



Seminar

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Magic and Pneumatology in Early Modern Academic Texts

Tuesday, 4 April, 11:15 a.m.

In the Thunberg Lecture Hall
SCAS, Linneanum, Thunbergsvägen 2, Uppsala
www.swedishcollegium.se

S W E D I S H
C O L L E G I U M
for ADVANCED STUDY

ABOUT MEELIS FRIEDENTHAL

Meelis Friedenthal studied theology at the universities of Tartu and Heidelberg. He received his doctoral degree in 2008 from the University of Tartu for the thesis ‘The *Tractatus moralis de oculo* of the Tallinn City Archives’. The thesis presented a transcription, translation and commentary of a fourteenth-century manuscript containing a moral-allegorical treatise on vision and seeing. From 2008 to 2013, Friedenthal worked on a University of Tartu Library project about the intellectual history of the Baltic provinces of the Swedish and Russian empires. In addition, Friedenthal led a project aiming to describe paper and watermarks of the seventeenth-century Tartu University print-shop. From 2014 to 2015, Friedenthal was a Fellow at the Lichtenberg-Kolleg, Göttingen, with the research focus on the concept of tolerance in early modern German university disputations.

His publications include a co-edited volume, *Religiooni ja ateismi ajaloost Eestis* (On the History of Religion and Atheism in Estonia, with Atko Rimmel, 2012) and *Text and Its Materialities in Early Modern Estonia* (with Anu Lepp, 2014). He is also a co-author of the early Estonian printings database (paber.ut.ee).

The goal of Friedenthal’s project at SCAS is to analyze the intellectual tradition of the Baltic Sea region during the period of the Swedish Empire (1611–1721). The approach is to examine university disputations and to investigate the presence and reception of new philosophical ideas. Digitized disputations make it possible, in parallel with the traditional methods of intellectual history, to also perform quantitative text analysis methods that will help to detect changing patterns of thinking.

ABSTRACT

In the universities of the Swedish empire during 17th century there were many disputations held that dealt with the question of magic. Some are general discussions concerning magic, but also more specific works on demons, occult powers, healing qualities of stones and crystals and judicial astrology were ventilated. The great majority of disputations concerning magic in Swedish universities were held in the faculty of philosophy – it appears that magic and occult were not foremost a theological concern. Accordingly, authors discuss magic relying mostly on „natural light” and we see both positive and negative attitudes towards these topics. The aim of my talk is first of all to look at some of these different attitudes and sort out the motivation for the disapproval or approval of magical practices. When leaving aside pacts with devil and the assistance of demons which are considered to be uncontroversially only harmful (demonic magic), it emerges that there are also different attitudes towards „natural magic”. Proponents of natural magic describe it as the most thorough investigation and knowledge about nature, which only seems to be wonderful and prodigious for the uneducated and simpleminded – actually there is nothing supernatural about it. At the same time they admit that natural magic operates with hidden qualities and mention often spirits or *virtutes* found in plants, stones and planets. These were all effects for what the normal Aristotelian physics was unable to give a satisfactory and convincing account. Admitting the reality of these effects there were questions raised that pertained to physics, metaphysics and medicine, but were relevant also to theology, not least because of the possibility of colluding with demons. Such an understanding of magic makes it very similar to pneumatology, which was defined as the science about all kinds of immaterial substances (including demons, souls etc). The talk discusses how these occult powers and immaterial substances came to be debated in Swedish universities of the 17th century.