

Centre for the History of Renaissance Knowledge

Institute of Philosophy and Sociology
Polish Academy of Sciences

Issue 2

Winter 2023

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Farewell to 2022 & welcome to 2023!

On behalf of all scholars hosted by the *Centre for the History of Renaissance Knowledge*, I invite you to read the new issue of its newsletter.

The texts in this issue range from **a glimpse of our studies**, news and new entries, to an informal interview with our brilliant colleague Farkas Gábor Kiss. At the end of this newsletter, you will also find a calendar of activities carried out in 2022 and those planned for 2023. Looking at this calendar, it is quite clear that we are all working hard. What is not written, but which I hope can be grasped between the lines, is **that our research is becoming more and more stimulating**, while the **ongoing collaboration between colleagues is turning to friendship**.

Valentina Lepri

(PI of the project & Head of the Centre)



Dennj Solera

He is an expert of university history, social history and student mobility.

He defended his Ph.D. at the University of Florence (2018), and conducted two postdoctoral fellowships at the University of Padua (2019–2020) and at the University of Bologna (2021–2022).

Since February 2023, he joined our KnowStudents team as a Postdoctoral Researcher.

More about his profile can be found [here](#).

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Dennj Solera

– a new team member

I have studied the early modern age by training in historical studies in various centres and universities (Padua, Aix-Marseille, Florence, Geneva, York, Bologna etc.). I devoted my **research to the social dimension of the Roman Inquisition, the history of religious sacrifice, universities, and student mobility.**

I will develop a part of the Project **focused on Padua, the main centre of attraction for students from Eastern Europe until the 17th century.** Since the Middle Ages, many young men came to Padua eager to learn about the latest discoveries being made there. The story of those students is of absolute importance for European intellectual history for two reasons: they contributed significantly with their prior knowledge to the golden age of the Paduan university and, at the same time, they were instrumental in conveying to the East certain ideas, scientific theories or volumes that marked the history of their home context for ever.

In addition to this general investigation, I will study a specific environment that welcomed many of these Eastern students, some of whom were destined to the fame like Andreas Dudith or Jan Zamoyski. This was **the cultural circle of Gian Vincenzo Pinelli**, a patrician who made study and patronage the aim of his life between 1558 and 1601. This private, intimate, and stimulating context made all the difference for some students. There, even during the Counter-Reformation, they could find a welcoming, **non-academic, intellectually open environment**, as well as **the most well-stocked library** (around 10,500 titles including manuscripts and printed books) and the best minds of the time (Mercurialis, Acquapendente, Sarpi, Galilei, Peiresc etc.). Frequenting Pinelli's house allowed them to have a direct relationship with some of their professors, to meet other scholars and international celebrities who were Gian Vincenzo's guests (van Ellebode, Savile, Camerarius II, Augustin etc.), and to take advantage of the patron's enormous correspondence relationships, that extended to the four corners of the continent (with Aldrovandi, Del Bene, Blotius, Brahe, Orsini, Granvelle, Clusius, Lipsius etc.). **Studying the remained documents of Pinelli**, and those produced by his friends, I will **analyse how his circle remained a reference for those students even when they continued their tour or returned to their home cities.** It is to this special, unique, often lifelong connection that I will devote my research.

*Battle of Varna
took place on November 10, 1444,
near Varna in eastern Bulgaria.*

*It was the final battle of
the Crusade of Varna
which goal was to stop
the expansion of
the Ottoman Empire into
Central and Eastern Europe.*



Battle of Varna
by Stanisław Chlebowski.



Battle of Varna
from the Poland Kronicle
(*Kronika wszystkiego świata*)
of Marcin Bielski, 1564.

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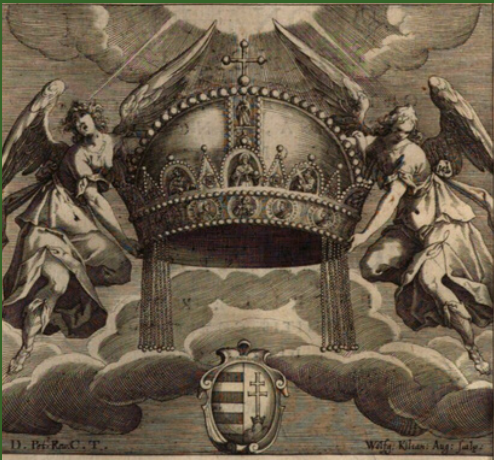


