CRITICAL THINKING
IN RENAISSANCE EAST CENTRAL EUROPE

Budapest, 9–11 September 2027

How much did Renaissance humanism contribute to the rise of new ways of critical thinking and practices in 1400–1600? While the geographical centre of this cultural movement was clearly Italy and, gradually, some parts of Western Europe, it is unclear how European peripheries, such as East Central Europe, contributed to critical thinking. What sort of relationship was there between centres and peripheries if one focuses not on social and economic factors but on the history of ideas? And how did ideas that counted as critical or even heterodox in one environment change their tinge and significance in another cultural and historical context?

If we think of some religious heterodoxies (such as the Hussites, the Anabaptists, the Antitrinitarians, the Socinians, and the Czech Brethren), it is easy to recognise the special place of East Central Europe in the history of critical or "free" thinking. Ideas, however, were not inherently orthodox or heterodox; what counted as conventional or canonical in one intellectual, social, or political milieu could often become unconventional, critical, or even heterodox in another context and vice versa. East Central European religious "heterodoxies" for example could have very different status when viewed from the "centres" or the "peripheries". At the same time, the thinkers themselves could also change (becoming more or less radical) when moving between centres and peripheries (cf. the "taming" of Galeotto Marzio and Filippo Buonaccorsi vs. the "radicalisation" of Niccolò Buccella, Fausto Sozzini, and Christian Francken in East Central Europe).

The aim of this conference is not only to rethink the circulation of critical and heterodox ideas and the mobility of the people who promoted them between centres and peripheries. Equally importantly, the conference wishes to call attention to less recognised forms of critical thinking, which were nonetheless integral to the historical, philological, literary, and scientific practices of Renaissance humanism.

Our assumption is that the cultural practices oriented toward the antiquity – i.e. Renaissance humanism – mattered as much for the potential ways of expressing ideas and ideals in the interest of the reform of contemporary society (including its cultural institutions, religious life, and forms of learning) as they did for the social advantages one could gain through learning. Humanism was not merely about the capacity to imitate the ancients or write Latin poetry or epideictic orations. Knowledge of antiquity in its own terms, the memory of powerful and successful civilisations (which were as learned as they were religious) offered both a comparative framework for rethinking modern life and a pool of new authorities and sources for critical thought. The methods of historical and philological criticism and comparativism, the use of humanist genres (such as the dialogues or utopias),



and the applied rhetorical tools could easily lead to doubt, scepticism, the questioning of established authorities, and attempts to rewrite the canon, all of which provided fertile ground for critical thinking.

Our **keynote speakers** will be **Daniele Conti** (University of Cassino and Southern Latium), **William J. Connell** (Seton Hall University), and **Mihály Balázs** (University of Szeged). Conti will present a group of Italian radical anti-Christians, such as Filippo Buonaccorsi and Galeotto Marzio, who found their fortune in East Central Europe. Connel will examine how the critical political thinker Donato Giannotti navigated the turbulent Italian landscape of the sixteenth century. Mihály Balázs will compare the different ways in which Italian heterodoxy has shaped the intellectual landscapes of Transylvania and Poland.

We encourage potential participants to rethink questions of authorial intent, explicate authors' criticism regarding intellectual authority, scientific canons, political or religious powers and institutions, read between the lines, and ponder the uses and functions of the applied rhetorical devices. We invite participants to analyse the ways in which humanist learning could be used to articulate criticisms of learning and society, allowing authors to stand out as moral guides.

We call for papers focused mostly – but not exclusively – on Renaissance East Central Europe, addressing issues and questions regarding:

- Centres, peripheries, and the transmission of critical or heterodox ideas
- The impact of social, political, and intellectual contexts on the evolution of critical ideas
- Humanism and critiques of institutions, authorities, and canons
- The uses of critical philology and historical criticism
- Rhetorical tools and critical thinking
- The role of scepticism and doubt in Renaissance humanism and religious heterodoxy
- Forms of "crypto-scepticism"
- The relationships between "free", "critical", "innovative", "sceptical", and "heterodox" thinking

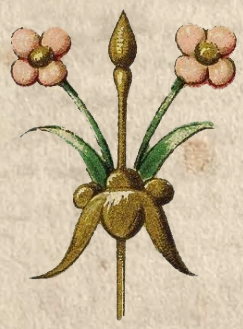
We look forward to receiving abstracts of 150–200 words for 20-minute presentations

until 28 February 2027

at the following address:

critical.thinking.2027.budapest@gmail.com

Applicants will be notified of the acceptance of their proposal by 31 March 2027.



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