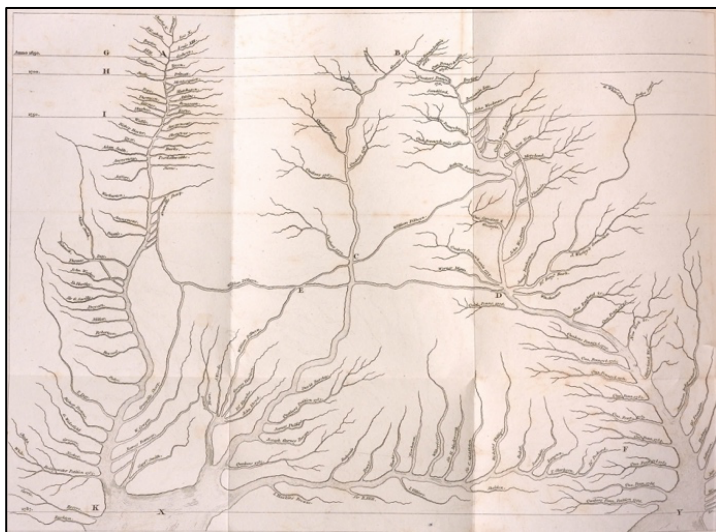


Abolitionist Movements: Freedom and Slavery in European

Political Thought, 1770–1820

Workshop 1

Overseas and Atlantic Perspectives



Organised by

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Moritz-Stern-Institut | Georg-August-Universität Göttingen

27–28 May 2026

Description

Recounting the rise of the abolitionist movement the British abolitionist Thomas Clarkson compared it to a “river” of ideas, with “different springs which have contributed to its increase” ultimately culminating in “the torrent which swept away the Slave-trade.” Clarkson found that to understand the rise of abolitionism one needed to study this river of ideas, not only its source but also the “different streams” which would “run into it and feed it.” The map, which Clarkson drew, had two main branches, a European and an American; however, despite the mentioning of a few continental thinkers like Rousseau, Montesquieu, and Raynal, the European branch was predominantly anglophone. Clarkson’s map of abolitionist thinkers, still today, outlines the dominating view of the development of abolitionist thought. Yet, a growing number of national studies have pointed to the limited scope of this anglophone perspective. Studies on Denmark, Sweden, Spain, Portugal, Italy, Netherlands, Switzerland, Germany, Poland, the Baltic provinces, and Russia have outlined the contours of rich and diverse abolitionist projects in Europe. But still, as these studies are mostly focused on national abolitionist projects, the understanding of a shared European heritage remains fragmented.

The aim of this network is to redraw, expand, and reassess Clarkson’s map from a European perspective in order to study and connect the multiple “springs” and “streams” that contributed to the “the torrent which swept away the Slave-trade.” By focusing on continental Europe, we aim to examine the common cause between the abolition of slavery and the abolition of serfdom. The network brings together a group of internationally recognized experts to produce the first comprehensive study of abolitionism as a European political discourse. In doing so, the network will analyse how key abolitionist texts and debates were connected transnationally through transfer, translation, and shared ideology, and how they intervened in national projects and policies on servitude.

Programme

27 May 2026

09:30–10:30 **Welcome and Opening Remarks**
Brian Kjær Olesen and Jonas Gerlings

10:30–12:30: **Panel 1: England**
Chair: Jonas Gerlings

John Coffey | *The Wilberforce Circle and European Abolitionists, 1787-1823*

12:30–14:30 **Lunch**

14:30–16:30 **Panel 2: France**
Chair: Brian Kjær Olesen

Gabriel Darriulat | *Colonial Slavery in Light of the Abolition of Slavery and Serfdom in Europe: Abbé Grégoire*

16:30–17:00 **Coffee/tea**

17:00–19:00 **Panel 3: The Netherlands**
Chair: Jonas Gerlings

Bert Drejer | *The language of liberty in Dutch anti-slavery discourse (1790s): Dutch or European?*

20:00 **Dinner**



28 May 2026

09:30–10:00 **Coffee/tea**

10:00–12:00 **Panel 4 (online): Spain**
Chair: Brian Kjær Olesen

Jose M. Portillo | *Neither Spanish, Nor Men, Nor Anything: Slavery and the Origins of Constitutional Culture in Spain*

12:00–14:00 **Lunch**

14:00–16:00 **Panel 5: Denmark**
Chair: Jonas Gerlings

Brian Kjær Olesen | *Abolitionist Divides: The Paradoxes of Modern Freedom in Eighteenth Century Denmark*

16:00–16:30 **Coffee/tea**

16:30–18:30 **Plenary Discussion and Network Plans**

20:00 **Dinner**

