

Believing, making, acting:

FREEDOMS IN PRE-MODERN EUROPE

*International Conference
27–28 May 2027, Vilnius*



Deutsches
Historisches Institut
Warschau



Niemiecki
Instytut Historyczny
w Warszawie



Vilnius
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Foundation

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The current research abounds with discussions and studies dedicated to various forms of unfreedom or 'asymmetrical dependency', their semantics or importance for social structures. The fundamental, omnipresent, and often seamless persistence of unfreedoms even today merits such attention. Unfreedom was and has remained one of the key categories of the human condition. However, any given form of unfreedom (such as slavery, serfdom, prisoners of war, imprisonment) suggests a possibility of emancipation or eventual freedom. Moreover, it seems that in historical studies the question of freedom remains something best left for the researchers of political discourses (especially in the case of liberty) or theology and philosophy (especially within the topics of free will, rationality, and agency), whilst the other aspects of this phenomenon remain somewhat sidelined.

Therefore, the conference aims to inquire and explore freedom in historical contexts. Yet, having the usual conceptual and methodological difficulties in researching and defining freedom in mind as well as being aware of the polysemy of the term, and understanding the wide array of various forms of freedom, we propose focusing on such issues as transformations, becomings, and makings of freedom. Such an approach highlights certain liminal and transitional states, such as social mobility, metamorphosis of custom into a law, acts of granting and negotiating freedoms, and so on. This, in turn, enables us to consider freedom not solely as an abstract idea to be found in philosophical or theological debates, but as a category pertaining to other kinds of specific social, legal or cultural acts as well.

We invite you to consider the topics such as:

- defining, reflecting and debating the term; varying and competing images and models of freedom in different European networks;
- granting and receiving freedoms; genesis and varying motivations of granting freedoms: negotiations, struggle, contract and grace;
- varying kinds of freedom: positive and negative, individual and collective, human and natural;
- customs, law, rights and privileges; stability and uniformity, transformations and fragmentations;
- representations of freedom and freedom of representation: words, images, bodies.

During this conference we would like to focus on pre-modern European history (Early Modern period included). The proposals should not be limited to the social, economic or political aspects of freedom and, therefore, exclusively deal with topics such as social relations, law or political discourse. Proposals on other relevant topics, such as religious or artistic freedoms, and interdisciplinary outlooks are equally welcome.

We are accepting proposals for papers in English (abstract up to 300 words, author's name and surname, affiliation, and a short CV up to 200 words to be sent to vilniuspremodern@if.vu.lt). **The deadline for applications is set for December 1, 2026** and the applicants will be informed about the results individually by the beginning of January, 2027. **The conference is scheduled to take place in Vilnius, Lithuania, on May 27–28, 2027 in the Faculty of History of Vilnius University.**

A keynote lecture will be delivered by Prof. Dr. Jan Dietrich from Bonn Center for Dependency & Slavery Studies, who is also currently working on a monograph *Forms of Freedom within Dependency Structures: How Ideas of Freedom Emerged in Ancient Israel* (to be published by Oxford University Press).

The organizers will provide the speakers with accommodation and meals but will not cover travel expenses. Afterwards, a peer-reviewed publication of papers based on the conference material in English is also planned. This conference is organised by the Faculty of History of Vilnius University in partnership with the German Historical Institute Warsaw and its Branch Office Vilnius.

All applications will be reviewed by a committee consisting of:

Karolis Čižauskas, Vilnius University
Povilas Dikavičius, German Historical Institute Warsaw
Martynas Jakulis, Vilnius University
Giedrė Mickūnaitė, Vilnius Academy of Arts
Rūta Miškinytė, Vilnius University
Rimvydas Petrauskas, Vilnius University
Oliver Schmitt, University of Vienna



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