

KRISIS. For a History from the Middle Ages to the Contemporary Age

International PhD Workshop

June 17-18, 2024

Scuola Normale Superiore
Sala Azzurra - Palazzo della Carovana
Piazza dei Cavalieri - Pisa

Call for papers 2024

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Introduction

The doctoral students of the Advanced Course in History at the Scuola Normale Superiore are organizing the first International PhD Workshop, dedicated to the theme of crisis from the Middle Ages to the Contemporary Age. The workshop will take place on June 17 and 18 at the Scuola Normale Superiore, in the Palazzo della Carovana (Sala Azzurra), located at Piazza dei Cavalieri, No. 7, in Pisa.

Subject

The concept of crisis has become so pervasive in public discourse, on a rhetorical and metaphorical level, that its analytical capacity is weakened: due to its normalization, it is difficult to reflect critically on the use of this concept, particularly in its relationship with the concept of "normality" (Holton, 1987). We owe a historical genealogy of the concept to Reinhart Koselleck, who highlighted how, from the medical field in ancient Greece, the term, used metaphorically, expanded to politics, economics, and history from the 17th century (Koselleck, 2006).

The recent years have been characterized by the narrative of an almost uninterrupted succession of crises. Economic shocks, global warming, the pandemic emergency, the reshaping of international relations, resorting to war, deep divisions within society and political systems, international and internal terrorism, migration phenomena, are just a few examples of what is interpreted today through the category of crisis: the more recent one being «polycrisis» (Morin, 1999; Tooze, 2021), developed in an attempt to represent the complexity arising from the intersection or overlap of different and increasingly uncontrollable phenomena. The perception is that the crisis no longer speaks of exceptional moments of «drama and decision» (Starn, 1971; Schmitt, 1922), but of permanent or at least extended states over time. If, in terms of politics, this changes the approach to crisis in managerial terms, in historiographical terms, it translates into a shift in the relationship with time: that of the present and the historical time of the past. In the absence of an idea of progress capable of supporting the conceptual framework of a crisis as a "passage" toward a new future, the crisis folds back, becoming an attribute of an eternal present, increasingly less able to represent itself as a decisive moment.

On the political level, the recourse to the paradigm of emergency becomes a representation of an extremely contingent present thought, where the priority is the restoration of the *status quo ante*, rather than the transition to a new stage. The concept of a state of exception, the suspension of the rules it requires, and the set of historically differentiated political practices adopted to achieve it (Benigno and Scuccimarra, 2007) rise to the status of a «dominant governing paradigm of contemporary politics» (Agamben, 2003), reproducing the simulacrum of the decisive moment without resolving it with a transformation towards a new arrangement.

Call for Papers 2024

Reflecting on what crises and emergencies signify today poses a certainly intriguing challenge for historiography. With this workshop, we aim to open a dialogue around the theme within the panels, spanning medieval, modern, and contemporary history, attempting to examine how crises and emergencies have been perceived, conceptualized, framed, and governed throughout history in different fields: from politics to economics, from the environment to culture.

The perspective we intend to adopt is that of political history, with a particular focus on:

- how politics and the power it embodies organize, reorganize, legitimize, or re-legitimize themselves in the face of or thanks to these occasions, both at the discursive and governance practice levels;
- the role of historical actors and the weight of their conflicting representations of crises and emergencies, both in terms of discourses and practices;
- an effort to re-historicize the concept, reflecting on what "crisis" means in each moment it is used as an interpretative or discursive category, and what lexicons are associated with it;
- reflecting on whether and how crises can still be observed as "laboratories" of the future or if they have transformed into something different.

Research Areas

Within this framework, contributions in medieval, modern, and contemporary history are welcome to investigate:

- The ways in which crises and their imagery are constructed;
- The categories, references, and codes through which crises are conceived, elaborated, transmitted, and disseminated;
- The role of lexicon and language in crises, their representations, discourses about them, and the communicative and political field in which they perform;
- The development of policies and practices for managing, overcoming, or maintaining crises by the institutional actors involved;
- How power organizes, reorganizes, legitimates, delegitimizes, or re-legitimizes itself in the face of crises;
- Political processes and their transformations during crises: forms of political participation, construction or deconstruction of political identities, formation or dissolution of alliances, directions of foreign or domestic policy, social effects of crises, and crisis containment measures;
- The production and use of special legislation in the context of crises;
- Comparative perspectives on crises;
- Crises in relation to the modes of writing history: the historiography of crises.

Other proposals may also be considered if they align with the workshop's theme.

Organization of the days

Graduate students and young Ph.D, who have obtained their degree within the last six years (reference date: the deadline of this call for papers), are invited to submit their presentation proposals. The accepted languages for contributions are Italian, English, and French.

Proposals should summarize the content of the presentation in a maximum of five hundred words, include a reference bibliography (6 to 10 titles), and a brief curriculum vitae ac studiorum of no more than two hundred and fifty words. All materials should be sent to the email workshopcrisi2024@sns.it in a single document, including the contact details of the candidates, by **March 31, 2024**.

The Organizing Committee commits to communicating the outcome of the selection by **April 19, 2024**. At the conclusion of the proceedings, a certificate will be issued to presenters. In the case of proven scientific quality of the proposed contributions, the Organizing Committee reserves the possibility of publishing the workshop proceedings in the Annals of the Scuola Normale Superiore.

The Organizing Committee will also provide participants with information regarding accommodation and meals.

Organizing Committee

Alessandro Brizzi, Giulia Corrado, Umberto Maria Delmastro, Giulia Lovison, Manuela Pacillo, Federico Ricci, Giacomo Santoro, Jacopo Sassera, Vittoria Vaccaro.