

Laudatio von Univ.-Prof. Dr. Meinrad Ziegler für die Preisträgerin

## **Matilda Cazzola**

Project „Towards a Global Conceptual History from Below:  
The Political Thought of Thomas Spence (1750-1814)

### **Introduction Matilda Cazzola**

Actual Position: Research-grant at Einaudi Fund in Turin for a project “Thought and administration in the British Empire: Lord Elgin and colonial constitutional orders”.

2018 PhD in “Political Thought and Institutions” at the University of Bologna. Titel of the dissertation: “The Missionaries of Order. Law Sovereignty and Government in the Political Thought of Administrators of the British Empire (c.1750-1900)

International research activities and grants, to name some of it:

- 2019: Research Assistant at International Institute of Social History, Project: “West African Consumption Patterns”.
- 2019: Cazzola was awarded with Early Career Essay Prize by the Journal “Atlantic Studies. Global Currents” for the article “‘All shall be happy by land and by sea’: Thomas Spence as an Atlantic Thinker”
- 2017: four-month scholarship “Marco Polo” for a visiting period at the University of Pittsburgh, granted by the University of Bologna.

2015 MA in History at University of Bologna; with a MA thesis which laid the basis for her project now awarded by Edith Saurer Fund. Titel: “The Political Thought of Thomas Spence”.

### **The project**

Thomas Spence is a British radical thinker of the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century. He lived from 1750 to 1814 in Newcastle and London and is renowned for his proposal to abolish private property of the land and to lease it for cultivation. In his thinking this idea implies a revolution in reorganizing of the

social and political relations as well as the state. The rents paid for the plots should be redistributed among the inhabitants. The state might be replaced with a decentralized parish system.

We learned that Matilda Cazzola is working on the Thomas Spence since she did her MA thesis. We may understand her as one voice in a rather quiet but persistent discourse in social history that argues that Spence and his thought might have been fallen victim to misinterpretation and neglect since the second half of the 19th century. Matilda is going to use the grant to turn her MA thesis from 2015 into a monography on Spence. In a minute we will hear the outlines of a Matilda's perspective on Thomas Spence and in which way she wants to give a new profile to this largely forgotten political thinker.

There are many reasons why we thought the project of Matilda Cazzola should be advocated. I want to mention two of them:

First, social inequality is the must have for being awarded by Edith Saurer Fund. The project fully meets this criterion. Thomas Spence's political thought is focused on private property of the land, an essential institution in regard with social inequality. His age was one of transformation: The Capital detached itself more and more from the land. Capitalist command on the working people was no longer founded on landed possessions but acquired the free and moveable form of labor payed with money and wages. Cazzola intends to demonstrate that Spence was not blind to this process of change. His idea was to turn back to the lands when looking for solutions to the problems of the newborn industrial society.

Second, the project is very special in its methodology: Thomas Spence did not address historians, philosophers, educated people. His privileged audience were poor and often illiterate members of the so called "swinish multitude". Therefore he had to use the methods of the underground, in his case these are humorous ballads, subversive tokens, half-penny pamphlets. One of the challenges of this Cazzola's project lies in re-reading these historical sources and in translating it into the language of conceptual historians. Now the title of the proposal is getting clear: "Towards a global conceptual history from below".