

## Antiquity and Modernity

The beginning of the European concept of modernity can be traced back to late medieval Italy and the likes of Petrarch, Boccaccio, Flavio Biondo and Lorenzo Valla, although in some ways it has roots in Christian theology (the belief in the revelation of Christ created a temporal division in history). The relationship between antiquity and modernity has been always problematic: first, in some ways the ancients were seen as models worthy of imitation, in others they were somehow dangerous because they could lead astray from Christianity. Later on, from the early seventeenth century, in most European countries artists and scholars started the so-called “quarrel of the ancients and the moderns”, producing endless debates on whether “we” had finally surpassed “them”.

The way in which European political thought can be considered somehow a commentary on classical texts is perhaps best exemplified by Machiavelli’s *Discourses on Livy* (c. 1517), but also Montesquieu’s *The Spirit of the Laws* (1748) presents hundreds of quotations from Greek and Roman authors. The constitution of the United States was directly influenced by these texts. French revolutionaries also looked back at the Roman republic to find alternative political models to the *ancien régime*. Romanticism and nationalism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century found in the same models inspiration to oppose the order imposed by the Congress of Vienna after the fall of Napoleon (1815). Henrik Ibsen’s first play, *Catiline*, was about a Roman aristocrat who was accused of trying to overthrow the Roman Republic in 62 BCE, and was inspired by the nationalist revolutions of 1848 in Europe. The relationship with antiquity still impacted much of 19<sup>th</sup> century scientific culture: many of the scholars considered the fathers of history as a scientific method had strong classical background (such as Ranke, who wrote his thesis on the Greek historian Thucydides), were equally versed in ancient and modern history (such as Fustel de Coulange and Michelet), or were primarily ancient historians (such as Niebuhr and Droysen). The relationship of antiquity and modernity also has political implications to contemporary concerns, and is still at the heart of many controversies: in the colonial period, classically educated elites of European powers frequently used ancient images and concepts to create a Eurocentric, civilizing narrative of western civilization. At the same time, however, a precursor of subaltern studies, the Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci, was strongly convinced of the importance of a classical education.

This complex tradition can be studied from different points of view, and looking at a broad variety of topics. I am happy to discuss supervision for Master dissertations on any topic concerning the relationship between antiquity and modernity and define concrete projects in conjunction with you, and depending on your specific interests.