A Sacrilegious Oath: a Religious Controversy around the Battle of Varna (1444)

...the current work of our researchers

I have recently spent a lot of time working on the notebooks of a young Lutheran nobleman, **Péter Révay** (1568–1622) who became an important historian after his schooling. **In his major work on Hungarian history entitled *De Monarchia*, a curious event is evoked: in 1444, Władysław I, King of Hungary (Władysław III as King of Poland) started a war against the Ottoman Empire despite a valid peace treaty between Christians and Muslims.** Fighting against Murad II, **the king died at the battle of Varna** (Bulgaria). According to the commonplace interpretation of this catastrophe, it was a divine punishment for his oath-breaking, and later, the Protestants were inclined to put the blame on the Catholics because it was the papal envoy who convinced the king to begin his campaign. **Révay added an astonishing detail to the usual account of the story.** He claims that the Christians gave a piece of sacramental bread to the sultan to seal the peace: practically, the body of Christ was taken as a hostage by non-Christians. It is obvious that the intention of the protestant Révay was to display the perjury as even more hideous than it already was.

He concludes his judgment in these obscure terms: the fact that **the king's death was an instance of divine vengeance** "is considered to be a truth also by those who profess that the real Christ is present in the host even when it is out of use." Whom is Révay talking about and what kind of theological teaching is the author evoking here? In the notes of the excellent modern edition made by Gergely Tóth, these people are identified with the Lutherans: they professed the doctrine of ubiquity, which means that the body of Christ is present everywhere in the world at the same time, while Calvinists argued that only his spirit can be present everywhere after the ascension of his body to heaven. In short, the body of Christ is always present in the host according to the followers of Luther. Though, it would have little argumentative value for a Lutheran historian to claim that even his co-religionists agree with his opinion.



A famous depiction of the Hungarian crown from the titlepage of one of Révay's works.

Péter Révay (Petrus de Rewa),
De sacrae coronae regni
Hungariae ortu, virtute, victoria,
fortuna, annos ultra DC clarissimae
brevis commentarius,
Augsburg, Christoph Mang, 1613.
Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek,
4 Gs 1947
([urn:nbn:de:bvb:12-bsb11212198-0](https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:bvb:12-bsb11212198-0))



LIVONIA

A historical region on the eastern shores of the Baltic Sea. It is named after the Livonians, who lived on the shores of present-day Latvia.

Wikipedia
February 9, 2023

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It is more plausible that Révay meant to talk about the Catholics here, for they indeed think that the body of Christ remains in the communion bread after consecration, even when it is not used during the service. But putting the host aside in the sacristy for later ceremony is something that Protestants would never do: when they commemorate the Lord's Supper, they consecrate the bread and the wine and consummate them all. This interpretation can be confirmed by comparing Révay's choice of word with the Catholic terminology. The term *extra usum* (out of use) that occurs in Révay's book can also be found in a work of Péter Pázmány (1570–1637), a major Hungarian Jesuit who uses it in his main treatise of theology (*Guide to the divine truth*), when he argues in favour of the Catholic practice of keeping the host in church between masses. To summarize, it is very likely that **Révay, as a Protestant, wanted to say that the oath-breaking**, especially after giving the host to the sultan, **was a crime recognized as such even by Catholics.**

Gábor Förköli

(Postdoctoral Researcher)

Werewolves of Livonia

...some thoughts of our researchers

It all started, as all good research does, with some hardcore procrastination – reading things, that were at best tangentially related to my topics of research and at worst... well you get the picture. Still, in my defence, when you come across an oration about werewolves written in your hometown Dorpat (Tartu) (*De Lykanthropis Oratio*), it really does not matter that you are supposed to study Ramist rhetoric and dialectic or that it is twenty-two pages and you barely read Latin.

