

Writing the Histories of Ancient Universities: A Roundtable Discussion

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What historiographical and methodological questions are posed in writing the history of the older universities of Europe? For whom are such histories written and from what materials? How do institutions reckon with the disruptions and darker episodes in their own past? And what can be learned from comparing institutions with very different histories across time and space? This seminar considers these issues through two case-studies: the Università di Padova in Italy (est. 1222) and the University of Aberdeen in Scotland (founded 1495 and 1593, united 1860), both of which are the subject of recently published or forthcoming collective histories. Over the centuries Padova and Aberdeen have made a distinctive contribution to the intellectual life not only of their city and region but also nationally and internationally. Both remain research-intensive institutions with an international profile. How do their past and present shape the stories they tell about themselves?

Antonella Barzazi is Professor of Early Modern History in the Department of Political Science, Law, and International Studies, and a member of the Academic Board of the Centre for the History of the University of Padua (CSUP). Her research focuses on political-religious history, cultural institutions, and intellectual networks from the 16th to the 18th centuries. Within this framework, she has particularly examined the educational and cultural initiatives of religious orders in Italy, as well as institutional and private libraries between the Counter-Reformation and the Enlightenment. A persistent interest in her studies is the history of the University of Padua in the early modern period. She has explored its role as a hub in international political-intellectual relations, in the formation of European political elites, and in the dissemination of models of cultural communication. She has also analysed the complex relationship between the Studium of Padua and ecclesiastical and political powers during the 16th and 17th centuries.

Annalisa Oboe is Professor of Anglophone Literatures and Postcolonial Studies in the Department of Linguistic and Literary Studies (DiSLL) at the University of Padua. Her research focuses on postcolonial literatures, cultures and critical theory; Black Atlantic studies; Anglophone women's writing; South African and West African literatures; Gender studies; historical fiction and historiographic metafiction; history, ethics and collective futures. Her main publications include *Fiction, History and Nation in South Africa* (Supernova, 1994); *Mongrel Signatures: Reflections on the Work of Mudrooroo* (Rodopi, 2003); *Recharting the Black Atlantic: Modern Cultures, Local Communities, Global Connections* (ed. with A. Scacchi, Routledge, 2008); *Experiences of Freedom in Postcolonial Literatures and Cultures* (ed. with S. Bassi, Routledge 2011); *Archives of the Future: Italy, the Postcolonial and the Time to Come* (From the European South 1, 2016); *Chris Abani* (monograph with E. Bordin, Contemporary World Writers Series, Manchester University Press, 2022); *Why EDI Matters: Equ(al)ity, Diversity and Inclusion in European Universities* (co-edited with Věra Sokolová, Helena Wahlström Henriksson, PUP, 2025). She is the founder and editor-in-chief of the refereed scientific journal *From the European South: a transdisciplinary journal of postcolonial humanities* (2016-).

Bradford Bow is Senior Lecturer in Intellectual History at the University of Aberdeen, Deputy Director of the Research Institute of Irish and Scottish Studies, and editor of the *Journal of Scottish Thought*. An intellectual historian of Scottish Enlightenment philosophy and its global diffusion, he is the author of *The Wise Club: Origins of Common Sense in the Aberdeen Philosophical Society, 1758-1773* (Cambridge University Press, 2026), *Dugald Stewart's Empire of the Mind: Moral Education in the late Scottish Enlightenment* (Oxford University Press, 2022), and editor of *Common Sense in the Scottish Enlightenment* (Oxford University Press, 2018). With Michael Brown, he is co-editing *Foundations and Disruptions: A New History of Aberdeen University* (Aberdeen University Press, forthcoming 2027).

Michael Brown holds a chair in Irish, Scottish and Enlightenment History at the University of Aberdeen, where he is also Director of the Research Institute of Irish and Scottish Studies. He is the author of *The Irish Enlightenment* (2016) and the editor of, most recently, *Adam Ferguson and the Politics of Virtue* (2023). He is working on a study entitled *The Unsettled State: British Identity Between the Unions, 1707-1801*. Together with Brad Bow, he is editing *Foundations and Disruptions: A New History of Aberdeen University* (Aberdeen University Press, forthcoming 2027).

History of Universities Seminar

Convened by Miles Taylor (Humboldt University of Berlin, Germany), Ku-ming (Kevin) Chang (Academia Sinica, Taiwan), and Heike Jöns (Loughborough University, United Kingdom) in collaboration with the ICHU. Hosted by the Humboldt University of Berlin on Zoom: <https://www.histgeog-uni.net/history-of-universities-seminar-2026-27/>.