

The AHRC Global Microhistory Network will hold three conferences over the course of 2018-2019

There will also be three evening Salon Sessions at the V&A during this period.

### **Background of the Network:**

Global history, as it developed out of comparative economic history and especially the debate on ‘divergence’ looked for broad frameworks within which to situate events, peoples and movements. It also sought to move beyond the distinct political and cultural boundaries of area studies and of ‘the nation’. Some notably high profile global history recently has gone the way of ‘big data’ collection, wide structures and geographies, and other scholars worry that the people and the events will be lost when the analysis is only focused on the macro level.

Microhistory’s great flowering between the 1980s and 2000 connected with cultural history, especially in France and Italy, and the postmodernist critique of large structuralist accounts. Inspired by anthropological approaches, microhistorians challenged the large-scale paradigms that had come to influence the study of the past, for example Marxism, modernization theory, and the quantitative focus of certain approaches derived from the social sciences. Studying the rich documentation of single episodes and characters as a starting point they found alternative ways of revealing larger human patterns. Thus focussing on the exceptional and the individual as a way of drawing out larger interpretations, they in turn allowed scholars to test those large-scale paradigms. In doing so, microhistorians were some of the earliest scholars to engage critically with the questions about the relationship between micro and macro that lie at the heart of the interests of global historians today.

Now a new generation of historians is seeking to engage with global history, while drawing on their training in the methodologies of microhistory. Many global historians also seek ways of conveying agency, individual histories, events and locality within a global framework. Where some regard global history as a forum for writing large-scale syntheses based mainly on secondary literature, other scholars have insisted that global history must preserve a close engagement with philology, local context and, above all, primary sources at its core.

Agency is also a crucial issue. What is to be understood by ‘agency’ in a global perspective? What are the different contexts for agency, and can these be

compared? A number of global historians have focused on individual encounters or interactions; they have studied merchants and companies, as well as the state or community officials and intermediaries that facilitated or blocked the global connections we now seek to understand. The moments of decision making that make for agency have wider and even global frameworks. The problem for global historians is writing about episodes of agency in a specific time and place, but also of connecting to long-term and long-distance structural explanations. The problem poses challenges we may not overcome, but our histories must also now seek to engage beyond the boundaries of specific communities and nation states. We must confront longstanding and critical issues of scale, distance, and the relationship between the general and the particular in historical analysis

### **Conference Cycle:**

**Conference 1: A Different Point of View: Scales, Spaces and Contexts in Histories of the Local and the Global** University of Warwick, 17-20 May, 2018

Registration at

<https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/history/ghcc/research/globalmicrohistory/scalesofhistory/>

**Conference 2: Empire, Courts and Religion – European University Institute – late September, 2018**

**Conference 3: Information, Correspondence Networks and Recording – University of Oxford, September, 2019**

**3 Salon sessions at the V&A – Dates to be determined.**