So, I read it and researched it and additionally discovered other disputations from the same period talking about **werewolves in Livonia – current day Estonia and Latvia**. Quite intriguing indeed. One moment you are reading what seems to you an isolated oration and the next you have discovered **an entire world full of werewolves**. So, to cut a long story short, it turns out that not only was Livonia inhabited by werewolves from the midpoint of 16th to the end of 17th century, it was also actually quite famous for them; to the extent that David Frölich – don't ask me who he is, I don't know –, while describing the lands and wildlife of Livonia, had no problem writing in his 1644 guidebook:

Livonia is a marshy, flat, densely forested land traversed by navigable rivers rich in fish. The fields are arable and very fertile. Boars, elk, foxes, lynxes, marten, sables, ermines, and beavers dwell in the woods. The rabbits change their color depending on the season. In winter they are white, and during summer gray. Horses, cattle, and fattened pigs are plentiful, and they are expediently bred. Werewolves are very common in this region." (Frölich 1644, via Donecker 2012: 303)

If you would have wanted to meet a werewolf in 16th to 17th century Europe – why you would have wanted to see such violent creature who was thought to cause more harm to people than a real wolf is up to you – you would have most likely been directed towards Livonian lands.

I must however emphasise, that my own contribution to this field of research is non-existent, will remain as such, and can be summed up by a workshop for high school students in University of Tartu where I mostly plagiarized Stefan Donecker's *The Werewolves of Livonia: Lycanthropy and Shape-Changing in Scholarly Texts, 1550–1720*; Carlo Ginzburg and Bruce Lincoln's *Old Thiess, a Livonian Werewolf: A Classic Case in Comparative Perspective*; and endless articles by Merili Metsvahi. Still, I was rather positively surprised with the result. I usually do tent to approach such obligations with some trepidation – you know, young people these days, they do not even know the morse code and need to be explained where the save-icon comes from.

Still, they had no problem contemplating the idiosyncratic absurdity that was Early Modern thought and having almost **a scholarly discussion on what would it have meant to be a werewolf from an academic, metaphysical point of view.**

And I mean, I guess that is just the way it is going to be, that rhetoric, dialectic, or – my latest official-academic interest – logic are too abstract ideas to use in order to introduce the early modern thought. For that we will always need some help from werewolves. So, it saddens me even more that **lately the Livonian werewolves have had to go into hiding, slowly slipping away from the consciousness on Estonian and (possibly) Latvian people whose lands they once so proudly inhabited.**

And as if to add insult to injury, in 2018 a common, regular, unremarkable, no-good, basic wolf was chosen as the national animal of Estonia. And yes, I get it, wolves are cute and cuddly and all, but I mean, you were so close and yet so far.



WEREWOLF

—
*In European folklore,
 a man who turns into a wolf
 at night and devours
 animals, people, or corpses
 but returns to human form
 by day.*

—
*Some werewolves
 change shape at will;
 others, in whom the condition
 is hereditary or acquired
 by having been bitten by
 a werewolf, change shape
 involuntarily, under the influence
 of a full moon.*

—
 Encyclopedia Britannica
 February 9, 2023



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NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTION

—

Its tradition is more than 4,000 years old and dates back to the Babylonians, who resolved to pay old debts and return borrowed things at the end of the year.

—

It was further adopted by the ancient Romans, Christians and more – it has many other religious parallels.

—

The concept, regardless of creed, is to reflect upon self-improvement annually.

—

Wikipedia
February 10, 2023

—

Some say that the habit of breaking these resolutions is only a couple days younger.

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Does it really matter, that **some might say werewolves do not exist** – unicorns are equally ontologically problematic but did this small inconvenience stop the Scottish? **Perhaps my only solace comes from the hope that maybe it is not yet too late.** This is my call to action to whomever it might concern. Quick, before the Latvians start getting any ideas.

Based on:

Donecker, Stefan (2012). The Werewolves of Livonia: Lycanthropy and Shape-Changing in Scholarly Texts, 1550–1720. *Preternature: Critical and Historical Studies on the Preternatural*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (2012), pp. 289–322

Ove Averin
(PhD student)

What is your New Year's resolution for 2023?

Matthias Rock (Fellow)

My new year's resolution is **to become better in time management**. To do so, I am reading works on practical demonology to inquire the possibility of time-stopping magic. As an alternative, I will ask the two astrophysicists I know about quantum theories of time travel. Always take the easiest and most feasible way to solve problems! (Another resolution of mine.)

Dennj Solera (Postdoctoral Researcher)

The goal I hope to achieve in the coming year is **to understand how the intellectual growth of eastern European students took place in 16th-century Padua**. I will chase them everywhere! In university lecture rooms, in the other sites they frequented in the Italian city, but above all, in a house that everyone knew: the one of Gian Vincenzo Pinelli. The nobleman was also a fundamental reference point for "Poloni" students, sharing his books, culture, and intellectual freedom with foreign visitors.

