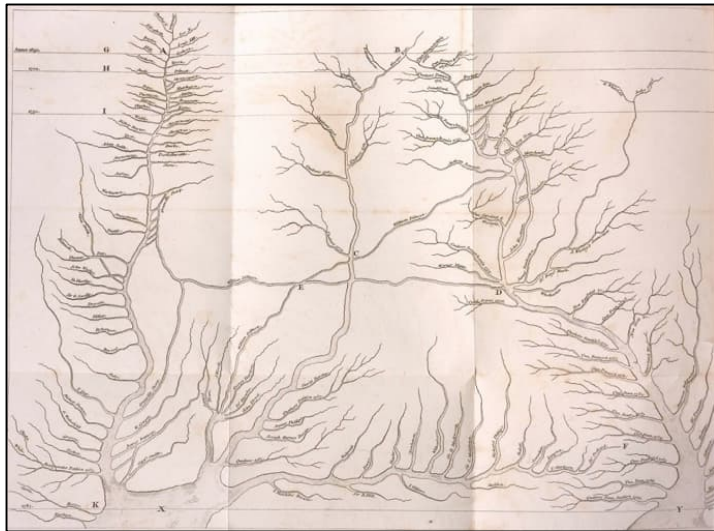


Abolitionist Movements: Freedom and Slavery in European

Political Thought, 1770–1820

Workshop 2

Continental and Baltic Perspectives



Organised by

Brian Kjær Olesen and Jonas Gerlings

(Olmo, Fiesole/Florence)

05–06 October 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

05 October 2026

10:00–10:30 Welcome and Opening Remarks
Brian Kjær Olesen and Jonas Gerlings

10:30–12:00 Panel 1
Chair: Jonas Gerlings

Andrew Kahn | *Considerations of the serf problem in Russia from the Pugachev Rebellion (1774) to the Decembrist Rebellion (1825)*

12:00–14:00 Lunch

14:00–15:30 Panel 2
Chair: Brian Kjær Olesen

Pärtel Piirimäe and Kadi Kähär-Peterson | *Conceptualizing freedom in Baltic debates on serfdom and reform, ca 1770–1820*

15:30–16:00 Coffee / tea

16:00–17:30 Panel 3
Chair: Jonas Gerlings

Vincent Roy-Di Piazza | *Did they know about it? Utopian Swedish abolitionism and the St Barthelemy slave trade*

20:00 Dinner

06 October 2026

10:00–10:30 Coffee / tea

10:30–12:00 Panel 4
Chair: Brian Kjær Olesen

Jonas Gerlings | *Abolitionism in Fragments. The Emergence of Anti-Slavery Sentiment in the German Public*

12:00–14:00 Lunch

14:00–15:30 Panel 5
Chair: Jonas Gerlings

Iwan-Michelangelo D'Aprile | *Abolitionism and Jewish Emancipation. Saul Ascher (1767-1822) as a German abolitionist in the Prussian reform era*

15:30–16:00 Coffee / tea

16:00–17:30 Panel 6
Chair: Brian Kjær Olesen

Giulia Bonazza | *Italian abolitionism and its transnational network*

17:30–18:00 Plenary Discussion and Network Plans

20:00 Dinner