

Suggestion for an international MA-programme in microhistory

The central concept is to seek to identify and focus on the methods of microhistory and so to enable students to explore the possibilities offered by these methods. The emphasis will be on periods and categories that have hitherto received little attention from microhistorians and on seeing whether it is possible to go deeper into them using the methods of microhistory.

The particular weight here is placed on research on minority groups, groups which history has hitherto largely passed over. Examples would include race, ethnicity, gender and the sub-alter, particularly over the last two or three centuries. The gaze should be directed to areas both within Europe and USA, where the methods of microhistory have so far been applied almost exclusively, and further afield. The programme would need to be developed with an eye to extending the methods to new countries and regions and showing how these methods are best suited to revealing the personal experience of individuals of different nations, races and sexes.

To this end I suggest that a study programme would be created in which the MA courses in microhistory will be defined and analysed. In this, regard would be taken of all stages in the training of MA students. One can safely say that this project will demand considerable ingenuity and originality and will need to be developed little by little over some time. The following thus presents only a rough outline of a teaching policy at MA or even doctoral level intended to provide a foundation upon which microhistory can make further headway within the intentional academic community.

The study courses in microhistory at MA or doctoral level might break down broadly as follows:

1. Theory and Practice: the Methods of Microhistory

– Three courses would be offered, all aimed at preparing MA students for more concentrated ideological and methodological studies:

- a. historiography – the development of microhistory and the examination of some major historical studies emanating from the "Italian school";
- b. *Alltagsgeschichte* ("everyday life history") and historical anthropology – developments in Germany and other western countries;
- c. microhistory within the postmodern state of knowledge – the current position and status of microhistory within historical scholarship as a whole.

2. Microhistory Today: Content

– Several courses would be offered and a direction taken on particular substantive categories such as:

- sex and gender;
- sex and crime;

- memory and microhistory;
- rumours, scandals, trials and history;
- scribal culture and microhistory;
- race, memory and the individual;
- transnational connections and ethnicity,
- material culture and microhistory,
- archival work and microhistory,
- emotions and microhistory, etc.

Here it would be important to consider shared characteristics and common points and the aims best suited as focal points in all the courses. The students would thus receive a systematic training in the microhistorical approach, i.e. by exploring certain specific topics and drawing conclusions on the methods applicable.

– **This would mark the end of the first year which would take place in the same country (possibly in Iceland)**

3. Microhistory and the Future

– Here I would place the emphasis on a critique of the status of microhistory and on research. Students would be enabled to familiarise themselves with and review the broader context of this research, form judgments on the validity of microhistorical methods, and select and educe the ones best suited to their needs. At this point students should reach the stage where they can emerge as fully-fledged scholars, prepared to tackle genuine subjects for research. They would choose to present at last one research seminar and use the discussion from it to take their first steps in their MA projects. This part would thus take in three elements which would be runned in different countries. The general idea is to pick on research seminar which would fit the best for each student and at the same time work on their MA thesis. Possible seminars might look like this:

- a. **Research seminar I:** American history. This seminar would focus on interesting American topics and attempt to deal with them using the methods of microhistory. The focus would be on race, ethnicity and gender – all topics which might benefit greatly from the application of such an approach.
- b. **Research seminar II:** European style. This would focus on topics from European history, especially topics from the modern period that have so far been largely neglected by microhistorians, and seek to explore new material. The methods of microhistory were largely developed in Europe, but have been mostly applied to a fairly restricted period of time and set of topics. This seminar would seek to take on new topics, mostly from the modern period.

- c. **Research seminar III:** other areas. This part of the program would center on countries and topics to which microhistory has not traditionally been applied to before. The range of possibilities here is endless and thus would provide one of the most important angles and tests of the whole program.

– **This second year would end with an MA-thesis**

It should be stated clearly at the outset that this draft programme of studies will need refining and adapting over a long period; I believe it is of the utmost importance to build ideas into the courses on the basis of a general overview of the benefits of the method as a whole.

With best wishes to all of you,

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