Gniewomir Hawrasz (PhD student)

The only resolutions I want to make this year concern my **broadly understood health**. I wish to find a golden mean between my priorities, ambitions, dreams, and commitments. Additionally, I would be on cloud nine if I learned how to do at least one complete muscle up by the end of 2023.



health

have fun

slow down

keep it simple

NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTION

time management

read

Aristotle's works

spend more quality time
with family and friends

tasting more wine

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Olga M. Hajduk (Research Coordinator)

My second book is on the way, so... I wish **not to prioritize what is on my schedule but to perfectly plan my 2023 priorities**. To be steady and well-ordered in my life so that I am fierce and original in my work! Lastly, I must not forget the little pinch of madness and exploring the unexplored. Let us just say: **work-life - balance**.

Farkas Gábor Kiss (Senior Scholar)

I have several New Year resolutions for 2023: 1) **to keep more deadlines** (probably not all of them, but more than before); 2) **turn down work I cannot do in time**; 3) finish a monograph on teaching 'how to write longer in the 16th century' - I have been preparing this for a long time.

Luisa Brotto (Fellow)

This year I decided to **keep it simple - I only wish to survive, have fun, and not hurt anyone**.

Ove Averin (PhD student)

In 2023 I am going to finally become financially independent from my parents, move out of my mother's basement, and start taking good care of my physical and mental health. I will find a perfect balance between my private and work life - no longer working extra hours on weekends. Start doing some exercise and eating healthily. Watch 364 movies, end world hunger and complete climate change. **I mean if you don't lie to yourself then who are you going to lie to?**

Danilo Facca (Senior Scholar)

I resolve to **read** the first **20 books** on the list of 267 that I have set aside for later.

Valentina Lepri (Principal Investigator)

My new year's resolutions for 2023 are related to my soul and body. I wish to find more time for travel, especially to the archives; consulting more books, ancient and new; and **tasting more wine**, strictly white and fresh.

Gábor Förköli (Postdoctoral Researcher)

In professional terms, **I will read Aristotle's complete works on natural philosophy** (Physics, Meteorology, On Heavens, etc.). I realized that a better insight into these texts could make my work with early modern students' notebooks much quicker. In my personal life, my New Year's resolution is to be nice to people who ask me if I have read these books.

HAPPY
New Year
2023



*Is there a place
for friendship in academia?
Or maybe it is a cruel and
inhospitable environment?*

Definitely, there is.

There remains always
something new to discover
thanks to the unstoppable
process of time, so there is no
need to envy others, or
decline help.

New ideas pop up rather
regularly, so if one reads,
does research and thinks,
there will come surely a new
discovery.



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Katarzyna Rusinek-Abarca (Research Promoter)

For this year, among many things I wish to accomplish / see / experience, first and foremost, **I want to slow down - but very consciously**. It does not mean resigning from things, duties, meetings, and events - quite the opposite! Choose them a tiny bit more wisely and get the most out of them at the right pace.

Alicja Bielak (Postdoctoral Researcher)

In the upcoming year, I hope to be able **to spend more quality time with family and friends**, simultaneously cutting down on the hours in front of the computer.

Meet our team - Farkas Gábor Kiss

Can you please tell us about your scientific interests and main inspirations?

From my childhood, I was interested in things connected to the past, and since I was born in Pécs, in the Roman city called Sopianae, many ancient monuments raised my interest in my home town. I started to study Latin at home when I was 11, and although I made little advance until high school, it was clear for me, that this is what I would like to deal with in my life. At the university, I studied Classics and Hungarian literature. From the beginning, I was more inspired by the scholars dealing with medieval and early modern literary studies than Classics, especially because one could join their research project at once, and receive some small research tasks already in the first and second year of the BA. Later on, I felt my choice was justified by the (perhaps false) impression, that it is much harder to say something new about Greek and Roman classics than about sixteenth century manuscripts.

How did you become interested in your field? Can you remember some ground-breaking moments or milestones that made you realize you would like to dedicate yourself towards inquiry in your field?

