



Call for Applications

Imperial Biographies

Individuals in Empires and Postimperial Spaces

Autumn school of the RTG “Empires” (University of Freiburg)

8th–12th October 2024, Müllheim (Germany)

Analysing the relations between individuals and empires has a long tradition in historiography: from the biographies of “great men” to more recent approaches such as “imperial biographies” and “imperial subjects”. And while the first has rightly been criticised in the past, the latter have shown that there is significant analytical value in studying individuals even when trying to understand macro-phenomena such as empires.

Imperial biographies are not just stories of individuals who lived in or travelled across empires. Both as texts and as lived experiences they shaped, and were shaped by, the imperial environments of their times. They show in a microcosm an empire’s structures, contradictions and opportunities. They can direct our focus to key actors, just as they can retrieve the histories of social groups that tend to be underrecognized in imperial histories. Imperial biographies are also entangled with narratives and perceptions of empires, where individuals are ascribed particular roles as either heroes or villains, subjects, subalterns or rebels.

They can be approached not just through a multitude of disciplines and for different time periods and regions. The Autumn School of the RTG 2571 “Empires” likewise aims to examine the relations between individuals and empires from different disciplines and eras through talks and workshops by professors of the RTG and other institutions. It will also provide graduate students with an opportunity to discuss their projects in respect to biographical approaches in imperial and postimperial spaces.

The school starts off on October 9th with a workshop moderated by Sitta von Reden (Ancient History) and Jürgen Osterhammel (Global History). This session will focus on “imperial brokers”, a type of person or social group that has been regarded as a key both to bridging cultural difference and to imperial transformation. On the next day we will begin with a workshop on the unequal representation of colonisers, collaborators and colonised in commemoration practices by Manuela Boatcă (Sociology) and Andreas Mehler (Political Science). In the evening Barbara Korte (English literature) will give a presentation on biopics as a means to acquaint large audiences with historical persons followed by a screening and critical discussion of “Chevalier” (2022). On the third day Benjamin Schenk (Eastern European History) will give a talk on the approach of “imperial subjects” and moderate a source-based workshop on noblewomen in the late Russian Empire. The school will conclude with an evaluation and the discussion of the participants’ own projects.

Application:

The Autumn School is designed for graduate students of the Humanities and Social Sciences with a project related to “Imperial Biographies” or a general interest in the approach. Applicants are invited to send a letter of motivation and a short CV to simon.suttmann@grk2571.uni-freiburg.de by **15/07/2024**. Invitations will be sent out in August and the selected participants will be asked to provide an abstract of their project. Accommodation and travel expenses will be covered by the RTG “Empires”. More info on the RTG can be found at: <https://www.grk2571.uni-freiburg.de/events/summer-schools/autumn-school-2024/autumn-school-2024>.