org/10.55283/jhk.19522>>

DOI: 10.55283/jhk.19522

This is an open access article made available under a [cc by 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).  
© 2024, The Author(s). Published by Gewina in collaboration with Brepols Publishers.



**BREPOLS**

contributor hence “comes from” a certain region, all have an interest in the bigger – global – picture. What they again vary in are the different aspects and problems of decentering the history of knowledge that they seek to highlight, whether these are conceptual, archival, material, linguistic, or otherwise.

The eight contributions are followed by a response, in which Anna Grasskamp wraps up the Forum by adding some overall reflections. It is our hope that the Forum will help to set an agenda for a global history of knowledge.

Sven Dupré and Geert Somsen, *Editors in Chief*