I usually remember the last discovery the best - which was in my case a manuscript of Livy, that the first Hungarian humanist scholar, John of Zredna had used and annotated. I already know from my own experience that early modern readers often annotated their books so that they can quote those annotated sentences in their own works - this is how I realized some 15 years ago that a Hungarian poet, Nicholas Zrínyi annotated and later on cited his volume of Marino.



Farkas Gábor Kiss

Senior Scholar
in ERC CoG n. 864542,
KnowStudents project.

Head of the [Department of Early Hungarian Literature](#), a unit of the Institute of Hungarian Literature and Cultural Studies, at the [Eötvös Loránd University Faculty of Humanities](#).

Associate Professor at IFiS PAN.

A short CV note, together with contact information, can be found **on our website**.

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So I decided to check whether John of Zredna cited the sentences he possibly annotated – and bingo: all his 30–40 citations from Livy were annotated also in his manuscript. This has also proven that these were his own annotations, because otherwise his writing is not very characteristic and could be easily confused with others.

How did your interests evolve over the years?

I studied medieval studies after university, and I got attracted by the manuscript culture of the late Middle Ages (esp. 15th century), an interest that still stays with me. This is the time when scribes start to write in a personal, and often hardly legible manner, so deciphering the scripts is always a challenge on its own, and it resembles the work of a code-breaker. At the same time, I was always interested in philosophy, and I took many classes on it both in Budapest (at the Eötvös University and CEU), and in Leuven, so I became an avid reader of books on intellectual history, books like A. O. Lovejoy, Aby Warburg, Paul Hazard, P. O. Kristeller from the earlier ones, and A. Grafton, R. Koselleck, Jonathan Israel, Steven Shapin among the more recent scholars (but this list should be much–much longer...).

What is your 'biggest' discovery? What was the most fascinating idea you have encountered? Maybe some artefact?

From the current project, I really appreciate that I had the occasion to collect more materials for my studies on 16th century classroom commentaries from Central Europe. It came as a new realization for me, and parallelly to scholars at the LECTIO research group, that many early 16th century prints, which were used at universities as textbooks, contain the very same manuscript commentaries. This means that the students had to buy their textbooks and listen to the dictation of the professor in the classroom. This is what they took home from the university to their often very distant birthplaces when they returned there. What I previously found in the case of one or two early 16th century textbooks, turned out to be a huge, and widespread phenomenon. This means also a methodological change: if anyone wants to deal with printed early 16th century university textbooks, one has to look for ALL the surviving copies of an edition, because it might turn out that some copies contain identical manuscript commentaries, which will show how and where that book was used in the classroom. Of course, identifying and checking all the surviving copies of a book is a money- and time-consuming hard work, but sooner or later we will have much more information on these courses and the process of knowledge transfer in the 16th century.

Issue 2

Winter 2023

Cats or dogs?

I used to have a dog for 15 years, now we have a cat, but it is my plan to add a new canine member to the family.

How does your research fit into your daily life?Which of the skills developed in your professional life were you able to transfer or utilize in private settings?

Perhaps it would be better to put this question the other way round: how does daily life fit into my research? If one has a specific interest with a new potential discovery, or something very interesting about which one would like to know everything at once in order to understand the context of the field better, then it is really difficult to stop for daily matters, and not go on with research.

What is the most fundamental question?

Is there milk at home?

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What is academia to you? How could you define or describe the values that should characterize a purely scientific pursuit?

I often wonder if the world would be a better place if everyone was an academic. Probably yes, especially if they were all humanities scholars. This is the field of academia that still resembles the most a Carthusian monastery – many scholars still work on their own, we publish monographs instead of collective articles, and – with a whim of self-irony – often act as knowing the only path to divine wisdom. But on the other hand, I think we have to accept that this way of life is just not suitable to the greater part of the mankind.

Right now, I am working on a study on early modern ideas about self-censorship, and its pictorial representation. Self-censorship is something that still many people have to practice (on a interpersonal level, it is even a necessity in the society), but unfortunately, it is also an everyday experience in scientific matters of scholars living un-democratic societies. I am looking at the origins of the practice of self-censorship; how humanists became aware of it, and how they started to represent it publicly, as this seemed to be the best method of fending off censorship, if one did not want to die at a stake.

What are the biggest advantages of being a scholar?

As a scholar, one meets new challenges every day – not only administrative ones, but also scholarly ones – , and therefore one has to remain very flexible in defining the exact field of research. Dealing with the history of knowledge, it is even more so, because one can suddenly develop an interest in fishing or volcanoes just because of reading late medieval or early modern encyclopedias.

