Generation and Emanation in Paul of Geldria’s Commentary on the Prologue of John:
Dynamics of assimilation and differentiation at the University of Vienna at the end of the fourteenth century

From the point of view of a wider research context, our society is confronted with the challenge of developing dynamics of dialog between Islam and Christianity in Europe. My hypothesis is that medieval philosophy can offer models of constructive interaction at the highest scientific and cultural level. I shall concentrate on a theoretical model in which Christian medieval theologians assimilate the Greek-Arabic philosophical concept of emanation (the production of reality as a flow out of the first Principle) to conceptualize their Trinitarian doctrine of the divine generation. My purpose is to show how European culture has developed itself through the assimilation of elements of Arabic metaphysics and to point out which differentiation strategies were adopted. My textual basis is the commentary on the Prologue of the Gospel of John of a theologian at the University of Vienna at the end of the 14th century, Paul of Geldria, a disciple of Henry of Langenstein.

The innovative potential of my project for philosophy consists in highlighting the role of Paul of Geldria on three levels which constitute the scientific impacts of my project. The first scientific impact is historiographical. It consists in the identification of a specific epistemic genre and its very reception at the University of Vienna at the end of the 14th century. The second impact concerns medieval intellectual history and the associated networks. With the help of an epistemic genre, one can precisely map the intellectual influences of different religious orders and universities on a set of questions. I will here focus on the context at the University of Vienna. The third impact concerns the history of philosophy and can inform our understanding of the dialogue with Islam on the concepts of generation and emanation. Those three scientific impacts will contribute to shed light on Prof. Prügl’s (co-applicant) ongoing FWF-Project at the Institute for Historical Theology in Vienna on a topic that offers the closest and most appropriate context for the study of Paul of Geldria’s commentary: Biblical Hermeneutics and Exegesis in the Late Middle Ages: The Introductio in sacram scripturam of Henry of Langenstein (†1397).

My project contributes to three theoretical research areas: (1) it brings new insights into the intellectual history of the Middle Ages (transfers between universities, religious orders of men and women); (2) it offers a philosophical study of the influences of Greek-Arabic Neoplatonism on medieval Johannine theology; (3) It serves to identify the commentaries on the Prologue to the Gospel of John as a specific epistemic genre. I use an interdisciplinary methodology: manuscript edition, palaeography and codicology, philosophical, theological and scientific sources, intellectual networks, global history, philosophical study of arguments and problems. My method of research presupposes that the intellectual history of Europe is an interweaving of languages and cultures where mixed influences do not prevent the definition of one’s own identity.