

Monday, 16.03.2026; 4:15 - 5:45 pm CET

Noel Lenski, Yale University, USA

A Global History of Slavery in Premodernity

Abstract:

Comparative studies of slavery have proliferated in the last forty years. These have brought tremendous insights into this very widespread, very human, and universally horrific social practice. They have also led to the tendency to treat modern contexts as paradigmatic frameworks for universalizing claims about slaving practices. The result has been to interpret premodern and non-western slaveries primarily through the lens of the Atlantic world. This lecture offers a different perspective which attempts to conceptualize ancient slaving as a category best analyzed on its own terms. In the limited time available, it will explore three areas where commonalities emerge across pre-modern slave societies that do not easily map onto modern understandings: proximity to captive-taking, integration into the family, and the use of enslaved persons as objects of power.

Short Bio:

Noel Lenski is the Dunham Professor of Classics and History at Yale University. He studies ancient history, especially later Roman history, and has published extensively on the history of power relations from the highest to the lowest levels of society - from emperors to slaves. His studies of ancient, early medieval, and global slavery include the edited volume *What is a Slave Society? The Practice of Slavery in Global Perspective* (Cambridge 2018).