Describe early modern knowledge / philosophy in three WORDS.

This would be a kind of motto for it, I suppose: Know more, but faster!

What is your best memory from the study mission, field trip, or conference?

It is difficult to select the best – but after the COVID restrictions, our very first trip together to a big conference – the congress of the Renaissance Society of America in Dublin in 2022 – was a great experience. While everyone was afraid that with the pandemic, something has changed forever in academia, it turned out very soon that fundamentally, it remained the same: projects started to be planned, collaborations began to evolve. Early modern scholars might have felt the same sense of becoming free again, as universities often closed down for one or two semesters if there was a plague in the nearby region.

December

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January

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February

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What is the place of philosophers and philosophy in the modern world?

I am not a philosopher by trade, but if I am allowed to make suggestions, I would say that philosopher exist in order to create concepts that better describe the intentions and doings of people than the existing ones. Of course, after creating and defining a notion, one has to describe the reasons and the effects, and whether it is a positive or a negative things – but without philosophers, we would not have notions like ‘argument’ – or to bring early modern examples – psychology or hermeneutics. Of course, it also belongs to the duties of philosophers why a notion was created exactly there, when and where it turned up.

Our calendar

Research trips & study missions

November 30 – December 7, 2022 • Vienna (Austria) • *Gniewomir Hawrasz, Valentina Lepri* • Department of Manuscripts and Rare Books of the Austrian National Library (called The Augustinian Reading Room)

February 14-18, 2023 • Târgu-Mureş (Romania) • *Gábor Förköli* • Teleki-Bolyai Library

Conferences & workshops

November 30 – December 3, 2022 • online • *Alicja Bielak, Gábor Förköli, Hanna Mazheika* • *RSA Virtual 2022 conference*

December 15, 2022 • Budapest (Hungary) • *Gábor Förköli* • ‘A magyar filozófia története a korai újkorban (1570–1710)’ [The history of Hungarian philosophy in the early modern period].

December 18–20, 2022 • Cracow (Poland) • *Whole Team* • *Yearly workshop of KnowStudents team*

Other events

November 6, 2022 – March 6, 2023 • Leuven (Belgium) • *Alicja Bielak* • Fellowship at *LECTIO Institute*, KU Leuven

December 28, 2022 • online • *Matthias Roick* • Interview for *Nauka. To lubię*

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December

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January

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February

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13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28					

January 6-7, 2023 • Tartu (Estonia) • *Ove Averin* • Workshop for high school students, organized by the Department of Philosophy of University of Tartu

January 26-27, 2023 • Berlin (Germany) • *Matthias Roick* • Lecture at the Research Colloquium of Latin Studies, Freie Universität Berlin

January, 30, 2023 • online • *Alicja Bielak, Danilo Facca, Gábor Förköli, Valentina Lepri* • Kick-off meeting for IFiS (CHRK) PAN & ILIESI CNR project

February 9, 2023 • online • *Ove Averin* • Recording a podcast (audio lecture) on the study of rhetoric and dialectic in Academia Gustaviana (1632-1665), for IDA radio and Vårske Röhk

Future plans

February 16, 2023 • online • *Alicja Bielak* • Key-note speaker at the 'Magister Dixit meets STUDIUM.AI' event

February 23, 2023 • London (UK) • *Matthias Roick* • Public lecture at the Warburg Institute

February 24, 2023 • London (UK) • *Gniewomir Hawrasz, Matthias Roick* • 'Editing Renaissance Printed Texts in Latin: A Practitioner's Guide' workshop at the Warburg Institute

March 6-13, 2023 • San Juan (Puerto Rico) • *Alicja Bielak, Luisa Brotto, Danilo Facca, Gábor Förköli, Olga M. Hajduk, Valentina Lepri, Matthias Roick, Katarzyna Rusinek-Abarca* • RSA San Juan 2023 conference

What's more & what's next?

Nowadays our main focus (besides 'daily' duties) is on the RSA San Juan 2023 conference and the IFiS (CHRK) PAN & ILIESI CNR project (more about it in the next issue - stay tuned!).

Meanwhile, our calendar for 2023 is starting to filled up and **publications** prepared in 2022 should see the light of day in the coming weeks and months.

More about our work in the next issue (May 2023).

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