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Foreword

The German cardinal Nicholas of Cusa (Nikolaus von Kues/Nicolaus Cusanus, 1401–1464) is mostly known today for his elaborate philosophical work. As one of the first proponents of Renaissance humanism, he was a key figure of the fifteenth century, with not only a strong interest in theology, philosophy and canon law, but also in astronomy, mapmaking and cosmography. In contrast to the traditional medieval Aristotelian cosmology Cusa developed the concept of an infinite universe. This leads to the innovative question of which epistemological or historical connections can be discerned to connect his writings to the contemporary beginnings of global explorations that culminated in the discovery of the New World(s).

But what did the term “cosmography” mean in those days? And in what sense was the universe considered infinite? What about the intellectual and personal connections of Cusa to the Iberian Peninsula, where scientific and technological knowledge was exchanged with the Holy Roman Empire? What role did he play in the history of science of the early modern period, on the eve of European exploration to the ocean world and its repercussions? And did his work actually offer an intellectual preparation and framework of reflection for the discoveries of the New World and their reception, which included a spiritual expansion of the Christian world?

These questions were discussed during the international workshop “*Universum Infinitum*”. From the German Philosopher Nicolaus Cusanus (1401–1464) to the Iberian Discoveries in the Fifteenth Century: Ocean World in European Exploration. This meeting took place at the National Library of Portugal in Lisbon on June 17 and 18, 2016. It was organized by Thomas Horst (CIUHCT/Faculdade de Ciências da Universidade de Lisboa, Portugal) in close cooperation with Harald Schwaetzer and Matthias Vollet (both at the Kueser Akademie für Europäische Geistesgeschichte, Bernkastel-Kues, Germany) and the local organisation committee (Maria Joaquina Esteves Feijão, João Carlos Garcia and Samuel Gessner).

The interdisciplinary workshop (with 17 papers in English, French, German, Portuguese and Spanish) brought together international scholars, who are concerned, in a broad sense with Nicholas of Cusa and his time. They approached the topic from different viewpoints, such as philosophy, church history, history of discoveries, theology, natural sciences, mathematics, history of scientific instruments, cartography, cosmography and astrology; see <https://ciuhct.org/congressos/universum-infinitum>. Thus, the conference illuminated a variety of aspects of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries: from contemporary cartography and cosmographical views of the world to humanistic reflections on philosophy, theology and natural history.

Due to several circumstances, including the Covid19 pandemic, it has taken a long time – more than six years – to publish the proceedings of the Lisbon meeting. Unfortunately, not all authors were able to submit their original papers. However, thanks to the help of Kirstin Zeyer (Kueser Akademie für Europäische Geistesgeschichte, Bernkastel-Kues, Germany) these papers, which have been peer-reviewed, can finally be published.

The volume starts with a substantial introduction keynote (by Thomas Horst, CIUHCT/FCUL, Portugal) that discusses not only the so-called Cusanus Map, but in particular the role of Nicholas of Cusa and his cosmographical network, in which the Lisbon canon Fernando Martins de Roriz (1423–after 1483) played a special role. The following chapter by Thomas Woelki (Acta Cusana, Berlin, Germany), who did not participate in the original meeting, but gave a guest lecture at the CIUHCT, University of Lisbon on April 20, 2018, brings new insights to the relations of Cusa and the contemporary mining activity in Tyrol.

The next two articles focus on cosmographical questions: Jean-Marie Nicolle (University Centre of Theology, Rouen, France) discusses the infinite universe in Cusa's works in his paper in French, while Gregor Nickel (University of Siegen, Germany) highlights the importance of mathematics for his cosmography.

The papers by Jürgen Pohle (CHAM/Universidade Nova de Lisboa, Portugal) and Robert King (independent researcher, National Library of Australia) demonstrate how Iberian exploration and discoveries were reflected in Renaissance texts and maps and how they began to visualize the ocean world.

While analysing the glosses written by Cusa himself in manuscripts, José Martínez Gázquez (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Spain) presents interesting material on Cusa's critical reading of the Koran. Using the example of the Italian humanist Peter Martyr d'Anghiera (1457–1526), Davide Scotto (University of Naples L'Orientale, Italy) is able to demonstrate how the connection between conventional knowledge and on the ground experience shapes the humanist's view of non-Christian peoples along the interaction between Mediterranean events and the discoveries in the 'New World'. On the other hand, Cristóvão S. Marinheiro (National Library of Luxembourg) tracks the reception of the Jesuit commentaries on Aristotle by the *Conimbricenses* and their role in constructing a new *Imago Mundi*.

Finally, Thomas Horst demonstrates the hitherto neglected aspect that the globe, which serves as a philosophical toy in Cusa's late work *Dialogus de ludo globi*, has to be understood as a figuration of a globe in the sense of a cosmographical instrument as well. The last contribution (Samuel Gessner, CIUHCT/FCUL, Portugal), deals with another instrument – the astrolabe purportedly once owned by Cusa himself that is still today preserved in Bernkastel-Kues.

With the publication of these eleven papers we hope to provide new insights into the multifaceted topic of an infinite universe in the thinking of the German cardinal. We are confident that this multidisciplinary approach will complement and bolster the classical philosophical studies (beginning with those by Ernst Cassirer and Alexandre Koyré) with new research suggesting underexplored cultural connections that will also enrich the history of science.

Lisbon, November 2022

Thomas Horst